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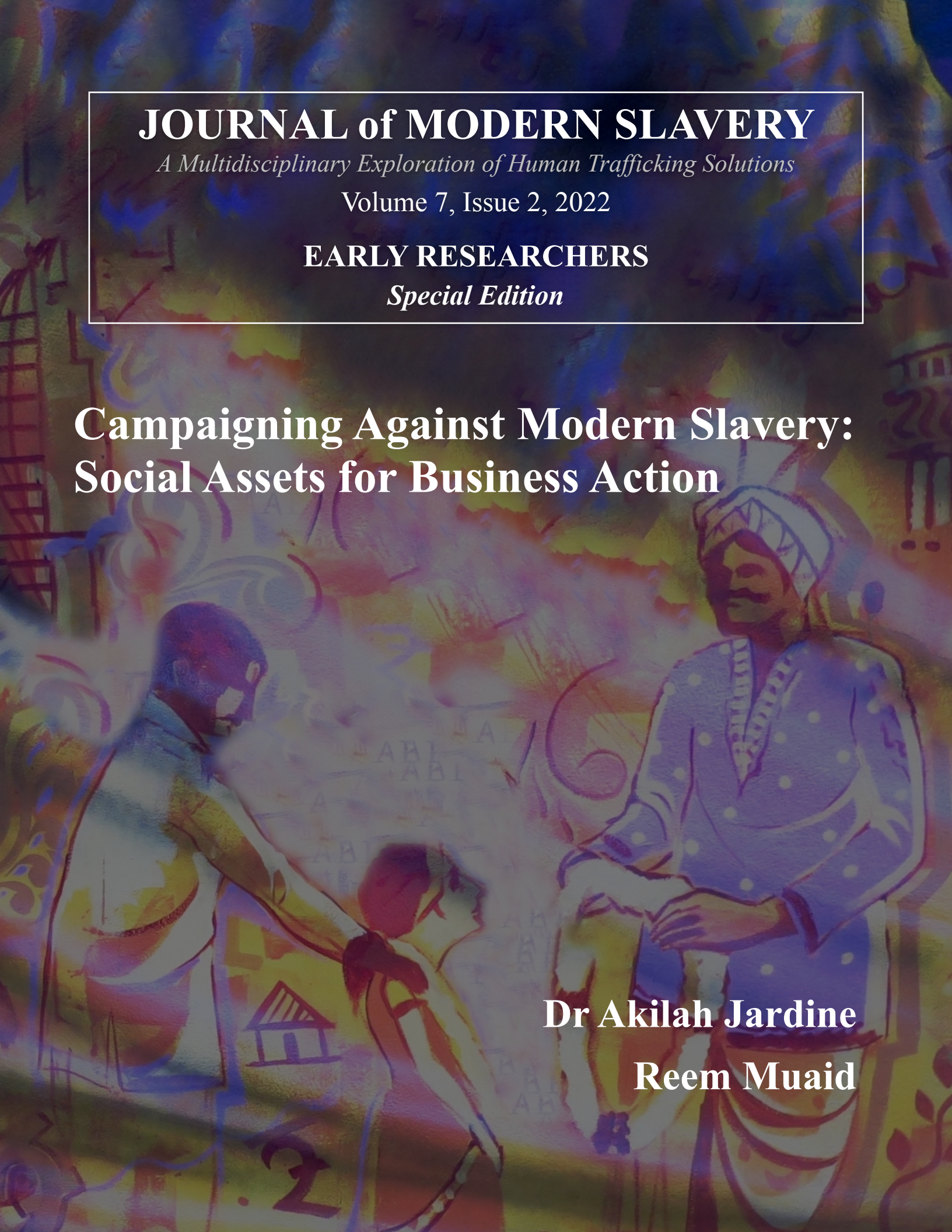
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## **Campaigning Against Modern Slavery: Social Assets for Business Action**

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# **Campaigning Against Modern Slavery: Social Assets for Business Action**

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## **Abstract**

One of the great challenges to campaigning against modern slavery is the availability of financial resources. Yet businesses have considerable social assets that can act as a major resource for meaningful anti-slavery campaigns. Inspired by social capital theory, this article reviews the Co-op's modern slavery campaign of 2017–2020 with the aim of identifying social assets that can be utilised by businesses in campaigning against modern slavery. It identifies four assets inherent in most businesses—identity, leadership, networks, and people, and discusses how these were leveraged by the Co-op to contribute to anti-slavery action.

**Keywords:** Modern slavery, business, campaigning, social capital, social assets

## **Introduction**

Modern slavery is an umbrella term used to describe a range of exploitative practices such as slavery<sup>1</sup>, forced labour<sup>2</sup>, human trafficking<sup>3</sup>, and related practices. It is estimated that 40.3 million people are enslaved worldwide.<sup>4</sup> Of these, 24.9 million are said to be exploited in

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<sup>1</sup> Slavery is defined by the 1926 Slavery Convention as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.”

<sup>2</sup> Forced Labour is defined by the International Labour Organization's Forced Labour Convention 1930 (No. 29) as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily.”

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Protocol to Prevent Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons 2000, defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”

<sup>4</sup> “Global Estimates of Modern Slavery,” Global Slavery Index, accessed January 20, 2022, <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/>.

forced labour, with 16 million in the private sector in high-risk industries such as construction, agriculture, and manufacturing. As part of the United Nations' 2030 sustainable development agenda, there is a global call for action to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, and end modern slavery and human trafficking.<sup>5</sup> Whilst no country is immune to the problem of modern slavery, certain factors can increase the risk of slavery occurrence. This includes low worker protection stemming from inadequate laws and government accountability, limited employment opportunities, and widespread discrimination against certain groups and communities.<sup>6</sup>

Modern slavery is a multifarious issue, prevalent in most supply chains globally. The supply chain management practices and business operations may considerably increase modern slavery risk. These practices include the global sourcing of products, services, and materials from at-risk countries facing issues such as corruption and economic hardship, and the use of complex subcontracting arrangements and unethical recruitment practices occurring throughout supply chains. More recently, businesses have been brought into the heart of the anti-slavery agenda due to the adverse impacts caused or linked to the activities occurring throughout their operations and supply chains. Organisations are under increasing pressure and scrutiny to ensure that they undertake due diligence on modern slavery and there have been several factors driving corporate action such as legal, financial, reputational, and commercial drivers.<sup>7</sup>

At the time of writing, COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for more resilient and responsible supply chains as the pandemic has exacerbated the risk of modern slavery. Victims have faced increased vulnerabilities such as financial insecurity, lack of adequate welfare and support provisions, and threats to health and safety. This was brought about by measures adopted to respond to the pandemic such as national lockdowns, restriction of movement and relaxation in labour regulations and enforcement.<sup>8</sup> There have also been significant shocks and disruptions to supply chains such as the cancellation of contracts, the closure of work places and heightened

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations. "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." 55 Geneva, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Stefan Gold, Alexander Trautrim, and Zoe Trodd, "Modern Slavery Challenges to Supply Chain Management," *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal* 20, no. 5 (2018): 488-489.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen New, "Modern Slavery and the Supply Chain: the Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility?" *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal* 20, no.6 (2015): 697-707 ; Anthony Flynn, "Determinants of Corporate Compliance with Modern Slavery Reporting," *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal* 25, no.1 (2019) 1-16.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Trautrim, Martin C. Schleper, M. Selim Cakir, and Stefan Gold, "Survival at the Expense of the Weakest? Managing Modern Slavery Risks in Supply Chains during COVID-19," *Journal of Risk Research* 23, no. 7-8 (2020): 1067-1072; Katherine Leanne Christ and Roger Leonard Burritt, "Accounting for Modern Slavery Risk in the Time of COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities," *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 34, no. 6 (2021): 1484-1501; Fergus Dowling, Mark Sumner, Matthew Davis, and Hinrich Voss, *The Impact of Covid-19 on Unethical Practices in Global Supply Chain* (University of Leeds and HEC Montreal, 2021) ; Hinrich Voss, "Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic for Human Rights and Modern Slavery Vulnerabilities in Global Value Chains," *Transnational Corporations Journal* 27, no. 2 (2020): 113-125.

unemployment in some sectors, which have increased the risk of modern slavery.<sup>9</sup> In other sectors there have been shifts in the demands for products and services such as personal protective gear, leading to businesses using new suppliers.<sup>10</sup> Many organisations may have prioritised supply continuity and in the process have de-prioritised due diligence processes that are critical for addressing modern slavery risks in the supply chain.<sup>11</sup>

Business leaders are advised to address modern slavery in a holistic approach by using a variety of methods to respond to modern slavery risks. This includes utilising supply chain management approaches such as supply chain mapping and conducting modern slavery risk assessments. However, beyond these measures, there is a growing interest for businesses to extend their efforts to campaign in the area of modern slavery. It is important to note, that campaigning against modern slavery in itself, will not, and should never, replace due diligence which is critical for addressing this problem. However, campaigning allows businesses to raise awareness of modern slavery to the wider public, influence public policy, and engage with various stakeholders such as policymakers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and industry peers.<sup>12</sup> However, such campaigns can have strong financial constraints. The budget can be high and effectiveness of campaigns is usually difficult to ascertain, hence it can be challenging to justify it.

Inspired by social capital, this article reviews the Co-op's modern slavery campaign of 2017 – 2020 with the aim of identifying social assets that can be utilised by businesses in campaigning against modern slavery. It identifies four assets inherent in most businesses - identity, leadership, networks, and people, and discusses how these were leveraged by the Co-op to contribute to anti-slavery action. As will be discussed, social capital can be understood as the relationships and interactions between individuals with shared values, reciprocity and trust which enables cooperation and collective action.

This paper is structured as follows. The following section provides a general overview of the key arms of the Co-op's anti-slavery campaign. In the next section we explain our data collection methods. We then introduce the concept of social capital, drawing on existing literature in the field to explain the usefulness of the concept for business engagement in socially responsible behaviour. Drawing on social capital and data collected on the Co-op's anti-slavery activities, the following section then identifies and explains four social assets utilised by the Co-op to campaign against modern slavery.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Jen Birks and Alison Gardner, "Introducing the Slave Next Door," *Anti-trafficking Review* 13: (2019) 66-81.

## Overview of the Co-op's campaign on modern slavery

In 2017 at the Co-op's Annual General Meeting (AGM), its members voted for the group to campaign on modern slavery and better victim support.<sup>13</sup> The Co-op's campaign aimed to play a part in the global campaign to end modern slavery. At the heart of this goal was to ensure that survivors have the support and opportunity needed to aid their recovery and reintegration into society. Whilst its activities mutually reinforced each other, they can be viewed as three distinct activities: modern slavery awareness campaign, the Bright Future programme, and lobbying for better victim support.<sup>14</sup>

### *Modern slavery awareness campaign*

Public awareness of modern slavery is important for tackling this issue as it can help shine a light on practices that are often hidden in plain sight and can exert pressure on government, businesses, and other stakeholders to address this problem.. At the local and national levels in the UK, various bodies have worked to raise awareness of modern slavery. For instance, in 2014, the UK government allocated £2.18 million for a national public awareness campaign<sup>15</sup> that reached 93% of UK adults.<sup>16</sup> Several cities and communities have also committed to developing slavery-free communities - a place-based approach to addressing modern slavery in their local areas.<sup>17</sup> Throughout its anti-slavery work, the Co-op sought opportunities to increase public awareness of the problem of modern slavery and identify ways the public could engage in the anti-slavery agenda such as contacting their members of parliament and raising awareness of the problem through their own networks . Separately, the Co-op sought to engage the business community and encourage others to take action against modern slavery within their operations, supply chains and communities.

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<sup>13</sup> "Co-op Modern Slavery Campaign," Co-op, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://www.co-operative.coop/campaigning/modern-slavery-campaign>.

<sup>14</sup> "Lobbying the Government for Better Victim Support," Co-op, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://www.co-operative.coop/campaigning/lobbying-the-government-for-better-victim-support>.

<sup>15</sup> The campaign aimed to increase public awareness of modern slavery in the UK, including the different types of slavery, signs of exploitation, and encourage reporting of suspicions.

<sup>16</sup> "Modern Slavery Marketing Campaign: Evaluation Report," Home Office, accessed 18th January, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-marketing-campaign-evaluation-report>.

<sup>17</sup> Alison Gardner, Phil Northall, and Ben Brewster, "Building Slavery-free Communities: A Resilience Framework," *Journal of Human Trafficking* (2020): 1-16 Alison Gardner, *Local Approaches to Modern Slavery* (United Nations University, 2019).

### *The Bright Future Programme*

In March 2017, the Co-op launched the Bright Future programme to support survivors of modern slavery with paid work placements and employment opportunities in its food business. As part of the programme, survivors are offered a four-week placement with the possibility of securing a permanent position. The programme was designed to address the key barriers faced by survivors in securing employment such as lack of qualifications, employment references and confidence. The Co-op collaborated with anti-slavery charity City Hearts to identify survivors to join the programme. It also encouraged other charities and businesses to join to ensure wider availability of employment opportunities for survivors.

As of May 2021, Bright Future has transformed into an independent co-operative with 28 charities and 23 businesses working together. Seventy-five survivors have been offered paid work experience with 40 offered full-time employment at the end of their placement. Candidates reported that Bright Future helped them to acquire new skills, increased their confidence, and expanded their professional networks. These skills and experience are valuable to the reintegration of survivors back into communities and supporting them in securing paid and sustainable employment.

### *Lobbying for Lord McColl's Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill*

Bright Future proved that survivor support was a key space in which businesses could have anti-slavery impact. The programme also gave the Co-op the ability to advocate with data and experience on behalf of a new bill before Parliament. Bright Future had highlighted to the Co-op a significant barrier for survivors in the UK: that only survivors with residency rights could benefit from the programme or access vital long-term support. In 2017 and again in 2020, House of Lords member Lord McColl of Dulwich tabled a Private Members' Modern Slavery Victim Support Bill ('the Bill') that, if enacted, would provide for confirmed adult victims of modern slavery to receive a grant of leave to remain for 12 months, together with assistance and support during this period. Due to the insights that it gained from working with City Hearts and other charities on the Bright Future programme, the Co-op recognised the significance of Lord McColl's Bill in supporting victims of modern slavery. The Co-op, therefore, embarked on several activities to raise awareness of the importance of the Bill, such as providing evidence on the value of paid work for victims and the difficulties of providing paid work opportunities as part of the Bright Future programme—including restrictive immigration laws which may contribute to the vulnerability of people to modern slavery and victims' access to support.

### **Methods**

This paper draws on an evaluation conducted on the Co-op's 2017–2020 anti-slavery campaign. The Co-op is the world's oldest and the UK's largest consumer co-operative, with

over 4 million members and over 60,000 employees, with a history of fair trading that dates to its founding in the 19th century.<sup>18</sup> Over the last four years, the Co-op has actively engaged in working on tackling modern slavery in a variety of ways: through its Bright Future programme, lobbying for better victim support, and raising awareness of the hidden issue of modern slavery amongst its members, colleagues, and the public, both nationally and globally.

Qualitative data was collected from three sources: document review consisting of publicly accessible documents plus internal documents supplied by the Co-op, including strategy documents, campaign documents, and emails; eight semi-structured interviews; and an online questionnaire collecting 26 responses. Participants comprised of internal and external stakeholders such as businesses, NGOs, and Co-op representatives who were involved in various parts of its anti-slavery campaign work.

Following the analysis of the data collected, the authors identified key social assets that were leveraged by the Co-op to campaign in the area of modern slavery. We explore how these assets were utilised to contribute to anti-slavery efforts.

## **Social Capital**

Social capital theory and its application has been explored across different disciplines such as economics, sociology, political science, and more recently in management studies.<sup>19</sup> Putnam, a notable proponent of social capital, defines it as the “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.”<sup>20</sup> Differentiating between physical capital he notes: “Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”<sup>21</sup> He conceptualises social capital as a public good, however, for Putnam, social capital is closely associated with civic engagement and collective action. He argues communities with high stocks of social capital greatly enriches societies:

“Networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. Such networks facilitate coordination and

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<sup>18</sup> “Co-op History,” Co-op, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://www.co-operative.coop/about-us/history>

<sup>19</sup> Chun Keung Hoi, Qiang Wu, and Hao Zhang, "Community Social Capital and Corporate Social Responsibility," *Journal of Business Ethics* 152, no. 3 (2018): 647-665 ; Laura J. Spence, René Schmidpeter, and André Habisch, "Assessing Social Capital: Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in Germany and the UK," *Journal of Business ethics* 47, no. 1 (2003): 17-29.

<sup>20</sup> Robert D. Putnam, "Social Capital and Public Affairs." *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (1994): 5.

<sup>21</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 19.

communication, amplify reputations, and allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved.”<sup>22</sup>

Ostrom and Ahn acknowledge that growing attention to the role of social capital “lie in part in the limit of the standard approaches to the problem of economic development order” arguing that current debates view social capital “as an attribute of individuals and other relationships that enhance their ability to solve collective-action problems.”<sup>23</sup> They suggest that while the rule of law and governments are valuable social capital attributes for society, there is a need for people to develop their own “working rules” to fill lacunas in governance and regulation. As Habisch and Moon note, “the experiences of the late twentieth century show that even in developed countries many problems – unemployment, a decline in public education, infrastructure and health care, family dissolution and so on – can no longer be satisfactorily addressed by twentieth century means.”<sup>24</sup> Commenting on the historical roots of civic engagement in regions in Italy, Putnam notes “these communities did not become civic simply because they were rich...they have become rich because they were civic. The social capital embodied in norms and networks of civic engagement seems to be a precondition for economic development, as well as effective government.”<sup>25</sup> Rupasingha and Goetz’s research on the structural determinants of poverty in the United States found that social capital reduces social and economic problems such as poverty.<sup>26</sup> However, scholars have noted a decline in social capital in and between Western and developing societies particularly as a result of lack of trust, cooperation and civic engagement.<sup>27</sup>

According to Adler and Kwon, definitions of social capital have varied depending on whether they focus on the substance, sources or the effects of social capital.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, research on the concept tends to adopt an external or internal viewpoint.<sup>29</sup> External capital,

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<sup>22</sup> Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," in *The City Reader*, eds Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout (New York: Routledge, 2015), 154-162.

<sup>23</sup> Elinor Ostrom, and Toh-Kyeong Ahn. "The Meaning of Social Capital and its Link to Collective Action," in *Handbook of Social Capital: The Troika of Sociology, Political Science and Economics*, eds. Gert Tinggaard Svendsen and Gunnar Lind Haase Svendsen (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2009), 17-35.

<sup>24</sup> André Habisch and Jeremy Moon, "Social Capital and Corporate Social Responsibility," in *The Challenge of Organizing and Implementing Corporate Social Responsibility*, eds. Jan Jonker and Marco De Witte (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 65

<sup>25</sup> Putnam, “Social Capital and Public Affairs,” 9.

<sup>26</sup> Anil Rupasingha and Stephan J. Goetz, "Social and Political Forces as Determinants of Poverty: A Spatial Analysis," *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 36, no. 4 (2007): 650-671.

<sup>27</sup> André Habisch and Jeremy Moon, "Social capital and corporate social responsibility," 65.

<sup>28</sup> Paul S. Adler and Seok-Woo Kwon, "Social Capital: Prospects for a New Concept," *Academy of Management Review* 27, no. 1 (2002): 17-40.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*



otherwise known as bridging, is used to describe connections between people from different backgrounds or communities.<sup>30</sup> Contrarily, internal or bonding capital relates to connections among individuals within homogenous groups that are mobilised to reinforce feelings of solidarity. In recent times, a third type of social capital – linking capital – has emerged. Szreter and Woolcock define linking capital as “norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society.”<sup>31</sup> Linking capital, therefore, describes a vertical relationship between representatives of formal institutions that are responsible for delivering key services. Writing on the efficacy of social capital in public health, Szreter and Woolcock articulate:

[J]ust as health outcomes can be improved by expanding the quality and quantity of bonding social capital (among friends, family and neighbours) and bridging social capital (trusting relations between those from different demographic and spatial groups), so, too, is it crucial to facilitate the building of linking social capital across power differentials, especially to representatives of institutions responsible for delivering those key services that necessarily entail on-going discretionary face-to-face interaction.<sup>32</sup>

In the context of business engagement in socially responsible behaviour, social capital could be a useful tool for shaping appropriate norms of behaviours and establishing trusting relationships amongst diverse stakeholders. Habisch and Moon note that businesses rely on “functioning societies” to ensure their survival and therefore maintaining trust between businesses and society is vital.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Spence and Schmidpeter note that “business organisations need to engage in the development of the society in which they want to do business, since business is influential by the society in which it operates, and societal problems often affect the efficiency and effectiveness of business activity.”<sup>34</sup> Like other forms of capital, social capital is another critical resource for businesses.<sup>35</sup> Razalan, Bickle, Park and Brodahl acknowledge three dimensions of social capital: structural capital, relational capital and cognitive

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid; Laura J. Spence, René Schmidpeter, and André Habisch, "Assessing Social Capital," 17-29; Elinor Ostrom and Toh-Kyeong Ahn, "The Meaning of Social Capital," 17-35.

<sup>31</sup> Simon Szreter and Michael Woolcock. "Health by Association? Social Capital, Social Theory, and the Political Economy of Public Health," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 33, no. 4 (2004): 655.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> André Habisch and Jeremy Moon, "Social capital and corporate social responsibility," 64.

<sup>34</sup> Laura J. Spence and René Schmidpeter. "SMEs, Social Capital and the Common Good," *Journal of Business Ethics* 45, no. 1 (2003): 94

<sup>35</sup> André Habisch and Jeremy Moon, "Social capital and corporate social responsibility," 64.

capital.<sup>36</sup> Structural capital relates to information benefits as a result of connecting and networking with others. The authors articulate that business professionals rely heavily on networking and building strong relationships which encourage knowledge exchange and information-sharing. Relational capital refers to qualities arising from personal relations and interactions with members of the community, such as respect, trust, and reciprocity. Cognitive capital captures shared values, attitudes and beliefs and facilitates sharing of resources and responsibilities. High stocks of social capital may facilitate individual change which in turn can foster collective action. Within the context of structural capital, Smith proposes that trusting and supportive relationships are central to the individual change process.<sup>37</sup> He suggests that close networks of contacts and trusting relationships between individuals who share similar ties (bonding capital), and networks of diverse contacts and relationships (bridging capital) can provide individuals with a safe environment for exploring new behaviours. Separately, the relational dimension of social capital may encourage normative behaviour as a result of respect, trust and reciprocity embedded within networks, while cognitive social capital may influence individual change by providing individuals with a mutual understanding of appropriate norms of behaviour.

Inspired by the concept of social capital, we explored the Co-op's campaign activities against modern slavery to identify key social assets utilised. The following section discusses these assets with illustrative examples of how they were utilised by the Co-op.

## **Social assets for campaigning against modern slavery**

### ***Identity***

Identity is an important facet in social capital as it can foster a sense of belonging, shared values, obligations and expectations between people having a shared sense of identity or amongst diverse individuals and groups. Consequently, behaviours, values and norms can be shaped by common association with a group and be a determining factor for individual behaviour and responsibility to foster collective action.<sup>38</sup> In line with the International Co-operative Alliance<sup>39</sup>, a federation representing co-operatives worldwide, the Co-op's identity is based on six core values: Self-help—uniting members to help make a difference in society; Self-responsibility –

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<sup>36</sup> Danielle Marie Razalan, Marianne C. Bickle, Joohyung Park, and Deborah Brodahl, "Local Retailers' Perspectives on Social Responsibility," *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*. 45, no.2 (2017):211-226.

<sup>37</sup> Melvin L. Smith, "Social Capital and Intentional Change: Exploring the Role of Social Networks on Individual Change Efforts," *Journal of Management Development* 25, no.7 (2006): 718-731.

<sup>38</sup> Paul S. Adler and Seok-Woo Kwon, "Social Capital," 21.

<sup>39</sup> "About Us," International Cooperative Alliance, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://www.ica.coop/en>.

empowering members to take responsibility individually by supporting its activities<sup>40</sup>; Democracy – ensuring that all members have a say in how the organisation is run; Equality – ensuring that all members are able to get involved in activities; Equity – promoting and upholding fairness; and Solidarity – leveraging the collective identity of its members to strengthen the organisation and its activities. Given its identity and roots as a co-operative, the Co-op has a long history of leveraging its position to advocate on issues such as worker’ rights and climate change. Additionally, it has embarked on several time-bound specific campaigns to address issues such as the use of neonicotinoids, reducing inequalities, promoting safer communities, and tackling loneliness. As aforementioned, in 2017 at the Co-op’s AGM, its members collectively voted for the group to campaign on modern slavery and better victim support. It realised its position as a key business leader in the community, and its commitments, values and principles placed it in a critical position to address these issues both in its supply chains and communities. Inherent to the Co-op’s identity is that no person should be left behind, and following this principle, it embarked on several activities with a key purpose—give survivors the opportunity to take back control of their lives, such as supporting them in securing regular and sustainable employment. The Co-op aligned its objective closely with its core identity, drawing on its history and values to campaign for change. As one survey respondent stated: “I think it’s clear that it’s part of their ethos, in terms of that’s what they want to do... they’re demonstrating those credentials on a daily basis.” The Co-op’s choice to tackle modern slavery and support survivors is therefore deeply rooted in its values. In addition, the Co-op’s identity as a business meant that it could credibly and authoritatively make a crucial point in support of the Bill: that the benefits of longer-term support for survivors of modern slavery could outweigh the initial costs.

The Co-op’s campaigning activities demonstrate that in campaigning against modern slavery, a coherent campaign should be rooted in a company’s identity, its vision, and its values. An integrity-based approach can help organisations to communicate their aims effectively, leveraging the brand’s identity for change and generating greater brand loyalty.

### ***Leadership***

A key social asset utilised in the Co-op’s campaign activities is its ability to exert and share leadership, which contributes to the development of social capital. A review of the Co-op’s anti-slavery campaign highlighted several ways they were able to exert influence and leverage through leadership. For instance, on his first day as CEO of the Co-op, Steve Murrells’ first press release was not about corporate plans, but about the Bright Future programme.<sup>41</sup> This put a spotlight on the Co-op’s modern slavery work and gave a bigger platform to the issue of survivor

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<sup>40</sup> “Principles More Valuable than Profits,” Co-op, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://www.co-operative.coop/about-us/values>.

<sup>41</sup> “Co-op Provides Bright Future for UK Victims of Modern Slavery,” Co-op, accessed January 20, 2022, <https://www.co-operative.coop/media/news-releases/co-op-provides-brighter-future-for-uk-victims-of-modern-slavery>.

support. Separately, the Co-op's used its influence and leverage to engage with a variety of stakeholders. Businesses can have a considerable influence when engaging with policymakers compared to other organisations, which might find it more challenging to be heard. As one NGO interviewed stated: "I think it's really great to have a different voice outside of just the NGO sector and be able to reach into different spaces and speak to different people."

Separately, the Co-op demonstrated leadership by engaging in lobbying for better victim support. For instance, it supported other groups such as Free for Good<sup>42</sup> in collecting and delivering thousands of messages to the UK Government urging them to back the Bill, submitted numerous briefings to parliamentarians in advance of debates on modern slavery and the Bill, met with policymakers, and hosted and presented at numerous events. For instance, in August 2017, the Co-op provided a briefing to support the second reading of the Bill. It highlighted its Bright Future programme as an opportunity for victims of modern slavery to get paid work. It referred to the current immigration rules that affect the right to work in the UK for victims,<sup>43</sup> and expressed its backing of the Bill to support victims for 12 months. The Co-op emphasised the importance of the Bill's provisions for tackling some of the difficulties in offering permanent work for victims after completing their four weeks paid placement via Bright Future, especially as some require adequate support to improve their language skills and work readiness. The Co-op stressed that the section of the Bill covering the "meaning of assistance and support" does not currently specifically reference the provision of support to ensure "work readiness" and briefed Lord McColl to consider the inclusion of pre-employment training/work readiness in this, if appropriate to the individual.<sup>44</sup>

It also sought opportunities to engage with its peers and other businesses and galvanise action from the business community through business networks, establishing its own local business network, and contacting hundreds of businesses to take action against modern slavery such as supporting anti-slavery campaigns. A survey respondent from the business community expressed:

The Co-op is particularly effective at engaging peer companies and are highly respected among those working towards similar goals... The Co-op comes across as leading by example and committing their business to addressing modern slavery, not simply raising awareness. This makes their campaigning much more effective.

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<sup>42</sup> Free for Good Coalition is a collaborative campaign of anti-trafficking organisations supporting supporting Lord McColl's Victim Support Bill. See: Free for Good, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://www.freeforgood.org.uk/>.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, according to victims must have the right in the UK to be offered the paid placement via Bright Future

<sup>44</sup> Internal document reviewed by the authors. Public reference is available at: HL Deb 8 September 2017, vol 783, col 8

Another stated:

The campaign has led the field amongst retailers in tackling and supporting victims directly of Modern Slavery, leading by example and driving an agenda that is sometimes hidden. [The Co-op] gave us the practical solutions to enable us to help and support victims better and understand their point of view [and] also raise awareness in our own operations.

The Co-op's campaign work demonstrates that effective campaigning requires senior-level commitment and that businesses can have a leadership role in influencing their peers and decision-makers. While leadership can be viewed as an isolated social asset, it is a driving force that affects other assets by translating values into action and bringing the attention of causes to a variety of stakeholders. Leadership is critical for enabling cooperative undertaking and can help drive collective efforts and facilitate resource allocation to unitedly create opportunities for successful campaigns.

### *Networks*

As aforementioned, a key aspect of social capital is networks and relationships between people which foster opportunities to access information, engage in knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and collective action. The Co-op recognised that one of its biggest assets is that it is a business: this meant it could lead by example, collaborate, and be a powerful messenger to other businesses. It actively sought ways to engage in knowledge exchange with other businesses, encourage collaboration, and motivate organisations to do more. For instance, in 2018, it joined the Business Against Slavery Forum – a “spearhead pioneering industry action to drive out slavery from supply chains.”<sup>45</sup> Separately, in January 2018, Co-op established the Greater Manchester Modern Slavery Business Network with a similar aim to help address modern slavery. The Network brings together businesses, law enforcement, academics, local authorities, charities, and other agencies to strengthen business response. Through this network, they sought ways to increase awareness of modern slavery amongst the business community, share insights and learnings and identify ways for businesses to contribute to anti-slavery efforts. Following an independent review of the UK's Modern Slavery Act 2015<sup>46</sup> by Frank Field MP,

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<sup>45</sup> Home Office, “Leading Businesses Unite to Tackle Modern Slavery,” 10 October, 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/leading-businesses-unite-to-tackle-slavery>.

<sup>46</sup> The Modern Slavery Act 2015 is a UK legislation focused on addressing the problem of modern slavery. It brought about a number of changes such as consolidating previous slavery and human trafficking offences, introduced the role of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, brought about new preventative measures, and established new responsibilities for certain businesses. It was the first legislation of its kind to support the UN SDGs on modern slavery.

Maria Miller MP, and Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, the Home Office<sup>47</sup> launched a public consultation in July 2019 to collect views on proposed measures to increase transparency, compliance, the quality of modern slavery reports, and the scope of the legislation.<sup>48</sup> To contribute to the consultation, the Co-op invited the Home Office to host a focus group with its business network. This allowed over 20 other organisations<sup>49</sup> to learn more about the proposals being considered and to discuss and share their own experience of modern slavery reporting and contribute to the revised legislation. In September 2020, the government responded to the findings of the consultation and announced changes to the legislation including establishing a government-run reporting repository for modern slavery statements, mandating that modern slavery statements must cover a single reporting deadline, and extending section 54<sup>50</sup> to cover the public sector.<sup>51</sup> These changes cannot be solely attributed to the Co-op's work as there were numerous organisations and stakeholders who provided evidence and support to the review and consultation; nevertheless, the Co-op utilised its networks to collaborate with its peers to engage in activities that seek to improve business compliance and transparency.

Separately, the Co-op engaged in networking and collaborative work as part of its campaign activities. For instance, it partnered with Global Citizen – a US-based non-profit Global Poverty Project - to bring modern slavery to the public attention. At a music festival in 2018 hosted by Global Citizen, Steve Murrells gave a speech on the problem of modern slavery and the significance of the Bill. Key points made by Murrells' acknowledgement of the limited period of support for victims and survivors. More than 4,000 Global Citizens, three heads of government, key representatives from eight governments, business leaders, non-profit organisations and socially conscious artists attended that music festival in London. Its partnership with Global Citizen resulted in over 9,000 emails and 5,000 tweets to MPs and over 4,000 emails and 800 tweets to then Prime Minister Theresa May.

The Co-op also collaborated with the Co-operative Party, and in July 2019, it met with stakeholders to discuss what role local authorities can and should play in the future in supporting victims. The discussion focused on the issues of both supply chains and victim support. In an interview conducted with Lord McColl of Dulwich, he stated:

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<sup>47</sup> The Home Office is the chief government department responsible for immigration and security in the UK.

<sup>48</sup> Home Office, Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act: Final Report (UK, 2019), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-the-modern-slavery-act-final-report>; Home Office, Transparency in Supply Chain Consultation (UK, 2020), <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transparency-in-supply-chains>.

<sup>49</sup> The network included representatives from local police, anti-slavery organisations, academics, and businesses of different sizes operating in variety of sectors.

<sup>50</sup> Section 54 Modern Slavery Act 2015 requires organisations with an annual turnover of £36 million or more to publish a modern slavery and human trafficking statement every year reporting on actions taken to address modern slavery.

<sup>51</sup> Home Office, Transparency in Supply Chain Consultation.

I believe that the relationship between the Co-op business with the Co-op political party underpins this support and the lobbying of the party by the business helped to bring about the strong support for my Bill expressed by a number of Labour/Co-op MPs during two debates in Westminster Hall in the House of Commons. All of which have helped to keep these issues and by Bill on the Government's agenda.

The Co-op's ability to collaborate with diverse actors demonstrates the assets that occur within and from networks, which have opened opportunities for forms of cooperation and collective action. Networks as a social asset demonstrate that businesses can make significant strides in campaigns by pooling together their knowledge, resources, influence, and reach. While collaboration is central to anti-slavery efforts, research has shown that engagement by multi-agency partnerships with businesses has been very limited.<sup>52</sup> However, the Co-op's work demonstrates that businesses can help contribute to anti-slavery efforts through its networks both in the business community and with other stakeholders. Collaborating with other organisations that have specialist expertise can facilitate better knowledge exchange and complement a campaign's activities and reach. As one private business stated:

[The Co-op] have made us think more deeply about how Modern Slavery might manifest itself within our supply chains. Initially the response would be 'it doesn't exist;' however, as more examples and organisations share their experience it makes you want to dive deeper to ensure that all aspects are covered and that the initial response was simply a cursory glance, skimming the top.

### *People*

Social networks comprise of trusting relationships between people within a particular group or community, between groups who may have weaker ties, and vertically between people and those in power and authority.<sup>53</sup> As well as building and leveraging relationships with diverse stakeholders, a key social asset the Co-op utilised is with its consumers/members and employees which it leveraged to promote awareness and activity. In addition to members collectively coming together to vote for the group to campaign on modern slavery, the Co-op sought ways to leverage its relationship with its consumers and employees. For instance, it sent over 600,000 emails to its employees encouraging them to take actions such as fundraising, contacting politicians, and learning more about the issue. The emails encouraged employees to take certain actions against slavery such as starting discussions in teams, running a half-marathon to raise

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<sup>52</sup> Alison Gardner, *Collaborating for Freedom: Anti-Slavery Partnerships in the UK* (Office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and the University of Nottingham's Rights Lab, 2018). [https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1186/collaborating-for-freedom\\_anti-slavery-partnerships-in-the-uk.pdf](https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1186/collaborating-for-freedom_anti-slavery-partnerships-in-the-uk.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> Ann Dale and Lenore Newman, "Social Capital: a Necessary and Sufficient Condition for Sustainable Community Development?" *Community Development Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 5.

funds for Anti-Slavery International (an international human rights NGO), or sharing stories with colleagues on Yammer.<sup>54</sup> The Co-op also asked its members to support the Free for Good campaign that is working to pass the Bill. This resulted in over 5,000 emails to MPs. A survey conducted by the Co-op of 254 members found that 63% were encouraged to find out more about the issue because of the Co-op's messages to its membership.

Additionally, the Co-op designed, printed, and distributed posters to bring the issue of modern slavery to the attention of its consumers, members, and the public. For example, in 2018; a "Know the Signs" poster was designed and displayed at all the Co-op's 2,700 food stores across the UK to raise awareness of the indicators of modern slavery. Also in 2018, a second poster was designed by Kalayaan, a charity based in London advocating for the rights of migrant domestic workers and providing victim support. The Co-op distributed Kalayaan's posters to 125 of its food stores. This poster targeted domestic workers and provided details of Kalayaan's services such as providing advocacy and support. Separately, in November 2018, the Co-op collaborated with the anti-slavery organisation Stop the Traffik to raise awareness of modern slavery via a poster and promoted the Stop the Traffik mobile application on selected sandwich packages. The Co-op distributed the poster at Christmas, a time of high footfall for supermarkets, and contributed donations from the sandwich sales to Stop the Traffik.



Figure 1: Kalayaan poster

<sup>54</sup> Yammer is an event management, networking, and communication platform.





Figure 2: Co-op poster



Figure 3: Co-op and Stop the Traffik campaign

To further raise awareness of modern slavery the Co-op used its customary #thecoopway hashtags on its social media platforms such as twitter to draw attention to modern slavery and the Bill. The hashtag promotion aimed to raise awareness of modern slavery and demonstrate how the Co-op champions critical issues such as supporting survivors of modern slavery. It also targeted its social media followers with a one-minute call-to-action video detailing how they can help survivors of modern slavery, including advocating for better victim support. Other activities included seeking opportunities to promote its modern slavery activities by engaging with the media. For instance, it placed a full-page advert in the national press to mark Anti-Slavery Day in 2018 and supported a six-week media campaign, “Stamp Out Slavery” with a British newspaper with a monthly print reach of almost seven million people and digital reach of over 35 million.

It can be challenging to assess the impact of awareness campaigns. This is because while we can quantify the predefined measures for each initiative, it is nearly impossible to measure the broader contribution or impact of the awareness campaign. This is due to the challenge of collecting evidence on how information was utilised by the public, for instance, if reports of suspicions of modern slavery were attributed to a campaign. Nevertheless, the Co-op’s campaign activities demonstrate that businesses can increase their reach to different audiences and increase support for campaign causes by using multiple communication channels. The Co-op’s use of a mixed-channel communication methods involving social media, emails, and press releases enabled them to connect with people within and outside its organisation.

## **Conclusion**

There is growing momentum worldwide for businesses to respond to grave human rights issues, such as modern slavery, and be held responsible and accountable for their actions. While businesses have a significant role to play in economic growth and technological advancements, they also have a vital role in addressing social issues. This requires organisations to abide by the relevant rules and regulations, but also to go beyond legal compliance by leveraging resources and influence to fill lacunae in regulatory frameworks and help societal actors address human rights challenges such as modern slavery. This can be done by engaging in activities that foster collaborative action and developing innovative solutions to address the causes and consequences of exploitative practices within their operations and the communities they serve.

This paper set out to identify social assets that businesses can utilise to campaign in the area of modern slavery. In reviewing the Co-op’s campaign work, we identified four social assets that were leveraged, building a campaign that mobilised its identity, leadership, networks, and people. This approach demonstrated the Co-op’s ability to tap into the different dimensions of social capital and establish and utilise its values, relationships and networks with diverse stakeholders including their employees, customers, the public, industry peers, civil society, and government. This meant that the Co-op could create a series of mutually reinforcing campaign activities. This approach to campaigning, where it brought together its existing assets, enabled the Co-op to create what a survey respondent described as a “greater than the sum of their parts.”

By taking an asset-based approach, the Co-op could use its internal expertise and member interests without needing costly investment in external campaign resources, instead, leveraging its existing available social assets. The assets demonstrate the value of social capital in contributing to socially responsible business behaviour and can be utilised collectively by businesses irrelevant of their size, sector, and nature of activity. These assets can be tapped into and employed to make a meaningful contribution in the area of modern slavery and other social justice issues facing our society.

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