

**Who Supports Corporate Political Advocacy? A Quantitative Study of Public
Expectations**

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Abstract

Background: Corporate Political Advocacy (CPA), in which corporations take positions on controversial socio-political issues to promote social change, is a relatively new phenomenon with underexplored antecedents. This research aims to examine the relationship between personal characteristics and public expectations of CPA. Specifically, it analyses the relationship between Socially Responsible Consumption (SRC), perceived discrimination, political orientation and demographics, while controlling for perceptions of CPA motives.

Method: An online survey was conducted (N = 191). Exploratory factor analysis revealed that CPA consists of three factors: a) social change, b) political involvement, and c) taking action. Multiple linear regression was performed on each factor of CPA, followed by a brief analysis of qualitative responses. **Results:** Participants' expectations varied across the three dimensions of CPA. Results indicated that SRC significantly predicted expectations of both social change ($\beta = 0.21, p = .006$) and political involvement ($\beta = -0.29, p = .028$). Perceived discrimination also significantly affected expectations towards political involvement ($\beta = 0.28, p = .047$). **Conclusion:** The findings suggest that CPA may consist of multiple dimensions, which need to be further explored. Personal characteristics such as level of SRC and perceived discrimination influence expectations of CPA. While individuals are generally supportive of social change as seen in CSR, they are more hesitant about companies engaging in controversial socio-political issues. Companies need to carefully consider and strategically plan their involvement in CPA if they decide to do so.

Keywords: Corporate Political Advocacy, Brand activism, Public Expectations, Corporate Political Involvement, Socially Responsible Consumption, Perceived Discrimination

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1. Introduction

In today's increasingly polarised political landscape, businesses are not only economic entities but also influential social actors (Austin et al., 2019). The recent phenomenon of corporations taking public stances on controversial political and social issues has become increasingly popular, particularly among large corporations with significant social influence (Hydock et al., 2019). Examples include Nike's campaign against racial inequality featuring Colin Kaepernick, an NFL player who was the first to take a knee in protest against racial oppression (Kim et al., 2020), and Ben & Jerry's renaming ice cream flavours to signal support for same-sex marriage (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Often referred to as “brand activism” (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017), “corporate social advocacy” (Dodd & Supa, 2014), and “corporate political advocacy” (Wettstein & Baur, 2016), this practice operates at the intersection of politics and marketing (Jung & Mittal, 2020), and aims to drive social change (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). For the purposes of this paper, the term corporate political advocacy (CPA) is chosen to reflect this concept, as it encompasses the political dimension of corporate action and has a stronger focus on driving social change rather than financial outcomes, as is the case with corporate social advocacy (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

The outcomes of CPA efforts have been mixed, often generating controversy (Bhagwat et al., 2020) and negative reactions (Weber et al., 2023). While corporate social responsibility (CSR) is generally seen as a positive force for change, CPA is often perceived as inappropriate because of its involvement in political affairs (Weber et al., 2023). Consequently, it is crucial to investigate public expectations in order to comprehend the expected and desired corporate behaviours, as well as the personal characteristics that influence these expectations. This knowledge enables companies to make well-informed decisions about engaging in CPA, and it also informs public discourse and public relations on the role of companies in political matters and social change.

Existing research has predominantly focused on the outcomes and controversies surrounding CPA (Song & Choi, 2023; Vasquez, 2022; Vredenburg et al., 2020; You & Hon, 2022), with little attention being given to understanding the antecedents of CPA, such as public expectations (Kim et al., 2023). It is important to examine public expectations regarding CPA as studies have demonstrated that when stakeholders' expectations are met, they legitimise the action and view it as appropriate (Dodd, 2018). Conversely, CPA is evaluated negatively when it does not meet expectations (Dodd, 2018; Haupt et al., 2023). Therefore, there is a need to investigate how various factors shape public expectations towards CPA.

In conclusion, this study addresses a significant research gap by focusing on the antecedents of CPA expectations, complementing existing research that predominantly examines outcomes (Bhagwat et al., 2020). The main objectives of this research are to understand public expectations towards companies regarding CPA and to analyse how personal characteristics such as demographics, political orientation, perceived discrimination, and social responsibility influence these expectations.

Thus, the research question guiding this paper is as follows: *How do demographics, political orientation, individual's social responsibility, and perceived discrimination influence public expectations regarding corporate political advocacy?*

2. Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework aims to define the concept of CPA and examine the role of public expectations. By examining personal characteristics such as demographics, socially responsible consumption, and perceived discrimination this framework seeks to understand public expectations towards CPA. It ends with a presentation of the conceptual model derived from the framework.

2.1 History and Evolution of CPA

In the past, businesses have often refrained from taking a stance on controversial political matters, supposedly because they knew that doing so may alienate stakeholders and negatively impacts their reputation (Hydock et al., 2019). The only way in which companies engaged with politics was in favor of their own profits and benefitting them (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). In the case of lobbying as a corporate political activity, which was being negatively viewed when companies only act in the interest of themselves (Scherer et al., 2012). Furthermore, social movements were acting against companies calling for societal change (labour rights etc) to improve work conditions, or the impact on the environment (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). Which made companies to start change and improve the ways in which they operate in line with the thought of taking social responsibility. Additionally, protests were directed at the government to make more rights to protect workers rights and the environment, but organizations could directly act at the heart of the cause. So companies started to act upon the needs and desires of society (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). Afterwards, awareness rised about how companies can contribute to society not just through making profit, but through social responsibility. According to Cornelissen (2020) encompasses a range of activities, from ad hoc efforts to transformative initiatives that address issues at their root and adopt a forward-thinking approach. Organizations have integrated CSR into their business strategies because they recognized the additional benefits that CSR brings, such as enhanced

brand reputation and brand credibility (Wang et al., 2021). As a result, CSR has become a common practice among the majority of companies, necessitating more innovative approaches to stand out (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

Traditionally, CSR has involved advocating for non-controversial topics, such as improving sustainability or donating a small percentage of the profit to charitable causes. These actions are generally being perceived as inherently beneficial (Overton et al., 2021). But in recent years, companies started to take a stand on controversial sociopolitical issues and advocate for change which is distinct from CSR (Dodd & Supa, 2015). This trend is primarily observed in the USA and other Western countries, with companies predominantly addressing liberal and progressive topics, although there are cases of advocacy for conservative issues as well (Cammarota et al., 2023).

2.2 Defining CPA

The phenomenon of brands taking a stance on controversial political issues, as exemplified by Ben & Jerry's, has gained popularity (Hydock et al., 2019). Many different terms emerged that describe this phenomenon such as "political CSR" (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011), "brand activism" (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017), "Corporate social advocacy" (Dodd & Supa, 2014), and "corporate political advocacy" (Wettstein & Baur, 2016), and "corporate sociopolitical activism" (Bhagwat et al., 2020). As Vasquez (2022) notes, there are clear distinctions to be made between these terms. However, they were frequently employed in a manner that did not differentiate between the specific concepts they were intended to represent, making the research more difficult (Cammarota et al., 2023). This study has chosen to adopt the term CPA, but also uses literature employing different terms if they describe the same phenomenon.

CPA was selected to explain the company's engagement in controversial sociopolitical issues and its advocacy for social change through public actions. The term can be defined as

companies expressing or demonstrating "explicit and public support for certain individuals, groups, or ideas and values with the aim of convincing and persuading others to do the same" (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 200). The authors identified four defining characteristics of CPA. Firstly, it advocates for sociopolitical ideology. Secondly, it is disconnected from the company's core business operations. Thirdly, it runs the risk of alienating some stakeholders. Fourthly, it contributes to social change and social justice (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). To put it another way, companies advocate for social or political topics that are not directly related to a company's bottom line. This can happen in the form of public statements, or taking a stance (Dodd & Supa, 2014; Hydock et al., 2020). Given the polarising and divisive nature of controversial political topics (Bhagwat et al., 2020), there will naturally be stakeholders who do not agree with the topic and might distance themselves from the company. Finally, the main goal of CPA is to bring forward meaningful societal change that contributes to the greater good.

2.3 Motivations and Risks of CPA

Engaging in CPA can yield benefits similar to those of CSR such as enhancing brand trust, brand image and a brand's overall reputation (Dodd & Supa, 2014). As a result, consumers may be inclined to support brands whose advocacy efforts align with their personal values (Hoffmann et al., 2018; You et al., 2023). However, engaging in CPA also carries risks. One of the main risks is the potential alienation of stakeholders, which is part of the core principles (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Stakeholders that align with the stance taken further strengthen the relationship, while misalignment decreases stakeholder relationships (Klostermann et al., 2022). This can range from splitting consumers to making businesses decide to quit partnerships (Dodd & Supa, 2015). This weighting between positive and negative effects indicates an asymmetric effect (Haupt et al., 2023). Which means that the positive effects are only marginal when compared to the probable negative effects (Haupt et

al., 2023; Hydock et al., 2020) which further supports the difficulty of making a decision whether or not to engage in CPA. The above effects focused on the outcomes of CPA of different cases and experiments in different context. But little is known about the determinants of CPA, specifically what attitudes the public adopt towards CPA. Edelman (Edelman, 2019; Edelman, 2024) reports for several years that consumers want companies to take the lead on social issues and highlights the trust in companies, which is allegedly higher than trust in the government to deal with social issues (Edelman, 2019; Edelman, 2024). But when taking a look at the outcomes of CPA there is an abundance of failed and negatively received cases (Weber et al., 2023), which leads to the question if individuals really want companies to speak out on controversial political issues. To understand this gap in expectations towards the role of companies in advocating for political issues and negative outcomes, the impact of several individual factors on attitudes towards CPA needs to be examined.

2.4 Public Expectations and Legitimacy towards CPA

Public expectations towards CPA play a pivotal role in shaping public responses to companies' involvement in sociopolitical issues. According to Social Contract Theory, which posits an implicit agreement between institutions and the public, companies are expected to uphold certain responsibilities (Smith, 1995; Steiner, 1972). Failing to meet these expectations or violating this social contract can result in negative public reactions (Grappi et al., 2013), potentially leading to accusations of green washing or woke washing and consequent reputational damage (Russell et al., 2016).

Expectations are "beliefs of what is to be expected" (Creyer (1997), providing forward-looking insights into stakeholders' beliefs. Research on CSR has demonstrated that these expectations serve as benchmarks for consumer intentions (Podnar & Golob, 2007). However, these expectations can vary widely, some stakeholders may only expect companies to comply with legal regulations, while others demand transparency and responsiveness to

stakeholders' needs (Podnar & Golob, 2007). In the context of CPA, where the line between economic interests and political advocacy is blurred, expectations are highly diverse and evolving (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). The specific responsibilities companies should assume remain unclear, varying significantly across disciplines, theories, and practical applications (Dodd, 2018).

Legitimacy is defined as “a condition or status which exists when an entity’s value system is congruent with the value system of the larger social system of which the entity is a part. When a disparity, actual or potential, exists between the two value systems, there is a threat to the entity’s legitimacy.” (Lindblom, 1994, as cited in Chen & Roberts, 2010). Companies are perceived to be legitimate when their actions align with moral and social norms and are deemed socially acceptable (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). Companies want to obtain or maintain their legitimacy as it is essential for their continued operations and reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). Coombs and Holladay (2018) distinguish between the legitimacy of issues and the legitimacy of the company as a spokesperson on those issues. Hence, in CPA, companies not only need legitimacy on the issue itself, demonstrating its relevance and importance, but also must justify why they have the right to speak on it. This justification often involves linking the issue to their business operations or demonstrating its broad societal significance (Coombs & Holladay, 2018).

For example, in CSR, companies enhance their legitimacy by addressing societal concerns and aligning their actions with stakeholder expectations (Podnar & Golob, 2007). Because CSR established as a common business practice (Carroll & Brown, 2018), it is expected to engage in CSR to remain legitimate. However, CPA presents a different scenario as topics are often highly political and polarizing, and while societal expectations are evolving, many members of the public do not anticipate companies to engage in political advocacy (Park & Jiang, 2023). Understanding the personal characteristics influencing

individuals' expectations regarding CPA actions is crucial for companies aiming to engage effectively without alienating stakeholders.

2.5 Personal Characteristics and CPA

The following section presents a review of previous literature and examines the relationship between personal characteristics and expectations regarding CPA. The following section will focus on the following variables: demographics, political orientation, SRC, and perceived discrimination. Last, the influence of CPA motives, which is the control variable, is examined.

2.5.1 Demographics & political orientation

There were only limited studies that looked at the influence of Age on the outcomes of CPA. A study from Overton et al. (2023) found that the word of mouth intention after being exposed to brand activism were stronger for young adults compared to older adults, indicating that they are more interested in the activities of companies with regard to sociopolitical issues. This finding is supported by Nonomura (2017) who found that young adults and middle aged adults are more likely to engage in political consumerism after being exposed to CPA, meaning that they adjust their purchase behaviour based on CPA messages of companies. These findings, are in line with research on CSR which showcased that young towards middle aged adults expect companies to engage in CSR in order to make better purchase decisions (Shetty et al., 2019). While there are studies contradicting an effect of age on CSR and socially responsible consumers (Palacios-González & Chamorro-Mera, 2020) , no studies could be found supporting this for CPA. Therefore, it is anticipated that younger adults have higher expectations regarding CPA.

H1: Age negatively effects expectations regarding CPA.

The results of studies focusing on Gender are mixed. When looking at the outcomes of CPA, one study found that women are more willing to spread advocacy messages online, showing their higher involvement or potentially higher interest in CPA (You et al., 2023). Furthermore, studies showed that women are more likely to respond to value-driven marketing and purchase more socially responsible products (Ríos-Rodríguez et al., 2021a), which supports the notion that they would be more interested than men in CPA efforts of companies. Additionally, research on CSR confirms that women are more interested than men in receiving information on CSR efforts (Kim & Ferguson, 2014). Despite, one study that did not find any significant effects of Gender on the outcomes of CPA (Shetty et al., 2019), it is expected that women have greater expectations regarding CPA.

H2: Women report greater expectations towards CPA than men.

Companies that engage in CPA might sell their products at increased prizes, similar to companies that are highly socially responsible and offer their products at an increased prize. Research found that prize is the greatest barrier to sustainable consumption (Gleim et al., 2013). That is why Income might be related to expectations regarding CPA. Individuals who expect brands to be socially responsible likely expect them to sell products at increased prices but have the opportunity to purchase them. Research from CSR showcases that the willingness to pay more for products from more sustainable brands increases (Narayanan & Singh, 2023). Thus, it is anticipated that individuals with a higher income have greater expectations regarding CPA.

H3: Income positively effects expectations towards CPA.

With regard to Education, there are also mixed views. On the one hand, effects were found on higher educated individuals, since they possess a greater awareness of sociopolitical issues and thus are more inclined to focus more on sustainable business practices (Nonomura, 2017; Pedrini & Ferri, 2014). But a study by (Ríos-Rodríguez et al., 2021) showed the exact

opposite, in that individuals having a higher level of education were not more socially responsible. As there is no research of education on CPA yet, this study seeks to explore the effect of education on CPA expectations and anticipates that a higher level of education will lead to greater expectations regarding CPA.

H4: Education positively effects expectations towards CPA.

One crucial precursor to the success of CPA is the alignment between an individual's values and those advocated for by the company (Weber et al., 2023). In general, companies advocate for societal change in a progressive manner, advocating for various human rights, which resonates more with liberal individuals (Haupt et al., 2023). Consequently, it can be assumed that individuals with a more liberal disposition would be more likely to support CPA, given that it aligns with their social values and the stance taken by the company. Research by Haupt et al. (2023) indicates that conservatives are less affected by CPA, whereas liberals react strongly if brands contradict their values. Liberals are more sensitive to the influence of sociopolitical topics (Haupt et al., 2023) and probably possess greater expectations regarding companies to fulfil those.

H5: Left-leaning individuals possess greater expectations towards CPA than right-leaning individuals.

2.5.2 Socially Responsible Consumers

The aspiration to be socially responsible is not solely confined to organisations. Additionally, individuals exhibit varying degrees of social responsibility in their purchasing behaviours (Falcão & Roseira, 2022). These consumers are being referred to as Socially Responsible Consumers (SRC) (Roberts, 1996). Those who exhibit these characteristics integrate their concerns for social and environmental issues into their purchasing decisions and consumption behaviours (Roberts, 1996). Next to the price and quality of a product, they also consider the products social and environmental characteristics as well as the actions of

the company that produces the products (Françoise-Lecompte & Roberts, 2006).

The motivators of SRCs are emotional engagement and perceived consumer effectiveness (Palacios-González & Chamorro-Mera, 2020). The former refers to an individual's concern with social and environmental issues, whereas the latter describes an individual's perception of the impact their consumer choices can have (Palacios-González & Chamorro-Mera, 2020). When companies engage in CPA and publicly communicate their social responsibility, SRC may be more inclined to switch to these brands, as they operate according to SRC values (Falcão & Roseira, 2022).

Furthermore, as an increasing number of companies adopt a more socially responsible approach, there is a growing expectation that CPA will become more prevalent. This is because consumers are becoming more aware of the potential impact of their consumption behaviour on the business landscape and the efficacy of their actions (Falcão & Roseira, 2022). In conclusion, it is anticipated that SRC will hold companies to a higher standard with regard to CPA, as they desire greater social responsibility from businesses.

H6: The level of SRC positively affects expectations towards CPA.

2.5.3 Perceived Discrimination

Issues often addressed in CPA include racial inequality for instance by Nike (Kim et al., 2020), and Ben & Jerry's (Ciszek & Logan, 2018). Other topics are abortion (Goldberg et al., 2022), and immigration (Haupt et al., 2023). These issues typically affect minority groups within society, who experience discrimination and are often the targets of societal prejudice. Achieving equal human rights for these groups presents significant challenges, as it requires convincing the majority to recognise the importance of these rights. Consequently, these groups depend on external actors to advocate for and improve issues related to minority rights. When companies listen to the needs of these marginalised groups, understand their issues, and advocate for their rights, social change could be aspired. Consequently, it is

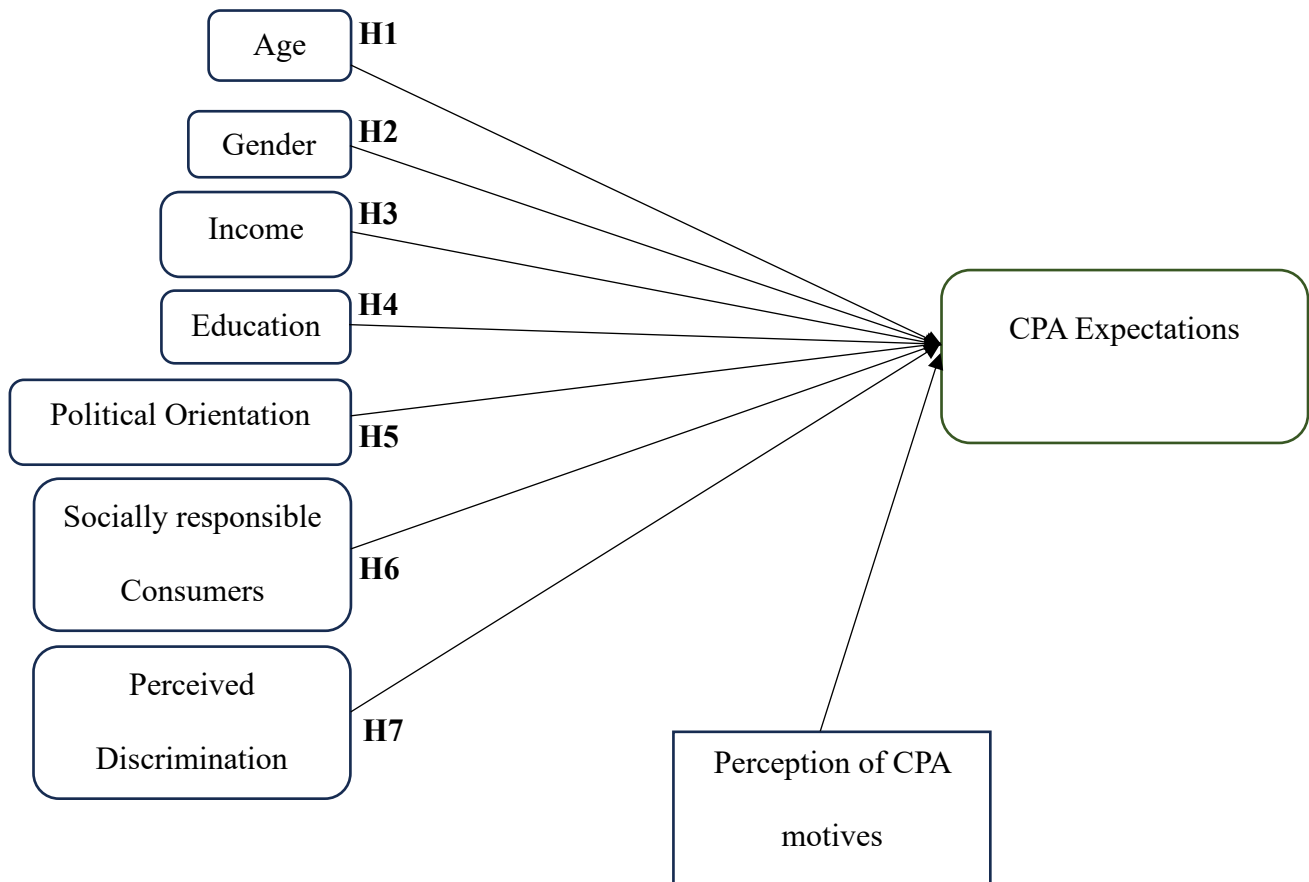
anticipated that individuals with a heightened perception of discrimination will have more elevated expectations regarding the manner in which companies utilise their social actor status (Austin et al., 2019).

H7: The level of perceived discrimination positively effects expectations regarding CPA.

2.6 Control Variable: Perception of CPA motives

One crucial factor that influences the success of CPA is the perception of authenticity and credibility (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Vredenburg et al., 2020; Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Achieving authenticity largely depends on the genuine business interests behind CPA initiatives. If stakeholders get the impression that companies engage in CPA merely to follow current trends, also referred to as “woke washing”, or enhance their image, their evaluation is likely to be negative (Mirzaei et al., 2022). Thus, companies should make sure that their CPA initiative is well integrated in their strategic communication. Although CPA does not necessarily need to be directly linked to the company's business and products (Dodd & Supa, 2014), the connection, such as shared values, should be clearly communicated (Korschun et al., 2019). In conclusion, authenticity and credibility have proven to be a main influence on the outcomes of CSR as well as CPA that significantly determine the outcomes, therefore perception of CPA motives need to be controlled for in this research.

Based on previous literature, a conceptual model has been developed. Figure 1 illustrates this research model, including the main effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable, while controlling for perception of CPA motives.

Figure 1*Conceptual Model*

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

In order to efficiently gather information regarding CPA expectations from a large sample in a relatively short time, a quantitative approach was chosen for this study. Furthermore, this method allows for the findings to be generalised to the broader population. Furthermore, participants are able to complete the survey at any time during the day, in a structured manner, with all respondents receiving the same questions in the same order. The objective of the survey is to explore the public expectations of CPA, taking into account a range of personal characteristics. The participants will respond to a structured questionnaire, which will provide insights into their expectations of CPA, their level of socially responsible consumption, their level of perceived discrimination, their political orientation and their demographic information. Furthermore, the influence of perceptions of CPA motives is controlled for. Furthermore, the survey will collect demographic information, including age, gender, educational level, nationality, political orientation, and income level. This will facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the data. The originality of this research lies in its investigation of public expectations as an antecedent of CPA. Furthermore, the examination of the influence of personal characteristics on the desire for CPA has not been conducted previously.

3.2 Sample and Recruitment

Two types of nonprobability sampling methods were employed for this study. The first method of recruitment involved the researchers' personal network, with an anonymous link to the survey shared via various social media platforms and the distribution of flyers at public places such as supermarkets and the local library of the researcher. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to disseminate the survey link to other potential respondents. This approach ensured that there were minimal restrictions on participation. Because of using nonprobability

sampling methods it cannot be guaranteed that the final sample will be representative (Babbie, 2016). The only criterion for participation was being 18 years or older, with no special exclusion criteria. Given the availability of the survey in both German and English, participants with varying degrees of English proficiency among German speakers could comprehend the questions well.

By the end of data collection, 243 responses were recorded. After removing incomplete responses and those with less than 80% survey progress 193 responses remained. Two additional responses were removed for not taking the study seriously resulting in a final sample size of 191 participants. An overview of the baseline characteristics are shown in Table 1. The majority of the sample was female, with no individuals identifying as non-binary. The mean age of participants was 38 years, ranging from 18 to 83 years. Most participants reported German nationality, with 30 participants indicating another nationality, primarily from Europe. In terms of education, most participants had completed or were currently attending high school, followed by those with a bachelor's degree or equivalent, vocational education, and master's degrees. The average monthly net income in the sample was 2.187 Euros.

Table 1*Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants at Baseline*

Baseline characteristics		
	n	%
Gender		
Female	116	60.7
Male	73	38.2
NA	2	1.1
Age		
Young Adults (< 30)	88	46.1
Middle Adults (30 – 44)	15	7.9
Older Adults (45 – 59)	70	36.6
Old Adults (>= 60)	18	9.4
Highest educational level		
Secondary School	12	6.7
High School	50	27.9
Vocational Education	36	20.1
Bachelor's degree or equivalent	58	32.4
Master's degree or equivalent	21	11.7
Phd or doctorate	2	1.1
Income		
Below average (0 – 1499)	91	47.6
Average (1500 – 3999)	65	34.0
Above average (4000 - >= 8000)	26	13.6
NA	9	4.7
Nationality		
German	171	89.5
Dutch	6	3.1
Other	14	7.3

Note. $N = 191$. Participants were on average 38.5 years old ($SD = 17.0$).

3.3 Procedure

Prior to the data collection process, ethical approval (240723) was granted by the BMS ethics committee on April 30th, 2024. For the purpose of data collection an online survey was created using the software Qualtrics. The final survey can be found in Appendix A. Responses were collected from May 16th to June 2nd, 2024. The survey was closed once a sufficient number of responses was obtained.

The survey began with a brief introduction informing participants about the general research context and objectives to avoid biasing their responses. In addition, there was the possibility to take the survey in German, ensuring participants of all educational levels and English proficiencies could participate. Next, participants were informed about their rights when participating in this study, namely participating voluntarily and anonymously with the right to withdraw at any time without facing consequences. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and informed about how the data was being used, for educational purpose only. Once the participants agreed to these terms and conditions they could start with the study. In case of not consenting they were directed to the end of the survey.

The first scale, presented to participants, measured their attitudes towards CPA, including a text entry field for providing a brief explanation of their choices. This was followed by scales measuring SRC, perceived discrimination, and perceptions of CPA motives. Subsequently, demographic questions about age, gender, nationality, education, and income level were asked. Finally, participants were asked about their political orientation. At the end of the survey, participants were thanked for their participation and given the opportunity to leave their email address to receive the study results within a few weeks. Participation in the survey took approximately 6 to 13 minutes.

3.4 Measurements

First, the dependent variable measuring individuals' expectations regarding CPA included 13 items. 12 items were taken from a study on CPA conducted by Borden (2019), which had high internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$). It included items such as "Corporate leaders should push for social change when the government doesn't." The last item "Companies should take a stand, even when the topic is controversial." was added by the researcher based on the theoretical framework as it being one of the central key points of CPA (Wettstein & Baur, 2016) which was not reflected in the scale. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) where participants had to indicate their level of agreement with each item respectively. In addition, there was a text entry field in which participants could briefly explain their choices made in the scale, further elaborating on their ideas towards CPA. High scores indicate positive attitudes towards CPA initiatives of companies.

The second scale was measuring an individual's degree of SRC by 10 items in total. The scale was a combination of two scales measuring SRC in Europe. Nine items were derived from the Ethically minded consumer scale ($\alpha = .90$) by Sudbury-Riley & Kohlbacher (2016). The item "I make an effort to buy products and services from companies that pay all of their employees a living wage." was added from the socially responsible consumption scale of Webb et al. (2008). Together the items cover a range of behaviours and attitudes towards SRC. High scores indicate a high level of socially responsible consumption.

The third scale measured perceived discrimination. For this measure, the intersectional discrimination scale ($\alpha = .93$) consisting of 9 items by Scheim and Bauer (2019) was chosen to be suitable in this context. Because it does not just assess a single dimension of a type of discrimination as for instance racism but focusses on making it possible for various kinds of discrimination to answer such as sexism, racism, ableism, or other factors. All items start with "*Because of who you are have you...*" with an additional text that primes participants to think

about their experiences and different factors such as Nationality, Gender, Income, Health Issues or other. Example items include [Because of who you are have you...] “*heard, saw, or read others joking or laughing about you.*” were included. These items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Almost Always) to assess an individual’s perception of discrimination.

The fourth scale measured the control variables perceptions of CPA motives. This scale was compiled by the researcher based on literature on Authenticity, Brand Trust and Brand Credibility (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Three items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The three items are 1) I trust that companies genuinely care about the societal issues they advocate for 2) I trust companies to prioritize societal concerns over their own self-interests. 3) I believe companies' societal advocacy is sincere.

Then, participants were presented with different questions regarding their demographics. They had to report their age, gender, country of origin, level of education, and personal monthly net income. Last, participants had to answer their political orientation on a slider ranging from Left (-4) to Right (+4). This method was proven to successfully measure an individual’s political ideology (Alwin, 1997). Therefore, this format was included.

3.5 Pilot testing

To gain an understanding of how the questionnaire was received by participants, a pre-test was conducted. The aim was to evaluate the clarity of the items, the accuracy of the translations, and to identify any general problems in the questionnaire. To check the translation, another German researcher compared the English and German versions, assessing clarity and correctness. In addition, seven people participated in the pilot test, three completed the English version and four completed the German version. They were asked to take their time completing the questionnaire, focusing on the clarity and ease of understanding the

questions and items. Participants were then asked to share their feedback with the researcher.

Based on the feedback from the pilot test, minor spelling mistakes were corrected, and the item “From time to time, companies should take action against bad government or politicians” was removed from the CPA scale, for its repetitiveness and vague formulation. Moreover, three items from the Intersectional Discrimination Scale were deleted because they were perceived as irrelevant or sensitive. One of the three items was “Heard that you or people like you don’t belong”. Lastly, the wording of some questions was revised to ensure participants better understood what was being asked of them.

3.6 Data Preparation and Scale Analyses

To assess the validity and reliability of the scales, the statistical software RStudio was used for analysis. After the data was cleaned (see Recruitment and Sample), 191 responses remained for analysis. Prior to conducting the factor analysis, four items of the CPA scale needed to be reverse coded so that a high score reflected high expectations regarding CPA. All other items were correctly formatted.

The overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy amounted to .77. In addition, the value of all scale items was equal to or above .60, which is above the acceptable threshold, indicating that the sample was adequate for factor analysis. Exploratory factor analysis was then conducted on each scale separately to assess the underlying structure and validity of each specific construct. Thus, items of the same measurement were grouped together to perform factor analysis.

First, the factor analysis of CPA suggests a structure of three factors measuring CPA as a construct. After comparing the results to the items three themes became clear that measure expectations regarding 1) taking *Action* 2) corporate *Political Involvement* and 3) *Social Change* and social responsibility. Table 2 shows the level of internal consistency for each factor, and the factor loadings of each item.

Table 2*Cronbach's Alpha and Factor Loadings for CPA factors*

Construct	Cronbach's α	Item	Factor Loading
CPA	.78		
Actions	.75	When the government doesn't or won't try to fix a problem, companies should fix it themselves.	.424
		When the government tries to pass a bad law or unethical regulation, companies should try to stop them, even if it has nothing to do with the business.	.362
		CEOs have an obligation to express their political viewpoints in public.	.489
		Companies should take a stand when the government won't.	.733
		When government leaders fail to act on social problems, corporations should act first.	.580
		Companies should take a stand, even when the topic is controversial.	.689
		Social Change	.61
Companies should wait for the government to take the lead on social change. (R)	.674		
Companies should make money first and consider social issues second or not at all. (R)	.521		
Corporate leaders should push for social change when the government doesn't.	.549		
Political Involvement	*	Companies should stay out of politics. (R)	.950
		Companies should "stay in their lane" and avoid political issues. (R)	.768

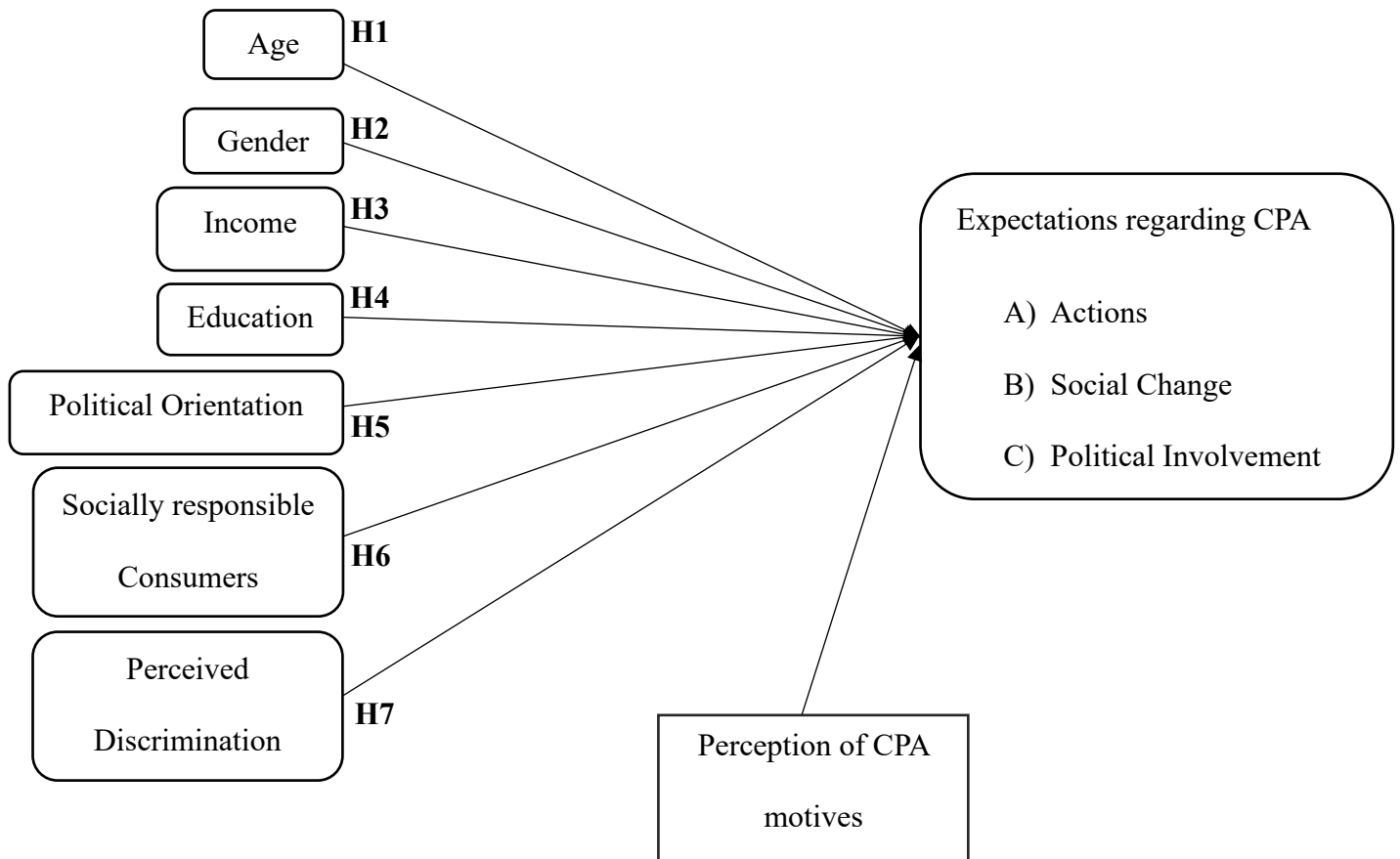
Note. *not possible to calculate Cronbach's Alpha

For the SRC scale, Cronbach's alpha was high at 0.86. The factor analysis indicated that one factor was sufficient based on the elbow criterion, although Kaiser's criterion suggested two factors with eigenvalues above 1. After considering the item context and factor loadings, it was decided to proceed with a single factor, as the second factor only consisted of two items.

The discrimination scale demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$). Factor analysis confirmed that the scale measured a single construct of discrimination, according to both Kaiser's and the elbow criterion.

The scale measuring the control variable perceptions of CPA motives had a low Cronbach's alpha of 0.56, indicating poor internal consistency. Factor analysis suggested two factors, but with low factor loadings. To proceed with the analysis, it was decided to use a single item with the highest factor loading, as it best represented the underlying construct. However, results involving this scale were interpreted with caution due to its low validity and reliability. During analyses, all three multiple regression analyses, had significant values for CPA motives as a control variable.

Because of the results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis, the conceptual model needs to be updated. The new model with all three dimensions of CPA as dependent variables is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2*Updated Conceptual Model*

4. Results

For the analysis of the data, RStudio, a statistical analysis software, was used. Multiple regression analyses were chosen to examine the relationship between the independent variables (Age, Gender, Income, Education, Socially Responsible Consumption (SRC), and Discrimination) and each dependent variable (Social Change, Political Involvement, and Actions), while controlling for CPA motives. The results of this study are presented in three parts: descriptive statistics, multiple regression analyses, and a qualitative analysis of the text box responses. This section ends with an overview of the results of the hypotheses (Table 6).

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent variables are presented in Table 3. The results indicate mixed attitudes towards CPA across different factors. On the one hand, the highest mean value was observed for social change, suggesting that the sample holds positive expectations regarding companies' efforts to drive social change. In contrast, for Political Involvement, the mean indicates a neutral stance and controversial expectations indicated by the large standard deviation. Similarly, Actions also centers around the middle point with a great variance, indicating that expectations towards Actions are weak and mixed expectations towards Actions, without a clear consensus among respondents. A visualization of the distribution of responses on each CPA dimension can be found in Appendix B.

The level of SRC in the sample was slightly positive, indicating a general adherence to SRC principles in consumer behavior. However, caution is advised as participants may have responded in a socially desirable manner. The level of perceived discrimination was low in the sample, showing that participants seldom reported experiencing discrimination. Lastly, political orientation leaned slightly leftward, reflecting the ideological disposition of the sample towards political issues. Demographic variables were previously described in the Methods section (see Table 1).

Table 3

Means and standard deviations of variables of dependent and independent variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Political Involvement	3.48	1.02
Social Change	3.87	0.61
Actions	3.29	0.65
Socially Responsible Consumption	3.57	0.67
Discrimination ^a	2.02	0.63
CPA motives	2.51	1.07
Political Orientation ^b	-0.49	1.43

Note. a) Discrimination was measured on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Almost Always) b) Political Orientation was measured from Left (-4) to Right (+4).

To test the hypotheses, three multiple regression analyses were applied. This data analysis method allows for the examination of a single dependent variable and multiple independent variables. This method takes into account the simultaneous effects of multiple predictors on the outcome variable. Furthermore, results of regression analyses are relatively easy to interpret because coefficients provide straightforward information about the direction and strength of relationships between variables.

4.2 Main effects

4.2.1 Multiple Regression on Social Change

The results indicated significant relationships between SRC and Social Change ($\beta = 0.205$, $SE = 0.073$, $p = .006$), supporting Hypothesis 6a. This suggests that higher levels of SRC are associated with greater expectations for companies to drive social change. The

effects of demographics (Age, Gender, Income, Education), perceived discrimination, and political orientation on Social Change did not reach significance, leading to the rejection of Hypotheses 1a through 5a and Hypothesis 7a. This indicates that these variables do not have a measurable effect on expectations for social change. Detailed statistics for all variables, including both significant and non-significant results, are provided in Table 4. Overall, the model explained a relatively low proportion of the variance in the social change dimension of CPA ($R^2 = 9.84\%$), suggesting that other unmeasured factors may play a significant role in shaping public expectations for corporate social change initiatives.

Table 4

Multiple Regression on Relationship between personal characteristics and Social Change

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Intercept	2.72	0.28	2.16	3.28	<.001
Age	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.01	.172
Gender	0.11	0.11	-0.09	0.32	.282
Income	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	.429
Education	0.10	0.10	-0.09	0.29	.298
Political Orientation	-0.03	0.03	-0.10	0.01	.418
Socially Responsible Consumption	0.21	0.07	0.06	0.35	.006
Discrimination	-0.05	0.08	-0.20	0.11	.543

Note. $N = 191$. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

4.2.2 Multiple Regression on Actions

Another multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between personal characteristics (Age, Gender, Income, Education, Socially Responsible Consumption, Discrimination, and Political Orientation) and expectations towards companies taking Action. Detailed statistics can be found in Table 5. No significant results were found for any of the independent variables. Consequently, all hypotheses (H1b to H7b) were rejected. The overall explained variance was low, with an R^2 value of 5.14%, indicating that these personal characteristics do not significantly predict the expectations towards the dimension of taking action of CPA.

Table 5

Multiple Regression on Relationship between personal characteristics and expectations towards Actions

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Intercept	2.50	0.32	1.87	3.12	<.001
Age	0.01	0.00	-0.00	0.01	.069
Gender	0.08	0.12	-0.18	0.31	.522
Income	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	.781
Education	0.12	0.11	-0.10	0.33	.284
Political Orientation	-0.03	0.04	-0.11	0.05	.450
Socially Responsible Consumption	-0.04	0.08	-0.20	0.13	.663
Discrimination	0.07	0.09	-0.10	0.25	.401

Note. $N = 191$. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

4.2.3 Multiple Regression on Political Involvement

Lastly, a multiple regression analysis examined the predictors of expectations towards Political Involvement. The results revealed significant relationships with *Discrimination* ($\beta = 0.27, SE = 0.14, p = .047$), *SRC* ($\beta = -0.29, SE = 0.13, p = .028$), and *Age* ($\beta = 0.02, SE = 0.01, p = .009$). Hypothesis H7c was supported, indicating that individuals who perceive higher levels of discrimination are more likely to want companies to be politically active. Hypothesis H1c was also supported, showing that older individuals have greater expectations for companies to intervene in political matters. Hypothesis H6c, predicted a positive relationship between SRC and CPA.

However, the analysis reveal a negative relationship indicating that H6c was not supported in the expected direction but showed significance in the opposite direction. The effects of other predictors (Gender, Income, Education, and Political Orientation) were not statistically significant. Detailed statistics can be found in Table 6. The overall explained variance for this model was low ($R^2 = 3.13\%$), suggesting that these personal characteristics do not fully predict expectations towards corporate political involvement.

Table 6

Multiple Regression on Relationship between personal characteristics and expectations towards Political Involvement

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Intercept	2.99	0.50	2.00	3.98	<.001
Age	0.02	0.01	0.004	0.03	.009
Gender	0.15	0.19	-0.22	0.51	.426
Income	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	.395
Education	0.20	0.17	-0.14	0.54	.240

Political Orientation	-0.05	0.06	-0.17	0.07	.437
Socially Responsible Consumption	-0.29	0.13	-0.54	-0.03	.028
Discrimination	0.28	0.14	0.01	0.55	.047

Note. $N = 191$. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.

4.3 Results of Qualitative Responses

Next to quantitative analyses, qualitative responses from participants were analysed. Out of the total sample of 191 participants, 30 provided additional comments about their views on CPA. Table 7 presents the prevalent topics identified in these qualitative responses along with their frequency and illustrative examples translated from German to English.

Table 7

Frequency table of common themes in qualitative responses

Topic	Count	Example
Responsibility for employees	7	Companies have a responsibility for staff and therefore also for their families. *
Focus on making profit	3	Companies certainly have a social responsibility, but the priority is the profitability of their own business.*
Involvement in political topics	3	Directors and CEOs should not impose their opinion on a company, as companies should also represent the opinion of their employees, and therefore a neutral and central position should be represented, especially politically.*
Contribute to social change	10	I would hope that more socially responsible companies will be more successful in the long run and that the free market will force others to rethink. Especially as many people are prepared to pay more for products that come from “good” companies.*
Depends on the topic	3	Decisions should always be made on a case-by-case basis, so that a generalization as in the case of some questions is not justified.*

Note. Examples marked with * translated from German to English

Seven participants emphasised that companies have a main responsibility towards their employees and their families, highlighting the importance of working conditions and employee well-being. Additionally, 10 participants underscored the role of CSR, stating that CSR initiatives not only drive social change but also enhance market structures by setting a positive example that incentivises other companies to follow. In contrast, other participants emphasised the economic responsibility of companies, prioritising profit generation to ensure the continuation of businesses. Furthermore, several participants expressed uncertainty regarding the extent to which companies should engage in political matters, citing concerns about the potential for corporate power to influence the political process and the appropriateness of such involvement. Finally, participants emphasised the necessity of a case-by-case evaluation of corporate actions, suggesting that context-specific decisions are of paramount importance.

In summary, the findings indicate that the majority of variables do not significantly influence individuals' expectations of CPA. The hypotheses related to demographic variables (2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 4a, 4b, and 4c) are rejected, indicating that factors such as gender, income, and education do not significantly impact expectations towards CPA activities. With regard to age, hypothesis 1a is accepted, indicating that older individuals hold higher expectations with regard to political involvement. Hypothesis 1b is partially accepted, suggesting that they also expect companies to take action in relation to CPA.

Discrimination and SRC emerged as significant predictors for expectations towards political involvement. This illustrates that individuals who perceive more discrimination and those less engaged in socially responsible consumption have greater expectations for corporate political involvement. Moreover, the findings indicated that SRC was positively associated with expectations regarding social change initiatives. It is important to note that all three models exhibited low statistical power, suggesting that other unmeasured factors likely influence public attitudes towards CPA. Qualitative analyses yielded insights into potential

additional factors that might influence public expectations regarding CPA. These findings will be discussed in the Discussion section. In conclusion, an overview of the results of the hypotheses can be found in Table 8 below.

Table 8

Results of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Relationship	Result
H ₁	Age negatively effects expectations regarding CPA.	A) Rejected B) Rejected C) Rejected*
H ₂	Women report higher expectations regarding CPA than men.	A) Rejected B) Rejected C) Rejected
H ₃	Income positively effects expectations regarding CPA.	A) Rejected B) Rejected C) Rejected
H ₄	Education positively effects expectations regarding CPA.	A) Rejected B) Rejected C) Rejected
H ₅	Left-leaning individuals report higher expectations regarding CPA than right-leaning individuals.	A) Rejected B) Rejected C) Rejected
H ₆	The level of SRC positively effects expectations regarding CPA.	A) Accepted B) Rejected C) Rejected*
H ₇	The level of perceived discrimination positively effects expectations regarding CPA.	A) Rejected B) Rejected C) Accepted

Note. A = Social Change, B = Actions, C = Political Involvement, *results were significant

but indicated the opposite direction

5. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine public attitudes towards Corporate Political Advocacy (CPA), defined as the phenomenon of companies taking a public stand on controversial societal issues with the aim of promoting social change (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Specifically, this study sought to ascertain the public's expectations of corporate behaviours that could be classified as CPA. This was done in order to identify the actions that are deemed appropriate and expected by the public. Moreover, the study aimed to explicate how different personal characteristics influence expectations regarding CPA, thereby providing a more profound comprehension of the types of individuals who support CPA. The personal characteristics considered in this study included demographics, political orientation, the level of social responsibility consciousness (SRC), and the level of perceived discrimination. The following section will interpret and discuss the results, provide practical implications, address the limitations of the current study and recommend directions for future research.

5.1 Discussion of the Results

Similarly to research on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), this research suggests that CPA may encompass multiple dimensions. Carroll (1979) proposed four dimensions of CSR: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary. Further research in Europe found that consumers differentiate between three dimensions, combining the ethical and philanthropic dimension (Golob et al., 2008; Maignan et al., 2005). In this study, individuals identified a dimension of *Social Change*, that appears comparable to the ethical-philanthropic dimension of CSR. The findings indicated that the public has high expectations of social change, which is consistent with previous research (Dodd, 2018; Golob et al., 2008; Podnar & Golob, 2007). This indicates that the general public anticipates corporations to play a role in driving social change (Mohr et al., 2001; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

However, the other two dimensions identified in this study, *Actions* and *Political Involvement*, diverge from CSR. As the concept of CPA is sometimes perceived as an extension of CSR (Kotler et al., 2021), it can be argued that these dimensions represent fundamental extensions of the construct, given their alignment with the core idea of CPA, namely advocating through public actions on controversial sociopolitical topics (Korschun et al., 2020). It is probable that these dimensions of CPA will result in stakeholders becoming alienated due to their controversial nature (Vredenburg et al., 2020). It is noteworthy that respondents in this study distinguished between political involvement and other forms of action, such as taking a stance or issuing a public statement against a government decision. The expectations of respondents regarding political involvement and actions were found to be mixed and controversial, suggesting that taking action on political topics may not be widely accepted (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020).

These findings correspond with Logan and Ciszek's (2020) observation that companies are often expected to avoid political discussions. However, this differs from the conclusions of Korschun et al. (2020) and Weber et al. (2021), who argue that companies are increasingly seen as having a role in addressing societal issues where governmental efforts fall short. Furthermore, Moorman (2020) delineates a spectrum of corporate activities, categorising them according to their risk profiles (p. 388). This demonstrates that different behaviours elicit distinct responses and possess varying levels of risk. This spectrum may explain why some forms of CPA are more acceptable to the public than others. It can be hypothesised that more direct political involvement is perceived as riskier and potentially more alienating.

5.1.1 Personal Characteristics and CPA

The influence of personal characteristics on CPA expectations was also investigated. No significant differences were found across all three CPA dimensions in relation to gender,

income, or education. Previous research yielded inconsistent and occasionally conflicting results. While studies on gender have found an effect on women, with them being more responsive to cause-related marketing (Lee & Cho, 2019; Ríos-Rodríguez et al., 2021), and outcomes showing a higher willingness to spread CPA messages on social media, indicating a higher level of involvement (You et al., 2023), others have been unable to confirm this hypothesis (Palacios-González & Chamorro-Mera, 2020; Pedrini & Ferri, 2014; Shetty et al., 2019).

Finally, it is worth noting that several studies have indicated that education programmes can positively influence consumer behaviour (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020; Palacios-González & Chamorro-Mera, 2020; Pedrini & Ferri, 2014). In contrast, Ríos-Rodríguez et al. (2021) found that lower levels of SRC were associated with higher levels of social cohesion. One potential explanation for this discrepancy in the demographics is the lack of societal consensus, which can result in the formation of opposing groups regardless of demographic characteristics (Haider-Markel & Meier, 1996).

One exception to this was age. Older individuals were found to have more positive attitudes towards companies being politically involved, which support research by Lee and Cho (2019). As no effect of age was found for the other variables, the findings indicate that age is not a predictor of individuals' attitudes towards CPA. In conclusion, the findings indicate that demographic variables have a negligible impact on public expectations of CPA.

5.1.2 Political Orientation and CPA

Previous research has demonstrated that political orientation does indeed have an impact on attitudes towards CPA. The study indicated that individuals with more liberal and left-leaning political orientations are more likely to support CPA because the addressed topics are often considered progressive and align with the values of left-leaning individuals (Ellis, 2004; Haupt et al., 2023; Klostermann et al., 2022; Neureiter & Bhattacharya, 2021). The

findings of this study were unexpected in that no significant distinction was observed between the expectations of left-leaning and right-leaning individuals.

Two possible explanations for this result can be proposed. The study did not focus on a specific societal issue but rather measured expectations towards companies' activities in general. One potential explanation for this discrepancy is that individuals do not anticipate a specific political direction from companies engaging in CPA, which contrasts with previous research (Haupt et al., 2023). An alternative explanation is that, given the lack of clarity regarding the specific issues under discussion, individuals may have chosen to refrain from forming a definitive opinion, on the grounds that it is not appropriate to make a decision on a topic that has been omitted from the agenda and which requires a case-by-case approach. This is in line with the argument put forward by Korschun (2021) that there is no single, universal strategy that can be applied in all cases.

Previous literature has not addressed the issue of perceived discrimination in relation to expectations of corporate activities. This research indicates that discrimination may influence expectations regarding corporate political involvement. Individuals who perceive greater discrimination are more likely to expect companies to engage in political activities (Haupt et al., 2023). However, no effect was found for the other dimension. One potential explanation for these findings is that individuals who experience discrimination may not wish to be used as a means of driving social change, or may be uncertain about CPA. From the perspective of the general public, the outcomes of CPA highlighted the risk of woke washing, which can be defined as the low authenticity of companies that use a woke topic to also talk about it and contribute to it (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Vredenburg et al., 2020).

5.1.3 SRC and CPA

As anticipated, there was a pronounced positive impact of SRC on expectations regarding social change. This finding is in accordance with the results of previous studies

(Falcão & Roseira, 2022; Schlaile et al., 2018). Those who engage in socially responsible consumption behaviors are more likely to demand that companies adopt similar practices. When consumers' values align with CPA activities, they may perceive an increase in their perceived efficacy, given that an increasing number of companies address issues that are important to socially responsible consumers (Falcao & Roseira, 2022).

It is notable that SRC had a negative effect on political involvement, contrary to the initial expectations. It was hypothesised that higher levels of SRC would lead to higher expectations of CPA, including political involvement. However, the findings indicate a significant negative effect, suggesting that more socially responsible individuals may believe that companies should refrain from being politically active. One possible explanation for this is that companies should focus on issues of moral or societal significance, rather than attempting to influence the political debate. Or that they believe believe that political involvement is not appropriate (Park & Jiang, 2023). This would mean that they should engage in their core business activities, but should not attempt to become active outside of their business.

5.2 Practical implications

Although the results did not align with the anticipated hypotheses, it is possible to derive some practical implications from the responses. The insights gained from this study can inform managerial decision-making regarding the engagement of CPA. Firstly, the results indicate that individuals in general view CPA as a risky corporate activity. Consequently, it is imperative that managers exercise caution when engaging in CPA. It is important to consider a number of factors before taking a stance on political issues. These include the relevance of the topic to stakeholders, the nature of the industry, and the political orientation and views of key stakeholders. The rationale behind this decision is as follows: It is of the utmost importance to ensure that any internal issues within the company are addressed prior to

engaging in external advocacy. Should a company be confronted with unresolved internal issues, there is a risk that its CPA efforts may be perceived as hypocritical or as a diversion from its shortcomings.

Furthermore, while social change efforts through CSR are generally regarded as beneficial, CPA requires a more deliberate approach. It is essential that managers conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the alignment between their stance on political issues and the values and stakeholder interests of their company. This strategic alignment can mitigate risks and enhance the potential positive impact of CPA. In conclusion, it is advisable that managers adopt a cautious, deliberative and strategic approach to CPA. By considering the specific context and ensuring alignment with both internal practices and external expectations, companies may be able to design a CPA initiative that resonates with their stakeholders.

5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, which should be addressed in future research. Firstly, the sample does not accurately represent the general population. Although the gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 63% of the sample identifying as female and 37% as male, the age distribution exhibited a bimodal pattern, with peaks at 22 and 55 years old. This resulted in unequal representation across different age groups. Furthermore, the educational attainment of the sample was slightly higher than that of the general population. The division of the sample into only two groups for analysis does not fully capture the nuances in educational background. Furthermore, the income levels of the sample were skewed towards the lower end, likely due to a significant number of student participants. It would have been more insightful to request household income, particularly in the context of marital status. Many older people who are in a marriage share their income and have a different amount of money available to spend.

Furthermore, the distribution of responses regarding discrimination was notably low,

as the majority of the sample is likely to have experienced minimal or no discrimination, given that the majority of them occupy a highly privileged position. Consequently, future research should ensure that the sample used allows for the results to be generalised to the population. Moreover, more sophisticated statistical techniques could be employed to account for the discrepancies observed in the sample.

Secondly, there were some limitations with the operationalisation of the instruments and scales used. The reliability of the CPA scale was satisfactory, although it could be enhanced. The instrument's low validity indicates that it is not an effective means of measuring the construct of CPA, which may lead to confusion among respondents. A significant proportion of respondents found it challenging to respond to the questions, as their responses were heavily influenced by the specific issues that were not included in the survey to avoid bias. However, including topics is crucial because respondents lacked the requisite knowledge to answer the questions. Furthermore, the results of the exploratory factor analysis indicated three dimensions. However, the dimension of political involvement consists of only two items and is therefore not a reliable measure of political involvement. These issues can be attributed to the variety of similar terms used to describe CPA, which are used interchangeably and have overlapping concepts. Furthermore, to date, no instrument exists that effectively measures CPA. Consequently, future research should aim to achieve a consensus on the conceptualisation and operationalisation of CPA.

Thirdly the sampling methods employed also present limitations. The reliance on personal networks and distribution through workplaces may have resulted in participants being already primed to consider CPA in the context of their work environment, rather than their personal attitudes towards it. This may have resulted in the assumption that pressure should be applied to small family-owned businesses to engage in CPA, which may be challenging to implement due to the limited resources and capacity of such companies. Furthermore, the sample was not randomised, which limits the generalisability of the findings.

Finally, social desirability bias represents another potential issue, particularly in the context of measuring SRC. It is possible that respondents may have provided responses that were perceived as socially desirable, particularly in the absence of concrete examples. To illustrate, if respondents were queried as to whether they purchase from companies known to employ child labour (e.g., H&M), their responses may have differed from more abstract questions that lacked concrete examples, which might have made it easier for respondents to imagine and think about the scenario. In order to mitigate the limitations of the survey method in the future, it is recommended that the think-aloud method be employed during the pilot testing of the survey, thereby enabling the identification of problems at an earlier stage. In order to account for the aspect of social desirability, it would have been beneficial to include another measurement in the survey.

5.4 Conclusion

This study is among the first to investigate the public's expectations of CPA and the influence of personal characteristics on these expectations. In particular, the study aimed to address the research question: *How do demographics, political orientation, individual's social responsibility, and perceived discrimination influence public expectations regarding corporate political advocacy?* First, the findings indicate that the public differentiates between three dimensions of CPA: social change, political involvement, and actions, with varying levels of expectations for each. In accordance with existing literature on CSR, the dimension of social change was anticipated and perceived in a favourable light. However, the other two dimensions, which are directly related to CPA, elicited a range of expectations that were both mixed and controversial. This indicates that the public remains uncertain about the appropriate extent of corporate involvement in political activities and actions, particularly when these actions are directed against government decisions on controversial sociopolitical topics.

Moreover, the proposed personal characteristics did not significantly affect public expectations. This suggests that other factors, such as the specific topic or the company addressing it, may play a more crucial role in shaping public expectations. This is particularly pertinent to sensitive issues such as immigration, racial inequality, or abortion. Given that CPA is a relatively novel phenomenon, the public may not yet anticipate companies engaging in it to the same extent as they do with CSR.

For managers, this study serves to highlight the necessity for caution when engaging in CPA. CPA actions should be planned and integrated into long-term strategies, taking into account the unique context of each case. It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to CPA. Managers should be prepared for the possibility of alienating some stakeholders (Wettstein & Baur, 2016).

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Appendices

*During the preparation of this work the author used DeepL Write and ChatGPT in order to improve grammar, spelling, and coherence of the text. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.

Appendix A

Online Questionnaire (English version)

Dear participant,

- You can change the language in the top right corner.-
- Sie können die Sprache oben rechts ändern. -

Thank you for taking part in this study.

This survey is being done by a Communication Science bachelor student at the University of Twente in the Netherlands. The purpose of this research study is to **explore consumer attitudes towards a company's role in society**. Completing the survey will take around 10-15 minutes of your time.

Your participation in this study is **entirely voluntary** and you can **withdraw at any time** without facing any negative consequences. All responses will be treated with confidentiality and will be kept **fully anonymous**. This means that you don't have to disclose any personally identifiable information. The data will be used for research and educational purposes only and is only visible to the researcher and her supervisor. We assume that there are no known risks associated with this study. Nevertheless, you can pause or end your participation if you feel uncomfortable.

For any further inquiries, please contact the researcher via e-mail;

j.krumbeck@student.utwente.nl

Bachelor thesis researcher: J. Krumbeck

Project supervisor: Dr. E. van Laar

Below, you may consent to the anonymized data being used for this research. If you do not consent please leave this survey.

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding your perception of a company's role in society. Read the statements carefully and choose the option that best reflects your opinion, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Companies have an ethical obligation to advocate for social change.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Companies should wait for the government to take the lead on social change.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Companies should stay out of politics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When the government doesn't or won't try to fix a problem, companies should fix it themselves.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When the government tries to pass a bad law or unethical regulation, companies should try to stop them, even if it has nothing to do with the business.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Companies should make money first and consider social issues second or not at all.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Companies should "stay in their lane" and avoid political issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CEOs have an obligation to express their political viewpoints in public.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CEOs should push for social change when the government doesn't.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When government leaders fail to act on social problems, corporations should act first.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Companies should take a stand when the government won't.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Companies should take a stand,
even when the topic is
controversial.

Please briefly explain why you support or oppose your choices made above. (Optional)

The following set of questions relate to your consumer behaviour. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
When there is a choice, I always choose the product that contributes to the least amount of environmental damage.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have switched products for environmental reasons.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I understand the potential damage to the environment that some products can cause, I do not purchase those products.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whenever possible, I buy products packaged in reusable or recyclable containers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I make every effort to buy paper products (toilet paper, tissues, etc.) made from recycled paper.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will not buy a product if I know that the company that sells it is socially irresponsible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not buy products from companies that I know use sweatshop labor, child labor, or other poor working conditions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have paid more for environmentally friendly products when there is a cheaper, non-environmentally friendly alternative.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have paid more for socially responsible products when there is a cheaper, non-socially responsible alternative.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I make an effort to buy products and services from companies that pay all of their employees a living wage.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The following set of questions are about experiences related to who you are. This includes how others might look at you because of factors like your nationality, religion, gender, sexuality, disability or mental health issue, and income or others.

Because of who you are, have you ...

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
Heard, saw, or read others joking or laughing about you (or people like you).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been treated as if you are unfriendly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been treated as if you are less smart or capable than other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Asked inappropriate, offensive, or overly personal questions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been stared at or pointed at in public.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been called names or heard/saw your identity used as an insult.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding your trust in companies' commitment to addressing societal issues.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I trust that companies genuinely care about the societal issues they advocate for.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I trust companies to prioritize societal concerns over their own self-interests.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe companies' societal advocacy is sincere.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

This is the last part of the survey. Please provide the following demographic information to help us understand the participants better. Remember: all information are completely anonymous.

What is your **age** (in years)?

Which **gender** do you identify with the most?

- Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary / third gender
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other (please describe):
-

What is your **nationality**?

- German
 - Dutch
 - Other (please specify below):
-

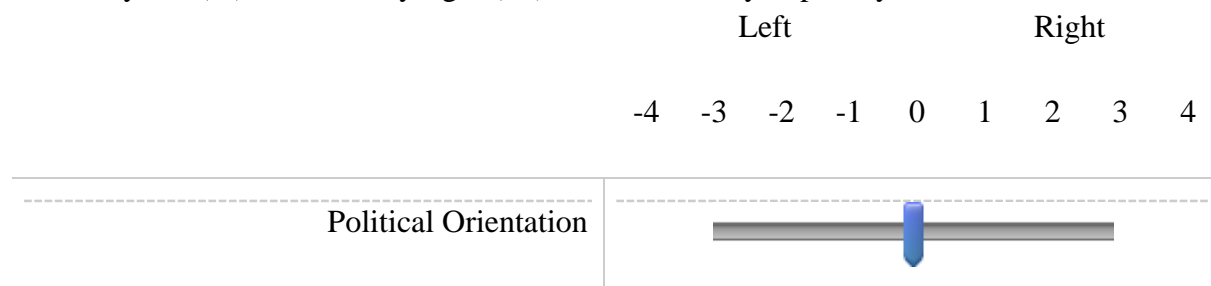
What is the **highest level of education** you have completed **or** that you are currently enrolled in?

- Primary school
 - Secondary school
 - High school graduate (Fach-/Abitur, HAVO/VWO)
 - Vocational Training (Berufliche Ausbildung, MBO)
 - Bachelor's degree or equivalent
 - Master's degree or equivalent
 - Phd or doctorate
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other (please specify below):
-

What is your **monthly personal net income** after taxes and deductions?

- €0 - €499
- €500 - €999
- €1,000 - €1,499
- €1,500 - €1,999
- €2,000 - €2,499
- €2,500 - €2,999
- €3,000 - €3,999
- €4,000 - €4,999
- €5,000 - €5,999
- €6,000 - €6,999
- €7,000 - €7,999
- €8,000 or more
- Prefer not to say

Here is a scale on which the **political views** that people might hold are arranged from **extremely left** (-4) to **extremely right** (+4). Where would you place yourself on this scale?



Thank you very much for participating in my bachelor thesis research. You can **finish the survey now by clicking the button in the bottom right corner**. If you have any additional comments or remarks about the survey feel free to leave them below. (Optional)

Remember: If you have any further questions, you have the opportunity to directly contact the researcher via e-mail (j.krumbeck@student.utwente.nl).

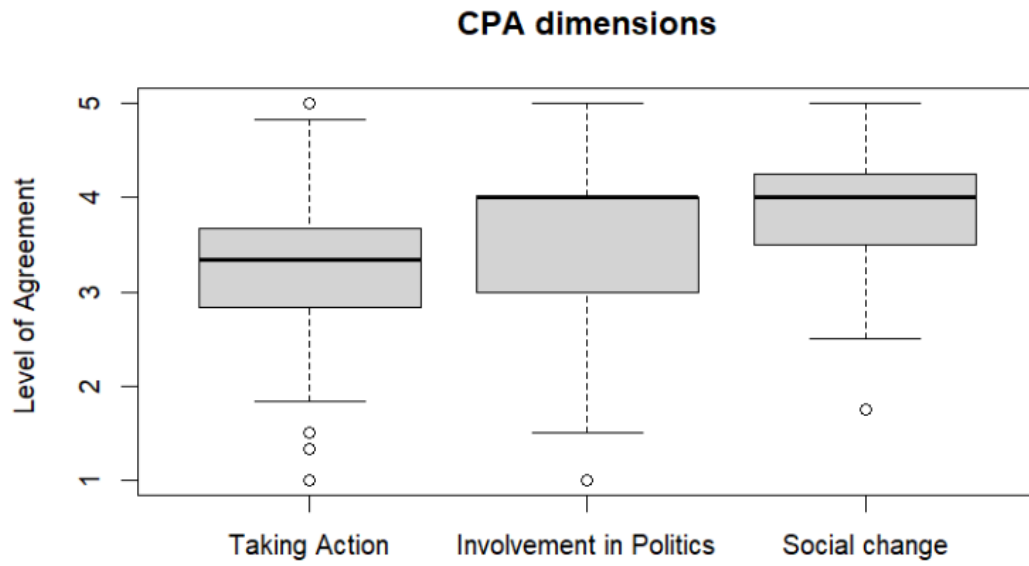
If you wish to receive the results of the survey, you can leave your e-mail address in the box below. Remember, all your answers remain anonymous and your e-mail is being stored in a separate place. After you receive the results in July, the data will be deleted. (Optional)

Additionally, if you know of others who might be interested in participating, we would greatly appreciate it if you could share this survey with them.

Appendix B

Figure 3

Visualization of CPA dimensions in Boxplots



Appendix C

Literature Log

Date	Website	Search Terms	Hits
28.02	Web of Science	("corporate Leadership" OR CEO OR "Corporate communication" OR "brand communication") AND (Politics OR political OR "extreme political") AND ("brand image" OR reputation OR "Corporate image" OR CSR)	91
06.03	Google Scholar	CSR and political standpoint	38.700
06.03	Web of Science	Political CSR OR political corporate social responsibility	1.096
13.03	Business Complete (EBSCO)	Corporate political advocacy	
13.03	Web of Science	("Corporate political standpoint" OR PCSR OR "political corporate social responsibility" OR "political engagement" OR "political alignment" OR "political standpoint" OR politic*) AND ("social media" OR "Social networking sites" OR Meta OR Instagram OR Facebook OR LinkedIn OR Twitter OR TikTok OR Snapchat OR YouTube) AND ("brand perception" OR "brand image" OR "brand reputation" OR "consumer perception" OR "brand awareness")	24
14.03	Google Scholar	„Corporate social advocacy“	1.030
14.03	Web of Science		
19.03	Web of Science	("Corporate political advocacy" OR "corporate social advocacy") and "social media"	16
22.03	Scopus	("corporate political advocacy" OR "corporate social advocacy") AND ("social media")	20
23.03	Web of Science	(corporate social responsibility OR CSR) AND ("consumer expectation" OR "consmer need")	3
23.03	Web of Science	("Social media" OR Instagram OR LinkedIn) AND ("Corporate social responsibility" OR "corporate political advocacy" OR "corporate social Advocacy")	508
26.03	Web of Science	("corporate political activism" OR "brand activism" OR "corporate political advocacy" OR "Corporate Social advocacy") AND (consumer response OR consumer attitude OR response)	69
08.04.	Web of Science	("public interest communication" OR thought leadership OR corporate citizenship) AND	374

08.04	Web of Science	(consumer OR political consumerism OR ethical purchasing behavior OR woke washing) ("public interest communication" OR thought leadership OR corporate citizenship OR corporate social responsibility OR corporate political advocacy OR corporate activism) AND (consumer OR political consumerism OR ethical purchasing behavior OR woke washing) (All Fields) – 4,905 – Web of Science Core Collection	4.905
08.04	Web of Science	("public interest communication" OR thought leadership OR corporate citizenship OR corporate social responsibility OR corporate political advocacy OR corporate activism) AND (consumer attitudes OR consumer reactions OR political consumerism OR woke washing) (All Fields) – 1,242 – Web of Science Core Collection	1.242
09.04	Google Scholar	Stance on controversial topics	364.000
13.04	Google Scholar	Brand activism	489.000
18.04	Web of Science	("political consumerism" OR boycott OR boycott) AND (consumer characteristics)	34
20.04	Web of Science	("socially responsible consumption" OR responsible consumerism)	243
20.04	Business Complete (EBSCO)	Corporate political advocacy OR brand activism OR corporate social advocacy OR corporate sociopolitical advocacy OR political CSR	583
22.04	Web of Science	("socially responsible consumption" OR responsible consumerism)	153
	Web of Science	("civic engagement" OR political participation) AND (characteristics OR demographics)	2.254
23.04	Web of Science	(societal role OR Political expectations OR social contract) AND (company OR brand)	83
25.04	Google Scholar	expectations toward corporate political advocacy legitimacy	170.000
02.05	Google Scholar	perceived discrimination intercategory	3.470
04.05	Web of Science	(brand activism OR corporate activism OR corporate political advocacy OR corporate social advocacy OR political CSR) AND (minority OR vulnerable groups OR empowerment OR discriminat*)	201
04.05	Web of Science	("brand activism" OR corporate activism OR corporate political advocacy OR corporate social advocacy OR political CSR) AND (minority OR	452

		vulnerable groups OR discriminat* OR outcomes)	
05.05	Web of Science	(consumer reactions OR consumer outcomes) AND (CSR OR brand activism OR political CSR OR Corporate political engagement) AND (price OR Prize)	30
05.05	Web of Science	(income OR income inequality) AND (CSR OR brand activism OR political CSR OR Corporate political engagement)	369
05.05	Web of Science	(Discriminat* OR disadvantaged OR minorit*) AND (Issue engagement OR issue importance OR emotional engagement) NOT (School)	3.090
06.05	Web of Science	(brand trust) AND (brand activism OR corporate political activism OR corporate social activism OR corporate sociopolitical advocacy OR corporate political advocacy OR political CSR)	22
06.05	Web of Science	(socially responsible consumer) AND (culture)	53
07.05	Web of Science	"political orientation"	2.263
08.05	Web of Science	"socially responsible consumption" OR "Socially responsible consumers"	112
08.05	Business Source Complete	Socially responsible consumpt*	117
27.05	Web of Science	"corporate political advocacy" OR "corporate political activism" OR "corporate social advocacy" OR "corporate social Activism" OR "brand activism"	149
06.06	Web of Science	(activism) AND Attitudes AND (minorit* OR Discriminat* OR racism OR LGBT* OR gender)	455
06.06	Web of Science	(activism OR advocacy OR Social Justice) AND (Attitudes OR expectations OR beliefs OR outcomes) AND (minorit* OR Discriminat* OR racism OR LGBT* OR gender OR communit*)	13.876
06.06	Web of Science	(activism OR advocacy OR Social Justice) AND (Attitudes OR expectations OR beliefs OR outcomes)AND (Among) AND (minorit* OR Discriminat* OR racism OR LGBT* OR gender OR communit*)	3.714
24.06	Web of Science	Public expectations OR public attitudes	104.299
24.06	Web of Science	(Public expectations OR public attitudes) AND (legitimacy OR social contract)	2.333

Note. Additional literature was found through snowballing approach.