Brand Governance in the Platform Economy: From Political to Regulatory Recognition

Journal:	*New Media and Society*
Manuscript ID	NMS-26-0365.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Manuscript
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[Anonymised for Review]

Abstract

This article reconceptualises corporate advocacy as brand governance, a techno-normative promotional practice that regulates the conditions of political visibility within networked publics. Drawing on a sociosemiotic analysis of global advocacy campaigns (2017–2022), three techno-normative strategies emerge from the corpus: Visionary ("Feeling the Other"), Sensitive ("Feeling for Others"), and Reflexive ("Feeling with Others"), each operating through distinct affective and narrative logics. The argument advances a distinction between political and regulatory recognition. Political recognition acknowledges claims in their structural and collective dimension; regulatory recognition extends legitimacy only to those aligned with the promotional regime's affective and reputational logic. The evidence suggests that brand governance operates predominantly in this regulatory mode, producing a conditional visibility that privileges individualised emotional appeals over structural political demands. This study focuses on U.S. and Western European promotional cultures; comparative research across other regions remains a necessary next step.

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Introduction

Recent corporate withdrawals from initiatives such as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are frequently analysed as lapses in corporate commitment or departures from stated values (Rim et al., 2024; Villagra et al., 2022). These critiques, often relying on the metaphor of "woke-washing," presuppose that the corporation functions as a moral subject bound by an obligation to ideological positions (Flight and Coker, 2022; Khamis, 2022). This article contests that premise, arguing instead that such strategic shifts are better understood as expressions of brand governance, defined here as a techno-normative promotional practice that regulates the conditions of political visibility within networked publics. Brand governance, the analytical concept advanced here, specifies what existing scholarship has examined under the broader rubric of brand advocacy, the practice through which corporations adopt public positions on social and political issues. The advocacy campaigns analysed in this article are the empirical units through which this regulation becomes observable.

Rather than assessing whether advocacy campaigns are authentic or performative (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Sobande, 2019), the analysis shifts focus to their structural function as governance mechanisms. Unlike approaches that treat branding primarily as cultural expression (Holt, 2002), brand governance emphasises how promotional communication interacts with platform affordances (Bucher, 2018) to establish thresholds of legibility. It regulates the emotional registers through which political grievances become legible within the promotional field, building on Orgad and Gill's (2022) analysis of affective norms but situating them within the logic of platform visibility (Cotter, 2019). Brands, therefore, do not govern through coercion but through the structuring of promotional visibility. They structure recognition by determining whose grievances can be validated, under which emotional codes,

and within which grammars of legitimacy (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) capable of circulating within the platform economy.

This dynamic is particularly evident in corporate responses to the demands of networked publics (Boyd, 2010; Papacharissi, 2015), where high-profile movements such as Black Lives Matter, the climate crisis, and #MeToo have compelled brands to navigate volatile public pressure shaped by algorithmic amplification. Such episodes expose how global brands participate in advocacy not by facilitating political voice but by regulating which claims can circulate and on what terms, through techno-normative strategies that interact with the governance arrangements of digital platforms (Gorwa, 2019; Gillespie, 2010). Platform governance encompasses the institutional arrangements through which platforms regulate communication, ranging from content policies to algorithmic curation (Gorwa, 2019, pp. 856–857). The campaigns analysed in this article sit at the intersection of brand governance and platform governance, where branded moral claims are formatted according to platform affordances that privilege affective intensity and rapid circulation.

This governance mechanism is exemplified by Nike's deployment of racial-justice narratives on Twitter and YouTube (Kiefer, 2020), which leveraged the platform's bias for high-arousal content to valorise individual resilience. The platform's algorithmic distribution simultaneously marginalised structural critiques of labour exploitation. Similarly, Patagonia's environmental advocacy mobilises Instagram's visual affordances to render ecology legible through lifestyle aesthetics (Chang, 2021), a framing that legitimises conservation while obscuring the systemic contradictions of capitalist growth behind curated imagery. In both instances, the platform does not merely host the message. Its techno-normative logic adjudicates which political claims can be amplified and which are displaced.

Current scholarship has largely failed to theorise this transformation of brand advocacy into a mechanism of techno-normative governance. Research remains organised

around a functionalist logic that divides into intent-oriented interrogations of authenticity and "woke-washing" (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Vredenburg et al., 2020) and impact-oriented assessments of reputational and stakeholder outcomes (Kim and Meganck, 2025; Wagner et al., 2020). While recent studies define advocacy through stance-taking (Bhagwat et al., 2020) or moral persuasion (Baur and Wettstein, 2016), these accounts privilege the brand's stated position over the structural conditions that govern its circulation. Even organisational communication research, which emphasises what Kelleher (2009) terms relational maintenance, frequently overlooks the structural critique advanced by Logan (2021), who demonstrates that advocacy often substitutes symbolic gestures for structural accountability, sustaining rather than disrupting conditions of inequality.

A more productive line of inquiry has emerged within critical media studies, where scholars have begun to challenge the assumption that visibility guarantees recognition (Creech, 2020; Couldry, 2010). Within this turn, Saha (2018, 2021) demonstrates how diversity discourse reproduces racial hierarchies, while Banet-Weiser (2012, 2018) traces the commodification of activist vocabularies within brand culture. Scholarship on promotional culture has established that visibility "is neither neutral nor spontaneous" but "is structured and disciplined to favour specific ways of seeing and showing" (Jiménez-Martínez and Edwards, 2023, p. 16). A significant gap remains, however. Scholarship has yet to articulate how this normative power interacts with the affordances of networked publics (Boyd, 2010; Davis and Chouinard, 2016) to produce specific regimes of visibility (Bucher, 2018). This insight fundamentally reframes the object of study. Rather than asking whether campaigns express authenticity or achieve impact, the critical task is to examine how brand governance defines the conditions of visibility (Brighenti, 2007), determining which grievances can appear, on what terms, and within which grammars of legitimacy.

From this perspective, the central question is not whether advocacy serves brand positioning, but how it structures the moral legibility of claims within platformed public spheres. To investigate this, the analysis is guided by two research questions. First, to determine how specific claims are rendered visible while others are systematically excluded (RQ1), the analysis examines the structural conditions of visibility through which brand governance establishes the initial thresholds of appearance. Second, to understand how grievances that have been granted visibility are framed (RQ2), the analysis examines the narrative and affective operations through which campaigns confer regulatory recognition on certain grievances while foreclosing the conditions under which political recognition might be achieved. Together, these questions address the claim that the selective extension of recognition is not incidental but constitutive. Advocacy campaigns function as a regulatory discourse that redefines the terms on which justice becomes articulable within the platform economy.

The primary theoretical contribution of this article is the distinction between political recognition and regulatory recognition as modes through which brand governance operates within the platform economy. Political recognition, as developed in the theoretical framework, addresses subjects as agents capable of making claims on the political order, granting visibility oriented toward reconfiguring social relations even when grievances resist assimilation to promotional logics (Taylor, 1994). Regulatory recognition distributes visibility according to promotional imperatives, affirming identity without redistributing power (Fraser, 2000) and rendering subjects legible within a branded moral economy but not as political agents capable of contesting the structures that govern their appearance (Edwards, 2016). By integrating critical platform studies with the philosophy of recognition, the article establishes that brand governance functions as a techno-normative promotional practice that grants visibility only on the condition that political agency is circumscribed.

Drawing on a sociosemiotic analysis of global advocacy campaigns from 2017 to 2022, the study identifies three techno-normative strategies through which this governance operates and examines how they interact with platform affordances to produce regulatory rather than political recognition. The argument is developed through close analysis of campaign material that reveals how these governance dynamics are enacted across semiotic and platform-specific contexts. The analysis shifts focus from evaluating campaign performance to interrogating the conditions of visibility through which recognition itself is produced.

Theoretical Framework: From Promotional Visibility to Recognition Theory

Within critical scholarship, the brand has been theorised along three principal axes, as a form of informational capital that organises the conditions under which publics emerge, as an institutional device that distributes authority across organisational and everyday life, and as a site of cultural politics in which consumers are simultaneously invested and critical. Brands, it has been argued, "should be understood as an institutional embodiment of the logic of a new form of informational capital" (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 7), a formulation that positions branding not as cultural expression but as a platform for action. This argument has been extended to show how brands structure organisational practice and everyday conduct, operating as devices that distribute authority unevenly (Kornberger, 2010). Scholarship has further established branding's deep entanglement with cultural politics. Brand cultures have become "cultural contexts for everyday living, individual identity, and affective relationships" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 4), and the politics of ambivalence that characterises brand culture means that consumers are simultaneously critical of and invested in branded spaces. This ambivalence is constitutive of contemporary branding rather than an aberration within it.

More recent scholarship has argued that brands do not simply absorb activist discourse into promotional messaging but actively extract moral authority from social movements and redeploy it as branded capital. Digital culture creates conditions of surveillance in which brands determine "who gets to authoritatively determine what is (and is not) 'morally problematic'" (Sobande, 2024, p. 38), and this capacity to impose moral positions constitutes a governance function rather than a purely communicative one. This analysis is significant because it identifies an asymmetry between the movements from which moral authority is extracted and the promotional systems within which that authority is redeployed. While these accounts establish that branding produces the cultural and political conditions under which claims become legible, they share a diagnostic orientation that does not specify the mechanism through which this operates as governance within the platform economy. The concept of carewashing addresses one dimension of this gap by showing how corporate expressions of concern depoliticise structural claims, converting them into affective gestures that sustain rather than challenge existing arrangements of power (Chatzidakis and Littler, 2023). Carewashing reveals that affect operates as a depoliticising mechanism rather than as an expression of corporate values, connecting critical branding scholarship to broader debates about the commodification of care.

What remains unaddressed is not an empirical deficit but a conceptual one. Existing accounts lack the theoretical resources to specify how branded visibility operates as governance within the platform economy. This article is positioned at the intersection of critical media studies and promotional culture scholarship, and it draws on recognition theory to address this gap. The disciplinary orientation is important because it distinguishes the present analysis from intent-oriented studies in marketing that assess sincerity (Vredenburg et al., 2020) and from strategic communication scholarship that examines advocacy as organisational practice (Adi, 2018; Kim and Meganck, 2025). Both the marketing and the

strategic communication traditions frame advocacy as a bounded intervention evaluated through effectiveness. The critical tradition within which this article operates asks a different question, namely how advocacy structures the conditions of visibility through which recognition itself is produced.

The concept of the promotional regime of visibility provides the analytical foundation for this account. Promotional communication structures the conditions under which public claims become recognisable, and visibility itself "is neither neutral nor spontaneous" but "is structured and disciplined to favour specific ways of seeing and showing" (Jiménez-Martínez and Edwards, 2023, p. 16). Contemporary culture is shaped by promotional industries to the extent that these industries "define the way individuals, states, and civil society organizations communicate and engage with one another in relationships mediated by promotionalism" (Lekakis, 2022, p. 4). Brand governance, as this article defines it, extends this framework by specifying how promotional visibility intersects with the governance arrangements of digital platforms.

Platform governance encompasses the institutional arrangements through which platforms regulate communication. It captures "the layers of governance relationships structuring interactions between key parties in today's platform society" (Gorwa, 2019, p. 854), and the governance mechanisms through which platforms operate range from content policies to algorithmic curation (Gorwa, 2019, pp. 856–857; Gillespie, 2010). This intersection between brand governance and platform governance has not been adequately theorised in existing scholarship, which tends to treat branded communication as though it circulates independently of the architectures that host it.

The theoretical framework developed above establishes the conceptual vocabulary for the analysis that follows. At its centre is brand governance, the techno-normative practice through which brands structure the conditions of political visibility within networked publics,

intersecting with platform governance, the institutional arrangements through which platforms regulate communication. Both forms of governance converge within the promotional regime of visibility, which disciplines which claims become recognisable and on what terms. Within this regime, brand governance produces thresholds of legibility that determine which grievances can appear as valid moral claims, while the communicative mechanisms through which branded visibility extracts value from the struggles it claims to support are identified as the economy of empathy and the economy of suffering. The subjects who appear within these branded narratives retain a circumscribed form of agency that the article terms conditional personhood.

Conceptual Framework: Brand Governance as Communicative Regulation

In the context of branded content, governance has been defined as "an ensemble of processes such as laws, regulation, industry self-regulation and market practices" through which content is organised and power distributed (Hardy, 2022, p. 173). This article extends the term beyond the institutional regulation of branded content to name the communicative practice through which brands themselves govern moral visibility within networked publics (Brighenti, 2007; Papacharissi, 2015). Brand governance, as used here, is not corporate governance in the organisational sense but a mode of dispersed governance (Foucault, 2007; Rose, 1999) that operates through communicative means.

Brand governance determines which grievances can appear, under what affective conditions, and within which grammars of legitimacy (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). It establishes thresholds of legibility (Creech, 2020; Flyverbom et al., 2016) that define what counts as a valid moral claim and which subjects can appear as agents capable of making such claims, though agency is not eliminated under this regime but persists as what this article terms conditional personhood, the social and political agency granted to the subject as

a participant in the branded narrative, albeit in a limited and prescribed manner. At the same time, the "prevalence of promotional culture conditions all possibilities for advocating and acting on the grounds of social and environmental justice" (Lekakis, 2022, p. 5), establishing that the very conditions for resistance are shaped by the promotional logics consumer activism seeks to contest.

The philosophical resources for specifying this regulatory function are drawn from recognition theory. The distinction between affirmative and transformative recognition (Fraser, 2003) provides the conceptual architecture for the article's central claim. Affirmative recognition works within existing institutional structures, extending selective visibility to previously excluded groups without altering the underlying distribution of authority. Transformative recognition restructures the conditions under which claims are made intelligible. This article proposes that branded recognition is affirmative in Fraser's sense. Advocacy campaigns confer visibility on certain subjects while leaving the political economy of that visibility intact. The campaigns analysed here indicate that this may constitute what Fraser terms misrecognition, not through the denial of visibility but through a mode of visibility that forecloses the conditions for political transformation. Under brand governance, the resulting social injury is produced not by exclusion from representation but by the terms on which representation is granted (Honneth, 1995). The branded subject is visible in a mode that withdraws the very political agency that recognition is supposed to confer. This formulation moves beyond the diagnostic scope of symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978), which addresses representational absence. The regulatory dynamic identified here operates through presence rather than absence, producing conditions under which subjects appear as depoliticised objects of empathy rather than as political claimants.

From this diagnosis, the article advances a distinction between political recognition and regulatory recognition. Political recognition, in the sense developed here, addresses

subjects as agents capable of making claims on the political order, granting visibility oriented toward reconfiguring social relations even when grievances resist assimilation to promotional logics (Taylor, 1994). Regulatory recognition distributes visibility according to promotional imperatives, affirming identity without redistributing power (Fraser, 2000) and rendering subjects legible within a branded moral economy but not as political agents capable of contesting the structures that govern their appearance (Edwards, 2016). The confidence culture literature has demonstrated a structurally analogous dynamic, whereby "features of an unequal society are systematically (re)framed by the confidence cult(ure) as individual psychological problems, requiring us to change women, not the world" (Orgad and Gill, 2022, p. 5). The evidence examined in this article suggests that the campaigns under analysis operate predominantly in this regulatory mode, though the relationship between the two forms is not fixed and may shift according to platform context and the political claims at issue.

A term that requires precise definition is techno-normative strategy. As used in this article, a techno-normative strategy is a mode of promotional communication in which brands deploy platform affordances to establish normative frameworks for interpreting social and political claims. Algorithmic amplification and affective targeting are among the specific affordances through which these strategies operate (Bucher, 2018; Cotter, 2019). The prefix techno refers to the platform-mediated character of the practice, and it connects to the observation that platforms govern by "algorithmically determining what information to make (in)visible" (Gorwa, 2019, p. 858). The suffix normative refers to its regulatory function over moral intelligibility. Campaigns do not simply communicate positions. They format moral claims according to the logics of the platforms on which they circulate, determining which affects will be amplified and which will be structurally suppressed.

This formulation addresses the relationship between brand power and platform power. Brand governance is not diminished by platform mediation but is reconfigured by it. Nike's racial-justice campaigns exploit algorithmic biases toward high-arousal content to amplify narratives of individual resilience while rendering structural critiques of labour exploitation algorithmically invisible (Kiefer, 2020). Patagonia's environmental advocacy mobilises Instagram's visual affordances to render ecological concern legible through lifestyle aesthetics, a framing that legitimises conservation while obscuring the systemic contradictions of capitalist growth (Chang, 2021). Because the formatting of moral claims operates through platform architectures rather than through brand messaging alone, the governance identified here is techno-normative rather than simply normative.

Where critical scholarship has identified extraction as the operative logic through which brands engage social justice discourse (Sobande, 2024), the question of mechanism remains. This article addresses this gap by proposing the economy of empathy and the economy of suffering as the communicative mechanisms through which branded visibility extracts value from the struggles it claims to support. The economy of empathy conditions visibility on affective appeal, ensuring that only those struggles which generate identification circulate effectively within promotional communication. It governs how audiences are positioned in relation to represented subjects, favouring emotional proximity over political solidarity (Orgad and Gill, 2022). This mechanism aligns with what Chouliaraki (2013) identifies as the post-humanitarian condition, in which solidarity is organised through consumer-oriented identification rather than through political obligation, and with the broader condition of emotional capitalism in which affective life has become constitutive of economic exchange (Illouz, 2007). The economy of suffering transforms structural injustice into affective value for brand positioning, converting political claims into narratives of resilience that serve reputational rather than emancipatory purposes. As scholarship on

diversity discourse has demonstrated, this conversion reproduces racial and gendered hierarchies even as it performs inclusion (Saha, 2018), sustaining what Berlant (2011) calls cruel optimism at the level of communicative structure. These concepts specify how Sobande's extraction thesis operates at the level of individual campaigns and how Fraser's affirmative recognition is enacted within contemporary branded communication.

Environmental advocacy poses a distinctive challenge to brand governance. Racial justice and gender equality, while systematically depoliticised through branded visibility, can be formatted within affirmative recognition because their claims can be individualised as stories of personal resilience. Environmental advocacy resists this formatting because its structural demands exceed what affirmative recognition can accommodate. Scholarship on corporate environmental strategy has established that the operative logic of eco-business "is fundamentally aiming for sustainability of big business, not sustainability of people and the planet" (Dauvergne and Lister, 2013, p. 2). The collective and planetary scale of environmental justice claims cannot be reduced to individual testimony without fundamental distortion. The branded accommodation of environmental claims therefore converts systemic critique into lifestyle aesthetics and consumer choice, as campaigns by Patagonia and Ben and Jerry's illustrate, rendering ecological crisis legible through the codes of outdoor recreation and ethical consumption. What Lekakis (2022, p. 14) terms "consumer solutionism," the celebration of consumer activism as the primary means of contemporary resistance, operates here as the promotional condition under which environmental claims are granted visibility while their transformative content is neutralised.

The conceptual framework specifies the analytical distinction between regulatory recognition, which distributes visibility according to promotional imperatives without altering the underlying distribution of authority, and political recognition, which addresses subjects as agents capable of making claims on the political order. This distinction provides

the evaluative criterion against which the analysis assesses how advocacy campaigns govern moral visibility. The concept of techno-normative strategy specifies the communicative mode through which this governance is enacted, as brands deploy platform affordances to structure moral claims for circulation. The analysis that follows examines how these strategies produce regulatory rather than political recognition across the corpus.

Research Design: Investigating the Semiotics of Advocacy Campaigns

Data collection spans 2017–2022, a period marked by the mainstreaming of sociopolitical themes in brand campaigns. The starting point is the 2017 U.S. Super Bowl, when several ads broke with brand neutrality to address immigration and national identity in response to the Trump presidency. The end point is the onset of the war in Ukraine, which again drew multinational corporations into explicit geopolitical positioning. This frame captures how campaigns both reacted to and anticipated shifting political conditions during a time of polarisation. While advocacy predates this period, exemplified by Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty (2004) or Tata Tea's Jaago Re (2007), the 2017–2022 interval is distinguished by the normalisation of advocacy as a marketing expectation, articulated through explicit links to partisan alignment and polarised publics.

The corpus concludes in 2022, aligned with interviews conducted between 2020 and 2022 as part of a broader research project (Anonymised, 2022). Although the interviews are not analysed here, they guided the identification of campaigns that were most publicly debated, thereby justifying both the temporal scope and purposive selection. The post-2022 withdrawal of corporate commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion, while outside the corpus, is addressed in the discussion as evidence of the structural continuity of brand governance rather than its disruption.

The corpus consists of video advertisements circulated on digital platforms (YouTube, Instagram, Twitter) and accompanying digital visuals. Campaigns were selected based on a logic of discursive dominance rather than simple commercial success. Criteria included substantial circulation in advertising trade press, indicating industry legitimation, and engagement metrics, indicating cultural saturation. The resulting corpus comprises widely circulated campaigns from Nike, Patagonia, Dove, Coca-Cola, Gillette, Ben & Jerry's, and Airbnb (see Table 2).

Crucially, this selection prioritises "successful" instances of governance, campaigns that effectively established a regime of visibility, over "failed" or marginal attempts. While the exclusion of failed campaigns may overlook instances where governance was contested or rejected, the specific aim of this analysis is to map the normative centre of brand governance. To understand how the thresholds of legibility are constructed, it is necessary to analyse the campaigns that successfully instituted these norms, rather than those that failed to gain traction. By focusing on hegemonic examples, the analysis exposes the dominant mechanisms through which recognition is distributed, operating on the premise that governance is best observed in its most effective and widely validated forms.

A specific note on the geographical scope is necessary. The corpus is heavily weighted toward Global North "super-brands," a choice that reflects the structural asymmetry this article critiques. Since the theoretical focus is on how brand governance regulates the conditions of political recognition within the platform economy, the analysis must interrogate the centres of power where these regulatory norms are produced. While Western brands do not monopolise advocacy, they disproportionately control the platforms through which admissible claims are broadcast. The focus on the Global North is therefore not a mere limitation but a methodological necessity. To critique the regulatory mechanism, the analysis must target the centres at which these norms are produced rather than cataloguing the

diversity of those excluded from them (Spivak, 1988). This approach exposes how Northern communicative norms are projected as universal standards of recognition.

While this analysis draws primarily on campaigns from the Global North (specifically the U.S. and Western Europe), it acknowledges that brand governance is not a universal monolith. In Western contexts, the regulatory mechanism relies heavily on the "liberal" values of individual self-expression and identity politics. As these strategies travel to non-Western contexts, the logic of governance likely adapts to different political substrates, emphasising developmentalist narratives in the Global South or navigating authoritarian constraints in illiberal markets. The mechanism through which brand governance structures visibility is therefore global in its reach, though the specific content of what is excluded will vary according to local regimes of citizenship and state power.

Analytical Approach and Coding Procedure

A critical sociosemiotic approach (Hodge and Kress, 1988) is employed to investigate how brands construct moral discourse across textual and visual modalities as well as affective registers. Rather than applying a structuralist semiotics of fixed codes (Barthes, 1972), the analysis foregrounds context-specific processes of meaning-making (Eco, 1976, 1978). Drawing on narrative semiotics (Greimas, 1987), affect theory (Ahmed, 2004), and discourse analysis (Chouliaraki, 2006), the analysis examines how campaigns stage ethical dilemmas, attribute moral authority, and position viewers within affectively charged frameworks (Berlant, 2011).

The typology of strategies was developed through grounded coding (Charmaz, 2006). Open coding identified recurrent features such as brand protagonism in moral storytelling, representations of the Other, and the affective positioning of viewers. Axial coding consolidated these into broader categories of prescriptive authority, empathetic connection,

and facilitative reflection, which selective coding synthesised into three interpretive strategies. Campaigns were chosen to maximise variation in tone and thematic range to capture this range.

To guide interpretation, prompts were developed that surfaced latent assumptions within campaign discourse (Fairclough, 2003). These asked: who defines the moral problem? Which emotions are mobilised, for whom, and against whom? Is the Other depicted as an agent or as a symbolic figure? Does the campaign ask viewers primarily to think, feel, or act? These questions linked micro-level features to broader concerns with moral positioning (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001) and were informed by the conceptual architecture developed in the theoretical framework. The first question operationalises brand governance (Hardy, 2022; Foucault, 2007) by identifying which institution establishes the thresholds of legibility through which grievances become admissible. The second operationalises the relationship between affective capitalism (Illouz, 2007) and the promotional regime of visibility (Jiménez-Martínez and Edwards, 2023) by tracing how emotional registers are formatted for platform circulation. The third operationalises conditional personhood by examining whether represented subjects retain political agency or are rendered as symbolic figures within the brand's narrative. The fourth operationalises the distinction between regulatory and political recognition (Fraser, 2000; Edwards, 2016) by assessing whether the campaign's address orients viewers toward affective alignment or toward political engagement with the conditions that produce suffering. The full coding process is presented in Tables 3 and 4. Figure 1 below summarises how the framework's key concepts are operationalised in the analysis.

Rather than privileging positivist reliability, the analysis emphasises interpretive validity, grounded in coding transparency, conceptual saturation, and theoretical alignment with the critique of the promotional regime of visibility. As a production-oriented

sociosemiotic analysis, the study examines how campaigns construct moral discourse rather than how audiences receive or contest it. The limitations of this orientation are acknowledged in the conclusion, where reception studies are identified as a priority for future research.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Findings: Semiotic Strategies and Regulatory Logics in Brand Governance

The analysis identifies three distinct semiotic strategies that organise how brands articulate moral engagement and position audiences in relation to socio-political issues. These formations should not be understood as fixed categories, but as overlapping repertoires that adapt to the pressures of political contestation and temporal shifts. While distinct in their logic, many campaigns deploy hybrid strategies, combining prescriptive moral authority, affective intimacy, and dialogic framing in varying proportions. Consequently, this typology functions as a heuristic for mapping dominant moral grammars, rather than a classification of discrete forms of advocacy.

Visionary Strategy: "Feeling the Other"

The Visionary Strategy emerged across the sample as a mode of moral address marked by prescriptive narrative structures and emotionally heightened semiotic techniques. Identified through iterative coding (Tables 3 and 4), this brand type displayed recurring patterns in articulating moral authority, mobilising affect, and organising viewer engagement. Within this semiotic arrangement, audiences are positioned primarily as affirmers of the brand's moral authority rather than as critical interpreters or reflective participants.

Visionary strategy mobilises urgency and multimodal adaptability to secure branded recognition, privileging emotional alignment over dialogue or critical engagement. As detailed in Table 6, platform affordances play a decisive role in shaping this strategy, influencing how it adapts its core grammar to platform logics. YouTube enables extended

ethical storytelling, Instagram condenses it into iconic visuals, and Twitter/X compresses it into binaries that demand immediate alignment. Consequently, this strategy emerged across the sample not just as a rhetorical style, but as a regime of visibility where the Other is hyper-visible yet politically mute, and where justice is reframed as a consumptive act of brand endorsement.

The strategy aligns with platform logic by constructing ethical possibility as a binary choice. Because algorithms prioritise content that generates rapid engagement, ambiguity is structurally disincentivised. Consequently, brands such as Nike's *Dream Crazy* and Ben & Jerry's *End Qualified Immunity* frame complex structural injustices as discrete, urgent problems that demand immediate alignment rather than deliberation. By presenting solutions as self-evident, these campaigns stabilise the volatility of social issues, positioning audiences not as critical interpreters but as passive affirmers of the brand's moral authority.

This dynamic is reinforced by a singular space-time narrative tailored to the perpetual present of the scroll. Visionary campaigns compress complex geopolitical histories (Iqani, 2015; 2022) into urgent, universalised crises suitable for instant consumption. As seen in Patagonia's Vote Our Planet or Ben & Jerry's refugee initiatives, specific struggles are detached from their local geographies and re-embedded into a generalised "global crisis" (Melgaço and Pinto Coelho, 2022). This space-time compression serves a techno-commercial function, justifying moral simplification by substituting historical accountability with the affective immediacy required to arrest the user's attention (Steinbrink, 2019).

Within this dynamic, the brand assumes the role of the primary algorithmic protagonist. The Other, whether the "voiceless nature" of Patagonia's campaigns or the aestheticised activists on Ben & Jerry's *Pecan Resist* pints, tends to be rendered as a static visual asset rather than a speaking subject. As Sobande (2024) has observed, marginalised groups are frequently reduced to a "silent minority" whose visibility validates the brand's

progressive credentials without disrupting its narrative control. The interaction is non-dialectical. The interface affords users the ability to "like" or "share" the brand's stance, but rarely to negotiate or contest it.

Finally, this regime relies on instrumentalised empathy to drive circulation. Empathy is choreographed through high-contrast visuals and emotive soundscapes designed for maximum algorithmic resonance. As Chouliaraki (2013) and Berlant (2011) suggest, this commodifies care, reducing solidarity to a fleeting moment of affective alignment.

Sensitive Strategy: "Feeling for Others"

While platform algorithms frequently privilege high-intensity content, they also necessitate spaces of affective respite to sustain user retention and brand safety. In response to this dual imperative, the Sensitive Strategy operates as a mode of algorithmic selection that reframes ethical engagement through curated vulnerability and quiet resilience. Unlike the Visionary Strategy which demands binary alignment, this approach leverages the platform's capacity for intimacy to construct a "soft" ethical space. As detailed in Table 7, it prioritises affective proximity over political friction by translating moral claims into a phenomenological relation between the brand and the audience that is optimised for frictionless sharing.

The efficacy of the Sensitive Strategy lies in its adaptability to specific platform affordances as outlined in Table 8. On YouTube, brands utilise extended durational formats to foster ambient immersion and encourage reflective emotional states rather than narrative climax. Instagram converts this logic into visual intimacy through high-resolution portraiture and handwritten captions that simulate personal connection. Even on Twitter/X, the strategy navigates brevity constraints by deploying poetic fragments and gentle affirmations that maintain affective presence without risking moral polarisation. Across these environments, the Sensitive Strategy operates as a regulatory mechanism that tends to grant the Other

visibility on the condition of affective passivity, ensuring that branded recognition remains aesthetically resonant but politically circumscribed.

This strategy reconfigures the temporal logic of the feed by shifting from urgent crises to ambient narratives. Where the Visionary Strategy compresses time into an immediate demand for action, the Sensitive Strategy suspends the political present to create a timeless zone of universal human connection. This is evident in Dove's *Courage Is Beautiful* campaign which utilised the visual stillness of close-up portraits to elevate healthcare workers as silent icons of sacrifice during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By stripping away narrative context, the campaign invites viewers into a reflective engagement that celebrates resilience while obscuring the structural realities of labour protections or state responsibility. Similarly, Airbnb's *We Accept* responds to the volatility of migration politics by effectively detaching the subject from the specific legal contest over borders. Here the represented figures appear in a generalised space of belonging where racial and religious differences are rendered as aesthetic markers of diversity rather than sites of political contestation.

Central to this logic is the personalisation of the Other through an aesthetic of depoliticised intimacy. To ensure viability within polarised networked publics, these campaigns employ a "soft" audiovisual grammar consisting of muted palettes, minimalist scores, and slow-motion imagery that signal affective restraint within the brand-safety logics that govern algorithmic distribution. Dove's Reverse Selfie and Coca-Cola's Together is Beautiful exemplify this tendency by foregrounding individual vulnerability while withholding political agency. The represented subjects are granted high-definition visibility but denied a voice to articulate specific demands. They function instead as vessels for instrumentalised empathy where the viewer is invited to feel with the subject but not to act

for them. This reduces recognition to a form of emotional consumption in which the complexity of structural injustice is smoothed over by the pleasure of shared sentiment.

Reflexive Strategy: "Feeling with Others"

The Reflexive Strategy emerges as a sophisticated response to the "participatory culture" of networked publics, diverging from the directive certainty of the Visionary mode and the quiet intimacy of the Sensitive. Rather than broadcasting a singular moral truth, this strategy aligns with the dialogic affordances of platforms by positioning the brand not as a protagonist but as discursive facilitator of plural ethical narratives. As outlined in the iterative coding (Table 9), this approach manages complexity by inviting viewers to interpret and question within a contingent moral field, effectively converting the volatility of online debate into a form of managed multivocality.

Crucially, the success of the Reflexive Strategy relies on its specific adjustment to platform affordances (Table 10). On YouTube, brands exploit extended durational formats and comment sections to foster "slow" testimonial complexity that encourages reflective engagement. Instagram adaptations utilise "takeover" formats and unpolished Stories to simulate unmediated community voicing, fostering low-intensity forms of witnessing. Even on Twitter/X, typically a site of polarisation, the strategy is repurposed through threaded conversations and retweets that mimic democratic deliberation. By adopting these platform-native behaviours, the brand masks its regulatory role, appearing instead as a neutral participant in a shared ethical project.

This strategy operationalises narrative multivocality to navigate the fragmented nature of the social feed. Rejecting linear scripting, campaigns such as Nike's *You Can't Stop Us* utilise split-screen montages to suture diverse subjectivities into a visual continuity that conveys connection without erasing difference. Here, moral authority is distributed rather

than centralised. The voiceover is minimal, and meaning emerges through the rhythmic juxtaposition of bodies. Similarly, Gillette's *The Best Men Can Be* departs from definitive resolution by acknowledging the ambivalence of toxic masculinity. By leaving the narrative explicitly unresolved, the brand signals a "controlled openness," engaging the audience's desire for debate while ensuring that the parameters of that debate remain within corporate safeguards. In this mode, the Other is granted partial agency, appearing as a speaking subject rather than a symbol, yet their voice circulates strictly within boundaries that protect institutional interests.

The Reflexive Strategy further distinguishes itself by grounding ethics in situated empathy (Table 9). Unlike the universalising abstractions of the Visionary approach, this mode anchors affect in specific, operational contexts. Airbnb's Open Homes initiative exemplifies this by framing displacement through the lens of domestic hospitality rather than geopolitical crisis. By showcasing everyday acts of hosting, the campaign positions the brand as the site where ethical norms become legible. Displaced subjects appear not as abstract victims but as participants in a shared space of encounter. This recognition is, however, inherently depoliticising. It celebrates private generosity and individual resilience while diverting attention from the structural drivers of displacement or the platform's own impact on housing markets. Recognition is extended as a gesture of incomplete solidarity, inviting audiences to witness complexity without demanding systemic redress.

Finally, this strategy validates everyday moral labour as a site of ethical value. By valorising ordinary acts of parenting, teaching, or caregiving, the Reflexive mode normalises ethical difference and frames morality as an ongoing, collective project rather than a heroic binary.

To sum up, these three strategies delineate a moral economy of brand governance that governs visibility through distinct logics. The Visionary Strategy functions through

algorithmic polarisation, converting political struggle into moral certainty to drive rapid alignment. The Sensitive Strategy operates through affective regulation, translating conflict into ambient feeling to ensure circulation through platforms. The Reflexive Strategy functions through managed participation, staging plurality and openness to sustain engagement while defining the limits of political possibility. Together, they reveal how brand governance regulates the conditions under which justice can be articulated and claimed.

Discussion: Regulatory Recognition and Its Limits

The techno-normative strategies identified in the findings each operate within the promotional regime of visibility (Jiménez-Martínez and Edwards, 2023) and intersect with the governance arrangements of platform governance (Gorwa, 2019; Gillespie, 2010). Across all three strategies, brand governance operates by excluding not subjects or groups from visibility but the modes of political address through which structural demands might be articulated. Brand governance establishes thresholds of legibility that determine which grievances can appear and within which grammars of legitimacy, and the claims that exceed these thresholds are rendered structurally unintelligible regardless of the subjects who advance them. The evidence examined here points toward a mode of recognition that operates predominantly in regulatory rather than political terms, though this claim is bounded by the scope of the corpus and should not be generalised beyond it.

This exclusionary logic should not be overstated, since brand governance does not control the conditions of legibility unilaterally. Platform governance introduces regulatory logics of its own that may redirect or undercut branded claims in ways that exceed corporate intention. Platform affordances privilege engagement, which frequently includes polarisation and antagonism, rather than the affective restraint that brand governance seeks to cultivate. Techno-normative regulation operates within this volatility, not against it. The findings

demonstrate this at the level of the campaigns themselves. The Visionary strategy's binary moral closure produces the polarised engagement that platform affordances amplify, exposing campaigns such as Nike's *Dream Crazy* to forms of response that exceed their narrative control. The Sensitive strategy's conditional access proves similarly unstable, as Dove's conferral of visibility without voice invites counter-readings in which audiences recognise precisely what has been withheld. The Reflexive strategy negotiates this instability most explicitly, with Gillette leaving its critique of masculinity deliberately unresolved while maintaining corporate safeguards. In each case, the strategy generates its own friction through the platform dynamics it seeks to harness. Corporate-level contradictions compound this instability, as when platform circulation exposed tensions between Dove's empowerment campaigns and Unilever's broader product portfolio. Together, these cases reveal brand governance as contested rather than totalising.

A consistent affective operation is visible across the strategies, whereby grievances that have been granted visibility are framed through registers that serve promotional rather than emancipatory purposes, whether through the individualising logic of confidence culture (Orgad and Gill, 2022) or through what Chatzidakis and Littler (2023) term carewashing. In both cases, the affective register is determined by the requirements of brand coherence and platform circulation rather than by the political content of the claims at issue.

The typology reveals a progression in how recognition operates across the three strategies. The Visionary strategy excludes through prescriptive closure, compressing injustice into binary demands that position the brand as moral protagonist and the Other as affirmable icon. Campaigns such as *End Qualified Immunity* and *Dream Crazy* admit racial injustice into branded discourse but foreclose the structural conditions of that injustice, converting collective political claims into narratives of individual resilience. The Sensitive strategy excludes through conditional access, granting visibility on the condition of affective

passivity. Campaigns such as *Courage Is Beautiful* and *We Accept* invite viewers to feel for represented subjects without confronting the conditions that produce their vulnerability, conditioning recognition on silence rather than speech. Both strategies narrow the terms of admission. The Reflexive strategy operates differently. By staging multiperspectival framing and granting partial voice to represented subjects, it opens a wider communicative space. Yet this openness is accompanied by more refined governance. The Reflexive strategy is the one that most closely approaches political recognition, yet it is also the most effective at foreclosing it. By absorbing the formal features of democratic engagement, such as multiperspectival framing and partial voice, into a promotional grammar, it produces the appearance of openness while retaining governance over the terms of that openness. The managed staging of masculine accountability in *The Best Men Can Be* demonstrates this tension, where the appearance of self-critique operates within parameters that protect the brand's institutional position.

This pattern indicates that branded recognition operates in what Fraser (2000) terms the affirmative mode of recognition, which works within existing institutional structures by extending selective visibility to previously excluded groups without altering the underlying distribution of authority. The findings specify two operations through which this affirmative recognition is enacted. The first is the conversion of injustice into affective value, whereby across the corpus racial protest is recoded as personal aspiration, healthcare workers' labour as aesthetic vulnerability, and ecological crisis as lifestyle commitment, so that in each case the political content of the claim is neutralised through its conversion into a register compatible with brand positioning. The second is the positioning of audiences, whereby the campaigns condition visibility on affective identification, favouring emotional proximity over political solidarity and addressing spectators as consumers whose alignment can be mobilised rather than as political subjects implicated in the conditions that produce suffering. These

operations function within what Illouz (2007) identifies as the broader condition of emotional capitalism, in which affective life has become constitutive of economic exchange rather than external to it, and in which platforms treat social interaction as raw material for value extraction (Dean, 2009; Karppi, 2018). The result is a form of recognition that acknowledges injustice but contains it within the grammar of brand value rather than political accountability.

Environmental advocacy represents a distinctive test case for this argument. Environmental claims pose a particular challenge to brand governance because their demands exceed what regulatory recognition can accommodate. The environmental campaigns compress ecological crisis into consumer solutionism (Lekakis, 2022), as in the invitation to address systemic problems through individual purchasing decisions, or aestheticise it into lifestyle ethics, as when ecological concern is rendered legible through visual idioms of wilderness appreciation that do not implicate the consumption patterns on which the brand depends. In both cases, the brand admits environmental injustice while foreclosing the modes of political address that climate justice would require. This suggests that environmental advocacy is the point at which the limits of regulatory recognition become most visible.

The analysis indicates that agency is not eliminated under brand governance but persists as conditional personhood, a form of social and political agency that is granted but circumscribed by the promotional logic of the brand. The Reflexive strategy grants partial agency, with the represented Other appearing as a speaking subject, but within boundaries that protect the brand's position. This is recognition that acknowledges the subject's capacity for speech while foreclosing the speech acts that would challenge the recognising institution. Responsibility in this arrangement is unevenly distributed. The brand determines the grammar of legitimacy while the platform governs circulation, and audiences participate within parameters that neither institution has fully chosen. The brand retains disproportionate

authority over which claims enter the promotional field and in what form. This specificity distinguishes the present analysis from accounts of branded authenticity as a pervasive cultural condition (Banet-Weiser, 2012) and from analyses that identify the brand as an allocative mechanism of moral visibility without fully specifying the platform logics through which that allocation operates (Sobande, 2024). Brand governance, as demonstrated here, is located at the intersection where promotional authority meets platform governance.

The analysis covers 2017–2022. The DEI retrenchment that followed does not invalidate these claims but renders the regulatory logic retrospectively legible. The post-2022 withdrawal of corporate commitments to racial and gender justice reveals that the campaigns analysed here were governed by promotional calculation rather than political conviction. The same promotional apparatus that determined which claims could be admitted into branded discourse during the period of corporate progressivism now determines which claims are withdrawn. Whether corporations sustain or reverse their political alignment, they exercise the same structural capacity to set what becomes visible. The withdrawal confirms rather than contradicts the argument, demonstrating that brand governance is not dependent on the direction of corporate positioning but inheres in the relationship between promotional authority and platform visibility. The commodification of cause communication that intensified during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Chatzidakis and Littler, 2023) provided the conjuncture in which this regulatory capacity became legible as a general feature of the platform economy rather than an attribute of individual campaigns.

This progression converges on a consistent limit, namely that even at its most open, branded communication extends visibility on terms that preclude the articulation of demands incompatible with institutional interests. The gap between the Reflexive strategy's managed multivocality and the condition of political recognition marks the boundary of branded communication within the platform economy. The concept of bearing witness (Peters, 2001;

Ristovska, 2016) clarifies what lies on the other side of this boundary. Witnessing involves a testimonial relation in which the spectator is addressed not as a consumer of affect but as a political subject implicated in the conditions that produce suffering (Chouliaraki, 2006). The findings demonstrate that branded recognition operates through an economy of suffering, converting structural injustice into affective value for brand positioning. Bearing witness reverses this operation. Where the economy of suffering converts pain into the grammar of brand value, witnessing demands that suffering function as testimony that indicts the institutional arrangements through which the brand itself operates. The Reflexive strategy approaches this condition through its multiperspectival framing but cannot enact it, because its communicative logic remains governed by the promotional imperatives that sustain the conversion of suffering into value. The distance between these two operations marks the distance between regulatory and political recognition.

This constraint distinguishes the present analysis from critiques of woke washing, which treat the gap between brand rhetoric and corporate conduct as a matter of inconsistency. The argument advanced here is that the gap is constitutive, built into the communicative logic of brand governance itself. The promotional imperatives and platform logics through which brand governance operates preclude transformative recognition. This is not a failure of execution but a feature of the regulatory apparatus the analysis has examined.

Conclusion

This article has argued that brand governance operates as a techno-normative promotional practice that regulates the conditions of political recognition within the platform economy. The typology of Visionary, Sensitive, and Reflexive strategies specifies how this regulation operates through distinct affective and narrative logics, each determining which claims are granted visibility and which modes of political address are rendered illegible. The central

finding is that visibility expands quantitatively, with more claims admitted into branded discourse, while legibility narrows qualitatively, with the terms of admission excluding structural demands that exceed the brand's communicative repertoire.

This governance is not totalising but rather an unstable practice that emerges as a strategic response to the unpredictable energy of networked publics. The strategies analysed here are management techniques rather than guaranteed outcomes. Agency persists, albeit conditionally. The findings demonstrated that platform circulation can expose contradictions that brand governance is designed to contain, while the post-2022 DEI retrenchment confirmed that the regulatory apparatus is subject to revision and contestation. These cases indicate that brand governance is a dynamic practice rather than a settled regime.

Brand governance, as developed in this article, is analytically distinct from adjacent concepts. Unlike promotional culture broadly conceived, which describes the commercialisation of meaning as a diffuse cultural condition, brand governance isolates the specific mechanisms through which corporate moral authority is operationalised. Unlike platform governance, which concerns institutional regulation of communicative activity at the infrastructural level, brand governance identifies the intersection where corporate authority and platform visibility converge. It describes the process by which brands operationalise platform logics to set the boundaries of the visible, determining not only which claims circulate but the affective and narrative terms under which they may be articulated.

The corpus is drawn from Global North super-brands with significant platform presence, a deliberate analytical choice aligned with the project of interrogating the centres at which regulatory norms are produced. This focus necessarily limits the generalisability of the findings. Future research should examine how these norms are received and contested in non-Western publics, and how consumer activism contests the logics of brand governance through practices of recognisability that refuse the terms of branded visibility. Reception studies that

attend to how audiences negotiate, resist, or repurpose branded recognition would complement the production-oriented analysis advanced here and would test whether the structural limits identified in this article hold across different media ecologies and political contexts. Longitudinal research tracking the consequences of the post-2022 DEI retrenchment would also clarify whether the regulatory capacity identified here persists through withdrawal or whether it is bound to the specific conjuncture of corporate progressivism that the corpus captures.

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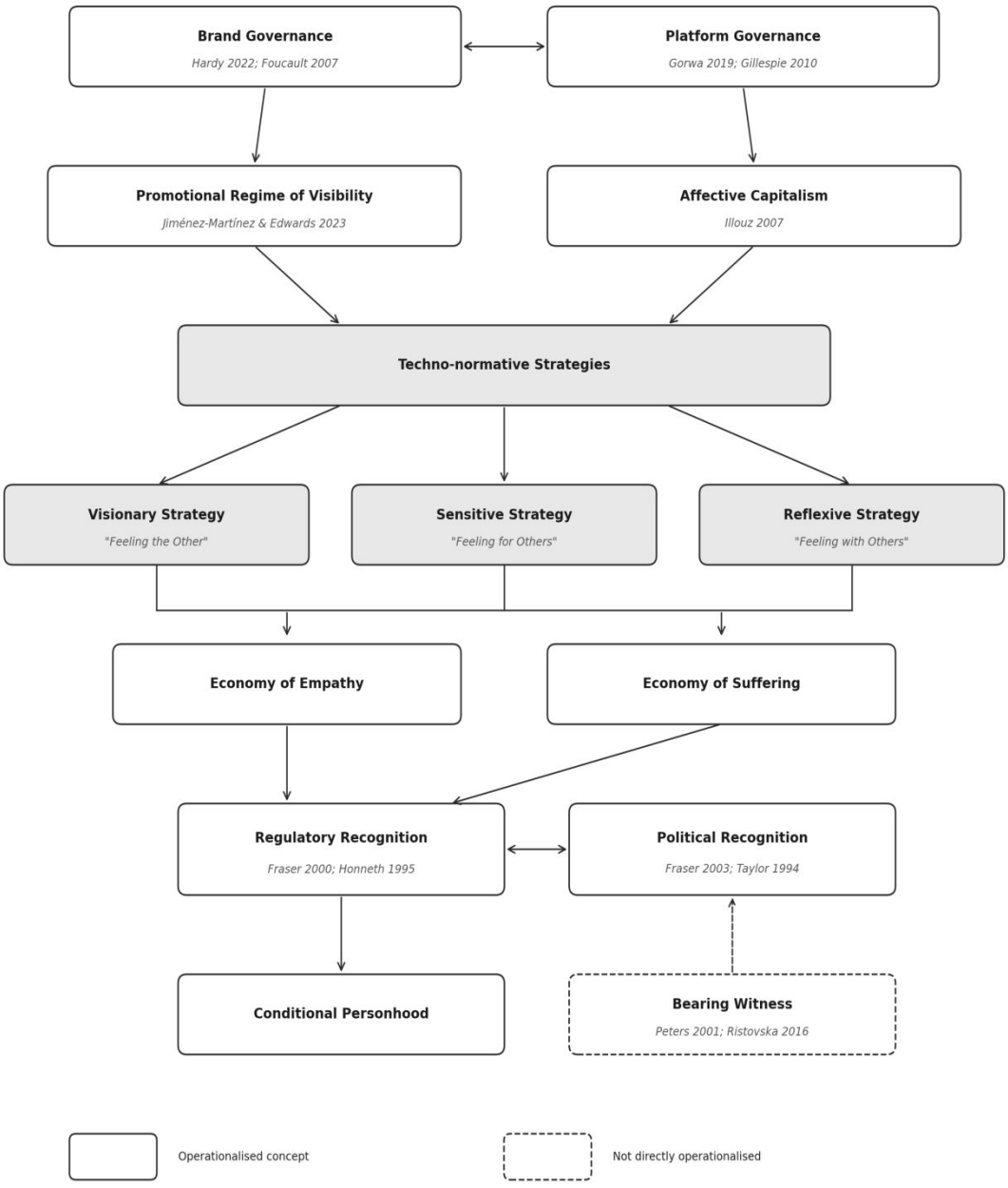
Figure 1

Conceptual Architecture of Brand Governance



BRAND GOVERNANCE

Supplemental Materials

Table 1: *Typology of Advocacy Strategies*

Strategy	Definition	Key Features	Moral Address
Visionary — *"Feeling the Other"*	Constructs moral authority through prescriptive address and emotionally charged narrative; the brand positions itself as moral protagonist while the Other is abstracted and instrumentalised to anchor certainty	• Singular, teleological narrative • Brand as moral arbiter • Abstract Other as instrumental figure • Prescriptive moral imperative	Monologic; morality is not open to interpretation but to affirmation, and the viewer is positioned as affirmer of brand authority
Sensitive — *"Feeling for Others"*	Organises affect through curated vulnerability and emotional proximity; recognition is produced through aesthetic intimacy rather than political engagement, and the Other is rendered proximate but passive	• Emotive, personalised storytelling • Viewer interpellated through shared affect • Other rendered proximate but passive • Non-directive moral framing	Relational and affectively charged but rarely reflexive; ethics is felt rather than declared, and empathy functions as emotional recognition rather than dialogic encounter
Reflexive — *"Feeling with Others"*	Frames moral address as relational and situated; the brand recedes as central moral agent, enabling viewers to form positions through exposure to multiple perspectives, and the Other is encountered in their specificity	• Multiperspectival narratives • Empathy embedded in ordinary contexts • Viewer as independent moral subject • No fixed ethical resolution	Distributed; moral authority is decentralised and the viewer becomes an interpretive agent, with openness managed within parameters that protect institutional interests

Table 2: *Corpus of Advocacy Campaigns (2017–2022)*

Brand	Campaign	Year	Description	Issue
Nike	*Equality*	2017	Application of sporting fairness to racial and gender equality, owned media	Racial and gender equality
Patagonia	*The President Stole Your Land*	2017	Opposition to reduction of national monuments, advocating public lands; website and YouTube	Environmental protection
Airbnb	*We Accept*	2017	Super Bowl spot promoting diversity and inclusivity, extended across YouTube and owned media	Diversity, inclusivity
Airbnb	*Open Homes*	2017	Free temporary housing for displaced people and refugees via Airbnb platform	Refugee assistance
Coca-Cola	*It's Beautiful*	2017	Re-aired spot celebrating linguistic and cultural diversity amid immigration politics	Diversity, immigration
Nike	*Dream Crazy*	2018	Campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick on racial injustice, YouTube and Instagram	Racial injustice
Patagonia	*Vote Our Planet*	2018	Encouraging voting for environmentally responsible candidates, website and YouTube	Environmental advocacy
Ben & Jerry's	*Pecan Resist*	2018	Opposition to Trump-era policies on climate, racial justice, and LGBTQ+ rights	Climate, LGBTQ+, racial justice
Nike	*Dream Crazier*	2019	Narrated by Serena Williams, female athletes defying stereotypes; YouTube, Twitter, Instagram	Gender equality
Dove	*Project #ShowUs*	2019	Global stock photo library featuring diverse women and non-binary people	Gender representation
Gillette	*The Best Men Can Be*	2019	Challenge to toxic masculinity, Super Bowl and owned media	Toxic masculinity

Brand	Campaign	Year	Description	Issue
Ben & Jerry's	*Justice ReMix'd*	2019	Campaign with Color of Change on criminal justice reform	Criminal justice reform
Nike	*You Can't Stop Us*	2020	Unity and resilience during COVID-19, owned media	Resilience, unity
Dove	*Courage Is Beautiful*	2020	Healthcare workers shown with physical marks of PPE during COVID-19	Public health
Gillette	*Made of What Matters*	2020	Responsible masculinity through real-life stories	Responsible masculinity
Ben & Jerry's	*End Qualified Immunity*	2020	Police accountability following George Floyd protests	Police accountability
Ben & Jerry's	*Unfudge Our Future*	2020	Climate justice campaign calling for urgent climate action	Climate justice
Airbnb	*Frontline Stays Program*	2020	Free or subsidised housing for healthcare workers during COVID-19	Public health
Dove	*Reverse Selfie*	2021	Impact of social media on young girls' self-esteem	Self-esteem, social media
Dove	*Beauty Bias*	2021	Challenge to appearance-based discrimination	Anti-discrimination
Airbnb	*Help Ukraine*	2022	Support for Ukrainian refugees through donations and temporary housing	Refugee crisis

Table 3: *Process Codes*

Code	Definition	Indicators
Framing Device	How the problem is introduced and who defines it	Declarative statements; strong opening frames; sound or music introducing gravity or drama
Moral Resolution Device	How the solution is framed as achievable, and by whom	Hopeful visuals or anthemic tone; brand linked with change; resolution through consumption or symbolic action
Voice of Authority	Who speaks, narrates, and guides the story	Corporate spokesperson, celebrity activist, or omniscient narrator; other voices subordinated or appearing visually only
Call to Alignment	What the audience is asked to do	Slogans, hashtags, limited-range behaviours such as signing a petition, buying a product, or sharing a message
Visual Heroism	How moral action is represented visually	Iconic imagery (raised fists, athletes, landscapes); spotlighting individuals as symbolic heroes

Table 4: *Primary Codes by Strategy*

Strategy	Code	Definition	Indicators	Examples
Visionary	**Prescriptive Moral Clarity**	Fixed ethical position, often binary, with clear heroes and antagonists	Imperative slogans; declarative statements; no space for ambiguity	Nike's Dream Crazy; Ben & Jerry's End Qualified Immunity
Visionary	**Brand as Moral Protagonist**	Brand centres itself as primary ethical agent directing the narrative arc	Brand as leader, narrator, or liberator; solutions through brand-led action	Patagonia's The President Stole Your Land

Strategy	Code	Definition	Indicators	Examples
Visionary	**Instrumentalised Other**	Marginalised subjects symbolised to evoke emotion but denied narrative agency	Other shown in distress or perseverance but rarely speaks or sets agenda	Kaepernick in Dream Crazy; Indigenous land in Patagonia
Visionary	**Singular Ethical Timeline**	Time compressed into linear arc; urgency prioritised, complexity minimised	Crisis-as-now; lack of historical depth; calls to act immediately	Ben & Jerry's political campaigns
Visionary	**Emotion as Understanding**	Emotion mobilised to direct moral behaviour rather than open reflexive space	High-arousal affects; swelling music; emotionally uplifting calls to align	Nike's Equality
Sensitive	**Affective Intimacy**	Emotional closeness constructed through personal or vulnerable imagery	Soft visuals, close-ups, narrative minimalism, warm or sad music	Dove's Courage Is Beautiful
Sensitive	**Shared Vulnerability**	Viewers invited to feel a common emotional experience, creating horizontal identification	Collective language; ambient tone; understated narration; everyday struggle	Airbnb's We Accept
Sensitive	**Non-Directive Moral Framing**	No specific actions or ideological alignments prescribed; focus on awareness	No clear call to action; "raising awareness" framing; ambiguous resolutions	Dove's Project #ShowUs
Sensitive	**Passive or Symbolic Other**	Other shown to evoke feeling but not to speak or act	Absence of direct speech; voiceover replacing testimony; visual symbolism	Patagonia's environmental imagery
Sensitive	**Soft Aesthetic Composition**	Visual design is emotive and slowed, encouraging feeling over action	Pastel tones, slow motion, piano scores, gentle voiceover	Dove's Reverse Selfie

Strategy	Code	Definition	Indicators	Examples
Reflexive	**Distributed Moral Voice**	Moral meaning emerges through multiple subjectivities rather than a central narrator	Multiple testimonials; dialogic structure; absence of brand spokesperson	Nike's You Can't Stop Us
Reflexive	**Situated Empathy**	Emotions grounded in specific contexts rather than universalised	Location and community references; no generalisations about "us" or "them"	Airbnb's Open Homes
Reflexive	**Viewer as Moral Subject**	Campaign invites reflection and independent meaning-making	Ambiguous moral framing; invitations to think rather than act	Gillette's The Best Men Can Be
Reflexive	**Ethical Inconclusiveness**	Campaigns resist closure or moral resolution	No fixed call to action; unresolved endings; acknowledged tensions	Gillette's The Best Men Can Be
Reflexive	**Everyday Moral Labour**	Ethical value shown in ordinary actions and sustained commitments	Small-scale care, community acts, daily resistance, relational effort	Nike's You Can't Stop Us

Table 5: *Platform-Specific Adaptations by Strategy*

Platform	Visionary	Sensitive	Reflexive
YouTube	Long-form moral narrative; cinematic heroism; testimonial vignettes; dramatic resolution	Emotive long-form storytelling; sustained empathy through slow-builds; documentary aesthetics; ambient soundtracks	Multi-voice, nonlinear storytelling; reflective pacing; documentary mini-films; interviews
Instagram	Stylised moral positioning; slogans in visual format; carousel posts; iconography	Visual intimacy via curated vulnerability; portrait photography; slow-paced reels with music overlays	Low-intensity witnessing; community spotlights; activist takeovers; unfiltered visuals
Twitter/X	Moral clarity condensed into slogan-like statements; polarising hashtags; activist claims by brand accounts	Affirmational messaging; concise emotional resonance; visual cards; emotional hashtags; poetic statements	Threads or dialogue over slogans; retweeting local actors; acknowledging complexity; sharing multiple responses
TikTok	Not strongly developed; brands tend to transpose visionary framings from other platforms	Participatory vulnerability; viewers duet or emote in solidarity; voiceover templates; filters; slow motion	Rare; when present, brands facilitate user-led storytelling rather than scripted campaigns