



Brand Silence in Protest Movements: Commercial Brands' Discursive Indifference during a Social Protest in Peru

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59045/nalans.2024.42>

APA Citation:

Dongo, Y. E., Calderon, E. C., Guerra, J. M. & Kanashiro, L.(2024). Brand Silence in Protest Movements:Commercial Brands' Discursive Indifference During a Social Protest in Peru. *Journal of Narrative and Language*, 12(24), 50-70.

Abstract

The study aims to politically analyze the narrative traits of protesting the indifference of commercial brands toward Peru's political mobilization in November 2020 via Facebook. From a multiple-case qualitative focus, the corpus was gathered through the semiotic pertinence of representation by the isotopic saturation. The object of the study comprises 110 comments from protesters posted on the public profiles of brands that did not participate in the political protest. The pertinence of their election corresponded to the level of affinity and affection Peruvian consumers had with the brands. Based on the post-Greimasian theory, we have identified four narrative traits of protesting—exclaiming, complaining, repudiating, and wavering—over the brands. Consequently, data showed that consumers exclaimed against “their” brand, complained about the brand, repudiated the institution, and wavered over institutionality (something undefined). We identified three forms of dissemination: i) those enunciated from the Self and concerning the brands, (ii) those enunciated toward the brands, and (iii) those enunciated toward the collective self, concerning the brands. This study seeks to contribute to the literature about the narrative relationship between political consumers and brands, protests and consumption, and corporate crisis management.

Keywords: Protest movements; Semiotics; Social media; Communication policy; Branding.

Introduction

Several studies have focused on studying protests against statements and actions from commercial brands (Gundelach, 2020; Hoffmann et al., 2018; Hooghe & Goubin, 2020; Kelm & Dohle, 2018; Lekakis, 2020; Rössel & Schenk, 2018; Sittler et al., 2020). Within the framework of persuasive communication, these literary works have studied the trustworthy and compromised relationships between brands and their users (Chahal et al., 2020). In this context, where consumers are asking brands to not only say something (discursive) but also do something (practical), the scope of consumption has expanded from the commercial to the human sphere (Luque de Marcos & Baraybar Fernández, 2018). Users are demanding brands to implement measures that extend beyond the products they offer and the promises they make. In situations where government institutions are weak, consumers rely on brands to improve social life and make political decisions (Jasso-Peña et al., 2019; Lekakis, 2020; Minocher, 2018). Consumption is utilized as a means of protesting about social disruption alongside strikes, sit-ins, vigils, and demonstrations.

Consumers use consumption tools and statements to address political issues to demand the restoration of rights, the implementation of positive corporate behaviors, and the optimization of business ethics that promote peaceful social interactions (Gundelach, 2020; Lozano-Monterrubio & Huertas, 2020). Therefore, boycotts represent one of the most visible actions taken by users to punish companies for their adverse behaviors regarding their social or environmental performance (Sittler et al., 2020; Zorell, 2019).

Despite the interest of the previous literature on the protests that arise in response to the releases or actions of commercial companies, a knowledge gap still exists regarding the ways of protests taking place when brands decide to remain silent during social uprisings. This paper addresses this need by examining the narrative ways in which users protest on social networks in response to Peru's most renowned brands' indifference to social protests. Henceforth, the lack of pronouncement of commercial brands with respect to the political protest held in November 2020 in Peru via Facebook will be referred to as *brand silence*. The main purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the protest narratives of social network users in the face of this scenario. To meet this objective, a qualitative-hermeneutic methodology was applied through a multiple case study. A semiotic approach was preferred to understand how the articulations that produce meaning are constructed, focusing on post-Greimasian narrativity to answer how protests occur, rather than focusing on their causes, forces, or conditions. The relevance of the study from narrativity is founded on preceding authors (Courtés, 1991; Cuevas-Calderón & Yalán-Dongo, 2021; Landowski, 1993; Leone, 2012), who analyzed the units that semantically compose the protest through narrative instances such as actions, manipulations, objects of desire intended by the protesters, and actantial roles. Those units were complemented by an affective dimension inspired by Zilberberg's semiotics model (2000). This allowed for the identification of affectivity in the narrative roles played by the main actors in ways of protesting as well as the identification of sensitivities in their digital practices understood as declarative scenes.

The Market Replacing the State: The Peruvian Case

Users' demand for brand participation during a social protest scenario has been recorded in one of the most important mobilizations in Peru. On November 9, 2020, the Congress of the Republic of Peru approved the impeachment of then President Martin Vizcarra and initiated the succession process of Manuel Merino as interim president. Protests against this event spread in several regions of the country to varying degrees: mobilizations, pot-banging, sit-ins, and clashes with the police as the days went by. According to the Ombudsman's Office (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2020), in November, 395 collective actions were registered nationwide, 30% of which were linked to the presidential impeachment.

Six intense days later (November 15, 2020), the protest would result in 2 deaths, 234 wounded, and the resignation of interim president Manuel Merino. The political mobilization achieved immediate propagation due to a series of socio-political factors, such as the 94% disapproval rate of President Merino and 90% of the Congress being stood out (Ipsos, 2020b). It was identified that approximately 60% of the population felt that no politician represented them (Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2020). The Ipsos survey (2020b) found that 13% of those surveyed actively took part in the protests, with 73% expressing support for the protests despite not participating directly. The number of protests increased as the days went by, making it possible to decentralize the protests from the capital, with a total of 195 acts of protest (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2020).

This political event echoed through social media. Hashtags such as *#NoALaVacanciaPresidencial* (*#SayNoToImpeachment*) or *#MerinoNoEsMiPresidente* (*#MerinoIsNotMyPresident*) were trending during the protests. Social media became a space for mobilization, proving that it allowed for the creation of groups related to political and/or social issues (Dumitrica, 2020; Minocher, 2018). Throughout this conflict, protesters demanded the pronouncement of social agents who remained absent, such as municipalities, unions, and social organizations. Along with them, some brands were the subjects of criticism due to their indifference and silence.

The emergence of a demand against brands during this social protest came as no surprise to companies. Brands have attempted to capitalize user-generated content from the protest as a language that enables a closer and more effective relationship with their digital audience, providing templates and tools to build content and/or using popular memes based on the social or political context. Some brands have viewed this communication display very positively (Buzoianu & Bîră, 2021; Deveney, 2018) as the protest matched the company's brand value. Thus, amidst the demonstration in November 2020 in Peru, some brands applied different measures toward the protests: some posted on social media from a shopping mall to gather information about missing people, others withdrew their advertisements from television as a way of showing their disagreement with a journalist who expressed his opposition toward the declarations from young citizens, and finally, a mobile phone brand used the hashtag *#GeneraciónDelBicentenario* ("*#BicentennialGeneration*") on their mobile network, referring to the young people who took to the streets and protested during that week of November.

While reviewing the literary works, no research on the commercial relations between consumers and brands during this protest could be found. Therefore, our aim is to reflect

upon the ways of protesting against the silence of brands, emphasizing the narrative approaches of protests through their declarative (practical) scenes and their characters (subjectivities) from the speeches made in this context, as well as trying to identify the processes of transformation of brands as they go from having an abstract commercial product to a real human face. In this regard, this study attempts to answer the following question: Which were the narrative approaches of protesting about the discursive indifference of commercial brands? With this purpose in mind, this article will try to critically analyze the narratives concerning the protest against commercial brands' indifference during the political demonstrations in Peru.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a hermeneutic-qualitative approach, which takes into account narrative components (both characteristics and behaviors) from discourse through digital comments (Flick, 2016). The participants' digital means of protesting through the narrativity of Facebook were classified according to the way of articulating their political demands against brands. This social network is relevant and representative of the Peruvian case as 24 out of 33 million Peruvians (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2022) have Internet access (Hootsuite, 2020), of whom 13.2 million use social media (Ipsos, 2020a), and Facebook ranks first with 94% of users (Ipsos, 2020a). Facebook's relevance is not only quantitative as it is also a platform where most of the political confrontations take place (Vučković & Črnič, 2020). In Latin America, it is the most influential social network to express social and political complaints (Altamirano-Benitez et al., 2022) among various social actors, ranging from conservatives to liberals and moderates (Sehl, 2020).

This research began with the empirical identification of a lack of involvement from brands on Facebook during the protests. The *Empresas Más Admiradas* (EMA) [Most admired companies] 2020 award list (Mercado Negro, 2023) was used as it is based on the affinity between brands and users and focuses on technological capacity, business reputation, social impact, environmental management, and gender equality policies. After identifying this phenomenon and confronting the top-six ranked companies of the list, it was discovered that these brands represented a group that had gained approval during the early observation stage, while the brands that occupied the lower positions had made few or no comments related to the topic of this study.

Although these brands belong to different lines of business (fast food, brewery, banking groups, construction groups, and an essential consumer goods or services group), the overall meaning of the comments maintained a certain homogeneity in terms of the demands made by protesters. These demands went beyond the specific lines of business represented by the companies, which is why this list was used as a criterion to build the corpus for this research. The search process for these brands was conducted using the "Posts" tab on Facebook, from an account specifically created for this study to prevent the gathered data from being corrupted by the researchers' personal accounts.

For the previous reasons, only comments made by users who were exposing brands with a greater affinity for their indifference during the social protest were selected. The entire corpus was obtained from the public feed of these brands, focusing on the comments (see Table 1). It is worth noting that the comment selection required manual and detailed

observations to study the users' intentions, which is why a qualitative analysis is necessary for the purpose of this research. This approach was implemented in response to the early-stage mistakes made in the data collection process through web crawlers or API wrappers, which were replaced by the current manual method due to the subtlety of the information.

Table 1

Number of comments collected by brand.

(Period: November 9th–15th, 2020)

Brand	Comments	Facebook followers
Banco de Crédito del Perú	39	1.8 M
Backus	25	287 K
Kentucky Fried Chicken	18	57 M (Global)
Ferreycorp	11	28 K
Intercorp	9	60 K
Alicorp	8	68 K
Total	110	

Source: Created by the authors.

Controversial opinions were gathered for this study, which explains the users' anonymity. Due to the existence of methodologically similar studies, informed consent on behalf of the users was not required as the recollection focused on the brands' public websites, whereas private and personal posts with friends and family members were excluded (Miller, 2022; Warren, 2020; Weimann & Masri, 2020)¹. The analytical period focused on was the protest in November 2020 due to its relevance for being the first demonstration in Peruvian history that led to the president's resignation in an era dominated by social media.

As a result, the reduced corpus was cohesive with the number of comments gathered, temporary records, and methodological suggestions for both the qualitative study and the critical discourse analysis of social media (Muro-Ampuero & Bach, 2019). Through this proposed data surveying, the research maintained the principle of saturation established by the semiotic approach for discourse analysis (Greimas & Courtés, 1979). The identification of recurrent data based on linguistic aspects, such as particular words, syntax, and diction, extracted from the comments (Marwick, 2013), resulted in the preparation of four narrative traits for protesting. Those narrative traits—exclaiming, complaining, repudiating, and wavering—are based on socio-semiotic principles and protest semiotics (Cuevas-Calderón

¹ This decision was made based on the Code of Ethics of the academic institution that supports this study, with the approval of the ethics committee of this research's governing body (Code PI.55.005.2020).

& Yalán-Dongo, 2021), considering the narrative model of dangerous interactions as the theoretical basis (Landowski, 2009).

There are four narrative types of interactions: (i) adjustment; (ii) manipulation; (iii) programming; and (iv) accident (Landowski, 2009). Interactions through *adjustment* are based on sensitive accommodation and relationships built while subjects interpret their feelings, which turns it into a type of high-risk interaction as there are no predetermined factors and it is prone to infection. In *manipulative* or strategic interactions, a subject will try to gain somebody else's consensus or obedience, but there are limited risks as this subject will not always reach the desired outcome. Interactions through *programming* are constant, routine, and predictable relationships, so they are considered zero-risk interactions due to the predictability of their consequences. Finally, *accidental* interactions are known for their disruptive and unexpected actions that make them total and perilous risk interactions as they fail to follow all previous social and cultural conventions (Landowski, 2009). Our research establishes a correlation with this narrative model, creating a link between the adjustment category and the *way of exclaiming*, the manipulation category and the *way of complaining*, the programming category and the *way of repudiating*, and the accident category with the *way of wavering*.

As a contribution from the semiotics of protesting, the interaction model has incorporated two layers of inherent meaning: roles or characters that we will refer to as "subjectivity," and the declarative scenes that we will call "practices." Subjectivity refers to the creation of a symbolic or narrative role acquired by social actors (not individuals) through semantic redundancies present in their practices and statements. Practices refer to the chaining of actions within a narrative formed by declarative successions (Cuevas-Calderón & Yalán-Dongo, 2021).

Based on past studies (Cuevas-Calderón & Yalán-Dongo, 2021; Landowski, 2009), four traits of protesting were identified in brand silence: exclaim, complain, repudiate, and waver. These are expressed as verbs as they fulfill different narrative actions for the subjectivities acquired by the characters, from which we can identify the indignant, demanding, strike-breaker, and intervenor. With regards to practices, the following groups were identified: 1) resentment, intolerance, and complaint; 2) demand, boycott, and *boycott*; 3) justification, antiriot tactics, and denigration; and 4) intervention and disturbance.

Lastly, the post-Greimasian model was used as a data analysis technique (Landowski 2009; Zilberberg, 2000), offering a perspective that allowed the corpus to be qualitatively classified as a language (linguistic and non-linguistic). Based on the semiotic principle (Greimas & Courtés, 1979), this study corpus was considered to be paradigmatic as a finite set of digital statements produced in a political protest on Facebook.

RESULTS

The findings about protest methods were classified into four categories in function of the narrative features [subjectivity and practice] and the number of events (see Table 2). When data selection was found to be ambiguous, the opinions of the third and fourth reviewers became crucial to define the proper category for each item. Of the total number of comments under study (n = 110), 11 statements did not fit into any protest methods. In view of their

undefined and widely applicable traits, in addition to their low impact on events, this study focused on those filling the model through semiotic reiteration.

Table 2

Types of interactions in function of events

Method	Subjectivity (roles or characters)	Practice (declarative scenes)	Events
Exclaiming (Adjustment)	Indignant	Resentment Intolerance Complaint	38
Complaining (Manipulation)	Demanding	Demand Boycott <i>Boycott</i>	34
Repudiating (Programming)	Strike-breaker	Justification Antiriot tactics Denigration	20
Wavering (Accident)	Intervenor	Intervention Disturbance	7
Other			11

Source: Created by the authors.

Exclaiming: Indignant Individuals and Resentment, Intolerance, and Complaint Practices

Exclaiming as a method of protest was identified through digital practices developing the participants' sensitivity, which could be observed through language (capital letters, exclamation marks, and the use of emojis and syntax). The subjectivity found was indignation, with narrative practices involving resentment, intolerance, and complaint. In line with the proposal by Greimas and Fontanille (1991, p. 78), resentment (see Figure 1;

C1, C2, C3, and C4) refers to the protesters' temporary feeling of annoyance toward brands as they consider them to lack commitment and, in some cases, their dissatisfaction with potential actions in the future.

Figure 1

Photomontage of resentful comments



Intolerance (See Figure 2; C5, C6, C7, and C8) could be observed in negative comments concerning actions taken by brands, considered to be inappropriate based on the situation under study. Unlike resentment, a temporary feeling, intolerance is a reaction in the immediate present. For example, the black pictures of some logos in mourning for the deaths of Bryan Pintado and Inti Sotelo, citizens murdered by the police repression during the protests.

Figure 2

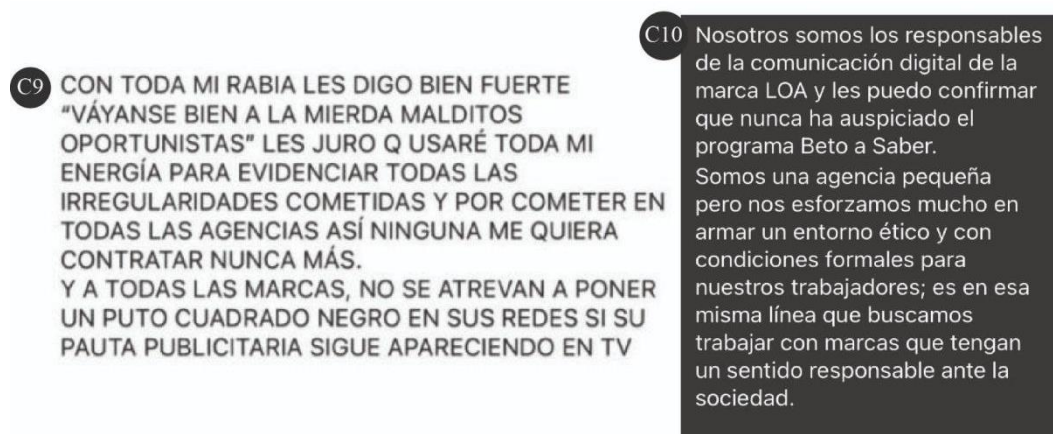
Photomontage of intolerant comments



Finally, the complaint (See Figure 3; C9, C10) was found to be the unveiling of a particular case against the brand or a direct threat to them. This type of practice does not require narrative changes as the goal is to trigger an emotional reaction (doing-feeling) among protesters through isolated events. Comments were longer than those showing resentment and intolerance.

Figure 3

Photomontage of complainant comments



All the abovementioned interactions (resentment, intolerance, and complaint) built a persuasive role through the participants' sensitivity, looking for an influence on the users' will and a successful method of emotional release in some cases. These complaints gave rise to personal protests, placing the symbolic body, their concern, and affective conflict of protesters as the driving force of this interaction.

The exclamation protest method triggered the subjectivity of the indignant individuals that made resentful, intolerant, and complaining comments targeted at the brand portrayed as the "opponent." Claims made by the indignant party were built from the Self, from a passionate-reactive perspective regarding the brand's activity—in this case, their absence. Therefore, protests against brands took place amidst tension between affectivity and the propagation of the message that customizes the demand. As a consequence, exclamation involves a close and interpersonal relationship between protesters and brands, whose statements are filled with passionate-affective traits, giving the digital interaction a friendly-filial tone. In short, they are more similar to a shout out or raising voices among equals (I-you), instead of becoming a request targeted at a corporation (us-the brand).

Complaining: Demanding Individuals and Boycott, *Buycott* and Demand Practices

Complaining-related digital practices are guided toward requests made to brands, rather than being an expressive narrative of emotions. Hence, the communication tone is more corporate than friendly-filial and, as a consequence, the emerging subjectivity is that of a demanding individual, whose narrative action executes three recurring declarative scenes: i) demand, ii) boycott, and iii) *buycott*.

A demand refers to the requests made by protesters to change the indifference perceived from commercial brands in support of the protests, through three discursive strategies: a) flattery (See figure 4; C11), which appeals to the brands' involvement by praising them, for them to actively join the protest; b) temptation (See figure 4; C12 and C13), which turns to brands by requesting them to make donations that physically contribute to the protest; and c) taunts or manipulation via negative judgments, used to elicit action (See figure 4; C14) or reject brand involvement (See figure 4; C15).

Figure 4

Photomontage of demand comments

C11 Una buena marca que puede aprovechar por así decirlo la coyuntura es RACUMIN , mata ratones y RATAS!!!
Me gusta · Responder · 14 sem · 9

C12 Sobrino. Los de la derecha son los que controlan el País y estas empresas más allá de la moral de sus lemas, son netamente comerciales, pero creo yo que también deberían hacer congruencia y respaldar a los movimientos que propiamente los consumen.
Un poco de consciencia moral para ellos.
Me gusta · Responder · 14 sem · Editado

C13 No queremos fotitos de "luto" queremos acciones! Que donen agua, comida, seguridad e implementos médicos para las protestas pacíficas.
La Policía Nacional del Perú nos dispara a quemarropa, hacen emboscadas, nos desaparecen. Queremos que las empresas nos ayuden y donen cosas tangibles! No queremos fotitas que solo muestran hipocresía y tibiesas.
#MerinoAsesino
#NiOlvidoNiPerdón
#PerúDespertó
#NoNosVanACallar
Me gusta · Responder · 14 sem · Editado · 26

C14 Esos que dicen. ¿dónde estabas?. A empresas, Marcas, Compañías, etc... Yo me pregunto, ¿Dónde estabas cuando te necesité?. ¿Dónde estabas cuando te necesitaban? Solo los ignoraste... A causa de eso, suele haber accidentes, suicidios, secuestros, etc. ahora que interrogas a ellos, ¿porqué no lo haces contigo y cambias ese aspecto contigo mismo? No sean hipócritas al subir esto.

C15 Espero, espero realmente que NINGUNA marca se aproveche de esta situación para luego poner una viñetita por ahí de gente manifestándose para "caer bien", pra hacer sentir que "son de la gente", cuando han BRILLADO POR SU AUSENCIA Y SILENCIO.
Espero también que NINGÚN PUBLICISTA se aproveche de esta situación para proponer una ideita, un truchito "para ayudar al país", esa misma viñetita en el comercial, si no se han atrevido a difundir información de lo que está pasando o no han salido a marchar por su país.
Seguimos atentxs y vigilantes, tenemos ya 2 muertos, porque para Merino, los 105 votos, la PNP, no era suficiente que tengamos que llorar a nuestros muertos por COVID 19, ahora también tenemos que llorar la muerte de dos compatriotas que salieron a defender al Perú, como dijo el hermano de uno de ellos "A mi hermano lo ha matado la PNP por salir a defender a su Patria".
3 comentarios · 24

INCA KOLA ¿DÓNDE ESTÁS? Pensé que combinabas con todo

Banco de Crédito BCP ¿DÓNDE ESTÁS? Contigo no cuento para nada

Pilsen ¿DÓNDE ESTÁS? Es de patas acompañar al pueblo

MINAFIN ¿DÓNDE ESTÁS? Pensé que marcharías cerca de mí

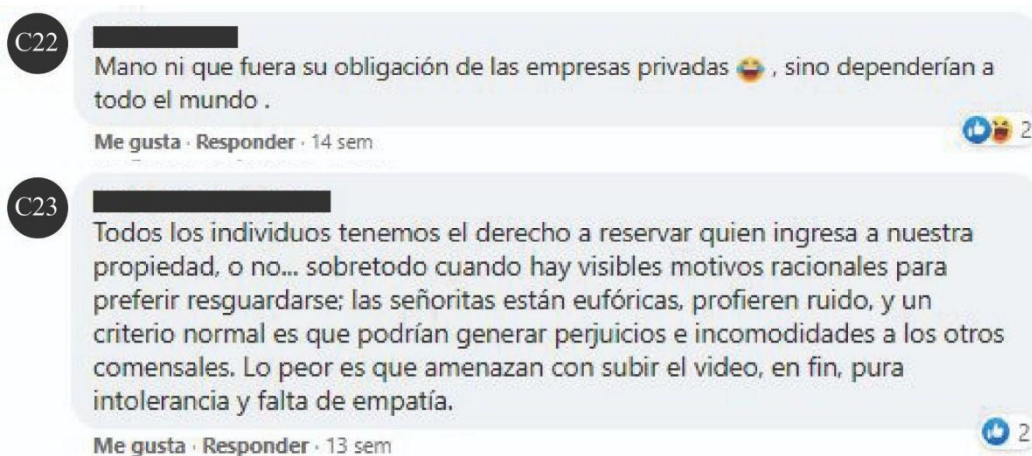
GLORIA ¿DÓNDE ESTÁS? No éramos juntos tu y yo

as “repudiating.” This protest method is part of the subjectivity of the strike-breaker and is portrayed in three declarative contexts: justification, antiriot tactics, and denigration.

Justification refers to some brands’ behaviors that are exonerated due to their lack of participation in protests as the strike-breakers think of them as entities dedicated to business and alienated from politics. As illustrated in Figure 6 (C22 and C23) the fast-food chain KFC, where a group of protesters was denied entrance to protect themselves from the turmoil produced by the confrontation with the police.

Figure 6

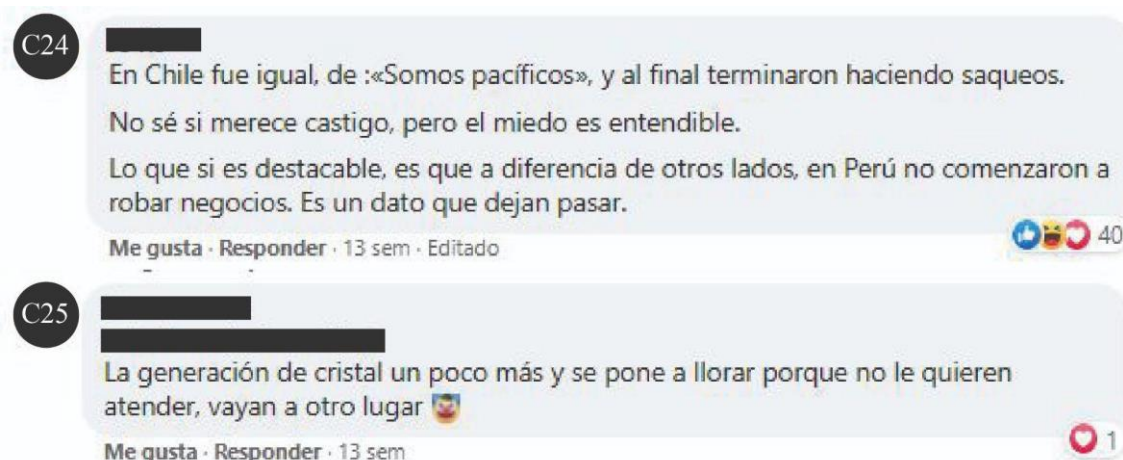
Photomontage of justification comments



Additionally, some antiriot tactics (see Figure 7; C24 and C25) were identified and accused of triggering negative opinions toward protests, depicting them and, in some cases, blaming them for being inherently detrimental for society.

Figure 7

Photomontage of antiriot comments

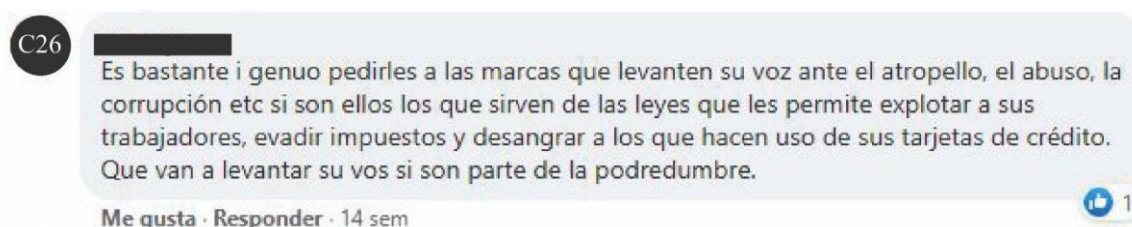


Lastly, the declarative tactics of strike-breakers are different. Although there was a more skeptical position toward protester’s operations (as they are trying to turn brands into their

allies) in the previous cases (justification and antiriot tactics), skepticism focuses on brands' operations as they are considered bad allies when applied to denigration.

Figure 8

Photomontage of denigration comments



The repudiating protest method produced the subjectivity of the strike-breaker, who carried out justification, antiriot, and denigration practices. Although justification repudiates the arbitrary invocation of brands on behalf of protesters, antiriot tactics repudiate the disruptive methods of protesting and denigration repudiates the invocation of allies (commercial brands) as they are thought to be part of the structural problem that causes protests. Despite these differences, *repudiating* demands derive from both the friendly–filial and personal (exclaiming) body and the human–corporate and interpersonal (complaining) body and spread to a broader body that questions brands' politicization and the appropriateness of protesting with them. As a result, *repudiating* methods protest against brand-institution politicization.

Wavering: Intervenors and Intervention and Disturbances Practices

Up to this point, we have identified three protest methods directed toward personal (exclaiming) and interpersonal (complaining) bodies and toward the brand-institution (repudiating) dehumanization. The last identified protest method is the wavering method, which triggers the subjectivity of the “intervenor,” who formulates the demand exceeding brands' commercial purposes and situates interventions against the society's structural issues. Thus, wavering works against institutionality through intervention (See Figure 9; C27 and C28) and digital disturbance (See Figure 9; C29) practices. On the one hand, intervention practices attempted to redefine economic demand in political terms, as seen in Figure 9, comment C27. This example shows how users extracted elements from brand's advertisements created before the protest and altered their commercial narrative to produce others with a political approach. This was accomplished through visual montages of political characters or critical statements of the current political sphere (See Figure 9; C28).

Figure 9

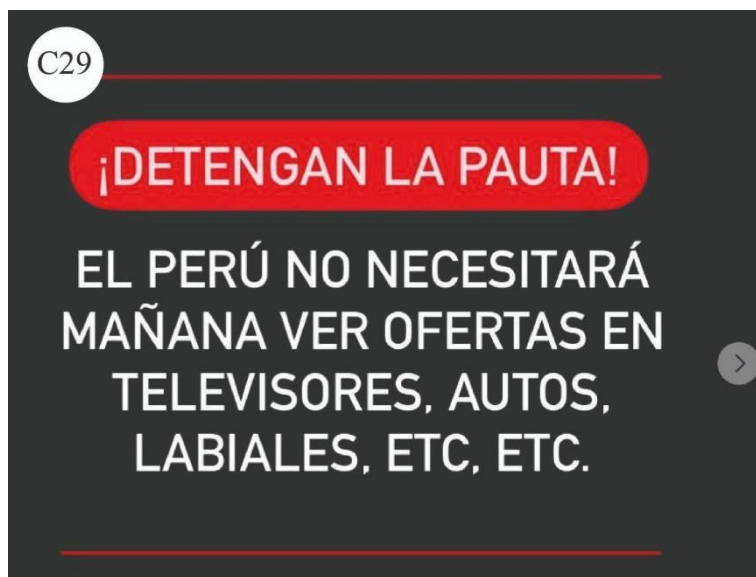
Photomontage of intervention comments



On the other hand, disturbance refers to comments that, in many cases, attempted to dismantle the advertising discourse and disrupt every commercial purpose in pursuit of a new beginning for interactions (See Figure 10). Therefore, although interventions focused on changing the direction of protests, disturbance interrupted the commercial sphere, transforming it into a patriotic action.

Figure 10

Photomontage of disturbance comments



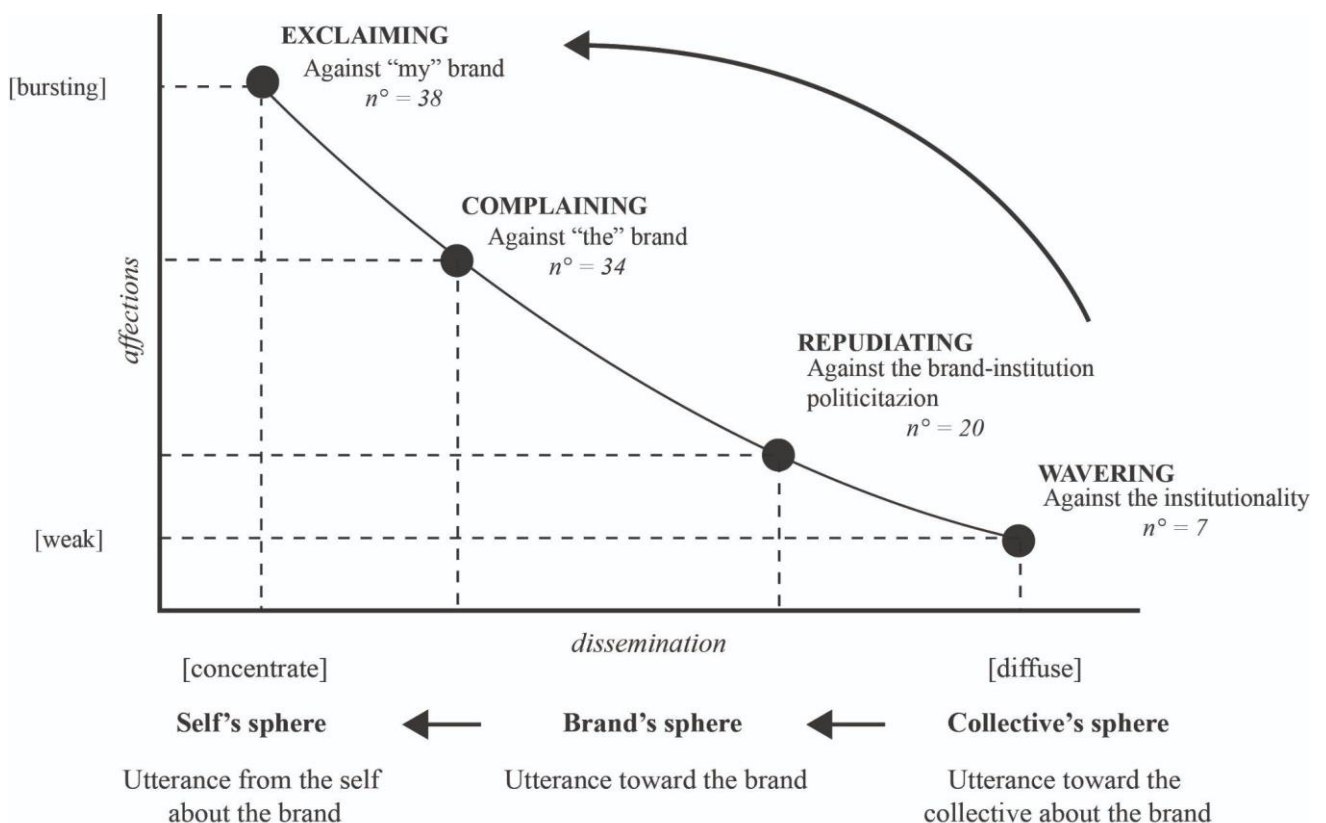
Lastly, wavering did not have many events as its digital practices related to disturbances and interventions are spaced and applied with less frequency as far as digital interactions go. The wavering protest method produced the subjectivity of the intervenor, who carried out intervention and disturbance practices. In both practices, interventions stated by the intervenor were executed from the general sphere (the people) and stated against institutionality through a speech expressing rejections toward the brand. As a result, the intervenor produced an impersonal speech as it alluded to the people as an abstract and ill-defined subject that the brand should “respect.”

Demand Propagation According to Protest Methods

After studying every comment and classifying them into different protest methods, the narrative strategies of *brand silence* may be displayed in a tensive model (Zilberberg, 2000), shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Tension between affections and demand dissemination according to each protest method



Source: Created by the authors

This diagram is based on tensive model semiotics by Zilberberg (2000) that takes two conditions into account to produce semiotic values. The first condition is intensity, which we have referred to as *affection* because of the recurring emotional features registered in the comments. The second condition is extension, which refers to the number or range; we will name it *dissemination* because we have identified compressed narratives about the self and other more extensive narratives related to the social sphere. Instances of wavering against institutionality (an indefinite entity, a structural malaise) and of repudiating against the institution along with instances of complaining against a brand and exclaiming against “my brand” were observed.

In the first instance, if exclaiming was found within demands made from the Self and about the brand, it is because it had a concentrated dissemination and a bursting affection. The forms of protest unfolded in a horizontal manner in which the brand took on forms of defined, closely related, and familiar individuals.

In the second instance, complaining became evident when the protest acquired greater dissemination and less affection. In these cases, demands were directed toward the brands. In the complaining method, the demand ceased to be “my brand-product” against which I protest and turned into “the brand-product” against which I must protest.

In the third instance, the repudiating method, the protest acquired a scattered dissemination and a weak affection; demands were directed toward the collective self and involved the brand. Although the name of the brand was still maintained in the repudiating instance, interventions that went beyond the commercial realm began to be requested. In this type of cases, the brand-product was asked to offer something that went beyond itself and was closer to the realm of a brand-institution. Additionally, the wavering methods were directed toward a more diffused collective space against institutionality (corruption, homeland, and country) rather than a brand-institution (private company).

Based on the frequencies found and their features, we understand that *brand silence* has a tendency toward individualization for protest methods. In that sense, we observe that the narrative strategies prioritized humanization in their demands against the brands. By doing so, they managed to confront a horizontal entity (the brand) whose anthropomorphized corporality gives the illusion of an effective response to their demands. Hence, the most repeated protest methods were primarily directed toward the human brand as opposed to the appreciation of state entities or a delegitimized and distant institutionality. This discovery allowed us to understand how private entities (brands) are prioritized over the public sphere (institutionality) as a form of governance.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to discover the narrative protest methods used by Facebook users in response to the indifference of major brands toward political demonstrations that occurred in November 2020 in Peru. We identified three forms of dissemination: i) those enunciated from the Self and concerning the brands, (ii) those enunciated toward the brands, and (iii) those enunciated toward the collective self, concerning the brands. The dissemination of demands was not evaluated by the number of impressions but by the way in which it appealed to another person. The identified protest methods were: exclaiming, complaining, repudiating, and wavering.

The identification of a shift from a collective sphere to an individual sphere in the narrative protest methods holds similarities and differences with the specialized literature.

The identified finding of a mode of protest composed as a personal discourse with moral and ethical features about the actions of brands is a characteristic noted by previous literature (Jasso-Peña et al., 2019; Lekakis, 2020). However, our research adds that these moralized interactions from participants sought to maintain sensitivity bonds through the construction of a character-brand. From this perspective, the narrative dimension of the character is responsible for strengthening the users' simulation of the protest and allowing them to be heard in an ethically more effective way but without a clear political attitude. Therefore, although the protest methods can be seen as a form of slacktivism (Hoffmann et al., 2018; Kelm & Dohle, 2018; Rössel & Schenk, 2018; Vučković & Črnič, 2020) since they present themselves as an opportunity for personal expression and public visibility without greater commitment or impact (Minocher, 2018), the literature does not fully explain why this practice makes sense for protesters without the concept of character.

The inclusion of the brand as a character in a protest narrative allows us to identify that political or anti-commercial rejection of the brand (Minocher, 2018) is not the desired objective of protesters as they construct their protest as a claim to "their" brand. Therefore, practices such as *buycotts* and boycotts are not seen as effective discourses of rupture with the consumption of the brand but as threats from a "me" toward a "you" (Minocher, 2018; Sittler et al., 2020; Zorell, 2019). According to Rössel and Schenk (2018), the consumer's political power would only be effective if the boycott or *buycott* was adopted by a significant group of people or in more challenging ways of political activism, something that does not happen in the humanized narrative focused on the "me" sphere of the protesters. Unlike *offline* practices studied in the literature (Minocher, 2018; Rössel & Schenk, 2018; Sittler et al., 2020; Zorell, 2019), our online-focused study found that boycotts and *buycotts* are predictive scenes (practices) of a narrative that only aim to go against the reputation, credibility, trust, and close (human) relationship, rather than affecting the company's economy (Al-Omar, 2020; Carareto et al., 2019; de Oca et al., 2020).

Finally, unlike what is commented on in the specialized literature (Gundelach, 2020; Hooghe & Goubin, 2020), the role of the intervening actor identified in the digital interactions of "wavering" did not develop a sustained and routine action (Siqueira & Hellín, 2018). Therefore, the intervening consumer identified in this research focused more on sporadic and immediate practices rather than long-term organizations (Gundelach, 2020). This indicated a strong fragmentation of political or activist actions, which gave greater development to consensual politics, sometimes understood within the purposes of an ethical, rather than political, "must-do" (Cuevas-Calderón & Yalán-Dongo, 2020).

As a result, this study has observed that the presented categories expand or contract qualitatively, favoring a humanized brand-character. Although this produces a simulation of effectiveness for protest responses, it also creates an antagonistic impersonality. The results indicated that protest methods focused on antagonism and contracted instead of expanding.

Our findings showed that narrative protest methods are related to the number of incidences. In this context, apathetic methods with the capacity for brand action are less frequent than those that humanize brands and view them as entities with possibilities for social action. However, this process of humanization can dismiss collective political figures and themes into the personal realm, leaving it in a commercial sphere. This means that humanization turns a collective petition into an individual claim. In that sense, the data found shows a movement toward what Cuevas-Calderón and Yalán-Dongo (2022) call protests

within the “ethical turn,” where an impossible demand (lacking an object) is satisfied with a possible demand (composed of an object). Moving from the collective to the individual sphere implies dislocating a demand without place, which is sustained in collective plurality, to a singular demand, composed of elements, negotiations, and distortions in the face of the causes that call for protest.

The limitations of this study stem from the need to develop a method for constant monitoring of the comments produced, including those that are deleted (censored) from brand page walls by administrators. Due to sustained manual recovery in this research, we were able to observe the constant presence of this type of data, making it a possible line of investigation since brand walls accept certain types of critical comments from users.

Future research will delve into the communication strategies that brands use to respond to demands for *brand silence* by protesters. It is essential to understand the influence that brands’ accountability to protesters has on protests and post-protest contexts. Similarly, it is necessary to explore the narratives that brands adopt in response to demands for political participation in protests and how they capitalize on the political demand of social protest.

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