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Consumers Perspective on Brand Activism and the Impact of Social Media on Mental Health

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CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE ON BRAND ACTIVISM AND THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH

By

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Master Thesis presented as partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in Data-Driven Marketing, with a specialization in Market Studies & CRM

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STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration. I further declare that I have fully acknowledge the Rules of Conduct and Code of Honor from the NOVA Information Management School.

Mohammad Alrojolah

Lisbon July 15,2023

ABSTRACT

Brand activism is one approach that marketers can take into consideration, that will help in maintaining or improving the brand image and reputation when promoting the brand using the social media platforms. Brand activism is a double-sided sword that can either benefit or harm the brand image. In the modern world, the use of social media apps like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, or YouTube have become one of the daily norms between all age groups, as it is associated with group identity. As the increased use of social media is leading to mental issues like anxiety and depression. As social media platforms evolve, the more difficult it is to control the spread of content through the platforms which increase the potential risk of social media on mental health. This evolution should be a concern for marketers as they should be more aware of what content is being advertised, taking into consideration the potential risk or opportunities that the advertising may entail. As they ensure that the brand won't be associated with or contribute to increase the negative impact of social media. This thesis aims to have a study the consumers perspective on brands participating in social and political issues when promoting the brand and its effect on the purchase intention and mental health. Primary data is collected through online questionnaire from 108 participants, concluding that brands that adopt social issues do have an influence on their customers' purchase intention mediated by engagement on social platforms (SPs).

KEYWORDS

Mental Health; Social Media; Brand Activism

Sustainable Development Goals (SGD):



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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the past decade, the use of social media has significantly increased. Those platforms provide daily communication with people all over the world, self-expression, and social interactions. However, being able to access the world through those online platforms might come with some risks. Research is being done on whether the excessive use of those platforms is contributing to the increase of mental health issues like depression and anxiety. (Kelly et al., 2018) model in studying the impact on social media on mental health included poor sleep, online harassment, poor self-esteem, and body image. As the number of social media users increases every year, it is getting more difficult to study the factors that impact mental health both positively and negatively. Additionally, the impact of social media on body image concerns, loneliness, and cyberbullying has been investigated in studies by Fardouly et al. (2018). The number of daily active users on Facebook alone during March 2023 was 2.04 billion users (an increase of 4% year-over-year) and the number of Facebook monthly active users were 2.99 billion users as of March 31, 2023 (an increase of 2% year-over-year) (Facebook, 2023).

As billions of users can access those social media platforms, the content being shared daily is difficult to monitor regardless of the efforts of the regulators online. So, the concern here arises as to what factors are having positive or negative impact on the mental health of the users.

This also raises the concern for brands as any post or content shared related to the brand might have a huge impact on the brand image and reputation. Nowadays, consumers want brands to take a stand on sociopolitical matters (Vredenburg et al., 2020). If prosecuted correctly, brand activism can have a positive impact on the brand image and reputation in the marketplace. On the other hand, if it was prosecuted without proper research and investigation, it might have a backlash on the brand image leading to damage of brand equity and potential of social change (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

So as established before, increased time spent on social media leads to increased mental health issues. If users linked their anxiety or depression to the content being presented, then this will force the brands and companies to research properly their content shared to avoid the bad reputation or jeopardizing the brand image. This is where the brand activism role comes to decide whether to participate in social issues when promoting the brand or not. If so, does this participation affect the consumers positively or negatively.

This thesis aims to identify the consumers' perspective on brands participating in social issues and its effect on consumers purchasing intention and mental health. Quantitative data is collected from adults who use social media regularly as the data is also used to examine the potential impact of brand participating in sociopolitical issues. Brand activism refers to a marketing strategy done by marketers that promote the brand using campaign around social and political issues to influence the consumers (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Brand activism occurs when a brand or a company promotes social, political, and cultural issues aligned with their core values, vision, and mission (Shetty et al., 2019). Besides creating a trend, social activism has an impact on the brands profits, customer loyalty and creating a connection between consumers and the shared values and principles of the company. However, on the negative side of social activism, if it is not in synchronization the brand core values, it might invite backlash and boycotting from consumers that have different values (Shetty et al., 2019).

As it is important to note that the increased time spent on social media lead to increased anxiety of the users (Astleitner et al., 2023). Hence, the more time spent on social media, the more content, and ads the users will observe. So, if the user linked their anxiety to the ads being created by companies and shown on social platforms, this will lead to creating a negative impact on the brand image. Data collection includes online surveys and content analysis of social media platforms while reviewing case studies done by brands that participated in social issues. The data collected is analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.

This study is significant since it links the consumer's perspective on brands taking a stand on social issues and the impact of social media on mental health. Leading to the actions that brands can take when participating in social and political issues, taking into consideration the brand's image and reputation. The findings of this thesis provide valuable information for policymakers, marketers and health professionals that are interested in creating a healthy, safe online environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, social media has been increasingly used by the public as concerns have been raised about the potential negative impact on mental health. These concerns play a major role for marketers as any misunderstood promotion or advertisement can easily spread across the world leading to the jeopardy of the brand image or reputation as brands are trying to participate in social and political issues to create a better relationship with the consumers. This literature review aims to shed light on brand activism and whether brands should actively participate in social issues when promoting their brands while ensuring the best possible outcome and whether social media have a positive or negative impact on the user's mental health.

2.1 BRAND ACTIVISM

Brand activism is identified as a strategy done by marketers that seeks to have an influence on consumers by developing campaigns created to be influenced by social and political issues. Brand activism also involves social movements that contribute to the social identity of the consumers (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019).

Brand activism can be broadly categorized into six categories. Social activism includes, for example, gender equality. Political activism such as voting and policies. Economic activism such as income equality. Workplace activism deals with labor issues etc. Environmental activism which includes but not limited to pollution and environmental policies, and legal activism deals with citizenship policies etc (Eyada, 2020). Recently, different brands are promoting their products or services through social issues as consumers are being engaged and moved by those campaigns. Brands like Nike, Under Armour, and Uber were found to use this strategy in promoting their brand.

As the world is evolving daily and as social and political issues are rising and spreading at a fast pace due to the existence of social media platforms, brands are trying to keep up with this growth. Brand activism is one of the approaches brands are using to stay aligned with sociopolitical issues. Recently, consumers are now being more belief driven when it comes to being exposed to the massive amount of product ads whether they were online or broadcasted. When customers look at or experience a brand, whether it was a product or a service, they do not only look for the best quality and lowest price, but they also want to gain emotional rewards and experience. As they would like to express their relation to the brand through consuming their product or services and belonging to a certain brand (Kim & Sullivan, 2019).

To be able to create a successful campaign, brands now must better understand the consumers and how the mentality of the consumer is changing (Eyada, 2020). Consumers today are linking themselves to the brands, so brands now cannot just advertise the old-fashioned way since now consumers are being belief driven when associating themselves to the brands they use or buy. Consumers nowadays consider the products they buy to be a representation of their beliefs and values and brands should take advantage of that when promoting their brands.

Figure 1 explains the relation between brands and human beings. How brands adopt and advertise their products based on social and political issues can be transformed into actions that have a role in forming society. Using proper advertising streams and specified messages in the promotion can have an impact on how consumers perceive the brand, and it decides if it would reach the consumers

beliefs. As Coyne et al., (2020) mentioned that the social media use is associated with the users group identity, this shows that consumers will try to belong to a certain group in their online presence. So as socially active brands try to spread their values through social media platforms, they are also setting their position in certain groups, leading to a relationship between the brand and the consumers.

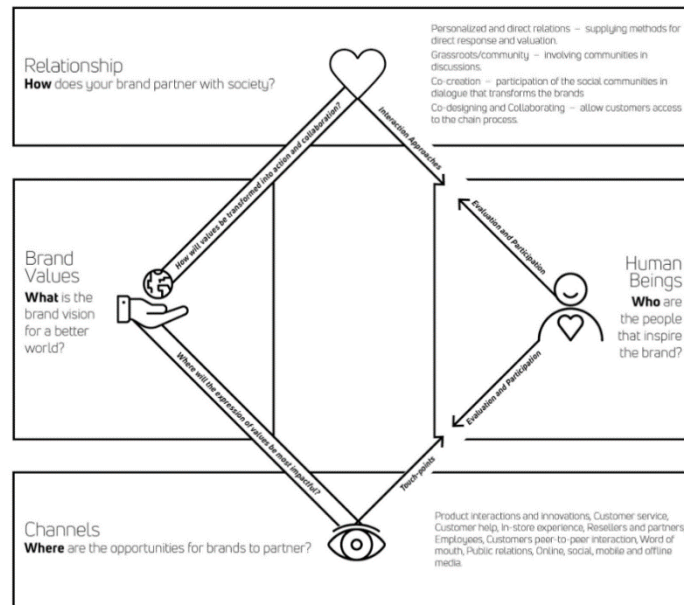


Figure 1: Framework that allows us to systematically explore the range of actions available to make a difference.

2.1.1 NIKE TAKING STANDS ON SOCIOPOLITICAL ISSUES.

Nikes slogan “Just Do It” has been always associated with sociopolitical matters as the brands always intended to not solely promote their products, but also engage in the emotional connection between the consumers and the brand through participating in social and political events. This makes Nike a good case to study and observe since their campaigns offer a very clear intention in participating in social and political issues, as they previously had their success and failure in this regard.

In 1995, the “Just Do It” campaign was associated with ads that undertook sexism, gay rights, and gender matters. Moreover, ads promoted by Nike stating the “If you let me play” was also made to address the benefit of organizing sports for girls and how it can positively increase their self-confidence and help girls suffering from depression (Eyada, 2020).

Again, another campaign was done by Nike in 2007 to advocate people with disabilities, as also in 2017 a campaign under the title “What will they say about us” was promoted to break the social norms of Middle Eastern women participating in sports like boxing and skateboarding. Lately in March 2022, Nike also a campaign done by the co-founders of a London-based collective to break down stereotypes of Muslim women (Nike, 2022).

However, participating actively in social and political issues to promote the brand and increase brand loyalty is not always granted. Brand activism is not executed carefully, may lead to serious backlash

that might harm the profit margins of the brands and their image. One example is Nikes campaign in September 2018 when they launched their “Dream Crazy” campaign with the American athlete Colin Kaepernick. Colin Kaepernick is well known for being active in social issues and for taking the knee at the NFL games during the national anthem of the United States of America, to protest police violence against black people. This campaign was two faced since it had positive and negative impact on the brand. Some people thought that Nike should not support Colin as he is a controversial figure and people were trying to express their disagreement by creating hashtags like #nikeboycott that gathered more than a billion impression as negative reaction was occurring (Eyada, 2020). Although there were cries to boycott the brand, Nike’s stock increased its value by more than \$6 billion after two weeks of the campaign (Draper, 2019). Moreover, the most watched video in the campaign generated 10,558,022 views on YouTube, 93,000 likes, 193,000 retweets and 450,000 liked in Nike’s Twitter account in February 2019 (Eyada, 2020). In the first 24 hours of launching the “Dream Crazy” campaign Nike was mentioned 2.7 million times on social media and over 5.2 million times within the 72 hours (Munoz, 2019) as Nike also gained 170,000 followers on Instagram (Thomas & Golden, 2018).

The campaign “Dream Crazy” is a perfect example of how brand participating in social and political matters can be a double-edged sword. One mistake is enough to risk the brand’s image, reputation and even future in the marketplace. Oppositely, if the promotion was well studied and executed correctly, it can significantly increase the brands loyalty and profit as more consumers will be willing to associate themselves to the brand since it will be representing their own believes and values.

2.1.2 OATLY AS ACTIVISTS

A successful case of brand activism is Oatly, which is a Swedish oat milk company. The brand positioned itself as an activist of sustainability and environmentalism. The brands decided to participate in social issues through creating slogans like “Wow, no cow!” and “It’s like milk, but made for humans.” Those slogans did not only shed light on the benefits of oat milk but also informed the consumers that the brand is aware and cares about the environment.

Oatly is a successful example of brand activism since their branding created a market for oat-based dairy alternatives not only in Sweden and the European countries but also in the USA and China, which makes the brand global and means that the brand could cross the borders and be aligned with the believes of the consumers (The New York Times, 2018).

Oatly was successful in reaching the consumers’ beliefs by creating catchy slogans and being consistent in their messages throughout the marketing channels. Moreover, when the brand is aligned in their campaign with their values, this leads to better customer loyalty (Koch, 2020).

The vision of Oatly was and still connected to promoting health well-being, firstly by promoting the health benefits of consuming oats. This goal was extended to promote using oat milk as it is more beneficial for consumers. When Oatly decided to tackle the issue of people being lactose intolerant in the beginning of the 1990’s, it was not only seen as the brand being active and caring about health issues but also about the environment (Koch, 2020). As the brand is still being socially active until this day leading to better social and economic outcomes.

2.2 CONSUMER RESPONSE TO BRAND ACTIVISM

Brands are not expected to engage in social issues when promoting their brands but when they do, this has a positive impact (Broberg & Doshoris, 2020). However, Mukherjee & Althuizen (2020) concluded that brand activism which was identified as the act of brands taking a stand on controversial social and political issues, has an asymmetric effect on consumer intentions and behaviors. When brands participate in consumer-brand disagreement issues, this leads to a decrease in brand attitude. On the other hand, when brands are participating in consumer-brand agreement this did not lead to any significant increase in brand attitude. When consumers disagree with the brand stand, this will negatively affect the consumer-brand identification since they consumers will believe that they do not share the same beliefs with the brand (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). The relationship between brand activism and the positive impact on consumers is not straight forward, since five key concepts should be taken into consideration on how the consumers form their perception to the brand. Those key concepts were demonstrated by Broberg & Doshoris (2020) which are self-identity, brand-cause fit, responsibility, authenticity, and emotions.

The literature suggests that social media use can have both positive and negative effects on teenagers' mental health. Social media experiences, such as fear of missing out, ghosting, and vague booking, may exacerbate the negative impact of social media use on mental health. Brands that are associated with negative mental health outcomes may have a negative impact on brand image and ultimately affect their reputation. Therefore, it is important for brands and social media platforms to consider the potential impact of their content and experiences on teenagers' mental health, and to take steps to promote positive mental health outcomes.

Moreover, the relationship between social media use and mental health is not straightforward, as it can vary depending on various factors such as the type of social media use and the individual's personality.

This being said, brands should know when and how to be socially active since the Edelman Earned Brands Study (2020) reported based on a survey were 8,000 people participated from eight different markets, that consumers think and believe that brands are more powerful in creating social change than governments. So, this thesis studies the consumers perception on social media affecting mental health negatively and having better insights from consumers perspective on whether brands should use brand activism when promoting their brand taking into consideration it's impact on consumers mental health.

As the literature from Nikes case also showed that when the campaign was made, the consumers were engaged with the brand and Nike's stock increased its value by more than \$6 billion after two weeks of the campaign (Draper, 2019). Prentice et al., (2019) study confirmed that belonging with users in the online community have a significant impact on engagement which can lead to purchase intention.

Hence as consumers think that brands have responsibility to participate in social issues, which will create a relationship between the brand and the consumer, this might lead to improved engagement. Moreover, as consumers feel that they belong to or are represented by a certain brand, this will lead to an improved brand image. Those variables combined might lead to an increase in the purchasing intention.

Research is also done to test the influence of brand activism campaigns on social media engagement, especially on Twitter. This study by Gray et al., (2019) considered the how consumers are engaging with campaign done by brands like Nike, Reebok, Under Armor, Puma, Always, Yoplait, Procter and Gamble, and Airbnb, in addition to online survey targeted to each campaign. Higher engagement was noticed when the brand included social issues in the campaign as it was recommended that the content should be focused on individuals rather than society as the engagement increase with long-term impact campaigns that targeted both genders rather than being gender specific.

Likewise, Kato et al. (June 3) quantitative study retrieved from 504 responders on how advertising including brand activism affects consumer- based brand equity and its effect on the purchasing intention engagement concluded that those ads positively impact consumers attitudes, purchasing engagement, and corporate consumer-based brand equity. Hence, confirming yet again that brand activism leads to increased engagement and thus leading to improved purchasing intentions.

As proven by Gray et al., (2019) that engagement can be increased by participating in social issues, it should be mentioned that the improved engagement can lead to enhanced purchase intention. Brands and marketers should focus on improving their social networking since it has proven its powerful influence on consumers purchasing intention (Toor et al., 2017).

Considering the impact of brand activism when promoting the brand on social media, it is expected that:

H1 Purchase intention improves when brands participate in social issues when promoting their brand (vs. promoting the brand without social issues)

H2a Consumers' perception of brand image mediates the relationship between social activism and purchase intention.

H2b Consumers' engagement mediates the relationship between social activism and purchase intention.

H2c Consumers' brand responsibility mediates the relationship between social activism and purchase intention.

2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH

The number of active monthly active users on Facebook was only 2.99 billion users as of March 31, 2023 (an increase of 2% year-over-year) (Facebook, 2023). This means that the number of overall active users on social media platforms is increasing yearly as more people have access to the internet and to platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others. However, as the number of users increases, the content being available to users is also increasing. The excessive time spent on social media is linked to an increase of negative potential impact on mental health of the users (Astleitner et al., 2023). This research also suggested that social media experiences can have negative impact on mental health and the fear of missing out, ghosting and vague booking may increase that effect.

The cohort study done by Kelly et al., (2018) also suggested that social media use is associated with an increased risk of depression, anxiety, and sleep problems. However, the relationship between the use of social media and mental health is not as straightforward as we think it is. As the authors also

found that social media use is also associated with social support and positive emotional connection (Kelly et al., 2018). This study suggests that the use of social media can have both negative and positive impact on mental health but depending on different factors like the content being shared and everyone's personality. An eight-year longitudinal study also found that time spent on social media is linked to increased anxiety and depression (Coyne et al., 2020).

(Hunt et al., 2018) has also suggested based on a three-week study done on random undergraduate users, that if the consumption of social media use was limited to only 10 minutes per application (Facebook, Instagram & Snapchat), leads to reduced symptoms of anxiety, loneliness, and depression. However, the participants did not show any significant improvement in social support or psychological well-being. This may be due to the duration of the study as it may be too long or too short to have an impact on or cause a change in the mental well-being. This also suggests that social media use affecting mental health does not only depend on the time spent online, but also on the content being viewed and exposed to.

Fardouly et al., (2015) also experimentally studied the effect of Facebook usage on women's mood and body image. As female participants were asked to use Facebook for 10 minutes browsing their feed and browsing an appearance-neutral control website. The study suggested that participants who spent time on Facebook reported negative mood changes than those who spent time on the control website.

Thus, the relationship between social media use and mental health is not straightforward, as it can vary depending on various factors such as the content being viewed and the individual's personality. Hence, future research should focus on identifying the specific types of social media use that may have negative effects on mental health and on understanding the underlying mechanisms of this relationship.

Overall, social media platforms and brands should be aware of the potential impact of their content and experiences on consumers' mental health and take measures to promote positive mental health outcomes. Furthermore, parents, educators, and mental health professionals should also play a role in educating teenagers about responsible social media use and promoting positive mental health outcomes.

Considering the concerns on mental health issues when brands are social active it is expected that:

H3 Perceived concerns on mental health problems provoked by social media consumption impact negatively the consumers' perception on the purchase intention.

2.4 THEORETICAL MODEL

Many brands are observed to engage in social and political issues. However, the determined results of that are not well formed to rule out whether it is beneficial to the brand or not. Many factors might affect the consumer perception of the success or failure of the social campaigns when promoting the brand. Shetty et al., (2019) found that millennials would buy the brand if it belonged to their own cause and believes as they would also stop purchasing the brand if they thought it was involved in unethical behaviors.

Further research should be done to test the relationship between brands participating in social issues and how consumers react to that. Hence, the model in **Figure 2** is established where the success or failure of the participation in social issues is determined by the change of purchasing intention of the customers, being mediated by the Engagement, responsibility, and brand image taking into consideration concerns about mental health as a moderator.

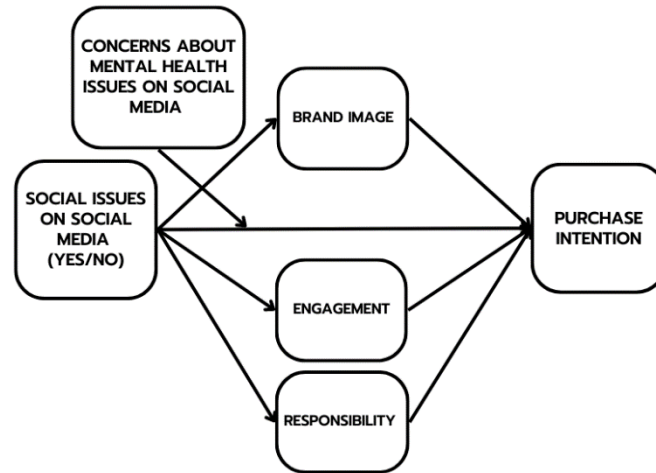


Figure 2: Theoretical Model

3 METHODOLOGY

In this study, SPSS software is being used to test our model and hypothesis. This study is divided into two sections. First it aims to understand the user's perspective towards social media and if it is causing any negative impact on their mental health. The second part aims to study the consumers perspective whether brands should participate in social and political issues when promoting their brands and services. While connecting those two parts together by having a better understanding of the brand's role from a consumer perspective in promoting mental well-being when advertising for the brand. (Appendix A)

3.1 STUDY DESIGN

Quantitative data from 108 number of participants was collected using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two different ad sets that were distributed randomly to the participants; the first is where the brand is being socially active in promoting and the other ad where the brand is using traditional marketing. Followed by questions related to the engagement, purchasing intention social responsibility of brands from the consumer perspective. As the questionnaire includes questions to target the negative impact of using social media on mental health. SPSS software v 28 testing model is used to analyze the data. We aimed to study the variables that are significant on the brand image and the impact on mental health of consumers when brands participate in social issues when promoting their products and services. This study also aimed to see if consumers create a better relationship with the brands when they are more socially active.

3.2 MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS

In this research, the theoretical framework to study the consumers perspective on brands participating in social issues and its impact on the brand image and mental health contained 5 variables (Brand image (BI), Engagement (ENG), purchasing intention (PI), Responsibility (R), and Mental Health (MH)) each measured by different statements. The Likert scale from 1 to 5 was used to measure the respondents' level of agreement with the questions related to brands having responsibilities in participating in social issues. 5 being "highly agree" and 1 "highly disagree". The other variables were measured through questions related to the changing behavior in consumers engagement and purchasing intention based on the ad shown. A similar Likert scale is used to measure consumers stand on social media affecting mental health. The questions used to measure the consumers perception on brands taking a stand on social issues was also influenced from a previous study done by Broberg and Doshoris, (2020) which is summarized in Appendix B. Moreover, to study the consumer perspective on the brand image, questions were retrieved from Ansary & Nik Hashim, (2018)

3.3 MEASUREMENT MODEL

Before analyzing our data, a new variable called "Control" was created where the two scenarios of whether the ad participated in social issues or not were combined.

Then factorial analysis is made to combine the items in the survey into one variable as **Table 1** shows. For the Purchase intention variable, one of the items was removed since it did not pass the level of significance for the Factorial analysis test which was less than 0.7.

Table 1: Reliability analysis of the study scales

Scale	Factorial Analysis	Cronbach's Alpha	Items
Brand Image (BI)	better characteristics than its competitors (.916)	0.918	3
	one of the best brands in the sector (.935)		
	satisfies its customers (.916)		
Responsibility (R)	N/A		0
Engagement (Eng)	Like the post (.778)	0.907	5
	Comment on the post (.858)		
	Share the post (.889)		
	React to the post (.876)		
	Save the post (.867)		
Purchase intention (PI)	I would change my purchase intention based on the ad shown (.544)	0.917	3
	Purchase the product (.921)		
	Recommend the product (.907)		
	Plan to purchase later (.906)		
Mental Health (MH)	How often do you experience anxiety or depression related to your social media use? (.778)	0.819	3
	Do you feel that social media affects your mental health negatively? (.898)		
	Have you noticed any negative changes in your mood or behavior after increasing your social media use? (.907)		

Regarding Cronbach's Alpha all variables passed the level of significance needed to check the reliability of our scales in the questionnaire. (>0.7)

Moreover, the Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) analysis is made to provide us with better insights on the participants responses in the questionnaire and the level of efficiency of the scales **Table 3.** Correlation tests provide a signal whether the variables are related to each other. **Table 2** shows the correlation between the variables.

Table 2: Correlation

Correlations						
		R	BI	ENG	PI	MH
R	Pearson Correlation	--				
	N	108				
BI	Pearson Correlation	.216*	--			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.025				
	N	108	108			
ENG	Pearson Correlation	.316**	.684**	--		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000			
	N	108	108	108		
PI	Pearson Correlation	.197*	.711**	.790**	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.041	0.000	0.000		
	N	108	108	108	108	
MH	Pearson Correlation	.207*	0.170	.217*	0.183	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.032	0.079	0.024	0.058	
	N	108	108	108	108	108

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviation

	M	SD
BI	3.000	0.986
R	2.680	1.534
ENG	3.341	1.052
PI	3.173	1.023
MH	2.923	0.992

3.4 DATA COLLECTION AND PARTICIPANTS

Data was collected using a Qualtrics XM software online questionnaire targeting the public to test our hypotheses. The questionnaire is divided into two sections: the first section presented a brand promoting their brand using social issues and the other section the brand promoted their brand without participating in social issues **figure 3**. As questions related to the consumers mental health followed. The data was collected between 1st of June and 25th of June and 108 participants successfully completed the full survey. A summary of the participants' profiles is shown in **Table 1**. The participants (n=108) consisted of 46.3% females (n=50) and 51.9% males (n=56), and 2 participants prefer not to mention their gender 1.9%. The average age of the respondents is 27.91 years, and the most representative age group was from 18 to 30 with 73.2% respondents. As for the English level, most participants are advanced with 76.9% (n=83) and (n=24) are intermediate with 22.2% and only (n=1) was beginner with 0.9%.



Figure 3: Ads shown in the survey (social issues Yes/No)

Table 4: Demographic summary

Demographic questions		Results (%)
Gender	Male	51.90%
	Female	46.30%
	I prefer not to say	1.90%
Age	18 - 25 years	36.10%
	26 - 30 years	37.10%
	31- 40 years	25.90%
	>40 years	0.90%
English Level	Beginner	0.90%
	Intermediate	22.20%
	Advanced	76.90%

4 EMPIRICAL STUDY

Studying the impact of participating in social issues and its effect on the consumers purchasing intention, taking into consideration the engagement, social responsibility, and brand image as mediators is conducted thought applying Andrew F. Hayez Process Macro, Model 5. As the concern about the effect of social media on mental health is being studied as a moderator. For each mediator, a separate test is done to test the effect of each mediator on our research.

One way ANOVA using the type of ads as independent variable revealed that participants did not have significantly higher intentions to purchase the product when the brand participated in social issues.

($M_{SINO} = 3.2917$, $SD = 1.01715$ vs $M_{SIYES} = 3.0449$, $SD = 1.02268$, $F = 1.579$, $p = 0.212$)

One way ANOVA is done to study the direct effect of participating in social issues and its impact on the purchasing intention of the consumers.

The results are shown in **Table 5**.

Table 5: One way ANOVA PI

Oneway

Descriptives

		PI							
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
No		56	3.2917	1.01715	.13592	3.0193	3.5641	1.00	5.00
Yes		52	3.0449	1.02268	.14182	2.7602	3.3296	1.00	5.00
Total		108	3.1728	1.02257	.09840	2.9778	3.3679	1.00	5.00
Model	Fixed Effects			1.01982	.09813	2.9783	3.3674		
	Random Effects				.12337	1.6052	4.7405		.01117

ANOVA

PI					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.642	1	1.642	1.579	.212
Within Groups	110.243	106	1.040		
Total	111.885	107			

4.1. THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF ENGAGEMENT

Running the model when the purchase intention is studied when participating in social issues taking into consideration Engagement as a mediator and the concern about mental health as a moderator, resulted in a P value of 0.0091 significance in the Model summary for the Engagement variable as shown in **Table 6**.

Table 6: Engagement Model Outcome

```

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
ENG

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
    .2499    .0625    1.0467    7.0631    1.0000    106.0000    .0091

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant    3.5929    .1367    26.2801    .0000    3.3218    3.8639
CONTROL     -.5236    .1970    -2.6577    .0091    -.9142    -.1330

```

Additionally, the outcome of the Purchase Intention is significant (P value, 0.000) in this model as shown in **Table 7**.

Table 7: PI - ENG Model Outcome

```

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
PI

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
    .7991    .6386    .3925    45.5061    4.0000    103.0000    .0000

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant    .9811    .4100    2.3933    .0185    .1681    1.7942
CONTROL     -.4165    .5492    -.7584    .4500    -1.5056    .6727
ENG          .8000    .0601    13.3161    .0000    .6808    .9191
MH          -.2172    .1415    -1.5351    .1278    -.4978    .0634
Int_1       .2263    .2025    1.1178    .2662    -.1752    .6279

Product terms key:
Int_1      :      CONTROL x      MH

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
      R2-chng      F      df1      df2      p
X*W      .0044    1.2496    1.0000    103.0000    .2662

```

This shows the significant effect of the consumers perception regarding their purchase intention and engagement with the brand when promoting the brand using social issues.

However, the concern about mental health was not significant in this process as it did not have a high influence on the user's perception of the purchase intention nor the negative impact on their mental health.

4.2 THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF BRAND IMAGE

When Brand Image (BI) is used as a mediator, the outcome of the variable resulted in a P value of 0.2176 as shown in **Table 8**. The result of the direct relation between brand image variable and participating in social issues is not significant.

Table 8: Brand Image Model Outcome

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

BI

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.1196	.0143	.9671	1.5382	1.0000	106.0000	.2176

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.1131	.1314	23.6892	.0000	2.8526	3.3736
CONTROL	-.2349	.1894	-1.2403	.2176	-.6104	.1406

However, the outcome of the whole model summary resulted in a P value of 0.000 for the Purchase intention variable and P value of 0.000 for the brand image as shown in **Table 9**. Which means Purchase intention is significantly affected by participating in social issues when brand image is used as a mediator.

Table 9: PI - BI Model Outcome

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

PI

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.7149	.5110	.5312	26.9105	4.0000	103.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.3958	.4702	2.9684	.0037	.4632	2.3284
CONTROL	-.3788	.6389	-.5928	.5546	-1.6459	.8884
BI	.7395	.0725	10.2061	.0000	.5958	.8832
MH	-.1566	.1642	-.9535	.3426	-.4822	.1691
Int_1	.1196	.2347	.5096	.6114	-.3459	.5852

4.3 THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF BRAND RESPONSIBILITY

Process Model Macro is also done to study the mediating effect of brand responsibility in participating in social issues on the consumers purchasing intention.

This resulted in a P value of 0.081 in the outcome of the mediator variable (Responsibility) as shown in **Table 10**. Which leads to a non-significant relationship between participating in social issues and responsibility.

Table 10: Responsibility Model Outcome

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

R

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.1683	.0283	1.3101	3.0881	1.0000	106.0000	.0818

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.7143	.1530	17.7459	.0000	2.4110	3.0175
CONTROL	-.3874	.2204	-1.7573	.0818	-.8244	.0497

As the P value in the model summary of the purchase intention variable is 0.2754 which is not significant. Furthermore, the P value of the Responsibility variable is 0.0677 as shown in **Table 11**.

Table 11: PI - R Model Outcome

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

PI

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.2192	.0480	1.0341	1.2991	4.0000	103.0000	.2754

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.8319	.6430	4.4040	.0000	1.5566	4.1072
CONTROL	.1687	.8901	.1896	.8500	-1.5966	1.9341
R	.1596	.0864	1.8467	.0677	-.0118	.3311
MH	.0102	.2279	.0448	.9644	-.4418	.4622
Int_1	-.1303	.3258	-.4000	.6900	-.7765	.5159

4.4 MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

As for the concerns of the negative impact of participating in social issues on the consumers mental health, the data concluded that participating in social issues did not affect the consumer mental health negatively.

The P value of MH when running the mediators was as shown in **Table 12**.

Table 12: MH P value vs Mediators

Mediators	MH P value
ENG	0.1278
BI	0.3426
R	0.9644

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data collected from the online questionnaire, it is feasible to reject and accept our hypothesis. **Table 13** provides a summary of our hypotheses that were accepted and rejected.

Table 13: Hypotheses testing summary

Hypothesis	Description	Status
H1	Purchase intention improves when brands participate in social issues when promoting their brand (vs. promoting the brand without social issues)	Not Supported
H2a	Consumers' perception of brand image mediates the relationship between social activism and purchase intention.	Not supported
H2b	Consumers engagement mediates the relationship between social activism and purchase intention.	Supported
H2c	Consumers' brand responsibility mediates the relationship between social activism and purchase intention.	Not supported
H3	Perceived concerns on mental health problems provoked by social media consumption impact negatively the consumers' perception on the purchase intention.	Not supported

Although we couldn't prove that participating in social issues when promoting the brand directly affects the purchase intention of the consumers, we can still conclude important contributions based on the results. When studying the mediation effect of engagement, brand image and responsibility on the purchase intention, no significant effect was shown in the brand image and reputation. However, engagement as a mediator is highly significant in the relation with the effect of participating in social issues, as it showed significance in the relation between social issues and purchase intention. As brand image failed to show significance in the direct effect of social issues on brand image as a mediator (P value = 0.2176), significance can still be seen in the overall model were the relationship between social issues and purchase intention is studied when brand image is used as a mediator (P value = 0.0000).

Prentice et al., (2019) confirmed that belonging to the certain online community is significantly related to identifying with the community, as both identification leads to significant impact on engagement, which can lead to purchase intention. Hence proving our results, that engagement is significant to increasing the purchase intention of the consumers. Based on the previous results of engagement as a mediator (P value = 0.0091) we can accept the hypothesis H2b.

"Consumers engagement mediates the relationship between social activism and purchase intention."

Hypothesis H2c is rejected in this study since participants did not show any significance when asked about their perception on whether brands should be engaging in social issues. This theory is supported by (Broberg & Doshoris, 2020) which mentioned that brands are not expected to engage in social issues when promoting their brands but when they do, this has a positive impact.

The cohort study done by Kelly et al., (2018) also suggested that the anxiety and other mental health issues can be derived from using social media platforms. However, in this research, no significance was found in the relationship between brand participating in social issues and negative impact on the mental health of consumers.

5.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This research provides information and theory about the consumer perspective on brands participating in social issues and its effect on the purchasing intention and mental health. Hence, this study contributes to existing literature in different theoretical means.

Although previous studies were made on the effect of improved engagement on the purchase intention like Prentice et al., (2019) this paper contributes to confirming that theory as it was proved that engagement is significantly related to purchase intention.

Moreover, in this research, we expand the scope of studying the effects of partaking in social issues linking it to mental health concerns, where previously it was only explored in the interchange between social issues and its impact on the brand from a financial and business perspective.

Astleitner et al., (2023) research suggested that social media experiences can have negative impact on mental health and the fear of missing out, ghosting and vague booking may increase that effect. Therefore, marketers should take into consideration the risk of linking the brand that engaged in social issues to the increased risk of anxiety in consumers. Although, in this research no significance is found between negative impact of mental health and brand activism, branding the products and services should be done with caution since it might backlash on the brand. This confirms the research done by Shetty et al., (2019) where it was suggested that the negative side of social activism, if it is not in synchronization the brand core values, it might invite backlash and boycotting from consumers that have different values.

5.2 PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The findings from this study provide relevant practical context on brands participating in social issues and their effect on the purchase intentions.

Shetty et al., (2019) found that when brands support the same cause or purpose that millennials support, they tend to buy the brand and to they stopped buying the brand when it behaved unethically. However, the question that rises is which social issues brands should participate in and which social issues they should avoid tackling.

This study offers a practical way for marketers and brand managers to improve the engagement with the brand leading to improved purchasing intention. When promoting the brand using social issues, it was proven that consumer better interact with the brand as this was the case with Nike campaign “dream crazy”. Enhancing the consumer purchase intention can be achieved by promoting the brand using trending issues related to social and political matters, as consumers will create a relationship with the brand since they will be representing their believes when owing this brand.

Consumers do not expect brands, marketers, or brand managers to engage in social issues, however, if it was applied in proper manner, it will have a positive impact on the user’s engagement

with the brand and vice versa. Thus, brands that was aiming to create a good relationship with the consumers or setting goals to increase the purchase intention, should consider promoting the brand using social issues as brand activism can have a significant impact as proven in this study.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

The main limitation in this study, is that when studying the consumer response to a certain aspect through an online questionnaire, there is no certainty that the participants fully understand the aspect being studied which might affect the results. Furthermore, it is challenging to determine the impact of brand activism on mental health with an online questionnaire as this matter is subjective to each single participant. To minimize those limitations, the questionnaire should be replaced with a better conducted experiment that allows us to notice the differences on the spot, like a lab test where participants' reaction to the ad shown can be seen and analyzed.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORKS

This paper aims to study the impact of brand activism on consumers' purchase intention and mental health. The data collected in this study allowed us to confirm that brand activism leads to improved engagement, thus leading to increased purchase intention. However, when studying the impact of brand activism on mental health, it is not a straightforward relationship since there are multiple factors that can play a role in contributing to a positive or negative impact.

Thus, further research should be done to know if brand activism has a positive, negative or no impact on consumers perspective on brand activism and its underlying effect on the consumers mental health. Future research should focus on identifying the specific types of social media use that may have negative effects on mental health and on understanding the underlying mechanisms of this relationship.

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APPENDIX A: ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Consumer perspective on brand activism and effects on mental health.

Dear participant,

This is a 4-minute survey intended to evaluate your perceptions and opinions towards brand participating in social issues and its impact on the brand and on mental health.

Please read the instructions and pay close attention to the scenario described.

There is no risk involved in answering this survey. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, which means that you are free to participate or not, as well as give up at any time.

However, your response is very important, anonymous, and will be used only for academic purposes.

Informed Consent Form

I declare that I am 18 or over 18 and agree to participate in this research. I declare that I was informed that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I can leave this survey at any time without penalty, and all data is confidential. I understand that I will evaluate responses and that this study does not offer serious risks.

Q1:

I agree to participate.

I do not agree to participate.

Please take into consideration the following definitions as they are important for this survey.

Brand activism is identified as a strategy done by marketers that seeks to have an influence on consumers by developing campaigns created to be influenced by social and political issues.

Social and political issues include but not limited to the following examples:

- Social justice
- Discrimination
- Human rights
- Racism

Q2: Imagine the following.

The brand is promoting their product using the following post.

This is an example of the post:



Q3: Based on the ad, would you most likely to

	1. Strongly agree	2 agree	3. neither agree or disagree	4 disagree	5. Strongly disagree
Like the post	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comment on the post	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Share the post	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
React to the post	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Save the post	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q4: Based on the ad, would you most likely to

	1. Strongly agree	2 Agree	3. neither agree or disagree	4 Disagree	5. Strongly disagree
better characteristics than its competitors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
one of the best brands in the sector	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
satisfies its customers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q5: Based on the ad, I think the brand has.

Q6: I would change my purchase intention based on the ad shown.

- ☐ Highly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Highly disagree

Q7: Brands have responsibility to engage in social and political issues.

- ☐ Highly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Highly disagree

Q8: How many hours do you spend on social media per day?

- ☐ 1-2 Hours
- ☐ 3-4 Hours
- ☐ 4-5 Hours
- ☐ 6-7 Hours
- ☐ 7-8 Hours

Q9: How often do you experience anxiety or depression related to your social media use?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Q10: Do you feel that social media affects your mental health negatively?

- ☐ Highly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Highly disagree

Q11: Have you noticed any negative changes in your mood or behavior after increasing your social media use?

- ☐ Highly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Highly disagree

Q12: Which social media platforms do you use the most?

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ TikTok
- ☐ Pinterest

Q13: Did the brand participate in social issues in the ad presented in the beginning of the survey?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

Q14: Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ I prefer not to say

Q15: Age

Age (please insert numbers only)

Q16: What is your level of English language?

- ☐ Beginner
- ☐ Intermediate
- ☐ Advanced

APPENDIX B: STATEMENTS USED FOR MEASURING CONSUMERS PERCEPITIVE ON SOCIAL ACTIVISM

Retrieved from Broberg & Doshoris, (2020)

Attribute	Statements
Personal questions	How would you describe yourself as a consumer?
	Would you compromise on quality or price for a given product or service to support a brand?
	Do you buy products that you feel you can use to express yourself?
	How does a brand become likeable to you?
	How do you base your opinions on brands?
Consumer activism	Would you say that you generally trust other people, brands and institutions?
	Have you ever blacklisted a brand?
	Have you ever purchased something from a particular brand because you wanted to support them?
	Have you ever expressed your anger or support towards a brand by liking/sharing commenting on social media channels?
	Have you ever taken part in a demonstration towards a brand or engaged in an activity to support a brand?
Powerful brands	Do you feel large companies hold too much power in society today?
	Do you feel large companies with great power have a positive or negative effect on our society?
	Do you think companies should become more involved in society?
Stancetaking	How do you feel about brands taking stance on environmental or social issues?
	Do you think that brands should take stance on social issues?
	Does brands engaging in social or environmental add value to you?
	Would you be more willing to support a brand that actively takes stances on certain issues?