



**Bryant University**

HONORS THESIS

# If You Can't Take the Tweet: Understanding Corporate Social Responsibility Through the Lens of Social Media Marketing

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**ABSTRACT**

Companies are increasingly taking action on societal issues and are aware of the impact that their corporate voice has on impressionable publics. Existing research focuses greatly on corporate social responsibility and the moral standards that set up companies to market themselves authentically to the values they build themselves on. The current study explores how three companies utilize their platform to share their values in relation to ethical issues arising in the modern world. Through the Twitter accounts of Ben & Jerry's, Patagonia, and Starbucks, a content analysis was conducted on their use of language related to their ethical standpoints on climate change and environmentalism. The data found a relationship between the context of keywords in tweets and the quality of information being shared by the company. Developing a strong presence on social media that is transparent with company values allows customers to trust the authenticity of the brands they invest in.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Holding companies responsible for taking a stand on societal issues has become increasingly more common as social media evolves into a prominent part of daily communication and a way to connect businesses and consumers. The current study researches the relationship between marketing, ethics, and brand image based on how companies portray their values to the public through social media platforms. Studies discussed throughout the paper examine the topics of corporate social responsibility, ethical communities, and buyer-seller relationships to further develop a discussion on the topic of ethical marketing practices. Existing research has evaluated brand authenticity in response to corporate-world issues to determine if they act responsibly or with the priority of financial success. Through a content analysis of three companies and the specific focus of environmentalism, the research was able to understand ethical business practices and motives behind corporate actions on social media. These analyses reviewed the values that the companies were built on and how they have evolved over time to align with social responsibility and pressing world issues. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is defined as an “ongoing global dialogue and activities regarding the financial, social, communicative, and environmental expectations and responsibilities of corporations towards their shareholders, employees, communities, and external stakeholders” (Stohl et al., 2017, p. 414). The presence of companies on social media led to an interest in understanding authentic brand images and the trust levels of consumers relationships to those brands. It is believed that companies will portray a specific image to the public based on what they think their target consumers would want them to look like. Whether they do so genuinely or not is the basis for further research. It is expected that companies are socially responsible, especially when their social media presence is high. To reflect their values to consumers, companies must represent them through smart and effective marketing tactics that the targeted consumer base will deem more important and influential to their own personal lives. Otherwise, it is expected that consumers lose trust in these companies and make sure to hold them accountable for misleading or unethical actions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### Marketing Ethics

The basis of the following research is ethical marketing practices as they relate to consumer behavior and perception of brand authenticity. Research has shown that marketing ethics play a very impactful role in consumer behavior, relationships, public image, and genuineness of brand values (Martin, 2011). Corporations are more likely to create a favorable image to their target consumers if they are ethically responsible and honest in their practices. A study done by Martin (2011) found that corporations with authentic ethical identities were more well received by the public than those whose identities had been calculated to fit an expected standard. The study sought to determine how people would hypothetically allocate resources to corporation's depending on their ethical standings and found that organizational identity is a crucial factor in how those decisions were made (Martin, 2011). Firms can benefit through improvement of their ethical actions and creating objectives that are both strategic in their marketing strategy and focused on consumer beliefs, as Martin (2011) states that a firm's ethics can be a basis for core objectives they build their business on. Ensuring that this identity is ethical also makes the corporation more favorable to their potential and existing consumers in times of crises, because in these times, people are likely to look to large corporations responsible for spreading public opinion (Martin, 2011). Similarly, in an analysis done by Schlegelmilch (2010) on marketing journals over the last 50 years, it was concluded that the topic of marketing ethics needs to be addressed more often in influential journals to stress the importance of transparency and authenticity. When the public looks into journals for perspectives and ideas on an issue important to them, popular sources hold more power than lesser-known sources by being open and vulnerable to people as consumers (Schlegelmilch, 2010). This study tracked the change in themes of marketing ethics over time to see which outlets provided the most influential content and created a marketing ethics impact factor (MEIF) to do so. The MEIF showed a general picture of all issues discussed in marketing journals and further helped identify plans for future research (Schlegelmilch, 2010). As shown in Makarem's (2016) study, consumers can go as far as to boycott a company that engages in unethical practices and ruin their reputation over social media when it is related to a social issue the public cares about. This research study examined the language used by consumers

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about brands they would boycott and how strongly their messages were conveyed. It was found that people use more intense language when it is an ethical practice they firmly believe in (Makarem, 2016). Therefore, it is important to understand the motives behind consumer behaviors before a company can make strong marketing decisions. The ways companies convey their ethics through marketing will be exemplified in the crisis communication tactics they use when they are faced with an issue that could be detrimental to their brand image.

#### Corporate Social Responsibility

A common theme that appeared in the existing research was the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). When discussing the consequences of a company's ethical or unethical behavior, it is important to recognize how it affects their targeted audience and surrounding environment. Research has shown that media coverage can either benefit or aggravate a company's social image depending on how they utilize their resources and choose to portray themselves (Stabler, 2020). In a time of crisis, media presence is heightened, and the public will examine every detail of a company's press release in order to determine if they are worth supporting based off how they handle the crisis. This study done by Stabler (2020) defined three factors that influence news selection, which are foreign brands, advertising relationships, and domestic CSR events. In a content analysis of 112 social media platform policies, research found that the guidelines they set add to the development of CSR communicative norms by outlining the practices and rationales of social media regulation (Stohl et al., 2017). These guidelines will help determine what constitutes a socially responsible corporation and further allow consumers to feel more engaged and comfortable with them.

For a company to engage their target consumers, their dedication to CSR is crucial. As shown in a research study done by Vo et al. (2019), companies with high engagement receive more positive feedback on social media as well as gain more trust from their customers. The authors studied the American airline industry through an analysis of how their CSR influenced word of mouth (WOM) on Twitter based on tweets including key words about the top six airlines of that year. Research showed that customers would produce more positive WOM about the airlines with high CSR and focused their concerns on more personal issues,

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such as engagement, rather than monetary, like their direct service with the airline (Vo et al., 2019). Similarly, research has also focused on the Twitter presence of Fortune 500 companies and how audiences resonated with their social media messages (Saxton et al., 2019). In this study, it was found that audiences want CSR messages that are relevant towards topics related to them and they will be more likely to share it with others. Positive WOM promotes a company's social media presence and creates a stronger relationship with their consumers (Saxton et al., 2019). The ways companies portray themselves, whether intentionally ethical or not, will stem from the values they were founded on. The authenticity behind a company's values will show consumers where their motives lie and shape their perceptions of the brand image (Hamby et al., 2019). Hamby's (2019) study showed that fidelity and authenticity of brands are enhanced when consumers endorse self-transcendence.

Social media and its users are the most influential contributors to a company's changes in the corporate world. Whelan et al. (2013) proposed a study on the relationship between social media and business responsibility, and states that there are two media arenas: corporate and public. Corporations establish these "arenas of citizenship" in order to address CSR related topics with their stakeholders and discuss how social media effects company progression. Therefore, the researchers further imply that social media brings a lot of risks for corporations, especially when making mistakes (Whelan et al., 2013). Being media literate will allow corporations to properly convey their messages and be more likely avoid these risks because they can create favorable awareness of their brand (Lee et. al, 2013). Higher CSR ratings are correlated with more proactive social media behaviors, having a greater online presence, and having more driven communication with consumers, as shown in a content analysis done by Lee et al. (2013) on over 200 firms from the US Fortune 500. This research examined the firms' behaviors and found that these correlations greatly helped their public image. When social media is used responsibly, they create a more favorable environment for their brand and allow for more open communication about the ethical implications of their media use. This helped further develop the research on founding values of brands and large corporations and how they shape their online marketing practices around what they want their consumers to think of them.

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These first two topics of the literature review led to the discussion of balancing financial and ethical responsibilities. At what point do companies lose touch with their customers values by promoting their products or services too much? Having strong CSR is reflected in how a company markets ethically through their resources while meeting the expectations of their shareholders. Customers can expect to feel more comfortable with a brand when the information they share is credible and keeps them engaged.

#### Ethical Communities

Akin to how consumers perceive a company's ethical motives, they can also shape their own behaviors based off the ethics and the community created around a brand. Research shows that people participating in online communities will strengthen their ethical behaviors due to the influence of others' activities and loyalty (Gummerus, 2017). This research study used an online questionnaire to capture consumers' commitment to ethical consumption online using a Likert scale. Gummerus (2017) found that prior commitment to this type of consumption will strengthen the perceived benefits of online communities and create an emotional bond with the brand. Furthermore, research was done on the relationships between consumers and the impact of brand sharing. Ordenes et al. (2019) collected data on social media of the number of shares a company received on their online posts and studied the trends of the ones that were the most popular. These brands ranged from food, to retail, to hospitality, and the researchers mostly focused on their strategies that were most effective in their messages. The types of posts that were well received by the public were the ones that were assertive or expressive, rather than directive (Ordenes et al., 2019). Companies should use these methods to reach their ideal audiences because it will send the most beneficial messages and allow them to reach an even wider group.

In some cases, consumers may not care as much about ethical issues that a company faces. This is usually due to the issue or crisis not directly impacting the consumer or the community they belong to. Carrigan (2001) conducted a study using focus group interviews to understand consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviors towards companies that are socially responsible or not. Respondents from this study stated they never boycotted a product based on a company's behavior, explaining that poor behavior can be justified through the company



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providing jobs and profits to the economy. People often believe that their impact is not large enough to shift the decision making of company executives, so they may not bother with being selective of the brands they support (Carrigan, 2001). To have an influence on consumer behavior, companies must portray their values through successful business practices that people will decide are more worthy of their time.

#### Moral Standards

Although the public expects companies to meet certain standards to categorize them as ethical or not, it is difficult to determine the set of standards that is attainable by every organization. Researchers have proposed various theories and reasonings to set up the values that people should abide by, but in the process have discriminated against certain groups of people because of differing traditions (Meyers, 2016). Meyers' (2016) study on creating universal standards recognizes that the most common morals are determined by Western traditions, and he poses a new model that accommodates multiple theories for the needs of different people. While everyone is subject to their own biases, moral accountability stems from the effort people put into their practices to make themselves more ethical (Meyers, 2016). These actions taken must also be genuine, otherwise people would have a difficult time trusting the company. Research showed that corporations should reflect their authentic ideologies in their social media messages to effectively earn the trust of their stakeholders (Georgallis, 2014).

Social movements allow companies to voice their support or opinion on a matter that is important to many groups of people. When companies create initiatives based off a current social movement, they are directly influencing their stakeholders that are impacted by that movement, which can be either in collaboration or conflict with their behaviors (Georgallis, 2014). These stakeholders expect companies to react in specific ways during times of crises, and therefore it cannot be done through deception. Maresh's (2007) research study used historical examples of crises that companies have faced and the level of secrecy the company used to cover up their mistakes. After analyzing events like the Exxon-Valdez oil spill and Tylenol tampering cases, the research stated that the level of intensity of a crisis should not justify a violation of ethics, especially when that crisis puts the public or the environment at

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risk (Maresh, 2007). These are standards the company must meet to satisfy the expectations of stakeholders and uphold their founding beliefs.

#### Case Studies

Social media can easily influence people in power and their audiences. This leaves a great responsibility on corporations, such as those like Starbucks, to present their ethical practices in the effective ways so that they do not abuse their power. Research has shown that individuals in positions of power hold pronounced responsibility for the messages they post on social media as well as the repercussions of their behaviors and actions (Chen, 2009). Existing research has analyzed specific brands and how they have explored the topics of authenticity and ethics on social media sites. A case analysis on Starbucks' Twitter presence was performed to examine their brand values and sentiment in an analysis of over two million tweets (Shirdastian et al., 2019). The study showed that tweets could be categorized by quality, commitment, heritage, uniqueness, and symbolism, and the model used could predict a brand's authenticity through these factors. Chen's (2009) case study of Facebook and Twitter found that the responsibility cannot only be recognized after there has been consequences of the company's actions, but rather prepared beforehand so that social media is utilized properly. These examples further help the study of marketing ethics and understanding corporate strategies in times of crisis.

#### Corporate Examples

While researching these previous topics mentioned and understanding ethical corporate responsibility on social media, the foundation for this study also relied on the background of specific companies that will be used for a content analysis. Research was done on corporation values and public issues that would reflect positively or negatively on large businesses involved in them. Many large corporations have direct impacts on our environment, so this research focuses on sustainability practices, climate change awareness, and how they relate to a brand's promotion of their products. Their direct involvement means they have an important role in corporate social responsibility and the ways they communicate with their publics. The corporations studied in relation to marketing practices based off brand values and ethics in the present study are Patagonia, Starbucks, and Ben & Jerry's.

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Patagonia's official website immediately opens to a page on how they educate their consumers and work towards environmental sustainability and land reservation. There is a tab listed "Activism" with convenient links to get involved in the movement of climate change. They pride themselves in using their platform for resources and to make an impact on pressing environmental issues. Their Twitter page, which will be analyzed in the methods section, is shaped around their mission to saving the planet and creating a platform that is for more than just a clothing company.

Starbucks, one of the most popular coffee companies in the United States, also aims to give back to the environment by giving back more than they take. Research from their company website has shown how they stay up to date on their farmers, create coffee-specific environmental goals, and where they donate their resources to. This company communicates their brand values through mission statements and proactive behaviors, for example, creating long term donation goals to farmers and communities to reduce waste and give back to those that have been helping their business profit. Their Twitter page, while a little more focused on their products than Patagonia, also represents their values through activism-related tweets and community building behavior.

Ben & Jerry's has been known as a socially responsible company since they first opened in 1978. The founders based their corporation on set values and have always had the goal to give back to causes they are passionate about, one of these included being climate change. Their website provide background on these topics along with what they do as a company to give back. Research on their site provided easy access to resources and ways to stay connected with both their brand and the issues they care about. Their Twitter is very active with content related to their products and current issues they stay active with.

#### Research Objectives

After reviewing the literature, the objective of this thesis is to examine the relationship between ethics and marketing in a way that evaluates how brands represent themselves to their desired consumers. Through a deeper understanding of the subject, analyses will be conducted on related content. Specifically, this will focus on the ethical issues of environmentalism and climate crises and how large corporations focus their marketing tactics

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and values on these issues to appeal to consumers and create a responsible brand image. These issues were chosen due to the overwhelming impact companies have on the environment and the powerful position they are in to bring attention to it. With a very public social media presence, companies that claim to be environmentally conscious can prove it through their marketing strategies and the messages they spread to their involved consumers. Thus, this leads to two overarching research questions for the present study:

RQ1: Do companies use their ethical values for marketing purposes on social media?

RQ2: How do companies reflect their ethical values concerning environmentalism on social media?

This research will be important in understanding how ethical marketing influences consumer behavior and trust in large corporations on social media. In relation to existing research, the present study will extend the knowledge of corporate social responsibility and provide new and current examples of social media marketing tactics related to environmentalism. It is a thesis worth studying because this issue is inevitably going to impact our future and the ways that companies will conduct business practices.

## **METHODS**

### Study Overview

The present study will utilize a content analysis. I found this to be the most beneficial for my research question because I will be able to directly analyze the social media practices of companies related to their stance on ethical crises in our current society. This analysis will consist of analyzing three companies' tweets that were related to the topic of environmentalism in relation to their business practices. The variable being studied will be the frequency of mentions of ethical concerns or progress the company is making to be socially responsible to define themes throughout their messages. This means the content analysis will be qualitative, because it is not directly studying measurable quantities such as numbers, and instead is looking at the quality of the tweets and how they correlate to the research question.

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#### Sample

Twitter will be used as the research platform due to the availability of thousands of tweets coming directly from the brand, and thousands more of responses from consumers. Twitter, being one of the most popular social media platforms, allows for companies to express their opinions and corporate policies in under 280 characters. The small number of characters available also eliminates unnecessary words or information, therefore allowing the analysis to reach the most specifically related tweets. This platform was selected because companies can directly post to their feeds about important topics related to their business, as well as keep up with what is trending within their area of business. I want to study tweets from the dates of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, through December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 with key words relating to ethics, environmental sustainability, climate change, and social movements related to those topics. This timeline was chosen because it will provide enough content for analysis, was during an election in the United States, saw the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, and saw changes with environmental policies. I chose these movements listed above to study because of their moral influence and corporate social responsibility. Climate change has long been a topic of discussion in the corporate sector because of how much of an impact large corporations have on the environment. By studying companies that claim to be eco-friendly and environmentally responsible, I can determine whether they are authentically doing so and if their company was founded on the same values they claim to still uphold. The companies I will research are Patagonia, Ben & Jerry's, and Starbucks. These companies were chosen because they were founded on the values of being socially responsible and creating a brand that reflects those values through their actions and business practices. As of January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the companies' follower counts are: Patagonia (554.5K), Ben & Jerry's (521.9K), and Starbucks (10.9M).

I first had to investigate the mission statements of each company in order to determine if they would be the right fit for my research question. I found information through their individual websites about their values and beliefs that they shape their business around. Patagonia has been a long-time supporter of grassroots environmental efforts through using environmentally friendly materials, following social responsibility programs, and holding themselves accountable to be fair and humane in their work. Ben & Jerry's, since they were founded in 1978, has aimed to be a sustainable corporation and has consistently advocated for political

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issues such as racial justice, LGBT equality, and climate change. Starbucks believes that, as a for-profit public company, they should have a positive social impact on communities they serve. Their website links to resources on ethical sustainability, creating educational and employment opportunities, minimizing their environmental footprint, and strengthening communities through civic services. These companies all portray themselves as ethically responsible in the realm of environmental sustainability, and therefore a content analysis of their social media presence will reveal how well they convey that message to their desired audiences and if it is with the goal of selling more product or simply being a socially responsible company.

#### Procedures

The material in the content analysis will be coded for key words relating to ethics, corporate responsibility, and specifically sustainability, environmentalism, and climate change. The key words I have included are “climate change”, “climate crisis”, “environment/alism”, “initiative(s)”, “sustainable/sustainability”, “global warming”, and “greenhouse gas(es)”. These words and phrases were chosen based on common phrases pulled from each company’s mission statement and values listed on their websites, as well as what was thought to be associated with environmental reform movements. Terms such as “ethics” were omitted from the research for being too broad and relating to topics outside of environmentalism. They will be coded by frequency to research how often the companies studied actually relate their marketing practices to their corporate values, or if they only bring up environmental issues when it is beneficial to their brand. I will do this directly through the Twitter site in their search bar by using their advanced search options. The advanced search allows for specifications such as date of tweets, keywords, hashtags, and engagement from one account. This search tool was concluded to be the best option for research because it pulls directly from the Twitter website, is easily accessible, and includes all necessary qualities of Tweets for analysis. This will filter out the tweets that are specific to my research over a time frame I put together to provide the tweets most beneficial to my study. Then I will save the links of each tweet into a categorized excel document and begin to organize them for my research.

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After collecting each company's tweets, they will be printed out and organized by common themes and then further analyzed on their relation to the environmental topics mentioned and the frequencies of keywords. This will then help to interpret if they align with the beliefs and practices each company stands for. Analyzing the tweets coded for ethics will give me a strong example of companies that promote certain values and how they market themselves to reflect them.

#### Potential Research Issues

There are no experiments or surveys involving people, so the research does not need any ethical review before being conducted, according to Bryant University's IRB. Instead, this research requires the use of Twitter to analyze selected tweets under a certain category. Potential problems could arise with the use of this software because understanding this resource requires some knowledge and expertise that will need to be acquired over time. It may be anticipated that this software could accidentally leave out important topics needed by the researcher in order to fully comprehend the posed research question.

## **RESULTS**

An inductive approach was taken to obtain these results, with the intention of creating themes throughout the data as it was analyzed based on what was found by the coders. This type of thematic analysis takes a "bottom up" approach that is flexible with how it helped to answer the research questions and provide deeper insights into the content collected.

#### RQ1: Do companies use their ethical values for marketing purposes on social media?

Tweets from the predetermined timeline were first electronically saved based on keywords and separated by company and were then printed out on paper to physically organize them into categories. The tweets were laid out by company before separating into categories and coders filtered through each one. They were looked at intensely to find meanings within the language and message being conveyed by the sources to narrow down an overarching theme. The tweets were looked at in entirety before categorizing, as well, so that the coders were familiarized with the data before beginning to code. As the tweets of each company were collected and organized, categories were created to find common themes within them (Appendix A). Themes were created based on patterns found throughout the data that were

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significant enough to enhance the research. For this reason, the inductive thematic approach worked to keep flexible guidance rather than following rigid rules created prior to the analysis. These themes constantly changed throughout the process as more content was added and the data overlapped or fit better into others.

Coders also created subcategories as each tweet was brought in the research process based on commonalities. These initial themes helped to construct concepts related to the research design and connected the data to the most focused part of the study, as well as relating back to the mission statements of each company and relating themes to the overarching ideas shared within them. During this phase of coding, as many themes as possible were searched for without excluding the possibility of an idea outside of any preexisting thoughts the coders had. This allowed for new themes to be constructed and the tweets could be looked at with a different perspective than originally anticipated. Once each tweet fit into a category, coders went through to rearrange and finalize tweets into the ones that fit best of the overall theme of the tweet, concluding into thirteen total categories. No tweets were excluded from the final organization of themes in order to count for the total data set from the timeline initially decided upon.

For a few instances, the coders disagreed on category placements and therefore went into a discussion before making a final decision. Out of the 170 total tweets, only seven (4.12%) were disagreed upon. Having two coders meant that certain phrasing or content in the tweet could be looked at in two different ways and therefore needed the meaning of it to be discussed further. Some of the tweets fit into multiple themes based on the content and language of them, and ultimately could only be placed into one category. This was decided by looking at the overarching theme of the tweet, thinking of the company's motive behind posting it, and how a consumer would understand it from the outside. As stated earlier, no tweets could be left out of the data set, so discussions continued until a single theme was agreed upon.

These 170 tweets (79 for Starbucks, 70 for Patagonia, and 21 for Ben & Jerry's) were divided up into these themes based on the content within them, keywords used, and any additional



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media, such as photos, videos, and links, to come to conclusions about their message's intention and goal.

#### Description of Themes

Noting how many tweets fit into each theme and the frequency of tweets per theme was essential in understanding how they helped to answer the research questions. In this section, further information about the creation and results of themes is described to correspond with the focus of environmentalism in social media messages.

#### RQ2: How do companies reflect their ethical values concerning environmentalism on social media?

The theme that emerged with the highest frequency of tweets is "actions that the company takes to promote environmentalism." For this theme, 26 total tweets were categorized into it: 16 for Starbucks, 10 for Patagonia, but none for Ben & Jerry's. The criterion for this category includes sharing actions the company has taken to work on environmentally friendly practices, ending the practices that were not, and describing what they have in place that is working well. For example, a tweet from @patagonia shares, "We want to be sure we are not only treating the environment with respect, but the population. For this reason, we have more Fair Trade styles than any other clothing brand. We now offer 480 styles that are Fair Trade Certified. Check out this link: [bit.ly/2mts0w0](https://bit.ly/2mts0w0)". In this tweet, the company shares a concern they have about their impact on the environment and therefore shares the initiative they took to offer more sustainable products. Another example from @Starbucks writes, "Going strawless is the right thing to do for the environment, our partners (employees), and our business. Starbucks plans to eliminate single-use plastic straws globally by 2020." Starbucks is expressing their concern for the impact their plastic products have on the environment and a step they are taking towards a goal of making their practices eco-friendlier.

The theme with the lowest frequency of tweets overall is "combining environmentalism with other social issues." This theme only totaled two tweets, one from Ben & Jerry's and one from Patagonia, none from Starbucks. This theme categorized tweets that related environmentalism to other important social issues discussed in the media, such as racial injustice and voting rights. An example from @benandjerrys writes, "Black people experience 56% more air pollution than they cause and are 50% more vulnerable to wildfires than other

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communities. Climate change is a racial justice issue, here are 4 reasons why: [benjerrys.co/36Ev40A](https://benjerrys.co/36Ev40A)". The other example, from @patagonia, says, "We support our employees and our customers. We support the environment and the communities where we live, where we work, and where we vote. @CivicAlliance #fordemocracy <http://CivicAlliance.com/100>" with a media attachment of a quote from the Civic Alliance CEO Ryan Gellert.

With the occurrences of keywords being used in contexts unrelated to the research purposes, a theme was created to differentiate them. This theme, called "using environmental terms for non-environmental contexts" categorized tweets that used a keyword in a sentence or phrase that doubles its meaning beyond what was expected. This was the most frequent theme for Starbucks at a count of 20, but only saw three from Patagonia and two from Ben & Jerry's. An example from @Starbucks is, "Please visit this site to learn about our dedication to foster a diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment: [sbux.com/2Y7xGjw](https://sbux.com/2Y7xGjw)" which uses the word "environment" to describe a setting or condition rather than the natural world. It becomes less relevant to the research question being used in this sense and therefore was categorized into this theme. Another example from @patagonia uses the keyword "initiative" in a non-environmental context by referencing voter turnout; "Together, we hope to achieve greater participation in our country's elections. Time to Vote is a nonpartisan, business-led initiative to help ensure employees across America don't have to choose between voting and earning a paycheck. Join our movement – [pat.ag/TimeToVote2020](https://pat.ag/TimeToVote2020)..."

The theme "focuses on political action" had the highest frequency for both Ben & Jerry's and Patagonia and was of the lowest frequency for Starbucks. For a total of 21 tweets in the data set, 14 were Patagonia, 6 were Ben & Jerry's, and 1 was for Starbucks. With this theme, tweets were categorized into it if they described political movements, people, and/or policies that relate to environmental topics. These tweets often called to action what customers could do in the political world. An example from @patagonia writes, "President Trump just removed protections for tributaries and wetlands in your community. This comes after polluting your air, putting your public lands under threat and ignoring the climate crisis. Register and vote in November to stop the pillaging of our planet. – Rose Marcario." This

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tweet highlights former president Donald Trump and how environmental protections are at risk if people do not go out and vote. An example showing a push for political action from @benandjerrys says, “We just came out of the hottest January in recorded history. The climate crisis is urgent and requires bold action. Let’s make VT a leader, not a laggard on climate. We are the Green Mtn State after all! @GovPhilScott we need to #ActOnClimateVT #VTPoli.”

A theme that was connected environmental topics to selling products or services was found and created as “using environmentalism as a sales pitch.” This theme had four tweets for Patagonia, one for Ben & Jerry’s, making it one of their least frequent, and none for Starbucks. This theme was created to categorize the tweets that promoted environmentally friendly practices but also tied in their own products to get customers to purchase more from them. For example, @patagonia tweeted “We definitely try our best to love and protect the planet we call home; while simultaneously making gear that will last a lifetime using sustainable materials,” and “Hi Ciara! I know that our prices can be out of reach for many people. Buying our products is an investment as they are built to last which save you time and money and it benefits the environment by reducing the number of products you buy overtime. We do have a sale starting 8/15!” In these tweets, the company promotes their clothing through the lens of sustainability and that purchasing from them would make the consumer a better person by contributing to an environmentally friendly brand.

In some tweets, people were referenced that were not overtly famous or political, but were part of environmental initiatives or partnerships that the company was involved in. The theme “using people as examples” includes tweets that reference a person or group for additional information and/or resources on an environmental topic. The theme has ten from @patagonia, one for @benandjerrys making it one of their least frequent, and none for @Starbucks. A sample tweet from @benandjerrys shares, “2019 saw youth coming together to demand change. Naming Greta as @TIME’s 2019 Person of the Year is a testament to the power of activism and an acceptance that adults have failed to address climate change. Thankfully, young people are up to that challenge. [Time.com/person-of-the-...](https://www.time.com/person-of-the-year/)” This tweet discusses the issue of climate change with reference to young activist Greta Thunberg who is known for her

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fight for environmental policies. Another example from @patagonia writes, “Nick Martin writes about the role Indigenous-led land management plays in combating the climate crisis and why global powers must give Indigenous nations a seat at the table. Read the story here: [pat.ag/RedLakeTW,](https://pat.ag/RedLakeTW)” with an attached video informing the reader of the Red Lake and its place in Indigenous people’s lives.

The theme “steps customers can take with company products to be more environmentally friendly” was found to be one of the least frequent of Patagonia’s themes, with only one tweet being categorized into it. To categorize tweets into this theme, coders looked for ways the companies were enforcing customers to act on their end using their products. For example, @Starbucks tweeted, “As part of our commitment to sustainable practices, each metal can and paper box is recyclable. See the label for more instructions.” This type of tweet showcases how they are being sustainable and shares insight into how a customer can take the next step in the process towards being a more environmentally friendly industry. Another example from @patagonia shows ways customers can get involved through promotional tools, replying to a Twitter user with concerns about paper waste; “Thanks for letting us know and we’d be happy to remove you from that paper mailing list and onto our email list. Please send us a DM so we can grab some info from you. Thanks for considering the environment!” The company offers more environmentally friendly practices for promotional mailing materials and guides their customers to taking those initiatives to join.

While searching for keywords throughout each company’s Twitter pages, it was noticed by the coders that these words are not always used for the expected purposes. The theme “using environmental terms as buzzwords” outlined tweets that included the keywords of interest but contained no solid context of environmental initiatives. This was one of the three lowest themes in frequency for Patagonia, had none from Ben & Jerry’s, and saw 13 from Starbucks. A tweet from @Starbucks writes, “You’re a sustainability R O C K S T A R!” and another says, “An early start to the day and sustainable refreshment for everyone. Even the plants!” For both tweets, the words “sustainable” and “sustainability” were used, but neither provided educational content or insightful information into the company’s practices or mission

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statements. Instead, they were used as buzzwords to increase the number of tweets from the account that would appear in a quick search.

A problem that the coders ran into during research pertains to the lack of keywords throughout the tweet searches. While terms such as “global warming”, “greenhouse gas(es)”, and “initiative(s)” were present on company websites and mission statements, they lacked in actual results. These results raise questioning on reliability and genuineness – mission statements are more easily accessible and commonly read by users looking to see what a company stands for in comparison to studying their tweets over time. People are more likely to read those statements, therefore the companies throw in these keywords to gain online traffic and a perception of them that is more likely to attract the interest of consumers. However, the lack of these words in their social media shows the disconnect from their mission statements as they get lost in the promotion of other services the company offers.

Ben and Jerry's Twitter account significantly lacked in number of tweets in comparison to Starbucks and Patagonia. The same number of keywords were used in searches, as well as over the same period of time, and the words were collected from the commonalities of each company's mission statements as to not exclude any or be biased. Ben and Jerry's totaled 21 tweets, just about 50 under the amount of the other two companies. However, due to the lower count of tweets, these will be held to more value when comparing to the others because it is the only direct source of information available.

## **DISCUSSION**

### Purpose of Brand Recognition

A commonality within themes was found for the purpose of brand recognition in relation to environmental topics and/or keywords. “Using environmental terms as buzzwords” (#11), “using environmentalism as a sales pitch” (#12), and “using environmental terms for non-environmental contexts” (#13) all were connected using keywords in order to promote the brand, their products, and their social media presences. As shown in the fourteen tweets under theme #11, the keywords being researched were used in a context that was not educational or beneficial to any environmental initiatives. Instead, they increased the number of tweets that

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would show up in a search result as to make the company's page appear more involved in these areas and have a larger social media presence. In theme #12, the keywords were used to pitch products or promote company sales, again, rather than being geared towards a more educational or socially conscious topic. Theme #13, being the second highest in total tweet frequency, included keywords being used in non-environmental contexts even though the words are environmentally related. They instead promoted the work environment and product initiatives to consumers without offering any truly beneficial information in terms of being eco-friendly. These three themes used keywords for their own brand recognition and knew that plotting those words into their social media content would convince their audience that they had higher involvement in environmental topics than they do.

These three companies utilize their businesses to promote environmental issues and initiatives, which raises the question of why they would need to increase their social media presence using buzzwords when they have legitimate topics to talk about. They are using their business for good, but through these themes we see they are also using them as a marketing ploy. If a company is built on a mission statement promoting socially responsible topics, they should be reflecting that within their social media content as much as possible.

#### Lack of Keywords in the Data

The terms "global warming", "greenhouse gas(es)", and "initiative(s)" were lacking in frequency overall once the data set was fully checked through. This raised concerns to the researchers because these words were present throughout the companies' websites, mission statements, and values, and yet there was no real implementation of them in their social media where a very large audience is able to reach them. Is a company true to their values if they cannot implement them into the information they share on a regular basis? Mission statements are easy to find and therefore are going to include keywords that hit the mark with what environmentally conscious consumers are expecting from them. As for a larger social media audience, they may not be looking directly for these words, but instead are going to be given information that is generalized and surface level. Through a mission statement, a company can shape their perception in a cohesive way. On Twitter, short tweets of less than 280 characters can only hold so much information that companies would rather share business

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promotions or buzzwords over important topics. The companies will appear more credible and truer to their words if their online conversations reflect their mission statements more directly. Editing out keywords from their mission statements or implementing them more into their frequent tweets will help them better align with one another.

#### Environmental Credibility

Building a strong foundation of corporate social responsibility in the environmental capacity is important to a company's credibility and factors into the level of trust a consumer has with them and their business practices. Sharing a mission statement that hits the right points of what an eco-friendly company looks like will only take them so far if their constant online presence is not matching up. By not addressing important topics, not creating educational content, and throwing out words to make them sound more involved than they are, these companies will lose credibility when it comes to sharing actual issues or initiatives related to their beliefs. As we recognized that Starbucks' least frequent theme was "focus on political action" and their most frequent was "using environmental terms for non-environmental contexts," we can make the case that they will be difficult to trust if they were to release a legitimate statement on political beliefs related to environmentalism. Their tweets appeared lighthearted, less focused on action or educational content, and therefore has been established as their way of communicating to their consumers. If Starbucks were to start posting tweets regarding a political movement or initiative, it would not line up with the online image they have created and would take longer for people to buy into their environmental credibility.

#### Why is this Important?

In an evolving society where every inch of social media is examined for faults, it is incredibly important for companies to handle their platforms responsibly and with transparency. Addressing topics that they are shaping their company values and mission statements around is important for customer relations and accountability. Failing to do so tarnishes their brand image and loses trust from consumers that invest their money in companies that share the same concerns and goals as them. Omitting important topics and phrases from social media posts will expose a company of fraudulent behavior and damage their reputation of being conscious of the social and environmental issues their practices directly impact. Establishing a

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responsibility to uphold their values within their daily outreach to the public will further solidify their credibility.

#### Limitations

There were limitations to this study that put constraints on the finalized data and therefore must be addressed further. Limitations to this study include limited access to data, differing experience of two coders, the inability to quantify the total number of tweets over the designated time period, and omitting observations of replies from users. Given that this study was conducted over Twitter, this limits the amount of content the coders could use to answer the research questions. Companies often are present on multiple social media platforms instead of just one, allowing for more content to be shared with their consumers and various types of posts to be made. While Twitter uses both text and visual media, platforms such as Instagram and Facebook may provide more information. The use of two coders allowed for differing perspectives throughout the methodology process, yet a limitation in this is the potential for more coders of various demographics. Being able to have more experienced coders could have allowed for diversification of ideas and a deeper discussion on the data to have a wider understanding of the content analysis.

As stated in the results, 170 total tweets were found over the two-year period, and it was noted that Ben & Jerry's only accounted for 21 of them. Whether this correlated to the same ratio as the 79 or 70 tweets from Starbucks and Patagonia respectively, or they did in fact lack in tweets using the keywords is unknown. Twitter's advanced search tool did not allow for filtering of the total number of general tweets over the two years. To avoid this limitation, a separate search engine may need to be used to analyze the total tweets a company sent out in a specific period of time. Lastly, a limitation lied in the omittance of replies from users on the tweets in the data set. Due to time constraints, coders could only observe and analyze the tweets that the companies posted whereas more insight into the research questions could be found in the replies from customers.

#### Conclusion

The importance of corporate social responsibility is becoming increasingly more prevalent as social media emerges as a strong marketing platform. Companies hoping to attract more customers will post what they believe their target audience is looking to find in a reliable



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brand they are willing to spend money on. Therefore, they must present themselves authentically if they are claiming to be the responsible company they are. Patagonia's use of environmental topics for education and productive initiatives shows a strong CSR over social media that customers value. Starbucks presenting their values through sales pitches and surface level concerns for the environment show they lack in authenticity and therefore are not seen as connected to their values. For further research, expanding onto other social media platforms could analyze more content related to this topic.

Appendices

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Appendix A – Themes

1. Combining environmentalism with other social issues
2. Using environmentalism as a sales pitch
3. Potential future actions the company could take on environmentalism
4. Forming partnerships for environmental purposes
5. Promotes initiatives to join
6. Encouraging education on environmental topics
7. Using people as examples
8. Using environmental terms as buzzwords
9. Steps customers can take with company products to be more environmentally friendly
10. Asking people to educate themselves on environmentalism
11. Focus on political action
12. Using environmental terms for non-environmental contexts
13. Actions that the company takes to promote environmentalism

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Appendix B – Table of Themes

	Ben & Jerry's	Patagonia	Starbucks	Total per theme
1. Combining environmentalism with other social issues	1	1	0	2
2. Using environmentalism as a sales pitch	1	4	0	5
3. Potential future actions the company could take on environmentalism	0	6	0	6
4. Forming partnerships for environmental purposes	4	3	0	7
5. Promotes initiatives to join	3	2	2	7
6. Encouraging education on environmental topics	0	11	0	11
7. Using people as examples	1	10	0	11
8. Using environmental terms as buzzwords	0	1	13	14
9. Steps customers can take with company products to be more environmentally friendly	0	1	14	15
10. Asking people to educate themselves on environmentalism	2	6	12	20
11. Focus on political action	6	14	1	21
12. Using environmental terms for non-environmental contexts	2	3	20	25
13. Actions that the company takes to promote environmentalism	0	10	16	26
Total per company	21	70	79	

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