

**When business gets political:
How perceived controversy shapes reactions to Corporate Political Advocacy**

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ABSTRACT

For decades, companies were expected to remain politically neutral, focusing solely on profit-making and efficiency. However, in an increasingly mediatized and politically polarized world, some brands are now engaging with controversial socio-political issues through Corporate Political Advocacy (CPA). This growing trend raises critical questions about consumer reactions, especially as brands risk alienating stakeholders while gaining support from others. This thesis investigates how the perceived controversy of CPA influences consumers' brand attitudes and how this relationship is moderated by consumer alignment, including agreement with the issue, political ideology and age (Gen Z). Drawing on stakeholder theory, the study emphasizes the evolving field of CPA and the crucial role of value congruence between corporations and their key stakeholders.

A quantitative online survey (N = 163) tested four hypotheses, with data analyzed using hierarchical regression in SPSS. Findings show that perceived controversy significantly and negatively affects brand attitudes, indicating that controversial CPA can harm consumer perceptions. Importantly, consumer agreement with the brand's position moderated this relationship and acted as a strong buffer, reducing the negative effects of perceived controversy. By contrast, political ideology and age did not significantly moderate the effect, suggesting that consumers' evaluations are shaped more by issue-specific value alignment than by broader demographic or ideological factors.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on CPA by highlighting the importance of consumer alignment in shaping brand attitudes. It supports moving beyond demographic segmentation towards a more nuanced, value-based understanding of consumer responses. Practically, the thesis offers guidance for brands considering CPA: Stakeholder alignment must be strategically assessed and managed. Brands should conduct issue-specific stakeholder analyses to ensure value congruence and minimize backlash. Ultimately, this thesis underlines that in CPA, aligning with stakeholder values is not just beneficial, but a strategic necessity for sustaining positive brand perceptions.

KEYWORDS: *Corporate Political Advocacy, Brand Attitudes, Perceived Controversy, Consumer Alignment, Political Ideology*

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Preface

Until one year ago, I was not even sure if I would be able to attend this Master's – never mind finish it. I walked a long and rocky road to get here, marked with setbacks and uncertainty. But today, I have reached this point and I owe that to the endless support of those people closest to me.

Above all, I want to thank my mother and brother who never let me forget what I'm capable of. You are the reason I can proudly stand here and say: I made it, despite all doubts and hurdles. I am so grateful for you.

I also want to thank my beloved father, who shaped my path and sparked my passion for politics early on. Your influence is present on every page of this thesis. You will never be forgotten.

1. Introduction

“The business of business is business.” This long-standing notion, commonly associated with economist Milton Friedman (1970), has shaped the logic of corporate behaviour for decades. Companies were expected to focus on profit-making and efficiency, distancing themselves clearly from political or societal matters. In this traditional view, speaking out on controversial issues was seen as a distraction or even a violation of a company’s economic purpose.

However, in today’s media-driven and politically charged environment, this perspective is increasingly challenged. Brands like Ben & Jerry’s, Patagonia, Starbucks or Nike have demonstrated that companies not only can act beyond their core business, but are in many cases, expected to do so. In 2009, Ben & Jerry’s support for gay marriage still marked an exception in corporate communication (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 199). Now, more than a decade later, such public stances have become common practice, as various companies routinely engage with issues like LGBTQ+ rights, migration, climate change, racial justice or wars.

This evolution reflects a broader societal shift in the role of companies as public actors, as the lines between business, politics and civil society become increasingly blurred. In this context, Corporate Political Advocacy (CPA) emerged as a growing field of both corporate practice and academic research. CPA refers to the strategic communication of political values and issue positions by companies, going beyond traditional lobbying or CSR efforts to directly engage in public debates (Cammarota et al., 2023, pp. 1679-1680). In doing so, companies no longer act solely as economic actors but become political actors themselves - publicly expressing moral viewpoints, unwillingly entering issue arenas and interacting with divided audiences (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021, pp. 2-4).

This public engagement often unfolds in an environment shaped by heightened consumer expectations. Internally, brands may be driven by the personal ideology of the CEO or pressured by employees who demand that their workplace reflect their values. Externally, they face increasing pressure from social movements and value-driven consumers (Cammarota et al., 2023, pp. 1682-1683). Especially among younger generations, this trend is evolving. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2024, p. 10), 71% of consumers now expect brands to take a position on socio-political issues. Generation Z in particular, views companies as civic actors responsible for contributing to societal progress (Coman et

al., 2022, p. 14). In addition, the growing influence of social movements and politically aware consumer bases leaves companies with little room to remain silent on controversial issues (Coombs, 2023, p. 80).

In addition to the changing consumer evaluations, which are the main focus of this thesis, this transformation is also fueled by broader media dynamics. The mediatization of society, defined as the long-term process through which media become deeply integrated into all areas of life, fundamentally reshaped the role of corporations (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021, p. 4). Companies today are embedded in an environment where they must follow the logic of the media to remain visible and relevant. This means adapting their communication strategies to a fast-paced, emotionally charged media landscape that rewards clear stances and punishes neutrality or silence. Social media in particular, accelerated the practice of CPA by enabling companies to reach large audiences instantly and by making brand values more transparent to consumers (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 208). These platforms not only amplify supportive voices but also let critics reach far bigger audiences, making reputational consequences more immediate and impactful (Ketrone et al., 2022, p. 354). These media conditions directly shape how CPA messages are perceived by consumers and intensify the risks associated with controversial issues. Especially, the reach and emotional characteristics of social media increase the likelihood of polarized responses, which makes perceived controversy a central factor in how stakeholders, primarily consumers, evaluate brands. As such, this thesis focuses specifically on perceived controversy in CPA and how it influences consumer brand attitudes.

As companies enter these highly visible and emotionally loaded conversations, they face a double-edged sword as this sensitive practice comes not only with potential benefits but also with considerable risks. When brands address socio-political issues, they reveal their values and ideals, stepping into the role of political actors. Given the inherently divisive nature of controversial topics, a clear positioning on them can trigger polarized reactions. While some stakeholders may feel represented and encouraged, others may strongly oppose the stance. Especially negative reactions can have serious consequences, including consumer boycotts (Dodd & Supa, 2014, p. 5), the termination of business relationships or public criticism by opposing stakeholders (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 209). One prominent example is Starbucks, which endorsed legislation supporting gay marriage and consequently

faced both a boycott campaign titled “Dump Starbucks” from opponents but also strong support from civil rights movements (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 199).

These mixed outcomes illustrate the unpredictable and sensitive nature of CPA, also mirrored in academic findings. While it can enhance a brand’s reputation (Lim & Young, 2021), it can also backfire and damage it (Abitbol, 2018). Ultimately, stakeholder reactions depend heavily on the extent to which a brand’s stance aligns with their personal values- if there is alignment, positive reactions are likely; if not, negative responses and even punishment can be expected (Bhagwat et al., 2020, pp. 16–17; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, pp. 773-774).

This complexity is further amplified by today’s highly fragmented media landscape. Particularly in a high-choice digital environment, where individuals can selectively consume their preferred (political) information, polarization contributes to fragmented shared realities and less acceptance of opposing viewpoints (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021, p. 3). These dynamics not only deepen stakeholder division but also make navigating CPA even more challenging for companies.

In this context, CPA is not just a reactive strategy but can also be seen as a proactive effort to build dialogue and mutual understanding across ideological divides, therefore tackling the polarization of society (Lu et al., 2025, p. 137). Yet, the question remains: what determines whether such efforts are welcomed or rejected by consumers?

Academic Relevance

In response to the mixed academic findings and outcomes of CPA, recent research called for deeper exploration into the conditions under which stakeholders respond favourably or unfavourably to corporate positions (Cammarota et al., 2023, p. 1676). In particular, this thesis focuses on two intertwined dimensions: First, the message, related factors, such as the perceived level of controversy of the communicated issue. Second, the audience-related moderators, such as consumers agreement with the issue, their political ideology and age.

The emerging academic field of CPA, similarly described as brand activism (Cammarota et al., 2023, p. 1679), primarily focused on how company characteristics impact the effectiveness of CPA. However, there is a notable gap in understanding the nature of the communicated issue itself, particularly its perceived controversy (Zhao et al., 2024, p. 1001).

While recent studies already acknowledged controversy as a factor (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Haupt et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024), just a few have systematically examined its effects on brand attitudes or tested potential moderating effects. Therefore, previous papers even called for more investigations into how the level of controversy in communicated issues affects consumer attitudes (Schmidt et al., 2022, p. 48). Given all that, there is a need to better understand how message perception and stakeholder traits interact to shape CPA outcomes.

Additionally, current CPA research is heavily US-focused, relying mainly on American case studies (Cammarota et al., 2023, p. 1686, which limits the generalizability of findings across cultural contexts. Lastly, current CPA research lacks in exploring moderating effects (Haupt et al., 2023, p. 1249).

To address these research gaps, this thesis examines the role of perceived controversy in CPA messages as a predictor of consumer brand attitudes by conducting a quantitative survey design. It will not only test how different levels of controversy affect brand attitudes but also how individual characteristics, such as agreement with the issue, political ideology and age (GenZ), moderate this relationship.

Societal relevance

As companies become increasingly involved in socio-political issues, their positions not only shape public opinions but also foster civic engagement in an already polarized society. Understanding consumer perceptions of CPA is essential, as consumers represent a key stakeholder group that can punish or reward a company through boycotts or purchase decisions (Coombs, 2023, p. 82). By examining consumer characteristics and their impact on brand attitudes, this study provides valuable insights to help businesses navigate through the sensitive practice of CPA and mitigate potential backlash.

From a stakeholder theory perspective, brands must view CPA as part of their stakeholder management strategy, especially in navigating through a controversial environment. In the eyes of the theory, which will act as the theoretical foundation for this thesis, consumers are not just passive recipients of brand messaging but active agents whose value alignment can influence their perceptions. As companies take stances on highly controversial issues, understanding how different groups of consumers react becomes

essential to manage stakeholder relationships in an era of increased polarization. The insights from this thesis can help companies to assess potential risk, segment audiences and engage in value-aligned communication that avoids backlash while contributing to public debates.

Research Questions

To contribute to both academic and societal understanding of CPA, this thesis focuses on how the perceived controversy of communicated issues affects consumer brand attitudes. It also examines whether and how individual characteristics moderate this relationship. Specifically, the following research questions are addressed:

RQ1: To what extent does the level of perceived controversy in CPA communicated issues affect consumers brand attitudes?

RQ2: To what extent does consumer alignment* (a) and age (b) moderate that relationship?

*Consumer alignment refers to the political ideology of consumers and their agreement with the position

2. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter provides the theoretical foundation for this thesis by examining the concept of Corporate Political Advocacy (CPA) and its impact on consumer brand attitudes. It begins by defining CPA, highlighting its relevance today and distinguishing it from familiar concepts such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Political CSR. Following this, Stakeholder Theory is introduced as the theoretical framework, explaining how companies actively engage with key stakeholders, particularly consumers, when addressing socio-political issues. Further, based on existing research, this chapter develops hypotheses between the relationship of the perceived controversy of CPA and consumer brand attitudes. Additionally, three potential moderators are introduced, including consumer agreement with a brand's position, political ideology and age (Gen Z), to investigate how different consumer characteristics impact this relationship.

2.1 Corporate Political Advocacy

For many companies nowadays, avoiding or being silent on socio-political issues is no longer an option (Coombs, 2023, p. 80). This shift is rooted in recent processes of polarization and politicization. Firstly, the polarization refers to opinions and political beliefs around issues that stand in conflict with each other (Lu et al., 2025, p. 137). Particularly in a high-choice digital media environment, where individuals can selectively consume their preferred (political) information, polarization can lead to less shared facts, fragmentation or even disrespect for the opposing standpoints (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021, p. 3).

Secondly, an increasing number of governments are either unable or unwilling to address controversial issues (Cammarota et al., 2023, p. 1687), contributing to a growing politicization. This politicization extends beyond the public and media environments to corporations, as they are deeply intertwined with socio-political issues (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021, p. 4).

Both developments increased the pressure on corporations, pushing many to take a position on various controversial issues. For instance, Starbucks endorsed legislations for gay marriage, while Chick-Fil-A stood against it (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 199), Nike launched a campaign with Colin Kaepernick, who became known for kneeling before football games to protest against racial oppression (Kim et al., 2020). More recently, various

companies took public stances on the Russian war in Ukraine, highlighting the continuous development of CPA (Tsoungkou et al., 2025).

These practices of corporations publicly engaging with socio-political issues is commonly referred to as corporate political advocacy (CPA), similarly described as brand activism, corporate social advocacy and corporate activism (Cammarota et al., 2023, p. 1679). CPA can be defined as “as voicing or showing explicit and public support for certain individuals, groups, or ideals and values with the aim of convincing and persuading others to do the same” (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 200). This definition emphasizes CPA as a strategic practice, aiming at influencing others to take similar actions and shaping public opinions.

Despite the fact that the field of CPA research is rather new, many papers concerned this topic from different angles. Scholars have studied its effects on brand perception (Klostermann et al., 2022), firm value (Bhagwat et al., 2020), corporate reputation (Marschlich & Bernet, 2024) or behavioural intentions (Kim et al., 2024). Others have compared it with CSR (Weber et al., 2023), investigated CPA’s role in controversial vs. non-controversial industries (Lopez et al., 2021) and analyzed different communicators of CPA, such as the CEO (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021).

Unlike corporate political activity (lobbying, campaigning, which aims to influence political processes and improve the company’s own position (Nalick et al., 2016, p. 385), CPA goes beyond self-interest to actively engage with public issues that reflect their intrinsic values (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021, p. 5). It often even addresses issues unrelated to a company’s core business activities (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 200), such as human rights, marriage equality or racism. By doing so, companies publicly align themselves with political and social issues, expressing their corporate values and vision for the future of society (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 203).

Characteristics of sociopolitical issues in CPA

The sociopolitical issues addressed by CPA are often, unresolved, controversial and characterised by intense public debates with widely divergent opinions. These sociopolitical issues can be described as “salient unresolved social matters on which societal and institutional opinion is split, thus potentially engendering acrimonious debate among

groups“ (Nalick et al., 2016, p. 386). Therefore, topics such as migration, gay marriage, gun rights, wars, abortion rights, or movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM) are covered. Given the dynamic nature of these issues, stakeholder positions on them evolve throughout the time (Nalick et al., 2016, p. 391).

A crucial factor in CPA is the perceived level of controversy associated with the issue. The controversy is characterized by the variety of polarizing opinions as well as the strong emotions it evokes, but it always depends on the observer’s perspective (Chen & Berger, 2013, p. 581). So, individual characteristics or their background might have an impact on the perceptions of the controversy level, which will be explored in the analysis of this thesis. Moreover, the perceived level of controversy also plays a significant role in the effectiveness of CPA. For instance, highly controversial issues tackled by brands come with higher risks to alienate consumers who do not share their position (Zhao et al., 2024, p. 1003).

Differentiating CPA from CSR and Political CSR

CPA shares similarities with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and political CSR, such as addressing public issues that political actors fail to sufficiently resolve (Weber et al., 2023, p. 78), still there are crucial distinctions that must be addressed. A key difference between CPA and political CSR lies in their approach to tackle controversial issues: while CPA involves strategic and often even one-sided public advocacy, political CSR seeks for inclusive and dialogical engagement with stakeholders to co-create solutions.

CSR, as defined by the European Commission, focuses on “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society” and emphasizes to integrate environmental and social standards into a company’s core business strategies to address those impacts (European Commission, 2011, p. 1). CSR activities often focus on sustainable production practices, energy efficiency, or fair labour policies, which are all directly connected to companies’ business operations and aim to enhance their reputation and impact on society (Nalick et al., 2016, p. 389). By contrast, CPA goes beyond these boundaries by addressing issues that are often unrelated to the company’s primary operations (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 205). This distinction highlights the unique element of CPA to express corporate values through direct advocacy on diverse public issues and to foster societal change.

A more critical distinction, particularly relevant to this thesis, lies in the level of controversy associated with the communicated issues addressed by CSR and CPA. CSR strategies generally focus on issues that evoke positive responses and come with low polarization and risk to alienate stakeholders (Wang & Bouroncle, 2024, p. 493). For instance, promoting CO² emission reduction, better working conditions or climate protection are broadly perceived as “correct” behaviour, aiming to have a positive impact on the environment or society (Song & Wen, 2020, p. 882). Consequently, CSR initiatives are perceived as less controversial and are less likely to provoke stakeholders or trigger consumer boycotts (Dodd & Supa, 2014, p. 5). By contrast, CPA often tackles highly polarizing issues that can divide public opinion and potentially alienate certain stakeholder groups (Weber et al., 2023, p. 85). Therefore, CPA strategies often require companies to carefully evaluate the risks and benefits of taking a public stance on controversial issues, considering how this position aligns with stakeholder values and public expectations.

Political CSR, while sharing some similarities with CPA in recognizing companies as political actors, differs significantly in its focus and approach. It refers to a dialogical governance model, in which companies aim to foster inclusive discussions with various stakeholders to collaboratively address socio-political challenges (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021, p. 6). While CPA is primarily strategic and aims to influence public opinion by taking public stances on controversial issues, political CSR emphasizes normative justifications for corporate political activities. Political CSR emerges in response to the increasing regulations and governance institutions and refers to the corporate role in public policy and stakeholder networks. In contrast to CPA, which often confronts other stakeholders with their ideals and positions, political CSR aims to include other stakeholders in the process, thereby increasing its legitimacy. For instance, it encourages other companies to participate in open dialogues to balance interests and find common ground. CPA bypasses these open dialogues and relies on direct advocacy that may either favour certain stakeholder groups or alienate others (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, pp. 204-205).

A final distinction is visible in the differing reactions to CSR or political CSR compared to CPA. While generally consumers react positively to companies engaging in CSR activities, their reactions to CPA are mixed and heavily depend on various factors, such as alignment, with personal values, the size of the company, the communicator, etc. (Weber et al., 2023, pp. 74-75). A direct comparison between CPA and CSR activities on consumer

responses even revealed that CPA showed less favourable brand attitudes. CPA was perceived as more controversial and less appropriate, which accounts for the variation in consumer responses (Weber et al., 2023, p. 85).

2.2 Stakeholder Theory

To address the importance of stakeholders in the context of CPA, the stakeholder theory was chosen to provide the theoretical basis for this thesis. It was first developed by Freeman in 1984, who defines stakeholders as either individual or group of actors that can influence the achievement of a company or that can get influenced by it (Freeman, 2010, p. 1). The theoretical approach roots in the field of strategic management and emphasizes how to build and maintain long-lasting relationships to stakeholders, which is seen as the foundation for a company's success (Freeman et al., 2021, p. 1758). Not just the relationship towards them is seen as crucial but also the strategic management is key to a company's success (Rathore et al., 2023, p. 269). This aspect is especially relevant in the case of highly controversial issues that might alienate or provoke consumers who will consequently need more attention and strategic management when addressing a particular issue. Further, stakeholder theory enables scholars to differentiate between two types of corporate value creation: One only based on increasing profits for shareholders and another that understands value as the relationships to the society and important stakeholders (Gaither et al., 2025, p. 2). So, in the scope of the theory, companies do not just act out of their own interests and aim to maximizing profits but also pursue societal impacts to create value (Gaither et al., 2025, p. 2). This aligns very well with the practice of CPA that is also not aimed at maximizing profits, but on a higher mission and intrinsic values of the company, playing a role in society.

While stakeholder theory can theoretically capture a wide range of stakeholders, including NGOs, employees, social movements, or political actors, this thesis focuses specifically on one key stakeholder group: consumers. In recent CPA research, social identity theory was the most frequently applied framework (Cammarota et al., 2023, p. 1678), while others, like the stakeholder theory, were criticized for its centrist perspective – seeing a company as focal object surrounded by stakeholders, instead of perceiving it in a multi-actor network with various socio-political issues (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021, p. 4). However, the stakeholder theory remains a widely used theory in CPA research (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021; Gaither et al., 2025; Villagra et al., 2021). Next to the relevance

of relationships to certain stakeholder, the stakeholder theory fits this thesis well as it can explain the motivation why companies decide to act in CPA. Apart from internal drivers that can also pressure a company to act in CPA (e.g. managers that act out of their own ideology), external drivers are especially relevant for this thesis. These external drivers refer to companies' interpretation of and interactions with their direct stakeholders that are directly affected by the corporate behaviour, such as consumers (Nalick et al., 2016, p. 390). They can involve two main stakeholder perspectives: Firstly, defined as risk taking on future stakeholder benefits, meaning to take a position on an issue that is currently not supported by other stakeholders, but will soon turn in the company's favour. Secondly, not just stakeholders like social movements but particularly consumers can directly exert pressure on the company to act upon an issue, referred as stakeholder pressure recognition (Nalick et al., 2016, p. 391). An additional trigger for CPA is the fact that stakeholders believe that the company can communicate socio-political issues better than political actors could do (Cammarota et al., 2023, p. 1670).

One of these crucial stakeholder groups are consumers, being the exclusive focus of this thesis. The stakeholder theory generally highlights that the attitudes of stakeholders and the relationship with them are key to company's success, but especially those from consumers (Rathore et al., 2023, p. 269). They particularly have a significant impact on the company, for instance by boycotting as response to CPA (Coombs, 2023, p. 82) or disidentifying with the brand (Bhagwat et al. 2020, p. 16). In contrast to punishing the brand with boycotts, consumers can also reward a company. In that case, the corporate position must align with consumers beliefs and their opinions, which can then even lead to higher sales growth and better corporate performance (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 17). Lastly, the relevance of CPA is higher for consumers compared to non-consumers (Klostermann et al., 2022). Thus, consumers interests must be considered when taking a socio-political stance. Framing stakeholder theory through a consumer lens, it will help to understand how consumers evaluate a company's stance on a socio-political issue and if it aligns with their motivations (Gaither et al., 2025, p. 3), which will be investigated in the following research.

2.3 Hypotheses development

Based on existing research, hypotheses between the relationship of the perceived controversy of CPA and consumer brand attitude will be developed, followed by three

potential moderators that impact that relationship, such as consumer agreement with the statement, their political ideology and age (GenZ).

2.3.1 Brand attitudes

Brand attitudes are seen as the foundation for consumer behaviour (Nguyen et al., 2023) and are part of consumer responses, e.g. next to consumers word of mouth (Haupt et al., 2023). They are defined as consistent positive or negative perceptions of a brand or its established tendencies (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2023, p. 1499). In the context of this thesis, this means that brand attitudes reflect how consumers perceive and react to the public engagement of the company with a socio-political issue, being either favourable or unfavourable. In the case of positive consumer brand attitudes, it can affect consumers intention to further support the brand and even explain brand loyalty or other consumer behaviours (Nguyen et al., 2023, p. 1499). These findings highlight the importance of brand attitudes as critical factor to evaluate the perceptions of a key stakeholder group, consumers.

Recent CPA research has commonly used brand attitudes as independent variable to evaluate consumer responses to CPA (Gaither et al., 2025; Haupt et al., 2023; Klostermann et al., 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Li et al. (2022) found a positive relationship between consumer's brand attitudes and their attitudes towards the CPA efforts, suggesting that individuals with more favourable brand attitudes are more likely to support CPA initiatives (p. 246). This finding clearly highlights the connection between brand attitudes and CPA initiatives, which will be investigated in this research.

Although the Edelman Trust Barometer (2024) indicates that 71% of consumers expect brands to take a position on socio-political issues (p. 10), CPA research has demonstrated that these corporate actions often lead to negative consumer responses. Many still remain sceptical with the process of companies engaging in socio-political issues, while additional people disagree with the taken position (Klostermann et al., 2022, pp. 781-782). Moreover, compared to corporate social responsibility (CSR), CPA is seen as more controversial and less appropriate, which leads to higher negative effects on brand attitudes than CSR (Weber et al., 2023, p. 85). This differing effect between CSR and CPA on consumers perception was found to mainly root from the level of controversy surrounding CPA issues (Klostermann et al. 2022, p. 785). This can be explained by the fact that highly controversial

issues are more likely to evoke a feeling of discomfort and polarized opinions (Chen & Berger, 2013). Therefore, highly controversial issues can even lead to lower brand identification and brand loyalty (Zhao et al., 2024), while low controversial issues reduce risks of alienating stakeholders and lead to more positive responses (Braga et al., 2024, p. 6).

In line with previous papers suggesting that higher perceived controversy of CPA comes with more negative brand perceptions (Klostermann et al., 2022, p. 789), this research states the following hypothesis to answer RQ1:

H1: The perceived controversy of CPA communicated issues is negatively related with consumer brand attitudes.

2.3.2 Moderator 1: Consumer Agreement

Additionally, the thesis will investigate three potential moderators between the perceived controversy of CPA communicated issues and brand attitudes, proposed in RQ2. First, it aims to answer how the agreement with the issue, also referred to as consumer alignment, moderates this relationship.

CPA research has already shown that prior brand attitudes can amplify negative effects of CPA. This can result in two ways: either in the love is blind-effect, where positive existing brand attitudes mitigate the negative consequences of CPA, or in the love becomes hate-effect, when a brand does not match the consumers expectations, leading to higher disappointment and negative emotions (Haupt et al., 2023, p. 1251). Although pre-existing brand attitudes are not measured in this research, it again underscores the relationship between consumer perceptions of the brand and their CPA initiatives.

In the context of this thesis, the **asymmetric effect** of CPA plays a crucial role and has been found by many scholars in the field. It describes that the impact of CPA on brand attitudes is negative when consumers disagree with the corporate position and shows no clear effect when people agree with the position (Haupt et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuisen, 2020). This is explained by a misalignment of consumers moral beliefs and those expressed by the brand. As a result, they are unlikely to reward a brand for aligning with their views but react strongly when a brand contradicts their moral foundation, leading to higher negative brand perceptions (Mukherjee & Althuisen, 2020, pp. 773-774).

Further, consumers tend to react stronger when they disagree with a brand's position than when it is aligned with their own opinion (Klostermann et al., 2022, p. 781). This psychological effect is described as negativity bias (negative things have a stronger effect than positive ones), leading to stronger negative reactions from all consumers that disagree with the issue, while only some consumers react positively when they agree (Haupt et al., 2023, p. 1253). Thus, consumer agreement with the communicated stance will be examined as the first potential moderator in this study.

Building on prior research that highlights the asymmetric nature of CPA's impact (Haupt et al., 2023; Hydock et al., 2020; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Consumer agreement with a brand's position positively moderates the effect of perceived controversy of CPA on brand attitudes, such that stronger disagreement amplifies the negative effect, while higher agreement weakens or neutralizes it.

2.3.3 Moderator 2: Political ideology

The second moderator investigated in this research is the political ideology of consumers, being already a commonly used variable in prior CPA studies. Especially in times of polarization, politicization of society and the higher connection between business and politics (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021, pp. 3-4), the academic interest in the role of consumers political ideology has increased. Their political view is seen as part of consumers social identity, which is the foundation for their behavior (e.g. boycotts) (Haupt et al., 2023, p. 1252). The political ideology is understood as "a set of core values and beliefs about how society should be organised" (Pecot et al., 2021, p. 62). As CPA refers to highly controversial issues with polarizing opinions, consumers perception will also be based on their political values and beliefs. The Edelman Trust Barometer (2024) underscores the relevance of this moderator in the case of CPA, as 60% of consumers worldwide buy, choose or avoid brands based on their politics (Edelman, 2024, p. 6).

Generally, consumers are more likely to identify with brands that are politically aligned with their own ideology and disidentify with brands that are misaligned with them (Hydock et al., 2020, p. 1137). When it comes to the division of political ideologies, it was found that the more liberal (left leaning) consumers are, the stronger their belief that companies should take a stance on political issues, as they see the social role of brands as more important

(Ketron et al., 2022, p. 356). Further, people with left leaning/liberal political positions are seen as more sensitive to socio-political issues communicated by brands and are expected to amplify the effect of CPA on brand attitudes, whereas people with right-leaning/conservative positions are more stable in evaluating brands (Haupt et al. 2023, p. 1252). Based on these findings and prior papers that found political ideology as a moderator for CPA effects on brand perceptions (Klostermann et al., 2022) and brand attitudes (Garg & Saluja, 2022; Tsoukoku et al., 2024), the following hypothesis is raised:

H3: The political ideology (left to right) of consumers negatively moderates the effect of perceived controversy of CPA and brand attitudes.

2.3.4 Moderator 3: Age (GenZ)

The last potential moderator is the age of consumers. GenZ, born between 1997 and 2012, has especially high expectations for companies to act out of their core business and speak up on sociopolitical issues. This is partly explained by their extensive social media use and strong social engagement (Silveira et al., 2024, p. 3). Even if issues are controversial, they think that companies are responsible to tackle them as companies are also seen as civic actors (Coman et al., 2022, p. 14). Supporting this assumption, younger consumers also show particularly high engagement with CSR communication, being more enthusiastic about corporate efforts and more likely to notice and value such actions (Rathore et al., 2023, p. 274). Recent research has further shown that especially younger generations react more positively towards CPA than older consumers (Braga et al., 2024, p. 6). It is argued that this generational difference reflects a broader shift in societal norms, where social engagement is not only valued but also expected by among younger consumers. This perspective reinforces the idea that younger audiences are more receptive to CPA as it mirrors their own values and civic-minded culture of GenZ.

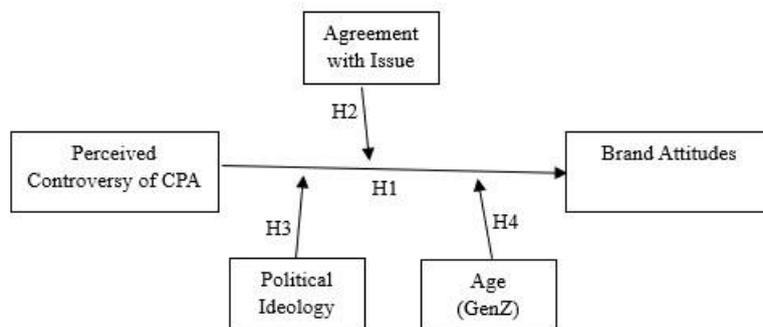
Nguyen (2023) highlights that Gen Z, as a value-driven group, seeks for brands that align with their ethical and social beliefs. Their strong commitment to societal issues influences their purchasing behaviour, making them more likely to support brands that take a stand while rejecting those that remain passive (p. 1495). This aligns with findings from the Edelman Trust Barometer (2024), which revealed that almost 60% of GenZ consumers assume the brand is doing nothing or hiding something if it does not publicly speak up on societal issues - far more than any other age group (p. 16).

Further, GenZ consumers value corporate environmental and social efforts, showing higher brand equity towards brands that advocate for these causes and are more likely to buy their products (Narayanan, 2022, p. 924). At the same time, they hold brands responsible for, in their eyes, morally wrong behaviour and even punish them for it, e.g. by boycotting products (Pradhan, 2023, p. 32). Their strong awareness of marketing strategies also makes them highly sensitive to authenticity in digital content, which can potentially lead to distrust or avoidance of brands they are perceiving as insincere (Silveira et al., 2024, p. 5).

Given these characteristics, recent research has already found age to be a moderator in familiar contexts, such as between CSR and consumer behaviours, as GenZ consumers are more concerned about the topic (Rathore et al., 2023, p. 274). Due to the high importance of CPA for GenZ, its strong reactions and high sensitivity to authentic corporate practices, it is expected that younger consumers show a stronger effect on brand attitudes while older people show a weaker effect. Therefore, the last hypothesis is defined accordingly:

H4: The age of consumers negatively moderates the effect of perceived controversy of CPA and brand attitudes.

Figure 2.1: Theoretical Framework



3. Research Design

This chapter will offer a detailed description and justification for the chosen methodological framework used to investigate how perceived controversy of CPA issues predicts consumer brand attitudes and how this relationship is moderated by agreement with the issue, political ideology and age. A quantitative research design, based on an online survey, was selected, targeting a diverse adult population as participants that were presented with a fictional brand's stance on a controversial issue. Further, relevant variables including their operationalization as well as the research procedure and chosen analysis will be discussed and justified in the following.

3.1 Research Method

The hypotheses including the relationship between the perceived controversy (IV), brand attitudes (DV) and potential moderators (level of agreement with the CPA, political ideology and age), were tested using an online survey on Qualtrics. Online questionnaires are commonly used for data collection, because of various benefits for researchers, such as improved access to respondent groups, lower costs or simplification of data management (Hardré et al., 2012, p. 1016).

Besides these benefits, the method was chosen as it aims to offer a wider scope and a bigger trend on the attitudes of consumers regarding businesses taking a stance on socio-political issues. Further, by using a quantitative approach and survey, the relationships of proposed variables and their strength can be statistically assessed and the defined hypotheses can be tested. Also, what other factors might influence the differences in consumer attitudes and relationships between variables can be answered, e.g. control variables such as demographics. The results of a quantitative analysis will also offer a generalizability to a broader population beyond the number of participants to create even more insightful implications on the corporate action of CPA. Finally, the method was chosen as this thesis investigates perceptions of controversy, opinions and attitudes regarding CPA, which are self-reported data that can be captured with a survey (Matthews & Ross, 2010, pp. 204-206).

3.2 Sample

The target audience is a diverse group of adults in different age groups, educational backgrounds and political ideologies, that engage with brands and their communication. The only exclusion criteria was a minimum age of 18 due to ethical considerations. Therefore,

diverse consumer opinions and brand attitudes were collected. The research aimed to recruit $N = 150$ respondents, ensuring statistical power, meaningful analysis of the moderators and the evaluation between different groups of people (e.g. regarding age or political leaning). Above the minimum sample size, additional responses will be collected to enhance the robustness and reliability of the findings.

The participants were recruited over public online channels, such as survey platforms (e.g. Qualtrics), online forums (e.g. Reddit), or public social media groups (e.g. Facebook), addressing a random sample. Recruitment aimed to avoid convenience sampling by primarily addressing publicly accessible online channels instead of personal networks. With this strategy, the potential biases were mitigated and a diverse group of participants was reached to enable the generalizability of the results to a bigger population.

3.3 Operationalization

The independent variable of this research is the perceived level of controversy of CPA communicated issues. It refers to the extent to which participants view a brand's position on a socio-political issue as divisive or controversial. Similarly to other papers that already measured the variable (Chen & Berger, 2013; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), this research will use a single-item, 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all controversial to 7 = very controversial. Although internal consistency cannot be calculated for single-item measures, the construct was found as a valid and effective measurement for perceived controversy in prior CPA studies. For instance, it was used as a manipulation check to test the cause controversy and demonstrated highly reliability and strong construct validity, $\alpha = 0.82$ (Zhao et al., 2024). The measurement with one item only is precise and sufficient, because prior research already successfully measured the level of perceived controversy with that scale. Further, it reduces the survey length and survey fatigue, allowing to find more participants and a better response quality. Lastly, perceived controversy is a unidimensional construct without any subcomponents that need to be included into the measurement.

The brand attitude of consumers serves as the dependent variable, so what positive or negative attitudes they have towards the brand communicating CPA. It will be measured on a 7-point differential scale with three items: Bad-Good, Unpleasant-Pleasant and Dislike-Like. The scales were already used in similar contexts in comparable studies on CPA (Haupt et al., 2023; Li et al. 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020) and were found as highly reliable

and internally consistent measurements, $\alpha = 0.97$.

To assess perceived controversy and brand attitudes, participants were exposed to a text (adopted from Mukherjee & Althuisen, 2020) about a fictional brand taking a public position on mass deportation of illegal immigrants. The issue was chosen, because previous research (Haupt et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuisen, 2020) already identified it as highly controversial. Therefore, similar perceptions are expected in this study. Further, a fictional company named Mercu was chosen to minimize potential biases arising from prior brand associations from participants. This research choice aligns with recommendations to use fictional names to avoid experience effects, such as brand awareness or pre-existing brand attitudes that can influence respondents' answers (Lencastre et al., 2023, p. 5). Additional context was given before the CPA by stating the brand is a chocolate company, because prior research suggested that a lack of contextual information in online surveys can influence participant's responses and the overall data quality (Hardré et al., 2012). After reading the text, participants evaluated their perceived level of cause controversy, their brand attitudes to the fictional company and other relevant variables.

The agreement with the presented issue/position serves as the first moderator and will be assessed on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = fully disagree to 7 = fully agree (Haupt et al. 2023). In previous comparable research, single-item agreement scales already showed high reliability and construct validity, $\alpha = 0.98$ (Zhao et al. 2024).

To measure the second moderator, the political ideology of consumers, this research uses a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly left-leaning to 7 = strongly right-leaning with one item only. While other papers similarly used a liberal-conservative scale to capture political ideologies of consumers (Haupt et al., 2023; Ketron et al., 2022), papers in the field of CPA also used a left-right scale to assess them and found them as reliable measurement (Marschlich & Bernet, 2024). Single-item measures for political ideology are commonly used and considered appropriate for capturing broad ideological orientation. Further, this research addresses a left-right continuum instead of a liberal-conservative scale as it is widely recognized across different political systems. Especially in the targeted countries for the data collection, it is culturally recognized, whereas liberal-conservative scales have a strong US focus and are commonly used in American studies.

Finally, the demographics, including age, as the third moderator, gender, educational background and longest country of residence were included in the survey to control for them. Another important note regarding political ideology is that it serves a dual role in this research. It is treated as a control variable to account for its main effect on brand attitudes and simultaneously as a moderator to examine whether consumers political leaning affects the relationship between perceived controversy and brand attitudes.

3.4 Procedure

Coming to the structure of the survey, it started with the consent and informing participants about the survey. Followingly, participants were asked to carefully read the statement (CPA) of the fictious chocolate company “Mercu” (see full statement in appendix) and answer a question about the text to make sure they read and understood it. After, key variables, such as the perceived controversy of the issue, the level of agreement with the statement and brand attitudes were asked using consistent scales. Finally, relevant demographic questions were asked at the very end, including age, gender, political ideology, longest country of residence and education. After finishing the survey, respondents received a small outro message thanking them for their time.

3.5 Choice of Analysis

The collected data were analysed using a hierarchical regression, which is a specific type of a multiple regression. Generally, multiple regressions allow to research how variables or subscales (perceived controversy) can predict another variable (brand attitudes) but can also assess if adding additional variables (e.g. political ideology) can predict the model even better. The approach of hierarchical regression involves entering the variables into the model in steps, all of which are chosen and based on theoretical foundation. Each block of variables is evaluated for its additional contribution to predicting the dependent variable, after controlling for the previous ones (Pallant, 2020, p. 167).

In the case of this research, several hierarchical regressions were conducted for each hypothesis. Brand attitudes were always entered as the dependent variable while perceived controversy was added as the main independent variable in Block 1 together with the variable relevant for each hypothesis (e.g. agreement with CPA). The moderators were tested by adding the interaction term (e.g. between controversy and agreement) in Block 2. Additionally, a separate model was run including all demographic variables (age, gender,

education, longest country of residence and political ideology) in Block 1 to test whether the main effects hold when controlling for these variables.

4. Results

The following chapter provides the main findings from the statistical analyses conducted to test the four hypotheses of this thesis. After the data cleaning, presenting the sample characteristics and verifying the reliability of key measures with a PCA, several hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to assess the effects of perceived controversy, agreement with the brand's position, political ideology and age on consumer brand attitudes. The results offer support for H1 and H2, while H3 and H4 were rejected. Additional insights from control variables (demographics) are also reported.

4.1 Data cleaning

After collecting enough responses, the data was exported to IBM statistic software SPSS 27. The full dataset initially included 208 responses, which were cleaned to ensure data quality and validity (Pallant, 2020, p. 44). Responses were removed if they included previews, overly fast completion times (below 60 seconds), missing values, or implausible open-text entries (e.g., joke answers in the gender field). Additionally, responses were excluded if the reading time for the key statement was below 8 seconds, indicating insufficient engagement and understanding. Furthermore, irrelevant variables such as recorded date, number of clicks and recipient information were eliminated to prepare the dataset for the following analysis. After cleaning all these cases, the final sample consisted of 163 valid responses.

4.2 Sample description

The final sample size after data cleaning consisted of 163 participants that will be the foundation for the analysis of this thesis.

Regarding the gender distribution, the sample included more female (55.3%) than male participants (43.4%), with a small percentage identifying as "other" or preferring not to define their gender. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 83 years, with a mean age of 32.43 years (SD = 13.99). When it comes to educational level, the majority of participants had either completed a bachelor's degree (35.2%) or a high school diploma (33.3%), followed by master's degree holders (22%). A smaller proportion reported having attained less than a high school diploma (8.2%) or a doctoral degree (1.3%). Over the past 10 years, most of them lived the longest time in Austria (40.9%), the Netherlands (10.1%) and

Germany (6.3%). However, participants from a broad range of 36 different countries were included in the sample. Finally, a broad spectrum of political ideologies was captured in the sample. The mean score on the left-right political scale (1 = left, 7 = right) was 3.76 ($SD = 1.91$), indicating a balanced distribution of political opinions.

An overview of the sample characteristics of respondents can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	88	55.3
	Male	69	43.4
	Other	1	0.6
	Prefer not to say	1	0.6
Age	Mean	32.43	
	Range	18-83	
Education	Less than high school	13	8.2
	High school diploma	53	33.3
	Bachelor's degree	56	35.2
	Master's degree	35	22.0
	Doctoral degree	2	1.3
Country of Residence	Austria	65	40.9
	Netherlands	16	10.1
	Germany	10	6.3
Political Ideology	Mean	3.76	

Note. Percentages are based on valid responses ($N = 159$).

4.3 Factor Analysis

To explore the underlying dimensions of the three item variable brand attitudes, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted using direct oblimin rotation based on eigenvalues (>1.00). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of $.77$ verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, as this exceeds the acceptable minimum value of $.60$ (Kaiser, 1970). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(3) = 516.47$, $p < .001$, thereby indicating that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for a PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The resultant model consisted of one factor which explains 92.58% of the variance in brand attitudes. The factor passed the reliability test with a Cronbach's alpha of $.96$, exceeding the minimum of $.7$ and could not be improved by removing items.

Therefore, the measurement for the variable brand attitudes was reliable. Based on the results of the PCA, the three items of brand attitudes were averaged to receive a single measurement for the following analysis. An overview of the data from the factor analysis is shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Principal Component Analysis and Reliability for Brand Attitudes

Item	Component Loading
How would you evaluate the brand (Mercu) with the following attributes? - Unpleasant - Pleasant	.972
How would you evaluate the brand (Mercu) with the following attributes? - Dislike - Like	.961
How would you evaluate the brand (Mercu) with the following attributes? - Bad - Good	.954
Total Variance Explained (R^2)	92.58%
Cronbach's α	.96

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

Before testing the hypotheses, descriptive statistics were examined to provide an overview of participants' perceptions and if they meet the theoretical expectations. As shown in Table 4.3, the issue of mass deportations of illegal immigrants was perceived as highly controversial ($M = 6.99$, $SD = 2.48$), supporting its suitability for testing the effects of perceived controversy. This was expected as previous studies using the chosen issue of illegal immigration and a similar CPA statement also found it as highly controversial (Haupt et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuisen, 2020).

The average agreement with the brand's position on this issue was relatively low ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 2.70$), indicating varied alignment across participants.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Perceived controversy of mass deportations of illegal immigrants	6.99	2.48	1	9
Agreement with brand's position on the issue	3.88	2.70	1	10

Note. *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation.

4.5 Hypotheses testing

Before conducting the hierarchical regression analyses, the assumptions of OLS regression were assessed in accordance with guidelines by Pituch and Stevens (2016) to verify if the data satisfy them. The important assumption of independence of observations was ensured by the study design, as each participant responded only once. Residual plots were visually inspected and appeared randomly scattered around 0 with no visible pattern and did not show major violations of linearity, normality, or homoscedasticity (pp. 93-94). As a final task before the start of the hierarchical regression, interaction variables were computed: Controversy x agreement, controversy x political ideology and controversy x age.

Hypothesis 1

First, a hierarchical regression was conducted with brand attitudes as the dependent variable. Perceived controversy was entered in the first block. The model reached significance, $R^2 = .22$, $F(1, 161) = 45.56$, $p < .001$. Higher perceived controversy was associated with lower brand attitudes ($\beta = -.47$, $p < .001$). H1 is therefore accepted.

The results suggest that the higher participants perceive the CPA statement, the less favourable their attitudes towards the brands were.

Hypothesis 2

To test the moderation effect and H2, another hierarchical regression was conducted with brand attitudes as the dependent variable. In the first block, perceived controversy and agreement with the brand's position were entered as predictors. This model reached significance, $R^2 = .64$, $F(2, 160) = 143.68$, $p < .001$. Both predictors showed significant main effects: Higher agreement with the statement was associated with more positive brand attitudes ($\beta = .71$, $p < .001$), while higher perceived controversy was associated with more negative brand attitudes ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .001$).

To test the moderation effect, the interaction term between controversy and agreement (controversy \times agreement) was added in the second block. This addition significantly improved the model, accounting for 67.5% of the variance in brand attitudes, $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $\Delta F(1, 159) = 15.79$, $p < .001$. The interaction between controversy and agreement was significant ($\beta = .43$, $p < .001$), supporting H2.

This indicates that agreement with the brand's position moderated the effect of perceived controversy on brand attitudes, meaning that higher agreement with the statement weakens the negative effect of perceived controversy. It leads to the conclusion that the negative effect of perceived controversy on brand attitudes was weaker for respondents who agreed with the corporate position – agreement buffered the negative impact of controversy.

Hypothesis 3

To test H3, the same process with other variables was repeated. Brand attitudes were used as dependent variable of the hierarchical regression, while perceived controversy and political ideology were entered as predictors in the first block. This model was significant, $R^2 = .37$, $F(2, 156) = 45.04$, $p < .001$. Again, perceived controversy negatively predicted brand attitudes ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .001$), while political ideology positively predicted brand attitudes ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$). These main effects suggest that more right-leaning participants had more favourable attitudes towards the fictional brand.

To test the moderation hypothesis, the interaction term between perceived controversy and political ideology was added in Block 2 (controversy \times political ideology).

However, adding the interaction term in Block 2 did not significantly improve the model, $\Delta R^2 = .002$, $\Delta F(1, 155) = 0.58$, $p = .450$. The interaction between controversy and political ideology was not significant ($\beta = .13$, $p = .450$), indicating that political ideology did not significantly moderate the relationship between perceived controversy and brand attitudes. Therefore, H3 is rejected.

In simpler terms, participants with more right-leaning political views generally had more favourable attitudes towards the brand. However, political ideology did not significantly change and therefore moderate how perceived controversy predicted those attitudes.

Hypothesis 4

Lastly, to test H4, a hierarchical regression was conducted with brand attitudes as the dependent variable. In Block 1, perceived controversy and age were entered as predictors. This model was significant, $R^2 = .25$, $F(2, 156) = 26.47$, $p < .001$. Both, perceived controversy and age, were significant predictors of brand attitudes, indicating that these variables independently influenced how participants evaluated the brand. These main effects suggest that higher perceived controversy was associated with more negative brand attitudes, while older participants tended to have slightly more favourable brand attitudes overall.

To test the moderation hypothesis, the interaction term between perceived controversy

and age was added in Block 2. This addition did not significantly improve the model, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\Delta F(1, 155) = 3.16$, $p = .077$. The interaction term itself was not significant ($\beta = .38$, $p = .077$), indicating that age did not moderate the relationship between perceived controversy and brand attitudes. Therefore, H4 is rejected.

Since the interaction was not significant, it means that participant's age did not have a clear effect, so did not moderate, on how controversy predicted the attitudes towards the brand. However, age together with perceived controversy showed a statistically significant main effect on brand attitudes, meaning that age individually was related to how people felt towards the brand and remains a relevant factor for CPA.

An overview of all relevant data of the hierarchical regression can be observed in Table 4.4, while all stated hypotheses H1-H4 and the conclusion after the analysis are visualized in Table 4.5.

Control variables

Additionally, demographic variables were included in the hierarchical regression to control for their potential effects on the dependent variable. In the first block, demographic control variables (age, gender, education and country of longest residence) were entered. This model was significant, $R^2 = .13$, $F(4, 154) = 5.53$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 12.6% of the variance in brand attitudes. In the second block, the main predictors, perceived controversy and agreement with the brand's statement, were added to the model. This resulted in a significant improvement, explaining an additional 53.4% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .53$, $\Delta F(2, 152) = 119.44$, $p < .001$. The full model was significant, $R^2 = .66$, $F(6, 152) = 49.17$, $p < .001$.

Higher agreement with the brand's position was associated with more favourable brand attitudes ($\beta = .69$, $p < .001$), while perceived controversy was negatively associated with brand attitudes ($\beta = -.17$, $p = .002$). Among the control variables, none of them were significant predictors in the final model ($ps > .05$).

Therefore, demographic variables have a small contribution to predicting brand attitudes once the main predictors are in the model. They do not explain much additional variance after adding perceived controversy and agreement with the statement.

Table 4.4: Hierarchical Regression Predicting Brand Attitudes Across H1-H4 (N = 163)

Predictor	H1 β	H2 β	H3 β	H4 β
Constant	3.07***	4.48***	4.62***	6.34***
Perceived Controversy	-.18***	-.47***	-.43**	-.72***
Agreement with Brand Position	.71***	.31**	-	-
Political Ideology	-	-	.30	-
Age	-	-	-	-.07
Controversy \times Agreement (H2)	-	.43***	-	-
Controversy \times Ideology (H3)	-	-	.13	-
Controversy \times Age (H4)	-	-	-	.38
R²	.64	.68	.37	.27
ΔR^2 (Interaction)	-	.03	.00	.02
F-change (Interaction)	-	15.79***	0.58	3.16

Note. Reported effects are standardized (Beta) coefficients. Significance levels: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Interaction terms reflect moderation hypotheses (H2–H4).

Table 4.5: Overview of Hypotheses

	Hypothesis	Conclusion
H1	The perceived controversy of CPA communicated issues is negatively related with consumer brand attitudes.	Accepted
H2	Consumer agreement with a brand's position positively moderates the effect of perceived controversy of CPA on brand attitudes.	Accepted
H3	The political ideology (left to right) of consumers negatively moderates the effect of perceived controversy of CPA and brand attitudes.	Rejected
H4	The age of consumers negatively moderates the effect of perceived controversy of CPA and brand attitudes.	Rejected

5. Conclusion

This final chapter brings together the key findings of this thesis and addresses their theoretical and practical implications. How the results contribute to the evolving literature on Corporate Political Advocacy (CPA) are discussed, especially by highlighting the role of perceived controversy and consumer alignment in shaping brand attitudes. By doing that, new insights are given, such as the growing importance of stakeholder theory and value congruence in understanding consumer responses to controversial issues and CPA. Based on these insights, several practical recommendations are outlined for brands considering CPA efforts, while also recognizing its risks. Lastly, the chapter addresses the study's limitations and identifies interesting avenues for future research that can help expand the understanding of CPA in an increasingly polarized consumer environment.

5.1 Theoretical discussion

This thesis aimed to examine to what extent the level of perceived controversy in CPA communicated issues is related to consumers brand attitudes and how this relationship is moderated by consumer alignment, including their agreement with the issue, political ideology and age (GenZ). The conducted research offered several contributions to theory of CPA.

First of all, it added to the new and evolving literature on CPA – especially emphasizing its potential negative effects on consumer perceptions. Further, this thesis provided a better understanding of which consumer characteristics might shape the responses and perceptions of CPA. The understanding of stakeholder theory was deepened by highlighting issue alignment and perceived controversy as significant primary drivers of consumer's evaluation of CPA. This confirms the view of a multi-actor and value-driven stakeholder environment, instead of the centrist corporate perspective, as criticized by Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021 (p. 4). While this thesis focuses empirically on consumer reactions, the findings have even broader implications for stakeholder theory. As stakeholder theory emphasizes strong relationships with all affected actors, consumer perceptions can be seen as an indicator for wider stakeholder sentiments. For instance, in the case of value-misalignment and negative responses of consumers, other stakeholder groups like NGOs, employees or investors might feel and react similarly. It draws back to the understanding of the theory on strategic alignment across the broader stakeholder network, not just consumers. Therefore, the

insights from this thesis may be transferable to understanding stakeholder tensions and opportunities beyond consumers.

Based on the results of the conducted survey, two key findings emerged:

Perceived controversy negatively affects brand attitudes (H1)

First, results showed a significant **negative main effect** between perceived controversy and brand attitudes, which means that the more controversial consumers perceive the issue of CPA, the more negative their attitudes towards the brand become. This supports H1 and aligns with much of existing literature in the field (discussed in chapter 2), despite some studies that indicated positive effects of CPA, e.g. on consumers purchase intention (Dodd & Supa, 2014, p. 14) or brand equity (Herzberg & Rudeloff, 2023). Many of these papers found mainly negative effects of highly controversial issues that were communicated in CPA on brand perceptions (Klostermann et al., 2022) or behavioral intentions (Kim et al., 2024). Also, the role of perceived controversy of the communicated issue is in line with previous research that reached similar findings about highly controversial issues that can harm brand perceptions (Klostermann et al., 2022) but even undermine brand identification and brand loyalty (Zhao et al., 2024). It reinforces the idea that CPA comes with higher reputational risks and polarizing effects, because of its controversial nature compared to CSR (Weber et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the results support the stakeholder theory perspective and relevance on building strong, trust-based relationships with key stakeholders, such as consumers (Freeman 1984, Freeman et al., 2021). In the case of highly perceived controversial issues, that relationship might get disrupted, leading to alienation of consumers and ultimately less favorable brand attitudes. These findings align with the theory's assumption that stakeholders evaluate corporate behavior depending on if it matches their own motivations and moral beliefs (Gaither et al, 2025, p. 3). Other researchers further support that notion as they found that scandalization nowadays is based on the moral violation of consumers which evokes their need to punish the brand for their behaviour (Coombs, 2023, p. 83).

While this finding aligns with the theoretical idea that controversial issues trigger negative reactions, some alternative explanations appear. For instance, there may be a general discomfort with the growing societal polarization or the perception of brands

entering political debates inappropriately, regardless of the issue itself. This might especially be the case for consumers that expect brands to remain fully neutral on sociopolitical issues.

Agreement buffers the negative effect of perceived controversy (H2)

The second key finding of this thesis is a significant **moderation effect** of consumer agreement, supporting H2. It reveals that value alignment shapes how consumers respond to controversial corporate actions. In other words, agreement mitigated/buffered the negative impact of perceived controversy of CPA on brand attitudes. This suggests that consumers are less sensitive to the controversy of CPA when they personally align and agree with the position. It strongly supports the established understanding of the asymmetric effect and negativity bias, stating that disagreement triggers a strong backlash, while agreement with the stance leads to neutral or positive responses (Haupt et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Therefore, agreement with the issue acts as a buffer against the negative effects of CPA, aligning well with other identified buffers, such as strong consumer-brand identification (Haupt et al., 2023).

The literature on consumer-brand identification explains the buffer effect through a lens of shared moral foundations: When consumers agree with the brand's CPA, their identification with the brand remains intact, therefore mitigating negative effects. However, disagreement signals a misalignment in their moral foundations and values, hurting identification and triggering a stronger decrease in brand attitudes (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 784). Stakeholder theory helps to interpret these findings by highlighting that stakeholder evaluation depends on alignment with core values. CPA can help to create corporate value only when it resonates with stakeholder ideals and builds trust through perceived congruence (Gaither et al., 2025, p. 2). Further, it aligns with previous research that found that value congruence plays a significant role in shaping consumers' attitudes and their behavioral intentions towards CPA (You et al., 2023, p. 17).

Overall, this also highlights the active role of consumers in assessing CPA efforts based on their personal lenses of morality and ideals.

Although the buffering effect of agreement is consistent with previous findings of value congruence, an alternative explanation might lie in the confirmation bias (e.g. Nickerson, 1998). According to that, consumers rate messages more positively simply because they

match pre-existing views and not because of perceived authenticity or deeper value alignment.

Political ideology did not moderate the effect (H3)

H3, by contrast to theoretical expectations and prior studies (Haupt et al., 2023; Ketron et al., 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), was not supported - the moderating effect of a conservative/right-leaning political ideology was not significant in this research. This finding challenges the assumptions of the, in the field of CPA, commonly used social identity theory. According to that, political ideology, is seen as a strong identity marker (Haupt et al., 2023, p. 1249). However, it did not significantly predict brand attitude responses, suggesting that identification and opinions about the issue itself may play an even bigger role than general social and political identities. In the lens of the stakeholder theory, the results suggest that consumers are strongly issue-based instead of ideologically driven actors. Brands may need to take a closer look at issue-based analysis than on general ideological segmentations, while research should focus more on value-congruence than on political ideologies.

An alternative explanation is that political ideology might not always serve as the most important driver of social identity in consumer-brand evaluations, even when the issue is highly controversial. Instead, personal and moral values may override broader political ideologies in shaping reactions to CPA. For instance, this is supported by the lens of the moral foundation theory (Haidt, 2012), which emphasizes that people's judgments about CPA are guided more by individual moral intuitions (e.g., care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, ...). All of these foundations cut across and overrule political ideology. So, a more left-leaning person may be particularly sensitive to the care/harm foundation, therefore opposing deportations due to perceived harm to vulnerable groups. On the other side, a more right-leaning person may respond based on a loyalty or fairness foundation but still oppose the CPA if it is perceived as more symbolic without authentic action. This theoretical perspective may help to explain why political ideology did not significantly moderate the effect. It is not political ideology per se, but rather the specific moral frame activated by the issue that drives consumer responses. Therefore, the alignment with the personal moral fundament and the issue-specific framing might have been more influential than ideological group membership.

Similarly, the value-belief-norm theory (Stern, 2000) suggests that individual values, beliefs and norms serve as the basis for people's behaviour, not political identity. Consumers want to act in ways that is consistent with these fundamental ideas. In this view, responses to CPA are guided more by the perceived moral responsibility and alignment with personal values than by ideological positioning, also possibly explaining the lack of significant moderation by political ideology. For example, a consumer might identify as political right-leaning but oppose deportations due to altruistic values. Or, a person identifies as politically left-leaning but still supports deportations of illegal immigrants if they prioritize norms related to security or rule of law.

Although H3 was not supported, the main effect model showed that more right-leaning consumers generally evaluated the brand more positively compared to left-leaning consumers. While this does not confirm a moderation, it suggests that political ideology still plays a role in shaping brand perceptions. This aligns with prior research that found that liberal/left-leaning people respond more negatively to CPA (Haupt et al., 2023, p. 1259). Therefore, political ideology might still contribute to the broader context of consumer evaluation, even if it does not shape reactions to controversy directly.

Age did not moderate the relationship (H4)

Lastly, despite the theoretical implications and prior research findings raised in chapter 2, age did not significantly moderate the effect between perceived controversy and brand attitudes of consumers, thereby rejecting H4. GenZ participants did not show significant differences in how perceived controversy is related to their brand attitudes. Even though, GenZ are a highly engaged and value-driven consumer group with strong social engagement and high expectations towards businesses (Nguyen, 2023; Silveira et al., 2024), their sensitivity to CPA controversy alone appears not to be a crucial factor in shaping attitudes.

One possible explanation is that age as a standalone variable is too broad to capture the fundamental values as well as the nuanced moral or political orientations that actually influence consumer responses. Additionally, generational labels may not reflect individual ideological alignment, which seem to be more relevant in the context of CPA.

This indicates that age alone is a poor predictor for brand evaluations and CPA perceptions. Rather, this thesis showed that consumer values and their alignment with CPA

are more important factors, aligning with other papers that also highlighted more important factors in CPA communication, such as the perceived authenticity of CPA that can lead to a backfire if not truly considered (Abitbol, 2018, p. 7).

Interestingly, age was still a relevant factor in shaping brand attitudes in general, just not in shaping the impact of controversy. It indicates that while it did not moderate the controversy-attitude relationship, age remains part of the bigger picture of attitude building. This calls for better and more detailed segmentation of consumers, for instance by combining age with media exposure, trust in brands, etc. to better understand CPA responses.

All in all, these findings support stakeholder theory's claim that corporate value is built not only through profit-maximization alone, but through trust-based and value-aligned stakeholder relationships. They reinforce the development of the theory towards a value-congruence based stakeholder model, where issue-agreement and alignment outweigh demographic characteristics.

5.2 Practical implications

The findings of this thesis offer several practical implications for brands considering involvement in Corporate Political Advocacy (CPA). Brands can use the insights as an opportunity to play an active societal role and strategically position themselves on socio-political issues. However, it comes with significant reputational risks. CPA is a sensitive practice and when it is executed without careful planning, it can lead to less favourable brand attitudes and consumer backlash. Therefore, brands must navigate this complex practice with strategic caution and stakeholder awareness.

If brands, despite these potential risks, decide to engage in CPA, several strategic factors should be considered. First and foremost, this thesis highlighted the importance of consumer alignment. The results showed that agreement with the communicated issue significantly buffers the negative impact of perceived controversy. Informed by stakeholder theory, which emphasizes that companies must identify and address the expectations of stakeholders affected by their actions (Freeman, 1984), brands should conduct detailed stakeholder analyses to assess the level of support or opposition to individual issues within their target audience. Taking a public stance is more likely to be successful when it resonates

with consumers' values and beliefs. In that case, CPA not only avoids backlash but can even lead to increased consumer trust, sales growth and better corporate performance (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 17).

This need for value alignment becomes even more critical when considering that CPA is not just a tactic, but also a public statement about what the brand stands for. As CPA communicates corporate values and aims to persuade others to adopt similar positions (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 200), brands must ensure their corporate messages matches with the values of their stakeholders – especially their consumers. This alignment is not just a matter of reputation management, but a strategic decision linked to stakeholder trust and long-term value creation. Highly controversial issues require careful navigation to avoid alienating consumers, aligning with the importance of stakeholder perception management as emphasized by Rathore et al. (2023) – consumers will need more attention and strategic management when addressing a particular issue.

Further, while demographic factors showed limited moderation in this thesis, age still appeared as a relevant predictor for brand attitudes in general. This suggests that brands must understand their audience in detail when planning CPA initiatives. Simple assumptions based on generational factors (e.g., generally viewing Gen Z as highly progressive or supportive) may not be helpful. Instead, a more nuanced segmentation is needed - combining demographic insights with variables such as issue salience, brand trust or media exposure to create more detailed personas.

Interestingly, the findings challenge the common assumption that political ideology is the key driver in CPA reactions. Instead, consumers were shown to be mainly issue-driven rather than ideologically driven, suggesting that brands should move beyond broad political segmentation. Strategic focus should shift towards issue-specific stakeholder analysis, evaluating how each issue aligns with consumer's values rather than expecting responses based on left/right political divides. Again, this implies that brands should prioritize stakeholder dialogue and issue-based segmentation when planning CPA initiatives, improving the precision in communication and reducing potential backlash.

Finally, this thesis reinforces the broader view from stakeholder theory that stakeholder relationships are key to long-term corporate success (Rathore et al., 2023, p. 269). Especially consumer attitudes can act as both a risk and a reward in CPA

communication: when aligned, they can help to maintain or even enhance positive brand perception, when misaligned, they may lead to rapid damage of brand equity. Therefore, brands engaging in CPA must see stakeholder alignment (not just those from consumers) not as a weak factor but as a strategic necessity.

5.3 Limitations and future research

This research has several limitations that open up new and interesting avenues for future studies.

First, this thesis focused its scope on agreement with the communicated issue, political ideology and age (Gen Z) as potential moderators of consumer responses to CPA. However, the set of consumer characteristics relevant to this field is likely far more complex. Future studies can explore additional consumer-trait variables, such as activism orientation, moral foundations, brand trust, or media consumption, to better understand the conditions under which consumer perceptions and attitudes toward CPA are formed.

Second, this research did not find political ideology as a significant moderator between perceived controversy and brand attitudes. This may be due to the relatively simple self-evaluation used in this study, that asked participants to position themselves on a political left-right scale. Further, in today's high-choice digital media environment, political polarization is rising and more and more issues are evolving simultaneously, potentially impacting consumers views (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021, p. 3). Therefore, the ideologies of consumers may also become increasingly complex and difficult than initially divided on left/liberal and right/conservative scales. This calls for more nuanced evaluation of political views, as already raised by Haupt et al., 2023 (p. 1261). These can include distinguishing between cultural and economic ideologies or even adding qualitative methods to better capture the complexity of political orientations. Instead of political ideology, this study found that issue-specific agreement and morality were found to play a more important role in shaping brand attitudes. Therefore, future studies should examine how specific moral worldviews of consumers (e.g., idealism vs. relativism) or their ethical belief systems predict responses to CPA differently.

Additionally, because of the dynamic power and controversy of socio-political issues, CPA might also have the potential to shape public opinion about them. Considering

the rising polarization in society, future research could go beyond analyzing consumer responses to CPA and instead investigate how corporate positions on socio-political issues may reinforce or even transform public discourse. This would help to better understand the reciprocal relationship between companies and society, where corporations are not only reactive to stakeholder expectations but also actively contribute to shaping the political and societal environment. To even better understand the bigger picture of polarization and ideological divide, studies could examine how CPA can intensify or change polarized worldviews.

Third, this study focused primarily on consumers' attitudes and perceptions. While these are relevant indicators of brand evaluation, future research is needed to examine actual consumer behaviours, such as boycott and buycott (Hong & Li, 2021), or engagement with activist brands.

Additionally, even if consumers are a key stakeholder group for corporations, future research can broaden its scope to include perceptions of other relevant stakeholders, such as political actors, investors, employees or NGOs, to oversee their potential reactions to CPA and fully apply stakeholder theory in practice.

Fourth, this thesis comes with general limitations regarding the research design. It was limited to a single CPA statement involving one socio-political issue. While this helped to maintain internal validity, it limits the generalizability of the findings across different types of CPA content. Future research could compare a wider range of issues that vary in level of perceived controversy, emotionality or personal relevance to better understand how different content characteristics affect consumer reactions.

Further, the sample of this research was relatively small and had a strong European focus, limiting the ability to uncover more nuanced segmentation of consumers. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to broader or non-European populations. Cross-cultural could reveal how consumer groups from different countries or cultures might have different interpretations regarding CPA, as perceptions of controversy may differ significantly.

Lastly, the research focused on immediate responses and perceptions of consumers, while CPA may potentially have long-term consequences on brand image and therefore corporate success. These long-term developments can be assessed with longitudinal studies.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Introduction

Dear respondent, Thank you for your interest in this research. We are inviting you to fill in a questionnaire. In this questionnaire, we will show you a statement from a corporation. We would like to ask you to evaluate and think about it. The purpose of this study is to investigate how people's attitudes towards the statement are different from each other. The questionnaire will take approximately 3 minutes to fill in. Please answer each question carefully and honestly, we are sincerely interested in your personal opinions. There are no right or wrong answers. **CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA** All research data remain completely confidential and are collected in anonymous form. We will not be able to identify you. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with participating in this research. **VOLUNTARY** If you now decide not to participate in this research, this will not affect you. If you decide to cease your cooperation while filling in the questionnaire, this will in no way affect you either. You can cease your cooperation without giving reasons. **FURTHER INFORMATION** If you have questions about this research, in advance or afterwards, you can contact the responsible researcher, Valentin Matzel, email: 663251vm@eur.nl. This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam. If you want to invoke your rights or if you have a question concerning privacy about this study, you can contact Erasmus University's DPO (Data Protection Officer) at fg@eur.nl.

Consent If you understand the information above and freely consent to participate in this study, click on the "I agree" button below to start the questionnaire.

I agree

I disagree

End of Block: Welcome message

Start of Block: CPA

CPA Statement

First, please carefully read the following information about the chocolate company "Mercu": As a local patriotic brand, Mercu firmly believes that all **illegal immigrants** should be asked to leave the country, regardless of how long they have been living here. They violated the law of the land, and there should be no amnesty. The rightful citizens of our country have been badly affected for far too long by such illegal immigration.

Reading understanding

What is the company's position on **illegal immigrants**?

- All should leave the country
 - Some might be allowed to stay
 - They should be given legal status
-

End of Block: CPA

Start of Block: Variables

Questions

Please answer each question as it appears. Take your time and respond carefully.

Controversy

How controversial do you perceive the issue of mass deportations of illegal immigrants?

1 = Not at all controversial

2

3

4

5

6

7 = Very controversial

Agreement

To what extent do you agree with the brand's position on this issue?

1 = Fully disagree

2

3

4

5

6

7 = Fully Agree

Brand attitudes

How would you evaluate the brand (Mercu) with the following attributes?

	1 =	2	3	4	5	6	7 =
	(Bad/Unpleasant/Dislike)						(Good/Pleasant/Like)
Bad - Good	<input type="radio"/>		((((<input type="radio"/>
Unpleasant - Pleasant	<input type="radio"/>		((((<input type="radio"/>
Dislike - Like	<input type="radio"/>		((((<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Variables

Start of Block: Demographics

Demographics

Before we finish the survey, we would like to collect some demographic data for statistical purposes only.

Political ideology

On the traditional left-right scale of political ideologies, where would you place yourself?

- 1 = Strongly left leaning
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - 6
 - 7 = Strongly right leaning
-

Gender

What is your gender?

- Female
 - Male
 - Other _____
 - Prefer not to say
-



Age

What is your age?

Nationality

Over the last 10 years, in which country have you lived the longest

▼ Afghanistan ... Other

Education

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school (no degree)
- High school diploma or equivalent
- Bachelor's degree or equivalent
- Master's degree or equivalent
- Doctoral degree or equivalent

Appendix B: Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information

Name: Valentin Matzel

Student ID: 663251

Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000

Supervisor Name: Dr. Aviv Barnoy

Date: 20.06.2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically ChatGPT in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature:



Date of Signature: 16.06.2025

Extent of AI Usage

I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination

Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature: 

Date of Signature: 16.06.2025

AI prompts examples:

“Proofread this paragraph for grammar and mark the mistakes”

“Give me ideas what I can change in my conclusion to focus more on stakeholder theory”

“here is my full thesis attached. can you point out any formatting mistakes according to my university writing guide and tell me what to adapt?”

“where can I add this sentence best: Also in CSR communication, especially younger consumers are the most enthusiastic about this corporate engagement and realize these actions more often (Rathore et al., 2023, p.274). in my theoretical chapter?”

“where in my result section can i include this descriptive table”

“How can I include page number in word starting at the first chapter (page 5)?”

“Please suggest how I can reduce the words for my abstract to make it slightly shorter: “

“do you have other suggestions for the title of my thesis, considering all you know about it:

When business gets political: The role of controversy in corporate political advocacy”

“here is my introduction, is it a good fit for the rest of my thesis or what critic points would you expect from a supervisor?”

“how can I adapt my results section to better separate main analysis effects from moderation effects”

“Please check for any word repetitions here”

“Give me alternative phrasings for ...”