

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: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF
CONFLICT ON CONSUMER ATTITUDES, EVALUATIONS AND
PURCHASE INTENTIONS**

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Abstract

Today's consumers want brands to engage in sociopolitical topics. However, this can be offensive and cause personal conflict. This work hypothesizes that when consumers think about these conflicts, their evaluation, and intentions towards brands that take a stand differ. Additionally, it examines how consumers' reactions to a brand's stand on a controversial vs. non-controversial topic influence conflict, attitudes, and purchase intention. Two main experiments were conducted. The results didn't show a difference when consumers either did or didn't think about conflict. Nonetheless, the controversial brand's engagement increased conflict perception. This negatively impacted attitudes that were positively linked to purchase intentions.

Keywords: consumer behavior, controversial brands, conflict, consumer evaluations

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1. Introduction

Recent market research studies indicate that today's consumers expect brands to align with their purpose more than ever before and, therefore, to go beyond corporate social responsibility and engage in sociopolitical or controversial issues about which they care (Nicolon 2020; Edelman 2018; Barton et al. 2018). Currently, one out of two consumers buy based on beliefs. This means the purchase decision is dependent, among other things, on a brand's stand on controversial issues (Edelman 2018). Richard Edelman, the CEO of Edelman, a global communications company, describes, "Brands are now being pushed to go beyond their classic business interests to become advocates. It is a new relationship between company and consumer, where a purchase is premised on the brand's willingness to live its values, act with purpose, and, if necessary, make the leap into activism."

In September 2018, Nike followed its purpose "to move the world forward through the power of sport – breaking barriers and building community to change the game for all" (Nike 2021) and took a stand on the Black Lives Matter discussion. The "Dream Crazy" campaign with the outcast NFL player Colin Kaepernick caused a vast backlash. On the one side, customers were burning their Nike products or boycotting the brand. On the other side, people praised the brand and the campaign for its strong message. Besides the negative reactions, the campaign was a massive success, causing digital sales to grow immensely and the stock prices to increase greatly (Wertz 2018; Edison Trends 2018). The campaign's success demonstrated that the use of controversy in marketing could raise interest, attention, and the probability to be discussed (Chen and Berger 2013). However, not all brands that engaged in a controversial issue were successful. Gillette's "The Best Men Can Be" campaign from January 2019 touched on the toxic masculinity topic and went viral fast, with more negative than positive customer reactions. The video campaign on YouTube was watched over 37 million times and had more than 800,000 likes, but twice as many dislikes (Gillette 2019). Despite the high

awareness, the campaign's sales were similar to prior campaigns (Meyersohn 2019). These examples demonstrate that some controversial campaigns were successful, and some were less successful. Moreover, recent research has shown that, on average, engaging in controversy might be damaging if the congruity between the brands' customer base values and the company's standpoint in a controversial issue is too low (Bhagwat et al. 2020).

Weak sales results of controversial campaigns seem to contradict current recommendations of consultancies and communication companies that brands should engage in controversial issues. In this research, I examine the role of conflict that consumers might experience when brands take a stand on a controversial topic as a possible explanation for this contradiction. Conflict might arise, for example, if a brand's engagement in a sociopolitical issue contradicts the opinion of an individual consumer or the consumer's social environment. It is generally known that consumers dislike conflict since it is aversive and causes negative feelings. When a brand then takes a stand in one direction and consumers face the resulting personal conflict, they might react more negatively compared to their initial evaluation of controversial brands. For companies, this raises an important question of whether it is worth taking the risk of engaging in controversial topics if consumers afterward do not reward them due to conflict. Thus, in the central hypothesis, I propose that consumers, when asked in studies if they like or prefer brands that take a stand on sociopolitical issues, have inflated intentions since they focus on the perceived positive impact and do not forecast the potential conflict.

Therefore, this work project tests how thinking about negative effects due to controversial brand actions influences brand attitudes, and thus, consumers' opinion if brands should take a stand and their purchase intention. Additionally, this work project investigates how consumers evaluate and react to a brand that actually takes a stand on a controversial issue. The results will help companies critically evaluate consultancies' recommendations that brands should take a stand. I suspect that consultancies might overestimate how much consumers will

actually support brands that take a stand and therefore be too optimistic in their recommendation. Thus, the reliability of these recommendations will be examined. Furthermore, it can help companies obtain a better understanding of how consumers respond to the conflict that might emerge due to controversial brand activities. Hence, it will help companies in their decision if they should address controversial topics or not.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Controversy and Controversial Brands

Controversy: A controversial topic causes divergent or polarizing judgments by different people. However, it is essential to mention that issues that cause contrary opinions are not all controversial. To explain this further, Chen and Berger (2013) use the example of soap smell. The smell or taste of a product may lead to contrary opinions if people like or dislike it; nonetheless, the issue would not lead to an extensive discussion since people do not take it too seriously. Conversely, if the topic of same-sex couples and adoption is raised, many people have their own strong opinion of whether this is right or wrong and are against the other point of view. Hence, there is much potential for discussion. This example demonstrates that a topic also needs to be considered important to the audience and an individual to be seen as controversial (Chen and Berger 2013; Cambridge Dictionary 2021). Examples of controversial issues currently relevant in Western societies are LGBTQ+ rights, climate change, refugees, gender equality, racism, etc. These topics are not stable and can differ over time and cultures (Vredenburg et al. 2020). Therefore, within this research project, the terms *controversial* or *controversy* describe *a topic or issue that causes strong divergent or polarizing opinions and is important to an audience.*

Controversial brands: More and more brands have engaged publicly in controversial topics during the last years. Present research classifies this behavior as brand activism or a

controversial brand activity. Within this research project, the term *controversial brand* describes a *brand that takes a stand on controversial issues, by either its communication or actions*. Examples of controversial brand communications are past United Colors of Benetton campaigns that addressed inter alia the AIDS and the Gulf War issue (Passariello and Clark 2011), but also statements like the one in which Barilla's chairman claims he would never use a homosexual family in a commercial (Reuters 2013). Examples of controversial brands' actions are Starbucks' policy of hiring refugees to take a stand against the immigration ban (Vaughan and Rushe 2017) or the conservative fast-food chain Chick-fil-A's donation to anti-same-sex marriage organizations (Sandler 2019).

Additionally, it is crucial to differentiate controversial brand behavior from corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. CSR is a brand's engagement that is less controversial, less divisive, and rather linked to social topics, for example, donations to victims of environmental catastrophes (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020). Therefore, CSR is less likely to cause adverse customer reactions unless perceived as inauthentic (Wagner et al. 2009).

2.2. Current Literature about Consumers and Controversial Brands

Previous literature about consumers and controversial brand actions mainly focuses on the positive aspects and evaluation of hypothetical controversial brands. Based on these surveys consumers seem to have favorable intentions towards brands that engage in sociopolitical issues, and it is almost certain that brands should take a stand. However, observations show that consumers' reactions to controversial brand actions were divided and were not always positive. Hence, this gap of different intentions and reactions needs to be investigated further.

Evidence for positive consumer attitudes and intentions towards controversial brands:

Consumer attitudes are a person's overall feelings or evaluations towards something. Current literature and surveys suggest that consumers seem to have favorable attitudes towards brands that engage and take a stand on controversial topics.

The literature indicates that engaging in CSR issues and staying out of topics that may lead to conflicting opinions is not enough anymore. Consumers might see strong companies behind the brands that have the resources and audience to take a stand on controversial issues, and therefore draw attention to important topics about which they care. Hence, they might expect brands to use their influence to contribute something back to society and drive a positive change instead of being just profit-driven (Bhagwat et al. 2020; Bakhtiari 2020). This finding is supported by the 2018 Edelman Earned Brand study, which found in every market in which the study was conducted that more than 50% of the consumers indicated that they were belief-driven buyers. Belief-driven buyers base their decision to buy, change, or boycott a brand on its engagement in sociopolitical issues and avoid buying a brand that does not engage when it is obligated to do so (Edelman 2018; De Neve and Heynderickx 2020). Additionally, the 2018 Edelman Earned Brand study found that 46% of the participants think that brands have better ideas than the government for solving current problems, and 53% agreed that brands are more engaged in overcoming social ills than governments are. The results demonstrate that many consumers believe that brands can solve problems better than governments.

Consumer reactions towards controversial brands: On the other side, there are some critical arguments why consumers react less favorable to controversial brands. Examples of brands that took a stand on controversial issues, such as Nike and Gillette, demonstrated that consumers' reactions are split, with some people in favor of the stand and others against it. In their research, Mukherjee and Niek (2020) discovered that after a brand takes a stand on a controversial issue, there is no significant effect on consumers' attitude towards the brand for consumers with the same stand. However, the same authors detected that if the brand's stand is contrary to the consumers, the attitudes towards the brand become more negative. Additionally, when brands take a stand on a controversial issue, observations show that besides some successful campaigns or actions, many cases result in a negative backlash by

consumers, and the effect on sales is often negative, low, or not observable (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020; Agrawal 2016a). This suggests that consumers seem to react not as positively as initially indicated in their intentions in previous market research studies about controversial brands. Further literature supports the observation since study results show that consumers might have a positive attitude about provocative advertising content, but they react negatively when confronted with examples (Vézina and Paul 1997). The results show that consumers' prior evaluations about their attitudes and intentions are not always correct. Additionally, Hydock et al. (2020) suggest that the net response to controversial brand actions has a high likelihood to be adverse since individuals react more strongly to negative than to positive stimuli (Hydock et al. 2020; Baumeister et al. 2001).

2.3. Gap between Intention and Reaction

In this research, I propose that the gap between consumers' intentions and their actual reactions could result since consumers focus on positive outcomes when asked if brands should take a stand. The false consensus effect, also called false consensus bias, could be a potential explanation for why consumers focus on the positive aspects of controversial brands. The bias emerges because people tend to project their own evaluations and preferences to others, and thus they overestimate the likelihood of others' approval (Hattula et al. 2015; Krueger and Clement 1994). Consumers perceive their judgments and behavioral choices as common and appropriate and evaluate the contrary stand as relatively uncommon (Ross et al. 1977). This means that they underestimate the probability of contrary opinions. Therefore, in the consumer psychology field, the false consensus bias is known to enhance prediction errors (Flynn and Wiltermuth 2010).

In the context of controversial brands, the false consensus bias could explain why consumers overestimate that a brand and their social environment will decide to take a concurring opinion in sociopolitical issues. When people are asked generic questions about brands taking

a stand on sociopolitical issues, they might expect that most other people will agree with their opinion as well as the brands' stand will be conforming. Therefore, consumers might express a favorable attitude and positive intentions toward buying the brand. Thus, consumers underestimate the probability that a brand or their social environment supports a contrary stand, and consequently, they do not foresee that a personal conflict might arise when a brand takes a stand. Evaluating a controversial brand's attitude might therefore be different if consumers answer a hypothetical question if brands should take a stand compared to their actual reaction when a brand takes a stand on a sociopolitical issue. In the following subchapter, I will elaborate further on how and why potential conflicts could lead to these different judgments of participants.

2.4. Controversial Brands and Conflict

The Oxford English Dictionary (2021) describes the term conflict as “the clashing or variance of opposed principles, statements, arguments, etc.” Since the definition of controversy is to cause divergent or polarizing judgments by different people, addressing controversial topics inherently provides the potential for conflict.

When a brand takes a stand on a controversial issue, there are two main reasons why a conflict can arise for a consumer. The first reason occurs when consumers disagree with the brand's stand on an issue. People perceive their moral opinion as superior, and therefore they will not change it to align with the brand's stand (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020). This causes a lower level of customer-brand identification, which, in turn, affects consumers' attitudes, intentions, and behavior towards a brand (Tuškej et al. 2013). One example of this kind of conflict is a brand that supports the adoption of children by same-sex couples. Conservative consumers who perceive same-sex parenting as wrong or unnatural could be offended and are less likely to identify with the brand and, therefore, are less likely to buy it.

The second reason emerges when the consumer agrees with the stand of the brand but

supporting the brand would create the risk of social rejection in the consumers' environment (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Social acceptance is an essential social trait since people want to conform with and be liked by their immediate social environment (Baumeister 1998). Thoughts about social rejection when supporting a brand can lead to a personal conflict and therefore impact consumers' behavior and lead to lower purchase intentions (Buss 1990). An example of this kind of conflict would be if a brand supports women in the #metoo movement against sexual harassment. A male consumer might support the stand, but at the same time have a social environment that is against the movement. The fear of social rejection through buying, wearing, or displaying the brand can lead to lower purchase intentions.

Reason why false consensus bias leads to underestimating conflict: In this work project, I propose that consumers do not foresee these potential conflicts since they assume, due to the false consensus bias, that either their environment or the brand will confirm their own stand. When consumers are confronted with an actual situation where a brand takes a stand, they might face one of the previously described conflicts associated with controversy.

Therefore, previous studies that suggest engagement in controversial topics is positive need to be critically evaluated since consumers are only asked hypothetical questions. Examples for such questions are to ask if brands should take a stand or if consumers would rather purchase brands that take a stand. Asking consumers about controversial brands with hypothetical questions is dangerous as they might focus on the positives and overlook the negative effects. Consumers are not confronted with the potential conflict, and therefore, they might evaluate controversial brands more positively than they react to controversial brand actions.

3. Research Framework

In this research, I first investigate whether overlooking conflict contributes to an overestimation of positive responses to brand activism. To examine if this is the case, I assign

people in two conditions. The first condition is similar to current survey methods in which people are asked whether brands should take a stand and positive questions about it. In the second condition consumers additionally think about negative aspects besides the positive ones of brands addressing sociopolitical issues, especially concerning potential conflicts.

Second, I investigate if there are differences in how consumers react to an actual example of a brand’s stand on a controversial sociopolitical issue compared to one on a non-controversial issue.

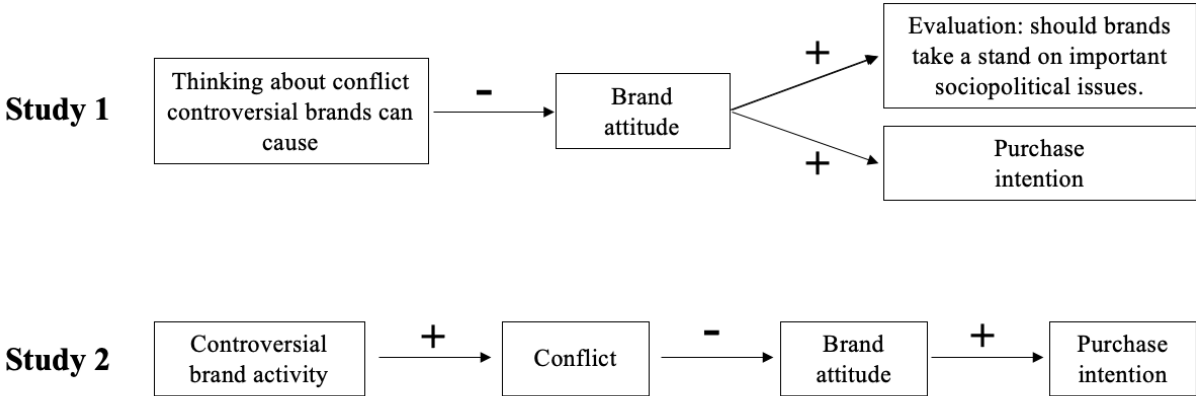


Figure 1: Hypothesized Models

I propose that consumers who think about potential conflicts that might arise when brands address sociopolitical issues have a less positive attitude towards these brands. I suggest that, due to less positive attitudes, consumers are less likely to expect brands to take a stand on important sociopolitical issues and have a lower purchase intention for brands that take a stand, as compared to surveys in which people are merely asked if brands should take a stand and positive questions.

Additionally, I propose that when consumers are confronted with an actual example in which a brand takes a stand on a controversial issue, they face a conflict and therefore indicate less positive brand attitudes. The decreased attitudes cause lower purchase intention for the brand.

The model (Figure 1) summarizes the hypotheses tested in the following studies. This work project contributes to the literature about controversial brands and elaborates besides positives

also potential negative aspects brand activism can cause. The impact of potential consumer conflicts was not investigated enough in prior research about brand activism. Therefore, this research will examine further how consumers evaluate brands that take a stand when they think about conflict or face an actual conflict due to a brand's stand. It should help to examine the full effect controversial brand actions have on consumers by investigating the role of conflict.

4. Empirical Section

To investigate the hypothesized models, I conducted a pre-test and a main experiment. All studies were executed through online surveys designed and carried out with Qualtrics, a data collection platform. I distributed the survey through an anonymous link that was sent to personal contacts and published it on social media platforms, Surveycicle and Surveyswap.

In the pre-test, I requested participants to evaluate two movements to check if they were perceived as controversial and conflicting or not.

In Study 1, I asked participants about brands that take a stand hypothetically. Participants were randomly split into a treatment group in which they were nudged to think about conflict and into a control group, similar to current survey methods, in which participants were not nudged to think about conflict but were merely asked positive questions.

In Study 2, I explored participants' actual reactions. In the first condition, a brand took a stand on a controversial topic and, in the second condition, on a non-controversial one.

4.1. Pre-test

The goal of the pre-test was to check whether the participants perceive the selected conditions of Study 2 as controversial or non-controversial and if they evaluate them as equally important.

Participants and procedure

Thirty-three participants (48.5% male; 87.9% between 18 and 34) answered the online questionnaire of the pre-test (Appendix 1). First, Qualtrics' *randomizer* function assigned participants randomly to a *controversial* or *non-controversial condition*. I selected the LGBTQ+ movement for the *controversial condition*. Recently, the LGBTQ+ community has become more accepted in Western countries (Flores 2019). However, there are still LGBTQ+-related topics perceived as controversial, like same-sex parenthood (Yerkes et al. 2018). Therefore, participants assigned to the *controversial condition* read this short text:

The LGBTQ+ movement aims to provide equal rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people. Examples are marriage for everyone, or that same-sex couples should have the right to adopt children. People's reactions to this movement are divided. Some people support it, whereas others are against it.

For the *non-controversial condition*, I selected the "equal opportunity for children" movement. I expected this topic to be non-controversial and reactions to be positive. Hence, participants assigned to the *non-controversial condition* read the following text:

The "equal opportunity for children" movement aims to provide equal opportunities for children and young adults. Examples are tutoring support for children from low-income families or reduced costs for participation in leisure activities. People's reactions to this movement are not divided. Most people support it, and almost no one is against it.

Next, participants responded how much they agree or disagree on a 7-point scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*) with different statements. The first three statements measured perception of controversy (adapted from Gomes 2020; e.g., "the movement causes opposing opinions"), followed by two statements to determine perception of conflict (e.g., "the movement creates conflict"). The following three statements measured perceived importance (adapted from Gomes 2020; e.g., "the movement is an important current topic") and the last two the level of support for the displayed movement (adapted from Gomes 2020; e.g., "I support the movement"). Additionally, I included an attention check where

participants had to select the option "Disagree" if they read the statement.

Data analysis and results

Data cleaning. Before analyzing the data, I excluded two participants who failed the attention check. Therefore, the final pre-test sample consisted of 31 participants (48.4% male; 87.1% between 18 and 34; Appendix 4).

Reliability of measures. The usage of multiple-item scales required an internal consistency check. According to Cronbach's alpha, all three measures were internally consistent: controversy perception ($\alpha = 0.885$), conflict perception ($\alpha = 0.867$), perceived importance ($\alpha = 0.804$), and support of the displayed movement ($\alpha = 0.922$).

Dependent Variables. The result of an independent sample t-test showed that the mean value of controversy perception was significantly different for the two conditions ($t(29) = 3.611, p < .001$). The *controversial condition* was perceived more controversial ($M_C = 4.688, SD_C = 1.693$) compared to the non-controversial one ($M_{NC} = 2.667, SD_{NC} = 1.397$). Additionally, there was a significantly different conflict perception ($M_C = 4.719, S_C = 1.683, M_{NC} = 2.600, S_{NC} = 1.289, t(29) = 3.905, p < .001$). There was no statistically significant difference for the mean perceived importance and the mean support of the corresponding movement ($p > .05$). The pre-test results indicated that participants perceived the conditions as intended. Therefore, they are suitable for the following Study 2.

4.2. Main Experiments

4.2.1. Study 1

The goal of Study 1 was to test the hypothesis of whether consumers' evaluations of hypothetical controversial brands differ when consumers think or do not think about the conflict that might arise from a brand's engagement in controversial topics. The expected

pattern of the results is that consumers who are asked to evaluate statements that make them aware of potential conflicts have a less positive attitude towards controversial brands. This decrease in attitude negatively affects consumers' evaluations of whether brands should engage in sociopolitical issues and lowers consumers' purchase intentions towards brands that engage in these issues, in contrast to participants' reactions in a context similar to current survey methods.

Participants and procedure

One hundred eighty-three participants (32.8% male; 90.1% between 18 and 34) answered the online questionnaire of Study 1 (Appendix 2). First, participants evaluated positive statements about brands taking a stand on important sociopolitical issues (e.g., "it has a positive impact on society") on a 7-point scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*). I derived the statements from prior research in which respondents indicated that brands taking a stand could have positive effects (Edelman 2018; Barton et al. 2018). Among these statements, I included an attention check where participants had to select "Disagree" if they read the statement. Afterward, the *randomizer* function of Qualtrics assigned participants randomly to one of two conditions: the *conflict statements condition* and the *no-conflict statements condition*. Participants that were assigned to the *conflict statements condition* evaluated statements related to previously described conflict situations that might arise due to controversial brand actions on a 7-point scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*). Examples are the *own stand could offend other people*, or if they would be *offended if a brand would take a contrary stand*. The treatment with conflict statements prompted participants to think also about negative aspects that potentially arise when brands take a stand. The participants of the *no-conflict statements condition* did not see the conflict statements.

In the following, participants of both conditions evaluated the statement that *Brands should take a stand on important sociopolitical issues* using a 7-point scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7

= *Strongly agree*). Then participants completed a 5-item, 7-point measure of brand attitudes towards brands that take a stand on important sociopolitical issues (items: *Unappealing-Appealing*, *Bad-Good*, *Unpleasant-Pleasant*, *Unfavorable-Favorable*, *Unlikable-Likable* adapted from Spears and Singh 2004). Finally, participants completed a 3-item measure of purchase intention (adapted from Putrevu and Lord 1994, e.g., “It is very likely that I will buy products from a brand that takes a stand on important sociopolitical issues”; 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*).

Data analysis, results, and discussion

Data cleaning. Prior to the data analysis, I had to exclude 14 participants who failed the attention check. Therefore, the final sample of Study 1 consisted of 169 participants (32% male; 90.6% between 18 and 34; Appendix 5). Further participants who did not answer the entire survey were excluded pairwise in this and all following analyses.

Reliability of measures. To control the internal consistency of the multiple-item scales for the measurement of brand attitude and purchase intention, I evaluated their reliability with Cronbach’s alpha. According to Cronbach’s alpha, both measures were internally consistent: brand attitude ($\alpha = 0.936$) and purchase intention ($\alpha = 0.835$).

Brand attitude. To test the mean difference for brand attitude between the conflict statements group and the no-conflict statements group, I performed an independent samples t-test. The result showed no significant difference in brand attitude evaluation between seeing and not seeing the conflict statements ($M_{CS} = 5.181$, $SD_{CS} = 1.197$, $M_{NCS} = 5.308$, $SD_{NCS} = 1.078$, $t(167) = -0.724$, $p = .470$).

Since the brand attitudes did not differ significantly between the two conditions, a mediation analysis with attitude as a mediator does not make much sense. The results of a simple mediation analysis confirmed the expectation (see Appendix 7) since the treatment had no

significant impact on the attitude (Process Model 4; Hayes 2013). Nevertheless, the results demonstrated that in general a higher brand attitude has a significant positive relationship with consumers' belief that brands should take a stand and with purchase intentions (Appendix 7). An explanation for the first relationship could be that the participants were positively biased, and thus they answered positively to questions in general, including attitudes and the evaluation. The second result shows that a more favorable brand attitude positively influences purchase intention aligns with previous research findings (e.g., Ajzen 1985).

To check if the *conflict statements treatment* directly affected consumers' evaluation of whether brands should take a stand and their purchase intention, I also performed independent sample t-tests.

Evaluation: Should brands take a stand on important sociopolitical issues. Participants in this study indicate no significant difference in their evaluation of whether brands should take a stand whether they were nudged to think about conflict or not ($M_{CS} = 4.950$, $SD_{CS} = 1.405$, $M_{NCS} = 5.160$, $SD_{NCS} = 1.244$, $t(167) = -0.994$, $p = .322$).

Purchase intention. The results of the independent sample t-test were not significantly different if people think versus do not think about the potential conflicts ($M_{CS} = 4.399$, $SD_{CS} = 1.092$, $M_{NCS} = 4.378$, $SD_{NCS} = 1.321$, $t(166) = 0.113$, $p = .910$).

Overall, the study results indicate that the treatment of thinking about conflict or not has no significant effect on the brand attitude, purchase intention, and the evaluation of whether brands should take a stand on important sociopolitical issues. A possible explanation for this result might be that the conflict statements treatment was too weak, but also that thinking about conflict is not close enough compared to facing an actual conflict due to a brand's stand. Thus, in Study 2 I investigated how consumers react to an actual controversial example.

4.2.2. Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to investigate consumers' reactions in a controlled experimental setting to brands that take a stand on a controversial topic. The confrontation of a brand that takes a stand on a controversial topic places consumers in a concrete conflicting situation. The expected pattern is that participants in the *controversial condition*, in which a brand takes a stand on a controversial topic, face the conflict that is intrinsic to controversy. The increased conflict perception leads to less positive attitudes and lower purchase intentions compared to participants in the *non-controversial condition*.

Participants and procedure

One hundred eighty-seven participants (32.6% male, 0.5% other gender; 85% between 18 and 34) answered the online questionnaire for Study 2 (Appendix 3). First, the *randomizer* function of Qualtrics assigned the participants randomly to a *controversial* or a *non-controversial condition*. Then the participants read the respective movement descriptions, as in the pre-test. Participants of the *controversial condition* read the LGBTQ+ movement description, and participants in the *non-controversial condition* the “equal opportunity for children” movement description. I included a 15-second timer to ensure that participants read the description. To check if the manipulation was successful, the participants evaluated statements about their controversy and conflict perception (adapted from Gomes 2020; e.g., “the ... movement causes opposing opinions”; 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*). Additionally, participants evaluated statements about the perceived importance (adapted from Gomes 2020; e.g., “The ... movement is a relevant societal issue”) and their support of the movement on a 7-point scale (adapted from Gomes 2020; e.g., “I support the ... movement”; 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*).

Next, the participants read a short description of a brand that addressed the previously described movement in their new campaign. To avoid an influence from previous brand

knowledge and perception, I created and used the fictional sportswear brand XYZ.

Participants assigned to the *controversial condition* read:

Brand XYZ, a well-known sportswear brand, launched a new campaign in which they addressed the LGBTQ+ topic.

Participants assigned to the *non-controversial condition* read:

Brand XYZ, a well-known sportswear brand, launched a new campaign in which they addressed the "equal opportunity for children" topic.

Afterward, to measure brand attitude, the participants evaluated their perception of the sportswear brand XYZ on a 5-item, 7-point, semantic differential scale (items: *Unappealing-Appealing*; *Bad-Good*; *Unpleasant-Pleasant*; *Unfavorable-Favorable*; *Unlikable-Likable*, adapted from Spears and Singh 2004). Finally, participants completed a 3-item measure of purchase intention for brand XYZ (adapted from Putrevu and Lord 1994, e.g., “The next time I need sportswear, I will purchase it from brand XYZ”; 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*).

Data analysis, results, and discussion

Data cleaning. I excluded 15 participants who failed the attention check. Thus, the final sample of Study 2 consisted of 172 participants (29.7% male, 0.5% other gender; 86.1% between 18 and 34; Appendix 6). Further, participants who did not answer the entire survey were excluded pairwise in this and all following analyses.

Reliability of measures. I used Cronbach’s alpha to control for internal consistency of the multiple-item scale measures controversy perception, conflict perception, importance perception, support of the movement, attitude, and purchase intention. According to Cronbach’s alpha, all measures were internally consistent: controversy perception ($\alpha = 0.859$), conflict perception ($\alpha = 0.818$), importance perception ($\alpha = 0.885$), support of the movement ($\alpha = 0.898$), attitude ($\alpha = 0.938$), and purchase intention ($\alpha = 0.875$).

Controversy manipulation check. To check if the manipulation of controversy was successful, I first performed an independent samples t-test to test the mean difference of controversy perception between the *controversial* and *non-controversial condition*. The controversy perception was significantly different for the two conditions ($t(170) = 12.208, p < .001$). The controversial condition was perceived as more controversial ($M_C = 4.639, SD_C = 1.304$) compared to the non-controversial one ($M_{NC} = 2.303, SD_{NC} = 1.205$). There was no statistically significant difference for the perceived importance and the support of the movement ($p > .05$), as intended.

Conflict. First, I conducted an independent samples t-test to check if the treatment led to a different conflict perception. The t-test results showed that the conflict perception differs significantly between the two conditions ($M_C = 4.253, SD_C = 1.503, M_{NC} = 2.201, SD_{NC} = 1.163, t(158) = 9.998, p < .001$)

Brand attitude. To test the mean difference for attitudes between the *controversial* and the *non-controversial condition*, I performed an independent samples t-test that showed a significant difference between the two conditions ($t(170) = -2.462, p < .05$). Participants in the controversial scenario reported a less favorable attitude towards a brand that engaged in a controversial sociopolitical topic ($M_C = 5.031, SD_C = 1.275$) compared to a brand with an engagement in a non-controversial sociopolitical topic ($M_{NC} = 5.458, SD_{NC} = 0.984$).

Purchase intention. An independent samples t-test was performed to check if there is a significant difference in the mean purchase intention. The results of the independent sample t-test were not significantly different between the *controversial* and *non-controversial condition* ($M_{CS} = 4.718, SD_{CS} = 1.385, M_{NCS} = 4.816, SD_{NCS} = 1.048, t(170) = -0.526, p = .599$).

Mediation analysis. To test the entire model, a sequential mediation analysis (Process Model 6; Hayes 2013) was performed. The goal was to investigate if conflict and brand attitudes sequentially mediate the effect of the controversy treatment on consumers' purchase

intentions. The results of this analysis are summarized in Figure 2.

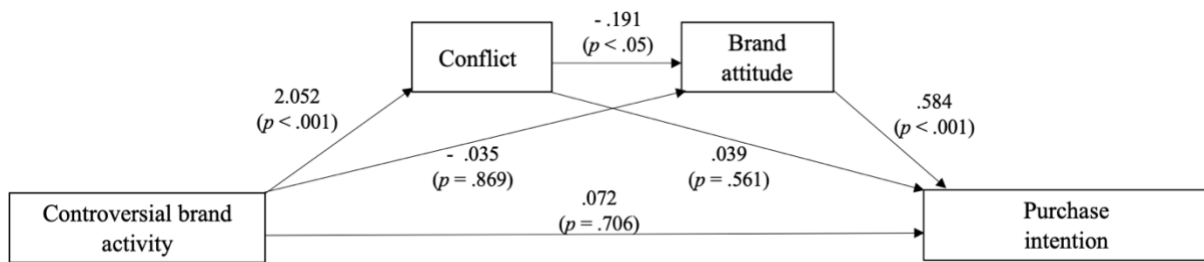


Figure 2: Sequential mediation analysis model (Process Model 6, Hayes 2013)

Direct effect. The analysis demonstrated that the direct effect from controversial brand activity on purchase intention is not significantly different from zero ($B = 0.072$, $t(168) = 0.377$, $p = .706$).

Indirect effects. However, the PROCESS analysis results indicated an indirect effect of controversial brand activity on purchase intention through the serial mediators conflict and brand attitude. The data analysis confirmed the predicted interaction between controversial brand activity and conflict. As predicted, the participants who saw the controversial brand activity had an increased perception of conflict ($B = 2.052$, $t(170) = 10.027$, $p < .001$). Additionally, a higher level of conflict perception had a significant negative effect on brand attitudes ($B = - 0.191$, $t(169) = -3.008$, $p < .01$). As expected and as in previous research, brand attitude had a significant positive effect on purchase intention ($B = 0.584$, $t(168) = 8.087$, $p < .001$). In total, the analysis showed a significant 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect mediation effect of conflict and brand attitude ($LLCI = -0.480$, $ULCI = -0.029$; 5.000 bootstrap sample). Further results of the model 6 PROCESS mediation analysis indicated no significant effects for the remaining paths of the model (see Figure 2 and Appendix 8).

In sum, the results of Study 2 indicate that there is no direct effect from a controversial brand activity on purchase intention, but there is an indirect one. As predicted, the participants in the *controversial condition* indicated a higher conflict perception. The data from this study

showed that a higher conflict perception negatively influences attitudes. This is critical since attitudes that are more favorable increase purchase intentions. This analysis revealed a significant mediation without a direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Thus, it could indicate that there is an unobserved, not tested mediator that has the opposite effect and therefore compensates for the observed indirect effect.

5. General Discussion

5.1. Summary of Findings

Marketing consultancies and communication companies like Accenture, Edelman, and Kantar present taking a stand on important sociopolitical issues as a major trend for brands. Even though there was no significant difference in the mean evaluation when participants considered if brands should take a stand when participants did or did not think about conflict, the results from the first study are in line with the findings of the consultancies. In both conditions, the consumers tend more towards agreeing than disagreeing that brands should take a stand. The assumption that this evaluation is more negative for the treatment group of consumers who thought about potential conflicts was not met. That implies that even though consumers think about potential conflicts of controversial brand actions in addition to the positive aspects, their positive evaluation does not differ. However, in previous consultancy studies and Study 1, consumers were asked hypothetically without an actual example of a brand taking a stand. Thinking about a hypothetical conflict and facing an actual conflict might have a differential impact on consumers. Therefore, Study 2 was performed to check if consumers react differently when confronted with an example. Study 2 found that the controversial brand's stand compared to a non-controversial one had a significant impact on the conflict perception of consumers and on their attitudes. For purchase intention, no significant direct effect could be identified. Nevertheless, there was a significant indirect

effect since consumers' conflict perception and brand attitudes were identified as mediators between the brand's stand and consumers' purchase intention. The finding that consumers differ in their judgment of a hypothetical brand's stand and an example of a controversial brand's stand is in line with the pattern that Vézina and Paul (1997) found.

5.2. Managerial Implications

Brands that think about engaging in important sociopolitical issues have the intention to satisfy customers' expectations and see this as a chance to promote an intensive consumer-brand relationship (Agrawal 2016b; Barton et al. 2018). Nevertheless, the results of this work project indicate that engaging in controversial sociopolitical topics is associated with increased risks. The mediation analysis in Study 2 revealed that the treatment with the controversial LGBTQ+ topic led to higher conflict perception, which negatively influenced brand attitudes. This decline in brand attitudes is critical since attitudes positively influence purchase intentions. Since there was no overall effect on purchase intention, there could be an additional positively influenced mediator, which was impacted through the controversial treatment and therefore canceled out the observed negative indirect impact. Nonetheless, it is still questionable if companies should take the risk of engaging in controversial topics if the purchase intention is not significantly different.

Additionally, the results also indicate that the suggestions of previous market research studies in which taking a stand is primarily depicted as positive should be treated with care and evaluated critically by companies. Companies must balance the benefits and risks of taking a stand. On the one hand, they might fulfill customer expectations, draw attention to the brand, and gain new customers. On the other hand, they risk impaired brand attitudes, decreasing their profits, and losing customers.

5.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the contributions of this work project, certain limitations should be considered and investigated in future research. One main limitation of the studies is that the sample compositions failed in their representativity. In both studies of the main experiment, most participants were between 18 and 35 (91% in Study 1 and 87% in Study 2, see Appendix 5 and 6). Particularly in Study 2, this could have been problematic since previous studies indicate that younger generations accept members of the LGBTQ+ community more than older generations (GLAAD 2017; McCarthy 2021). Consequently, the controversial brand example in Study 2 could have had a weaker controversy effect and hence led to a lower conflict perception in this sample composition compared to a sample that displays the population better. Thus, it would be interesting to investigate further how a more balanced age group reacts to a controversial versus a non-controversial example.

Besides age, gender composition might be a limitation. Both studies have unequal gender distributions - with more females than males (68% female in Study 1 and 70% in Study 2, see Appendix 5 and 6). This is critical since previous research suggests that females and males differ in their emotional reactions to conflicting situations (Smith et al. 1989; El-Sheikh et al. 2000).

Furthermore, the participants' origins could be a limitation. In both studies, most participants were from Germany (69% in Study 1 and 65% in Study 2, see Appendix 5 and 6). However, people from various countries participated. This can be critical since controversy perception is dependent and can differ over cultures (Vredenburg et al. 2020). Particularly the LGBTQ+ movement might be more accepted in Western cultures and therefore less controversial in Germany compared to more conservative countries, such as Poland or Russia. Hence, it might be interesting to examine further if there are effects of thinking about conflict or facing conflict with different controversial examples in other countries.

Another limitation might be the study design. In Study 2, I used the fictional brand XYZ to avoid having previous brand knowledge and attitudes influence consumers' responses. However, this can also be a potential limitation since consumers have different expectations from brands they like or know. If a preferred or well-known brand takes a stand on a controversial topic, consumers are more affected, and this might cause a more intense or different effect on the consumer. Further research could therefore include consumers' prior brand attitudes into the analysis and examine how controversial brand actions influence them.

Moreover, in Study 2, I investigated the short-term effects of one controversial brand's stand example on consumers' evaluations, attitudes, and purchase intentions. The effects may change when brands engage multiple times in controversial topics, and consumers face conflict more frequently. Further research could assess how repeated stands of a brand influence consumers and reveal different long-term effects.

Finally, it would be interesting to examine if some other mediators or moderators influence the effect of controversial brand activity and purchase intention. Since the mediation analysis with conflict and attitudes revealed a significant adverse effect, there might be other variables that cancel out the overall effect on purchase intention. Thus, further analysis with additional potential variables could help to explain the observed effects. Possible variables might be perceived authenticity, perception of power, and political orientations.

Overall, the results of this work project contribute to the research about how consumers evaluate and react to controversial brand actions. The findings explain some effects of controversial advertising on purchase intention. However, further research is needed to examine the full effect on consumer behavior of brands taking a stand on social and political issues.

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7. Appendix

Appendix 1: Pre-test – Questionnaire

<p>Q1. Movement description (<i>randomly assigned: controversial or non-controversial movement</i>)</p>	<p><i>Controversial movement:</i> The LGBTQ+ movement aims to provide equal rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people. Examples are marriage for everyone, or that same-sex couples should have the right to adopt children. People’s reactions to this movement are divided. Some people support it, whereas others are against it.</p> <p>OR</p> <p><i>Non-controversial movement:</i> The “equal opportunity for children” movement aims to provide equal opportunities for children and young adults. Examples are tutoring support for children from low-income families or reduced costs for participation in leisure activities. People’s reactions to this movement are not divided. Most people support it, and almost no one is against it.</p>
<p>Q2. Controversy manipulation check (Gomes 2020) & Conflict measurement</p>	<p>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The _____ movement causes opposing opinions. [Manipulation] 2) The _____ movement creates conflict. [Conflict] 3) The _____ movement is controversial. [Manipulation] 4) The _____ movement is likely to divide people. [Manipulation] 5) The _____ movement is likely to cause discomfort. [Conflict]
<p>Q3. Assess perceived importance (Gomes 2020)</p>	<p>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The _____ movement is a relevant societal issue. 2) The _____ movement is an important current topic. 3) I perceive the _____ movement as relevant.
<p>Q4. Assess support of the movement (Gomes 2020) & Attention check</p>	<p>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) I support the _____ movement. 2) I support movements that support children and young adults from low-income families <p>OR</p> <p>I support movements that aim to provide equal rights for everyone regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Select "Disagree" if you read this.

Q5. Demographics	<p>Please fill in the information requested below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Age 2) Gender 3) Level of education (completed) 4) Nationality
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Appendix 2: Study 1 - Questionnaire

<p>Q1. Positive statements about brands that take a stand & Attention check</p>	<p>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <p>When a brand takes a stand on important sociopolitical issues* ...</p> <p><i>*Examples: advertising, statements, donations</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) ... it has a positive impact on society. 2) ... it has the potential to create change. 3) ... it raises awareness for important topics. 4) ... it's a strong signal. 5) ... it makes a powerful statement. 6) Select "Disagree" if you read this. 7) ... it differentiates the brand from competitors.
<p>Q2. Conflict statements treatment (randomly assigned if participants see conflict statements or not)</p>	<p>Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements when a brand takes a stand on important sociopolitical issues. (1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) I think my stand on some societal issues could offend other people. 2) I would be offended if a brand would take a stand contrary to mine. 3) I think other people will agree with my stand. 4) In my social environment, some people have a contrary opinion to mine on societal issues. 5) I think brands that take a stand on sociopolitical issues can create conflict.
<p>Q3. Assess overall evaluation if brands should take a stand</p>	<p>To what extent do you agree with the following statement? (1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Brands should take a stand on important sociopolitical issues.

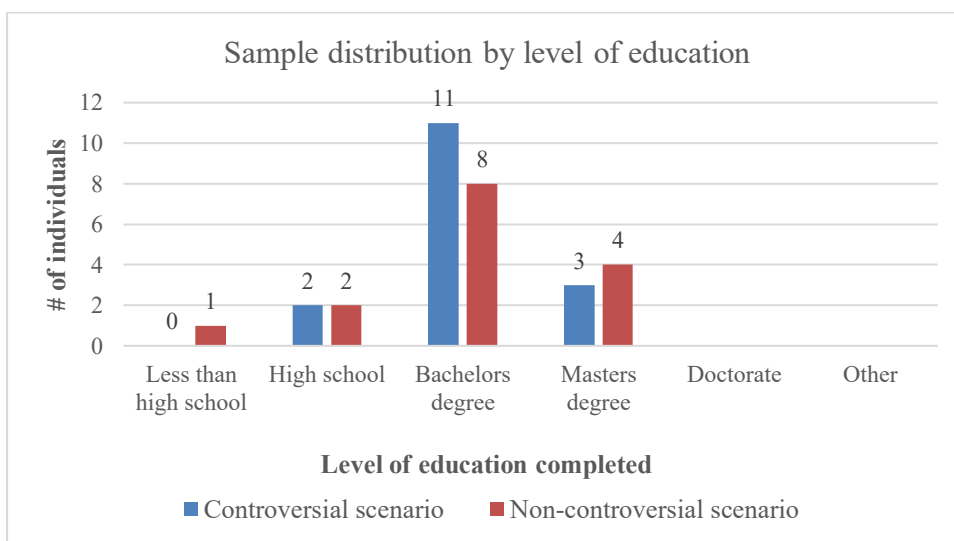
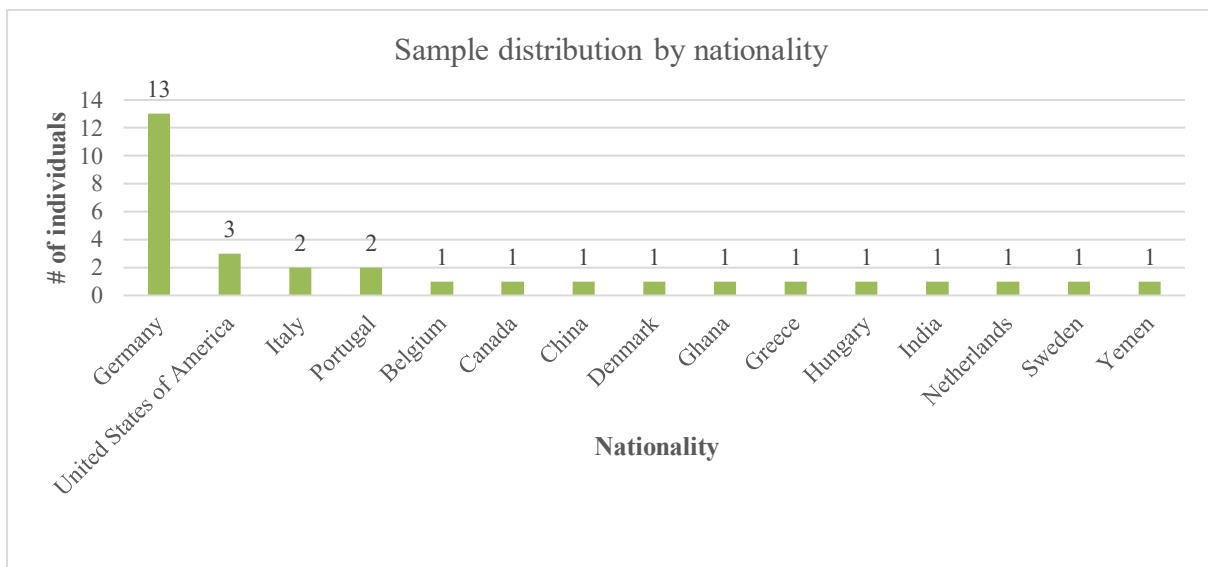
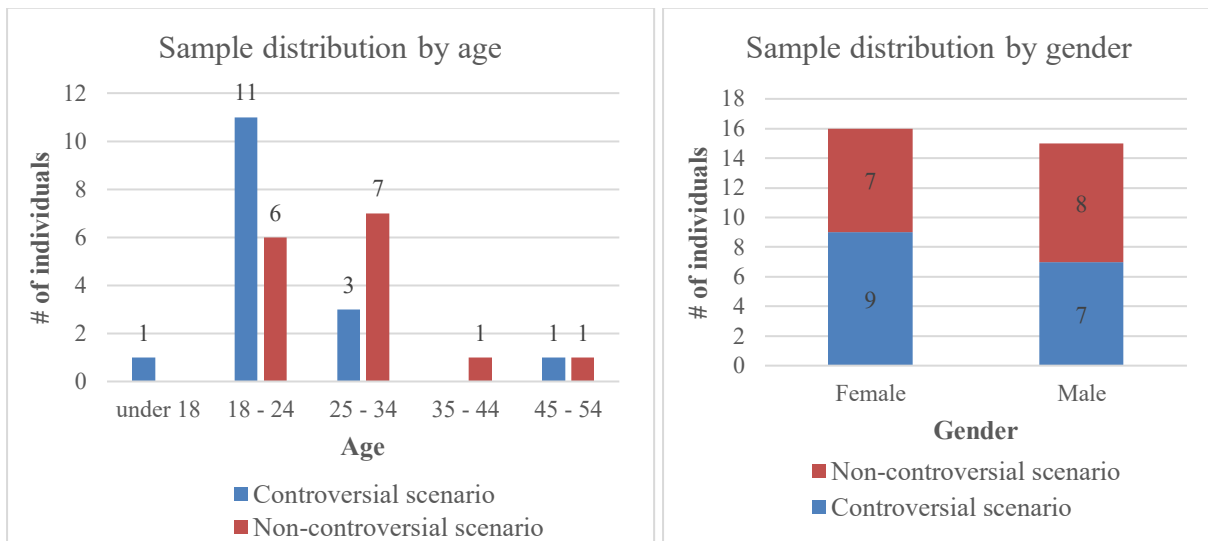
<p>Q4. Assess brand attitudes (Spears and Singh 2004)</p>	<p>In my opinion, brands that take a stand on important sociopolitical issues are ...</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Unappealing</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;"><input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Appealing</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Bad</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;"><input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Good</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Unpleasant</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;"><input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Pleasant</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Unfavorable</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;"><input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Favorable</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Unlikable</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;"><input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Likable</td> </tr> </table>	Unappealing	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Appealing	Bad	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Good	Unpleasant	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Pleasant	Unfavorable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Favorable	Unlikable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Likable
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<p>Q5. Assess purchase intentions (Putrevu and Lord 1994)</p>	<p>What would you say about the likelihood that you intend to purchase a product from a brand that takes a stand on important sociopolitical issues if the products are available for a good price?</p> <p>(1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) It is very likely that I will buy products from a brand that takes a stand on important sociopolitical issues. 2) The next time I need a product, I will purchase it from a brand that takes a stand on important sociopolitical issues. 3) I will definitely try brands that take a stand on important sociopolitical issues. 															
<p>Q6. Demographics</p>	<p>Please fill in the information requested below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Age 2) Gender 3) Level of education (completed) 4) Nationality 															
<p>Q7. Suspicion test</p>	<p>What do you think is the purpose of this study?</p> <p>If you don't have any presumption, you can leave this question empty.</p>															

Appendix 3: Study 2 - Questionnaire

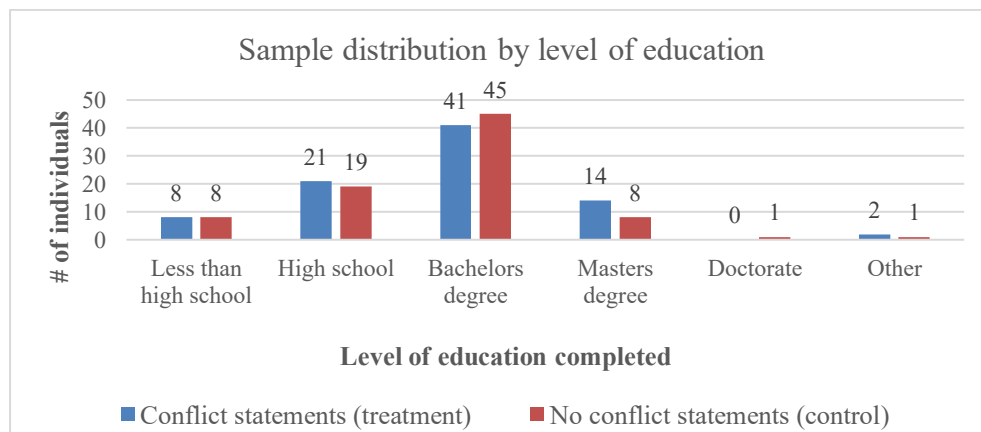
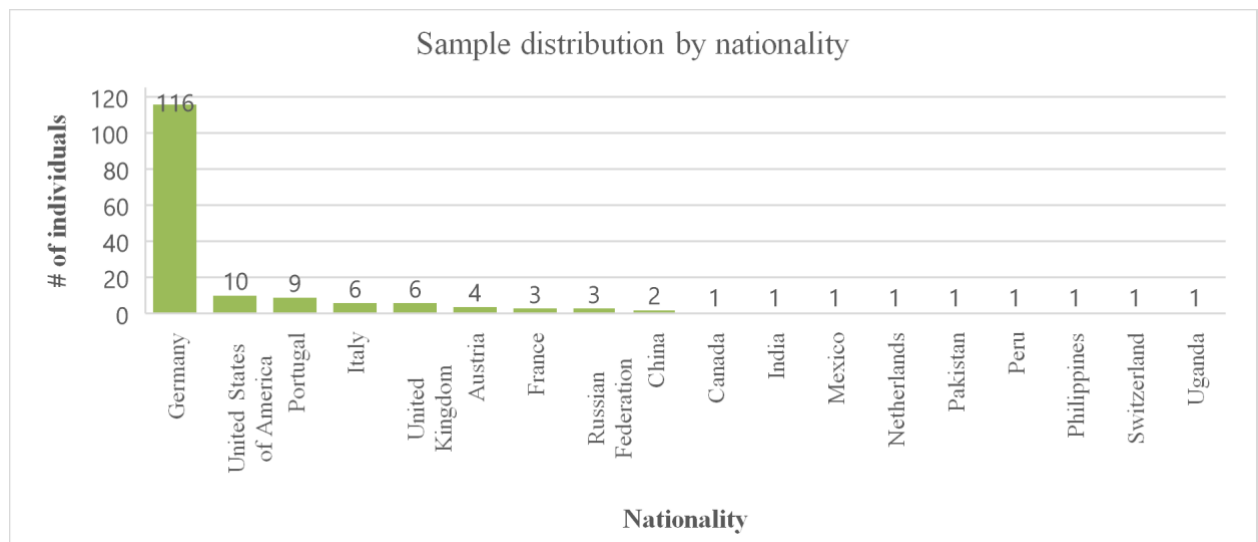
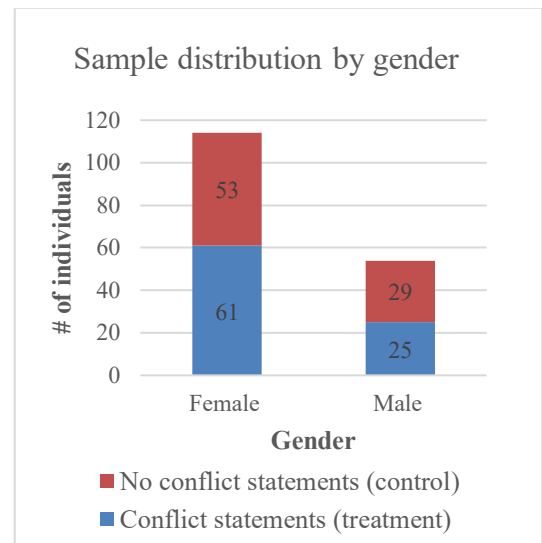
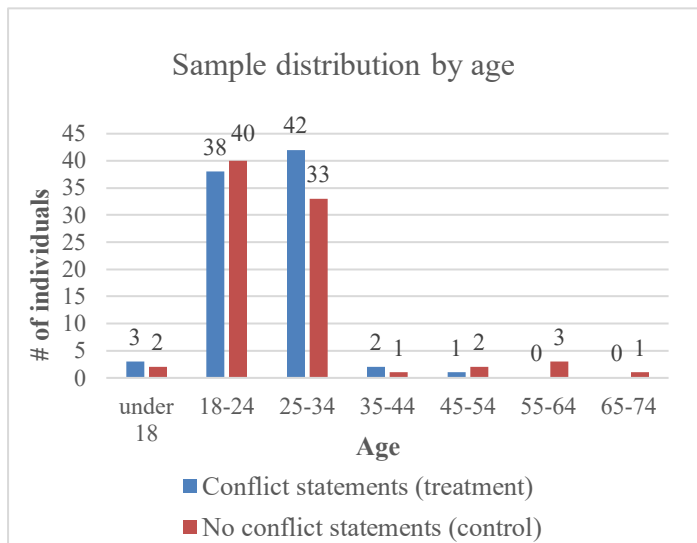
<p>Q1. Movement description (randomly assigned: controversial or non-controversial movement)</p>	<p><i>Controversial movement:</i> The LGBTQ+ movement aims to provide equal rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people. Examples are marriage for everyone, or that same-sex couples should have the right to adopt children. People’s reactions to this movement are divided. Some people support it, whereas others are against it.</p> <p>OR</p> <p><i>Non-controversial movement:</i> The “equal opportunity for children” movement aims to provide equal opportunities for children and young adults. Examples are tutoring support for children from low-income families or reduced costs for participation in leisure activities. People’s reactions to this movement are not divided. Most people support it, and almost no one is against it.</p>
<p>Q2. Controversy manipulation check (Gomes 2020) & Conflict measurement</p>	<p>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <p>6) The _____ movement causes opposing opinions. [Manipulation] 7) The _____ movement creates conflict. [Conflict] 8) The _____ movement is controversial. [Manipulation] 9) The _____ movement is likely to divide people. [Manipulation] 10) The _____ movement is likely to cause discomfort. [Conflict]</p>
<p>Q3. Assess perceived importance (Gomes 2020)</p>	<p>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <p>4) The _____ movement is a relevant societal issue. 5) The _____ movement is an important current topic. 6) I perceive the _____ movement as relevant.</p>
<p>Q4. Assess support of the movement (Gomes 2020) & Attention check</p>	<p>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <p>1) I support the _____ movement. 2) I support movements that support children and young adults from low-income families</p> <p>OR</p> <p>I support movements that aim to provide equal rights for everyone regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.</p> <p>3) Select "Disagree" if you read this.</p>

<p>Q5. Brand scenario description</p>	<p><i>Controversial brand activity:</i> Brand XYZ, a well-known sportswear brand, launched a new campaign in which they addressed the LGBTQ+ topic. OR <i>Non-controversial brand activity:</i> Brand XYZ, a well-known sportswear brand, launched a new campaign in which they addressed the "equal opportunity for children" topic.</p>															
<p>Q6. Assess overall evaluation if brand XYZ should take a stand</p>	<p>To what extent do you agree with the following statement? (1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <p>1) Brand XYZ should take a stand on important sociopolitical issues.</p>															
<p>Q7. Assess attitudes for brand XYZ (Spears and Singh 2004)</p>	<p>In my opinion, the previously described sportswear brand XYZ is...</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%; border-right: 1px solid black; padding-right: 10px;">Unappealing</td> <td style="width: 40%; text-align: center; padding: 0 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </td> <td style="width: 30%; border-left: 1px solid black; padding-left: 10px;">Appealing</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding-right: 10px;">Bad</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 0 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </td> <td style="border-left: 1px solid black; padding-left: 10px;">Good</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding-right: 10px;">Unpleasant</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 0 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </td> <td style="border-left: 1px solid black; padding-left: 10px;">Pleasant</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding-right: 10px;">Unfavorable</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 0 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </td> <td style="border-left: 1px solid black; padding-left: 10px;">Favorable</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding-right: 10px;">Unlikable</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 0 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </td> <td style="border-left: 1px solid black; padding-left: 10px;">Likable</td> </tr> </table>	Unappealing	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Appealing	Bad	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Good	Unpleasant	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Pleasant	Unfavorable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Favorable	Unlikable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Likable
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Unlikable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Likable														
<p>Q8. Assess purchase intention for brand XYZ (Putrevu and Lord 1994)</p>	<p>What would you say about the likelihood that you intend to purchase sportswear from brand XYZ if the products are available for a good price? (1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i>, 7 = <i>Strongly agree</i>)</p> <p>1) It is very likely that I will buy sportswear from brand XYZ. 2) The next time I need sportswear, I will purchase it from brand XYZ. 3) I will definitely try brand XYZ.</p>															
<p>Q9. Demographics</p>	<p>Please fill in the information requested below.</p> <p>5) Age 6) Gender 7) Level of education (completed) 8) Nationality</p>															
<p>Q10. Suspicion test</p>	<p>What do you think is the purpose of this study? If you don't have any presumption, you can leave this question empty.</p>															

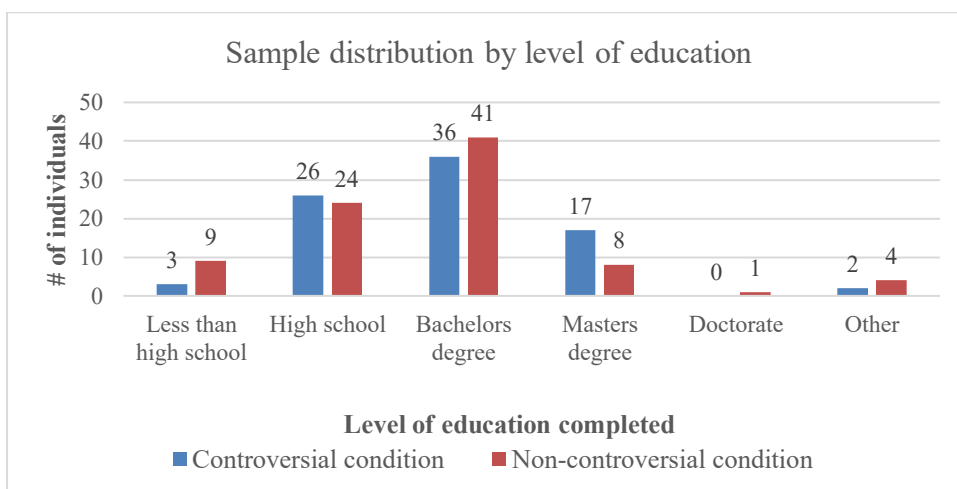
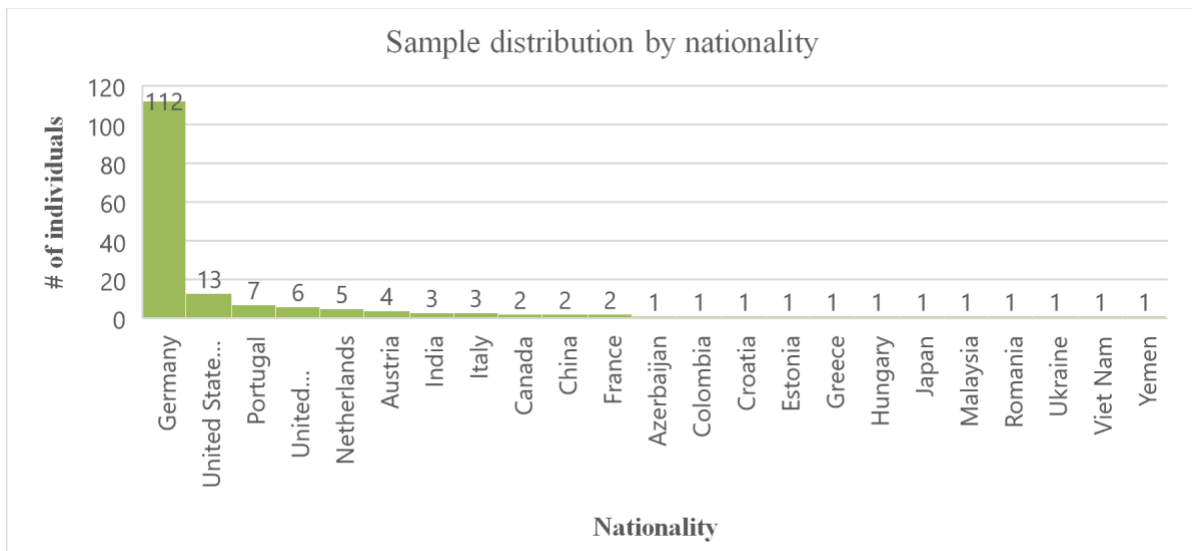
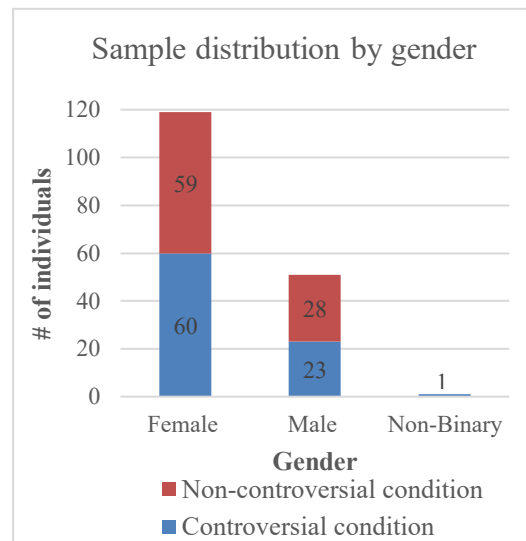
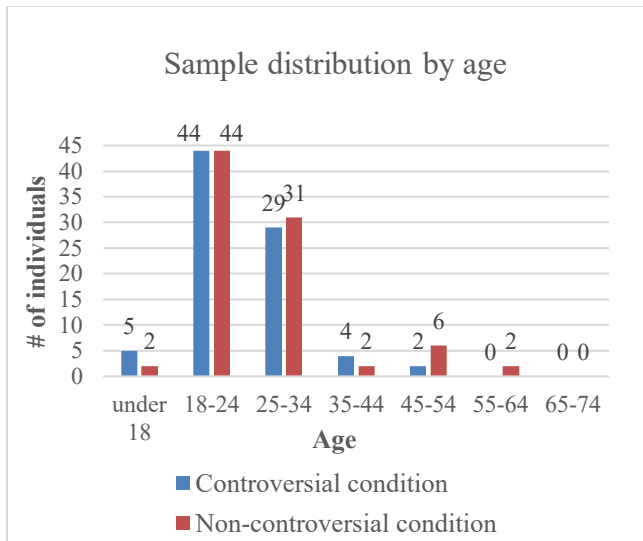
Appendix 4: Sample demographics pre-test



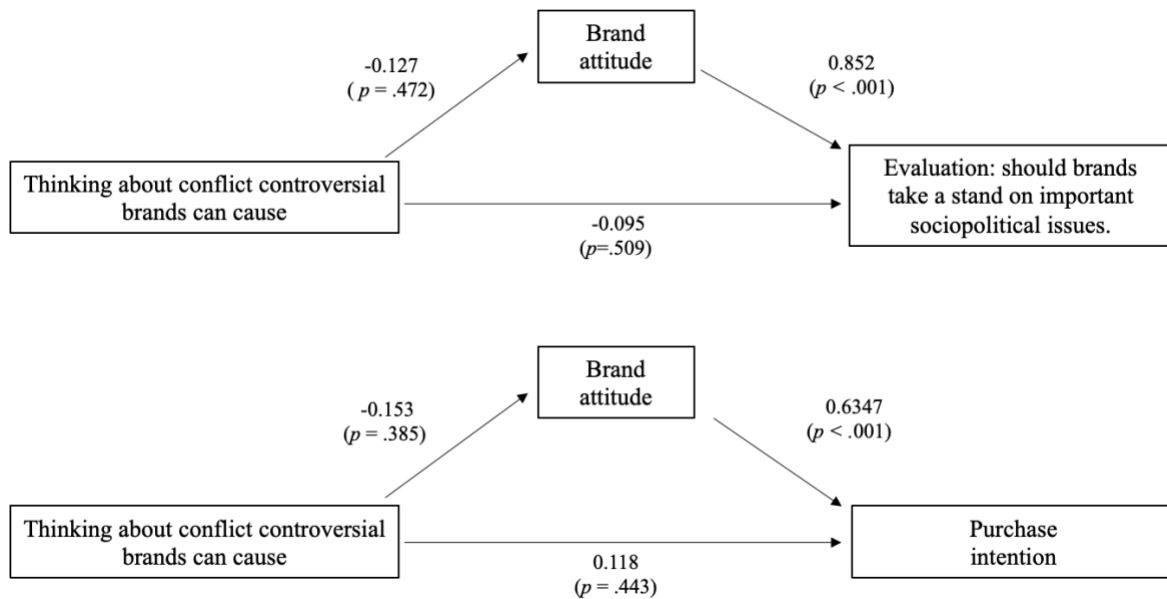
Appendix 5: Sample demographics Study 1



Appendix 6: Sample demographics Study 2



Appendix 7: Study 1 – Results of Hayes PROCESS analysis - Model 4 (Mediation)



Appendix 8: Study 2 – Results of Hayes PROCESS analysis - Model 6 (sequential mediation)

Antecedent	Consequent											
	M1 (Conflict)			M2 (Brand attitudes)			Y (Purchase intention)					
	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p			
X (Controversial brand activity)	a_1	2.052	0.206	< .001	a_2	-0.035	0.212	0.869	c'	0.072	0.191	0.706
M₁ (Conflict)	---	---	---	d_{21}	-0.191	0.081	< 0.05	b_1	0.039	0.066	0.561	
M₂ (Brand attitudes)	---	---	---	---	---	---	b_2	0.584	0.082	< .001		
Constant	i_{M1}	2.201	0.125	< .001	i_{M2}	5.878	0.200	< .001	i_Y	1.544	0.458	< .001
	$R^2 = 0.372$			$R^2 = 0.084$			$R^2 = 0.286$					
	$F(1,170) = 98.786, p < .001$			$F(2,169) = 4.870, p < .01$			$F(3,168) = 18.617, p < .001$					

$M_1 = 2.201 + 2.052X$
 $M_2 = 5.878 - 0.035X - 0.191M_1$
 $Y = 1.544 + 0.072X + 0.039M_1 + 0.584M_2$