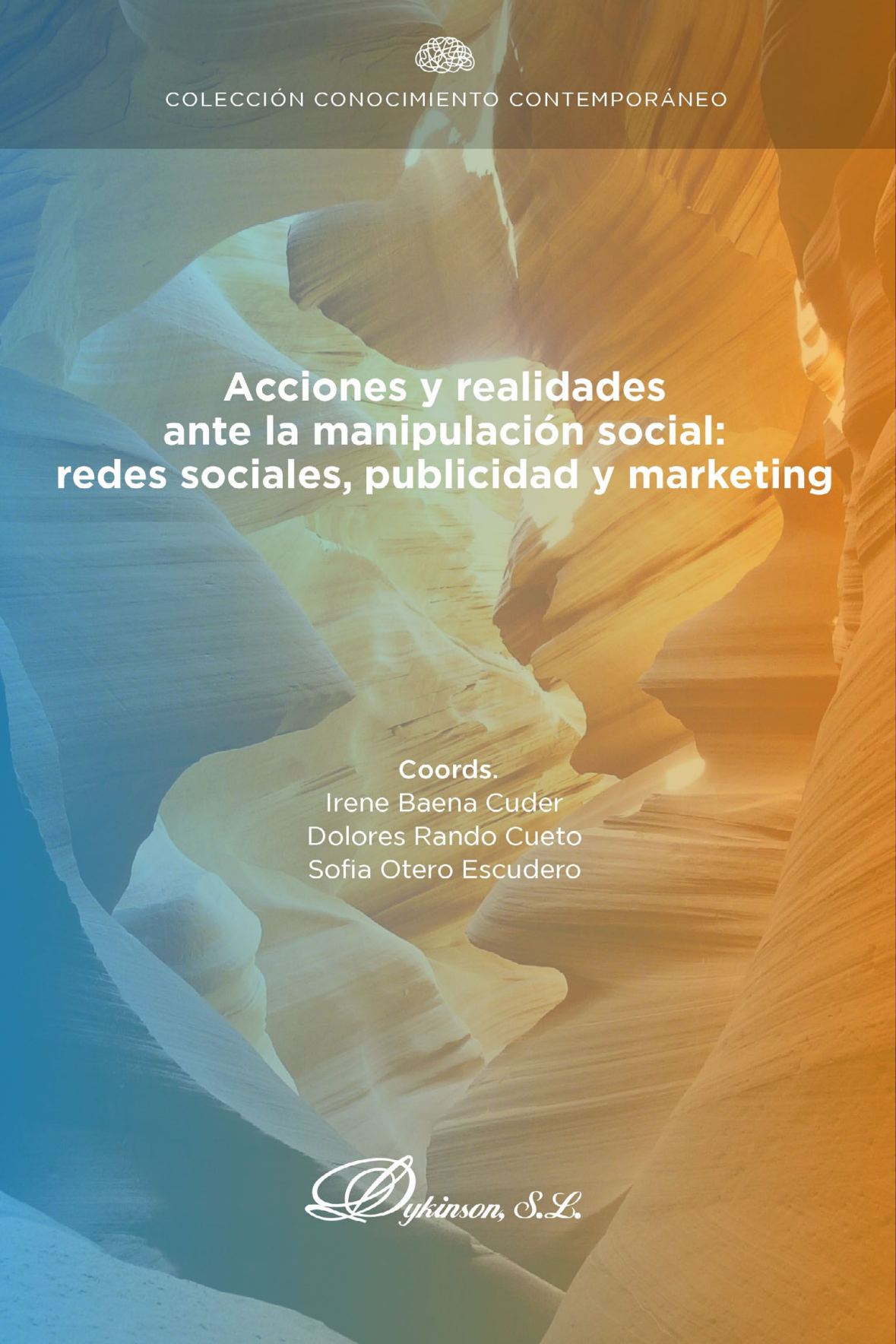

COLECCIÓN CONOCIMIENTO CONTEMPORÁNEO

Acciones y realidades ante la manipulación social: redes sociales, publicidad y marketing

Coords.
Irene Baena Cuder
Dolores Rando Cueto
Sofia Otero Escudero

Dykinson, S.L.

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IRENE BAENA CUDER
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SOFIA OTERO ESCUDERO

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THE NEW SOCIAL POWER OF STAKEHOLDERS: THE CURRENT ACTIVIST PRACTICES THAT ARE SHAPING CORPORATE SOCIAL CONDUCT

ALEXANDRA MIGUEL
Centro de Investigação e Estudos De Sociologia
Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

SANDRA MIRANDA
Escola Superior de Comunicação Social
Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa
Centro de Investigação e Estudos De Sociologia
Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

1. INTRODUCTION

Stakeholder expectations and actions have always served as an important predictor of companies conduct and policies, especially regarding social issues (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). This influence has been exerted over the years through public statements and movements which, as Greening and Gray (1994) and King (2008) found, have been inducing companies to engage in social affairs and affecting the types of initiatives they implement.

In recent decades, the social power of stakeholders has been intensifying, assuming an increasingly activist character (Hollenbeck & Zinkhanb, 2010), which increases the pressure for companies not to be neutral regarding social issues (Lin, 2018). In particular, younger consumers gained greater awareness of the sociopolitical nature of consumption, showing a superior interest in brands committed to social issues (Amed et al., 2019), and expressing their sociopolitical stances by openly criticizing brands considered unethical (Schmidt et al., 2022).

The greater belief of consumers and other stakeholders about the duty of companies to improve the sociopolitical problems of today's world,

combined with factors such as the greater social and economic power of companies, globalization, technological advances, and the consequent empowerment of stakeholders, has given rise to a new set of participatory and collective actions that seek to affect organizations' social conduct (Hyman & Tohill, 2017). Such movements include anti-brand activism (e.g., Romani et al., 2015), encompassing well-known practices such as boycotts (e.g., Friedman, 1999), anti-brand communities (e.g., Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006) and culture-jamming (e.g., Lasn, 2000), as well as anti-consumption movements (e.g., Zavestoski, 2002), and the recent so-called "cancel culture" (e.g., Saldanha et at., 2022).

These stakeholders' activist actions, greatly favored by the new media, have thus contributed to increase the participation of stakeholders in corporate decision-making on social issues (Fontenelle, 2010), being a source of social change by encouraging companies to positively change their internal practices and defend sociopolitical causes (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). However, some concerns have also been raised about the democratic nature and effectiveness of these strategies, given the non-egalitarian nature of markets and the possible fugacity of these movements (Crane et al., 2004; Lightfoot, 2019).

Based on a literature review and concrete examples, this investigation seeks to debate the greatest power that stakeholders exercise today over the social conduct of companies, addressing the current activist actions by which stakeholders pressure businesses to act on sociopolitical issues. Likewise, the benefits and criticisms aroused around the use of social practices in the corporate context will also be addressed, as well as the increasing importance to analyze the relationship between brands and stakeholders within the scope of citizenship.

2. PURPOSE

2.1. The main purposes of this investigation are:

- Investigate the growing power of stakeholders in the social orientation of companies and in the definition of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) conduct and activist campaigns;

- Explore the current practices through which stakeholders exercise social power over companies, giving concrete examples of how these groups are influencing corporate social conduct;
- Discuss the positive implications, as well as the challenges, raised by these new activist stakeholder practices;
- Draw conclusions about the way in which the notion of citizenship is currently embedded in the relationship between companies and stakeholders.

3. DISCUSSION

The term stakeholder encompasses all groups that can affect or are affected by an organization, having a "stake", claim or interest in the company's operations and decisions (Carroll, 1991; Freeman, 1984). Some of these groups are, therefore, shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, investors, interest groups and society itself, and their expectations, beliefs, needs, and demands are now highly recognized as critical factors in the decision-making processes of any postmodern organization (Parmar et al., 2010; Thomas & Stephens, 2015), as well as in its own legitimacy to operate (Riel, 2012).

In fact, although some views point to a domination of organizations in the company-stakeholder relationship, through deceitful marketing tactics and unequal access to information (Dobscha, 1998), there has been a growing power of each stakeholder group to monitor business conduct and decisions, and to influence their ways of acting (Kapferer, 2012). Currently, stakeholders can even easily establish relationships with each other and create networks and synergies with the ability to influence an organization positively or negatively (Carrillo, 2014). This power of stakeholders over companies comes from the fact that these groups provide essential resources and returns for the positive functioning of organizations and for their economic well-being, so the organizational survival and success largely depend on meeting the interests and needs of its stakeholders (Roeck & Delobbe, 2012).

Nowadays, one of the areas in which stakeholders show strong demands on companies is social issues (e.g., Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Korschun, 2021; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). Over time, stakeholders have become increasingly socially aware, largely due the spread of globalization and the constant technological advances, which allowed quick and easy access to a greater volume of information and greater ease for stakeholders to participate in the debate on social, political, economic, and environmental issues (Hyman & Tohill, 2017; Kotler et al., 2012). In addition, the greater economic power of companies provided a broader social view of corporate rights and duties and led to the conceptualization of corporations as moral and socially conscious entities (Pimentel & Didonet, 2021), conducting to the transfer of part of the responsibility for addressing social issues from the State to the private sector (McMahon, 2012).

Today's consumers, for example, require brands to contribute and take a stand on social issues, expecting their values to be reflected in business actions (Hoppner & Vadakkepatt, 2019; Schmidt et al., 2022; Vredenburg et al., 2020) and valuing companies that show concerns for the well-being of society (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). According to a 2019 study by Accenture, 62% of current consumers expect companies to take a stand on social issues and 53% say they are prone to complain if they are unhappy with the brand's words or actions about those issues, 47% admit switching to other brands, while 17% may never consume the brand again (Accenture, 2019). Likewise, employees increasingly worry about the social and environmental impacts of their employers (Skoglund & Böhm, 2020) and desire to be involved in corporate social actions and decisions (Tao et al., 2018). Millennials employees even go further, not applying for job openings or turning down economically interesting job offers, if an employer does not fit with their values (Buder et al., 2019). Furthermore, there has been a greater concern of shareholders about social and moral issues (Rehbein et al., 2004), stockholders increasingly prefer to invest in socially responsible funds (Rahim et al., 2011), suppliers feel more motivated to work with socially responsible companies (Mason & Simmons, 2014) and communities better accept corporations that implement socially responsible practices (Bertoncello & Junior, 2007).

Within this framework, stakeholder demands began to assume an increasingly important role in definition of CSR conduct and, more recently, in the activist positions taken by brands on the most varied sociopolitical issues (Korschun, 2021; Moorman, 2020). This led companies to not just adjusting certain practices used in its production, distribution, and sales activities, making them more in line with the social and environmental concerns of their stakeholders, but also to get directly involved with sociopolitical causes, by exposing a public stance about them and acting for their resolution (Dauvergne, 2017). Given the relevance of stakeholders for the effectiveness of companies, stakeholders' values are indeed key predictors not only for brands' decision to invest in CSR and activism, but also guide the type of social strategies implemented and the causes addressed in brand activism campaigns (Chernev & Blair, 2015; Greening & Gray, 1994; Hydock et al., 2020; King, 2008).

In this sense, Mayfield et al. (2015) recognize the critical position of stakeholders inside and outside the organization, proposing that companies should always take in account their demands, interests and needs in any corporate strategy, so that there is a company-stakeholder alignment. The strongest form of alignment would be the total support of stakeholders for the company's actions and conduct, which allows corporations to operate with full legitimacy (Riel, 2012).

However, when the alignment between business conduct and stakeholder demands does not occur, these groups have been finding increasingly sophisticated and powerful ways to make companies listen to their claims, particularly regarding social issues (Fontenelle, 2010; Hollenbeck & Zinkhanb, 2010; Hyman & Tohill, 2017; Low, 2016). Since the 1990s, the emergence of the World Wide Web came not only to facilitate stakeholder access to flows of information, opinion, and feedback on the social conduct of companies and make the company-stakeholder relationship closer and more interactive (Berthon et al., 2012), but also promoted stakeholder empowerment, providing them with new participatory and collective methods with the ability to mobilize millions of people on a given issue and, thus, more effectively pressure companies to engage in social issues (Lin, 2018). The online world has allowed stakeholders to interfere in all corporate activities and public positions by

having the ability to scrutinize business actions and to transmit their opinions about companies and their brands quickly, directly and with a wide reach (Mazurek, 2009). Thus, the rise of the internet and social media has greatly influenced stakeholder activism in the twenty-first century, as well as its effectiveness (Hollenbeck & Zinhan, 2006).

In this way, the current practices through which stakeholders exercise social power over companies have been gaining an activist character, increasingly emerging in the form of anti-brand movements (Fontenelle, 2010; Klein, 2009). According to Klein (2009), the anti-brand movement is configured as an anti-corporate movement that uses companies' brands as targets for criticism aimed at affecting their value. Although they can also have economic and legal reasons, a large part of these activist movements has social motives, attacking especially multinationals by targeting their brands institutionally and seeking to unmask immoral corporate conduct and/or force companies to adopt more responsible practices, whether these be better wages and working conditions or better environmental standards and social performance (Fontenelle, 2010; Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009; Stolle & Micheletti, 2015).

There are different forms that activist manifestations against brands can take. One of the most used by stakeholders is anti-brand or anti-corporation activism (e.g., Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010; Iyer & Muncy, 2009; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Romani et al., 2015). Anti-brand activism concerns stakeholders' disapproval of brand practices towards their or other stakeholder group or the environment, symbolizing negative perceptions associated with corporations (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010; Iyer & Muncy, 2009; Romani et al., 2015). Thus, stakeholders engage in anti-brand activism when they perceive the presence of injustices in the market, denote brand violations or make attributions of brands and their parent companies as heavily weighted toward internal interests (i.e., profit-driven), without considering external ones (e.g., stakeholder interests and needs) (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010). In fact, it was found that brand parent company moral violations can lead to the emergence of perceptions of hypocrisy among stakeholders (Wagner et al., 2009) and hateful feelings towards the brand, including disgust,

anger/fear and contempt, which influence anti-brand activism directly as main effect (Romani et al., 2015).

Anti-brand activism, both online and offline, threatens the image and the reputation of a brand/company, being able to reduce its financial value (Dauvergne, 2017; King, 2008). Specifically, in an anti-brand activist movement, companies and their brands can receive labels as negative as labor rights abusers, monopolistic threats to competition or immoral actors (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Smith et al., 2010). These brand threats often come from its consumers, who engage themselves and/or mobilize others to collectively harm an organization's image and revenue, either directly or through the media and other third parties, as a way to effect change (Glickman, 2009; Hertz, 2001; Lightfoot, 2019). Today's consumers see brands as a symbol of power vis-à-vis the government, acting to change or transform business practices and demanding the contribution of companies to the social and environmental welfare, largely because it is easier for them to receive an effective response from companies than from the State (Hertz, 2001; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Likewise, employees are nowadays among the groups that, through activist actions, exert the most pressure on companies to contribute to social change (Sarkar & Kotler, 2021; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020), with 38% of employees assuming they have spoken up to support or criticize their employers' actions over a controversial issue that affects society (Weber Shandwick, 2019). In addition, shareholder activism has also been largely driven by social and ethical motives (Rehbein et al., 2004). Shareholders use their right to speak at general meetings, for example, to denounce companies for polluting the environment, oppose to certain products, or criticize the organization's value system (Hoffmann et al., 2016; Vasi & King, 2012), getting broad media attention for these issues (Crane et al., 2004), which can threaten the corporate reputation in the financial market and create uncertainties in the medium or long term (Mazzola et al., 2006). Society itself can also start anti-brand activism movements, for example to try to introduce forms of civil regulation, such as workplace standards and other codes of conduct (Crane et al., 2004).

Since stakeholder anti-brand activism appears to be on increase, one of the most popular tactics used by these groups to enforce their activist goals is brand boycott (e.g., Basci, 2014; Friedman, 1999; Hyman & Tohill, 2017). Friedman (1999, p. 4) define a brand boycott as any "attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace". In this way, there is an attempt to avoid the purchase/use of the products/services of certain brands as a means of resistance, for a short or long term (Neilson, 2010), with these boycotts being normally conducted for societal concerns (Basci, 2014). Indeed, brand boycotts have been crucial to important struggles for social justice, like anti-child labor, civil rights, or trade unionism (Hyman & Tohill, 2017). At the opposite extreme of this movement is, therefore, buycotts, in which there is the encouragement or the deliberate purchase of a brand's products/services, in support of its ethical policies and moral stances (Basci, 2014; Lightfoot, 2019; Vogel, 2004). Such practices are thus linked to the idea of consumption as an inherently political act, embedded in a web of economic and social relations, making use of the buying power to change market or business practices that activists find politically, ethically, or environmentally unacceptable (Hyman & Tohill, 2017).

Many corporations, especially the global ones, have suffered from stakeholder boycotts. Uber, for example, was boycotted by its consumers in 2017, as a response to accusations that the ride-hailing service intended to profit from a protest against former President Donald Trump's executive order banning refugees and immigrants from certain countries from entering the United States. Hundreds of thousands of customers deleted Uber app and deactivated their accounts when Uber continued to operate its service at John F. Kennedy International Airport, in New York, during a civil protest against Donald Trump's policy, which included a taxi driver strike. Uber was accused of being unethical, profiting from the taxi strike and putting its support behind Trump's immigration ban. This affected the brand's reputation and revenues, leading Uber to commit to set aside a $3 million fund to help drivers affected by the immigration ban (Isaac, 2017). Another example comes from the employees of the American consulting McKinsey and Company, where

hundreds of employees revolted over the company's work for 43 of the world's biggest polluters, although it publicly states its commitment to environmental responsibility. More than 1,100 employees have signed an open letter to the firm's top partners, demanding them to disclose its clients' carbon emissions, and several of the open letter authors resigned in protest (Forsythe & Bogdanich, 2021). Likewise, in 2018, Apple was subject to increased shareholder activism over children's iPhone use when two of the largest Apple shareholders voiced their concerns over kids' smartphone addiction and its mental health effects. In response, the brand committed to making its devices safer for children by introducing new features and tools (Gibbs, 2018).

Although brand boycotts are often linked with liberal causes, this method has been used by social movements of many political orientations (Lightfoot, 2019). For example, in 2018, after Nike launched an advertising campaign starring Colin Kaepernick, a football player who knelt during the United Stated national anthem before NFL games to protest racial injustice, several Republican supporters starting the "Burn Your Nikes" movement in protest against the campaign, posting videos on social networks in which Nike products were destroyed, and urging people to stop buy the brand's products (BBC, 2018).

The interactive nature of Web 2.0, emerged in the early 2000s, has strengthened another activist tactic through which stakeholders demand from brands more social and environmental responsibility – anti-brand communities (e.g., Awasthi et al., 2012; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006, 2010; Wong et al., 2018). Anti-brand communities consist of groups of stakeholders who resist imposed meanings or values that are prescribed by a particular brand, having negative feelings towards it, frequently related to social justice issues (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006, 2010). Although they are often not geographically united, these groups still manifest common community characteristics, including affiliation, joint achievements, intimacy, and a collective identity, apart from that which is imposed on by large corporations (Johnson et al. 2006). Today, these communities arise and operate mostly through the cyberspace, providing a social liberating place where members try to achieve common goals (e.g., obtain labor rights, reveal unpleasant practices of a brand, etc.),

and being a resource center for activist actions, such as demonstrations or boycotts (Awasthi et al., 2012). Regardless its motives, the main goals of anti-brand communities are to weaken a brand, reduce its value, and cultivate bad feelings for the brand, such as hatred or revenge (Cooper et al., 2019). However, these communities are also used as a channel to provide constructive feedback on brand practices that may lead to positive discussions and foster further brand improvements (Wong et al., 2018).

Examples of anti-brand communities include anti-Nike (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004), anti-Starbucks (Thompson & Arsel, 2004), or anti-McDonald's communities (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006). Anti-Nike communities, for example, began to emerge strongly in the 1990s, namely due to the brand's labor practices at the time (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). The brand was accused of physical abuse, salary below minimum wage, unpaid overtime, or insecure and unhealthy installations in Vietnam and in other Asian manufacturing operations, beginning to suffer strong pressure from non-governmental organizations and anti-brand communities to change their practices in these countries (Vietnam Labor Watch, 2004). Other anti-brand communities emerged from movements against cultural heterogeneity and global corporate capitalism. This is the case of some anti-Starbucks communities, which oppose Starbucks' stratospheric growth and market dominance, assailing the brand for predatory business practices and a plethora of harmful effects on the local coffee trade, the environment, and the economic well-being of coffee growers (Thompson & Arsel, 2004). For their part, Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006) analyzed an online anti-McDonald's community created with the aim of providing information about the health risks of consuming McDonald's food products, such as an increased risk of heart disease, cancer, or diabetes, as well as the brand's environmental impacts. The authors (2006) also found that the community tried to get its members involved or to take action to eliminate unhealthy foods, reject excessive consumption and promote a healthier lifestyle.

Another form of stakeholder activism is the so-called "culture-jamming" (e.g., Klein, 2009; Lasn, 2000; Lekakis, 2017; Sandlin & Milam,

2008) – a term coined by sound-collage band Negativland, in 1984, in reference to the illegal interruption of the signals of ham radio (Klein, 2009). In the corporate field, the practice of culture-jamming involves the appropriation of the image content of a brand, such as logos or advertisements, keeping its form and design but altering its meaning and purposes as an act of resistance to raise awareness of unethical corporate practices or sociopolitical issues related to the brand (Klein, 2009; Lekakis, 2017; Sandlin & Milam, 2008). This practice is intrinsically related to anti-capitalist movements and its mainstream cultural institutions, such as companies, being based on the idea of resisting the dominant ideology of consumerism and the constant capitalist laden messages fed through the mass media, re-creating commercial culture in order to transform society (Atkinson, 2003; Lasn, 2000). Culture-jamming is thus also related to "political consumerism", which involves the transference of political values and concerns in the realm of the market and individual consumption choices aimed at changing questionable institutional or market practices (Stolle & Micheletti, 2015). Therefore, culture jammers become cultural producers who actively and creatively resist, critique, appropriate, alter, recreate, and reuse brand cultural and marketing products, ultimately seeking to challenge dominant discourses and practices of multinational corporations (Harold, 2004), educate, and incite action on the addressed issues (Sandlin & Milam, 2008).

The spread of culture-jamming is strongly linked to digital technologies, which have made both the creation and the circulation of ad and logo satires much easier (Klein, 2009). For instance, a few weeks before the start of COP27, the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference, the Adbusters Media Foundation, an anti-consumerist non-profit organization well-recognized for its culture-jamming campaigns, launched on its website and social networks a culture-jamming ad against Coca-Cola's sponsorship of COP27. The organization claims that Coca-Cola is the single largest plastic polluter in the world, with over 3 million tons of plastic packaging each year, sponsoring the world's largest climate conference in an attempt to greenwash their legacy of ecocide. As such, Adbusters appropriated the design and image used in Coca-Cola's ads (an open bottle spouting colors and images of happiness), as well as its

slogan "open happiness", and changed the images coming out of the bottle to images of garbage and wasted plastic, and the slogan for "Open ecocide. Proud sponsor of #COP27", in order to alert to the damages of the brand to the environment (Adbusters, 2022). Likewise, in 2014, when Apple launched the iPhone 6, the Hong Kong-based Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior staged a protest at a Hong Kong Apple Store, creating a large banner that featured the image of the new device sandwiched between the words, "iSlave. Harsher than harsher. Still made in sweatshops". The organization thus changed the name of Apple's product "iPhone" to "iSlave" and used the product image to protest about the working conditions that the brand offers at its factories in East Asian countries (Cole, 2021).

The growing opposition to capitalism and corporate globalization that began to be widely disseminated in the second half of the 20th century, favored the debate on notions such as individual freedom, autonomy, and power of choice in consumption (Holt, 2002; Szmigin et al., 2009). As a matter of fact, since the industrial revolution, several concerns had been raised about excessive consumption and the way in which mass production and consumerism negatively impact society and the environment, namely by creating greater economic inequalities and intensifying climate change and environmental pollution (Baudrillard, 1995). These concerns lead to the emergence of the so-called “conscious consumption”, characterized as being socially responsible, ethical, and environmentally friendly, through which consumers question the values and excesses of the consumer society and try to minimize their environmental and social impact through the brands they buy (Roux & Nantel, 2009). Conscious consumption, also referred to under the terms "responsible", “sustainable”, “ethical”, “rational”, “activist”, “citizen” or “green” (Fontenelle, 2010), then made consumers unite in anti-consumption movements (e.g., Basci, 2014; Varman & Belk, 2009; Wight, 2017; Zavestoski, 2002), as a way to resist capitalism, globalization, consumerism and marketing efforts (Holt, 2002; Thompson & Arsel, 2004; Varman & Belk, 2009).

Zavestoski (2002) addresses anti-consumption movements as a practice of resistance to, resentment of or rejection of consumption in general.

For Basci (2014) anti-consumption movements mean the non-consumption, reduction-of-consumption or selective-consumption act that has a rational link to a societal and systemic problem on the local and/or global scenario. In this way, there is a voluntary decrease in consumption levels, whether directed towards one or more brands, or towards the market in general (Varman & Belk, 2009). As this is a movement organized and carried out mainly by consumers, the focus is on the collective choices of consumption or non-consumption, with the aim of bringing about change (Wight, 2017). Activities such as sharing products or services, self or collective production or product reuse can thus fragment the market and prevent marketers from segmentation and other persuasive advertising and branding efforts, emancipating and giving sovereignty to consumers (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995).

The "Buy Nothing Day" movement, founded in Canada in the 1990s, is, therefore, one example of anti-consumerism, being celebrated on Black Friday. The goal is to stop the overconsumption that occurs on Black Friday, in which there is a generalized drop in prices, and to warn about the social and climatic consequences of consumerism. The movement also gives consumers several ideas to reduce consumption in their daily lives, such as stop buying single-use products, with the aim of promoting ethical and responsible consumption and the recycling and reuse of products (Buy Nothing Day, 2022). Another example of an anti-consumption movement is the Fashion Revolution movement, which brings together consumers and other stakeholders in the fashion area, such as designers, producers, manufacturers, and workers, to warn of the harmful consequences of fast fashion, raise awareness of more sustainable clothing production and buying methods, and inspire people to consume less, value quality and take better care of their clothes (Fashion Revolution Foundation, 2022).

More recently, the increasingly political character of consumption gave rise to another activist stakeholder movement against brands – the so-called "cancel culture", an activist phenomenon that emerged and manifests itself through social networks, especially on Twitter (e.g., Bouvier & Machin, 2021; Goldsbrough, 2020; Saldanha et at., 2022). Indeed, the term "cancel culture" is credited to black users of Twitter and emerged

from conversations on social media motivated by the #MeToo[49] movement in 2017 (Bouvier & Machin, 2021) and, subsequently, by other movements, such as Black Lives Matter[50] and ANTIFA[51], that demanded greater accountability from public figures and organizations (Duque et al., 2021). Goldsbrough (2020) describes this phenomenon as the process of cancelling someone or some corporation by rejecting or ignoring them, by publicly opposing their views or actions, and by depriving them of time and attention, eventually making them financially, politically, or professionally powerless. In the business field, Saldanha et al. (2022, p.2) refer to cancel culture as the "collective desire by consumers to withdraw support of those individuals and brands in power, perceived to be involved in objectionable behavior or activities through the use of social media". Cancel culture thus emerge as a form of activism which seek to call out companies and individuals in power for misalignments with social values and shed light on their wrongdoings, being enhanced by the greater empowerment that social networks have brought to stakeholders, giving them a broad platform to express discontent and produce influence on corporate practices that they view as unacceptable (Bouvier & Machin, 2021; Duque et al., 2021). According to Saldanha et at. (2022), cancel culture even goes beyond traditional boycotts, since it associates the cessation of the purchase of products with online public shaming of the brand, including overall withdrawal of support and loyalty. This can have temporary consequences such as online public rebuke and shame, but can also lead to more permanent penalties, like lost revenue, cancelled contracts, tarnished reputations, and damaged brand positioning (Goldsbrough, 2020; Saldanha et at., 2022).

A recent example of cancel culture occurred in 2020 with L'Oréal Paris. As a result of George Floyd's death, an African-American strangled by a police officer in the United States, L'Oréal Paris, along with other

[49] The #MeToo movement is a social movement against sexual abuse and harassment, initiated in 2006 by sexual assault survivor and activist Tarana Burke (Garcia, 2017).

[50] Black Lives Matter is an international activist movement founded in 2013, whose mission is to build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities (Black Lives Matter, 2022).

[51] ANTIFA is an anti-fascist activist movement, campaigning against actions viewed as authoritarian, homophobic, racist, or xenophobic (Bogel-Burroughs & Garcia, 2020).

brands, made statements in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. However, three years earlier, the company fired Black transgender model Munroe Bergdorf over a Facebook post regarding white supremacy. Bergdorf took to Twitter to report the episode and accuse the cosmetic brand of being hypocritical in its support of the rights of the black community. The event led to the company being briefly cancelled by consumers, with many accusing L'Oréal Paris of inauthenticity and refusing to buy from it. In response, L'Oréal Paris offered Bergdorf a consulting position on the company's Diversity & Inclusion Advisory Board, and donated $50,000 to two transgender organizations (Liffreing, 2020). In the same year, the release of the trailer for the Netflix movie "Cuties" led many users of the streaming platform to start the #CancelNetflix movement on Twitter. The film storyline follows an immigrant preteen girl from France who joins a dance team as rebellion against her culture. However, Netflix users considered that the trailer was promoting and marketing inappropriate scenes of the film, viewed as sexualizing the children, leading Netflix to update the film promotional materials and apologized about how the situation was handled (Wilkinson & Romano, 2020).

The intensification of stakeholder activism over the last few decades has thus changed the prospects of power in the market, making it increasingly pass from brands to stakeholders. Nowadays, it is not only brands that manage to shape the values and preferences of their stakeholders, but these groups are also able to interfere with all corporate activities and public positions of brands, giving the pressure and possible impacts of collective corporate criticism movements (Fontenelle, 2010; Lin, 2018; Mazurek, 2009). Since their goals are mostly sociopolitical, antibrand movements and other forms of stakeholder activism urged companies to renew its positions and purposes as brands, improve their social conduct and communication practices, and stand for relevant sociopolitical causes (Holt, 2002; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). Moreover, these forms of activism increased stakeholder involvement and accountability in the market, empowering them separately or collectively to fight for their rights, help others to make politically choices among brands, and achieve broader progressive ends (Fontenelle, 2010; Lightfoot, 2019).

Notwithstanding its emancipatory character, there are also a number of ethical and pragmatic concerns related to stakeholder activism that are important to consider. First, however socially responsible corporations may be, their primary motives will always be economic. Therefore, companies' attention to social concerns will always be driven by market appeal, which may set aside minority interests or unattractive causes. Likewise, as companies' choices are also based on consumers' propensity to pay, many companies may abandon ethical assumptions if consumers are no longer able or willing to pay for it (Crane et al., 2004). In addition, while any stakeholder can theoretically participate in these activist practices, stakeholders with more resources and economic power are, by definition, able to have more impact (Lightfoot, 2019). For instance, boycotts and buycotts can only be performed by consumers who have sufficient purchasing power to withhold or to wield (Hyman & Tohill, 2017). Likewise, conscious consumption can only be carried out by those who have the economic means to do so, as sustainable products are often significantly more expensive (Joy et al., 2012). This can not only impact the democratic nature of these types of movements (Lightfoot, 2019), but also lead to groups with economic power and conservative purposes to initiate activist movements that seek to reinforce inequality (e.g., boycotts to immigrant stores), diverting stakeholder activism from social justice (Hyman & Tohill, 2017). At the same time, by attempting to dictate how brands should respond to social issues, stakeholders' activist movements can also work against critical thinking and close rather than open transitional spaces (Sandlin & Milam, 2008). For example, boycott campaigns against certain brands that sell products from sweatshops may only lead to consumers buying products from alternative stores that sell products with the same origin (Stewart, 2017). Finally, since these practices are mostly carried out through the web, there is often an intention-action gap between stakeholder claims and behavior. In this way, there are often viral stakeholder activism campaigns on the Web that garner great support, but that end up being quite ephemeral and not leading to effective social change (Hyman & Tohill, 2017; Lightfoot, 2019). For these reasons, there are still authors who do not consider these movements a real form of stakeholder participation in corporate decisions (e.g., Crane et al., 2004).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays, stakeholders are not only more attentive to the conduct of brands and expect more from them in sociopolitical terms, but they have also found ways to participate in the construction of brands' social policies and to make their demands heard, as is the case of anti-brand movements (e.g., Klein, 2009; Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). This "patrolling" challenged existing theories of the stakeholders' resistance ability and ended up forcing corporations to look for a shared accountability with their stakeholders, increasingly taking the social concerns of all these groups into account in its CSR policies and in the definition of its activist campaigns (e.g., Fontenelle, 2010; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018).

The rise of anti-brand movements was thus characterized by widespread stakeholder consciousness, and the increasing view of stakeholders as citizens, representing citizens' interests (Hyman & Tohill, 2017; Manville & Ober, 2003). In this sense, these groups expect to see their rights as stakeholders respected and protected, along with their social, civil, and political rights (Crane et al., 2004). For shareholders, for examples, this implies exercising some of their political rights through their shareholdings (Taylor, 2001); for employees, it can mean having greater influence on their tasks, job environments, and on their company's sociopolitical goals (Claydon, 2000); and for consumers, it implies including the notion of citizenship in its purchasing decisions and demanding from companies a participation and shared responsibility in addressing sociopolitical issues (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019).

This broader view of stakeholder rights and involvement within the corporate field, led to companies themselves also starting to be analyzed under the scope of citizenship. The suggestion is that companies are entities with social rights and duties towards communities and, therefore, hold political power (Matten et al., 2003). The concept of corporate citizenship thus emerges as a way for companies to develop mutually beneficial, interactive and trusting relationships with their stakeholders (Waddock, 2002), which necessarily involves greater stakeholder participation and involvement in corporate decisions, greater involvement of companies at a social and environmental level, and the development

of a more open and democratic model of corporate governance (Crane et al., 2004).

Thus, the connection between stakeholders, corporations, and sociopolitical issues expands the significance of corporations in providing an arena for citizenship. This implies both companies and stakeholders to define, enable, or constrain what is a socially acceptable business activity, and broaden the democratic participation of stakeholders in building ethical institutions in society (Crane et al., 2004; Hyman & Tohill, 2017).

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