

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Master's degree  
in Management from the Nova School of Business and Economics.

**THE POWER OF CONTROVERSY:  
THE ROLE OF BRAND AUTHENTICITY**

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02-07-2022

**Abstract:** Brands are increasingly touching on controversial issues and maintain a position in reaction, making it important to understand how consumers perceive and respond to these brands. But, what does consumers feel when brands take a public stand on controversial socio-political issues? How do they respond to these actions? Do they perceive them as authentic?

In this work project I ran an experiment involving a fictional brand and its level of commitment to a socio-political controversial issue (brand activism commitment). Results showed brand activism commitment has a positive effect on perceived brand authenticity. This effect of brand activism commitment holds also for consumers' purchase intentions. In summary, higher commitment induces higher perceived authenticity, which leads to a higher purchase intention.

**Keywords:** Belief-Driven Consumers, Brand Activism, Brand Authenticity

**Reference statement:** No funding was given to the pursue of this research.

This work used infrastructure and resources funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (UID/ECO/00124/2013, UID/ECO/00124/2019 and Social Sciences DataLab, Project 22209), POR Lisboa (LISBOA-01-0145-FEDER-007722 and Social Sciences DataLab, Project 22209) and POR Norte (Social Sciences DataLab, Project 22209).

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# 1. Introduction

A brand can be defined as “a set of tangible and intangible attributes designed to create awareness and identity, and to build the reputation of a product, service, person, place, or organization” (Sammot-Bonnici, 2015). Hence, branding is primarily devoted to telling the public within which prospective customers exist that a particular service or product exists and is ready to satisfy their specific needs. The year 2020 and its twists and turns have prompted people to rethink how they think about business practices. Such critical questions like; Can companies combine profit with social impact? Are worth asking. Businesses are facing a cultural shift (Parida, Sjödin, and Reim 2019) with the advent of brand controversy, a trend that continues to gain momentum (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020).

The emergence of the movement, 'Black Lives Matter' in 2013 has impacted many brands around America. In 2020, following the demand and awareness of police violence stemming from the movement's central theme to end the discrimination of people of color, many brands spoke out against racism, with a practical example being Nike (Vredenburg et al. 2020). Some were acclaimed for their actions, like Ben and Jerry's, which was quick to condemn white supremacy (Ciszek and Logan 2018). Others have been criticized for their opportunistic and even hypocritical responses in plain sight (Alemany 2020). Consumers now expect brands to make social and environmental commitments (Copeland and Bhaduri 2019), including corporate and social responsibility (Jermsttiparsert et al. 2019). Exactly this dynamic can be observed right now with the Russian war in Ukraine. Companies that still do business with or in Russia are publicly accused by consumers for supporting the aggressor that way. (Chan 2022).

Financial factors are a vital element in the rise of brand controversy, as consumers' wallets have replaced the ballot. According to a survey on the support of BLM, 64% of Americans' say a brand's contribution to the movement weighs in on their purchasing decision (Brownen-Trinh, and Orujov 2020). A higher percentage of millennials and Gen Z members that are willing to spend even more on sustainable products (Wang, n.d) want brands to take a firm stand on critical issues. Social media and the ability to connect brands with their customers reinforce this trend. By developing their brand identities and value propositions, companies can no longer remain silent or neutral. In other words, consumers are putting more pressure on brands and demand that they drive change themselves.

Controversies equally impact the brand image. So, gaining insight into the concept of controversial brands can help channel critical factual information about different brands and how controversial they should present themselves to mitigate the risk of losing customer loyalty. Mitha (2017) demonstrates that when consumers face inconsistent or false information about a brand, the brand's impression towards them is impacted based on whether they are focusing on the brand itself or the ethics. Further, brand controversies affect not only the brand's image. Kapoor and Banerjee (2021) argue that controversies around a brand also impact the stakeholders in society. Hence, a critical implication of this to managers is that the nature of the controversy is irrelevant.

"Company acts that enhance social benefit beyond what is required by law" is what corporate social responsibility refers to (Kang et al.; 2016). It is mainly concerned with well accepted prosocial issues, and it is linked to a variety of favorable performance outcomes, such as

company reputation, product assessments, consumer trust, and long-term loyalty. Corporate social activism, often known as brand activism, is defined as a company's public display of statements and/or actions in support or opposition to one side of a contentious sociopolitical issue (Bhagwat et al., 2020). It involves greater uncertainty and risk compared to corporate social responsibility, as it is linked to controversial and divisive societal and political issues making the reaction of the stakeholders more passionate (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Controversy in advertisement is the structure of a product or an advertisement strategy which elicits sensitive reactions from sections of people when presented (Waller, 2004). Controversial brands are the brands whose brand identities or advertisement approaches elicit these feelings of sensitivity from the consumers.

Verbosity is the situation in communication where one of the parties involved become wordier than would be necessary. Arnaud and Waguespack (2018), argue that controversial advertising may bring about popularity of the brand since it attracts great attention of the masses because of the sensitivity that controversial issues appeal to people. When emotions arise in the consumers, the divergence of perceptions improves verbosity on the platforms that these organizations are conducting their advertisement.

More companies are publicly voicing their opinion pertaining to social and political issues that arise in society, due to the enhanced value that consumers are placing in brand activism commitment and corporate social responsibility (Gray, 2019). Authenticity enters the picture since it has become a hot topic in modern marketing and a vital determinant in brand success.

Understanding customer perceptions of authenticity may aid marketing managers in explaining consumer brand attitudes and purchase intent. Such insights will give brand managers with a tool to measure the efficiency of strategic communication messages aimed to build a perception of authenticity in the eyes of external stakeholders, including consumers, as brand activism and corporate social responsibility ideals grow. (Molleda, 2010).

This research is structured as follows. First, I examine the nature and definitions of brand authenticity and brand activism. Second, I address theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and finally I give some directions for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Belief-Driven Consumers**

In response to the social crisis we have faced over the past years, such as financial crisis, increasing political instability, gender inequality or climate change, there has been an increasing consumer demand for consistency and brand authenticity (Fritz et al., 2017). The desire of authenticity is stronger in moments of uncertainty and social changes (Turner and Manning 1988). That is why today more than ever, brands are expected to take a larger role in social and political issues that arises in society, act with integrity and authenticity, and lead with the example.

According to Edelman Earned Brand Report 2018, nearly two-thirds of the global consumers choose to buy, switch or avoid a brand based on the brand's stand on societal issues (Edelman, 2018). These "belief-driven buyers" put principles over products and make their buying decisions based on the company's morals, beliefs and public support or condemnation of social and political issues. This large consumer segment represents a high-value opportunity for brands as they tend to have deeper relationships with their favorite brands as shared beliefs are the most powerful driver of commitment and it build stronger consumer relationships. Due to the large influence on consumers purchase decision, the value and the importance of brand activism has become more important over the past years. Consumers express themselves via their purchasing decisions, choosing companies that agree with their values and beliefs and rejecting those that do not (Edelman 2018). This is an opportunity for companies to contribute to the societal conversation while also catering to customer values (Gray, 2019).

Informed consumers demand consistency and are no longer willing to accept unauthentic or insincere brand behavior (Holt 2002); they want brands to have real conversations and take part on social stands as they believe brands have the potential to be a compelling and strong force for change. "This is the birth of Brand Democracy; as consumers are electing brands as their change agents" (Edelman, 2018), this means that these buyers are more willing to buy first, stay loyal, and even defend a brand they perceive as authentic and shared beliefs and values with.

## **2.2 Brand Activism**

Brands are entering an era where customers want them to take a stand on sociopolitical issues. Different stakeholders are concerned about the contribution of the firm to the society and expect the firm to demonstrate their values by giving public support to a societal or political issue. Corporate sociopolitical activism (brand activism) is defined as a company's public display of support or opposition to one side of a contentious sociopolitical issue by remarks and/or actions (Bhagwat et al.,2020). Extending on Moorman's work (2020), brand activism is described as a purpose and value-driven approach in which brands take a public stance on a social problem in order to effect social change. It involves greater uncertainty and higher risk as it is unclear on how the consumers will react to brands taking a stand on controversial societal issues.

While corporate social responsibility focuses mostly on well-known prosocial problems (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), brand activism concern for society's most pressing challenges, which in consequence generates more passionate responses. Building on Bhagwat et al. (2020), definition of "sociopolitical activism", when brands engage in controversial issues, must pick a position by defending or challenging an initiative. Taking a public position can have a positive or negative impact on brands trust and equity. It may build stronger relationships with consumers who agree with the company stand, but it is more likely to harm relationships with those who do not agree.

Despite their similarities, corporate social responsibility differs in many ways from brand activism. The main objective of corporate social responsibility is to create solutions and

initiatives to overcome environmental and social issues. It unlikely evokes negative responses from the consumers as their actions are generally seen as beneficial, and normally these policies and practices are embedded in the firms' strategic plan and reflects the business social responsibility.

Brand activism allow consumers to morally determine whether the brands align to their values or not. If this moral alignment is positive, it will build a stronger brand-consumer bond, and, thus, more favorable attitudes and sentiments towards the brand, such as higher purchase intention and stronger brand advocacy. On the contrary, if consumers disagree with the brand's moral position, the level of consumer-brand identification will be lower which will negatively impact the consumers attitudes, intentions and behaviors (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013).

***Brand activism and perceptions of authenticity.***

When companies become social or political activists, their motivations are scrutinized and judged. (Holt 2002). When companies participate in activism, consumers may doubt their authenticity. According to Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report (2019), 56% of consumers believe that brands utilize societal and political concerns as a marketing gimmick to sell more of their products. Despite this, 53% of consumers believe companies have a duty to become engaged in at least one societal problem that does not directly affect their business. As consumers may question the motivation behind brands taking a public stand, marketing academic Moorman (2020) has call attention of the importance of authenticity in brand activism. The integration of mission and values with activist marketing message and

prosocial business activities (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020). Conversely, “woke washing” or inauthentic brand activism, occurs when a social or political problem is not connected with the brand's purpose, values, and business practices (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020).

### **2.3 Brand Authenticity**

The concept of authenticity comes from the ancient Greek word *authentikos* and the Latin word *authenticus*, conveying a sense of originality, trustworthy and genuineness. Due to its strong association throughout the years to social sciences, the concept of authenticity has adopted different conceptual associations.

Despite its frequent use, the definition of the term “authenticity” has not been sufficiently well defined. As it is subjective constructed, few consumer researches have defined it. According to Grayson and Martinec (2004), the word “authentic” is continuously associated with “truth” and “genuine”, yet these words can have different meaning to different consumers as they evaluate indicators of brand authenticity based on their context and past experiences. This means that the term is defined by personal experiences rather than objective realities.

Morhart et al. (2015) identified four dimensions of brand authenticity: continuity, credibility, symbolism and integrity. The continuity dimension stands for the brand historicity and transcendence over time and trends, credibility refers to the ability of a brand to deliver what it promises, symbolism refers to the symbolic quality of the brand, and lastly the integrity

dimension alludes to the brand values, intentions and moral responsibility. The researchers define brand authenticity as “the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful and true toward itself and its consumers, and to support consumers being true to themselves” (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 202).

Grayson and Martinec (2004) identified two factors that contribute to the authenticity evaluation: (1) indexical cues, which are factual connections to brand attributes and (2) iconic cues which conveys the individual’s emotions and feelings. There is a complex relationship between indexical and iconic elements, making the distinction between authentic and inauthentic a subjective, socially or personally construct.

In summary, we can conclude that consumers evaluate authenticity differently and uses different judgements to evaluate the authenticity of a brand or object. It refers to the brand being consistent and faithful to itself, rather than to a moral conduct or tradition.

### ***Brand authenticity and purchase intention.***

Customers form a significant emotional brand attachment to brands they believe are authentic. Brand authenticity represents a value proposition to consumers who seek meaning and cherish their true self (Hyunjoo et al., 2019). This means consumers develop a higher connection, passion and affection to the brand, increasing brand trust and eventually brand equity (Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005). Prior research demonstrates that consumer responses are positively influenced by brand authenticity ((Napoli et al., 2014, Morhart et al., 2015) and positively effect consumers behavioral intentions to buy a product and recommend

the brand to other people (Hyunjoo et al., 2019). Drawing from Napoli et al. (2016) attribution, consumer perceptions toward authentic vs inauthentic brands positively impact purchase behavior.

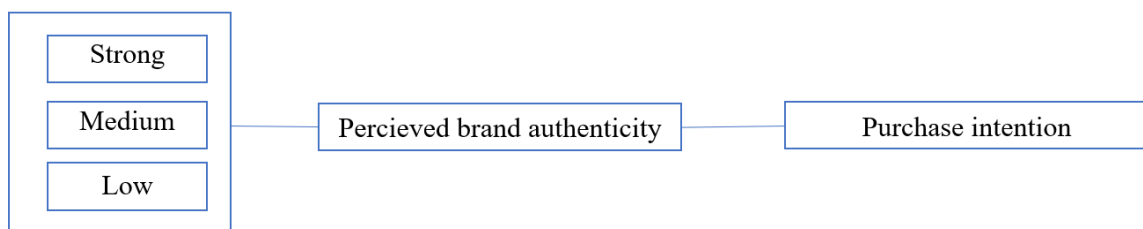
## 2. Hypotheses

As a result of the literature research, I can suggest that's consumers perceptions toward brand authenticity can lead to positive outcomes. Following this research, two hypotheses were developed:

***H1:** When a brand takes a stand but does not fully commit in a controversial social political issue, consumers will perceive it as less authentic compared to a brand that take a stand and is fully commit and a brand that's doesn't take a stand at all.*

***H2:** When a brand takes a stand but does not fully commit in a controversial social political issue, consumers will express lower purchase intention than a brand that takes a stand and is fully commit and a brand that's doesn't take a stand at all.*

Level of brand activism commitment



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework.

## **4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Sample**

The public online questionnaire was undertaken in Europe in 2022, whereby both international and national individuals were considered. The voluntary online experiment generated a total of 221 data sets.

Participant`s age range from 18 to 68 with 42% of the participants being part of the interval 18 to 24 years old, and 39% of 25 to 34 years, which can be explained by Millennials and Gen Z having a similar and stronger online affinity. Among the participants, 63% identified themselves as female, 35% as male and the remainder 2% as other. The sample contained a total of 44 countries of origin, being Mexico (17%), Unites States (15%) and United Kingdome (12%) the leading nationalities. Regarding the education level, the majority possess a graduate degree (54%) (Appendix I).

### **4.2 Design**

To test the hypotheses, I conducted an online experiment through an online questionnaire developed in Qualtrics. The data were collected via social networking sites, as well as student platforms. The purpose of the study is to explore the consumers perceptions of brand authenticity in relation to the role of a brand in social political issues and its effect in purchase intention.

The controversy presented in this study was based on a fictitious brand named “Brand XX” and the commitment the brand took during the Black Lives Matter movement in United States. It was decided to use a fictitious brand name and hypothetical condition, in order to prevent respondents' prejudices which might have resulted in biased results. In order to attribute different levels on commitment during the social movement, I created three different scenarios which showcase a brand that was fully committed, a brand with a medium commitment and lastly, a brand which preferred to maintain neutral and inactive during the social movement.

To assess the hypotheses previously argued, several brand perceptions referring to “Brand XX”, along with individuals’ purchase intention and perceived brand authenticity were measured.

### **4.3 Procedure**

The questionnaire (Appendix II) firstly presented three different scenarios of fictitious brands during the Black Lives Matter movement. Participants were assigned randomly to one of three possible scenarios using the randomizer tool in Qualtrics. The focus of the scenarios developed lied on the type of role the brands had during the social movement.

The three scenarios showcase an American brand of ice cream which was created in the 60`s by two immigrants.

Participants in the high commitment condition read the following:

*Imagine the following fictional scenario:*

*Brand XX is an American ice cream brand that was created in the 60`s by two immigrants. The ice cream comes in many different flavors, it uses the highest quality ingredients and it is sold as a premium brand. Over the year, the brand donates part of its profits to support different socio-political causes. The brand also participates in demonstrations for the causes it believes in, such as racial equality, climate change, mass incarceration, and a variety of other causes.*

*During the Black Lives Matter movement, many brands took a stand, and brand XX was one of them. The brand posted a public statement calling out police brutality and suggested actionable items that needed to take place to address racial justice.*

Participant in the medium commitment condition read:

*Imagine the following fictional scenario:*

*Brand XX is an American ice cream brand that was created in the 60`s by two immigrants. The ice cream comes in many different flavors, it uses the highest quality ingredients and it is sold as a premium brand. Over the year, the brand donates part of its profits to support different socio-political causes.*

*During the Black Lives Matter movement, many brands took a stand and brand Xx was one of them. The brand posted a public statement stating that they will donate \$250.000 to drive change.*

And finally, participants assigned to the low commitment condition read the following:

*Imagine the following fictional scenario:*

*Brand XX is an American ice cream brand that was created in the 60`s by two immigrants.*

*The ice cream comes in many different flavors, it uses the highest quality ingredients and it is sold as a super-premium brand.*

*During Black Lives Matter movement, many brands took a stand but brand XZ wasn`t was one of them. they continued their regular marketing activities and branding.*

Next, several perceptions regarding the presented brand were assessed, specifically brand authenticity. The set of items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (e.g.: “I believe the brand is being authentic”. With: 1- Strongly disagree, 7- Strongly agree; all multi-item scales are reported in full in appendix). Subsequently, purchase intentions towards the mentioned brand were measured with a 7-point Likert scale (e.g. “If I wanted an ice-cream and Brand XX were available near me at a good price, I would consider purchasing an ice-cream from this brand” With: 1- Strongly disagree, 7- Strongly agree). Following this, a set of individual preferences regarding the importance of brands taking a stand on social-political issues were presented (e.g.: “I have strong opinions about many societal and political issues. The brands I choose to buy and not buy are one important way I express those opinions”. With: 1- Strongly disagree, 7- Strongly agree). The aim of these statements was to measure and understand the importance of trust and authenticity during brand activism. Rather than presuming that my conception is adequate for comprehending consumer perceptions of authenticity in brand activism, I utilized open-ended questions to hear, in consumers’ own words, how is important for them to agree with a company`s stand on important social issues and how this affects their purchase decisions scale (e.g.: ”Even if a company makes the

product that I like most, I will not buy it if I disagree with the company's stand on important social issues. Please give an example"). These questions serve as exploratory purpose and will not be analyzed further in this research report. Finally, participants reported their demographic information.

## **5. Data Analysis**

### **5.1 Reliability**

Prior to conducting the main analyses, accuracy checks, missing data analyses were conducted. No missing data was detected during the data set preparation process. Cronbach's alpha was applied as a reliability measurement to provide information about the correlation between the items and their internal consistency. In accordance with Cronbach's alpha, a scale can be regarded as reliable if the reliability statistic yields an  $\alpha > .70$  (Peterson 1994). In accordance with Cronbach's alpha, brand authenticity (0.864) and purchase intention (0.921) were reliable. Thus, I averaged their respective items to form a brand authenticity and purchase intentions index, which I then used in the analyses reported below.

### **5.2 Hypotheses Testing**

The goal of these analyses was to examine the links between brands commitment to a social political cause, brand authenticity and purchase intention. Accordingly, one sequential mediation model was computed. The model was examined using IBM SPSS statistics software, version 28.0.1.1 and subsequently Haye's mediation model 4 was used to quantify the mediation analysis.

***Perceived Authenticity.***

**H1:** *When a brand takes a stand but does not fully commit in a controversial social political issue, consumers will perceive it as less authentic compared to a brand that take a stand and is fully commit and a brand that's doesn't take a stand at all.*

A one-way ANOVA was performed to analyze the effect of three different levels of commitment of a brand in a controversial social political issue on perceived brand authenticity. The analysis of variance revealed that there was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level for the three conditions [ $F(2,218)=12.783, p < .001$ ]. Because I found a statistically significant effect, I computed a post hoc test. Using the Tukey's High Significant Difference test indicated that the mean score of the strong brand activism commitment condition ( $M=5.4868, SD=1.0728$ ) was significantly different from the medium commitment ( $M=4.9744, SD=1.1304$ ) and the low commitment ( $M=4.4627, SD=1.4260$ ) conditions.

To determine the effect size at the level of significant  $p < 0.05$ , I used Tukey's HSD Tests for multiple comparisons and found that the mean values of authenticity was significantly different between the strong brand activism commitment and the low activism commitment ( $p < .001, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [0.625, 1.424]$ ), and between the medium and low brand activism commitment ( $p = 0.012, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = [0.115, 0.909]$ ).

In contrast of the hypothesis, taken together, these results suggest that a strong and medium brand activism commitment during a controversial social political issue will be perceived as more authentic than a low brand activism commitment.

***Purchase Intention.***

**H2:** *When a brand takes a stand but does not fully commit in a controversial social political issue, consumers will express lower purchase intention than a brand that takes a stand and is fully committed and a brand that's doesn't take a stand at all.*

To test whether respondents of the three conditions, namely level of activism commitment (Strong activism commitment, medium activism commitment and low activism commitment) indeed perceived the conditions manipulation, a one-way ANOVA was performed. The results [ $F(2,214)=26.121, p<.001$ ] indicated that the commitment activism manipulation was effective as the analysis revealed a statistically significant difference as the p-value was below 0.05

Participants of the group of strong activism commitment had a higher purchase intention ( $M=6.936, SD=2.0181$ ), than the medium activism commitment ( $M=5.6453, SD=1.1626$ ) and the low activism commitment ( $M=4.9798, SD=1.6307$ ). A Tukey post hoc test showed there is a statistically significant difference between the strong activism condition and the low condition ( $p<.001$ ), and between the medium brand activism condition and the low condition ( $p=0.016$ ).

All things considered, in contrast of the hypothesis, the results indicate that a strong commitment and medium commitment of a brand in a controversial socio-political issue will have as a result a higher purchase intention compared to a brand that has a low commitment.

### ***Mediation Effect.***

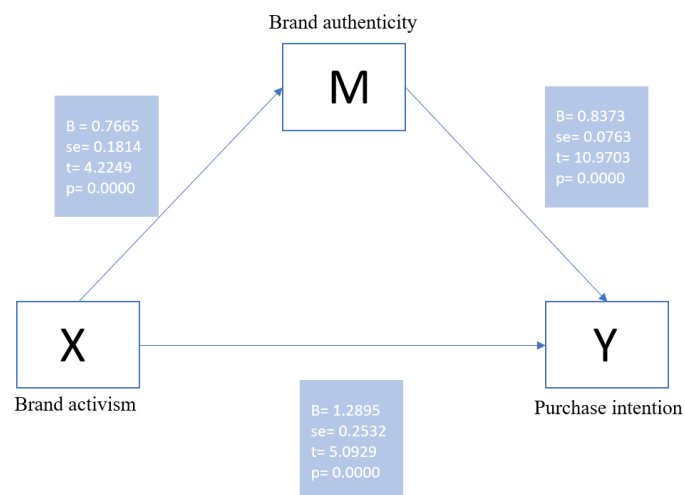
In order to understand the correlation effect of the perception of brand authenticity on purchase intention, I used Hayes' mediation model 4 (Hayes 2013). To simplify the analysis, the brand commitment was divided in two groups rather than in three as it was previously assigned in the study. Group zero representing brands with a low commitment, and group number one representing brands with a high and medium commitment during a socio-political controversial issue.

The results show that in the first (simple) regression, perceived authenticity is a significant positive predictor of purchase intention ( $B= 0.7665$ ,  $SE=0.1814$ ,  $t= 4.2249$ ,  $p<.000$ ). This positive coefficient suggests that as the independent variable increases (e.g. With: 1=Low brand activism, 2= Strong and medium brand activism), the dependent variable tends to decrease.

In the second regression, the level of brand activism is a positive predictor of purchase intention ( $B= 0.6477$ ,  $SE= 0.2113$ ,  $t= 3.0655$ ,  $p= 0.0025$ ), as perceived brand authenticity which is also a positive predictor of purchase intention ( $B=0.8373$ ,  $SE= 0.763$ ,  $t= 10.9703$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The standardized path coefficients for this portion model are 0.3574 and 0.5898 for level of brand activism and perceived authenticity, respectively.

The unstandardized indirect effect (0.6418) of perceived brand authenticity was calculated as the product of paths a (0.7665) and b (0.8373). To evaluate the indirect effect (a path),  $B=0.7665$ ,  $t(215) = 4.2249$ ,  $p<.001$ . This means that for every one unit increase in x (brand activism) we get an increment of 0.5235 units in y (purchase intention). Computing the indirect effect of m predicting y (b path)  $B= 0.8373$ ,  $t(214) = 10.9703$ ,  $p<.001$  and lastly the indirect effect of x predicting y (c path)  $B= 1.2895$ ,  $t(215) = 5.0929$ ,  $p<.001$ . Concluding, the indirect effect= 0.6418,  $SE= 0.1719$ , 95% CI [0.3110, 0.9835] indicating that there indeed is mediation because de CI doesn't include zero.

With these results I concluded that as the level of activism increases, it positively affects the perception of brand authenticity which as a consequence has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Meaning, that the perceived authenticity is higher in the strong and medium brand activism versus the low commitment.



**Figure 2.** Results of Haye's Process Model 4

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1 Implications**

Consumers nowadays are looking for authentic brands that can help them express their true self. (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). As a result, real brands play a crucial role in consumer identification since they provide as symbolic resources for self-expression. (e.g., Holt, 2002; Morhart et al., 2015).

Rather than traditional brand product marketing, brands are approaching an era where brand activism and corporate social responsibility tactics are having a significant impact on customer purchasing decisions. (Napoli et al. 2016). This type of research is important for brand and marketing managers as it will allow them to assess how consumers will perceive as authentic or not the stand and commitment taken by brands during a socio-political issue. As the consumer landscape evolves, it is crucial for brands to understand their consumers and the extent to which they perceived a brand to be authentic to be able to build an appropriate brand strategy that might influence the public's engagement and purchase decision.

Considering that the value of brand activism is on the rise, perceived authenticity in a brand's public position on a controversial issue is critical as it is an important factor in customer purchase decisions (Edelman, 2018). This is a huge opportunity for brands to serve towards consumer values by contributing to the social and political dialogue.

## **6.2 Limitations**

This study presents some significant data and findings on customer perceptions of brand authenticity, nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. First, the key limitation of this study refers to the use of an online questionnaire distributed mainly through social media and student platforms. Secondly, although our internationally diverse group of respondents supports the proposition that our findings are not limited to a particular demographic category. Concluding that this sampling approach only covers a small and specific portion of the population, the study's findings are not generalizable. However, it is interesting to consider consumer variables beyond basic demographics that might influence brand authenticity perceptions.

## **6.3 Conclusion and Future Research**

As the value of brand activism has become more important for consumers, brands have an increased opportunity to contribute to the societal dialogue and cater towards consumer values. The findings of this study are consistent with previous researches which highlight the importance of brand authenticity in brand activism (Kotler and Sakar 2017; Moorman 2020). Brands should indeed engage in controversy as it is perceived as more authentic by consumers and this has a positive effect in purchase intention.

As the study demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between perceived authenticity and brand activism commitment, it will be important for managers to think strategically about authentic activism as it is the backbone of every brand`s long term success (Kumar, 2020) and it positively influences consumers purchase intention.

Although brand authenticity is today considered a key marketing asset, there is still misunderstanding over the term's definition and application. Future research concerning the long-term consequences of brand authenticity would be interesting. While this study demonstrated how brand authenticity influences behavioral and purchasing intentions, the causes and effects of brand authenticity across cultures and industries remain unknown. Brand authenticity has become a crucial success factor for brand, it would be important to analyze which factors can be manipulated by the marketing and management team to positively impact consumers perceptions towards brand`s authenticity. There is opportunity for future research to explore deeper the role of authenticity in the context of brand activism. For example, there have been few studies on how different types of exploitative marketing strategies, such as 'woke-washing', where products are promoted to appeal to consumer consciousness in order to be perceived as progressive and tolerant, without actually standing for or integrating these values into the brand's core values, may affect brand authenticity (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

According to Cohen and Cohen (2012), the notion of brand authenticity has been frequently studied in consumer research, authentication as the social, political, and cultural process by which brand authenticity is affirmed is essentially unexplored. Meanwhile, a research opportunity to study the possible negative aspects of brand authentication which could lead to a better understand of the circumstances.

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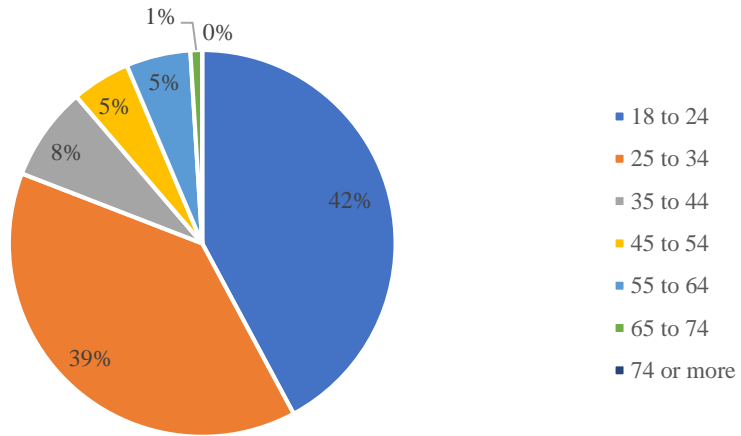
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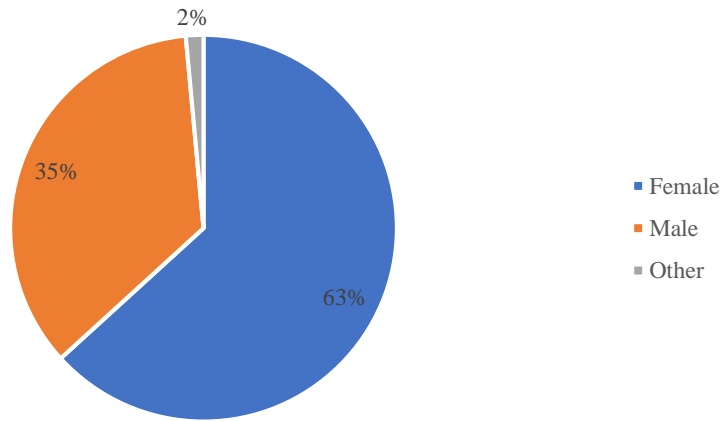
## **8. Appendices**

### **Appendix I**

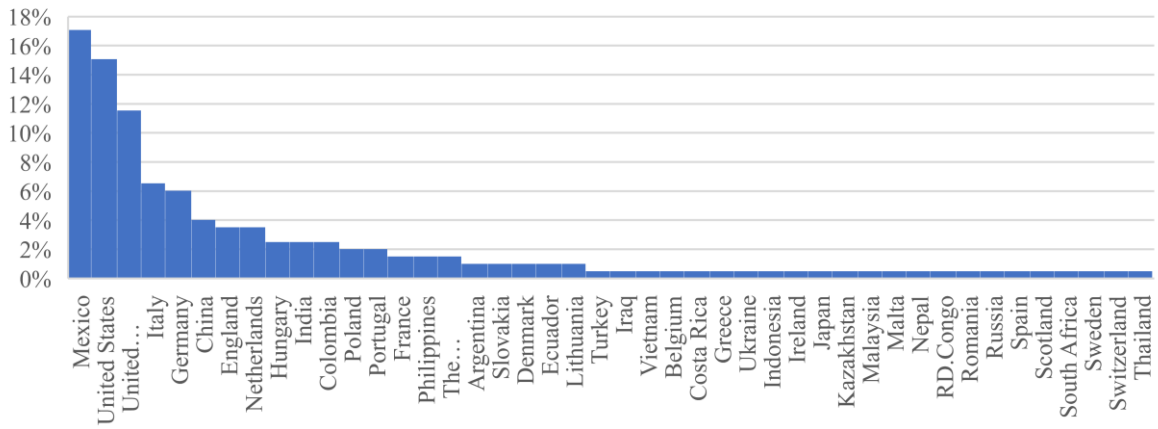
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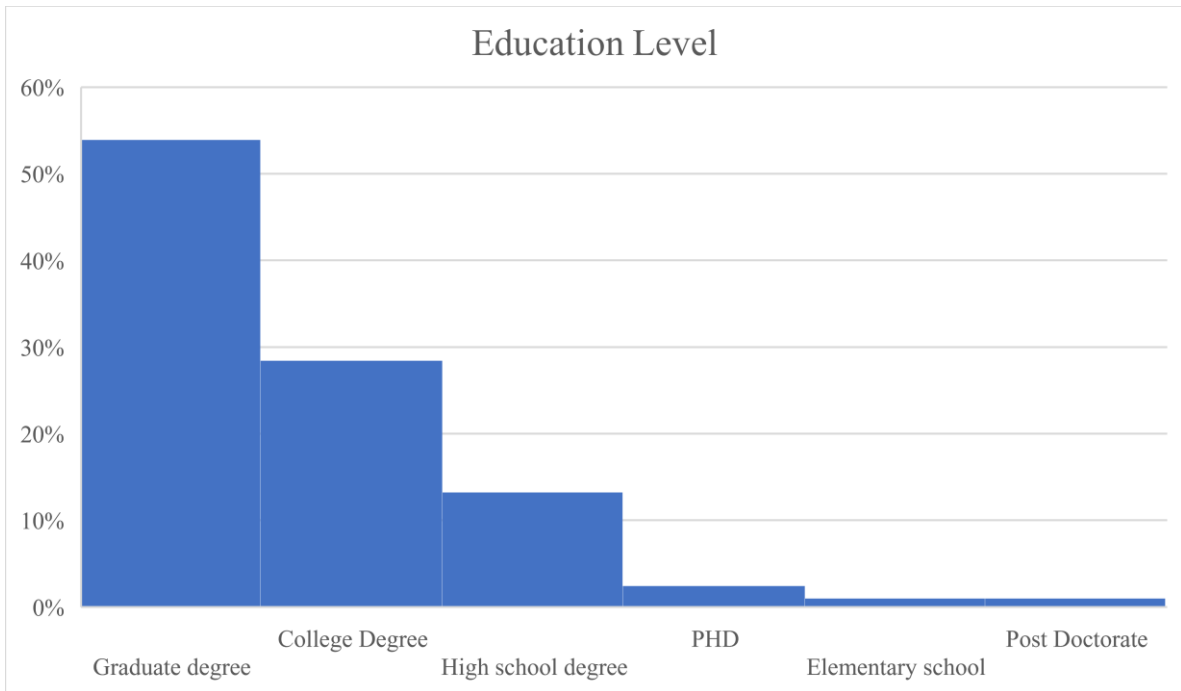
Gender



### Country of origin



### Education Level



## Appendix II



## Disclosure

### You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this research session

**Researcher:** Ximena Lizarraga Lopez, Student of MSc International Management at Nova SBE.

**Purpose of this research session:** Explore the consumer's perceptions of brand authenticity in relation to the role of a brand in social-political issues and its effect on purchase intention.

We are interested in knowing whether certain things happening in the world today make it even more important to trust the brands you buy or use.

**Tasks:** This survey is designed in the scope of a Master's Thesis in Management at Nova SBE, under the supervision of Irene Consiglio.

**Duration:** 4-5 minutes to complete.

**Anonymity and GDPR information:** We collect all your responses to the questions in this questionnaire anonymously and analyze them in aggregate. The personal data we collect include your answers to the topic of the survey, age, gender, and nationality. Your data will remain anonymous and your name will not appear anywhere in relation to this study. We do not foresee that data collection and analysis pose any risk to participants. Your name will never be paired with your data. Results may include summary data, but you will never be identified. Your data is completely anonymous at all times. There are no right or wrong answers when we ask about your personal thoughts and feelings: we are interested in your authentic opinion. Your answers will never be judged.

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If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research, please contact Ximena Lizarraga Lopez ([46214@novasbe.pt](mailto:46214@novasbe.pt)).



I'm willing to participate in this study voluntarily, and I allow the data to be processed for the purpose of the underlying study.

No, I am not willing to participate in the study.

Yes, I am at least 18 years old and I want to participate in this study.



Brand XX is an American ice cream brand that was created in the 60`s by two immigrants. The ice cream comes in many different flavors, it uses the highest quality ingredients and it is sold as a premium brand. During the Black Lives Matter movement, many brands took a stand and brand XX was one of them. The brand posted a public statement stating that they will donate \$250.000 to drive change.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The brand is honest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand is sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe the brand is being authentic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand is reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



On a seven point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:  
If I wanted an ice-cream and Brand XX were available near me at a good price...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would be <b>likely</b> buy an ice-cream from this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would <b>consider</b> purchasing an ice-cream from this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would <b>probably</b> buy an ice-cream from this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



On a seven point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Even if a company makes the product that I like most, I will not buy it if I disagree with the company's stand on important social issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



On a seven point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
If a brand offers the best price on a product, I will buy it even if I disagree with the company's stand on controversial social or political issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



On a seven point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I have bought a brand for the first time for the sole reason that I appreciated its position on a controversial societal or political issue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide more information: which brand did you bought and why?



On a seven point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I have stopped buying one brand and started buying another because I liked the politics of one more than the other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

On a seven point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I have strong opinions about many societal and political issues. The brands I choose to buy and not buy are one important way I express those opinions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have stopped buying a brand solely because it remained silent on a controversial societal or political issue that I believed it had an obligation to publicly address.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Every brand has a responsibility to get involved in at least one societal issue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Brands use societal issues to sell more of their products	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I must be able to trust a brand to do what is right	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A company can take specific actions that both increase profits and improve the economic conditions in the community where it operates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How old are you?

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other

What is your education level?

Elementary school

High school degree

College degree

Graduate degree

PHD

Post Doctorate

Country of origin



We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.  
Your response has been recorded.