Protest Rhetoric's Appeal:
How Moral Entrepreneurs Recruit the Media into Moral Struggles

Verena E. Wieser, University of Innsbruck, Austria
Andrea Hemetsberger, University of Innsbruck, Austria
Marius K. Luedicke, Cass Business School, UK

1

Abstract

Whenever the news media feature brand-related moral struggles over issues such as ethicality, fairness, or sustainability, brands often find themselves in the position of the culprit. However, brands may also take the opposite position, that of a moral entrepreneur that proactively raises and addresses moral issues that matter to society. In this chapter, we present a case study of the Austrian shoe manufacturer Waldviertler, which staged a protest campaign against Austria's financial market authorities (FMA) in the wake of the authorities demanding that the company closes its alternative (and illegal) consumer investment model after 10 years of operation. In response to this demand, the company organized protest marches, online petitions, and press conferences to reclaim the moral high ground for its financing model as a way out of the crunch following the global credit crisis and as a way to fight unfair administrative burdens. We present an interpretive analysis of brand communication material and media coverage that reveals how this brand used protest rhetoric on three levels – logos, ethos, and pathos – to reverse moral standards, to embody a rebel ethos, and to cultivate moral indignation. We also show how the media responded to protest rhetoric both with thematic coverage of context, trends, and general evidence, and with episodic coverage focusing on dramatic actions and the company owner's charisma. We close with a discussion of how *protestainment*, the stylization of a leader figure, and marketplace sentiments can ensure sustained media coverage of moral struggles.

Keywords: Moral entrepreneurs, brands as protestors,

social movements, protest rhetoric, news media analysis, protestainment

Brands as Moral Entrepreneurs

Brands permeate the cultural landscape of our times. To stand out in a *global sign wars* (Goldman & Papson, 1996), companies use brands to infuse their – fairly generic – products and services with unique images and meanings. However, in contemporary Western consumer cultures, consumers and other brand audiences are increasingly enabled and willing to 'peel away the corporate brand veneer' (Holt, 2002, p. 86) of commercially created images and meanings, and are demanding that brands take a position concerning the key moral questions of our times (Balsiger, 2016; Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård, 2007). For instance, consumers often publicly address moral concerns about controversial products and brand actions (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2009; Fournier & Avery, 2011: Gabl, Wieser, & Hemetsberger, 2016; Ward & Ostrom, 2006), or discredit consumers of products they consider immoral (Luedicke, Thompson, & Giesler, 2010). The *brand publics* (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015) that emerge on social media leverage these consumer protests to the extent that they reach global audiences almost instantly and at negligible costs.

During such moral struggles, brand managers, consumers, and their public agents become moral entrepreneurs who 'contend with each other to define which kinds of actors and which kinds of persons are more or less worthy and what kinds of practices are permitted or forbidden' (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013, p. 59). Brands can take at least two positions as moral entrepreneurs in such moral struggles:

First, when starting from a culprit position in cases of complaints or corruption scandals, brands take a reactive and defensive position so as to preserve brand legitimacy in the news media. Brand managers can use a wide variety of practical rhetorical strategies to take a moral position. Denial, defense, excuses, or counter-attacks are just some examples that the brand crisis management research has identified as response strategies that resonate well with brand audiences (James, Wooten, & Dushek, 2011). For instance, when in 2015 and subsequently, VW Dieselgate revealed that the bypassing of emission regulations had become the rule in the automobile industry rather than just an exception, the brand was compelled to react, and all the major industry players were eventually forced to admit that their corporate cultures had gone astray.

Second, when taking a proactive leadership position in a moral struggle, brands take the role of 'moral crusaders' (Becker, 1995, p. 169) when they seek to demonstrate that collectively agreed-upon moral

standards in the marketplace need remediation (Oka, 2018; Shamir, 2008). For instance, the web browser Mozilla continues to position itself as a market agent 'pledging for a healthy Internet' and treating consumer data fairly. In its manifesto, the company states that it follows the principle that 'Individuals' security and privacy on the internet are fundamental and must not be treated as optional' (https://www.mozilla.org/en-US/about/manifesto/). With such rhetoric strategies, brands lead public disputes about moral questions, thereby shaping what is considered right/wrong, good/bad, or worthy/unworthy in the industries in which they operate.

How do brands as moral entrepreneurs succeed in proactively leveraging their moral positions in moral struggles? As branding research has to date studied the rhetorical strategies of brands in the defensive position, it has not yet provided theoretical knowledge on what rhetoric strategy types brands adopt in the proactive position, nor on how effective these strategies may be for attracting media coverage.

We address this gap by analyzing a brand that underwent an intense, mass-mediated episode of moral protest. Protests and civil disobedience are extreme and contentious tactics for moral entrepreneurs. Brands that take the path of protest in moral struggles seek to publicly air moral grievances, and to create pressure and alliances to support their alternative moral vision. Since protestors commonly make strategic and provocative appeals to persuade the public about their cause, our first analytical interest in this chapter concerns the *protest rhetoric* that brands apply as rhetoric strategies in moral struggles. Further, since the mass media commonly plays a key role in picking up, disseminating, and ultimately (de)legitimating these appeals, our second analytical interest concerns the question how protest rhetoric resonates with the media.

We will first review existing knowledge on the cultural significance of protest as a strategy of moral entrepreneurship, and on the tools and social dynamics of protest rhetoric and protest mediation in the branding, social movement, and communication research. We then present the empirical case of an Austrian shoe-making company to reveal how a brand can successfully attract sustained mass-mediated coverage and public support by using protest rhetoric. The chapter closes with a discussion on how *protestainment* (Orkibi, 2006, p. 554), the stylization of a leader figure as well as marketplace sentiments attract media coverage of moral struggles.

Protest Rhetoric

Protest is a strategy of raising a voice against specific practices or conditions that are perceived as unjust and unfair or unacceptable for reasons other than justice or fairness, and as violating some social, political, or religious standard of morality (Gamson, 1995; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). In Western societies of the 20th and 21st centuries, protests have become a central and democratically legitimate outlet for political agenda-setting, for carrying critical feedback to social institutions, and most generally for enriching the marketplace of ideas (Gamson, 1990). Traditionally, activist groups or social movements combine contentious protest activities such as protest marches or boycotts with conventional tactics of promoting their strategic agenda, such as lobbying, petition-writing, or service provision (Corrigall-Brown, 2016).

However, in the digitalized world of the 21st century, a single person can carry a moral grievance to a level of public concern through protest action mediatized in online and social media channels. More than ever before, protests rely on skillful moral entrepreneurs who are adept at mobilizing cultural tools for strategic purposes (Jasper, 1999). Moral entrepreneurs both formulate and promote protest goals, and apply various communicative tactics to establish a powerful community of dissent (Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007). Building on social movement research, consumer researchers have revealed that, when consumers protest against brands in mass-mediated environments, such communication tactics include rhetoric frames of injustice, identity, and agency (Gamson, 1995; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). However, in assuming that these cultural agents who initiate and lead protests play a key role in substantiating and enriching moral struggles with personal experiences and moral sentiments, these frames neither capture how protestors moralize their cause with emotions of anger, fear, suspicion, disgust, indignation, outrage, or hope (Jasper, 2010; Reed, 2004; Satterfield, 2004), nor is it clear if and how brands equally apply these frames in the case of protest.

Rhetoric analysis – the world's oldest tradition of cultural analysis (Jasper, 2010) – provides an analysis tool that captures both the strategic and the emotional levels of protest communication (Jasper, 1999). Generally, rhetoric refers to the 'use of symbols to persuade others to change their attitudes, beliefs, values, or actions' (Cheney, Christensen, Christensen, & Lair, 2004, p. 79). Rhetoric strategies are key tools

for moral entrepreneurs to compete in contests of legitimacy by revealing contradictions in current institutional orders, or through connecting their own suggested innovations to broader scenarios of change (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). With its roots in Aristotelean philosophy, rhetoric analysis reveals how moral entrepreneurs' argumentation motivates individual and collective action via applying three primary persuasion strategies: *logos, ethos*, and *pathos*. *Logos* refers to appeals to logics, evidence, and proof; facts and figures often serve as persuasion tools. *Ethos* refers to persuasive arguments that rely on establishing a protestor's credibility and on depicting and developing power relationships. *Pathos* includes attempts to persuade others based on emotions and values relevant to an audience (Leach, 2000; Scaraboto, Rossi, & Costa, 2012).

In sum, rhetoric analysis suggests that protestors use the protest rhetoric of promoting basic principles (*logos*), of establishing their position in society (*ethos*), and of airing their sentiments (*pathos*) to persuade the public about their cause in protest communication. But how effectively do these rhetoric strategies resonate with a protest's target audience? We will now discuss how protest rhetoric resonates with the media – a target audience that is specifically relevant for the dissemination and amplification of protest messages (Andrews & Caren, 2010).

Protest Mediation

TV stations, newspapers, and Internet editorial offices can either be a force for diffusing and amplifying protest rhetoric, or for undermining or marginalizing protestors' substantive agendas (Andrews & Caren, 2010; Wouters, 2015). Both social movement and communication scholars have raised two key questions in their studies of the interplays between protestors and news coverage: *what* gets covered (access/selection), and *how* protest gets covered (meaning/description).

Concerning selection, the media pays limited attention to protest. Only few protests make it into the news, and even fewer remain in the news long (Gottlieb, 2015). Researchers have identified various conditions that influence the media's protest selections. The protest type, location, political situation, and the extent to which a story reproduces general power relationships determine selection in relation to a

protest's contextual environment (Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong, 2012; Oliver & Maney, 2000). Further, organizational routines in the news market become relevant when for instance busy news days and protest locations outside journalists' common territory discourage selection (Oliver & Meyers, 1999). Finally, protestors' choices of tactics and rhetorics have key roles in media selection. By stressing a protest story's novelty and drama, protestors can arouse the media's interest in sensational and contentious actions (Corrigall-Brown, 2016).

Concerning description, media coverage of protest commonly entails both thematic and episodic coverage (Iyengar, 1991). According to Wouters (2015, p. 477): 'Thematic coverage places events into context, pays attention to trends, and presents general evidence. In contrast, episodic news treats events as particular cases in the form of event-oriented reports.' Wouters (2015) further suggests distinguishing between *episodic event coverage*, which focuses on an event's details, and *episodic exemplar coverage*, which focuses on personal testimonies. Although the media traditionally covers both themes and events, social movement and communication scholars emphasize the media's structural bias towards highlighting a protest event's noise, conflict, and spectacle. The *protest paradigm* (McLeod & Hertog, 1999) holds that the media applies routinized templates that favor a protest event's characteristics. The media's tendency to focus on dramatic action, and protestors' common reaction to issue more dramatic rhetoric and action in return spur a vicious cycle: When the media portrays protests as overtly deviant, derogatory, and threatening, the coverage tends to draw attention away from protestors' thematic agendas and concerns, offering little substance that allows audiences to connect to the cause. Ultimately, media coverage marginalizes protests causes in the medium to long run.

In sum, communication research suggests that moral entrepreneurs who engage in protest need to pursue two key strategies if they are to get media coverage: protestors must provide incentives for selection in protest communication, including dramatic and novel protest rhetoric, as well as a balanced portfolio of theme-oriented and event-oriented rhetoric to maintain media interest. We will now reveal how these two qualifying factors played out in the protest campaign of an Austrian shoe manufacturing brand that challenged the Austrian state's moral institutions by protesting against regulations.

The Moral Struggle between Waldviertler and the FMA

How does a protest issued by a brand enroll the media and, in turn, how does the media enroll the protest? The case of the shoe brand Waldviertler, which engages in public moral protest, provides rich insights into the characteristics of moral entrepreneurs' protest rhetoric. Waldviertler produces high-quality leather shoes and furniture in Austria and Hungary and sells shoes and selected lifestyle products in the integrated store network GEA (https://gea-waldviertler.at/). In 2012, 2013, and 2014, this Austrian brand issued a protest campaign against legal standards concerning the regulation of crowdfunding initiatives in order to promote its own lending-based crowdfunding model as morally superior to existing regulations and related financial practices.

Waldviertler provides a case of a moral entrepreneurship seeking to morally legitimize something pragmatic: When in the late 1990s local banks curtailed the company's credit limit despite a positive balance statement and growing profits, the company started a consumer investment model called *Savings Club*. This club allowed fans of the brand to lend the company funds, letting them earn interest; it helped to refloat the company by getting €2.8 million from 250 investors over 10 years. However, in 2012, the Austrian financial market authorities (FMA) declared that the model violated banking regulations owing to the absence of a banking concession. The authorities assigned a penalty, demanded that the financing model be closed or changed towards legal compliance by providing investors with the necessary information about the model. However, Waldviertler refused to comply, seeking to legitimate its illegal practice by delegitimizing existing legal standards. The brand owner, Heinrich Staudinger, argued that small and medium-sized companies could not carry the high costs of the information required by current legal obligations. The company demanded changes to existing regulatory frameworks for alternative funding solutions, organizing online petitions, media conferences, and protest marches to parliament, and started a legal fight that lasted from December 2012 to January 2014. Throughout these years of protest, the Waldviertler vs. the FMA case attracted vast media coverage and enjoyed international attention from lobbyists to institutions in financial market regulatory frameworks.

Waldviertler vs. the FMA has had both a brand legacy and an institutional legacy: On a brand level, the company's offerings gained visibility among more diverse audiences beyond its brand fan base, and the company owner gained access to prominent presentation platforms that allowed him to present the brand's products and missions. For instance, in the spring of 2016, the moral struggle between Waldviertler and the FMA provided the plot for the movie *Life Is No Rehearsal*. Today, the media still carries the brand's *shoe rebel* ethos in its coverage on the brand. At an institutional level, regulatory authorities summoned the company in January 2014 to change the model and to pay a much smaller penalty than previously indicated. When Waldviertler asked investors to sign subordination agreements, all, but eight investors signed the agreement, and hundreds more sought to participate in the funding model. This heightened public interest sparked political debate and added political legitimacy to the matter of regulatory frameworks for alternative funding models. When Austria's national political parties put the adaptation of juridical frameworks on the political agenda, the minimum consensus was to raise the investment sum ceiling that determines the need for formalized information to European standards (*Prospektpflicht*), and to limit the sum an individual can invest in crowd investment formats (Alternativfinanzierungsgesetz AltFG/September 2016).

How did Waldviertler as a brand manage to leverage its moral position in this moral struggle? How did it recruit the mass media into its moral cause? We will now outline the results of our protest rhetoric and mediation analysis: Publicly available brand communication material (e.g., letters to investors, media releases, public statements, and videos of public talks by the company owner) provided a rich foundation for deriving the Waldviertler brand's protest rhetoric throughout around two years of protesting (Leach, 2000). Newspaper articles on the case drawn from four of Austria's largest newspaper outlets further showed how the print media selects and reports on such protest rhetoric. A selection of the articles most commented on between October 2012 and January 2014 provided the basis for our protest mediation analysis, following the assumption that these articles most resonated with news audiences and sparked the most discussion on protest events and goals (Stoeckl, 2014). Several rounds of comparing the collected texts to the rhetorical means of persuasion of logos, ethos, and pathos revealed a solid rhetoric strategy set. Interviews with the company owner, key company employees, and two journalists of key media outlets further confirmed the

prevalence and relevance of these rhetorical strategies in this moral struggle (for an overview of data sources, see Table 1).

Data type	Data size
Public brand communication on https://gea-waldviertler.at/: media releases, quarterly magazine, open letters to investors and political agents, two YouTube videos, a radio interview	45 documents Three transcripts of public talks and radio interviews
Newspaper articles of four major national online news outlets (Presse, der Standard, Kurier, orf.at)	The 30 articles most commented on
Interviews with the company owner and five employees (Heinrich Staudinger, other names were anonymized)	Transcripts of 240 minutes of interviews
Telephone interviews by research assistants with two journalists (the names and outlets were anonymized)	Transcripts of 45 minutes of interviews

Table 1: Data Pool for our Protest Rhetoric and Protest Mediation Analysis

Media Recruitment into Moral Struggles

In the struggle between Waldviertler and the FMA, Waldviertler turned a legal charge against the company into a moral question of justice: Does the state take good care by providing *just* ways to finance businesses? Does it put certain parties in the market at a (dis)advantage? These questions became increasingly relevant in Austria when the global financial crisis hit the country's finance market in 2007, and companies started to look for alternative ways to finance their businesses in response to the crisis. Simultaneously, the fact of one of Austria's largest banking institutions going bust initiated a national discussion about whether the state takes seriously its responsibility for governing and monitoring financial institutions. In this contextual environment, Waldviertler positioned itself as a moral entrepreneur by criticizing the state for imposing unfair administrative burdens on alternative financing models, and by claiming that the company's own financing model is better able to save small and medium-sized companies from bankruptcy than the currently available legal financial products. By delegitimizing existing legal and institutional frameworks in its rhetoric (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), the brand ultimately intended to persuade the public about the legitimacy of its own illegal financing practice. It did so by employing three major rhetorical strategies: promoting alternative moral standards, embodying a rebel ethos, and cultivating

moral indignation. In turn, the media selected, echoed, and legitimated these rhetorical strategies via thematic and episodic coverage.

Reversing Moral Standards

Rhetoricians who use *logos* rely on evidence and proof by referring to facts or careful reasoning. Clearly, when speakers on behalf of the financial market authorities issued legal charges against Waldviertler's funding model, they strongly relied on logical appeals. The authorities claimed that their objective was to ensure investor protection and to check whether companies provide investors with structured and transparent information about risks and securities so that they could make informed investment choices. However, throughout this moral struggle, the FMA missed making explicit this underlying moral argument. Instead, speakers steadily emphasized that the law is the moral authority, and that it is above the particular case of Waldviertler: "No matter if it is good people from the Waldviertel, or crooks – laws exist, and one must obey" (FMA speaker, cited in "The shoemaker as rebellious banker", der Standard, October 18, 2012). Further, these speakers made clear that the moral standards of the law were not negotiable: "FMA: Nobody is allowed to play bank" (headline indirectly citing the FMA's COO, der Standard, November 13, 2012). In the later stages of this moral struggle, the FMA was rather silent, shifting the responsibility for leading the moral debate to Austria's political parties.

Waldviertler counterattacked its opponents' rigid normative position with ridicule and provocation. When the authorities criticized the *Sparverein* funding model's name (Savings Club) for providing misleading cues of financial growth and of secured deposits to investors, Waldviertler provocatively renamed the model the *Apfelbäumchen Club* (Apple Tree Club) to signal protest, growth, and tangibility. It also attacked the dominant moral standards concerning information provision in the finance market. Staudinger protested against the complexity of information provided in finance and the high cost of producing vast amounts of impractical information. He promoted the idea that investment information needed to become more 'tangible', 'accessible', 'transparent', 'meaningful', and 'understandable' for the people who want to invest in local brands. To deliver transparency, Waldviertler regularly invited investors

11

to company visits, and personally asked fans of the brand for advice and assistance when the company needed specific resources, such as networking contacts or specialized competences. According to Staudinger, investors' money should not 'vanish into the dark', which he saw happening in anonymous finance products in the global financial market. Instead, investors should be able to monitor directly and locally how a company invests money in tangible products and facilities:

> " "My" model is an attempt to depart from the beaten track to discover and capture new possibilities for a meaningful monetary economy [….]. Thousands of people, probably hundreds of thousands, will be delighted to put their money to work at a place where they can see what happens with their money." (Staudinger, open letter, November 1, 2012)

At the same time, the brand criticized the FMA's legal solution to the matter: "It is a paradox: The FMA wants investors to be safe, but the [solution of the] "subordination agreement" is a fool's license: the investor is informed but not safe!" (Staudinger, research interview).

The strategic placement of counterarguments in the media ultimately undermined the argumentative legitimacy of the brand's opponents. It questioned the assumption that 'more information' is the appropriate moral ground for laws that help consumers to judge an investment's value and security. Instead, Staudinger repeatedly praised his company's characteristics as a safety merit, applauding investors who favored direct investments in tangible products such as shoes and regional companies like Waldviertler over other, more complex financial products. Further, he claimed that market authorities are becoming increasingly alienated from both companies' realities and investors' needs. To back up his argumentation, Staudinger declined the authorities' invitation to meet for clarifying talks, inviting the authorities to his company instead. He demanded that the FMA should be "informed about what is actually happening in reality" (Staudinger, "Staudinger invites FMA to the Waldviertel", noe.orf.at, November 3, 2012).

The brand's provocative reversal of dominant moral standards about how to provide information to investors resonated with the media. The brand's constant rationalizations of its funding model captured much news space: "It's not about him or his company, he [Heinrich Staudinger] says, but about people's

right to a good and self-determined life. A killer argument. But one that appeals to the people." (Steindorfer, Die Presse, December 13, 2012)

This journalist's assessment shows how the media viewed Staudinger's strong rhetoric – as compelling and authentic. Despite its finance product's illegality, the brand could credibly claim to fight for the people and against state repression. As the news coverage of this moral struggle triggered vast reader discussions on newspaper fora, the media continued reporting on the background and developments in the case. To provide a balanced view of the moral positions of the sides in this struggle, all media outlets presented expert opinions on the legal case, and placed opponents' arguments into Austria's national legal and political context. Thematic coverage connected the case to a public debate about how to achieve a more transparent global financial market system (Willke, 2010). Further, thematic coverage connected the case with a current trend in the finance market: According to the media, the case showed how a growing global interest in crowdfunding and crowd investment initiatives has the potential to stir up the structures of institutionalized credit markets (Ordanini, 2009; Ordanini, Miceli, Pizzetti & Parasuraman, 2011). Such thematic contextualization highlighted the brand's protest theme as a legitimate moral endeavor.

Embodying a Rebel Ethos

Rhetoricians who apply *ethos* promote the protesting entity's integrity and credibility. Waldviertler established its credibility as legitimate moral entrepreneur in this moral struggle by cultivating a rebel ethos across two levels of brand meaning: the product and production level, and the persona level.

On the product and production level, Waldviertler had positioned itself as a rebel in the shoe-making industry long before the protest episode began. Since its foundation in the early 1980s, the factory had enforced the product ethos of a 'sustainable' and 'local' shoe brand that was proud to create jobs in an economically weak region in Western Europe, to safeguard and develop the shoe-making artisanship expertise in Western Europe, and not to harm the environment, with its production operating on renewable resources. With a local production facility that is open to visitors, the company claimed to reconnect consumers with the production history of consumer goods for daily use.

With this positioning, the brand set a counterpoint to the product obsolescence strategies prevalent in the shoe industry and to the global dispersion and alienation of modern supply chains prevalent in the fashion industry in the 21st century (Klein, 1999; Guiltinan, 2009). Rhetorically, Staudinger repeatedly highlighted the company's extraordinariness in speeches and newspaper interviews by presenting selected moments in the company history that proved how it has consistently had a rebel ethos:

> "Back in the days [of starting the business] we were crazy enough to think that even if everyone [other industries] moves out of the region, we'll start right here […] it was all done with passion and energy." (Staudinger, 'Ö1' radio interview, February 15, 2015).

On the persona level, Staudinger embodied the ethos of an inspirational and innovative charismatic leader, in several facets (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). First, he was aware of the current sociopolitical context, stating that the financial market authorities should prove their integrity and accountability in this case in the context of a public common distrust after several national political scandals and the global financial crisis. Second, he was aware of the needs of potential followers, claiming to speak on behalf of thousands of small and medium-sized companies who were seeking a way out of credit constraints and administrative burdens. Third, he – credibly – promoted the strategic vision of achieving 'a solution for all', promising not to stop fighting until the authorities found a 'sustainable' solution that went beyond this single case. Finally, he demonstrated unconventional behavior, starting a fight with the FMA instead of giving in, proving a willingness to take high personal risk, refusing to pay the assigned penalty, and claiming to be willing to go to jail instead.

The persistence of the rebellious protest rhetoric of 'proving that the seemingly impossible is possible' improved this protestor's credibility and ultimately ensured media interest. When reporting on the moral struggle between Waldviertler and the FMA, the media provided detailed background information on the products, the company, and the company owner in episodic coverage. While the spirit of innovation and transgression of the funding model had novelty appeal, the leader's rebel ethos provided an appealing dramatic narrative for the media:

"It was of course a nice story to tell; I mean, when he got one summons after the other and one request for payment after the other, or one call to change his system after the other, he in principle just refuse every time." (journalist, research interview).

The journalist's statement indicates that Staudinger's high-risk strategy of persistent disobedience against state regulations helped the media portrayal of Waldviertler as a 'shoe rebel'. The *episodic event coverage* by the media continuously covered all protest activities, including media conferences, TV debates, protest marches to parliament, and talks with politicians. The *episodic exemplar coverage* focused on Staudinger's extraordinary appearance, character, and career, as the charismatic leader constantly provided the media with catchy quotes, stories, and images (i.e., he consistently entered the public stage dressed in a red jacket and with an attitude of defiance). The media readily employed the David vs. Goliath template to describe the power relationships in this case: " "David against Goliath – that appeals to the people", said a journalist, almost excusing herself in the direction of FMA chief officer Helmut Ettl." (Steindorfer, Die Presse, November 13, 2012).

The David vs. Goliath myth is a popular journalist script that portrays a dramatic underdog situation of a powerless individual overturning the overwhelming power of an institution. In the case of the moral struggle between Waldviertler and the FMA, this media script suggested that this small manufacturer fighting a large state apparatus was not hopeless, but heroic. It spoke into the brand's position as legitimate moral entrepreneur whose protest against the rigid enforcement of state regulations enjoyed support from the audience.

Cultivating Moral Indignation

Rhetoricians who apply *pathos* seek to persuade others based on emotions and values relevant to the audience. In the case of the moral struggle between Waldviertler and the FMA, the company cultivated emotions of indignation about moral injustice, in two specific ways: dramatizing the morally shocking experience of facing bankruptcy and blaming opponents.

'Moral shock' is a 'precipitating event' (Jasper, 2010, p. 889) that starts a process of rethinking 'moral standards and considering action to redress the wrong'. Waldviertler faced a major moral shock when the banks curtailed credit to the company after evaluating its financial situation in the late 1990s. In 2012, Staudinger repeatedly emphasized that he was treated unfairly when the banks suddenly denied the company new funds despite the fact that – according to him – the company was growing and prospering: "At that time I learned that it is too risky for my company to trust banks." (Staudinger, company news, October 30, 2012).

Waldviertler interpreted the bank's denial of funds as hubris, and the regulatory foundations that guided the bank's decision as a discrimination against small businesses, who suffer owing to limited access to credit. The company owner repeated the story of this precipitating event in public talks, letters to investors, and radio and TV interviews, to legitimize the moral impetus for initiating an alternative funding model, and to invite the public to doubt the trustworthiness of institutions in the finance industry at large.

Staudinger further invited the audience to join his indignation against the structures of modern finance market and the banks' roles therein through joint blaming. By blaming, he sought to clarify who is the victim and who is the villain, and to spur outrage that seeks to turn pity for victims into action (Jasper, 2010). In *pathos* language, the company blamed the banks for not fulfilling their responsibility to fund small and medium-sized enterprises or social projects with lower profit prospects than conventional projects. According to Waldviertler, the banks did not meet their traditional responsibility to build bridges (and shields) between savers and borrowers (Cowton, 2002). It also structurally blamed rigid finance market politics, which led to the exclusion of social groups from finance. Waldviertler claimed that financial market authorities excluded those who are the 'backbone' of a 'just', 'participatory', and 'thriving' economy with their strict enforcement of regulations, and privileged the established banking system over more innovative alternatives. The following quote epitomized the company's concerns about how legal regulations and the prevailing structures in the finance markets benefitted those with substantial capital resources and threatened small companies: "Our financing model heals; that of banks amplifies the crisis." (Staudinger, media release, January 11, 2013).

The media portrayed Staudinger's expressions of indignation and his provocative blaming in episodic coverage. By delivering emotional claims in the form of direct and indirect quotes by the company owner, the media left judgments about these claims' righteousness up to the audience. The following excerpt from a newspaper article depicts how Staudinger's blaming the market authorities – in this case, referring to their role in a national banking scandal – entered the public stage:

> 'The authorities have prompted him to pay back the 3 million Euro to the 250 investors, since he is not entitled to do banking business. Staudinger proposed that the FMA should go and look for the lost billion [in a previous national banking scandal] instead of hounding his company.'
>
> ("Staudinger earns prize for brilliant marketing", Die Presse, December 12, 2012)

By covering Staudinger's provocative blaming, the media helped the brand to assemble moral convergence with audiences who identified with the protestor's situation (Luckmann, 2002). In online news fora, readers published their own experiences with banks concerning funding issues, blamed state authorities that they give banks a structural advantage, and celebrated the company for fighting this inequity. While some readers defended the authorities' position, others emotionally identified with the company and contacted it directly to provide their financial and/or emotional support. In interviews, Staudinger stated that such feedback and reciprocation of indignation by various media audiences boosted his confidence in his moral struggle, and encouraged him to keep defending his funding model.

Protestainment as Branding Strategy

How do brands as moral entrepreneurs succeed in proactively leveraging their moral positions in moral struggles? Here, we explore what rhetoric strategy types brands take as proactive moral agents in the marketplace, and how effective these strategies are for attracting media coverage. The Waldviertler vs. the FMA case demonstrates how a brand can gain sustained brand recognition in the media by protesting and fighting a legal and rhetoric battle against state authorities. The case confirms that brands, rather than being the targets of antagonism in moral struggles, can also successfully lead antagonism in moral struggles. Thus,

protest is one of many potential proactive moralized branding tactics that may help companies to gain broad media coverage. The case also reveals that three factors make protest effective as a branding strategy in terms of sustaining media interest in a moral struggle:

First, protest becomes effective when brands apply variants of *protestainment* (Orkibi, 2016, p. 554) via criticizing and ridiculing the law in their *logos rhetoric*. According to Orkibi (2016, p. 559), a strategy of protestainment that combines humor, vernacular speech, and pop culture references in political protest has the potential to reverse knowledge diffusion processes: 'from authorized knowledge descending from an epistemic community, perceived as elitist and partisan, to social knowledge rooted in shared values, perceived as an authentic expression of a popular trend in the public opinion' (Orkibi, 2016, p. 559). The brand triggered such reversal processes in the Waldviertler vs. the FMA case when the company challenged the institutional controls of non-compliance (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) via provocation, radical confidence, and perseverance, when the media elevated the rebellious brand to a competent pioneer of novel crowdfunding solutions, and when state representatives needed to defend and renegotiate the moral foundations of existing institutional orders in turn.

Second, protest becomes effective when brands push the personification of the protest entity in their *ethos rhetoric*. Through repeated, unconventional public speeches, Waldviertler's owner lent his face and character to the brand's protest. The media readily reported on the human moral entrepreneur behind the corporate moral entrepreneur in episodic coverage. Although such coverage potentially moves the protest goals into the background, Waldviertler vs. the FMA reveals that a brand leader's increased celebrity status is an enduring brand equity asset. Thus, the case corroborates research that recognizes a leader's critical yet ambivalent role in delivering moral aspirations to protest audiences in the context of political protest movements (Jasper, 2010).

Third, protest becomes effective when brands resonate with the collective marketplace sentiments of their time in their *pathos rhetoric* (Gopaldas, 2014; Holt, 2002). In Waldviertler vs. the FMA, the *fairness of finance* issue attracted media attention, since it connected to marketplace sentiments of distrust and frustration against financing businesses and governing institutions after the global financial crisis. In such a

climate of doubt, the company managed to position itself as a victim of administrative burdens, to channel indignation against state repression, and to elevate it to a moral crusader fighting 'the establishment' in the finance market on behalf of those who also suffer under financial regulations. Surprisingly, via hyper-performing emotional appeals, the company managed to embody the social aspiration for leadership in finance governance more than state authorities could. Ultimately, the Waldviertler vs. the FMA case demonstrated that, even in an age of moral relativism, the strategy of rhetorically positioning a brand as a protesting moral crusader is a viable tool in fighting moral struggles.

References

Andrews, K. T., & Caren, N. (2010). Making the news: Movement organizations, media attention, and the public agenda. *American Sociological Review*, *75*(6), 841-866.

Arvidsson, A., & Caliandro, A. (2015). Brand public. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *42*(5), 727-748.

Balsiger, P. (2016). Moral struggles in markets: The fight against battery cages and the rise of cage-free eggs in Switzerland. *European Journal of Sociology*, *57*(3), 419-450.

Becker, H. S. (1995). Moral entrepreneurs: The creation and enforcement of deviant categories. *Deviance: A Symbolic Interactionist Approach*, 169-178.

Braunsberger, K., & Buckler, B. (2009). Consumers on a mission to force a change in public policy: A qualitative study of the ongoing Canadian seafood boycott. *Business and Society Review*, *114*(4), 457-489.

Boyle, M., McLeod, D., & Armstrong, C. (2012). Adherence to the protest paradigm. The influence of protest goals and tactics on news coverage in U.S. and international newspapers. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, *17*(2), 127-144.

Cheney, G., Christensen, L.T., Christensen, C., & Lair, D. J. (2004). Corporate rhetoric in organizational discourse. In Grant, D., Hardy, C., Oswick, C. & L. Putnam (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse* (pp. 79-103). London: Sage.

Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1998). *Charismatic leadership in organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Corrigall-Brown, C. (2016). What gets covered? An examination of media coverage of the environmental movement in Canada. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, *53*(1), 72-93.

Cowton, C. J. (2002). Integrity, responsibility and affinity: Three aspects of ethics in banking. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, *11*, 393-400.

Den Hond, F., & De Bakker, G. A. (2007). Ideologically motivated activism: How activist groups influence corporate social change activities. *Academy of Management Review*, *32*(3), 901-924.

"FMA: Nobody is allowed to play bank" (2012, November 12). der Standard. Retrieved from https://derstandard.at.

Fournier, S., & Avery, J. (2011). The uninvited brand. *Business Horizons*, *54*(3), 193-207.

Gabl, S., Wieser, V. E., & Hemetsberger, A. (2016). Public Brand Auditing: A Pathway to Brand Accountability. *Research in Consumer Behavior*, *18*, 147-167.

Gamson, W. A. (1990). *The strategy of social protest.* Second Edition, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Gamson, W.A. (1995). Constructing social protest. In Johnston, H. & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *Social Movements and Culture* (pp. 85-106). Minneapolis: Univ. Minn. Press.

Goldman, R., & Papson, S. (1996). *Sign wars: The cluttered landscape of advertising*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Gopaldas, A. (2014). Marketplace sentiments. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *41*(4), 995-1014.

Gottlieb, J. (2015). Protest news framing cycle: How the New York Times covered Occupy Wall Street. *International Journal of Communication*, *9*, 231-253.

Guiltinan, J. (2009). Creative destruction and destructive creations: Environmental ethics and planned obsolescence. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *89*(1), 19-28.

Hitlin, S. & Vaisey, S. (2013). The new sociology of morality. *Sociology*, *39*(1), 51-68.

Holt, D. B. (2002). Why do brands cause trouble? A dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *29*(1), 70-90.

Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago, IL: The

    University of Chicago Press.

James, E. H., Wooten L.P., & Dushek, K. (2011). Crisis management: Informing a new leadership

    research agenda. *Academy of Management Annals*, *5*(1), 455-493.

Jasper, J. M. (1999). *The art of moral protest: Culture, biography, and creativity in social movements*.

    Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jasper, J. M. (2010). Cultural approaches in the sociology of social movements. In Klandermans, B. & C.

    Roggeband (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Movements Across Disciplines*, New York: Springer, 59-

    109.

Klein, N. (1999). *No logo: Taking aim at the brand bullies*, New York, NY: Picador.

Lawrence, T. B., & Suddaby, R. (2006). Institutions and institutional work. In Clegg, S. R., Hardy, C.,

    Lawrence, T. B. & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Organization Studies* (pp. 215-

    254). London: Sage.

Leach, J. (2000). Rhetorical analysis, in Bauer, M. W. & G. Gaskell (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with

    text, image, and sound: A practical handbook* (pp. 207-226). London: Sage Publications.

Luckmann, T. (2002). Moral communication in modern societies. *Human Studies*, *25*(1), 19-32.

Luedicke, M. K., Thompson, C. J., & Giesler, M. (2010). Consumer identity work as moral protagonism:

    How myth and ideology animate a brand-mediated moral conflict. *Journal of Consumer Research*,

    36(6), 1016-1032.

McLeod, D. M., & Hertog, J. K. (1999). Social control and the mass media's role in the regulation of

    protest groups: The communicative acts perspective. In Demers, D., & K. Viswanath (Eds.), *Mass

    media, social control and social change* (pp. 305-330). Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Oliver, P. E., & Myers, D. J. (1999). How events enter the public sphere: Conflict, location, and

    sponsorship in local newspaper coverage of public events. *American Journal of Sociology*,

    105, 38-87.

Oliver, P. E., & Maney, G. M. (2000). Political processes and local newspaper coverage of protest events: From selection bias to triadic interactions. *American Journal of Sociology*, *106*(2), 463-505.

Oka, C. (2018). Brands as labour rights advocates? Potential and limits of brand advocacy in global supply chains. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, *27*(2), 95-107.

Ordanini, A. (2009, March 3). Crowd funding: Customers as investors. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com.

Ordanini, A., Miceli, L., Pizzetti, M. & Parasuraman, A. (2011). Crowd-funding: Transforming customers into investors through innovative service platforms. *Journal of Service Management*, *22*(4), 443-470.

Orkibi, E. (2016). The pop-culturization of political dissent: Humor and rhetoric as protestainment in the French "Anti-Sarko" Movement (2007–2012). *The Journal of Popular Culture*, *49*(3), 541-563.

Reed, J.-P. (2004). Emotions in context: Revolutionary accelerators, hope, moral outrage, and other emotions in the making of Nicaragua's revolution. *Theory and Society*, *33*(6), 653-703.

Salzer-Mörling, M. & Strannegård, L. (2007). Ain't misbehavin'—Consumption in a moralized brandscape. *Marketing Theory*, *7*(4), 407-425.

Satterfield, T. (2004). Emotional agency and contentious practice: Activist dispute in old-growth forests. *Ethos*, *32*, 233-256.

Scaraboto, D., Rossi C. A.V., & Costa, D. (2012). How consumers persuade each other: Rhetorical strategies of interpersonal influence in online communities," *BAR-Brazilian Administration Review*, *9*(3), 246-267.

Shamir, R. (2008). The Age of responsibilization: On market-embedded morality. *Economy and Society*, *37*(1), 1-19.

"Staudinger earns prize for brilliant marketing" (2012, December 12). *Die Presse*. Retrieved from https://diepresse.com.

"Staudinger invites FMA to the Waldviertel" (2012, November 3). noe.orf.at. Retrieved from http://noe.orf.at.

Steindorfer, E. (2012, November 13). Credit without bank: "Tremendous demand". *Die Presse*. Retrieved from https://diepresse.com.

Steindorfer, E. (2012, December 13). Staudinger: Shadow boxing with the financial authorities. *Die Presse*. Retrieved from https://diepresse.com.

Stoeckl, V. E. (2014). Lonely rebel or pioneer of the future? Towards an understanding of moral stakeholder framing of activist brands. In Cotte, J. & S. Wood (Eds.), *NA-Advances in Consumer Research*, Volume 42 (pp. 371-376). Duluth, MN: Association for Consumer Research.

Suddaby, R., & Greenwood, R. (2005). Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *50*(1), 35-67.

"The shoemaker as rebellious banker" (2012, October 18). *der Standard*. Retrieved from https://derstandard.at.

Ward, J.C., & Ostrom, A. L. (2006). Complaining to the masses: The role of protest framing in customer-created complaint Web Sites. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *33*(2), 220-230.

Willke, H. (2010). Transparency after the financial crisis. Democracy, transparency, and the veil of ignorance. *Transparenz,* VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 56-81.

Wouters, R. (2015). Reporting demonstrations: On episodic and thematic coverage of protest events in Belgian television news. *Political Communication*, *32*, 475-496.