

# Sociopolitical Advocacy and the Role of Public Relations

---

Theoretical Developments and Emerging Perspectives on Corporate Social Advocacy and Related Constructs

**Edited by Holly K. Overton and Nicholas Browning**

First published 2026

ISBN: 978-1-032-97295-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-97296-1 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-59314-0 (ebk)

## Chapter 6

---

### **Engaging Polarized Publics in Corporate Social Advocacy**

A Deliberative-Agonistic Model of Dialogic Communication

*Joon Soo Lim*

(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003593140-8



**Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

# 6 Engaging Polarized Publics in Corporate Social Advocacy

## A Deliberative-Agonistic Model of Dialogic Communication

*Joon Soo Lim*

Corporate social advocacy (CSA) has become a central focus of corporate public relations, as leading global companies increasingly take public stances on contentious sociopolitical issues to engage with diverse stakeholders. While some see CSA as an opportunity for companies to demonstrate leadership in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and broader environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments, others argue that businesses should remain politically neutral to avoid alienating those with opposing views. This tension implies the strategic complexity of CSA in that firms must carefully balance the risks of advocacy while upholding their corporate values and stakeholder relationships.

This chapter critically reviews two theoretical perspectives on CSA: the symbolic management perspective and the deliberative-agonistic democracy perspective. The symbolic management perspective, widely adopted in corporate practice, treats CSA as a reputational management strategy through which firms seek to strategically “own” an important social issue to influence stakeholder perception rather than committing to substantive action (Lim & Young, 2021). In contrast, the deliberative-agonistic democracy perspective offers a more ethical and effective approach to CSA, with the potential to contribute to democratic discourse and foster meaningful social impact. This chapter explains the shared and slightly diverging theoretical assumptions underlying Habermas’s (1984) deliberative democracy and Mouffe’s (1999, 2007) agonistic pluralism perspectives. The contrast between these perspectives naturally delineates varying approaches to dialogic communication—that is, the consensus-driven approach and the agonistic dialogue approach, which determine how companies engage in CSA and respond to pressures from key stakeholders who hold contrasting positions on contentious issues. Additionally, to bridge theory with practice, the chapter presents real-world cases that point out controversies surrounding the CSA of high-profile companies. These examples reveal the limitations of consensus-driven approaches to CSA and demonstrate how agonistic dialogue can establish more sustainable and genuine stakeholder relationships.

The chapter is structured as follows: First, it summarizes how global companies’ CSA engagement has evolved in the millennial age in the United States.

Then, a section critically reviews why CSA is at a crossroads, as several Fortune 500 companies find themselves entangled in controversy. They face pressure to embrace DEI initiatives on the one hand. On the other hand, conservative politicians and their supporters pressure companies to abandon or reverse progressive stances they view as politically or culturally oppositional. This push does not necessarily call for corporate neutrality; rather, it often promotes alternative ideological agendas, as seen in cases where corporations have received support for aligning with conservative values (Bhagwat et al., 2020; DiTomaso, 2024). This chapter then introduces the symbolic management perspective and the deliberative-agonistic democracy perspective and explains their implications for dialogic communication in engaging in CSA.

Grounded in the agonistic dialogic approach, the subsequent section suggests how companies can institutionalize stakeholder dialogue to address ideological conflicts constructively. The goal of this chapter is to provide theoretical grounds and managerial implications for today's firms to establish CSA legitimacy and facilitate agonistic dialogic engagement.

### **The Rise of CSA in a Polarized Era**

CSA is defined as a company's active engagement in public discourse on a contentious sociopolitical issue by issuing public statements and taking visible actions, despite the risk of alienating some stakeholders (Lee, 2024; Lim & Young, 2021). CSA has gained significant traction in the new millennial era. Bhagwat et al. (2020) note that CSA differs from traditional CSR in that it often involves taking stances on polarizing sociopolitical issues, which can generate both support and backlash. This trade-off underscores the need for firms to make deliberative assessments when evaluating the risks and benefits of taking a public stance on a contentious social issue.

This chapter illustrates how the potential risks of CSA, often underestimated during its rise, became more visible in recent years. As CSA gained prominence, it created the impression that taking public stances on DEI-related issues had become the new normal for corporate America, particularly in response to increasing demands from younger and more diverse generations. However, as the definition of CSA suggests, public commitments involve inherent risks. Beginning in late 2022 and continuing through to 2025, a strong anti-DEI backlash took shape. This backlash involved conservative political actors, coordinated social media campaigns, and the resurgence of cultural and ideological conflict. High-profile critics of what they labeled "woke capitalism" challenged many companies' DEI programs (Lim et al., 2025). As a result, several firms reversed or quietly reduced their earlier commitments. This period of ideological conflict introduced greater complexity into the CSA landscape. Firms now must make deliberative assessments that address not only reputational concerns but also political threats and the risk of stakeholder division.

While corporate activism is not new, the mid-2010s marked a turning point when businesses began taking public stances on divisive sociopolitical issues,

often in response to public pressure and/or evolving stakeholder expectations (Waymer & Logan, 2021). One early example was the opposition to North Carolina's House Bill 2 (HB2) in 2016, which restricted transgender individuals from using bathrooms aligning with their gender identity. More than 80 CEOs from major corporations, including Apple, American Airlines, and PayPal, signed an open letter condemning the law and argued that such legislation was not only discriminatory but also economically damaging (Katz, 2016). Their opposition resulted in tangible consequences, with companies canceling planned expansions and the relocation of sporting events, including the NBA All-Star Game (Stewart, 2016; Taylor, 2024). During U.S. President Donald Trump's first term, several high-profile incidents made big companies feel pressured to take a stand in response to mounting conflicts surrounding the issues of racial inequality and police brutality. Amid an intensely divisive political and cultural environment, Nike launched its now-iconic Dream Crazy campaign in 2018, starring Kaepernick and featuring the slogan: "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything" (Hoffmann et al., 2020). The campaign immediately sparked both widespread praise and fierce backlash, with supporters lauding Nike's stance on racial justice, while critics, particularly from conservative circles, called for boycotts of the brand (Hoffmann et al., 2020).

Since 2020, CSA has become more normalized across industries, with companies facing increasing pressure to embrace DEI principles. Observing the trend of DEI initiatives becoming more prevalent in various sectors of society, conservative columnist John Seminara (2020) argued in his op-ed for *The Wall Street Journal*, "Today, the left is the establishment, and conservatives are part of a new counterculture that quietly seethes as the companies we patronize inundate us with woke virtue signaling." A significant development in the normalization of DEI principles in corporate governance occurred in August 2021, when the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) approved the Nasdaq Stock Market's board diversity requirements. These rules require Nasdaq-listed companies to annually disclose board-level diversity statistics and have at least two diverse directors—one self-identified female and one self-identified underrepresented minority or LGBTQ+ individual—or explain the absence of such (Osipovich, 2021).

### **CSA at a Crossroads**

Corporate advocacy has led to high-profile political clashes, most notably in early 2022 when Disney opposed Florida's Parental Rights in Education bill, widely known as the "Don't Say Gay" bill. After initially remaining silent, then-CEO Bob Chapek faced pressure from employees and advocacy groups and eventually had to condemn the legislation while pledging \$5 million to LGBTQ+ organizations (Barnes, 2022). The company's stance triggered swift retaliation from Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who led efforts to revoke Disney World's special tax district status. The outcomes from Disney's taking

a stand signified the risks associated with CSA. Before Disney, companies like Delta Air Lines and Coca-Cola faced political backlash in Georgia for opposing voting restrictions in 2021 (Gelles, 2021), and financial institutions such as BlackRock and JPMorgan also encountered resistance in Republican-led states over their ESG and climate advocacy (Gelles & Tabuchi, 2022).

Amid growing political opposition, companies like Anheuser-Busch and Target faced conservative backlash for their marketing endeavors seen as aligned with liberal social causes—Bud Light’s partnership with a transgender influencer and Target’s Pride Month displays. Their equality-themed marketing activities sparked controversies and led to conservative boycotts.

Fast forward to 2025: Target, which had pledged \$2 billion to Black-owned businesses in 2020 following the George Floyd protests (Kim, 2021), finally reversed course and announced the end of its DEI programs. Critics argued that the company should not succumb to political pressure and should instead take a principled stand that could define its legacy (Lindell, 2025). However, this pattern is not unique to Target. More big companies have also declared plans to scale back or end their advocacy for DEI and related programs, as conservative activists like Robby Starbuck effectively used social media activism to exert pressure, and President Trump, in his second term, publicly denounced DEI policies within society and organizations (Lim et al., 2025).

These trends of big companies scaling back or ending their once-pledged commitments to DEI are inextricably linked to the changing political environment since the 2024 U.S. election. Moreover, the SEC-approved Nasdaq board diversity rules, once enacted, encountered a reversal when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit struck them down in December 2024 (Osipovich, 2024), which further prompted firms to reposition their stance on DEI initiatives. The current state of CSA, which push America’s large companies to the front lines of a public relations battle, requires the understanding of dialogic communication theories in applying it to evolving, and more contentious CSA battlegrounds.

### **Managing CSA Challenges**

To better understand how organizations manage external pressure on their CSA initiatives, this section reviews two distinct theoretical perspectives: the symbolic management perspective and the deliberative-agonistic perspectives. Each offers different insights into how companies respond to sociopolitical challenges. While both approaches utilize public discourse and rhetoric as strategic tools, they differ fundamentally in how corporate legitimacy is constructed and maintained through public relations.

#### *Symbolic Management Perspectives of CSA*

The symbolic management perspective emphasizes how organizations construct legitimacy through discourse, symbols, and strategic messaging rather

than through substantive policy commitments. This view rests on the assumption that “reality is largely a social construct” (Schnackenberg et al., 2019, p. 375) and underscores the role of corporate communication in influencing stakeholder perceptions. Although criticized by both normative public relations theories (Grunig, 2001) and deliberative systems theory (Edwards, 2016), this perspective remains the dominant managerial perspective in public relations. Critiquing this view, Edwards (2016) once argued that while public relations can facilitate dialogue and exchange of ideas, its primary function often remains strategic by serving corporate self-interest rather than fostering genuine democratic deliberation (Edwards, 2016, p. 60).

Within this managerial perspective, CSA is often viewed as a signaling mechanism that conveys “the unobservable commitment of a firm to activism” (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 4). Managers working within this perspective strategically align with prevailing social norms and values to maintain legitimacy, rather than enact genuine structural change. They tend to rely on “performative dialogue” or “faux-participative engagement” (Capizzo & Feinman, 2022, p. 279), where listening and dialogue are often staged for reputational control rather than used to acknowledge dissenting voices or address structural inequalities. When interpreted from this perspective, CSA can function as a performative act that may not always reflect deep-seated corporate values but instead serves as a strategic response to external pressures. Companies may issue public statements or marketing campaigns to signal support for a cause without making substantive operational changes. Echoing this perspective, Kim et al. (2024) argued that CSA limited to statements, where a company expresses support for a cause without committing resources, is more likely to be perceived as symbolic than substantive. Their research found that public responses to CSA depend on whether companies take concrete actions or merely issue declarative statements. Kim et al. (2024) further suggested that CSA efforts without demonstrable action are seen as less authentic and, as a result, do not enhance brand preference or lead to consumer recommendations.

CSA from a symbolic management perspective is often criticized as woke-washing, where firms adopt progressive rhetoric to attract socially conscious consumers without enacting meaningful change (Melloni et al., 2023). Some scholars argue that when companies approach CSA with a virtue-signaling mindset, they commodify social issues rather than actively working to address them (Arias et al., 2024). David et al. (2007) explain that companies often default to symbolic responses when facing stakeholder activism rather than implementing substantive policy changes. These symbolic actions, such as rhetorical commitments, high-profile donations, and public relations campaigns, create the impression of responsiveness without necessarily driving meaningful structural change. When legitimacy is suddenly threatened, management tends to react rigidly and reflexively, with a greater focus on appearances than on substantive action (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). This phenomenon, known as “management’s reflex” (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990, p. 184), occurs when

companies, under external scrutiny, instinctively offer superficial assurances rather than addressing core concerns. Such reflexive behavior is particularly common when corporations fear alienating key stakeholders or facing financial repercussions.

A prime example of the symbolic management approach to handling CSA's legitimacy challenges can be seen in the response of corporations such as Tractor Supply and Harley-Davidson to conservative activists' pressure (Pisani & Cutter, 2024). These companies initially adopted DEI commitments but swiftly abandoned them following conservative backlash. Tractor Supply reversed its DEI initiatives after facing social media-driven pressure from activist Robby Starbuck. In an official statement, the company acknowledged that it had "heard from customers that we have disappointed them" and had "taken this feedback to heart" (Lim et al., 2025). This reaction exemplifies a defensive legitimation strategy, where companies under scrutiny prioritize symbolic gestures over substantive commitments to mitigate short-term reputational threats (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). Rather than maintaining a principled stance on DEI, these firms opted for risk-averse, performative actions designed to mitigate short-term reputational threats.

### *Symbolic Management Approach to Responding to Challenges*

David et al. (2007) argue that managers are more likely to settle proposals filed by salient shareholders—those with power, legitimacy, and urgency. In traditional shareholder activism, corporate managers must preemptively respond to activism to maintain control over corporate decision-making. In the age of social media activism, salient stakeholders have expanded beyond traditional activist shareholders to include influential social media figures who can leverage public sentiment and exert pressure on corporate decisions (Pisani & Cutter, 2024). These activists, powered by their large social capital and their ability to mobilize like-minded social media users, wield considerable power in forming the perception of CSA legitimacy. This is because corporate managers are expected to "proactively preempt activism" (David et al., 2007, p. 92) by reflecting the concerns and requests raised by such salient stakeholders. Aligned with David et al. (2007), who considered shareholder activism as a mechanism to discipline management by forcing attention on overlooked issues, right-wing social media activism similarly pressures companies to abandon DEI initiatives deemed inconsistent with prevailing customer values.

The Bud Light crisis provides a case study of how corporations employ symbolic management strategies in response to controversies rather than engaging in substantive stakeholder engagement. In April 2023, Bud Light partnered with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney for a limited social media promotion celebrating her "365 Days of Girlhood" milestone (Wood & Allan, 2024). While the campaign appeared consistent with Bud Light's decades-long support of the LGBTQ+ community, it triggered immediate backlash from conservative consumers, including boycotts and viral condemnation. Bud Light initially remained silent for two weeks as the controversy escalated, and when the company

eventually responded, its noncommittal and ambiguous messaging failed to satisfy either side of the debate (Coffee, 2023). The situation worsened when Anheuser-Busch appeared to distance itself from the campaign by firing key marketing executives and issuing a vague public statement that neither reaffirmed support for the LGBTQ+ community nor directly addressed the backlash. (Wood & Allan, 2024). LGBTQ+ advocates criticized the brand for abandoning its stance, while conservative critics remained unsatisfied by what they viewed as performative backtracking. This pattern aligns with David et al.'s (2007) discussion of symbolic responses—corporate actions that appear to address stakeholder concerns but ultimately fail to produce meaningful change. Bud Light's response also highlights the risks of performative CSA, where socio-political advocacy is driven more by branding imperatives than by genuine engagement with affected communities. As Mirvis (2023) noted, "there is no evidence that Bud Light's marketers engaged with any LGBTQ+ associations, worked with experts in this arena, or sought the advice of internal LGBTQ+ employee resource groups before launching its campaign."

The following section presents an alternative theoretical perspective on CSA, known as the deliberative-agonistic democracy perspective. This perspective argues that companies should institutionalize spaces or platforms that foster discursive contestation, allowing conflicting viewpoints to be constructively debated, rather than relying solely on reactive strategies in response to backlash. The section then illustrates how different deliberative systems theories—deliberative democracy and agonistic pluralism—offer shared yet slightly diverging views on dialogic communication, which is proposed as the ideal approach to addressing the CSA challenges discussed earlier.

### *Deliberative-Agonistic Democracy Perspective of CSA*

Habermas's (2006) deliberative democracy conceptualizes democracy as a model where political deliberation enables citizens to collaboratively "search for solutions to political problems" (p. 412). In this model, dialogue is structured around reasoned argumentation, where all stakeholders have the opportunity to present, debate, and evaluate differing perspectives in a fair and inclusive manner (Nielsen, 2023). This rationalistic approach seeks to achieve mutual understanding through open dialogue, marked by uncoerced, reasoned deliberation among stakeholders. This process, in turn, safeguards against "the potentially damaging effects of distorted communication" (Nielsen, 2023, p. 49). From this perspective, political CSR or CSA positions corporations as political actors that contribute to democracy by promoting diverse, equitable viewpoints through communicative action (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). Under this approach, companies should act as facilitators of inclusive and reasoned dialogue while maintaining legitimacy and accountability through transparent engagement with stakeholders.

The deliberative-agonistic democracy perspective of CSA is grounded in the assumption that democracy is shaped through contestation, negotiation, and dialogue among actors with differing views and power dynamics.

This perspective emphasizes the importance of institutionalizing stakeholder engagement as an ongoing and participatory process, rather than as a reactionary response to crises (Passetti et al., 2019). This perspective values the “heterogeneity of discourse” to “democratize stakeholder engagement” to make different values are to be heard (Passetti et al., 2019, p. 175).

However, critics of deliberative democracy argue that it assumes an idealized communicative environment that does not fully account for power asymmetries, ideological fragmentation, and deep-seated societal conflicts (Davidson, 2016). Foust and St. John (2022) contended that Habermas’s assumption is problematic in contemporary public discourse, where actors often refuse to engage in good-faith dialogue and instead rely on “forceful assertion rather than deliberation based on facts and reason” (p. 464). This view also poses a critical limitation in explaining CSA because a firm’s stance-taking often fails to integrate diverse perspectives into decision-making processes and is never likely to reach to consensus among different stakeholders. Edwards (2016) also warns that corporate actors often reinforce power imbalances, as those who control resources and media access can shape narratives to protect their interests, which can ultimately distort the deliberative process rather than foster genuine democratic engagement (Edwards, 2016, p. 73).

Mouffe’s (2007) agonistic democratic perspective, by contrast, views democracy not as a space for erasing ideological differences but as a process of engaging with ongoing contestation through structured political confrontation. Although it does not reject deliberation, this agonistic view shifts its goal away from consensus and toward the management of ideological conflict. Therefore, this perspective assumes that discursive conflict is inherent to the political arena and cannot be entirely resolved. Instead of seeking to erase ideological differences, this perspective recognizes that democratic politics involves an “us/them distinction,” which cannot be eliminated but should be reconfigured so that adversaries engage in legitimate contestation rather than antagonistic destruction (Mouffe, 2007, p. 43). This perspective underscores the importance of fostering a “pluralism that valorizes diversity and dissensus,” rather than attempting to establish a political sphere that suppresses them (Mouffe, 2007, p. 44). Davidson (2016) contends that public relations theory has largely failed to integrate this agonistic democracy perspective and that much of scholarship has instead drawn on Grunig’s symmetrical public relations model and Habermas’ deliberative democracy perspective. Davidson (2016) argues that agonistic democratic perspective provides a more realistic and robust framework, as it acknowledges the legitimacy of public conflict and “rhetorical rivalries” (p. 147) in fostering civic discourse.

### **Bridging Deliberation and Agonism in CSA: Principle of Dialogism**

Despite their contrasts, both perspectives share the principle of dialogism, wherein a dialogic approach serves as a bridge between competing perspectives. As Nielsen (2023) put it, dialogue is “critical to a process of communicative engagement” (p. 62), which provides a mechanism for organizations to

engage with stakeholders in ways that go beyond performative or symbolic gestures. When taking a stand on contentious issues, corporations may adopt different communicative strategies. That is, the deliberative perspective prioritizes consensus-building, whereas the agonistic perspective acknowledges ideological contestation as inevitable and advocates for its constructive management rather than suppression, even amid pressure from opposing ideological sides.

### ***Consensus-Driven Approach to Dialogic Communication***

The consensus-driven dialogic approach to CSA, rooted in deliberative democracy theory, emphasizes collaboration, transparency, and mutual understanding in corporate stance-taking. Ganesh and Zoller (2012) describe this dialogic communication approach as prioritizing “mutual relationship building” (p. 70) and the creation of a communicative space where “identity and otherness are mutually implicated” (p. 68). Foss and Griffin (1995) introduced the concept of invitational rhetoric, which has become a central element in modern public relations, particularly in digital and blog-mediated public relations (Yang & Lim, 2009). This perspective aligns with Grunig’s (2001) classical symmetrical public relations model, which prioritizes ethical engagement and the inclusion of diverse stakeholder voices in decision-making processes (see also Kent & Taylor, 2002). However, contemporary public relations research suggests that organizations do not always operate in ways that adhere to these idealized principles of symmetrical dialogue. Critics (e.g., Ciszek & Logan, 2018; Edwards, 2016) argue that corporate-led deliberation often privileges dominant voices, which can limit true inclusivity and pluralism in stakeholder engagement. Although corporations may appear to engage in dialogue, their primary motivation often lies in managing stakeholder perceptions rather than integrating diverse perspectives into decision-making processes (Edwards, 2016). Ciszek and Logan (2018) argue that consensus-driven models often fail to account for power imbalances and ideological fragmentation within digital communication environments.

The limits of the consensus-driven model became evident in cases like Target’s decision to end its DEI commitments. This reflects a broader challenge: reconciling competing stakeholder expectations while managing political pressures and financial constraints. Consensus-based dialogue assumes that stakeholders can reach common ground, but as Ganesh and Zoller (2012) and Ciszek and Logan (2018) argue, increasing public polarization suggests that CSA built on dissensus, rather than consensus, leads to more practical outcomes. This has led scholars to explore agonistic approaches to corporate dialogue, which embrace ideological contestation rather than seeking mutual agreement.

### ***From Consensus-Driven Dialogue to Agonistic Dialogue***

Traditionally, organizations have approached dialogue as a consensus-driven process, assuming that the primary objective is to build consensus through communicative actions among the participating actors (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007).

This view is derived from the deliberative democracy models of political CSR (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007), which emphasizes mutual reason-giving and persuasion as mechanisms to achieve agreement (Beccarini et al., 2023). However, scholars drawing on agonistic pluralism (Davidson, 2016; Davidson & Motion, 2018; Dawkins, 2015; Foust & St. John, 2022) increasingly challenge this assumption. Schormair and Gilbert (2021) argue that in pluralistic societies, deep ideological divides make consensus on contentious social issues not only unlikely but, in some cases, also undesirable. Dawkins (2021) similarly contends that in contexts marked by entrenched power asymmetries and conflicting interests, expecting organizations to resolve disagreements solely through rational deliberation and consensus-building is both unrealistic and insufficient. Building on this perspective, Beccarini et al. (2023) suggest that stakeholder engagement processes should not be expected to yield unanimous agreement but rather strive for “sufficient justification” (p. 29) that allows dissenting stakeholders to propose their contested viewpoints. Reflecting Mouffe’s (2005) the notion of agonistic pluralism, Dawkins (2015, p. 2) contends that “conflict is inescapable, and society benefits when conflict is explicitly acknowledged and accommodated.”

This shift from consensus to dissensus aligns with agonistic democracy theories, which emphasize the productive role of conflict in democratic processes (Schormair & Gilbert, 2021). Rather than suppressing disagreement, an agonistic model of dialogue encourages organizations to create structured spaces for debate, where publics with opposing perspectives can engage in open negotiation of corporate values and decisions. This model is particularly critical for empowering underrepresented stakeholders, whose voices are often marginalized in consensus-driven approaches that favor dominant groups. Dawkins (2015) argues that an agonistic approach can increase the agency of less powerful actors in matters that affect them and ensure that stakeholder engagement is not reduced to passive consultation but instead creates substantive opportunities for these groups to contest corporate prerogatives. By fostering a public sphere where conflicting perspectives can be constructively debated, organizations can mitigate power asymmetries and promote stakeholder agency rather than imposing top-down decisions that reflect only dominant interests.

Companies often face backlash from multiple sides when advocating contentious sociopolitical issues. Rather than attempting to appease all stakeholders, an agonistic approach enables firms to engage in meaningful, equity-driven dialogue through which underrepresented publics have a platform to articulate their contested ideas and actions. By shifting from consensus-seeking to a more inclusive dissensus-based dialogue, firms can build credibility, foster genuine public empowerment, and strengthen their long-term commitment to ESG. For example, when Bud Light faced a crisis following its partnership with Dylan Mulvaney in 2023, the company could have engaged in an agonistic dialogue. Had Bud Light engaged in agonistic dialogue, it could have proactively created a space for open debate and ideological contestation. Rather than retreating into silence or issuing an ambiguous response, Bud Light could have leveraged

the crisis as an opportunity to foster a more meaningful public dialogue. By cultivating “agonistic legitimate political channels for dissenting voices” (Mouffe, 2005, p. 21), the company could have provided a platform for structured discourse rather than allowing polarized narratives to escalate uncontested. Dawkins (2015) argues that an agonistic model of stakeholder engagement should recognize stakeholder dissent as an essential component of ethical stakeholder relations rather than as a problem to be neutralized.

An agonistic approach offers a more realistic framework for corporate engagement with sociopolitical issues, particularly in today’s highly polarized media and political landscape (see Foust & St. John, 2022). Rather than pursuing broad consensus—often an unattainable goal in advocating contentious sociopolitical issues—firms should institutionalize structured dissent, with the understanding that ideological conflicts are not only inevitable but also essential to democratic engagement. Building on this premise, Foust and St. John (2022) emphasized the concept of “domesticating hostility” in deliberative spaces, originally proposed by Mouffe (1994) to “defuse the potential antagonism” (p. 105) inherent in ideological conflict. They argued that through this process, ideological opponents remain adversaries rather than enemies and engage in political contestation without resorting to outright exclusion or violence.

Brand et al. (2020) observed that the need for agonistic dialogic engagement frequently arises in business–NGO interactions, where relationships are often characterized by persistent ideological conflict and divergent strategic interests that cannot be easily resolved through consensus. Rather than sidelining these tensions, the agonistic engagement model encourages stakeholders to view one another as legitimate participants in a meaningful exchange, where both parties, despite conflicting aims, commit to mutual justification and structured contestation. By remaining adversarial yet deliberative, agonistic engagement enables businesses to interact with oppositional voices such as NGOs without compromising their commercial priorities. This approach helps avoid the pitfalls of false consensus while fostering more resilient and ethically grounded stakeholder relationships.

Introducing the concept of the “ethics of disharmony,” Castelló and Lopez-Berzosa (2023) also emphasizes that stakeholder engagement should not seek to resolve conflicts through rational consensus but rather acknowledge and work within the tensions of competing moral positions. The ethics of disharmony presents an alternative to consensus-driven engagement by recognizing that stakeholders do not merely hold different perspectives but construct their identities through the very act of contestation. As Castelló and Lopez-Berzosa (2023) put it, the “ethics of disharmony is concerned not only with the different moral categories that characterize opponent stakeholders, but also with the inherent constitution of conflict between the opponents in an us-versus-them discrimination that leads to the creation of identities” (p. 181). This idea aligns with Mouffe’s (1999, 2007) agonistic pluralism, which contends that democratic engagement should convert antagonism into adversarial relationships

where stakeholders recognize each other as legitimate opponents rather than enemies.

Ciszek and Logan's (2018) analysis of Ben & Jerry's advocacy for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement illustrates how corporate advocacy in digital spaces often results in ideological contestation rather than mutual agreement. Instead of fostering broad consensus, Ben & Jerry's advocacy became a discursive battleground, where competing publics engaged in polarized debates about race, corporate activism, and social justice. Maddison (2015) asserted agonistic dialogue plays an important role in fostering relational transformation in divided societies. Echoing the agonistic democratic perspective, she contends the aim of dialogue should be to "transform the conflict rather than to resolve it" (p. 1019). She advocates for agonistic engagement, where conflict remains central to democratic life. This perspective aligns with Mouffe's (2007) notion that democratic institutions should provide structured avenues for adversarial contestation rather than seeking to eliminate disagreement.

### **Institutionalizing Agonistic Dialogue in CSA**

In today's hostile political climate and with the rise of conservative activism on social media, companies should proactively establish agonistic dialogue channels when taking a stand on contentious issues. This approach, referred to here as institutionalizing agonistic dialogue, enables companies to articulate the ethical and business imperatives behind their DEI commitments while allowing for structured contestation. Institutionalizing agonistic dialogue helps companies avoid making reactionary, top-down decisions under political pressure and thus mitigates backlash while affirming a long-term commitment to inclusion and strengthening CSA legitimacy. Another key benefit is that it creates mechanisms through which diverse stakeholder perspectives—particularly those of disempowered groups—are meaningfully integrated into corporate decision-making. Given the need for structured contestation, the following sections introduce different approaches to institutionalizing agonistic dialogue.

#### ***Stakeholder Arbitration Mechanisms***

Dawkins (2015) proposes arbitration as an agonistic tool that enables stakeholders, particularly those with less power, to challenge corporate decisions in a structured setting. Arbitration differs from mediation by providing a definitive resolution rather than merely facilitating discussion. According to Dawkins (2015),

Arbitration can potentially help resolve disputes by establishing a set of unbiased terms with which to frame the dispute, shaping stakeholders' expectations regarding legitimate outcomes ... and engaging the glare of publicity to push the parties toward compliance with arbitration decisions.

(p. 15)

Castelló and Lopez-Berzosa (2023) further criticized that existing arbitration mechanisms often fail to fully embrace dissensus because they aim for temporary resolution rather than fostering ongoing structural change.

### ***Public Deliberation Forums with Agonistic Facilitation***

Unlike traditional consensus-driven stakeholder dialogues, companies can establish structured debates where competing viewpoints are encouraged rather than suppressed. The goal is to recognize oppositional voices as a legitimate part of public discourse while maintaining a firm's commitments, rather than capitulating to criticism from opposing ideological groups. This approach allows for what Mouffe (2007) described as "legitimate political channels for dissenting voices" (p. 21), which helps prevent ideological suppression. Weder (2022) critiques conventional stakeholder dialogues for often serving as instrumental tools for corporate legitimacy rather than genuine spaces for engagement. Instead, Weder (2022) proposes "dialogue forums" (p. 341) as spaces where dissent can be actively expressed and institutionalized.

### ***Inclusive Dissensus Strategies***

Institutionalizing agonistic dialogue also requires engagement strategies that do not merely tolerate dissensus but actively incorporate it into corporate decision-making. Castelló and Lopez-Berzosa (2023) introduce the concept of "inclusive-dissensus strategies" (p. 182), which leverage affect and emotion to create solidarity among adversaries while maintaining ideological contestation. They argue that rather than seeking compromise, firms should facilitate conditions where dissenting voices are amplified and incorporated into strategic decision-making. To institutionalize dissenting voices for transformation, firms should create spaces where contestation is not only acknowledged but also leveraged as a transformative force (Weder, 2022). Weder (2022) critiques traditional stakeholder engagement models for their tendency to neutralize or manage dissent rather than engage with it constructively. She argues that public relations should move beyond mere facilitation of dialogue to actively problematizing power dynamics in stakeholder relations. This involves reframing dissensus as a productive force rather than an obstacle to be resolved. Nike's engagement with racial justice movements exemplifies this approach—not only issuing public statements but also investing in long-term social impact initiatives that demonstrated a commitment to structural change rather than superficial branding.

### ***Agonistic Dialogue in Practice***

While the agonistic model offers a compelling alternative to consensus-driven approaches, a key challenge remains: How can this model grounded in the principles of agonistic pluralism be meaningfully implemented in

organizational settings, particularly in today's deeply polarized and ideologically entrenched environment? Critics argue that it is not always clear how dissensus-driven engagement works in practice, especially when some publics refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy, or even the presence of opposing viewpoints. This section addresses that concern by illustrating how organizations can move beyond symbolic gestures and begin institutionalizing structured forms of contestation that allow for principled disagreement without collapsing into antagonism.

First, a practical approach to implementing agonistic engagement begins with fostering an organizational mindset that transparently acknowledges competing viewpoints through offline channels (e.g., town halls) as well as social listening tools. This mindset requires a sincere commitment to recognizing dissent without manufacturing the appearance of consensus. For instance, Starbucks' #RaceTogether campaign was criticized for presenting employee support as spontaneous and widespread, despite internal pushback and a lack of transparent dialogue (Novak & Richmond, 2019). The initiative's top-down execution and failure to create space for authentic, inclusive dialogue ultimately undermined its credibility, which demonstrated the risks of engineering consent and suppressing genuine dissensus. Dawkins (2021) argues that less powerful stakeholders often lack the structural resources and institutional access necessary to meaningfully participate in the deliberative process. Implementing agonistic dialogue therefore involves creating conditions that allow marginalized or less powerful groups to process information, articulate their positions, and contest dominant narratives on equal footing (Dawkins, 2021).

Building on this, a second practical approach involves adopting the principle of civic listening, which Capizzo and Feinman (2022) defined as the systematic collection and consideration of diverse perspectives across lines of difference. This practice emphasizes that pluralism should not be seen as a problem to solve but as a reality to engage with. Civic listening reinforces the shared responsibility of organizations to contribute meaningfully to community and societal decision-making by ensuring that marginalized or dissenting voices are not only heard but also institutionally acknowledged (Capizzo & Feinman, 2022). One effective way to operationalize civic listening is through public listening sessions that invite and support dissent, a practice affirmed by practitioners interviewed in Capizzo's (2023) study. It is important to note that civic listening differs from "inauthentic listening as a way to pacify critics," as it is implemented as part of agonistic dialogue, the goal of which is "ongoing justification of organizational values rather than silence or appeasement" (Capizzo, 2023, p. 102263). For instance, one practitioner in Capizzo's (2023) study mentioned holding community meetings in response to opposition to a hospital expansion as a way to ensure all concerns were heard and acknowledged, which served as an example of engaged agonism in managing an intractable organizational issue. Therefore, within an agonistic framework, civic listening serves as a corrective to performative or symbolic dialogue by embedding dissent into organizational processes in ways that support mutual recognition and accountability.

Third, artificial intelligence (AI) technologies can be used to facilitate agonistic engagement by structuring digital spaces that support principled contestation rather than suppressing dissent. Grounded in agonistic pluralism, Shaw et al. (2025) examined how dissensus-driven prompt design influenced the diversity and political framing of images generated through AI systems. They found that prompts offering politically grounded alternatives, which were intended to expose users to unfamiliar or challenging perspectives, led to greater variation in image outputs and a stronger emphasis on diversity as a value. This suggests that presenting competing interpretations, rather than a single unified message, prompts users to reflect more critically on their assumptions and engage more thoughtfully with contested issues. Their findings offer practical insights for companies when taking a stand on contentious issues. Rather than striving for consensus, a company can institutionalize agonistic engagement by designing forums that support open dissent and value-based contestation, potentially moderated by AI systems built to facilitate deliberative yet adversarial public discourse. In polarized environments, such dialogue may prove more effective than consensus-based approaches, as it does not depend on agreement but treats disagreement as essential to sustained engagement.

Ihlen and Raknes (2025) suggest that message customization strategies in multi-party systems can help public sector communicators achieve agonistic engagement. They illustrated how public sector communicators in Norway tailored their messages to resonate with ideologically diverse political actors, such as framing environmental initiatives in terms of economic growth for conservative audiences, while emphasizing sustainability for progressive ones—all without compromising their institutional values. Instead of avoiding contentious ideological terrain, these communicators adjust their framing to meet stakeholders where they are, thereby acknowledging dissent while maintaining firm policy commitments. This approach embodies the agonistic ideal of engaging with divergent viewpoints as legitimate contributions to public discourse, rather than seeking consensus or suppressing difference.

### **Conclusions: Toward Agonistic Dialogic Engagement in CSA**

Habermas's (1984) deliberative model assumes that legitimacy stems from rational discourse and that stakeholder engagement should be guided by shared reasoning (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). However, deliberative democracy has been critiqued for overlooking power asymmetries and ideological contestation in corporate–stakeholder relationships (Dawkins, 2015). As Dawkins (2015) argues, stakeholder engagement does not take place in a vacuum; rather, it occurs within a context of power, where dominant actors often shape discourse in ways that marginalize less powerful stakeholders. Consequently, the deliberative model may not be sufficient for guiding firms' CSA engagement, because it risks reinforcing existing hierarchies by privileging voices that already wield substantial influence while expecting marginalized voices to conform to rational, consensus-seeking processes (Maddison, 2015). As Mouffe (2007) asserts,

the premise that political questions can be resolved through rational debate overlooks the reality that democratic politics is inherently adversarial. Thus, instead of aiming for an unattainable consensus, firms engaging in CSA should acknowledge that ideological and cultural conflicts are not merely obstacles to overcome but essential components of public discourse that must be managed constructively.

The agonistic democratic perspective challenges the notion that CSA should be rooted in consensus-building. While deliberative democracy emphasizes rational discourse and agreement, agonistic pluralism recognizes that ideological conflict is an inescapable feature of democratic engagement. In a polarized or pluralistic society, it is not possible to make every member of the society satisfied with a firm's decision. The key principle in agonistic communication is not to eliminate disagreements; instead, the company needs to create a public sphere where different perspectives can be expressed and debated openly (Davidson, 2016; Weder, 2022). Agonistic communication does not seek to resolve all ideological conflicts but rather to create structured spaces where contestation occurs constructively. A genuine agonistic approach to CSA requires companies to acknowledge and anticipate ideological pushback rather than attempting to appease all sides. Firms should engage in transparent, open dialogue with stakeholders while recognizing that consensus may never be reached. Instead of making reactive adjustments to public backlash, companies must maintain a clear stance grounded in corporate values so that their advocacy efforts remain principled and consistent over time.

### **Discussion Questions**

- 1 How might Bud Light have responded differently to conservative social media boycotts if it had adopted strategies from the deliberative-agonistic perspective?
- 2 What major corporate examples illustrate either the symbolic management or deliberative-agonistic democracy perspective in CSA?
- 3 Which companies or brands have adopted a deliberative-agonistic approach in dialogic communication to address conservative pressure against their CSA efforts?
- 4 How do the symbolic management and deliberative-agonistic democracy perspectives differ in establishing legitimacy in CSA?
- 5 What are the potential risks and benefits of adopting an agonistic dialogue model instead of a consensus-driven approach when responding to activist pressure?

### **References for Further Reading**

Davidson, S. (2016). Public relations theory: An agonistic critique of the turns to dialogue and symmetry. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 5(2), 145–167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x16649007>

- Ciszek, E., & Logan, N. (2018). Challenging the dialogic promise: How Ben & Jerry's support for Black Lives Matter fosters dissensus on social media. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 30(3), 115–127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2018.1498342>
- Foust, J., & St. John, B. (2022). Facts do care about your feelings: The “assertive turn” in emergent attributes of the contemporary U.S. public sphere. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 47(4), 459–480. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01968599221099646>

## References

- Arias, D., Barriola, X., & Adauí, C. R. L. (2024). Corporate purpose and early disaster response: Providing evidence of dynamic materiality? *Business Strategy and the Environment*, Online Advance Publication. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.3707>
- Ashforth, B. E., & Gibbs, B. W. (1990). The double-edge of organizational legitimation. *Organization Science*, 1(2), 177–194. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1.2.177>
- Barnes, B. (2022, March 10). Disney chief addresses anti-gay bill. *The New York Times*, B6. <https://nyti.ms/3z9T6IV>
- Beccarini, I., Beunza, D., Ferraro, F., & Hoepner, A. G. F. (2023). The contingent role of conflict: Deliberative interaction and disagreement in shareholder engagement. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 33(1), 26–66. <https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2021.46>
- Bhagwat, Y., Warren, N. L., Beck, J. T., & Watson, G. F. (2020). Corporate socio-political activism and firm value. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(5), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242920937000>
- Brand, T., Blok, V., & Verweij, M. (2020). Stakeholder dialogue as agonistic deliberation: Exploring the role of conflict and self-interest in business-NGO interaction. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 30(1), 3–30. <https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2019.21>
- Capizzo, L. (2023). Managing intractability: Wrestling with wicked problems and seeing beyond consensus in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 49(1), 102263. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2022.102263>
- Capizzo, L., & Feinman, M. (2022). Extending civic values in architectures of listening: Arendt, Mouffe and the pluralistic imperative for organizational listening. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 34(6), 274–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2022.2127728>
- Castelló, I., & Lopez-Berzosa, D. (2023). Affects in online stakeholder engagement: A dissensus perspective. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 33(1), 180–215. <https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2021.35>
- Ciszek, E., & Logan, N. (2018). Challenging the dialogic promise: How Ben & Jerry's support for Black Lives Matter fosters dissensus on social media. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 30(3), 115–127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2018.1498342>
- Coffee, P. (2023, April 13). Bud Light faces boycott calls, but punishing brands is harder than it looks. *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://on.wsj.com/4gXCkAY>
- David, P., Bloom, M., & Hillman, A. J. (2007). Investor activism, managerial responsiveness, and corporate social performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(1), 91–100. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.571>
- Davidson, S. (2016). Public relations theory: An agonistic critique of the turns to dialogue and symmetry. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 5(2), 145–167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x16649007>
- Davidson, S., & Motion, J. (2018). On Mouffe: Radical pluralism and public relations. In Ø. Ihlen & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory* (pp. 394–413). Routledge.
- Dawkins, C. (2015). Agonistic pluralism and stakeholder engagement. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 25(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2015.2>

- Dawkins, C. E. (2021). An agonistic notion of political CSR: Melding activism and deliberation. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 170(1), 5–19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04352-z>
- DiTomaso, N. (2024). Rethinking “woke” and “integrative” diversity strategies: Diversity, equity, inclusion—and inequality. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 38(2), 225–244. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2023.0013>
- Edwards, L. (2016). The role of public relations in deliberative systems. *Journal of Communication*, 66(1), 60–81. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12199>
- Foss, S. K., & Griffin, C. L. (1995). Beyond persuasion: A proposal for an invitational rhetoric. *Communication Monographs*, 62(1), 2–18.
- Foust, J., & St. John, B. (2022). Facts do care about your feelings: The “assertive turn” in emergent attributes of the contemporary U.S. public sphere. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 47(4), 459–480. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01968599221099646>
- Ganesh, S., & Zoller, H. M. (2012). Dialogue, activism, and democratic social change. *Communication Theory*, 22(1), 66–91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01396.x>
- Gelles, D. (2021). Delta and Coca-Cola face backlash on voting stance. *The New York Times*, B2. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/business/delta-coca-cola-georgia-voting-law.html>
- Gelles, D., & Tabuchi, H. (2022, May 27). How an organized Republican effort punishes companies for climate action. *The New York Times*. <https://nyti.ms/4gBYv5k>
- Grunig, J. E. (2001). Two-way symmetrical public relations: Past, present, and future. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 11–32). Sage.
- Habermas, J. (1984). *The theory of communicative action*. Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (2006). Political communication in media society: Does democracy still enjoy an epistemic dimension? The impact of normative theory on empirical research. *Communication Theory*, 16(4), 411–426. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00280.x>
- Hoffmann, J., Nyborg, K., Averhoff, C., & Olesen, S. (2020). The contingency of corporate political advocacy: Nike’s ‘dream crazy’ campaign with Colin Kaepernick. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 9(2), 155–175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x20920802>
- Ihlen, Ø., & Raknes, K. (2025). Made to measure: Interest group message customization in a multi-party system. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 14(1), 25–43. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41309-024-00220-y>
- Katz, J. M. (2016). Major companies press North Carolina on law curbing protections from bias. *The New York Times*. <https://nyti.ms/40M3dYx>
- Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 28(1), 21–37. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111\(02\)00108-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(02)00108-X)
- Kim, B. (2021, May 26). Have companies followed through on promises made after George Floyd’s death? *PR Week*. <https://shorturl.at/kglaa>
- Kim, J. K., Moon, W.-K., & Lee, J. (2024). The role of corporate social advocacy forms in shaping young adults’ responses. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 29(5), 653–669. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-11-2023-0151>
- Lee, E. (2024). Perceived authenticity in corporate social advocacy: Conceptualization and measurement scale development. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Advance Early Publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2024.2437775>
- Lim, J. S., Yang, S.-U., & Park, E. (2025, March 8). *Analyzing image restoration strategies in Fortune 500 companies’ responses to stakeholder pushback on DEI initiatives*. *The International Public Relations Conference (IPRRC)*, Orlando, FL.
- Lim, J. S., & Young, C. (2021). Effects of issue ownership, perceived fit, and authenticity in corporate social advocacy on corporate reputation. *Public Relations Review*, 47(4), 102071. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102071>

- Lindell, K. (2025). DEI rollbacks can make us feel helpless—but we are not. *PR Week*. <https://shorturl.at/BVsoK>
- Maddison, S. (2015). Relational transformation and agonistic dialogue in divided societies. *Political Studies*, 63(5), 1014–1030. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12149>
- Melloni, G., Pataconi, A., & Vikander, N. (2023). Cashing in on the culture wars? CEO activism, wokewashing, and firm value. *Strategic Management Journal*, 44(13), 3098–3121. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3542>
- Mirvis, P. (2023, December 26). In a war on ‘woke capitalism,’ what’s a good company to do? *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. <https://bit.ly/454ZPcS>
- Mouffe, C. (1994). For a politics of nomadic identity. In J. Bird, B. Curtis, M. Mash, T. Putnam, G. Robertson, & L. Tickner (Eds.), *Travellers’ tales* (pp. 102–110). Routledge.
- Mouffe, C. (1999). Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? *Social Research*, 66(3), 745–758. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971349>
- Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the Political* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203870112>
- Mouffe, C. (2007). Democracy as agonistic pluralism. In E. D. Ermath (Ed.), *Rewriting democracy: cultural politics in postmodernity* (pp. 36–45). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315244167-3>
- Nielsen, G. M. (2023). *Media sociology and journalism*. Anthem Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.766975.6>
- Novak, A. N., & Richmond, J. C. (2019). E-racing together: How Starbucks reshaped and deflected racial conversations on social media. *Public Relations Review*, 45(3), 101773. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.04.006>
- Osipovich, A. (2021). Nasdaq’s board-diversity proposal wins SEC approval. <https://on.wsj.com/3QaiRb3>
- Osipovich, A. (2024, December 12). Appeals Court strikes down Nasdaq’s Board-Diversity Rules. *WSJ*. <https://on.wsj.com/3DZiH3L>
- Passetti, E., Bianchi, L., Battaglia, M., & Frey, M. (2019). When democratic principles are not enough: Tensions and temporalities of dialogic stakeholder engagement. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 155(1), 173–190. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3500-z>
- Pisani, J., & Cutter, C. (2024, August 3). The activist pushing companies to ditch their diversity policies. *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://on.wsj.com/4hcWIVc>
- Scherer, A. G., & Palazzo, G. (2007). Toward a political conception of corporate responsibility: Business and society seen from a Habermasian perspective. *The Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1096–1120. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20159358>
- Schnackenberg, A. K., Bundy, J., Coen, C. A., & Westphal, J. D. (2019). Capitalizing on categories of social construction: A review and integration of organizational research on symbolic management strategies. *Academy of Management Annals*, 13(2), 375–413. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2017.0096>
- Schormair, M. J. L., & Gilbert, D. U. (2021). Creating value by sharing values: Managing stakeholder value conflict in the face of pluralism through discursive justification. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 31(1), 1–36. <https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2020.12>
- Seminara, D. (2020, August 5). When your favorite companies go woke. *Wall Street Journal*. <https://on.wsj.com/3Erg5vs>
- Shaw, A., Ye, A., Krishna, R., & Zhang, A. X. (2025). Unsettling the hegemony of intention: Agonistic image generation. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2502.15242*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2502.15242>
- Stewart, J. B. (2016, April 1). Corporations no longer sit idly by on bias. *The New York Times*, B1. <https://nyti.ms/4hzcg6b>
- Taylor, A. (2024). *Higher ground: How business can do the right thing in a turbulent world*. Harvard Business Review Press.

- Waymer, D., & Logan, N. (2021). Corporate social advocacy as engagement: Nike's social justice communication. *Public Relations Review*, 47(1), 102005. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.102005>
- Weder, F. (2022). Strategic problematization of sustainability reframing dissent in strategic communication for transformation. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 11(3), 337–360. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x211026857>
- Wood, N., & Allan, D. (2024). *This bud light's for you—Him/her/them*. SAGE Publications: SAGE Business Cases Originals. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071934876>
- Yang, S.-U., & Lim, J. S. (2009). The effects of blog-mediated public relations (BMPR) on relational trust. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 21(3), 341–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10627260802640773>