LUISS

BI-Luiss Joint Master's in Marketing

Course of Integrated Marketing Communication

Clicktivism vs Activism:
Exploring the role of Self-Monitoring and Perceived Value of Click in Consumer Intentions toward Offline Activism

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Academic Year 2022/2023

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the following individuals who have played a significant role in my journey.

First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Deniz Lefkeli, for her guidance, support, and expertise throughout this research journey. Her invaluable insights and constructive feedbacks have had a crucial role in shaping this work.

To all the Professors, both from BI and Luiss, who have been an incredible source of inspiration. I am deeply grateful for their dedication, knowledge, and kindness.

I am exceedingly thankful to my family. Your unwavering love, encouragement, and belief in my abilities have been my rock. Thank you for instilling in me a thirst for knowledge and for supporting me in every endeavor I undertake.

Lastly, to all those I have had the pleasure of meeting along these two incredible years, whether through academic instances or casual encounters, your insights, conversations, and diverse perspectives have broadened my horizons, contributing to my personal and academic growth.

Truly grateful,

Caterina

Abstract

This master's thesis explores the world of clicktivism, a subject that has received little attention despite becoming more and more predominant in modern culture. This research intends to close the existing gap in the literature by exploring the relationship between consumers' clicktivism and offline activism, with a particular emphasis on the mediating role of perceived value of click and the moderating effect of self-monitoring. The importance of this study derives from the rising popularity of clicktivism as a form of activism and the urgent need to understand the real impact of this practice at the societal level. An online experiment using a survey methodology was carried out to look into these relationships. In order to investigate the proposed mediation effect of perceived click value and the proposed moderating effect of self-monitoring on the relationship between clicktivism and offline activism, the collected data will be analyzed using statistical methods on the statistics software platform SPSS. The results of this study add to the scarce body of knowledge relating to clicktivism and its effects on offline activism. The findings can help educate activists, politicians, and practitioners on the possible advantages and drawbacks of clicktivism as a tool for social change. Despite the fact that we were unable to find evidence to support the proposed model, the study revealed a crucial fact: the effect of clicktivism, as well as the one of self-monitoring, on perceived value of click resulted statistically significant. Although clicktivism did not directly result in a greater inclination to engage in offline activism, this imply that there is a need to further investigate these practices, the value that people attribute to their actions online, and the function of self-monitoring in the same context.

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Introduction

"In promoting the illusion that surfing the web can change the world, Clicktivism is to activism as McDonald's is to a slow cooked meal. It may look like food, but the life-giving nutrients are long gone."

(White, 2010)

Micah White, one of the most outspoken and trenchant critics of clicktivism, firmly believes that the end does not justify the means and it can be detrimental to the development of activists' qualities (The Guardian, 2010). This is the point of view representing one side of the heated debate that focuses on the increasingly relevant theme of clicktivism: the self-deluded idea that by liking, sharing, or retweeting something you are helping out (The Urban Dictionary, cited in BBC Future, 2020). On the other hand, some value the extremely high increase the practice determines in terms of awareness and accessibility to important issues and sensitive topics that should be brought to the attention of all. However, to fully identify the phenomenon of clicktivism, a broader perspective will be reported.

In the 21st century, brands have a profound influence on consumers. Scholars have explored the brand and its potential in shaping how people think and behave, affecting culture, politics, and society in the process. Beyond surface-level representations like a logo or design, the brand is in fact defined as a complex social phenomenon that strengthens and personalize the bond between a commodity and its users (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Recognizing their impact on consumers' attitudes and choices, organizations embrace sociopolitical vision into their business strategy, delivering it to customers through a variety of marketing and product consumption formats. The elements that are integrated in the business model become part of the core brand values, moving the company's focus from solely boosting sales to also delivering the brand promise to customers, arousing their emotions, and forging connections with them (Urde, 2009). In the midst of the myriad names appearing in the contemporary market, this also enables companies to differentiate themselves (Jones, 2017).

Being a two-way interaction, likewise consumers play a role in determining the values that companies pursue. Younger generations are better at gathering information, researching specific issues, and forming opinions (Parment, 2011; Solomon, 2011). Specifically in today's global trust crisis, progressive customers like Millennials and Gen Z are requiring organizations to take a stance about controversial issues (Sarkar & Kotler, 2021) to deliver more than product features or vague promises relating to their "purpose" (Swant, 2021). There is a general trend in consumers to call out and pressure-test brands to know what they stand for (Hsu, 2020) and 58% of consumers expect this to be expressed on social media, the most popular platform for customer receptivity (Sprout Social, 2017). On top of that, Manfredi-Sánchez (2019) considers companies'

political activity one of the most relevant topics in the contemporary academic literature for a society where institutional and interpersonal mistrust is on the rise.

In this setting, the evolution of social media and online platforms has provided consumers and organizations with new avenues to engage in activism and advocate for causes they care about. In line with this, the conflict-ridden discussion of the political impact of the Internet and digital media has been growing lately and this is exactly where the current research took inspiration. Nowadays, people are used to consider social media a part of them and their daily lives, partly because the same are important means to express beliefs and values. However, some wonder to what extent social media genuinely represents who we are and how we feel about this.

The Internet and social media allow consumers to pursue sociopolitical matters independently and on their own terms. This participatory flexibility has attracted the interest of several scholars (Nam, 2012; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Collin, 2008), in light of the alluring alternative to traditional, more restrictive forms of political participation offered to individuals, who are drawn in this sense to get involved. Moreover, this kind of independence better matches the growing complexity that derives from a late-modernist era (Fitri, 2011; Marsh, 2011; Best & Kellner, 1997).

At the same time, the more technology reduces usability, connectivity, and communication barriers, the easier online political participation gets. If we think about one-to-many communication, or the production of content, we realize how practices once considered complex are commonplace today. But when it comes to the increasingly prominent behaviors related to "clicktivism" - also referred to by the term "slacktivism" (Skoric, 2012) -, there is a growing number of critiques coming from the academic discussion and mostly due to the lower level of commitment this new practice presents, compared to traditional forms of activism.

Few studies have investigated clicktivism and its effect on consumer behavior. Therefore, there is a need to better explore brand and consumer activism, clicktivism, as well as their relationship, like it was also pointed out by Vrendenburg et al. (2020). Regarding the latter's research, it is stated in it that the objective of authentic brand activism is to foster meaningful social change. Therefore, this exploration will examine the impact of authentic brand activism on consumer behavior, mainly focusing on the "like" and "share" on social media aspect of brand activism campaigns. Specifically, the thesis aims at understanding whether clicktivism deters consumers from taking real actions toward societal change and if people feel they are actually contributing to the latter through the use of click as a medium.

The relevance of this analysis is firstly linked to the contribution it brings to the Research about brand activism and consumers' responses to it. The World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Risks Report outlines

current crises and the risks that are likely to be severe in the next 2 to 10 years. From this study, we can deduct that brand activism is a highly significant subject nowadays. Among the top risks for 2023 with the greatest potential impact on a global scale, most respondents chose: energy supply crisis, failure to meet net-zero targets, weakening of human rights, cost-of-living crisis. The major problems that run through our society, as those mentioned, can change over time, but they may typically be classified as Environmental, Societal, Economic, Political, and Technological. And it is with these topics that Brand Activism is concerned. For what relate to the environmental category, for example, climate change, pollution and the loss of biodiversity are topics many organizations focus on. At the societal level, brands often tackle issues regarding human rights, increased polarization, and the erosion of social cohesion. From a political standpoint, voting rights, the use of weapons, and lobbying are other matters companies take a stance about.

Literature Review

2.1 BRAND ACTIVISM

2.1.1. Defining Brand Activism

Brand activism, according to Kotler & Sarkar (2021), is a proactive, value-driven strategy used by companies to enhance economic results by emphasizing the need to address social, political, and/or environmental challenges. Their message is that talking about "purpose" and "brand activism" today means rethinking the organization as institution, as well as the concept of leadership and its possible declinations. In this way, organizations and brands can give their contribution to make the World more habitable (Addamiano, 2020). In line with this way of thinking, Jay Curley (2019), Ben & Jerry's global head of integrated marketing, writes on LinkedIn that brand activism "turns your marketing organization into a campaigning organization, and marketers into activists. It means you sell not just more stuff, but big ideas". The concept of engaging with and making a difference, not only in the market, but also in the society and in culture, make brand activism a win-win strategy that benefits both the community and the brand. In fact, companies that engage in activism become advocates for real social change in the world, while also advancing their brand's values (Curley, 2019).

Back in 2002, Holt had already talked about brands as effective social actors able to influence society with their ideas and messages (p. 82). The 2018 Edelman Earned Brand Study adds an important element to this idea: brands seem to have a more easily achievable impact and can actually drive societal change much more effectively than governments. As a consequence, organizations are in a position of power and responsibility. Nike, for instance, symbolizes a fierce dedication to action and self-improvement, whereas Apple represents creativity and independence (Moorman, 2020). Companies like these, by incorporating activism in their strategy, aim to gain cultural authority, which is crucial if it also serves as a bridge to inspire participation.

Parallel research to the Edelman study has also been carried out in Italy, such as the Civic Brands Observatory, a new project by Ipsos and Paolo Iabichino that examines brands' social impact in Italy. The Observatory discovered that about 40% of Italian adults who participated in the poll were in favor of getting involved with social, cultural, or environmental initiatives to enhance the community and environment they live in, including the ones promoted by brands, which could then act as aggregators of movements. People should and want to be part of change: more than one third of Italians genuinely believe that, for organizations to have an impact, citizens' and consumers' active involvement is a must.

From all of this, a need for collaboration, co-creation, and engagement between businesses and customers emerges (Ipsos Italy 2021), also presented in the Davos Manifesto 2020, launched by the World Economic Forum. The latter support the idea of a Stakeholder Capitalism model that "positions private

corporations as trustees of society and is clearly the best response to today's social and environmental challenges" (Schwab, 2019).

2.1.2 Marketing vs. Society - driven brands

As urgent as it is to adopt brand activism, the topic is relatively new and quite unexplored by academics, wherefore it is important to shed light on its development. The evolution of the notion is linked to a major cultural transformation it has already been through. The latter can be captured by examining two collaborations that Nike has chosen in two different moments of the brand's history: the first with Michael Jordan, best player in the National Basketball Association (NBA) - and, by extension, in the world -, and the second with the National Football League (NFL) player, Colin Kaepernick.

The journalist David Halberstam in 1997 publishes an extensive biography of the basketball player Michael Jordan (Manfredi-Sanchéz, 2019). In his work, he discusses how the NBA icon and other celebrities, international TV networks, and the selling of sports apparel helped the professional basketball league grow into a global phenomenon. As a result of the emergence of international stars and teams, a brand that was recognizable to the general public was created: "[...] the signature commercial representation of this huge new athletic-cultural-commercial empire would be an American and a basketball player [Jordan]" (Halberstam, 1997, p. 131).

At the time, Michael Jordan's ability to have an impact on politics as a sports idol or an advertising figure was undoubtable. However, the player took the decision to stay out of it and, in particular, out of the election process, refraining from addressing the Republicans' racist comments he received. Regardless of his avoidance of being exposed on sensitive issues, Nike chose him, aiming to leverage the star's huge popularity to get a 3 million dollars increase in sales, over four years, and ended up with a yearly, 126 million dollars one (Falk, 2020, cited in Poole, 2021).

Hence, on one hand, the Nike-Jordan collaboration revolutionized athlete endorsements. Michael Jordan pioneered the possibility for sport players to be key, commercially viable assets for businesses and, from the symbiotic connection he has had with Nike, they both have grown into two of the world's most popular sports brands (Kunkel, 2023). Today's Jordan Brand's reach extends beyond basketball and into sports, entertainment, streetwear culture, fashion, and lifestyle. On the other hand, in terms of brands' political participation, there was still a long way to go to get to the concept of (authentic) brand activism.

Today, the situation has completely changed. Following the death of George Floyd, several current and past sport players were outspoken in their opposition to racial injustice and voter suppression. Nike itself has supported Colin Kaepernick because of his affiliation with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The

NFL quarterback, in fact, in 2016, initiated the gesture of kneeling during the US national anthem to draw attention to racial discrimination and police brutality (Reuters, 2018). Besides sparking a national controversy, the player lost his contract with the NFL. In line with this, Nike released the campaign with the slogan "Believe in something. Even if it means giving up everything." (Fig.1), which produced partisan results, strong on both sides.

Fig. 1: "Believe in Something" campaign by Nike in collaboration with Colin Kaepernick.

The evident transformation in advertising activity, as a consequence of taking into consideration global audiences as the spearhead of a model of capitalism (Manfredi-Sanchéz, 2019), demonstrates the strong connection that nowadays exists between consumer brands, as well as brand endorsers, and the political sphere. According to Len Elmore - former NBA player turned New York prosecutor, television pundit, and senior lecturer at Columbia University -, the position of Black players evolved into one of the potentially most powerful, particularly in America, in the two major sports of basketball and football (Poole, 2021). And from this, a change in the relationship between endorsers and brands derives too. A new politics of engagement can be grasped by comparing the two above-mentioned collaborations of Nike with Michael Jordan and Colin Kaepernick. For what relates the first one, the organization's motivation in choosing the NBA superstar was the idea of success, visibility, power. Michael Jordan, moreover, embodies a universal truth: money talks (Poole, 2021). The choice of featuring Kaepernick was based instead on the quarterback's status as "one of the most inspirational athletes of his generation, who has leveraged the power of sport to help move the World forward", according to the then Vice President of the brand in North America, Gino Fisanotti (Maaddi, 2018). According to Fisanotti, the firm intended to introduce "Just Do It" to a new generation of sportsmen, while also reinvigorating its meaning (Maaddi, 2018).

Speaking of meanings, today brands support the activist causes committed to the counter-hegemonic culture that challenge the dominant system of symbolic production. The sociologist Alberto Melucci anticipated the use of cultural codes for the benefit of the promoted cause, and explained how the media

activism's action system works. He says: "rather than being interiorized in a way that fosters collective identity, [the action system] is exteriorized through constant engagement with other movements and progressive communities" (Carroll & Hackett, 2006, p.100). In this scenario, constructing a "politics of connections" (Carroll & Hackett, 2006, p.100) becomes more relevant than the very existence of the movement. Brand activists aim for an emotional connection with people based on specific values, rather than an internal regulated political identity. This new organizational approach to activism, where the movement serves both as the channel and the message, is not merely instrumental to the firm's objectives; it is a goal itself.

This logic explains the development of a new area of study that examines how businesses behave with respect to social and political topics. In contrast with the brands that engaged with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that were driven by marketing, seen as a promotion of the cause (Kotler & Sarkar, 2021), contemporary brand activism relates to society-driven organizations, connecting companies' political orientation to consumer behavior and the creation of the individual's self-image.

To conclude, the Black Lives Matter movement, soon became a phenomenon, turned brand activism into something mainstream (Admirand, 2020), meaning that a larger audience could potentially participate to the cause. And participation can make a difference. Now the doubt is about the form of involvement that can actually determine an impact, at the societal level.

2.1.3 A Brand Activism typology

Academics identify different types of Brand Activism. According to Kotler & Sarkar (2021), for instance, brand activism transcends Aaker's Building Strong Brands theorization (Aaker, 2012), attempting to cultivate a true activist behavior inside organizations. Depending on how this behavior is positioned in relation to stakeholders' expectations and requirements, activism may be progressive or regressive (Kotler & Sarkar, 2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020). As it can be seen in Fig. 2, progressive activism aims at supporting the common good, rather than hindering it by encouraging polarization, like the regressive one does. Patagonia, today known as The Activist Company, is an iconic example of this first activism behavior. The firm has in fact launched campaigns like "The President Took Your Land", to confront the Trump administration (Kotler & Sarkar, 2021), or "Don't Buy this Jacket", to make consumers aware of the environmental impact of consumerism and encourage the reduction of this last.
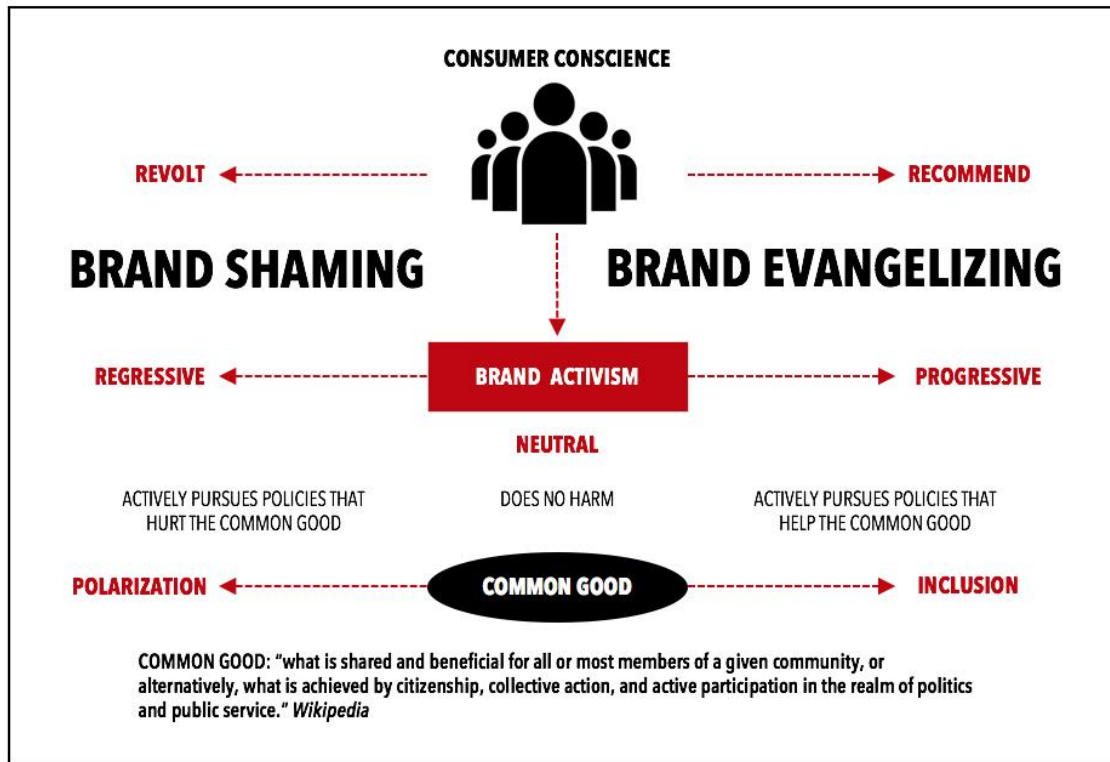
Fig. 2: A framework of How Brand Activism works (Kotler & Sarkar, 2021).

In addition to Kotler and Sarkar's one, there is another major classification of activism already used by numerous Scholars. It is the one by Vredenburg et al. (2020) that, based on the degree of activist marketing messaging and prosocial corporate practice, distinguishes four patterns: Absence of Brand Activism, Silent Brand Activism, Authentic Brand Activism, and Inauthentic Brand Activism (Fig.3).
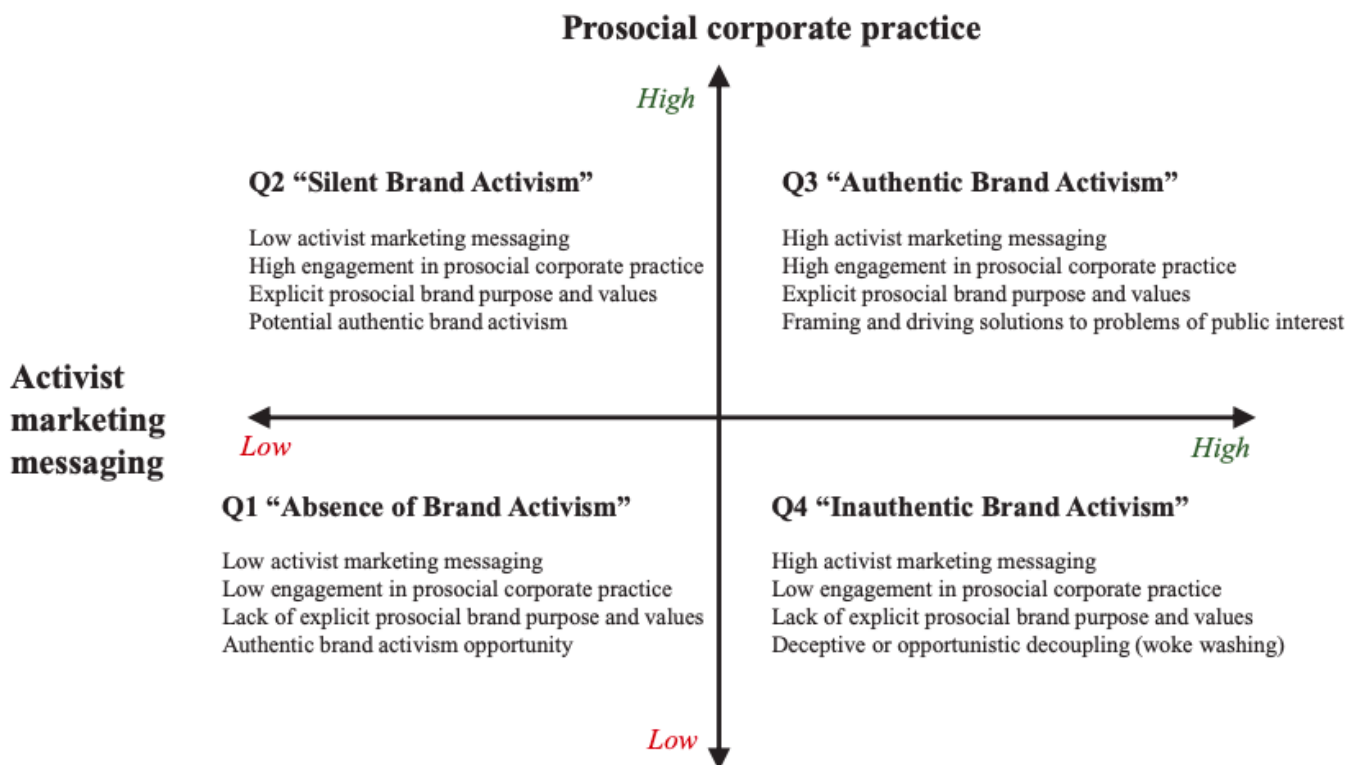
Fig.3: Typology of brand activism by Vredenburg et al. (2020).

Low marketing activity in relation to sociopolitical issues and a lack of prosocial corporate behaviors are characteristics of "absence of corporate brand activism" (Q1). Relating to this category, consumers do not generally expect brands to participate in activism, and historically, the brand credibility has not depended on its commitment to socially conscious causes. The majority of these corporations run their businesses in the B2B sector.

Q2 is the one of "silent corporate brand activism". Brands that adopt this kind of activism present again a low degree of marketing activity, but they incorporate social concerns into their core values or business objectives, or into both. These companies tend to be smaller and keep their prosocial practices "behind the scenes". They are one step away from authentic brand activism, as they are naturally linked to their purpose and values which, however, should be aligned to their communication.

Organizations that fall in Q3 are recognized as "authentic" brand activists because their brand purpose and values, activist marketing messaging, and prosocial corporate practice are consistent. An example of a company belonging to this category is again Patagonia, whose marketing statements are synchronized with its engagement and attempts to advance social change from the points of view of sustainability and transparency.

The behavior of firms operating with a high marketing message activity addressing sociopolitical concerns while concurrently showcasing a low engagement in prosocial actions is referred to as "inauthentic corporate brand activism" (Q4). Due to this unalignment of communication and prosocial practice, organizations in this quadrant are generally seen as unauthentic, often lacking in brand purpose, and intentionally concealing the absence of prosocial behaviors. Inauthentic corporate brand activism is viewed as false signaling and unethical because of the misleading promises made by the businesses that operate within this quadrant. The actions of these companies are actually best exemplified by the term "woke washing" in the context of inauthentic corporate brand activism.

The importance of authenticity in brand activism and the risks of brands not "walking the talk" have been emphasized by marketing academics (Moorman, 2020; Kotler & Sarkar, 2017; Dudler, 2017) and practitioners (Unilever, 2019b). Yet, according to 56% of consumers, too many brands now use societal issues primarily as a marketing gimmick to sell more of their products (Edelman, 2019). At the same time, as already mentioned, companies are increasingly expected to be agents of change. In this scenario, it is not new that developing and expressing brand activism authenticity is essential for both marketing success and the social impact such a strategy may bring about, as well as the importance of encouraging progressive activism behaviors, also among brands. It is for this reason that this thesis will not confront the effects of authentic and inauthentic brand activism, as several previous studies did, or the ones of progressive and regressive campaigns. Instead, in the pursue of the investigation of clicktivism in this field, it will deepen the

consequences and influence of progressive and authentic brand activism – whose specific area of study results still quite unexplored - on consumers.

2.2 THE "CONSUMER ACTIVIST"

Given the paramount significance of brands in the endeavor for societal transformation, it is critical to undertake a thorough examination of customers' standpoint as well.

Before Millenials and Gen Z, solidarity campaigns were notably deficient in substance, compared to the contemporary ones, and reputation was still far from becoming a valuable marketing asset to be sold. Today, it seems this has finally occurred, with business ethics acting as a strategic motivator to get and uphold customer consent, and their purchases too (Iabichino, 2020). This means people must have done something for things to change. Consequently, various questions arise: Can we actually influence social change, as consumers? It was mentioned how some believe that brands, to make a difference, must go through the active involvement of citizens and consumers, but do people really want to commit? If yes, in what ways? How do they plan to contribute? What is the meaning of contribution to societal change for them? How did this last change over time?

2.2.1 Consumer response to Brand Activism

Consumers' responses can be defined as favorable or unfavorable feedbacks about a business, its goods or services, and their ethics too, and indicates people' degree of satisfaction in relation to their purchases (Link, 2017). Consequently, customer feedback enables companies to enhance the quality of their offerings. The focus of the present study is on analyzing whether consumers responding to authentic brand activism through clicktivism are deterred from taking real actions toward societal change.

The context thus far outlined made clear that firms, by acknowledging that consumers and their beliefs are moving closer to society, have been aligning to this trend, in order to promote it. So, beyond the prosocial one, organizations have another reason for moving toward activism: align with consumer demands. Besides their mentioned request for companies to take a stance on controversial matters, individuals genuinely desire to have a connection with brands based on the match between personal and organizational values and beliefs. If on one side, in light of what has been said, consumers can support businesses, yet they also have the power to oppose to an entity (Roux, 2007; Fournier, 1998b). Some authors name this condition "consumer resistance" (Cambefort & Roux, 2019), which occurs when people experience hegemony or oppression (Fournier, 1998b; Peñaloza & Price, 1993) and perceive a discordance between their values and beliefs and the business and market practices, discourses, and logic (Roux, 2007). Nowadays, the World is becoming more and more polarized. And when a brand participates in a divisive public discussion, it reflects ideals that not all customers

embrace (Wannow & Haupt, 2022; Hydock, Paharia, & Blair, 2020). As a result, companies that participate in brand activism may receive support from some clients while facing criticism from others.

Researchers have been investigating the consequences of brand activism as stimulus for consumer responses and found that the first is a risky strategy, since opponents could show disproportionately negative resactions (Jungblut & Johnen, 2021; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). In light of the facts that emotions are a key variable in consumer behaviour (Bruno, Melnyk, & Murray, 2022; Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999) and that strong emotional responses to brand activism are a reality (Vredenburg et al., 2020), Wannow, Haupt, & Ohlwein (2023) have recently explored this field of study, identified as a research gap (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2020). The authors demonstrated that moral emotions may influence, not just brand-related results, but also socially significant behavior. Actually, it is interesting to note that brand activism appears to spur detractors of the brand's viewpoint to fight for their position harder than supporters (Wannow et al., 2023).

Consequence of the need of consumers to have a values and beliefs' alignment with the brand they choose is an increase in belief-driven buying and loyalty (Edelman, 2018; Fournier, 1998b). This is in line with Elliott and Wattanasuwan's (1998) earlier suggestion that postmodern consumers are thirsting for identity, which they can express through the purchasing choices they make (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; McCracken, 1990; Belk, 1988). Belk (1988) presents evidence in support of what he calls the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behavior: we are what we have. In fact, buyers' decision making take on a symbolic value, as "their possessions are viewed as major parts of their extended selves" (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998, p. 134). People use symbols, practices, and the marketplace to create a self-identity constituted by four dimensions: personality, self-concept, identity project, and self-presentation (Schau, 2018).

It is interesting to note that, according to Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998), identity work is not only inwardly directed in the context of self-symbolism of consumption but also outwardly focused, in terms of the desire for communal identities through social symbolism. Indeed, as symbolic interactionists say, "even sovereign identities require the interpretive support of others to give them ballast" (Holt, 2002, p. 83). Collective identities have been addressed with various names, like subcultures of consumption (Kozinets, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), consumer tribes (Goulding, Shankar, & Canniford, 2013; Cova & Kozinets, 2007; Cova, 1997), and brand communities (Schau, Muñiz Jr, & Arnould, 2009; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001).

A problematic relationship links self and social identities. Research on consumer culture has sought to "address the dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868), and has done so by shedding light on what Jenkins (2000) refers to as

"the internal-external dialectic of identification" (p.40). Jenkins (2000) contends that the self is embedded in social practices and that the development of an individual's self-identity is inextricably linked to the parallel development of a collective social identity. Consumer identity is defined through social interaction and validation (Shankar, Elliott, & Fitchett, 2009). In the consumption space of a rave, for instance, individual identity projects are focused on the Other and heavily reliant on group acceptability (Goulding, Shankar, & Elliott, 2002). The literature on both market-based and counter-cultural collectives, including brand communities and subcultures of consumption, emphasizes how consumer identity projects are socially, historically, and culturally structured and bound (Larsen & Patterson, 2018). According to a large body of research (Hebdige, 2012; Kozinets, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), such collectives also offer significant meanings and practices that influence not only consumers' identities, but their behaviors and relationships too.

Shared consumption symbols are one of the primary means of expressing and identifying group membership and the group self, according to Boorstin (2010). Despite the fact that we may be more individualistic and have more distinct and independent group memberships than we did before societal specialization, the division of labor, and the relocation of production from the household to the workplace (Belk, 1984), it is clear that we still define ourselves at different levels through group identity.

There are other regularly used but understudied categories of possessions making up our extended self that should be noted, in addition to the frequently purchased consumer goods. Moreover, it is not necessary for group symbols to be individually owned. In fact, Belk (1988) indicated that they may also be things like landmarks, places, leaders, media "stars", inventions, institutions, sports teams, public monuments, money, body parts, and other people (p. 140, 153). In each instance, there is evidence of a connection between these things and one's sense of self (Belk, 1988). Along with musical knowledge and preference, ownership of different types of bicycles, motorcycles, or cars, going to bars, clubs, and other places of entertainment, or supporting particular cultural arts, are all ways of identifying a group (Lynes, 1980; Cialdini et al., 1976). The degree to which group members depend on the collective for identification can be demonstrated via the relative heterogeneity of these consumption preferences within groups (Belk, 1988).

It has been said previously that the extended self-functions on a collective level too. It involves family, group, subcultural, and national identities (Belk, 1988). Belk, by affirming this, echoes Sartre's (Daly, 1956) view that other people affect relationships among having, doing, and being, resulting "an important mirror through which we see ourselves" (Belk, 1988, p.146). A wide range of findings and theory that draws from several disciplines of study support the relevance of extended self as a key concept that may explain a variety of consumer and human behaviors (Belk, 1988). The extra layers of self were specifically proposed by Belk (1988) to explain particular behaviors that may be viewed as selfless in the more limited individual sense of self. Indeed, possessions can also serve a social purpose by revealing social binds to one's family, community,

or cultural groups, including brand communities (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Academic researchers have drawn inferences about gift-giving, property maintenance, organ donation, product disposal and disuse, and the position of the extended self in producing meaning in life (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). When trying to comprehend the desire to give organs, for instance, the previously noted fact that people and groups can also be perceived as a part of one's extended self leads to yet another consideration. Those who value their community more will be more willing to donate their organs to their fellow members, seen as the people who are more important to the firsts' extended selves (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

In the context of brand activism and consumer reactions to it, identity expression and self-congruity are two topics that merit consideration. These days, people create communities centered around brands, adopting a very postmodernist approach to social interaction, and they claim to operate freely while collaborating with thousands of other like-minded individuals (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Considering the theoretical insights on identity previously reported, it can be said that persons can express their identities also through brand activism, both privately and publicly. In this sense, privately, brands and products function as indicators of success, boost self-esteem, and support individuals during major life transitions (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Instead, to meet the need of publicly expressing their selves, consumers strategically align with companies that support issues linked to their self-identities and use brand affiliation as a way to convey their beliefs to others (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Based on Levy's (1959) work, buyers, in fact, purchase a good not only for its functionality, but also for what it represents. Consequently, brands can act as symbols whose meaning helps determine and build a consumer's self-concept. According to McCracken's (1990) model of meaning transfer, meanings continuously circulate in the consumer society, leaving the "culturally constituted world" (p. 314) to get to the life and experience of consumers. In order to do so, they are transferred into products through the fashion system and advertising (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; McCracken, 1990). Advertising is treated, in fact, as a tool through which a meaning gets into a brand, for which purpose it uses cultural symbols thought, in every case, for the specific product in question (McCracken, 1990).

Furthermore, identity projects have become exceedingly complicated, as a result of the waning influence of conventional cultural organizations, the transfer of responsibility towards the individual, and the plethora of options available to consumers (Seregina & Schouten, 2017; McAlexander et al., 2014). The multitude of identities that people find themselves having to navigate is one facet of such complexity (Larsen & Patterson, 2018). According to Linville (1987), the self is constituted by different components. It includes social roles and personality traits, of which the most significant are schematic self-aspects (Markus, 1977) and possible self, that is one's ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Consumers handle this multiplicity, say Carrington, Neville, & Canniford (2015), by embracing it (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Goulding et al., 2009), or pursuing a

coherent identity narrative (Murray, 2002; Thompson, 1996; Thompson & Haytko, 1997), or using coping strategies (Ahuvia, 2005; Schau & Gilly, 2003). It is important to pay attention to the complexity of customers' numerous identities and how brand activism interacts with them. According to Ciszek (2015), there are numerous, competing, and occasionally overlapping identities associated with activism. If we think about this, consumers do, in fact, deal with brand activism initiatives that target issues across several dimensions, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, and their intersecting identities may affect their reactions to the different stimuli.

In contrast to the traditional view of identity as something that merely exist, the same is today defined as a process that serves both producers' and consumers' situational needs (Curtin & Gaither, 2005, p. 102). Hall (1990) assessed already that identity should be seen as a "production" (p. 222): never finalized, always in progress, and created inside, not outside, representation. In line with this, campaign discourses, through identity management, develop overlapping zones of meaning for all the audiences that brands want to target. The shared meanings of different identities - built on the basis of multiple socially created meanings and practices (Curtin & Gaither, 2005) - provide a cultural background for organizing, enabling, performing, and analyzing individual and group participation (Ciszek, 2015).

To, conclude, identity, as well as beliefs and group connections, works as a tool that enables political mobilization, influencing people' choices to participate in collective actions, either by aggressively promoting or deliberately distancing themselves from companies, respectively in line or not with their activism viewpoints (Ciszek, 2015). Therefore, identity is more than just an essentialist concept; it is also a dynamic setting for social and political activity (Ciszek, 2015).

2.2.2 The impact of the digital revolution on cause involvement

Social media has established a new environment, where a new type of relational experience between individuals is progressively emerging and endless options for communication - not a priori destined to remain confined to the online domain - are offered. In light of this, the question of whether there is any basis for the distinction between the "real" and "virtual" worlds arises: can what occurs online have repercussions, let alone significant ones, in life away from the computer screen?

Thanks to a new communication system emerged from the consolidation of social media, today a potentially infinite number of people have access to a public, cost-free (or almost cost-free) environment that permits the dissemination of ideas, opinions, information, and any other kind of content, at a pace and scale that was previously unheard of. The explanation for why social movements are using the Internet more and more frequently can be found in the aforementioned characteristics of the new scenario: social media, and particularly social networks, have made it possible to observe how, how much, and why a group of people

interact by joining a virtual community. And as it was raised in the preceding paragraphs, by enforcing transparency and holding companies responsible for their acts, consumers and civil society may also act as watchdogs through the use of internet technologies (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013; Waldron et al., 2013). When citizens have the ability to fact-check, monitor, and analyze a company's operations, pressuring these toward corporate responsibility, it may transform the power relationships in the form of a "reverse panopticon" of sorts (Garrett, 2006, p. 11). The numerous feedbacks provided by the network makes it feasible to speculate more confidently, than in the past, about whether a certain event, group, or movement has a larger or smaller probability of success and achievement.

At this point, some claim, quite rightly, that the "recruitment" for a cause becomes easier and possibly more widespread, if one takes into account the practice of online sharing and word-of-mouth (WoM): users who are bombarded by a specific proposal or event on Facebook, for example, will present a greater predisposition to interest in that particular topic, because a congruent number of people, part of one's contact list, talk about it, share it, recommend it, or simply express opinions about it.

However, despite the enormous potential described above, it is necessary to move with caution in the webs of trending topics, "Groups" and "Pages" suggested by contacts, and highly shared and retweeted discussion topics (Cosenza, 2014). This is because quantity has never been a reliable indicator of quality on the web: providing someone the chance to express themselves to a potentially limitless audience is not always a sign of riches, as it may be difficult to assess the validity of what is posted online.

The New Media, by offering "arenas" for potential debates, enable the emergence of a widely shared common sense, without regard to time or space constraints. And previously, synthesizing, it was introduced the idea of new engagement and commitment formats that could flow, from an early stage of online activism to "offline", tangible participation, in the form of a collective action. This last would be an expression of the identity cultivated and developed online. Social networks provide more committed activists the ability to start an effective recall process that unites unknown users in a shared cause. Hence, a socio-political actor may be created from scratch. However, this ideal view of what could happen does not consider multiple factors that affect this process, but this issue will be revisited at a later stage.

The multidimensional convergence of social media is another factor that has altered online social dynamics (Cosenza, 2014). Owing to technology advancement, it is now possible to insert images, videos, and texts from other sources into one of the many social networks we use, in order to propagate one's concept as an individual or as a collectivity and attempt to elicit some sort of emotional response. In addition, keep in mind that a user will view a post recommended by a Facebook "friend" more highly than a flier handed out on the street by a stranger.

What has been said demonstrates how, from the simple and passive enjoyment of content typical of Web 1.0, we have arrived at allowing the user to occupy his or her online space in a "active" manner with the help of social media. People feel stimulated to face the virtual reality as "protagonists", since the dissemination of user generated contents (UGC) and the conviction of being surrounded by and in contact with peers, according to the peer-to-peer logic, allows them to feel at ease, which is uncommon in "offline" gatherings. With the media tools at their disposal on the Web, it is conceivable that any individual would become convinced that they can make a difference and arouse active interest in any setting that piques their curiosity.

Yet, the risk of developing complete apathy in the offline world and an aversion for everything that does not need the use of a keyboard or mouse must be considered. The satisfaction and comfort that "online engagement" brings may reduce the possibility that a social actor in power will actually develop into a social actor. On the other hand, a virtual res publica is rapidly developing, which may be explained by the network's great potential, in combination with a search for really democratic conditions that let everyone voice their thoughts (Castells, 2008). But the limitless possibilities for encounter and dialogue, as well as the democratic and participatory potential noted above, run the danger of producing a painful illusion because it is impossible to rule out of the reproduction of traditional power structures online.

In summary, when communicating about causes and opening up new dialogues about what it means to be "involved" in a cause today, both in the traditional sense and in the actions of so-called "slacktivists" and other people empowered by the availability of digital tools, there is a profound need for strategy and the integration of disciplines.

2.3 CLICKTIVISM VS. ACTIVISM

As a result of the growing migration of activism to the online space (Freelon et al., 2020), there is a renewed interest in analyzing how digital technologies alter the practices of social movements and, therefore, theories of collective action (George & Leidner, 2019; Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Earl & Kimport, 2011). According to studies, activists utilize digital tools to practice new forms of activism (George & Leidner, 2019), build new action repertoires (Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016), and alter collective action participation, mobilization, and coordination (Schmitz et al., 2020; Earl et al., 2014; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Brunsting & Postmes, 2002), yet there is little research on how digital technology fits into their toolkit (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Luo et al., 2016).

Online activism is easier and more affordable to join than traditional offline protests. Unlike offline activism, which often needs an infrastructure to sustain prolonged contention, online activism may have an influence from a small core of highly dedicated individuals if they are integrated into a supporting network of

low commitment members (George & Leidner, 2019; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Depending on the factors that led to someone's initial engagement - such as a shared interest, ideology, or emotional variables (i.e., moral anger) -, supporters' motivation to become involved in a cause, their retention rate within a movement, and their level of commitment may vary (George & Leidner, 2019; Jasper, 1998; Jasper & Poulsen, 1995), as well as the human and social capital that each of them contribute with (Diani, 1997). Moreover, network participants' reach, sensitivity, and influence have an impact on the dynamics of information dissemination processes (Himelboim & Golan, 2019; Watts & Dodds, 2007). For instance, public celebrities (Wiegmann et al., 2019), by acting as network bridges (Himelboim & Golan, 2019; Isa & Himelboim, 2018; González-Bailón et al., 2013), may play a significant role in disseminating information about the movement and inspiring others to take part in collective action.

Theoretically, social media can encourage greater participation in collective action, signaling more effective movements (Tilly, 1999). Nonetheless, even if an online social movement may have thousands of supporters, many of them result passive spectators (i.e., "lurkers"), who do not really participate in the movement's activities or interactions (Tagarelli & Interdonato, 2015). The most popular manifestation of this post-modernist behavior is "clicktivism". According to Jordan Flaherty, a journalist and author of No More Heroes, social media can only imitate, not replace, empathy: "Empathy can only come from looking someone in the eye and hearing their voice in person and is something that any progressive or radical movement for change needs" (Flaherty, cited in Fernández, 2022). "Likes" draw attention to problems in a matter of seconds. However, when acts are limited to the virtual, they quickly fade away. To confront climate change, inequality, and authoritarianism, solid physical movements are required (Fernández, 2022).

Clicktivism, also defined as slacktivism (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2013), or micro-political action (Vromen, 2017), is an emerging form of political engagement that resulted from the simplification of user-end communication processes and the emergence of social media environments. The earliest clicktivism literature reveals that it is mostly labile and ineffective (Morozov, 2011; Gladwell, 2010; White, 2010; Morozov, 2009). However, some academics have made a deliberate effort to break away from this marginalized position and, in doing so, give much-needed conceptual clarity. Considering this body of literature, the most succinct conceptualization of clicktivism is offered by Rotman et al. (2011), who define it as a "[…] low-risk, low-cost activity via social media, whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity". Then, Lee & Hsieh (2013) attempted to describe clicktivism by citing concrete instances, such as clicking "like" on Facebook to support interest groups, sign online petitions, send contents like videos, or changing the profile picture, along with retweeting others and mobilizing around hashtags (Bozarth & Budak, 2017; Morozov, 2011). Lastly, Halupka (2014) wrote a systematic heuristic to identify and analyze clicktivism, where he defines the phenomenon through seven key features: situated Online, an impulsive gesture, noncommittal, does not draw upon specialized knowledge,

easily replicated, engages a political object, an action performed. With this as a foundation, clicktivism may be broadly characterized as: an impulsive and noncommittal online political reaction that is simple to imitate and does not call for specialized understanding.

2.3.1 Differentiating Clicktivism from Offline Activism

Why might Clicktivism not translate in Offline Activism? In this paragraph, different theories about factors concurring to cause slacktivism behavior that does not lead to offline commitment toward activism are presented. In doing so, the aim is to have a greater understanding of the main research topic, clicktivism, but more importantly of the potential negative relationship that it could have with consumer activism behavior, which is the focus of this exploration.

In April 2020, Impact (https://impactmr.com/) conducted the Great Green Sustainability Study, which indicated that 80% of customers say they want to do more to protect the environment. Yet, 75% of respondents (up from 71% in October 2019) concur that they could do more. Although this is encouraging, it is doubtful that the same percentage will act, by altering their behavior. The percentual difference between those actually changing behavior and those who stops at online "participation" can be explained through the so-called "Intention-Action Gap". This thesis studies this gap in the context of consumer activism, where social media users often express their support to a cause on social media, but then do not pursue the same commitment offline.

Another concurring factor in this dynamic is moral self-licensing or cleansing, which was observed in different domains (Khan & Dhar, 2007; Monin & Miller, 2001). According to Sachdeva, Iliev, & Medin (2009), prosocial behavior is essentially expensive to the person, therefore if individuals feel "too moral" (p.524), they may lack adequate motivation to participate in moral action. People might not feel the need to volunteer or give blood, for instance, if they already have a solid reputation as moral individuals. This sort of attitude can be compared to moral licensing, since people may be in fact "licensed" to stop acting morally upright when they have an excess of moral currency (Sachdeva, Iliev, & Medin, 2009). In consonance with moral licensing theory, engaging in clicktivism may actually decrease the probability that one would take part in and commit to the future offline action, by serving as a permission to slack up without feeling bad. Kim, Kim, Tan, Wang, & Ong (2023) provide additional evidence for theorizing a potential negative effect of clicktivism on offline activism behavior. The results of their analysis are coherent with moral self-licensing theory, which holds that an initial moral act releases individuals from their felt duty to engage in more prosocial activities (Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010; Monin & Miller, 2001). Kim et al. (2023) believe, in fact, that the moral licensing framework can be applied to the context of clicktivism and, by doing so, they found evidence that clicking on an online petition significantly reduced the likelihood of donating.

The benefits linked to our mobile phone are also something that is able to influence our activism behavior. In addition to the vast array of practical advantages that smartphones offer, consumers are drawn to them for a deeper emotional reward as well: psychological comfort (Melumad & Pham, 2020). The authors explain how this kind of reassurance results from a special combination of features that turn mobile phones into a comforting presence for their owners: the portability of the device, its personal nature, the subjective sense of privacy experienced while using the device, and the haptic gratification it provides. People benefit from their own device not only in terms of psychological comfort but also, if necessary, of actual stress relief (Melumad & Pham, 2020). And this idea is consistent with other phenomena linked to the smartphone, like anxiety (Cheever et al. 2014) and cognitive load (Ward et al. 2017) that users report experiencing when they are not with their phone. As supporting a cause can be seen as an emotionally loaded experience by many people, some might choose to participate online, exactly because they feel more comfortable and protected. Moreover, relatively anonymous online environments allow people to feel free from concerns of being judged for their actions (Greijdanus et al., 2020). As a consequence, these same people are less likely to expose their selves by taking part in offline activities and might think to exclusively use online tools as a way to commit to sociopolitical causes. But relying exclusively on the smartphone, if on one hand could facilitate online activism, on the other may lead to slacktivism. And this last, by increasing the sense of diffusion of responsibility that is perceived on social networking sites (Martin & North, 2015; Runions & Bak, 2015), probably would not be followed by offline activism.

Furthermore, specifically relating to environmental issues, according to Reczek, Trudel, & White (2018), sustainable consumer behaviors are frequently described as abstract and challenging for individuals to understand, and this is also true of their potential outcomes, which may be unclear and ambiguous (Weber, 2010). As a result, many feel discouraged from engaging in those behaviors, not being able to recognize any sort of tangible impact deriving from them. Individual action might be seen as minor and insignificant, given that climate change and other problems are severe, complex, and can have significant effects (White et al., 2019). However, social influence can mitigate this issue of abstractness. People are impacted by social dynamics in the sense that, in uncertain situations, we frequently look at others' expectations and behaviors for guidance (Cialdini, 2007; White & Simpson, 2011). This might result in information overload, green fatigue, or demotivation brought on by the absence of realistic expectations for change (Guyader, Ottosson, & Witell, 2017; Strother & Fazal, 2011). Moreover, White et al. (2019) found that, in order to adopt sustainable behavior, it is sometimes necessary to replace an automatic habit with a controlled one. Based on these multiple supporting theories, consumers who feel demotivated or "fatigued" may find it difficult to break their reflexive behavior of "scrolling", "liking", and "sharing" social media information and, likely overloaded by the latter, they will be discouraged from getting involved in high-commitment activities.

Theoretical developments

3.1 The effect of clicktivism on consumer offline behavior

This investigation attempts to contribute filling the research gap regarding the negative impact of clicktivism on offline activism behavior. Until today, researchers have been mainly focusing on the "good side" of clicktivism, as its function in sharing information pertaining to sociopolitical causes, potentially resulting in bringing users of the Internet and social media closer to these issues. In the context of clicktivism, the responsibility of disseminating information may be effectively assigned to the large number of members who play the role of unpaid volunteers by spreading received messages throughout their personal networks (Breuer & Farooq, 2012). However, as Bimber & Copeland (2011) contend, while digital media offer platforms for political discussion, they do not in and of themselves promote engagement.

Boulianne (2009), with her meta-analysis, presents 38 studies investigating the effect of Internet use on civic involvement covering the time period 1995–2005, and reveals a favorable but extremely limited influence of the Internet in this regard. First, the average effect size found is 0.07, within a standard deviation of 0. Additionally, these slightly positive results appear to be associated with the positive effect of moderators like social capital (Gibson, Howard, & Ward, 2000) and political interest (Xenos & Moy, 2007), which have long been recognized as reliable predictors of political engagement.

Bimber, Stohl, & Flanagin (2008) suggest that, while the use of digital media broadly enriches the array of strategic actions available to people who are already interested in politics, it does not automatically lead to increased levels of engagement. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that those who are "politically apathetic" would become more engaged in politics as a result of using digital media (Breuer & Farooq, 2012, p.3). In the best case scenario, it seems that they will become increasingly involved only in Internet-based political activities (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). In light of this trend, in the last years, an increasing number of academics have expressed concerns that the consequences of digital media in this setting may be detrimental, as people increasingly adopt more "slacktivist" forms of online activism, defined as those that demand little effort but also have little real-world impact (Morozov, 2009; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001).

In order to be able to evaluate specifically the consequences of consumer clicktivism, we must understand how people truly engage with activism through the Internet. The first step in this process is to define this new form of engagement and its variants. Second, we need to examine the articles that discuss how offline and online engagement differ from one another and relate to each other. By answering to these questions, it is also possible to address the growing general concern about the declining participation in conventional, offline political activism (Vissers & Stolle, 2014).

If slacktivism is actually threatening the world of political involvement and civic participation as we know it, then this intriguing phenomenon needs to have greater space in the academic literature than it currently has. The term "slacktivism" was created by combining the words "slacker" and "activist", and it is typically used pejoratively to refer to political or civic actions taken online (Breuer & Farooq, 2012; Christensen, 2011, quoted in Skoric, 2012). One of the primary criticisms to this type of political involvement stems directly from the fact that there are fewer transaction costs involved, compared to its conventional offline counterpart. Slacktivists, according to Klafka (2010), put no personal effort to produce change. Another criticism that is commonly leveled at people who engage in online activism is that they are simply immersed in narcissistic self-promotion (Breuer & Farooq, 2012). The foundation of the second criticism is that those who voice their concerns about social or political issues online do so out of a selfish need to elevate their social status, rather than a genuine desire to successfully advance the common good. But this will be covered in greater depth in the section regarding the moderator that this thesis proposes.

Furthermore, there is ongoing debate regarding the efficacy of online political engagement at the macro-level of policymaking. The few academics who have tackled this subject seem to be quite skeptical about the power of online advocacy to significantly alter policy or the way decision-makers think (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). Shulman (2009), based on the theory of perverse incentives, believed that uniquely Internet-based, low-cost forms of participation, like mass mailings, may ultimately result in an increase in "low-quality, redundant, and generally insubstantial commenting by the public" (p.26). If on one hand, Mikheyev (2004), cited in Breuer & Farooq (2012), claims that officials facing extremely long work shifts may identify such messages as "spam" and ignore them altogether, on the other, the increasing use of the Internet to gather and promote commenting indicates the need to further investigate how public comments originate, are posted, received, and taken into account in regulation (Shulman, 2009).

When looking at the micro-level of individual participation and the question of whether engaging in online activism actually change a person's general pattern of activism behavior, it is critical to make an important distinction. Breuer & Farooq (2012) assert that the primary offer of well-known, entertainment-focused networking sites like Facebook consists of simple-to-perform activities with low transaction costs for the user. In their research about the influence of various online activities on the choice to contact a policymaker, one-click solutions proved less effective than the ones that required more effort. Moreover, their analysis indicates that switching from online to offline participation, as a result of Internet-based activities, is very unlikely.

Building on this finding, the present study explores clicktivism as a form of online activism performed through one-click tasks. Considering all the previously reviewed theories, I propose that clicktivism negatively

impacts consumers' willingness to engage in offline activism, by dissuading them from taking real actions toward social change.

H1: Clicktivism negatively affects willingness to engage in offline activism, in a way that individuals practicing clicktivism are less willing to take real actions offline, compared to those who do not practice Clicktivism.

3.2 Perceived value of click as a mediator between clicktivism and offline activism behavior

Gladwell (2010) affirmed: "where activists were once defined by their causes, they are now defined by their tools". This can be considered true in the sense that nowadays we are able to differentiate online from offline activism, which we would not be doing if no relevance was attributed to the medium through which people engage with activism. Understanding whether individuals attach some sort of value to these media results then fundamental in our age.

A negative connotation is often given to the constant use of social media, and this has led to a general perception that clicking should not be considered something valuable, in most cases. "Clicking" is now something that people do automatically and, according to a study presented by the Center for Social Impact Communication at Georgetown University and Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide (2011), more than 50% of Americans did not attribute any worth to the click itself. On the other hand, given the increasingly prominent phenomenon of clicktivism, it comes naturally to mind that a different perception of the value of social media activity, and in particular of the click, might exist. Indeed, Chen & Fu (2018), for example, introduce the sociability value of a medium, which they define as the "user's perceived level of interaction and association with others in a medium" (p. 122). The authors discuss the social networking capability, along with the potential force of traction to attract and retain users, of a medium. Another work that values the medium is the one by Hayes et al. (2016), where the researchers conceptualize social media activities that require only a click to be performed as "paralinguistic digital affordances" (p.171) and argue that one-click tools (e.g., Likes, Favorites) often serve to signal a response.

Given these considerations and the frequency by which social media users choose the same cue as reactions to posts with quite diverse emotional undertones, it is possible to conclude that clicks can be used and interpreted in different ways (Hayes, Carr, & Wohn, 2016). In this context, this thesis seeks to determine if, and if so, how, clicktivism influences the way individuals value the click. Additionally, it investigates whether a relationship between the value attributed to the click and consumers' offline activism exists.

Hsee, Yu, Zhang, & Zhang (2003) provides an interesting perspective, in this regard. Although the authors posit that the medium has no value in and of itself, they also believe that it can be "traded for a desired outcome" (p. 1). They observe that people who make an effort to deal with the complexities of media appear

to be more sensitive to media influence and less concerned about the ultimate outcomes. The basis of this reasoning originates from the consideration that individuals are supposed to "skip" the medium and take decisions solely considering the effort required and the expected outcome (p.1). However, the relationship between the latter is indeed typically mediated by some sort of instruments, or tokens, and can be divided into two sub-relations: one between effort and medium, and another between the medium and the outcome. If individuals do not pay equal attention to these two relationships, they fail to skip the medium.

Hsee et al. (2003, p.1) define "medium maximization" as "the pursuit of the effort → medium return" and find that people frequently fail to completely skip the medium, maximizing not only the effort → outcome return but also the effort → medium return. This means that, when people have to choose between two or more actions, which require different levels of effort, are performed through different media, and provide different outcomes, they do not only consider which is the best final outcome, but also what is the greater medium.

Building on this theorization, the click can be defined as the medium between the effort required to perform clicktivism-related actions and the expected outcome of clicktivism, which is identified in this study as a real-life impact produced by offline activism behavior. Furthermore, I suggest that clicktivism makes people value the click. In this case, medium maximization is expected to act as follows: clicktivists maximize the click as a medium and, consequently, place less emphasis on what is supposed to be the last phase of the process, that is engaging in offline activism. The mediation hypothesis, based on these findings, follows.

H2: The effect of clicktivism on willingness to engage in offline activism is mediated by perceived value of click.

3.3 Self-monitoring as a boundary condition

Impression management is defined as "the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34). Individuals are continuously engaged in strategic efforts to establish and preserve a desired image of themselves (Goffman, 1959). Nonetheless, despite its pervasiveness, people differ in their concern for their public image, namely how relevant they feel others' perceptions of them are (Kim et al., 2023). People who have greater impression concerns are more worried about their public image, believe it is essential in a number of situations, and adapt to social circumstances in order to present to others their ideal image (Leary & Allen, 2011). Being regarded as a moral person by others has been found to be indeed desirable in a number of research (Wedekind & Milinski, 2000; Alexander, 1987; Goffman, 1959). On the other hand, there are people with lower concerns about their impressions, who believe that their public image has little bearing on the outcomes that matter to them and that impressions are only relevant in a few selected circumstances, reason for which they generally put minimal effort into controlling their impressions (Leary & Allen, 2011).

Individual differences in impression management have been studied in the past as a possible moderator. According to studies conducted by Cornelissen, Karelaia, & Soyer (2013), clicktivism had no effect on people with lower impression management concerns, whereas those with higher impression management tendencies were more sensitive to the negative effects of token symbolic action (i.e., they revealed a larger decrease in subsequent support or donations). The authors interpret this finding through the lens of the strategic attitude of high self-monitors, saying that these individuals strategically preserve their effort to act more concretely when they engage in symbolic activities. In spite of this being true, consistency motives may also explain this result, especially when the token support is made public (Kim et al., 2023).

Similarly, in the context of our interest, high self-monitors might engage in activism for the sole purpose of being recognized as moral people. Lacking a genuine desire to contribute to social change, it is possible that they save their effort for a symbolic online participation, while avoiding to engage in real actions offline. In this sense, high self-monitors might value the click and clicktivism rather than offline activism.

With the aim of integrating this body of literature, the current research seeks to further investigate the moderating role of impression management tendency (i.e., self-monitoring), by applying the findings of the afore-mentioned studies to clicktivism behavior, specifically hypothesizing an effect on the relationship between consumer clicktivism and their perceived value of click.

H3: Self-monitoring moderates the relationship between clicktivism and perceived value of click such that, while high self-monitoring increases clicktivists' perceived value of click, low self-monitoring decreases it.

3.4 Conceptual Framework

In summary, it is hypothesized that clicktivism makes people value the click, which reduces their willingness to engage in offline activism. Additionally, the main relationship is moderated by individuals' self-monitoring tendency. In Fig. 4, the conceptual framework illustrates the expected main and sub-relationships between the variables of interest, along with the respective distinct hypotheses presented.
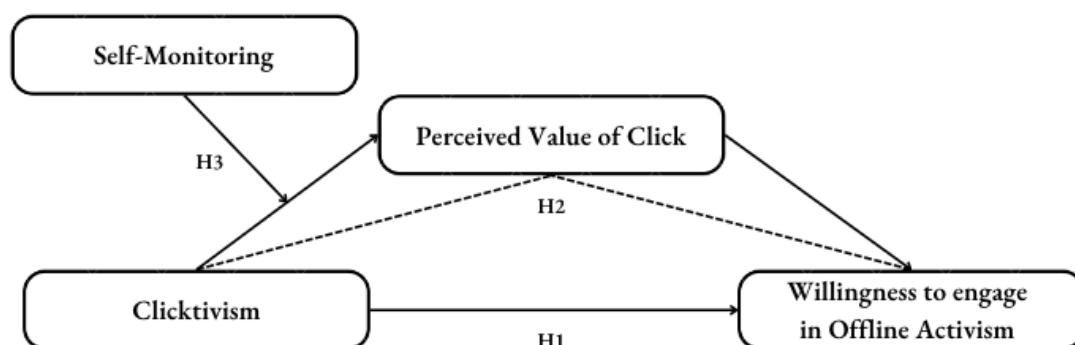

Fig. 4: Conceptual framework

Methodology

The purpose of this elaborate is to examine how consumers' *Willingness to engage in offline activism* can be influenced by the practice of *Clicktivism* (Yes vs. No), considering the potential mediating effect of *Perceived value of click*. I also aim to investigate whether *Self-monitoring* acts as a moderator of the relationship between the independent variable (Clicktivism) and the mediator (Perceived value of click). An experimental study is presented to test the different hypotheses.

4.1 Participants

A total of 289 participants were recruited with an anonymous link generated through the online platform Qualtrics (https://www.qualtrics.com/it/). The link was subsequently distributed via social media and instant messaging applications (i.e., Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp), and SurveyCircle, a participant-sourcing platform for online research, which provides access to millions of diverse respondents around the world and is based on mutual support (https://www.surveycircle.com/en/). In order to ensure accessibility of the survey to an even broader sample of respondents, the survey was distributed in two languages: Italian and English. Additionally, it required on average 3 minutes to complete, and no incentives were given upon the completion of the survey. Of the 289 total responses, 203 were complete, meaning that participants had answered all the questions included in the survey. The dataset was further cleaned, given that only 188 respondents passed the preestablished attention check (i.e., "Choose number two") and were included in the rest of the analyses ($M_{age} = 31.06$; 58.5% female, 0.55% third gender/non-binary, 0.55% not specified). People were also asked to state what was the highest academic qualification they obtained (High school diploma = 31.91%, Bachelor's degree = 30.85%, Master's degree = 34.04%, Doctorate = 2.13%, Other (specified) = 1.07%).

4.2 Design, Procedure, and Reliability of the Scales

This research undertakes a quantitative method, which is constructed as an experimental research design. Experimental design enables researchers to identify causal relationships between the variables, as well as to determine the factors that might affect the nature of those relations and to measure the systematic influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

To conduct the experiment, a questionnaire consisting of 12 questions (9 specific and 3 demographic) was developed through the online platform Qualtrics. The survey is reported in Appendix 1. Participants were told they would participate in an experiment about the relationship between online and offline consumer activism. They needed to provide informed consent to take part in the study and it was told that the data

obtained would have been anonymous and treated with confidentiality, for the sole purpose of conducting research.

Specifically, the experimental design chosen for this analysis was between-subjects, in which participants are assigned to different conditions and each subject experiences only one of them. This type of analysis implies the need for a manipulation of the independent variable, while holding everything else constant.

In order to manipulate *Clicktivism* (Yes vs. No), two distinct stimuli were created (Appendix 1). People have been randomly assigned to two different groups: one of them was shown a post and intrusted to imagine that they liked, shared, and/or commented it, while the other group had to visualize that they saw the post but did not liked, shared, or commented it. In particular, the shown image was a real post, published on Instagram by the brand Ben&Jerry's in collaboration with the All4Climate initiative. In each stimulus figured an image of the pro-environmental campaign, the intrusted information, and a brief explanation of both the purpose of All4Climate and the reason behind the collaboration with Ben&Jerry's: "foster a proactive dialogue about the challenges of the climate crisis" and "improve the societal well-being" (Appendix 1). Hence, it can be said that the brand, the initiative, and the image chosen for the stimuli are controlled variables in this case. This means that in both conditions, they figured in the same way for both groups, in order to produce and effective manipulation of the IV. The focus of the manipulation of the IV was on one-click-solutions in the context of online activism. This decision was based on the recognition of those forms of activism as the ones that are more closely related to slacktivism behavior (Breuer & Farooq, 2012).

After being exposed to one of the stimuli, participants were asked to answer three questions relating to dependent variable, mediator, moderator. The starting point for formulating the survey questions was to choose validated scales to measure exactly the constructs proposed in the conceptual framework.

With regard to the DV (*Willingness to engage in offline activism)*, Corning & Myers (2002) define activist orientation as "an individual's developed, relatively stable, yet changeable orientation to engage in various collective, social-political, problem-solving behaviors spanning a range from low-risk, passive, and institutionalized acts to high-risk, active, and unconventional behaviors" (p.704). The authors also provide an interesting measure for this construct: the Activism Orientation Scale. Both for the inadequate length of the scale (40 original items) and the desire of a greater fit with the context of study, I used an adapted version of the scale, constituted by 9 items (from 1 = Extremely unlikely to 4 = Extremely likely). To make sure that the new scale items were consistent with each other, a reliability analysis was conducted. Specifically, internal consistency (Cronbach's α) was satisfactory, equal to .849 (Appendix 2(a)).

Finding the right measure for the mediator *Perceived value of click* proved to be challenging. No scale specifically relating to this variable have been proposed. Chen & Fu (2018) talked about perceived value in the mobile moment, and contributed to the field by theorizing sociability, a third value dimension, besides hedonic and utilitarian, to measure users' perceptions of image-based apps. The authors' scale tries to express perceived sociability and utilitarian values paired with the characteristics of mobile moments, namely immediate and contextual responsiveness. I formulated five items based on the original scale by Chen & Fu (2018). Also in this case, internal consistency (Cronbach's α) was satisfactory, equal to .864 (Appendix 2(b)). Respondents to the survey evaluated all items on a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree).

Finally, to measure the moderator *Self-Monitoring*, a 2-item scale (Cronbach's α = .764) was adopted (Appendix 2(c)). These 2 items were already used by Seo & Lang (2019), who had themselves taken it from the revised self-monitoring scale by Lennox & Wolfe (1984). The measure was chosen for the current analysis as the construct's definition around which Seo & Lang' (2019) built their conceptualization showed to be in line with the moderating variable of interest of this study. The authors actually take up Cass's (2001) definition, who affirmed that *Self-Monitoring* "represents the degree to which people control and observe their self-presentation in accordance with social norms" (Seo & Lang, 2019, p. 70).

Once they answered the reviewed three questions, along with the afore-mentioned attention check, participants were shown with a control question about their past engagement with clicktivism and finished the questionnaire by responding to the demographic questions (Appendix 1).

Results

Collected data were analyzed in the statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science).

5.1 One-way ANOVA: the main effect of Clicktivism on Willingness to engage in Offline Activism

To test the direct effect (H1) between the independent variable and the dependent variable, it was necessary to perform a comparison of averages through the use of a One-Way ANOVA, as the independent variable is categorical, while the dependent variable is metric (Appendix 3). From the analysis of the descriptive statistics table, it was possible to observe that the group of respondents exposed to the stimulus coded with "1" (Clicktivism = Yes) showed a mean of 2.5509, while the group of respondents subjected to the other scenario labeled with "0" (Clicktivism = No) recorded an average of 2.5012. In addition, looking at the ANOVA table it was possible to find a p-value related to the F-test equal to 0.518 and therefore higher than the reference value $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, it can be stated that the main effect, of X on Y, was found to be statistically not significant. This translates in the fact that we fail to reject the null hypothesis H0 (equal means) and that the DV is not influenced by the manipulation performed.

5.2 Regression analysis with SPSS Process model 4 by Hayes (2017)

To test the main effect and mediating hypotheses presented, a mediation regression analysis has been conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (model 4) (Hayes, 2017). *Willingness to engage in offline activism* was used as the Dependent Variable and *Clicktivism* was used as the Independent Variable of the model. *Perceived Value of click* was the Mediating Variable of the model. The results of the regression analysis confirmed, as expected, a non-significant main effect (b=0.2326; p=0.4549>.05). However, a significant effect of IV on mediator was found (b=0.3815; p=0.0012<.05). This leads to assume a partial support for H2, the mediation hypothesis, that we will furtherly discuss later, considering the subsequent results.

At this point, the control question used in the survey about consumers' past engagement with clicktivism was to take into account. The variable was added as a covariate in the same model 4 by Hayes (2017) since it was not included in the proposed causal mechanism but could have explained part of the variability in the outcome. However, while the covariate results to have a significant direct effect on the mediator (b=0.2747; p=0.0000), it shows a non-significant effect in relation to the DV (b=-0.0260; p=0.5750). Hence, even by controlling for *Previous engagement with clicktivism*, we find that the effect of the IV on the DV is still non-significant.

5.3 One-way ANOVA: the effect of Clicktivism on mediator Perceived value of click

Considering the significant results in relation to the mediator, another One-way ANOVA (Appendix 5) was conducted, this time to investigate the direct effect between the independent variable and the mediator. The descriptive statistics table shows a more relevant difference in the means between the group of respondents exposed to the stimulus coded with "1" (Clicktivism = Yes), that exhibits a value of 3.2750, and the one of people subjected to the other scenario labeled with "0" (Clicktivism = No), which recorded an average of 2.8935. Looking at the ANOVA table, I found a p-value related to the F-test equal to 0.001 and therefore lower than the reference value $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, we can assert that the direct effect, of X on mediator, is statistically significant, meaning that Perceived Value of Click is influenced by the Clicktivism manipulation.

5.4 Regression analysis with SPSS Process model 7 by Hayes (2017): the moderating effect of self-monitoring

To also test the effect and hypothesis related to the moderator, a moderated mediation regression analysis has been conducted using the Software PROCESS macro SPSS (model 7) (Hayes, 2017). *Willingness to engage in offline activism* was used as the Dependent Variable and *Clicktivism* was used as the Independent Variable of the model (Appendix 6). *Perceived Value of click* was the Mediating Variable of the model and *Self-Monitoring* was the moderator. The results of the regression analysis exhibit a non-significant effect of the moderator on path a, contrarily to what was hypothesized, but a significant direct effect of the moderator on the mediator ($b=0.3007$; $p=0.0047$). We can also observe a significant effect of the covariate, included also in this model, on the mediator ($b=0.2121$; $p=0.0009$).

5.5 Correlations

Taking into consideration the non-significant main effect of *Clicktivism* on *Willingness to engage in offline activism*, and thus an inefficacy in the IV manipulation, correlations between the moderator, the mediator and the DV (Appendix 7) were analyzed. The results suggest a significant association between these variables. Hence, it could be interesting to further analyze how these variables relate to each other, perhaps utilizing a different manipulation of the independent variable.

Discussion

Theoretical contributions and Managerial implications

The quantitative analysis provides evidence for a significant relationship between clicktivism and perceived value of click. This emphasizes the fact that clicktivists to attribute value to their actions for different reasons, which might be connected to medium maximization, level of self-monitoring, but also to the desire of actually making an impact. Scholars could advance this analysis along these lines and marketing managers would leverage the present and subsequent significant results related to clicktivists' behavior to develop more effective campaigns in the context of sociopolitical matters. Furthermore, research into the moderating variable, that is self-monitoring, reveals that people' propensities to control how they come across and present themselves may have an impact on the value they attribute to clicks. This indicates to marketers that the contemporary audience should be segmented also in these terms, namely in dependence of the various motivations that drive their engagement relatively to sociopolitical causes, and of their level of concern in relation to others' impressions of them. However, given that no evidence was found in support of the relationship between online and offline political participation, most probably due to the inefficacy of the independent variable's manipulation used, we might think of different implications to derive. On one hand, we might suppose that brands, by creating ads that appeal to particular target groups identified on the base of self-monitoring and perceived value of click levels, could be able to optimize the efficiency of consumers' clicktivism efforts, which might also raise the possibility of offline involvement. On the other hand, it could be true that clicktivism actually does not translate in offline activism and that clicks, in and of themselves, have a detrimental influence on consumers' perception of their sociopolitical contribution. In this case, organizations, policymakers, and researchers in this field, should deepen the reasons behind this dynamic and focus on developing alternative means of participation. Despite the lack of evidence for the proposed model, this study enriches the body of theoretical information regarding clicktivism and its connection to offline activism. The knowledge of the psychological processes involved in online activism is enhanced, as it is possible to recognize important relationships between the variables that were measured in this analysis. Moreover, the qualitative exploration conducted in the literature review section represents a valid starting point for further investigation of the subjects matters, since it integrates the scarce current knowledge of these understudied subjects with the rich prior one concerning well-established constructs that are strongly related to the former.

In sum, this study offers important insights for Researchers and Marketing Managers willing to leverage brand activism not only to increase engagement and positive sentiment towards the brands themselves, but to bring consumers closer to sociopolitical issues and contribute to social change.

Limitations and suggestions for Future Research

This exploration, making no exception to any other paper previously written, certainly presents some limitations that can be a source of inspiration for future research. First, it should be noted that the study's sample size was relatively small and that participants did not belong to a single age category or socioeconomic class. Neither income nor occupation statistics were obtained. The low sample diversity may have made it difficult to detect significant effects, or fully explore the complexity of the relationships under investigation. Accordingly, results could differ if the sample was changed. Secondly, the use of self-report measurements in the online experiment is susceptible to cognitive biases, including the ones related to social desirability and memory recall. The use of an online survey might also constrain the findings' generalizability. Additionally, the study did not take into consideration participants' level of involvement with the presented topic, as well as their level of interest in activism. This restriction might have had a notable impact on how respondents answered the questions they were exposed to. On top of this, clicktivism's manipulation, as anticipated, was probably ineffective because participants were intrusted to have done something during the experiment, rather than examining whether they would have actually done it. Lastly, the literature related to this fast evolving topic is scares and sparse, and this proves even more evident about clicktivism connection to offline participation. This fact represented another obstacle faced in the present study, also implying a difficulty in the interpretation of findings.

Future research should take into account the limitations listed above and conduct itself consequently. A replication of the present investigation, with a larger sample, or by focusing on individuals within a particular age group or income level, could be replicated to analyze these topics across various demographic groups and socio-cultural contexts. Subsequent studies could make use of different data gathering techniques to solve the shortcomings of self-report assessments and online experiments. For instance, longitudinal designs that could not be adopted in this case due to time constraints, would shed light on the temporal relationships between clicktivism, perceived click value, self-monitoring, and willingness to get involved in offline activism. Additionally, qualitative methods like focus groups or interviews may be able to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of individuals' motivations for engaging in clicktivism and offline activism. Future investigations should then include measures to gauge participants' pre-existing interest in activism and their familiarity with the particular topic presented, in order to address the issue of the lack of control for these possible confounding variables. Researchers should deepen the connection between clicktivism and persons' perceived importance of their online behavior. Investigating the factors that influence people' perceptions of the meaning and impact of their clicktivism could offer insightful information on how to manage and possibly take advantage of this practice. Finally, self-monitoring results not to moderate the relationship between clicktivism and perceived value of click, but to have a significant effect on the second and to be correlated to both perceived click value and willingness to engage in offline activism. Thus, the first finding is likely to be related to the inefficacy of the independent variable's manipulation. By changing the latter, as well as the measures used for the other variables, other, relevant implications could be derived. To conclude, our

understanding of how self-monitoring, as a personality attribute, interacts with clicktivism and affects how people perceive their online behavior should be furthered by future research. This would entail including measurements that reflect also other aspects of self-monitoring and impression management tendencies, like self-presentation, to better comprehend whether, and if so, how, these aspects affect perceived click value, online and offline activism, and the connections between these topics.

Conclusion

In this research, neither the value people attribute to clicks nor their level of concern about the others' impressions of them had any discernible impact on consumers' willingness to engage in offline activism. The investigation was also unable to find support neither for a moderating effect of self-monitoring on the relationship between clicktivism and perceived value of click, nor for the direct effect of clicktivism on intentions toward offline activism. However, this thesis shows that clicktivism and self-monitoring tendencies influence our perceived value of click, and highlights how crucial it is to look at the ways these concepts relate to each other. The quantitative results and literature review of this study open up new avenues for investigation and provide a valid foundation for future studies hoping these will be able to harness the potential of clicktivism. Firstly, this elaborate is a relevant piece for scholars, as it sheds light on the importance of including impression management related variables in research regarding the complex relationship between clicktivism and willingness to participate in offline activism. Secondly, it proves to be important for organizations and policymakers that want to develop tactics to encourage involvement and mobilization among social media and Internet users. In this way, both researchers and practitioners could optimize clicktivism, so that individuals would be inspired to participate in offline activism or, however, they will actually contribute via digital media to societal change.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Survey

Introduction

Hi!

This survey investigates the relationship between online and offline consumer activism and is conducted as part of my master's thesis at LUISS Guido Carli University in Rome. Your opinion is important to the outcome of this research. The questionnaire takes about 3 minutes. The data obtained are used solely for the purpose of conducting research and are therefore anonymous and confidential.

Thank you in advance for your participation :)
Before proceeding, I request your permission to include your feedback in the study.

I agree to take part in the research:

○ Yes

○ No

Stimulus - manipulation of IV (Clicktivism)

Condition 1: Clicktivism = Yes

In recent years, organizations have been trying to make their own contributions to improve the societal well-being. For example, Ben and Jerry's partnered with the All4Climate initiative, which aimed to foster a proactive dialogue about the challenges of the climate crisis.

Imagine that you have seen the following post on LinkedIn and have liked, share, and/or commented it.

Condition 2: Clicktivism = No

In recent years, organizations have been trying to make their own contributions to improve the societal well-being. For example, Ben and Jerry's partnered with the All4Climate initiative, which aimed to foster a proactive dialogue about the challenges of the climate crisis.

Imagine that you have seen the following post on LinkedIn. You have not liked, shared, or commented it.
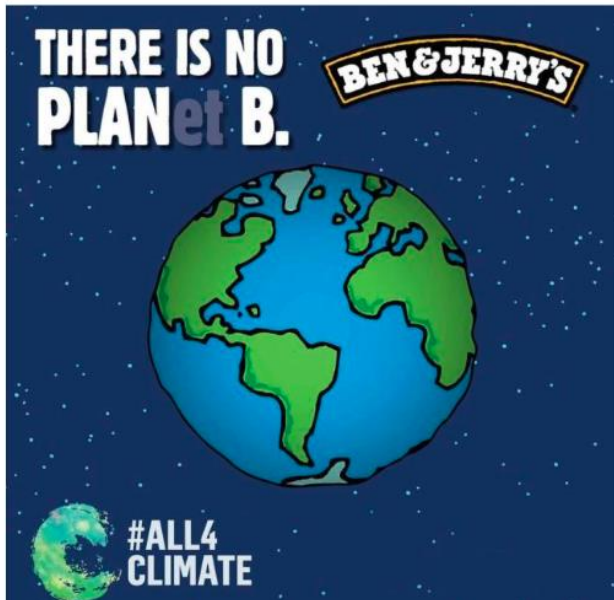
Measurement of DV (Willingness to engage in offline activism)

How likely is it that you will be involved in the following activities in the future?

	Extremely unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Extremely likely
Invite a friend to attend an All4Climate event	○	○	○	○
Buy a poster/pin/t-shirt etc. that supports the fight against climate change	○	○	○	○
Join the All4Climate initiative	○	○	○	○
Boycott a product because it does not take into account the climate crisis	○	○	○	○
Address jokes, statements, or insinuations that oppose the cause of All4Climate	○	○	○	○
Distribute information that represents the cause of All4Climate	○	○	○	○
Partecipate to the events of All4Climate	○	○	○	○
Try to change a friend/acquaintance/relative's mind about an issue related to climate change	○	○	○	○
Donate money to All4Climate	○	○	○	○

Measurement of mediator (Perceived value of click)

Think about the post you saw at the beginning and assess the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements that follow. In these statements, the word "click" refers to the cases when you click, like, share, or comment on a social media post related to political, social, and environmental issues.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The click allows me to achieve the results I want in terms of activism	○	○	○	○	○
Clicking gives me a feeling of accomplishment	○	○	○	○	○
Clicking makes me feel a sense of purpose	○	○	○	○	○
The click improves the effectiveness of my activism efforts	○	○	○	○	○
Clicking allows me to engage in activism anytime, anywhere, without limitations	○	○	○	○	○

Focus check

Choose number two:

○ 1
○ 2
○ 3

Measurement of moderator (Self-monitoring)

Indicate how much you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them	○	○	○	○	○
In social situations, I have the ability to alter my behavior if I feel the need to do so	○	○	○	○	○

Control question (Past engagement with clicktivism)

Read the following paragraph carefully, you will be asked questions about it.

"Clicktivism" is about the "like" and "share" side of activism. It is a form of political involvement expressed online by consumers and linked to the evolution of social media and the consequent simplification of communication processes. Examples of clicktivism are: liking a post, commenting, sharing, signing petitions or making an online donation, changing your profile picture. All this, with the aim of supporting a cause you believe in.

How often have you practiced clicktivism in the past 12 months?

○ Never
○ Sometimes
○ Often
○ Always

Demographic questions

Which of the categories below includes your age?

○ 18 - 26
○ 27 - 42
○ 43 - 58
○ 59 - 77
○ ≥78

What gender do you identify with?

○ Woman
○ Man
○ Third gender / Non-binary
○ Rather not answer

What is the highest educational qualification you have obtained?

○ High school graduation
○ Bachelor's degree
○ Master's degree
○ Doctorate
○ [   ] Other (specify)

Appendix 2: Scales' Reliability tests

(a) Activism Orientation Scale (adapted)

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.849	9

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Invite a friend to attend an All4Climate event	20.29	17.960	.629	.828
Buy a poster/pin/t-shirt etc. that supports the fight against climate change	20.28	18.287	.530	.837
Join the All4Climate initiative	20.34	17.358	.709	.819
Boycott a product because it does not take into account the climate crisis	20.20	17.724	.486	.845
Address jokes, statements, or insinuations that oppose the cause of All4Climate	20.20	18.815	.399	.852
Distribute information that represents the cause of All4Climate	20.26	18.266	.597	.831
Partecipate to the events of All4Climate	20.35	17.758	.657	.825
Try to change a friend/acquaintance/relative's mind about an issue related to climate change	19.59	18.061	.599	.831
Donate money to All4Climate	20.41	18.116	.563	.834

(b) Perceived Value of Click Scale (Adapted)

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.864	5

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
The click allows me to achieve the results I want in terms of activism	12.37	11.711	.591	.858
Clicking gives me a feeling of accomplishment	12.45	10.922	.688	.835
Clicking makes me feel a sense of purpose	12.30	11.023	.680	.837
The click improves the effectiveness of my activism efforts	12.43	10.396	.766	.814
Clicking allows me to engage in activism anytime, anywhere, without limitations	12.22	10.909	.697	.833

(c) Self-monitoring Scale

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.764	2

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them	3.92	.609	.625	.
In social situations, I have the ability to alter my behavior if I feel the need to do so	3.72	.824	.625	.

Appendix 3: ANOVA (main effect)

Descriptives

Mean_DV

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum	Between-Component Variance
.00	92	2.5012	.56500	.05891	2.3842	2.6182	1.00	3.89	
1.00	96	2.5509	.48738	.04974	2.4522	2.6497	1.00	3.56	
Total	188	2.5266	.52596	.03836	2.4509	2.6023	1.00	3.89	
Model Fixed Effects			.52678	.03842	2.4508	2.6024			
Random Effects				.03842[a]	2.0384[a]	3.0148[a]			-.00172

a. Warning: Between-component variance is negative. It was replaced by 0.0 in computing this random effects measure.

ANOVA

Mean_DV

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.116	1	.116	.418	.518
Within Groups	51.615	186	.278		
Total	51.731	187			

Appendix 4: Regression with Model 4 by Hayes

(a) Without controlling for Past engagement with clicktivism

```
*********************************************************************
Model : 4
    Y : Mean_DV
    X : IV
    M : Mean_MED

Sample
Size:  188

*********************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Mean_MED

Model Summary
          R        R-sq         MSE           F         df1         df2           p
      .2346       .0550       .6313     10.8324      1.0000    186.0000       .0012

Model
              coeff          se           t           p        LLCI        ULCI
constant     2.8935       .0828     34.9307       .0000      2.7301      3.0569
IV            .3815       .1159      3.2913       .0012       .1528       .6102

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:
          constant          IV
constant     .0069      -.0069
IV          -.0069       .0134

*********************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Mean_DV

Model Summary
          R        R-sq         MSE           F         df1         df2           p
      .0802       .0064       .2793       .3970      3.0000    184.0000       .7553

Model
              coeff          se           t           p        LLCI        ULCI
constant     2.3264       .2062     11.2825       .0000      1.9196      2.7332
IV            .2326       .3113       .7473       .4559      -.3816       .8469
Mean_MED      .0604       .0687       .8797       .3802      -.0751       .1959
Int_1        -.0629       .0976      -.6447       .5199      -.2554       .1296

Product terms key:
 Int_1    :         Mean_MED x          IV

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:
          constant          IV    Mean_MED        Int_1
constant     .0425      -.0425      -.0136        .0136
IV          -.0425       .0969       .0136       -.0294
Mean_MED    -.0136       .0136       .0047       -.0047
Int_1        .0136      -.0294      -.0047        .0095

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
        R2-chng           F         df1         df2           p
X*M        .0022       .4156      1.0000    184.0000       .5199
```

(b) With Past engagement with clicktivism as covariate

```
************************************************************************
Model  : 4
    Y  : Mean_DV
    X  : IV
    M  : Mean_MED

Covariates:
 Contr_q

Sample
Size:  188

************************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Mean_MED

Model Summary
          R        R-sq        MSE          F        df1        df2          p
      .3794       .1440      .5749    15.5572     2.0000   185.0000      .0000

Model
              coeff         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant     2.2873      .1593    14.3604      .0000     1.9730     2.6015
IV            .3467      .1109     3.1257      .0021      .1279      .5655
Contr_q       .2747      .0627     4.3842      .0000      .1511      .3984

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:
           constant         IV     Contr_q
constant      .0254     -.0052      -.0087
IV           -.0052      .0123      -.0005
Contr_q      -.0087     -.0005       .0039


************************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Mean_DV

Model Summary
          R        R-sq        MSE          F        df1        df2          p
      .0902       .0081      .2804      .3755     4.0000   183.0000      .8259

Model
              coeff         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant     2.3497      .2107    11.1520      .0000     1.9340     2.7654
IV            .2504      .3135      .7987      .4255     -.3682      .8689
Mean_MED      .0722      .0719     1.0036      .3169     -.0697      .2141
Int_1        -.0687      .0983     -.6988      .4856     -.2626      .1252
Contr_q      -.0260      .0462     -.5617      .5750     -.1172      .0652

Product terms key:
 Int_1    :         Mean_MED x         IV

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:
           constant         IV   Mean_MED      Int_1    Contr_q
constant      .0444     -.0414     -.0128      .0133     -.0019
IV           -.0414      .0983      .0144     -.0298     -.0015
Mean_MED     -.0128      .0144      .0052     -.0049     -.0010
Int_1         .0133     -.0298     -.0049      .0097      .0005
Contr_q      -.0019     -.0015     -.0010      .0005      .0021

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
        R2-chng          F        df1        df2          p
X*M       .0026      .4883     1.0000   183.0000      .4856
        ----------
```

Appendix 5: ANOVA (IV on Mediator)

Descriptives

Mean_MED

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum	Between–Component Variance
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
.00	92	2.8935	.80681	.08412	2.7264	3.0606	1.00	4.60	
1.00	96	3.2750	.78257	.07987	3.1164	3.4336	1.00	5.00	
Total	188	3.0883	.81514	.05945	2.9710	3.2056	1.00	5.00	
Model Fixed Effects			.79452	.05795	2.9740	3.2026			
Random Effects				.19080	.6640	5.5126			.06606

ANOVA

Mean_MED

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.838	1	6.838	10.832	.001
Within Groups	117.416	186	.631		
Total	124.254	187			

Appendix 6: Regression with Model 7 by Hayes

```
************************************************************************
Model  : 7
    Y  : Mean_DV
    X  : IV
    M  : Mean_MED
    W  : Mean_MOD

Covariates:
 Contr_q

Sample
Size:  188

************************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Mean_MED

Model Summary
          R        R-sq        MSE          F        df1        df2          p
      .4604       .2120       .5350    12.3094     4.0000   183.0000      .0000

Model
              coeff         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant     1.2850      .3986     3.2241      .0015      .4986     2.0713
IV            .4273      .5502      .7766      .4384     -.6583     1.5128
Mean_MOD      .3007      .1051     2.8613      .0047      .0933      .5080
Int_1        -.0228      .1412     -.1616      .8718     -.3015      .2558
Contr_q       .2121      .0626     3.3874      .0009      .0886      .3356

Product terms key:
 Int_1    :         IV       x        Mean_MOD

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:
          constant         IV    Mean_MOD      Int_1    Contr_q
constant      .1588     -.1543     -.0386      .0392     -.0030
IV           -.1543      .3027      .0409     -.0762     -.0030
Mean_MOD     -.0386      .0409      .0110     -.0107     -.0015
Int_1         .0392     -.0762     -.0107      .0199      .0007
Contr_q      -.0030     -.0030     -.0015      .0007      .0039

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
       R2-chng          F        df1        df2          p
X*W       .0001      .0261     1.0000   183.0000      .8718
----------
```

```
************************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Mean_DV

Model Summary
          R        R-sq        MSE          F        df1        df2          p
      .0741       .0055      .2796       .3388     3.0000   184.0000      .7973

Model
              coeff         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant     2.4440      .1615    15.1312      .0000     2.1254     2.7627
IV            .0385      .0794      .4848      .6284     -.1181      .1950
Mean_MED      .0370      .0513      .7214      .4716     -.0642      .1381
Contr_q      -.0226      .0459     -.4919      .6234     -.1132      .0680

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:
           constant         IV   Mean_MED     Contr_q
constant      .0261     -.0004     -.0060     -.0026
IV           -.0004      .0063     -.0009      .0000
Mean_MED     -.0060     -.0009      .0026     -.0007
Contr_q      -.0026      .0000     -.0007      .0021


***************** DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y ****************

Direct effect of X on Y
     Effect         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
      .0385      .0794      .4848      .6284     -.1181      .1950

Conditional indirect effects of X on Y:

INDIRECT EFFECT:
 IV          ->    Mean_MED    ->    Mean_DV

   Mean_MOD     Effect     BootSE    BootLLCI    BootULCI
     3.0580      .0132      .0236     -.0295       .0654
     3.8191      .0126      .0220     -.0263       .0621
     4.5803      .0119      .0228     -.0259       .0683
```

Appendix 7: Correlations

Correlations		Mean_MOD	Mean_MED	Mean_DV
Mean_MOD	Pearson Correlation	1	.334**	-.225**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	.002
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	108.351	38.802	-16.818
	Covariance	.579	.207	-.090
	N	188	188	188
Mean_MED	Pearson Correlation	.334**	1	.054
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		.462
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	38.802	124.254	4.325
	Covariance	.207	.664	.023
	N	188	188	188
Mean_DV	Pearson Correlation	-.225**	.054	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.462	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	-16.818	4.325	51.731
	Covariance	-.090	.023	.277
	N	188	188	188
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Thesis Summary

Introduction

Micah White, one of the most outspoken and trenchant critics of clicktivism, firmly believes that the end does not justify the means and it can be detrimental to the development of activists' qualities (The Guardian, 2010). This is the point of view representing one side of the heated debate that focuses on the increasingly relevant theme of clicktivism: the self-deluded idea that by liking, sharing, or retweeting something you are helping out (The Urban Dictionary, cited in BBC Future, 2020). On the other hand, some value the extremely high increase the practice determines in terms of awareness and accessibility to important issues and sensitive topics that should be brought to the attention of all.

In the 21st century, brands have a profound influence on consumers. Scholars have explored the brand and its potential in shaping how people think and behave, affecting culture, politics, and society in the process. The brand is in fact defined as a complex social phenomenon that strengthens and personalize the bond between a commodity and its users (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Recognizing their impact on consumers' attitudes and choices, organizations embrace sociopolitical vision into their business strategy, delivering it to customers through a variety of marketing and product consumption formats. The elements that are integrated in the business model become part of the core brand values, moving the company's focus form solely boosting sales to also delivering the brand promise to customers, arousing their emotions, and forging connections with them (Urde, 2009). Being a two-way interaction, likewise consumers play a role in determining the values that companies pursue. Younger generations are better at gathering information, researching specific issues, and forming opinions (Parment, 2011; Solomon, 2011). Specifically in today's global trust crisis, progressive customers like Millennials and Gen Z are requiring organizations to take a stance about controversial issues (Sarkar & Kotler, 2021) to deliver more than product features or vague promises relating to their "purpose" (Swant, 2021). There is a general trend in consumers to call out and pressure-test brands to know what they stand for (Hsu, 2020) and 58% of consumers expect this to be expressed on social media, the most popular platform for customer receptivity (Sprout Social, 2017).

In this setting, the evolution of social media and online platforms has provided consumers and organizations with new avenues to engage in activism and advocate for causes they care about. In line with this, the conflict-ridden discussion of the political impact of the Internet and digital media has been growing lately and this is exactly where the current research took inspiration. Nowadays, people are used to consider social media a part of them and their daily lives, partly because the same are important means to express beliefs and values. However, some wonder to what extent social media genuinely represents who we are and how we feel about this.

At the same time, the more technology reduces usability, connectivity, and communication barriers, the easier online political participation gets. If we think about one-to-many communication, or the production of content,

we realize how practices once considered complex are commonplace today. But when it comes to the increasingly prominent behaviors related to "clicktivism" - also referred to by the term "slacktivism" (Skoric, 2012) -, there is a growing number of critiques coming from the academic discussion and mostly due to the lower level of commitment this new practice presents, compared to traditional forms of activism.

Few studies have investigated clicktivism and its effect on consumer behavior. Therefore, there is a need to better explore brand and consumer activism, clicktivism, as well as their relationship, like it was also pointed out by Vrendenburg et al. (2020). Regarding the latter's research, it is stated in it that the objective of authentic brand activism is to foster meaningful social change. Therefore, this exploration will examine the impact of authentic brand activism on consumer behavior, mainly focusing on the "like" and "share" on social media aspect of brand activism campaigns. Specifically, the thesis aims at understanding whether clicktivism deters consumers from taking real actions toward societal change and if people feel they are actually contributing to the latter through the use of clicks. The relevance of this analysis is firstly linked to the contribution it brings to the Research about brand activism and consumers' responses to it. The World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Risks Report outlines current crises and the risks that are likely to be severe in the next 2 to 10 years. From this study, we can deduct that brand activism is a highly significant subject nowadays. Among the top risks for 2023 with the greatest potential impact on a global scale, most respondents chose: energy supply crisis, failure to meet net-zero targets, weakening of human rights, cost-of-living crisis. The major problems that run through our society, as those mentioned, can change over time, but they may typically be classified as Environmental, Societal, Economic, Political, and Technological. And it is with these topics that Brand Activism is concerned.

Literature Review

2.1 BRAND ACTIVISM

2.1.1. Defining Brand Activism

Brand activism, according to Kotler & Sarkar (2021), is a proactive, value-driven strategy used by companies to enhance economic results by emphasizing the need to address social, political, and/or environmental challenges. Their message is that talking about "purpose" and "brand activism" today means rethinking the organization as institution, as well as the concept of leadership and its possible declinations. In this way, organizations and brands can give their contribution to make the World more habitable (Addamiano, 2020). In line with this way of thinking, Jay Curley (2019), Ben & Jerry's global head of integrated marketing, writes on LinkedIn that brand activism "turns your marketing organization into a campaigning organization, and marketers into activists. It means you sell not just more stuff, but big ideas". The concept of engaging with and making a difference, not only in the market, but also in the society and in culture, make brand activism a win-win strategy that benefits both the community and the brand. In fact, companies that engage in activism become advocates for real social change in the world, while also advancing their brand's values (Curley, 2019). The 2018 Edelman Earned Brand Study adds an important element to this idea: brands seem to have a more

easily achievable impact and can actually drive societal change much more effectively than governments. As a consequence, organizations are in a position of power and responsibility. Parallel research to the Edelman study has also been carried out in Italy, such as the Civic Brands Observatory, a new project by Ipsos and Paolo Iabichino that examines brands' social impact in Italy. People should and want to be part of change: more than one third of Italians genuinely believe that, for organizations to have an impact, citizens' and consumers' active involvement is a must.

From all of this, a need for collaboration, co-creation, and engagement between businesses and customers emerges (Ipsos Italy 2021), also presented in the Davos Manifesto 2020, launched by the World Economic Forum. The latter support the idea of a Stakeholder Capitalism model that "positions private corporations as trustees of society and is clearly the best response to today's social and environmental challenges" (Schwab, 2019).

2.1.2 Marketing vs. Society - driven brands

The evident transformation in advertising activity, as a consequence of taking into consideration global audiences as the spearhead of a model of capitalism (Manfredi-Sanchéz, 2019), demonstrates the strong connection that nowadays exists between consumer brands, as well as brand endorsers, and the political sphere. A new politics of engagement can be grasped by comparing the two collaborations of Nike with Michael Jordan and Colin Kaepernick. For what relates the first one, the organization's motivation in choosing the NBA superstar was the idea of success, visibility, power. Michael Jordan, moreover, embodies a universal truth: money talks (Poole, 2021). The choice of featuring Kaepernick was based instead on the quarterback's status as "one of the most inspirational athletes of his generation, who has leveraged the power of sport to help move the World forward", according to the then Vice President of the brand in North America, Gino Fisanotti (Maaddi, 2018). According to Fisanotti, the firm intended to introduce "Just Do It" to a new generation of sportsmen, while also reinvigorating its meaning (Maaddi, 2018).

Speaking of meanings, today brands support the activist causes committed to the counter-hegemonic culture that challenge the dominant system of symbolic production. The sociologist Alberto Melucci anticipated the use of cultural codes for the benefit of the promoted cause, and explained how the media activism's action system works. He says: "rather than being interiorized in a way that fosters collective identity, [the action system] is exteriorized through constant engagement with other movements and progressive communities" (Carroll & Hackett, 2006, p.100). In this scenario, constructing a "politics of connections" (Carroll & Hackett, 2006, p.100) becomes more relevant than the very existence of the movement. Brand activists aim for an emotional connection with people based on specific values, rather than an internal regulated political identity. This new organizational approach to activism, where the movement serves both as the channel and the message, is not merely instrumental to the firm's objectives; it is a goal itself.

This logic explains the development of a new area of study that examines how businesses behave with respect to social and political topics. In contrast with the brands that engaged with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that were driven by marketing, seen as a promotion of the cause (Kotler & Sarkar, 2021), contemporary brand activism relates to society-driven organizations, connecting companies' political orientation to consumer behavior and the creation of the individual's self-image.

2.1.3 A Brand Activism typology

According to Kotler & Sarkar (2021) brand activism transcends Aaker's Building Strong Brands theorization (Aaker, 2012), attempting to cultivate a true activist behavior inside organizations. Depending on how this behavior is positioned in relation to stakeholders' expectations and requirements, activism may be progressive or regressive (Kotler & Sarkar, 2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Progressive activism aims at supporting the common good, rather than hindering it by encouraging polarization, like the regressive one does.

In addition to Kotler and Sarkar's one, there is another major classification of activism already used by numerous Scholars. It is the one by Vredenburg et al. (2020) that, based on the degree of activist marketing messaging and prosocial corporate practice, distinguishes four patterns: Absence of Brand Activism, Silent Brand Activism, Authentic Brand Activism, and Inauthentic Brand Activism.

The importance of authenticity in brand activism, highlighted in the research by Vredenburg et al. (2020), and the risks of brands not "walking the talk" have been emphasized by marketing academics (Moorman, 2020; Kotler & Sarkar, 2017; Dudler, 2017) and practitioners (Unilever, 2019b). Yet, according to 56% of consumers, too many brands now use societal issues primarily as a marketing gimmick to sell more of their products (Edelman, 2019). At the same time, as already mentioned, companies are increasingly expected to be agents of change. In this scenario, it is not new that developing and expressing brand activism authenticity is essential for both marketing success and the social impact such a strategy may bring about, as well as the importance of encouraging progressive activism behaviors, also among brands. It is for this reason that this thesis will not confront the effects of authentic and inauthentic brand activism, as several previous studies did, or the ones of progressive and regressive campaigns. Instead, in the pursue of the investigation of clicktivism in this field, it will deepen the consequences and influence of progressive and authentic brand activism – whose specific area of study results still quite unexplored - on consumers.

2.2 THE "CONSUMER ACTIVIST"

2.2.1 Consumer response to Brand Activism

Consumers' responses can be defined as favorable or unfavorable feedbacks about a business, its goods or services, and their ethics too, and indicates people' degree of satisfaction in relation to their purchases (Link, 2017). Consequently, customer feedback enables companies to enhance the quality of their offerings. The focus of the present study is on analyzing whether consumers responding to authentic brand activism through clicktivism are deterred from taking real actions toward societal change.

The context thus far outlined made clear that firms, by acknowledging that consumers and their beliefs are moving closer to society, have been aligning to this trend, in order to promote it. So, beyond the prosocial one, organizations have another reason for moving toward activism: align with consumer demands. Besides their mentioned request for companies to take a stance on controversial matters, individuals genuinely desire to have a connection with brands based on the match between personal and organizational values and beliefs.

Consequence of the need of consumers to have a values and beliefs' alignment with the brand they choose is an increase in belief-driven buying and loyalty (Edelman, 2018; Fournier, 1998b). This is in line with Elliott and Wattanasuwan's (1998) earlier suggestion that postmodern consumers are thirsting for identity, which they can express through the purchasing choices they make (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; McCracken, 1990; Belk, 1988). Belk (1988) presents evidence in support of what he calls the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behavior: we are what we have. In fact, buyers' decision making take on a symbolic value, as "their possessions are viewed as major parts of their extended selves" (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998, p. 134). People use symbols, practices, and the marketplace to create a self-identity constituted by four dimensions: personality, self-concept, identity project, and self-presentation (Schau, 2018).

It is interesting to note that, according to Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998), identity work is not only inwardly directed in the context of self-symbolism of consumption but also outwardly focused, in terms of the desire for communal identities through social symbolism. Indeed, as symbolic interactionists say, "even sovereign identities require the interpretive support of others to give them ballast" (Holt, 2002, p. 83). A problematic relationship links self and social identities. Research on consumer culture has sought to "address the dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868), and has done so by shedding light on what Jenkins (2000) refers to as "the internal-external dialectic of identification" (p.40).

In the context of brand activism and consumer reactions to it, identity expression and self-congruity are two topics that merit consideration. These days, people create communities centered around brands, adopting a very postmodernist approach to social interaction, and they claim to operate freely while collaborating with thousands of other like-minded individuals (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Considering the theoretical insights on identity previously reported, it can be said that persons can express their identities also through brand activism, both privately and publicly. In this sense, privately, brands and products function as indicators of success, boost self-esteem, and support individuals during major life transitions (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Instead, to meet the need of publicly expressing their selves, consumers strategically align with companies that support issues linked to their self-identities and use brand affiliation as a way to convey their beliefs to others (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

Based on Levy's (1959) work, buyers, in fact, purchase a good not only for its functionality, but also for what it represents. Consequently, brands can act as symbols whose meaning helps determine and build a consumer's self-concept. According to McCracken's (1990) model of meaning transfer, meanings continuously circulate in the consumer society, leaving the "culturally constituted world" (p. 314) to get to the life and experience of consumers. In order to do so, they are transferred into products through the fashion system and advertising (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; McCracken, 1990). Advertising is treated, in fact, as a tool through which a meaning gets into a brand, for which purpose it uses cultural symbols thought, in every case, for the specific product in question (McCracken, 1990).

2.3 CLICKTIVISM VS. ACTIVISM

As a result of the growing migration of activism to the online space (Freelon et al., 2020), there is a renewed interest in analyzing how digital technologies alter the practices of social movements and, therefore, theories of collective action (George & Leidner, 2019; Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Earl & Kimport, 2011). According to studies, activists utilize digital tools to practice new forms of activism (George & Leidner, 2019), build new action repertoires (Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016), and alter collective action participation, mobilization, and coordination (Schmitz et al., 2020; Earl et al., 2014; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Brunsting & Postmes, 2002), yet there is little research on how digital technology fits into their toolkit (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Luo et al., 2016).

Clicktivism, also defined as slacktivism (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2013), or micro-political action (Vromen, 2017), is an emerging form of political engagement that resulted from the simplification of user-end communication processes and the emergence of social media environments. The earliest clicktivism literature reveals that it is mostly labile and ineffective (Morozov, 2011; Gladwell, 2010; White, 2010; Morozov, 2009). However, some academics have made a deliberate effort to break away from this marginalized position and, in doing so, give much-needed conceptual clarity. Considering this body of literature, the most succinct conceptualization of clicktivism is offered by Rotman et al. (2011), who define it as a "[…] low-risk, low-cost activity via social media, whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity". Then, Lee & Hsieh (2013) attempted to describe clicktivism by citing concrete instances, such as clicking "like" on Facebook to support interest groups, sign online petitions, send contents like videos, or changing the profile picture, along with retweeting others and mobilizing around hashtags (Bozarth & Budak, 2017; Morozov, 2011). Lastly, Halupka (2014) wrote a systematic heuristic to identify and analyze clicktivism, where he defines the phenomenon through seven key features: situated Online, an impulsive gesture, noncommittal, does not draw upon specialized knowledge, easily replicated, engages a political object, an action performed. With this as a foundation, clicktivism may be broadly characterized as: an impulsive and noncommittal online political reaction that is simple to imitate and does not call for specialized understanding.

2.3.1 Differentiating Clicktivism from Offline Activism

Why might Clicktivism not translate in Offline Activism? In this paragraph, different theories about factors concurring to cause slacktivism behavior that does not lead to offline commitment toward activism are presented. In doing so, the aim is to have a greater understanding of the main research topic, clicktivism, but more importantly of the potential negative relationship that it could have with consumer activism behavior, which is the focus of this exploration.

First, the percentual difference between those actually changing behavior and those who stops at online "participation" can be explained through the so-called "Intention-Action Gap". This thesis studies this gap in the context of consumer activism, where social media users often express their support to a cause on social media, but then do not pursue the same commitment offline.

Another concurring factor in this dynamic is moral self-licensing or cleansing, which was observed in different domains (Khan & Dhar, 2007; Monin & Miller, 2001). According to Sachdeva, Iliev, & Medin (2009), prosocial behavior is essentially expensive to the person, therefore if individuals feel "too moral" (p.524), they may lack adequate motivation to participate in moral action. In consonance with moral licensing theory, engaging in clicktivism may actually decrease the probability that one would take part in and commit to the future offline action, by serving as a permission to slack up without feeling bad.

The benefits linked to our mobile phone are also something that is able to influence our activism behavior. In addition to the vast array of practical advantages that smartphones offer, consumers are drawn to them for a deeper emotional reward as well: psychological comfort (Melumad & Pham, 2020). People benefit from their own device also, if necessary, of actual stress relief (Melumad & Pham, 2020). And this idea is consistent with other phenomena linked to the smartphone, like anxiety (Cheever et al. 2014) and cognitive load (Ward et al. 2017) that users report experiencing when they are not with their phone. As supporting a cause can be seen as an emotionally loaded experience by many people, some might choose to participate online, exactly because they feel more comfortable and protected. Moreover, relatively anonymous online environments allow people to feel free from concerns of being judged for their actions (Greijdanus et al., 2020). But relying exclusively on the smartphone, if on one hand could facilitate online activism, on the other may lead to slacktivism. And this last, by increasing the sense of diffusion of responsibility that is perceived on social networking sites (Martin & North, 2015; Runions & Bak, 2015), probably would not be followed by offline activism.

Furthermore, specifically relating to environmental issues, according to Reczek, Trudel, & White (2018), sustainable consumer behaviors are frequently described as abstract and challenging for individuals to understand, and this is also true of their potential outcomes, which may be unclear and ambiguous (Weber, 2010). As a result, many feel discouraged from engaging in those behaviors, not being able to recognize any sort of tangible impact deriving from them. Individual action might be seen as minor and insignificant, given that climate change and other problems are severe, complex, and can have significant effects (White et al.,

2019). This might result in information overload, green fatigue, or demotivation brought on by the absence of realistic expectations for change (Guyader, Ottosson, & Witell, 2017; Strother & Fazal, 2011). Moreover, White et al. (2019) found that, in order to adopt sustainable behavior, it is sometimes necessary to replace an automatic habit with a controlled one. Based on these multiple supporting theories, consumers who feel demotivated or "fatigued" may find it difficult to break their reflexive behavior of "scrolling", "liking", and "sharing" social media information and, likely overloaded by the latter, they will be discouraged from getting involved in high-commitment activities.

Theoretical developments

3.1 THE EFFECT OF CLICKTIVISM ON CONSUMER OFFLINE ACTIVISM

This investigation attempts to contribute filling the research gap regarding the negative impact of clicktivism on offline activism behavior. Until today, researchers have been mainly focusing on the "good side" of clicktivism, as its function in sharing information pertaining to sociopolitical causes, potentially resulting in bringing users of the Internet and social media closer to these issues. However, as Bimber & Copeland (2011) contend, while digital media offer platforms for political discussion, they do not in and of themselves promote engagement.

Bimber, Stohl, & Flanagin (2008) suggest that, while the use of digital media broadly enriches the array of strategic actions available to people who are already interested in politics, it does not automatically lead to increased levels of engagement. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that those who are "politically apathetic" would become more engaged in politics as a result of using digital media (Breuer & Farooq, 2012, p.3). In the best case scenario, it seems that they will become increasingly involved only in Internet-based political activities (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). In light of this trend, in the last years, an increasing number of academics have expressed concerns that the consequences of digital media in this setting may be detrimental, as people increasingly adopt more "slacktivist" forms of online activism, defined as those that demand little effort but also have little real-world impact (Morozov, 2009; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001).

When looking at the micro-level of individual participation and the question of whether engaging in online activism actually change a person's general pattern of activism behavior, it is critical to make an important distinction. Breuer & Farooq (2012) assert that the primary offer of well-known, entertainment-focused networking sites like Facebook consists of simple-to-perform activities with low transaction costs for the user. In their research about the influence of various online activities on the choice to contact a policymaker, one-click solutions proved less effective than the ones that required more effort. Moreover, their analysis indicates that switching from online to offline participation, as a result of Internet-based activities, is very unlikely.

H1: Clicktivism negatively affects willingness to engage in offline activism, in a way that individuals practicing clicktivism are less willing to take real actions offline, compared to those who do not practice Clicktivism.

3.2 PERCEIVED VALUE OF CLICK AS A MEDIATOR OF OFFLINE ACTIVISM BEHAVIOR

Gladwell (2010) affirmed: "where activists were once defined by their causes, they are now defined by their tools". This can be considered true in the sense that nowadays we are able to differentiate online from offline activism, which we would not be doing if no relevance was attributed to the medium through which people engage with activism. Understanding whether individuals attach some sort of value to these media results then fundamental in our age.

A negative connotation is often given to the constant use of social media, and this has led to a general perception that clicking should not be considered something valuable, in most cases. "Clicking" is now something that people do automatically and, according to a study presented by the Center for Social Impact Communication at Georgetown University and Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide (2011), more than 50% of Americans did not attribute any worth to the click itself. On the other hand, given the increasingly prominent phenomenon of clicktivism, it comes naturally to mind that a different perception of the value of social media activity, and in particular of the click, might exist. Indeed, Chen & Fu (2018), for example, introduce the sociability value of a medium, which they define as the "user's perceived level of interaction and association with others in a medium" (p. 122). The authors discuss the social networking capability, along with the potential force of traction to attract and retain users, of a medium. Another work that values the medium is the one by Hayes et al. (2016), where the researchers conceptualize social media activities that require only a click to be performed as "paralinguistic digital affordances" (p.171) and argue that one-click tools (e.g., Likes, Favorites) often serve to signal a response. Given these considerations and the frequency by which social media users choose the same cue as reactions to posts with quite diverse emotional undertones, it is possible to conclude that clicks can be used and interpreted in different ways (Hayes, Carr, & Wohn, 2016).

Hsee, Yu, Zhang, & Zhang (2003) provides an interesting perspective, in this regard. Although the authors posit that the medium has no value in and of itself, they also believe that it can be "traded for a desired outcome" (p. 1). They observe that people who make an effort to deal with the complexities of media appear to be more sensitive to media influence and less concerned about the ultimate outcomes. Hsee et al. (2003, p.1) define "medium maximization" as "the pursuit of the effort → medium return" and find that people frequently fail to completely skip the medium, maximizing not only the effort → outcome return but also the effort → medium return. This means that, when people have to choose between two or more actions, which require different levels of effort, are performed through different media, and provide different outcomes, they do not only consider which is the best final outcome, but also what is the greater medium (Hsee et al., 2003).

Building on this theorization, the click can be defined as the medium between the effort required to perform clicktivism-related actions and the expected outcome of clicktivism, which is identified in this study as a real-life impact produced by offline activism behavior. Furthermore, I suggest that clicktivism makes people value the click. In this case, medium maximization is expected to act as follows: clicktivists maximize the click as a medium and, consequently, place less emphasis on what is supposed to be the last phase of the process, that is engaging in offline activism. The mediation hypothesis, based on these findings, follows.

H2: The effect of clicktivism on willingness to engage in offline activism is mediated by perceived value of click.
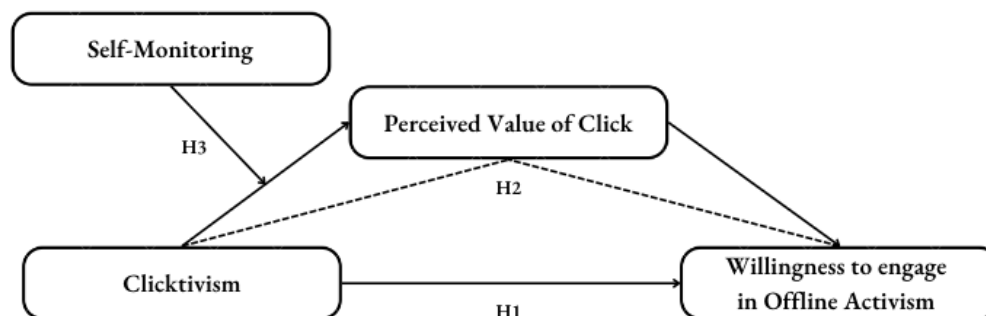
3.3 SELF-MONITORING AS A BOUNDARY CONDITION

Impression management is defined as "the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34). Individuals are continuously engaged in strategic efforts to establish and preserve a desired image of themselves (Goffman, 1959). Nonetheless, despite its pervasiveness, people differ in their concern for their public image, namely how relevant they feel others' perceptions of them are (Kim et al., 2023). People who have greater impression concerns are more worried about their public image, believe it is essential in a number of situations, and adapt to social circumstances in order to present to others their ideal image (Leary & Allen, 2011). Being regarded as a moral person by others has been found to be indeed desirable in a number of research (Wedekind & Milinski, 2000; Alexander, 1987; Goffman, 1959). On the other hand, there are people with lower concerns about their impressions, who believe that their public image has little bearing on the outcomes that matter to them and that impressions are only relevant in a few selected circumstances, reason for which they generally put minimal effort into controlling their impressions (Leary & Allen, 2011).

Individual differences in impression management have been studied in the past as a possible moderator. According to studies conducted by Cornelissen, Karelaia, & Soyer (2013), clicktivism had no effect on people with lower impression management concerns, whereas those with higher impression management tendencies were more sensitive to the negative effects of token symbolic action (i.e., they revealed a larger decrease in subsequent support or donations). The authors interpret this finding through the lens of the strategic attitude of high self-monitors, saying that these individuals strategically preserve their effort to act more concretely when they engage in symbolic activities. In spite of this being true, consistency motives may also explain this result, especially when the token support is made public (Kim et al., 2023).

Similarly, in the context of our interest, high self-monitors might engage in activism for the sole purpose of being recognized as moral people. Lacking a genuine desire to contribute to social change, it is possible that they save their effort for a symbolic online participation, while avoiding to engage in real actions offline. In this sense, high self-monitors might value the click and clicktivism rather than offline activism.

H3: Self-monitoring moderates the relationship between clicktivism and perceived value of click such that, while high self-monitoring increases clicktivists' perceived value of click, low self-monitoring decreases it

Methodology

The purpose of this elaborate is to examine how consumers' *Willingness to engage in offline activism* can be influenced by the practice of *Clicktivism* (Yes vs. No), considering the potential mediating effect of *Perceived value of click*. I also aim to investigate whether *Self-monitoring* acts as a moderator of the relationship between the independent variable (Clicktivism) and the mediator (Perceived value of click). An experimental study is presented to test the different hypotheses.

4.1 Participants

A total of 289 participants were recruited with an anonymous link generated through the online platform Qualtrics. The link was subsequently distributed via social media and instant messaging applications (i.e., Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp), and SurveyCircle. In order to increase the survey's accessibility, it was distributed in two languages: Italian and English and required on average 3 minutes to complete. No incentives were given upon the completion of the survey. Of the 289 total responses, 203 were complete. The dataset was further cleaned, given that only 188 respondents passed the attention check (i.e., "Choose number two") and were included in the analyses ($M_{age} = 31.06$; 58.5% female, 0.55% third gender/non-binary, 0.55% not specified). People were also asked to state what was the highest academic qualification they obtained (High school diploma = 31.91%, Bachelor's degree = 30.85%, Master's degree = 34.04%, Doctorate = 2.13%, Other (specified) = 1.07%).

4.2 Design and Procedure

This research undertakes a quantitative method, which is constructed as an experimental research design. To conduct the experiment, a questionnaire consisting of 12 questions (9 specific and 3 demographic) was developed through the online platform Qualtrics (Appendix 1). Participants were told they would participate in an experiment about the relationship between online and offline consumer activism. They needed to provide informed consent to take part in the study and it was told that the data obtained would have been anonymous and treated with confidentiality, for the sole purpose of conducting research.

Specifically, the experimental design chosen for this analysis was between-subjects. This type of analysis implies the need for a manipulation of the independent variable, while holding everything else constant. In order to manipulate *Clicktivism* (Yes vs. No), two distinct stimuli were created (Appendix 1). People have

been randomly assigned to two different groups: one of them was shown a post and intrusted to imagine that they liked, shared, and/or commented it, while the other group had to visualize that they saw the post but did not liked, shared, or commented it. In particular, the shown image was a real post, published on Instagram by the brand Ben&Jerry's in collaboration with the All4Climate initiative. In each stimulus figured an image of the pro-environmental campaign, the intrusted information, and a brief explanation of both the purpose of All4Climate and the reason behind the collaboration with Ben&Jerry's. Hence, it can be said that the brand, the initiative, and the image chosen for the stimuli are controlled variables in this case to produce and effective manipulation of the IV, where the focus was on one-click-solutions in the context of online activism, recognized as those forms of activism that are more closely related to slacktivism (Breuer & Farooq, 2012).

After being exposed to one of the stimuli, participants were asked to answer three questions relating to dependent variable, mediator, moderator. The starting point for formulating the survey questions was to choose validated scales to measure exactly the constructs proposed in the conceptual framework.

With regard to the DV (*Willingness to engage in offline activism)*, Corning & Myers (2002) provide an interesting measure: the Activism Orientation Scale. Both for the inadequate length of the scale (40 original items) and the desire of a greater fit with the context of study, I used an adapted version of the scale, constituted by 9 items (from 1 = Extremely unlikely to 4 = Extremely likely). To make sure that the new scale items were consistent with each other, a reliability analysis was conducted. Specifically, internal consistency (Cronbach's α) was satisfactory, equal to .849 (Appendix 2(a)).

No scale specifically relating to *Perceived value of click* have been proposed. Chen & Fu (2018) talked about perceived value in the mobile moment, and contributed to the field by theorizing sociability, a third value dimension, besides hedonic and utilitarian, to measure users' perceptions of image-based apps. I formulated five items based on the original scale by Chen & Fu (2018). Internal consistency (Cronbach's α) was equal to .864 (Appendix 2(b)). Respondents to the survey evaluated all items on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree).

To measure *Self-Monitoring*, a 2-item scale (Cronbach's α = .764) was adopted (Appendix 2(c)). These 2 items were already used by Seo & Lang (2019), who had themselves taken it from the revised self-monitoring scale by Lennox & Wolfe (1984). The authors take up Cass's (2001) definition, who affirmed that *Self-Monitoring* "represents the degree to which people control and observe their self-presentation in accordance with social norms" (Seo & Lang, 2019, p. 70). This was in line with the variable I wanted to measure.

Once they answered the reviewed three questions, along with the afore-mentioned attention check, participants were shown with a control question about their past engagement with clicktivism and finished the questionnaire by responding to the demographic questions (Appendix 1).

Results

5.1 One-way ANOVA: the main effect of Clicktivism on Willingness to engage in Offline Activism

To test the direct effect (H1) between the independent variable and the dependent variable, it was necessary to perform a comparison of averages through the use of a One-Way ANOVA (Appendix 3). It was possible to observe that the group of respondents exposed to the stimulus coded with "1" (Clicktivism = Yes) showed a mean of 2.5509, while the group of respondents subjected to the other scenario labeled with "0" (Clicktivism = No) recorded an average of 2.5012. In addition, the ANOVA table exhibits a p-value related to the F-test equal to 0.518 and therefore higher than the reference value $\alpha = 0.05$. Thus, the main effect, of X on Y, was found to be statistically not significant.

5.2 Regression analysis with SPSS Process model 4 by Hayes (2017)

To test the main effect and mediating hypotheses presented, a mediation regression analysis has been conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (model 4) (Hayes, 2017). *Willingness to engage in offline activism* was used as the Dependent Variable and *Clicktivism* was used as the Independent Variable of the model. *Perceived Value of click* was the Mediating Variable of the model. The results of the regression analysis confirmed, as expected, a non-significant main effect (b=0.2326; p=0.4549>.05). However, a significant effect of IV on mediator was found (b=0.3815; p=0.0012<.05).

At this point, the control question used in the survey about consumers' past engagement with clicktivism was to take into account. The variable was added as a covariate in the same model 4 by Hayes (2017). However, while the covariate results to have a significant direct effect on the mediator (b=0.2747; p=0.0000), it shows a non-significant effect on the DV (b=-0.0260; p=0.5750). Hence, by controlling for *Previous engagement with clicktivism*, the effect of the IV on the DV is still non-significant.

5.3 One-way ANOVA: the effect of Clicktivism on mediator Perceived value of click

Considering the significant results in relation to the mediator, another One-way ANOVA (Appendix 5) was conducted, this time to investigate the direct effect between the independent variable and the mediator. The descriptive statistics table shows a more relevant difference in the means between the group of respondents exposed to the stimulus coded with "1" (Clicktivism = Yes), that exhibits a value of 3.2750, and the one of people subjected to the other scenario labeled with "0" (Clicktivism = No), which recorded an average of 2.8935. Looking at the ANOVA table, I found a p-value related to the F-test equal to 0.001 and therefore lower than the reference value α = 0.05. Therefore, we can assert that the direct effect, of X on mediator, is statistically significant, meaning that *Perceived Value of Click* is influenced by the *Clicktivism* manipulation.

5.4 Regression analysis with SPSS Process model 7 by Hayes (2017): the moderating effect of self-monitoring

To also test the effect and hypothesis related to the moderator, a moderated mediation regression analysis has been conducted using the Software PROCESS macro SPSS (model 7) (Hayes, 2017), with *Self-Monitoring* as the moderator. The results of the regression analysis exhibit a non-significant effect of the moderator on path a, contrarily to what was hypothesized, but a significant direct effect of the moderator on the mediator (b=0.3007; p=0.0047). We can also observe a significant effect of the covariate, included also in this model, on the mediator (b=0.2121; p=0.0009).

5.5 Correlations

Correlations between the moderator, the mediator and the DV (Appendix 7) were analyzed. The results suggest a significant association between these variables.

Discussion

Theoretical contributions and Managerial implications

The quantitative analysis shows a significant relationship between clicktivism and the perceived value of click. Clicktivists attribute value to their actions for various reasons, connected to medium maximization, self-monitoring, and desire to make an impact. Scholars could advance this analysis along these lines and marketing managers would leverage the present and subsequent significant results related to clicktivists' behavior to develop more effective campaigns in the context of sociopolitical matters. Furthermore, research reveals that people' propensities to control how they come across and present themselves may have an impact on the value they attribute to click. Marketers could derive that the contemporary audience should be segmented also in these terms, namely in dependence of the various motivations that drive their engagement relatively to sociopolitical causes, and of their level of concern in relation to others' impressions of them. However, given that no evidence was found in support of the relationship between online and offline political participation, most probably due to the inefficacy of the independent variable's manipulation used, we might think of different implications to derive. On one hand, we might suppose that brands, by creating ads that appeal to particular target groups identified on the base of self-monitoring and perceived value of click levels, could be able to optimize the efficiency of consumers' clicktivism efforts, which might also raise the possibility of offline involvement. On the other hand, it could be true that clicktivism actually does not translate in offline activism and that clicks, in and of themselves, have a detrimental influence on consumers' perception of their sociopolitical contribution. In this case, organizations, policymakers, and researchers in this field, should deepen the reasons behind this dynamic and focus on developing alternative means of participation. Despite the lack of evidence for the proposed model, this study enriches the body of theoretical information regarding clicktivism and its connection to offline activism. The knowledge of the psychological processes involved in online activism is enhanced, as it is possible to recognize important relationships between the variables that were measured in this analysis. Moreover, the qualitative exploration conducted in the literature review section represents a valid starting point for further investigation of the subjects matters, since it integrates the scarce current knowledge of these understudied subjects with the rich prior one concerning well-established constructs that are strongly related to the former.

In sum, this study offers important insights for Researchers and Marketing Managers willing to leverage brand activism not only to increase engagement and positive sentiment towards the brands themselves, but to bring consumers closer to sociopolitical issues and contribute to social change.

Limitations and suggestions for Future Research

This exploration, making no exception to any other paper previously written, certainly presents some limitations that can be a source of inspiration for future research. First, it should be noted that the study's sample size was relatively small and that participants did not belong to a single age category or socioeconomic class. Neither income nor occupation statistics were obtained. The low sample diversity may have made it difficult to detect significant effects, or fully explore the complexity of the relationships under investigation. Accordingly, results could differ if the sample was changed. Secondly, the use of self-report measurements in the online experiment is susceptible to cognitive biases, including the ones related to social desirability and memory recall. The use of an online survey might also constrain the findings' generalizability. Additionally, the study did not take into consideration participants' level of involvement with the presented topic, as well as their level of interest in activism. This restriction might have had a notable impact on how respondents answered the questions they were exposed to. On top of this, clicktivism's manipulation, as anticipated, was probably ineffective because participants were intrusted to have done something during the experiment, rather than examining whether they would have actually done it. Lastly, the literature related to this fast evolving topic is scares and sparse, and this proves even more evident about clicktivism connection to offline participation. This fact represented another obstacle faced in the present study, also implying a difficulty in the interpretation of findings.

Future research should take into account the limitations listed above and conduct itself consequently. A replication of the present investigation, with a larger sample, or by focusing on individuals within a particular age group or income level, could be replicated to analyze these topics across various demographic groups and socio-cultural contexts. Subsequent studies could make use of different data gathering techniques to solve the shortcomings of self-report assessments and online experiments. For instance, longitudinal designs that could not be adopted in this case due to time constraints, would shed light on the temporal relationships between clicktivism, perceived click value, self-monitoring, and willingness to get involved in offline activism. Additionally, qualitative methods like focus groups or interviews may be able to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of individuals' motivations for engaging in clicktivism and offline activism. Future investigations should then include measures to gauge participants' pre-existing interest in activism and their familiarity with the particular topic presented, in order to address the issue of the lack of control for these possible confounding variables. Researchers should deepen the connection between clicktivism and persons' perceived importance of their online behavior. Investigating the factors that influence people' perceptions of the meaning and impact of their clicktivism could offer insightful information on how to manage and possibly take advantage of this practice. Finally, self-monitoring results not to moderate the relationship between clicktivism and perceived value of click, but to have a significant effect on the second and to be correlated to both perceived click value and willingness to engage in offline activism. Thus, the first finding is likely to be related to the inefficacy of the independent variable's manipulation. By changing the latter, as well as the measures used for the other variables, other, relevant implications could be derived. To conclude, our understanding of how self-monitoring interacts with clicktivism and affects how people perceive their online

behavior should be furthered by future research. This would entail including measurements that reflect also other aspects of impression management tendencies to better comprehend whether, and if so, how, these aspects affect perceived click value, online and offline activism, and the connections between these topics.