



MSc in Marketing
Market Relationship & Customer Engagement

Chair of Product & Brand Management

Brand Activism in The Fashion and Luxury Industry.
An empirical analysis of the relationship between Brand Activism
and consumers' Willingness to Buy.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	4
CHAPTER I - MARKETING IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY.....	6
1.1 IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY.....	7
1.1.1 <i>Increased brand image</i>	7
1.1.2 <i>Enhancing customer engagement</i>	8
1.1.3 <i>Competitive advantage</i>	10
1.1.4 <i>Building and Maintaining brand loyalty</i>	11
1.2 KINDS OF MARKETING IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY.....	12
1.2.1 <i>Social media marketing</i>	13
1.2.2 <i>Influencer marketing</i>	15
1.2.3 <i>Content marketing</i>	16
1.2.4 <i>Experience Marketing</i>	17
1.2.5 <i>Event Marketing</i>	18
1.3 SUSTAINABLE MARKETING IN THE FASHION AND LUXURY INDUSTRY.....	20
1.3.1 <i>Trends and evolution towards sustainability in marketing</i>	20
1.3.2 <i>Sustainability communication and impact on brand perception: should brands take a stand?</i> 21	
1.4 SUCCESSFUL FASHION MARKETING CAMPAIGNS: CASE ANALYSIS.....	21
1.4.1 <i>Patagonia</i>	22
1.4.2 <i>Stella McCartney</i>	23
1.4.3 <i>Levi's</i>	24
1.6 SUSTAINABILITY METRICS AND REPORTING.....	26
CHAPTER II - BRAND ACTIVISM.....	29
2.1 THE PREREQUISITES FOR THE RISE OF BRAND ACTIVISM.....	30
2.2 KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS.....	32
2.2.1 <i>Differences between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Brand Activism</i>	33
2.2.2 <i>Progressive and regressive activism</i>	34
2.3 DIFFERENT TYPES OF BRAND ACTIVISM.....	36
2.3.1 <i>Social Activism</i>	37
2.2.2. <i>Workplace Activism</i>	38
2.2.3. <i>Political Activism</i>	39
2.2.4. <i>Environmental Activism</i>	41
2.2.5. <i>Economic activism</i>	42
2.2.6. <i>Legal Activism</i>	44
2.4 THE EVIL SEVEN.....	45
2.5 THE RELEVANCE OF BRAND ACTIVISM IN THE MODERN ERA: BRAND ACTIVISM AS A REPUTATION AMPLIFIER.....	46

2.5.1	<i>The Concept of Justice</i>	50
2.6	THE IMPORTANCE OF AUTHENTIC ACTIVISM.....	51
3.1	GUCCI'S HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT.....	53
3.1.1	<i>Creative Leadership: A Journey of Tradition and Innovation</i>	55
3.1.2	<i>Gucci: Embracing Sustainability and Digital Innovation</i>	58
3.1.3	<i>Social media communication strategy</i>	59
3.2	GUCCI EQUILIBRIUM: PLANET, PEOPLE AND CHIME FOR CHANGE	60
3.2.1	<i>Gucci Equilibrium Environmental background</i>	62
3.2.2	<i>Gucci Equilibrium initiative description</i>	63
3.2.3	<i>Gucci Equilibrium: Planet</i>	65
3.2.4	<i>Gucci Equilibrium: People</i>	68
3.2.5	<i>Gucci Equilibrium: Chime for Change</i>	70
	CHAPTER IV – EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH.....	74
4.2	METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH.....	77
4.2.1	<i>Methodology and study</i>	77
4.2.2	<i>Participants and sampling procedure</i>	77
4.3	EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS	80
4.3.1	<i>Data analysis</i>	80
4.3.2	<i>Hypotheses results</i>	81
4.4	GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	85
4.4.1	<i>Theoretical contributions</i>	85
4.4.2	<i>Managerial implications</i>	88
4.4.3	<i>Limitations and Future Research</i>	91
	APPENDIX.....	93
	BIBLIOGRAPHY:.....	98

INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry is one of the most rapidly changing industries in the global economy, fuelled by shifting consumer preferences, rising technologies, and the growing importance of digital marketing. Marketing is essential in fashion companies' identity, image, and profitability since it helps them connect with their target audience, retain customers, and build long-term brand loyalty. However, in recent years, the business has undergone substantial changes, primarily thanks to the introduction of social media, greater demand for sustainability, and the rise of brand activism. These factors have presented new problems and opportunities for fashion marketers, leading to the reconsideration of traditional methodologies and the development of innovative approaches to remain competitive. In an industry where trends come and go and client tastes change regularly, marketing serves as a bridge between fashion companies and their target audience. Fashion firms can improve their brand image, increase customer engagement, and gain a competitive advantage by using various strategies, including social media marketing, influencer alliances, and content-driven campaigns. As the market gets more competitive, individuality becomes increasingly vital through inventive marketing strategies. Successful fashion marketing boosts income and fosters long-term brand loyalty by developing a deep emotional bond with customers. Although luxury is traditionally associated with a history of artisan traditions, its meaning has shifted significantly due to digitisation and the ongoing craving for connection among the millennial and Gen Z generations. To maintain a close relationship with them, the market has evolved by shifting the entire value chain. The largest transformation has occurred in the realm of communication. As the fashion industry grows, the requirement for sustainability has become an increasingly essential factor in influencing customer behaviour and brand perception. Customers have progressively evolved to prefer companies that are committed to sustainability operations. This tendency has led to the rise of sustainable fashion marketing, in which companies stress their efforts to reduce environmental impact, support fair employment standards, and supply eco-friendly products. For fashion brands, sustainability is a moral obligation and a commercial need to remain relevant and competitive in a market where buyers are more aware and discriminatory than ever.

Eco-consciousness and ethical consumption trends have revolutionised retail marketing, requiring retailers to communicate their sustainability operations to get buyers' trust. Brands like Patagonia, Stella McCartney, and Levi's have successfully integrated sustainability into their marketing strategies, positioning themselves as market leaders in

the growing demand for environmentally and socially responsible products. These firms have demonstrated that when presented authentically, sustainability may promote brand reputation and consumer loyalty. Combining sustainability with branding in the fashion industry raises an important question: should brands take a stand on social and environmental concerns? Consumers today expect companies to operate ethically, participate in societal discussions, and actively advocate for positive change. This expectation has given rise to brand activism, in which companies actively declare their opinions on climate change, gender equality, and racial justice. While this strategy has risks, particularly in polarising political environments, it can also bring significant advantages for brand loyalty and reputation if done well

The primary purpose of my final paper, which is divided into four chapters, was to focus on Brand Activism in the fashion and luxury industries. First, I emphasised the importance of marketing in the fashion industry, such as how it enhances brand image, customer engagement, competitive advantage, and brand loyalty. This section revolves around key marketing tactics such as social media, influencer, content, experiential, and event marketing, which have altered fashion enterprises in the digital era.

In the second chapter, I examined the evolution of brand activism, its key concepts, and how it stands apart from corporate social responsibility (CSR). This chapter also discusses the reputational impact of brand activism and modern customers' growing desire for authenticity.

The third chapter examines a case study of Gucci, a well-known luxury firm. I discuss the brand's history, innovative leadership, and how it has embraced sustainability and digital change through the "Gucci Equilibrium" program. This chapter examines how Gucci's marketing strategies evolved to include social and environmental commitments, positioning the firm as a pioneer in ethical luxury.

Finally, the fourth chapter presents the experimental study I conducted to assess the impact of marketing methods and brand activism on customer perceptions and behaviour. By analysing the data, I determined the effectiveness of several approaches for developing brand success and loyalty. I also provided theoretical and managerial contributions that address the future direction of marketing in the fashion and luxury sectors and its limitations and prospects for additional research.

CHAPTER I - MARKETING IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

Sustainable and ethical fashion marketing involves the understanding of promotional and communicative strategies used by fashion companies to highlight and sell apparel products produced in an eco-friendly and socially conscious way. This intentional approach is meant to minimise the damage done to the environment, support fair working conditions, and promote transparency all along the supply chain. It is now essential for companies to include these basic ideas in their marketing plans as the awareness and demand for ethical and sustainable fashion rise, therefore capturing and keeping consumers that give social and environmental values a priority.

The fashion business powerfully shapes the patterns and values of our culture. Growing environmental and social justice concerns have fuelled the development of the sustainable fashion movement, which hopes to revolutionise clothing production and consumption. Sustainable and ethical fashion marketing is an important component of this trend since it allows fashion firms to sell garment goods that are produced in a way that reduces environmental harm and promotes fair working conditions.

Communication is frequently used as the foundation of ethical and sustainable fashion marketing. Fashion firms need to use these approaches to demonstrate their commitment to eco-friendly practices while also interacting with and appealing to clients who place a high value on social and environmental concerns. Effective communication of their commitment to sustainability and ethics will help brands identify as ethical and responsible industry participants and develop confidence with their audience.

Transparency across the supply chain is fundamental to ethical and sustainable fashion marketing. Customers are becoming increasingly interested in the origins of their clothing and the conditions under which it was produced. Companies must be transparent about their employment practices, production processes, and supplier selection. By providing this information, companies may help customers make informed decisions and support businesses that reflect their values. Furthermore, part of sustainable and ethical fashion marketing is promoting environmental damage mitigation. Using recycled or organic materials will help reduce waste during production through eco-friendly manufacturing techniques. By stressing these methods, companies can attract customers who care about the environment and look for clothes that least affect the earth.

Apart from environmental sustainability, a fundamental ethical fashion marketing principle is maintaining fair working standards. Companies must prioritise workers' welfare, guaranteeing fair pay and safe working conditions throughout their supply chains. Promoting

ethical work standards will help brands attract customers who are worried about the social consequences of their clothing decisions.

In recent years, ethical and sustainable fashion has become more in demand and an awareness-raising topic. Customers are becoming more aware of their product choices' social and environmental effects. Therefore, fashion companies have to understand these basic ideas. Including ethics and sustainability in their marketing plans is crucial and benefits them in grabbing and keeping consumers who prioritise social and environmental values.

Finally, sustainable and ethical fashion marketing requires the mastery of promotional and communicative strategies to highlight and disseminate clothes products produced in an eco-friendly and socially concerned manner. Fashion firms incorporating sustainability and ethics into their marketing strategies can effectively target the growing demand for environmentally friendly items. Companies must adopt these principles because they are essential for attracting and retaining customers who value the world and its residents. Fashion firms have a unique opportunity to lead the way and positively affect the industry and society as the world evolves towards a more sustainable future.

1.1 Importance of Marketing in the Fashion Industry

Marketing is the fundamental force that supports and propels the fashion industry's progress. Marketing significantly influences fashion companies by improving their brand image. Establishing a solid and memorable brand identity is increasingly vital in an industry constantly expanding and influenced by shifting trends and aesthetics. Fashion firms must have a distinctive and alluring personality that distinguishes them from the many options accessible to consumers. Successful marketing enables fashion companies to successfully convey their brand information and value offers. Brands may capture and maintain their target audience through efficient digital marketing platforms and campaigns. Marketing strategies must exhibit sufficient creativity to distinguish themselves in the highly competitive market and captivate the interest of prospective customers. However, it is also necessary for them to provide helpful information to establish confidence with clients.

1.1.1 Increased brand image

Marketing is critical in the fashion industry, as it significantly increases brand image and represents how consumers perceive and connect with a company or product. People who develop positive feelings towards a brand are likelier to become loyal customers. Marketing

has the power to influence the impression and perception of a brand. By implementing strategic marketing tactics, fashion companies can create a memorable and emotional connection with their target audience, substantially boosting their brand image.

To better understand the influence of marketing on brand image in the fashion business, consider successful marketing initiatives that have significantly improved the perception of various fashion brands. Nike's famous "Just Do It" campaign is an example which captivated millions of people and motivated them to push past their limits and embrace their inner champions.

This campaign represented empowerment and drive, reinforcing Nike's reputation as a sports equipment and footwear pioneer. Chanel's "Little Black Jacket" campaign is another notable example that helped tremendously improve the company's image. This campaign highlighted the ageless beauty and flexibility of Chanel's classic black jacket through a series of gorgeous photos of celebrities, models, and significant personalities from many sectors. Chanel effectively positioned themselves as the embodiment of refinement and style by linking their brand with well-known personalities and demonstrating the jacket's ability to improve any ensemble instantly.

Similarly, Burberry's "Art of the Trench" campaign shows how marketing can improve a brand's reputation in the fashion sector. This innovative campaign invited individuals from all walks of life to submit their photographs wearing Burberry's iconic trench coat. Burberry showcased its product's versatility and fostered a sense of community and inclusivity by involving its customers in the creative process and celebrating its unique styles. This campaign increased brand image and established a deeper emotional connection with customers, resulting in heightened brand loyalty.

1.1.2 Enhancing customer engagement

In addition to improving company image, marketing is critical for growing consumer involvement. Customer engagement refers to the degree of contact and involvement between customers and a brand. Fashion firms may effectively improve client trust, loyalty, and engagement through various marketing activities, including active participation on social media platforms, holding events that allow for direct connection with customers, and incorporating them into the brand's product creation processes. These marketing initiatives foster a sense of connection and create an emotional bond between the customer and the brand, resulting in higher levels of engagement.

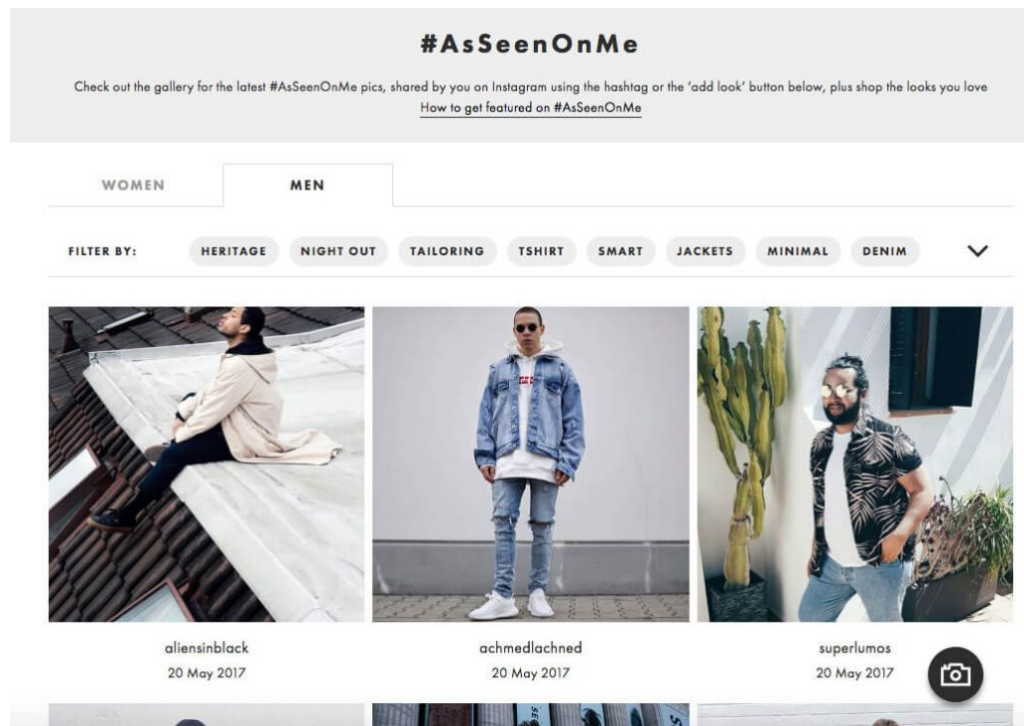


Figure 1: ASOS' #AsSeenOnMe campaign, <https://weez.myblog.arts.ac.uk/2022/01/09/as-seen-on-me-the-user-generated-content-for-asos/>

ASOS' #AsSeenOnMe campaign¹ is an ideal example of a fashion firm effectively improving client involvement through marketing. This unique initiative encourages shoppers to express their style by wearing ASOS items and sharing their outfits on social media. ASOS raises its visibility and fosters a strong feeling of community and inclusion by actively integrating its consumers in the creative process and encouraging them to become brand ambassadors. The campaign allows customers to showcase their unique personalities while also motivating others. ASOS effectively increases customer engagement and develops the brand-consumer connection by giving a platform for users to showcase their style and become members of a fashion community. The campaign demonstrates how marketing can effectively increase consumer involvement by integrating customers into the creative process and fostering a feeling of community. Also, customised marketing methods that give specialised information might help boost client engagement. Finally, by investing in comprehensive marketing strategies prioritising consumer connection, fashion firms can create stronger connections with their audience and succeed in the competitive fashion sector.²

¹ "As Seen on Me": The User Generated Content for ASOS. (n.d.).

<https://weez.myblog.arts.ac.uk/2022/01/09/as-seen-on-me-the-user-generated-content-for-asos/>

² Ghosh, A. (2021). A study of online brand activism and its impact on consumer brand relationship. International Journal of Advanced Research. <https://doi.org/10.21474/ijar01/13274>.

Furthermore, marketing initiatives focusing on personalised experiences and tailored content can significantly enhance customer engagement. Fashion brands can deliver personalised customer messages by leveraging data-driven insights and targeted marketing strategies. This approach allows brands to connect meaningfully with their audience, as customers feel understood and valued. For instance, personalised email campaigns that recommend products based on a customer's previous purchases or browsing history can make the shopping experience more personalised and tailored to their preferences. Fashion brands can capture their attention and increase engagement by providing customers with relevant and personalised content.

1.1.3 Competitive advantage

Marketing is critical in helping fashion firms get a competitive edge, which leads to enhanced brand loyalty. A competitive advantage is a feature that distinguishes a brand from its competitors giving it an advantage in the market. In the highly competitive fashion sector, where companies constantly for attention, a strong competitive edge can be critical to success.

Fashion companies must conduct effective marketing campaigns in order to get an advantage over their competitors. These advertisements promote a brand's distinctive selling qualities and value proposition, emphasising what distinguishes it. For example, a business may highlight its dedication to sustainability, creative design, or great craftsmanship. Another way in which brands can stand out is through effectively expressing their distinctive features via marketing. In the fashion market, where consumers have several options, having such an advantage might mean the difference between what brands succeed and those that fall into oblivion. That is why marketing, whether through intriguing stories, eye-catching imagery, or engaging experiences, is critical to attracting and maintaining consumers who might not know the depth of your efforts otherwise. In addition, advertising plays a significant role in developing brand loyalty in the fashion business. Brand loyalty refers to a customer's emotional connection and commitment to a certain brand. This is obviously a huge add-on when talking about competitive advantage, as it means that consumers will come straight to you before other brand offerings. Fashion firms may increase client loyalty and even convert them into advocates by developing a deep emotional relationship with them through marketing campaigns.

H&M's "Conscious Collection"³ is an excellent example of a campaign that managed to build a competitive edge as well as brand loyalty effectively. This campaign advocated for environmentally friendly production practices, emphasising the use of sustainable materials at reasonable rates. H&M demonstrated its commitment to sustainability and producing items that reflect the values of its customers, and it gained extreme success from that. This resulted in greater brand loyalty since customers felt a solid connection to the company's values and goals.

Marketing campaigns may differentiate businesses and catch consumers' attention by highlighting their unique selling features and value propositions. Furthermore, by creating a deep emotional relationship with clients, fashion firms can nurture their loyalty and convert them into long-term supporters, eventually adding to the overall success of a fashion business.

1.1.4 Building and Maintaining brand loyalty

Nurturing brand loyalty is critical in the luxury and fashion industries. It builds a devoted consumer base and increases prestige.

With customers increasingly spending more time online, a dramatic shift from traditional marketing to a digital-focused strategy has revealed new potential. This advancement uses the power of social media platforms and online campaigns to interact with consumers at their peak engagement levels, effortlessly merging a brand into the very core of current society. The rise of internet marketing has radically changed how brand loyalty is fostered in the fashion business. With tailored campaigns and interactive platforms, digital marketing encourages a deeper customer connection, going beyond mere recognition to establish steadfast loyalty to fashion companies. It also improves customer involvement by providing tailored experiences and direct discussion channels for fashion enthusiasts. The chain effects on brand perception are similarly significant; firms who are competent at using digital spaces are frequently viewed as modern and in sync with their target audience, while those who are basically absent on social media miss out on a ton of opportunities and free advertisement generated by earned media and word of mouth, further consolidating the status gap in the fashion industry.

³ Sustainability | H&M. (2018). H&M. https://www2.hm.com/en_gb/sustainability-at-hm.html?srsId=AfmBOopJ7STmUK1-OZxMKIZfKtIxOHIlknM6J_W_P1txSrSuWk80UDVj

Digital marketing has therefore proven critical in developing brand loyalty ⁴, intensifying consumer engagement, and sculpting brand perception within the fashion realm. By embracing the digital paradigm, fashion brands have redefined the pathways to consumers' hearts and minds, ensuring lasting connections⁵. As the digital landscape matures, its role in the fashion industry will become indispensable in market strategies. This digital influence promises to keep the loom of the fashion world in constant, vibrant motion well into the future.

1.2 Kinds of Marketing in the Fashion Industry

As mentioned above, the fashion business is characterised by a fast-paced environment, necessitating specialised marketing methods to properly reach its target demographic on time. In today's fiercely competitive scenario, a strong marketing strategy is critical for firms to stand out while also connecting with their customers. This paragraph is going to look into the many marketing methods used by top fashion firms to gain the attention of their target demographic and increase sales. From social media campaigns and influencer relationships to experiential marketing and creative web platforms, we'll look at how fashion firms use a variety of techniques to build a great brand. In addition, we will examine how these methods have developed in response to shifting consumer habits and technology advances.

The fashion sector has seen a tremendous shift in marketing techniques, moving away from traditional approaches and towards a digital-centric strategy that has transformed customer interaction and branding. Traditional fashion marketing consisted of mostly printed advertisements, billboards, and television commercials, with the goal of reaching a large audience. However, with the significant trend towards digital marketing, fashion firms are leveraging online platforms, social media, and e-commerce to interact directly with their target consumers. This move has been critical in creating an interactive place for businesses to engage with their audience, allowing for tailored experiences and real-time feedback. The digital revolution in fashion marketing has led to a shift in consumer behaviour towards true connections with companies, personalised information, and an ideal shopping experience.

⁴ Dinh, T., Hà, A., Ngân, G., Linh, G., & Việt, V. (2022). The Effect of Generation Z's Perceptions of Brand Activism on Brand Loyalty: Comparative Difference between Cities. *Journal of Asian business and economic studies*. <https://doi.org/10.24311/jabes/2022.33.07.02>.

⁵ Nguyen, D., Le, D., Truong, L., Truong, N., & Vu, V. (2022). The effect of Generation Z's perceptions of brand activism on brand loyalty: evidence from Vietnam. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/apjml-02-2022-0165>.

1.2.1 Social media marketing

Social media marketing has had a tremendous influence on the fashion sector, becoming a cornerstone of modern marketing strategies and transforming how businesses communicate with their target audience and promote their products and services. The use of social media as a marketing tool has enabled direct engagement between fashion firms and their target audience, leading to deeper and more instantaneous relationships (Hsiao et al., 2024).⁶ This transition has resulted in the metamorphosis of fashion marketing methods, which now successfully use platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to promote items, tap into current trends, and engage followers with visually appealing material. The value of visual material has grown in social media fashion marketing, with captivating photos and videos able to capture and impact customer behaviour and purchase decisions (Madhura et al., 2022)⁷.

Fashion marketing has evolved dramatically, moving away from traditional marketing methods and towards using the power of social media platforms. Social media marketing dates back to the early 2000s, when social media platforms like MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter first emerged. Initially used for personal contact and networking, corporations quickly grasped social media's enormous potential as a marketing tool. Early adopters experimented with using social media platforms to communicate with their target audience, spread brand messaging, and increase website traffic. However, it was in the mid-2000s that social media marketing gained widespread awareness and use by organisations of all sizes and sectors. Introducing business-specific tools, such as Facebook Pages and Twitter Ads, aided in integrating social media into marketing plans, marking a watershed event in the history of digital marketing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)⁸. In the article "Going Digital?" The authors of "The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Retail Website Traffic, Orders, and Sales" highlight the relevance of social media in influencing customer purchasing decisions and boosting sales. The document highlights the importance of social media platforms such as Facebook in digital marketing strategies, emphasising increasing website traffic to maximise earnings. It emphasises an important point: while social media efforts might

⁶ Hsiao, S., Wang, Y., Wang, T., & Kao, T. (2024). How social media shapes the fashion industry: The spillover effects between private labels and national brands. *Industrial Marketing Management*. www.elsevier.com/locate/indmarman.

⁷ Madhura K. and Niyaz Panakaje. "Social Media as a Promotional Tool in the Fashion Industry: A Case Study on Meta Platforms Inc." *International Journal of Case Studies in Business, IT, and Education (IJCSBE)*, vol. 6, no. 1, May 2022, pp. 351.

⁸ Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.

increase website traffic, they do not always convert into a comparable rise in product orders and sales. The efficiency of social media marketing varies based on product complexity, cost, and brand status, highlighting the significance of taking a more personalised strategy for social media campaigns to achieve business outcomes successfully (Dolega et al., 2021)⁹.

1.2.1.1 The Influence of Visual Content on Consumer Behaviour in Social Media Fashion Marketing

Visual material is integral to social media fashion marketing since engaging photos and videos directly influence consumer behaviour and purchase decisions. Visual content has transformed how fashion goods are exhibited and consumed, resulting in immersive customer experiences. Fashion businesses may individually interact with their target audience by sharing visually appealing material on sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, which shapes their perceptions and influences their purchase decisions. The fascinating quality of visual content enables organisations to capitalise on current trends while communicating their unique value propositions, eventually boosting customer engagement and brand loyalty (Lim & Childs, 2020)¹⁰. The essay will investigate how the narrative components of a photograph promote self-brand connection by eliciting viewers' transportation and emotional reactions. It focuses on the influence of suggested movement and other narrative elements such as character, motion for chronology, and pertinent background information in developing a captivating picture narrative. The findings reveal that multiple narrative elements, such as implied motion, must transport the viewer into the image's narrative. Instead, viewer transportation and subsequent self-brand connection are achieved through complex and diverse narrative elements that encourage active simulation and meaning creation in the branded photo story.¹¹

This type of interaction was never possible before the advent of social media, which has completely revolutionised how we see a brand and the type of relationship created with it. In the following paragraphs, I will analyse other types of marketing techniques. However, it

⁹ Dolega, L., Rowe, F., & Branagan, E. (2021). Going digital? The impact of social media marketing on retail website traffic, orders and sales. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*.

¹⁰ Lim, H., & Childs, M. (2020). Visual storytelling on Instagram: branded photo narrative and the role of telepresence. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 14, 33-50. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jrim-09-2018-0115>.

¹¹ Xu, X. (2023). Influencer Marketing with Social Platforms: Increasing Brand Awareness and User Engagement. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.54097/ehss.v19i.11039>.

is essential to remember that all of those were only possible with social media, which is the precursor of all contemporary marketing methodologies.

1.2.2 Influencer marketing

In today's digital age, influencer marketing has emerged as a prominent and vital component of current marketing strategies, changing how businesses connect with customers on social media platforms.

This marketing technique is based on gaining followers' trust and loyalty while also attaining specific marketing goals such as product attitude and buy intent (Kim & Kim, 2021)¹². Some individuals who have managed to gain a substantial following and, therefore, influence within certain niches or sectors, known as influencers, can work with companies to push products or services to their audiences as those followers trust and admire those individuals. The better the link with the community, the greater the opportunities that can result from involvement. Because of aforesaid trust and admiration, influencers may significantly impact customer perceptions, alter purchase habits, and raise brand awareness, contributing to the brand's success. By utilising influencers' perceived genuineness, marketers may efficiently reach target audiences that were previously sceptical and increase brand awareness more organically. The efficacy of influencer marketing relies on connection, stimulating the emotional part of purchase patterns. It is emphasised through a comprehensive analysis of its impact on consumer engagement on social media platforms. This effect is analysed in the paper by Lou and Yuan (2019)¹³, where the utility and efficacy of influencer marketing are emphasised through a comprehensive analysis of its impact on consumer engagement on social media platforms. Through an online survey among social media users who follow at least one influencer, the study employed Partial Least Squares (PLS) path modelling to analyse the data. The results reveal that the informative value of influencer-generated content, alongside the influencer's trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity to the followers, significantly enhances followers' trust in influencers' branded posts.

Moreover, the research by Lou and Yuan (2019) highlights the intrinsic value of influencer marketing in driving brand awareness and purchase intentions among consumers. Through

¹² Kim, D., & Kim, H. (2021). Trust me, trust me not: A nuanced view of influencer marketing on social media. *Journal of Business Research*, 134, 223-232.

¹³ Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer Marketing: How Message Value and Credibility Affect Consumer Trust of Branded Content on Social Media. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 19, 58 - 73.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501>.

strategic partnerships with influencers, brands can amplify their messaging and reach new audiences with unparalleled efficacy. Unlike traditional forms of advertising, influencer marketing offers a more personalised and relatable approach to brand promotion, as influencers often integrate products or services seamlessly into their content, enhancing authenticity and consumer trust. This seamless integration allows marketers to communicate with consumers in a non-intrusive manner, encouraging real conversations and promoting meaningful engagement.

While influencer marketing has acquired universal acceptance and acknowledgement as a potent tool for brand promotion, there are times when a business may want to avoid this method. One major concern is aligning the influencer's brand with the brand you are trying to promote, as highlighted in research (Xu, 2023)¹⁴; if a celebrity or influencer's image clashes with the brand's values, it can potentially tarnish the brand's reputation and negatively impact consumer perceptions. Furthermore, social media material's satisfaction, especially influencer-generated content, can lead to positive brand assessments during the consumer purchasing process, reducing the efficacy of influencer marketing activities. Furthermore, the changing landscape of social media platforms and changed user behaviours make influencer marketing less successful. As platforms grow and user tastes shift, influencers may become less powerful at driving customer engagement and purchase choices. Furthermore, in recent years, there have been worries about the authenticity and reliability of influencers, with instances of deceptive advertising and fraudulent tactics calling influencer endorsements into question.

1.2.3 Content marketing

Hollebeek and Macky define digital content marketing (DCM) as "the creation and dissemination of relevant, valuable brand-related content to develop consumers' favourable brand engagement, trust, and relationships" (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019)¹⁵.

With the introduction of digital platforms, the paradigm of content marketing has been altered substantially, focusing on the creation of relevant material that fits client demands while smoothly integrating with the B2B selling processes. This method encourages a deeper connection with potential customers by providing customised content experiences. Still, it

¹⁴ Xu, X. (2023). Influencer Marketing with Social Platforms: Increasing Brand Awareness and User Engagement. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*.
<https://doi.org/10.54097/ehss.v19i.11039>.

¹⁵ Hollebeek, L., & Macky, K. (2019). Digital Content Marketing's Role in Fostering Consumer Engagement, Trust, and Value: Framework, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 45, 27 - 41.

also highlights the power of marketing automation solutions in expanding the reach and efficacy of content marketing tactics. Integrating marketing automation with content marketing tactics, particularly in the B2B sector, is a significant step towards more efficient and successful marketing procedures. This collaboration is essential for producing high-quality sales leads using advanced behavioural targeting and content customisation. In this context, Järvinen and Taiminen (2016)¹⁶ emphasise the importance of this integration, highlighting how B2B sellers may use digital material to motivate potential buyers to engage with their business. Because of that, companies may use marketing automation solutions to build tailored content experiences that satisfy consumer demands while also seamlessly integrating in the B2B selling processes, resulting in high-quality sales or leads using behavioural targeting.

Furthermore, Hollebeek and Macky (2019)¹⁷ discuss the influence of digital content marketing on consumer engagement, trust, and value, highlighting the importance of relevant, meaningful brand-related information in fostering positive brand engagement and trust on digital channels. This study emphasises the relevance of content customisation and behavioural targeting to develop deeper customer connections, which are critical for B2B organisations that are looking to translate engagement into concrete business benefits. Combined, these studies give convincing evidence of the transformational potential of using marketing automation and content marketing tactics together to improve lead generation and client engagement in the B2B sector (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

1.2.4 Experience Marketing

Experiential marketing, a key component of current advertising techniques, encapsulates the essence of engaging with customers through live, interactive campaigns or in-person events. This immersive strategy goes beyond traditional advertising by providing a participatory environment in which clients become part of the story, resulting in memorable encounters that resonate with clients on a personal level. In the fashion sector, which is known for its visually orientated character, experiential marketing is a critical instrument for creating brand identification which allows brands to transform into something that allows clients to

¹⁶ Järvinen, J., & Taiminen, H. (2016). Harnessing marketing automation for B2B content marketing. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54(0019-8501), 164–175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.07.002>

¹⁷ Hollebeek, L. D., & Macky, K. (2019). Digital Content Marketing's Role in Fostering Consumer Engagement, Trust, and Value: Framework, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 45(1), 27–41. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1016/j.intmar.2018.07.003>

express their inner self. Brands may also improve their market position by providing customers with products, stories, and experiences that convert casual shoppers into loyal supporters.

Looking at real-world applications, Nike's House of Innovation exemplifies successful experiential marketing. Nike's flagship shops are transformed into sites of engagement and customisation by integrating technology and physical locations. Shoppers may create shoes, test them in simulated surroundings such as virtual basketball courts, and engage with professional sportsmen. This creative strategy does more than improve the shopping experience; it reimagines Nike as a brand and a lifestyle, fostering a sense of community. Similarly, Burberry has successfully used experiential marketing to increase customer involvement. High-end business usually incorporates augmented reality (AR) mirrors into their retail rooms, which allows shoppers to visually try on items while learning about the brand's history. This combination of digital innovation and physical shopping experiences fosters an emotional tie between the consumer and the brand, making Burberry an essential component of the customer's identity story (Vorgias, P., 2024).

Experiential marketing goes beyond simply selling. Its goal is cultivating brand advocates—customers who become committed enthusiasts as a result of pleasant and memorable experiences. These clients do more than interact with the brand; they become its most valued boosters, sharing their experiences with their social networks and greatly adding to the company's cultural and economic capital. Such methods emphasise the necessity of designing engaging experiences that reflect the brand's values, ensuring that each encounter has purpose and relevance.

Nike and Burberry's instances demonstrate experiential marketing's revolutionary impact on fashion. By incorporating technology, customisation, and narrative into the retail experience, these firms have established new standards for consumer interaction. They show how natural, dynamic, and emotionally fascinating experiences can draw customers and convert them into enthusiastic brand ambassadors in the ever-changing world of fashion marketing.

1.2.5 Event Marketing

Event marketing in the fashion business refers to a promotional approach that leverages face-to-face contacts between companies and their target audience using conferences, trade fairs, seminars, and bespoke events. This sensory technique allows brands to have a more direct connection and interaction with its consumers, offering a physical sense of the brand's essence outside of both the digital and the traditional marketing channels. The importance

of event marketing can be demonstrated by its significant influence on corporate value and return on investment (ROI). According to a Harvard Business Review Analytic Services poll, 52% of respondents said event marketing generates greater business value than other marketing channels. In comparison, only 8% believed it drove less.

Furthermore, 23% of respondents were able to compute a clear ROI for their event activities, demonstrating the quantitative benefits of this technique. Notably, organisations experiencing rapid growth—those with 30% or more sales gains over two years—are the most likely to extend their event activities, demonstrating a clear link between event marketing and economic success. These findings highlight the importance of event marketing in creating client loyalty and aiding relationship marketing by providing unique, delightful experiences away from the norm (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, n.d.)¹⁸.

Event marketing has long played an essential role in the fashion business, with fashion weeks, catwalks, and exclusive debuts as the foundation for promotional efforts. These events are more than simply venues for launching new collections; they are also immersive experiences that engage people with the brand's design and spirit on a visceral level.

The development of event marketing in the fashion sector is shifting towards a storytelling approach, pushing luxury events to new heights. In 2024, marketers display items and create captivating storylines that immerse participants in their world. An excellent example is Dior's arrangement of an exclusive lunch on a private island in the Seine, followed by an open-air fashion presentation in Paris. This event demonstrates the trend of telling stories through the event's venue, cuisine, and overall mood, changing attendees from passive observers to active players in a rich narrative.

Luxury labels like Louis Vuitton and Dior are pioneering new ways to display products at private events. Launching a product today frequently includes interactive presentations that dive into its history, materials, and workmanship. Brands organise workshops with professional artists, providing hands-on experiences that allow guests to participate directly in the creative process, making the buying process even more tailored to the customer's taste. Furthermore, short-lived stores in renowned Parisian locations are evolving into experience environments where shopping is combined with personalised style consultations,

¹⁸ Harvard Business Review Analytic Services. The event marketing evolution An Era of Data, Technology, and Revenue Impact. <http://go.splashthat.com/rs/985-MUN-268/images/HBR-Report-Event-Marketing-Evolution-Splash.pdf>.

transforming the product from a mere object to a vital component of a sensory and emotional trip, further allowing the product to be part of one's brand identity. (Abecassis, 2023)¹⁹.

These improvements mirror a larger trend in luxury event marketing, which focuses on providing a comprehensive experience that combines the physical with the narrative. This ensures that each event serves as both a showcase and an entrance into an immersive brand story.

1.3 Sustainable Marketing in the Fashion and Luxury Industry

1.3.1 Trends and evolution towards sustainability in marketing

Consumer tastes have shifted significantly, especially in the fashion and luxury industries. With the rise of eco-conscious consumers increasingly demanding sustainable products and practices. This shift has been fuelled by the increased knowledge of the industry's environmental effect and customers' desire to match their purchase decisions with their personal beliefs.

Consumers now are more aware than ever before, actively discriminating brands who don't align with their values, carefully scrutinising firms' environmental credentials. Driven by the global sustainability movement, these environmentally conscious customers make purchase selections based on criteria such as ethical work conditions, waste reduction, and the use of sustainable materials. In response, well-known fashion and luxury businesses have started focusing on the adoption of sustainable supply chain management practices.

The introduction of new materials, such as recycled polyester, organic cotton, and plant-based leather substitutes, has allowed businesses to provide more ecological products. Also, implementing circular economy ideas and closed-loop recycling activities has become critical to the industry's transition to higher levels of sustainability. By embracing these practices, companies lessen their environmental impact while also appealing to a rising number of consumers who care to make a positive difference with their purchases.

Furthermore, communication of sustainability objectives has a tremendous impact on its image and consumer loyalty. Effective sustainability messaging that demonstrates a brand's true commitment to environmental and social responsibility. It may help the brand build

¹⁹ Abecassis, A. (2023). Emerging trends in luxury events. Acmé Paris - 1st B2B Event Agency in France.
<https://www.acmeparis.fr/en/edito/les-tendances-mergentes-dans-lvnementiel-de-luxe-quoi-de-neuf-en-2024->

stronger customer relationships and appear more transparent. However, this communication must go beyond greenwashing and show real, verifiable success.

1.3.2 Sustainability communication and impact on brand perception: should brands take a stand?

Effective communication of a brand's sustainability activities is critical in today's environmentally sensitive world. Consumers increasingly demand authenticity and transparency from businesses, and communicating its environmental and social effects may, therefore, have a huge impact on their image and consumer loyalty. Through customised messaging, companies may develop stronger connections with consumers who want to match their purchase decisions with their beliefs. However, this communication must go beyond greenwashing to demonstrate real, verifiable progress. When done correctly, sustainability messaging may boost a business's image, set it apart from competitors, and inspire increased brand advocacy among environmentally conscious consumers. While embracing sustainability is frequently regarded as desirable, it may sometimes generate great consequences for a firm. Many businesses are concerned about how activist-driven efforts may affect their image, reputation, and, eventually, earnings. They must also examine the asymmetry in customer responses to their social positions. When a company promotes issues regarded as "right" by society, the reaction is often neutral rather than overwhelmingly favourable. On the other hand, when a brand makes a mistake or takes a stance that contradicts customer values or the company's identity, the reaction may be severe. This can have adverse effects such as boycotts, bad word-of-mouth, and ruined reputations.

Even when businesses make significant efforts to establish strong positions and gain customer attention, these initiatives may cause controversy and divide public opinion. As demand for brand activism grows, consumers' political opinions have become more polarised, posing a significant challenge to firms. Taking a statement on complex subjects may alienate specific client groups. Despite these hurdles, some sustainability-driven marketing initiatives have achieved a balance, appealing to consumers while also delivering good social effects and corporate success.

1.4 Successful Fashion marketing campaigns: case analysis

This chapter focusses on three well-known sustainable marketing initiatives, exploring the marketing sector's impact on the fashion industry. In recent years, companies' activism and

consumers' interest in the matter has encouraged sustainable marketing in the fashion industry, as demonstrated by campaigns like Patagonia's 'Don't Buy This Jacket,' Stella McCartney's animal welfare campaigns, and Levi's Water Less® program. By focusing on these cases, the dissertation will be able to examine how firms promote their products while simultaneously generating broader discussions, affecting customer behaviour, and defining new fashion sustainability standards.

1.4.1 Patagonia

DON'T BUY THIS JACKET



Figure 2: Patagonia's "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign,

<https://eu.patagonia.com/it/it/stories/dont-buy-this-jacket-black-friday-and-the-new-york-times/story-18615.html>

Patagonia's "Don't Buy This Jacket" ad illustrates a successful sustainable fashion marketing technique. Rather than stressing the features of its products, Patagonia chose a unique strategy, urging people to purchase jackets only if they truly needed them. This clear and honest statement was consistent with the brand's longstanding commitment to environmental care and responsible consumption, even if it goes against its own interests.

In fact, this campaign separated the brand from traditional marketing efforts, which tend to concentrate on increasing sales and revenues. Instead, Patagonia chose to address the idea of mindless consumerism by encouraging customers to think carefully about their purchase decisions and the environmental effect of those choices. This message resonated with environmentally conscious buyers looking for firms that shared their principles, allowing them to be more comfortable with their purchases. Patagonia showed their dedication to waste reduction and environmental protection by limiting unneeded purchases. The ad

highlighted the brand's efforts to create long-lasting, repairable items that could be reused or repaired rather than being thrown away. This strategy appealed to customers and established Patagonia as a pioneer in sustainable fashion, bolstering the company's reputation as a socially careful business.

The popularity of the "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign demonstrates the need of true sustainability message in the fashion business. This campaign served to consolidate Patagonia's status as a trusted brand in sustainable fashion, encouraging increased brand loyalty and advocacy among customers. This proves that, rather than relying on superficial green claims or greenwashing, brands should take example from Patagonia's advertising which resonated with consumers and contributed to the brand's success.

1.4.2 Stella McCartney



Figure 3: Stella McCartney's animal welfare campaign, <https://www.hsi.org/news-resources/celebrities-join-stella-mccartney-and-hsi-campaign-to-end-fur-cruelty-in-fashion/>

Similarly, Stella McCartney's commitment to animal welfare and the circular economy has established the company as the leader in sustainable luxury fashion. Stella McCartney has taken a strong position against animal exploitation in the fashion industry by demonstrating their constant dedication to removing leather and fur from their designs. This ethical position connects powerfully with consumers who appreciate animal welfare.

Stella McCartney additionally pioneered the production of novel, plant-based leather substitutes that have the appearance and feel of classic leather but without any associated ethical concerns. The brand's use of sustainable materials, such as the "Alter Nappa" collection²⁰, displays a commitment to lowering their merchandise' environmental effect. Furthermore, Stella McCartney has been trying to reduce waste by completing the closing the loop and implementing circular economy principles, ensuring that their products could be recycled or repurposed at the end of their lives.

Stella McCartney has established a deep emotional connection with consumers who value environmentally conscious fashion by communicating transparently about its operations, making sure that consumers can look into the entire supply chain and be sure of the brand's endeavours. The brand's dedication to sustainability pervades all aspects of its operations, from material sourcing to manufacturing procedures and end-of-life product management. Stella McCartney's holistic approach to sustainability has established her as a leader in the luxury fashion business, motivating others to follow suit and fulfil the rising demand for sustainable and socially responsible products.

1.4.3 Levi's



Figure 4: Levi's Water<Less® campaign,

https://www.levi.com/IT/it_IT/features/waterless?srltid=AfmBOoqPQ4Rg0BWMHb4t2lMhEt2OfEn4VXC1cLctf1zoEE3HnXa8zwul

²⁰ Stella McCartney and Sustainability. (n.d.). Google Arts & Culture.
<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/stella-mccartney-and-sustainability-british-fashion-council/CAVRW3FfB40VJQ?hl=en#>

Levi's Water Less® line and water conservation programs have successfully communicated the brand's commitment to the environment to customers, cementing it as a green denim pioneer. Levi's has dramatically reduced its water footprint by using the Water Less® technique, which saves up to 96% of water throughout denim finishing stages. By employing this new method, the brand was able to lower its environmental footprint, providing consumers with an eco-friendly alternative to traditional denim.

In addition, Levi's has adopted a comprehensive approach to sustainability throughout its entire supply chain. In fact, the corporation has set ambitious targets regarding reduced greenhouse gas emissions, increased use of recycled materials, and expanded clothing recycling program, allowing the consumer to actively participate in the process. Through this initiative, Levi's has proved their commitment to sustainability showing the desire to lead the industry towards more responsible practices and transparently communicating about these projects.

1.5 Ineffective Fashion marketing campaigns: case analysis

Brand activism strategies can sometimes face challenges. When a brand takes a stand on controversial social or political topics, it risks pushing away customers who disagree with it. This can lead to losing support from people who might have otherwise been loyal.

However, the biggest risk isn't just losing customers over disagreements but rather being seen as fake or insensitive. If a campaign feels fake, it can quickly fail. This happens when there's a gap between what the company claims to believe and the cause it chooses to support. Customers may, therefore, believe that the company is simply taking advantage of critical social concerns to gain money rather than genuinely caring about the cause. This can harm the brand's reputation and make consumers less inclined to believe them in the future (Vredenburg et al., 2020)²¹.

Pepsi's 2017 ad featuring Kendall Jenner, "Live for Now—Moments,"²² is a well-known example of a brand activism campaign that failed due to perceived insensitivity. The ad attempted to connect Pepsi with social justice movements by portraying a protest scenario that many viewers compared to real-life events such as Black Lives Matter. Instead of eliciting an emotional response, it was criticised for dismissing severe societal concerns.

²¹ Vredenburg, J., Kapitan, S., Spry, A., & Kemper, J. (2020). Brands Taking a Stand: Authentic Brand Activism or Woke Washing?. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 39, 444 - 460. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743915620947359>.

²² Pepsi - Live For Now (with Kendall Jenner, 2017). (2017). [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqQG4cGl2dI). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqQG4cGl2dI>

The ad portrays Kendall Jenner, the known reality star and supermodel, posing in a photoshoot when she spots a neighbouring protest. The protest remains unclear, with individuals holding posters that read "Join the Conversation" and, therefore, not even engaging in an actual real-life topic. Jenner eventually joins the crowd, approaching a group of police officers and offering one of them a Pepsi. The cop sips the Pepsi, and the audience celebrates, signifying that the conflict between protesters and police has been settled.

The advertisement received criticism for various reasons. Many believed it significantly downplayed the importance of social movements, particularly those that addressed racial inequity and police brutality. By implying that Pepsi could solve such deep-rooted concerns, the advertisement reduced actual conflicts, such as Black Lives Matter, to something that could be quickly resolved with a soft drink. Furthermore, the picture of Jenner, a wealthy white celebrity, handing a Pepsi to a police officer seems tone-deaf, particularly in light of real-life conflicts between demonstrators and law enforcement. A particular analogy was made to a famous photo of Ieshia Evans, a Black lady who stood quietly in front of riot police at a Black Lives Matter rally; this obviously further exaggerated the inadequacy of the ad.

People also accused Pepsi of using social justice movements to sell products without truly caring about the causes they were portraying. This led to widespread outrage, especially on social media, where hashtags like #PepsiGate trended. Activists, celebrities, and the public heavily criticised the ad. Pepsi withdrew the commercial barely one day after its premiere and apologised, adding, "We missed the mark."

The unsuccessful campaign had significant consequences. Pepsi's reputation was harmed, particularly among younger, socially sensitive consumers. Many people believed the firm was out of touch with actual social justice problems. Also, Kendall Jenner, the ad's face, received criticism, but still, most of the blame rested on Pepsi. Jenner subsequently expressed guilt for participating in the advertisement on her family's reality program, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (Craddock et al., 2018)²³.

1.6 Sustainability Metrics and Reporting

Effective sustainability reporting is critical for organisations seeking to convey their environmental and social impact to stakeholders in a transparent manner. Companies that set

²³ Craddock, J., Boichuk, J., Cian, L., & Parmar, B. (2018). Brand Activism. *Games & Political Behavior eJournal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3207042>.

clear sustainability measures may assess and track their performance while adhering to industry standards and frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)²⁴, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)²⁵, and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) guidelines²⁶. This displays accountability and enables benchmarking progress and finding opportunities for continuing development. Robust sustainability reporting improves brand reputation, fosters confidence among customers, investors, and other stakeholders, and ensures consistent, transparent communication via yearly reports, brand websites, and social media platforms.

1.6.1.1 Sustainability Metrics and Reporting



Figure 5: The Elements of Sustainability Reporting according to ESG Principle,
<https://www.burohappold.com/articles/esg-and-why-is-it-important/>

The ESG acronym stands for three key elements: environment, social, and governance. These components provide the methodical framework for every sustainability report. They

²⁴ GRI. (2019). Global Reporting Initiative. Globalreporting.org. <https://www.globalreporting.org>

²⁵ United Nations. (n.d.). The 17 sustainable development goals. United Nations. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

²⁶ Joss-Bethlehem, E. (2023, July 17). The Elements of Sustainability Reporting. WordWorx, <https://www.elizabethjoss.com/the-elements-of-sustainability-reporting/?srsltid=AfmBOoqHUF17EdQkwlrR4SJxesDtlyFH24hCbkiDfjDWtl-o3tWQ0qy>

may serve as a solid structure for your report, helping to organise ideas and material while also driving your overall ESG story.

The following analysis will outline the components of sustainability reporting and the material that can be included in each section. While these main components can provide a structure, it is advisable to include additional sections in your publication. For instance, a dedicated section on policies or a section at the end that addresses acronyms used throughout the report.

- **Governance:** effective governance integrates and incorporates sustainability into core plans and operations, including internal reviews to match practices with organisational aims. It also entails developing compliance and measurement systems that reconcile corporate regulations with external sustainability benchmarks. This comprises internal solid controls, rules, and processes that regulate leadership, board makeup, and the roles of sustainability committees.
- **Environment:** it emphasises minimising an organisation's impact on the natural world. Key initiatives include pursuing carbon neutrality, water conservation, and waste management. Addressing climate change, carbon emissions, biodiversity, and air pollution is essential, with strategies focused on reducing carbon footprints, protecting ecosystems, and managing air quality.
- **Social:** The social factor of sustainability is on employee fairness and broader societal effect. This involves paying equitable salaries, increasing employee engagement, and encouraging diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI). Organisations also do community outreach and preserve good labour standards and human rights. Furthermore, data protection, privacy, and gender-related efforts are critical for promoting social justice and improving the overall sustainability plan.

CHAPTER II - BRAND ACTIVISM

In today's corporate world, brand activism has evolved into a powerful force, transforming the connection between firms, customers, and society overall. Brand activism represents a substantial shift away from standard corporate social responsibility and towards a more involved, issue-driven strategy in which companies actively participate in societal debates and movements. This shift is more than a simple response to ever-changing customer expectations. It represents a more profound understanding of a corporation's role in society—an idea carefully dealt with by Peter Drucker in his seminal essay "The Concept of the Corporation" (1946)²⁷.

Drucker's observations regarding the nature and responsibilities of companies serve as a proactive framework for comprehending brand activism. He frequently refers to "the corporation as a social institution," implying that it owes its existence to society, while also stating, "But if a social institution operates in such a manner as to make difficult or impossible the attainment of the basic ethical purposes of society it will bring about a severe political crisis" (Drucker, 1946). This phrase emphasises the fundamental relationship between businesses and their social environment. It implies that companies are not separate entities focused exclusively on profit, but one of the essential components of the social system that therefore has greater obligations.

Brand activism today is a manifestation of Drucker's vision, in which businesses actively engage in social, political, environmental, and economic concerns by advocating for change, creating discourse, and taking a stance on a variety of topics.

This chapter examines the multidimensional nature of brand activism, including social, workplace, political, environmental, economic, and legal manifestations. Each kind of activism highlights one particular aspect of a company's involvement in societal concerns, ranging from campaigning for social justice and equality (social activism) to promoting sustainable environmental practices (environmental activism). By understanding these various kinds, we can comprehend the importance of brand activism in today's business environment.

Furthermore, brand activism can strengthen a brand's reputation, dramatically influencing how customers see it. The famous quote, "The best way to predict the future is to create it",

²⁷ Drucker, P.F., (1946). Concept Of the Corporation. In Internet Archive. The John Day Company, 133.

attributed both to Drucker and Abraham Lincoln, is very appropriate here. Brands that engage in activist actions address present societal concerns and shape the future societal environment. This proactive position may improve a brand's reputation, attract like-minded customers, and set it apart from competitors.

However, brand activism can have controversy and problems. While some perceive it as an honest company effort to contribute to society positively, others dispute the intentions behind such activism, claiming it is motivated more by self-interest than compassion. This chapter will evaluate which perspective is more valid, considering how modern organisations traverse the complicated environment of reconciling societal commitments with economic goals. We hope that this research will help us comprehend how they are reinventing what it means to be a corporation in the twenty-first century.

2.1 The prerequisites for the rise of Brand activism

Brand activism is a recently identified phenomenon whose origins and development are rooted in the societal changes that began in the 1970s and have reached their peak in recent years. Without a comprehensive understanding of the social, cultural, and political context, it would be difficult to fully grasp this new "marketing strategy," deeply rooted in an era of uncertainty and precariousness²⁸.

The following paragraphs discuss the evolving dynamic between brands and consumers. Historically, companies have relied on a push strategy, which has progressively been substituted by a pull strategy, resulting in a hybrid model where consumers and brands participate in reciprocal communication²⁹.

Over the past few years, communication has transitioned from content provided by brands to content produced or worked on by external individuals, marking an end to the unidirectional communication methodologies employed by firms. Consequently, it is easy to understand the transformation in brands' messaging, systems of communication, and consumer response.

²⁸ Eilert, M.; Nappier Cherup, A. The activist company: Examining a company's pursuit of societal change through corporate activism using an institutional theoretical lens. *J. Public Policy Mark.* 2020, 39, 461–476.

²⁹ Marketing Communications Planning. (2023). Marketing communications planning is the process of developing and implementing a coherent and consistent message that supports your business goals and connects with your target audience. One of the key decisions you need to make is whether to use a push or a pull strategy, or a combination of both,. *Linkedin.com*. <https://www.linkedin.com/advice/1/what-key-differences-between-push-pull>

Consumer knowledge and comprehension have improved as data and sharing platforms have become more accessible. They currently serve as both debate authors and market significant participants. The previously indicated paradigm shift is an essential factor contributing to the emergence of brand activism, but it is not the only one.

Before describing brand activism, it is critical to understand the sociocultural context, the behaviour of postmodern consumers, and the digital revolution that laid the groundwork for the phenomenon.

2.1.1 Purpose

Some scholars argue that brand activism (BA) is closely related to corporate social advocacy (CSA), where companies take a clear stance on political or social issues (ElAlfy et al., 2020; Moorman, 2020)³⁰. Wettstein and Baur (2016)³¹ identify three crucial requirements for real advocacy: consistency (alignment with the company's values), plausibility (long-term commitment to the cause), and authenticity (actions beyond words). Vredenburg et al. (2020)³² highlight that authenticity in BA entails matching brand purpose, values, message, and business practices.

The authors identify three main factors influencing BA authenticity:

- 1) Employees, stakeholders, and the market understand the brand's purpose and core values.
- 2) The content and messaging distributed across various media channels
- 3) The prosocial corporate practices and how stakeholders perceive these actions. A misalignment between the brand's values and actions can damage brand equity and lead to "woke washing".

2.1.2 Initiatives

Demonstrating a real dedication to a cause is challenging. Public support for a cause is insufficient and can lead to increased judgement (Carlos et al., 2018)³³. An activist brand must engage in visible actions that promote change and actively seek the

³⁰ Moorman, C. Commentary: Brand activism in a political world. *J. Public Policy Mark.* 2020, 39, 388–392.1

³¹ Wettstein, F.; Baur, D. "Why should we care about marriage equality?": Political advocacy as a part of corporate responsibility. *J. Bus. Ethics* 2016, 138, 199–213.

³² Vredenburg, J.; Kapitan, S.; Spry, A.; Kemper, J.A. Brands taking a stand: Authentic brand activism or woke washing? *J. Public Policy Mark.* 2020.

³³ Carlos, W.C.; Lewis, B.W. Strategic silence: Withholding certification status as a hypocrisy avoidance tactic. *Adm. Sci. Q.* 2018, 63, 130–169.

common good (Sarkar, Kotler, 2018)³⁴. For example, if a brand advocates for diversity and racial equality, its employees should embody these beliefs. Companies interested in brand activism may initiate a variety of activities aimed at various institutional players, such as government authorities, regulatory agencies, industry groupings, and civil society organisations, in order to generate pressure and promote significant change (Briscoe and Gupta, 2016)³⁵. Companies that engage strategically with these individuals can increase their impact on critical social or political problems while also fostering larger systemic change.

2.1.3 Communication

Academic research indicates that BA is primarily displayed through communication activities such as cause-related advertising and campaigns (Accenture, 2019)³⁶. Nowadays, social media has empowered activism by providing political and social discourse platforms, allowing users to voice their views and develop collective identities to gather support for concerns when necessary (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015)³⁷. Social media also enables companies to exhibit authenticity by connecting with communities, resolving problems, and cultivating connections to stimulate social involvement (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). Brands may personalise their message across numerous channels to provide transparency and evidence of their efforts. Corporate blogs and websites, for example, may highlight a brand's ideas and values while also providing verifiable evidence of its efforts (Korschun et al., 2021)³⁸.

2.2 Key Concepts and Definitions

Brand activism, as defined by Philip Kotler and Christian Sarkar in "Brand Activism: From Purpose to Action," encapsulates the strategic involvement of businesses in "efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to promote or impede improvements in society" (2018, p. 570).

³⁴ Sarkar, C.; Kotler, P. *Brand Activism: From Purpose to Action*; Idea Bite Press: College Station, TX, USA, 2018.

³⁵ Briscoe, F.; Gupta, A. Social activism in and around organizations. *Acad. Manag. Ann.* 2016, 10, 671–727.

³⁶ Accenture. (2018). *ACHIEVE COMPETITIVE AGILITY*.

https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/thought-leadership-assets/pdf/accenture-competitiveagility-gcpr-pov.pdf

³⁷ Velasquez, A.; LaRose, R. Social media for social change: Social media political efficacy and activism in student activist groups. *J. Broadcast. Electron. Media* 2015, 59, 456–474.

³⁸ Korschun, D. Brand Activism Is Here to Stay: Here's Why. *NIM Mark. Intell. Rev.* 2021, 13, 11–17.

This concept, underpinned by a "fundamental concern for the biggest and most urgent problems facing society," represents a paradigm shift in how businesses perceive their roles within the broader social fabric. Historically, the corporate world's primary objective has been the pursuit of profit and shareholder value; before the 90s, the objective was to make the least possible effort to look good. In the book *Corporate Social Responsibility: Doing the Most Good for your company and Your Cause*, the authors explain how corporate help to social causes was given to as many organisations as possible to satisfy the most significant number of customers and never addressed controversial issues, such as AIDS (Kotler & Lee, 2008)³⁹. Over time, it became critical not just to pay a check but also to take action and become involved in social concerns that the public cares about. However, as societal expectations developed, so did the notion of brand advocacy. Today, it represents a more integrated and strategic approach in which firms actively utilise their power and resources to effect social change or promote causes that are consistent with their values and those of their stakeholders. This evolution represents a recognition of the link between corporate success and societal well-being, as evidenced by an increasing demand from consumers, employees, and the general public for brands to take a stand on issues ranging from climate change and inequality to political transparency and economic justice. In this setting, brand activism has evolved not just as a response to external forces but also as a strategic necessity that fits with the long-term interests of both businesses and the society in which they operate, emphasising its importance in today's fast-changing global scene.

2.2.1 Differences between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Brand Activism

Brand activism and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are two concepts that frequently come up in discussions concerning firms and their involvement in societal issues. However, they are motivated by drastically different goals. According to Philip Kotler and Christian Sarkar in "Brand Activism: From Purpose to Action,"⁴⁰ s goal is to use corporate power to effect meaningful change or address critical problems. This strategic nature inspires businesses to actively strive to influence social, political, economic, and environmental changes or stagnation based on a strong desire to support society's progress. This is very different from the traditional corporate social responsibility perspective, which is based on

³⁹ Kotler, P., & Lee, N. (2008). *Corporate social responsibility: Doing the most good for your company and your cause*. John Wiley & Sons.

⁴⁰ Sarkar, C.; Kotler, P. *Brand Activism: From Purpose to Action*; Idea Bite Press: College Station, TX, USA, 2018.

the principle of being a good corporate citizen. CSR often entails businesses accepting responsibility for their overall impact on the environment, customers, workers, communities, and stakeholders. It encompasses a wide range of activities, such as environmental sustainability initiatives, ethical business practices, and charity contributions, all of which are designed to improve the company's reputation and long-term performance. While CSR may be considered as part of a company's operational hygiene, with an emphasis on doing no harm and ensuring ethical conduct, brand activism goes a step further by portraying the firm as a change agent, actively working to fix the core causes of social problems. This difference demonstrates the transition in company engagement from a passive commitment to ethical behaviour and sustainability to an active and urgent response to societal problems.

2.2.2 Progressive and regressive activism



Figure 6: Brand Activism spectrum, Philip Kotler and Cristian Sarkar, "Finally, Brand Activism!"

Brand activism spans a range, with progressive and regressive activity on opposing extremes. The difference is based on the entity's contribution to the common good and the ethical concerns that guide its conduct.

The difference between progressive and regressive brand activism proposed by Kotler and Sarkar is crucial in determining the genuine influence of corporate actions on society. This distinction is more than just semantics; it represents a deeper examination of the aims, techniques, and consequences connected with corporate activism. Progressive brand activism is characterised by a proactive commitment to addressing social challenges, which generally means that we need business decisions that prioritise long-term societal benefits over short-term financial returns. This strategy is centred on the idea of business being a beneficial catalyst, trying to solve societal concerns at their root through innovative solutions, ethical practices, and accountable stewardship.

Brand activism and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are two concepts that frequently come up in discussions concerning firms and their involvement in societal issues. However, they are motivated by drastically different goals. According to Philip Kotler and Christian Sarkar in "Brand Activism: From Purpose to Action," brand activism is a planned and proactive strategy inspired by a desire to address significant social issues. Its goal is to use corporate power to effect meaningful change or address critical problems. This strategic nature inspires businesses to actively strive to influence social, political, economic, and environmental changes or stagnation based on a strong desire to support society progress. This is very different from the traditional perspective of corporate social responsibility, which is based on the principle of being a good corporate citizen. CSR often entails businesses accepting responsibility for their overall impact on the environment, customers, workers, communities, and stakeholders. It encompasses a wide range of activities, such as environmental sustainability initiatives, ethical business practices, and charity contributions, all of which are designed to improve the company's reputation and long-term performance. While CSR may be considered as part of a company's operational hygiene, with an emphasis on doing no harm and ensuring ethical conduct, brand activism goes a step further by portraying the firm as a change agent, actively working to fix the core causes of social problems.

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On the other hand, regressive brand activism represents a more cynical or opportunistic approach. Companies may participate in actions that, purposefully or unintentionally, worsen social, environmental, or economic issues. Such acts may prioritise short-term earnings or strategic benefits over the common good, indicating a misalignment between proclaimed company ideals and actual behaviour.

Progressive brand activism can help differentiate the brand from others in the same category. One example is Unilever, which, in addition to trying to be more sustainable (Unilever, 2021)⁴¹, promotes acceptance by not investing in platforms known to spread hatred and violence.

2.3 Different types of brand activism

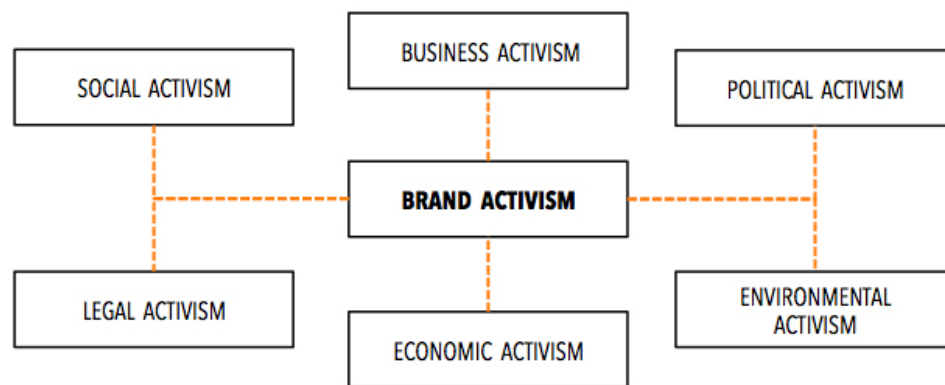


Figure 7: The six areas of brand activism, according to Philip Kotler and Cristian Sarkar, "Finally, Brand Activism!"

After providing an initial definition of Brand activism, it is also appropriate to identify the main areas in which Brand Activism can take place. Brand activism embodies the strategic alignment of a brand's operations, marketing endeavours, and overarching ethos with broader societal, political, and environmental values, reflecting a significant evolution in corporate responsibility and public engagement. This dynamic strategy deviates from traditional commercial practices by directly incorporating activism into the brand's identity, resulting in increased consumer involvement. Customers are increasingly drawn to firms that offer high-quality products and services while also reflecting their own beliefs and societal concerns. As a result, brand activism has emerged as a key marketing tactic, allowing

⁴¹ Unilever (2021). Unilever Sustainable Living Plan 2010 to 2020. [online] Unilever.com. <https://www.unilever.com/files/92ui5egz/production/16cb778e4d31b81509dc5937001559f1f5c863ab.pdf>.

businesses to engage meaningfully in the global debate on vital problems. This transformational approach is manifested through a variety of fields, including social, workplace, political, environmental, economic, and legal settings, each of which provides a unique opportunity for brands to demonstrate their commitment to societal advancement and ethical business practices. The following sections will delve into these categories, elucidating how brands have successfully navigated the complex landscape of brand activism through targeted initiatives and campaigns, thereby illustrating the multifaceted nature of this contemporary marketing phenomenon.

2.3.1 Social Activism

Companies' social involvement demonstrates a strong dedication to engaging with and addressing significant societal issues ranging from gender equality to LGBTQ+ rights, ageism, and ethnic diversity. It also includes a brand's efforts to address community and societal issues such as education, healthcare, privacy, and security. This holistic strategy enables companies to express their views on critical social issues and actively contribute to societal improvement through a variety of initiatives and campaigns. Social activism in branding is more than just corporate social responsibility; it is an essential component of the brand's identity and messaging, with the goal of influencing society norms, attitudes, and behaviours to produce more equal and inclusive outcomes.

Gillette's 2019 campaign, "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be," is a perfect example of social action manifested via corporate marketing. This commercial marked a significant shift in Gillette's brand image, which had previously been associated with a traditional concept of masculinity. By tackling current themes like toxic masculinity and misogyny, Gillette created a worldwide discourse and demonstrated a substantial shift in its brand philosophy. The campaign soon went viral, reaching over 1.8 billion views, proving the broad influence that a well-planned brand activism program can have on public conversation. Gillette's ad was groundbreaking in its direct confrontation with social concerns, questioning long-held masculinity-associated conventions and behaviours (Mirzaei & al., 2022, p. 2; Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 444). The campaign, which urged men to hold one other accountable and set positive models for the next generation, struck a chord with a large audience, encouraging thought and conversation about what it means to be a man in today's society. This strategy was a significant break from the brand's prior marketing techniques, linking Gillette with a more progressive, inclusive view of masculinity.

Furthermore, Gillette's dedication to social advocacy beyond the internet arena. The corporation agreed to provide \$1 million each year for three years to non-profit groups that promote educational and inspiring activities for men of all ages. This financial contribution strengthened Gillette's position in brand activism by displaying a genuine investment in the issues it supported. Through these projects, Gillette demonstrated how companies can utilise their position and resources to encourage societal change by increasing awareness and making material contributions to the advancement of social ideals and concerns.

In essence, social activism in branding, as seen in Gillette's "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be" campaign, is a strategy change towards confronting and solving societal concerns directly on. This paradigm not only transforms the interaction between businesses and their customers, but it also highlights marketing's potential as a strong vehicle for social change. By combining their identity with social activity, businesses like Gillette pave the path for a more socially conscious corporate landscape in which a brand's influence goes well beyond its goods to its beneficial societal effect.

2.2.2. Workplace Activism

Workplace activism represents firms' complete processes and practices for ensuring justice, equity, and ethical behaviour in corporate governance, employee relations, compensation policy, and supply chain management. This complex idea goes beyond the usual limits of corporate social responsibility and integrates itself into the organization's operational culture. It shows firms' intentional attempts to align internal operations with wider social principles, such as openness, inclusion, and sustainability. Workplace activism involves critically reviewing and redesigning corporate structures, remuneration systems, and labour relations in order to cultivate a culture of respect, dignity, and mutual benefit for all stakeholders. This involves providing equal pay to firm leaders and staff, assuring fair treatment and representation of workers, working constructively with trade unions, and adopting sustainable and ethical supply chain procedures.

An outstanding example is the Embankment Project for Inclusive Capitalism (EPIC), founded by the Coalition for Inclusive Capitalism and Ernst & Young (EY)⁴², which shows how worker activism may be incorporated into corporate governance and strategy. EPIC's

⁴² Ernst & Young (EY). (2020). Embankment Project for Inclusive Capitalism. https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_ca/topics/transaction-advisory-services/ey-the-embankment-project-for-inclusive-capitalism-report.pdf.

objective to reinvent how firms assess and convey their value represents an important milestone towards inclusive capitalism. EPIC emphasises the value of broadening corporate responsibility and performance beyond traditional financial measurements by providing a defined set of indicators to analyse a company's contributions to economic development, environmental sustainability, and social well-being.

A key component of EPIC's corporate governance focus is to improve openness and effectiveness in how corporate boards may contribute to a company's long-term strategy and value development. EPIC promotes an enhanced approach to corporate board disclosure, recognising that current disclosures frequently fail to give investors and other stakeholders with a full understanding of a board's role in setting long-term strategy. This entails developing standard measurements that provide insights into the board's composition and competencies, defining how the skills and expertise of board members contribute and how these traits connect with the company's strategic goals and milestones. Such transparency is critical for stakeholders to evaluate the board's success in leading the firm towards long-term and inclusive growth.

EPIC adds to the wider agenda of workplace activism by highlighting the need for governance in attaining long-term commercial success and societal impact. This method is consistent with workplace activism ideas since it advocates for a corporate governance model that is not just open and accountable, but also profoundly bound by the strategic planning and ethical concerns required for inclusive capitalism.

EPIC's programs demonstrate how worker activism can appear at the highest levels of corporate strategy and governance. It also promotes a more responsible form of capitalism by advocating for a new standard in which enterprises are evaluated based on a thorough understanding of their governance structures, strategic planning, and long-term wealth generation. This emphasis on improving corporate governance and board performance within workplace activism underlines the interdependence between ethical business practices, strategic planning, and the pursuit of a more equitable business ecosystem.

2.2.3. Political Activism

Political activism refers to firms' bold approach to openly engaging with the political landscape in order to influence policy, legislative reform, and public opinion on crucial societal issues. This type of activism extends beyond standard commercial activities, establishing brands as active political actors through advocacy, vote privatisation schemes, political fundraising, and public advocacy. Political activism by brands entails a purposeful

attempt to shape and contribute to political debate, advocating for policies and regulations that are consistent with their beliefs and mission. This participation reflects a deeper awareness of companies' role in advancing societal development, as they use their platforms, influence, and resources to push for real change on critical issues.

Ben & Jerry's "Pecan Resist" campaign, which started in 2018, is a striking example of brand-led political action.⁴³ Ben & Jerry's utilised this campaign to show its unequivocal opposition to President Trump's policies, which the firm perceived as undermining decades of progress on vital issues such as climate change, racial and gender fairness, refugee and immigrant rights, and LGBTQ rights. These subjects are strongly embedded in Ben & Jerry's social purpose, illustrating the company's long-standing commitment to social justice and environmental sustainability. The "Pecan Resist" campaign was more than just a symbolic gesture; it was a call to action, encouraging consumers to actively participate in the electoral process and speak out against policies that they thought contradicted the company's principles and the larger interests of society.

To magnify its aim and effect, Ben & Jerry's gave \$25,000 to four organisations that line up with the campaign's goals: Colours of Change, Honour the Earth, Women's March, and Neta. Each of these institutions works relentlessly to address the structural injustices and problems highlighted by the "Pecan Resist" campaign, ranging from combatting discrimination based on race and environmental degradation to lobbying for women's rights and also assisting communities affected by immigration policy. Ben & Jerry's total gift of \$100,000 was both a cash boost to these charities and a strategic attempt to create awareness among the brand's large fan base, urging them to support and interact with these causes.

The campaign demonstrates how firms can utilise their voice and resources to actively participate in politics and be spokesmen for justice rather than laying back and being indifferent. Through the initiative, the brand demonstrated the power that companies have to influence political debate and contribute to societal advancement just by taking a stand on controversial topics and supporting groups working on the front lines of social change. This approach to political activism reflects the rising customers' expectation that corporations address societal concerns proactively, utilising their platform not only for financial benefit but also to be a force for good in the world. This shows that brands are actually able to motivate crowds, encourage conversation, and drive change using projects like "Pecan Resist," while also making a profit and enhancing the brand's visibility and success by targeting those who align with the company's values.

⁴³ Hoeffner, M.K. (n.d.). Ben & Jerry's Launches New Resistance-Themed Ice Cream Pints. [online] Forbes. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/melissakravitz/2018/10/30/ben-jerrys-pecan-resist-trump/#>.

2.2.4. Environmental Activism

Environmental activism refers to a broad set of efforts conducted by businesses to address serious environmental concerns. This type of activism aims to influence and implement conservation activities, improve environmental regulations, and promote sustainable practices in land use, air and water pollution legislation, and overall ecological conservation. The primary goal of corporate environmental activism is to reduce the negative ecological effects of company operations, promoting a more environmentally responsible approach to production, distribution, and consumption.

Eco-conscious businesses try to catalyse major change through strategic initiatives and policy advocacy, to preserve natural resources, reduce pollution, and contribute to the planet's general health.

Loop's operations serve as a perfect example of environmental advocacy. This revolutionary company promotes circular economy ideas to prevent food waste as well as reusable packaging usage. Loop runs on a basic, yet revolutionary, model, with the name "loop" representing a continuous, circular process of consumption and reuse⁴⁴. To guarantee that packaging does not turn into waste, the firm works with customers and a wide range of partner brands, including industry giants such as Nestlé, Carrefour, Tesco, PepsiCo, and Coca-Cola. Instead of throwing it away, the packaging is intended to be returned, cleaned, and reused, greatly minimising the environmental effect of single-use packaging. Loop's effort targets crucial concerns such as resource waste and greenhouse gas emissions along the whole production chain, from manufacturing to final consumption, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to environmental sustainability and waste reduction. Given their unique position in the supply chain between upstream suppliers and downstream customers, retailers are critical to a circular economy in which items at the end of their useful life are returned to the supply chain for further use. Retail efforts may aid in the reduction, reuse, and recycling of materials by connecting suppliers and customers. Furthermore, retailers may use their unique position in the supply chain to help promote and validate a focus on social concerns throughout the supply chain.

While Loop offers a fresh approach to environmental activism, the actions of Patagonia, a well-known outdoor apparel business, highlight the multidimensional nature of brand activism in the environmental sector. Patagonia has positioned itself as the leader of the fight against climate change, always using its brand authority to invite customers to sustainable

⁴⁴ exploreloop.com. (n.d.). Shop. [online] Available at: <https://exploreloop.com/shop/?country=us>.

habits combating the disposable nature of fast fashion. As mentioned in the previous chapter Patagonia's Black Friday ad in The New York Times in 2013, which read: "Don't buy this jacket" is one of the most iconic ads of this sector as it completely went against traditional company interests, benefitting the general public. This distinct marketing strategy, typical of reverse marketing, urged customers to ponder the significance of what they were purchasing. Patagonia's advertising fostered a paradigm shift towards prioritising quality and sustainability over quantity, emphasising the environmental impact of garment manufacturing. Despite its counterintuitive nature, this advertisement not only improved Patagonia's reputation as an environmental steward but also increased sales of the jacket it warned against by 30%. This result demonstrates the effectiveness of combining marketing methods with environmental action to appeal to a rising group of eco-conscious consumers. This kind of campaign worked so well because it is perceived as authentic as it isn't the first time they were doing something like this. In fact, in 2014 they announced that 100% of the voting shares were transferred to the Patagonia Purpose Trust, which was established to protect and defend the company's values, while 100% of the non-voting shares were transferred to the Holdfast Collective, a non-profit organisation dedicated to combating the environmental crisis and defending nature⁴⁵.

Loop and Patagonia both demonstrate the diverse range of environmental activism within brand activism, from pioneering reusable packaging solutions to questioning consumer behaviour and fast fashion industry conventions. These examples demonstrate businesses' capacity to serve as catalysts for sustainable living. Companies that incorporate environmental activism into their fundamental principles and operations can provide a good example, motivating individuals and the larger business community to embrace more sustainable practices.

2.2.5. Economic activism

In the context of brand activism, economic activism refers to a company's strategic efforts to address and influence economic policies and practices such as minimum wage rules, tax policies, income inequality, and wealth redistribution. This type of activism tries to use companies' economic influence to achieve larger societal change by lobbying for legislation and practices that promote economic fairness and sustainable development. Economic

⁴⁵ Il nostro unico azionista ora è il pianeta | Patagonia IT. (2014). Patagonia.com.
<https://eu.patagonia.com/it/it/ownership/?srsId=AfmBOorYEA0yQuryr0qU1Nzve1wdB96wgaV4L6baBSIf0WxadcGtEqkS>

activism extends beyond a company's direct commercial activities, demonstrating a desire to positively affect the larger economic environment in which it works. Brands that participate in economic activism have a deep grasp of their role in establishing a more equitable and inclusive economy, connecting their business practices with initiatives to improve community welfare, promote local economies, and address fundamental economic imbalances.

Volkswagen South Africa's "Drive Local, Support Local" campaign⁴⁶, was launched in 2020 in response to the financial implications of the COVID-19 epidemic. The initiative perfectly illustrates economic activism as Volkswagen implemented a comprehensive plan to promote local economic recovery by recognising the significant challenges that local enterprises and the South African industry faced as a result of lockdown measures. Meredith Kelly, Head of Marketing at Volkswagen South Africa, stated that the campaign wanted to support small companies and contribute to the country's economic recovery. Volkswagen's strategy included a wide range of measures, from investing in local performances and assisting female entrepreneurs through the VW Lionesses Den competition to sponsoring non-profit groups. Volkswagen also gave back to the community by constructing a temporary medical clinic for COVID-19 patients in the Eastern Cape and leveraging its technological expertise to offer crucial medical equipment like ventilators.

Volkswagen introduced the 'Little Blue Book' in October 2020 to amplify the impact of its "Drive Local, Support Local" initiative. This one-of-a-kind project was a curated online business directory complete with reviews, photos, and video material to assist South Africans in discovering and supporting local companies. The 'Little Blue Book' aimed to provide small businesses, particularly those with limited marketing expenditures, with a platform to contact potential customers, therefore giving economic assistance during a critical era. The book illustrates how brands can utilise their resources and platforms to support local economies and small enterprises, fostering an atmosphere that promotes economic resilience and growth.

Indeed, Volkswagen South Africa exemplifies how brands may include economic activism ideas while also contributing significantly to economic recovery and community welfare. These initiatives reflect a solid understanding of the link between company success, local economic health, and community well-being. The corporation worked to alleviate the economic impact of the pandemic by prioritising aid to local businesses and economic

⁴⁶ Drive Local, Support Local" campaign - Google Search. (2024). Google.com.
<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Drive+Local%2C+Support+Local%22+campaign&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

growth, while also offering a compelling example of corporate responsibility and economic action. This strategy highlights brand activism's ability to go beyond traditional marketing objectives, integrating brand actions with efforts to achieve greater societal and economic goals.

2.2.6. Legal Activism

Legal activism refers to the strategic initiatives that firms take to interact with, modify, or adapt to laws that affect their operations and society at large. This type of activism addresses a variety of legal and policy issues, such as tax legislation, workplace rules, employment laws, privacy concerns, and so on. Legal activism allows businesses to not only manage the complicated legal landscapes that affect their business activities but also use their power to fight for changes in the law that are consistent with their values and ethical convictions. Brands may contribute to societal development through supporting policies that promote justice, equity, and privacy.

Google's attempt to erase the location details of users who visit abortion clinics in response to the recent Supreme Court ruling that ended the right to abortion in the United States ⁴⁷ illustrates their positions on this kind of delicate societal issues. The IT industry, in particular, has been in the forefront of efforts to establish stronger safeguards against the possible misuse of personal data by law enforcement or other agencies.

Google's reaction to these issues was both imaginative and proactive. Recognising the potential for sensitive location data to be abused, the tech giant agreed to automatically delete records from users' Location Histories that show trips to abortion clinics shortly after they occur. This policy change is an important step towards maintaining women's and those seeking abortion services, privacy and autonomy as it addresses concerns about monitoring and legal consequences in a post-Roe v. Wade environment. Google's decision sets a precedent for how technology companies might utilise their power and platforms to protect user rights and privacy in the face of shifting legal realities.

Furthermore, Google's strategy exhibits legal activism by illustrating how businesses may actively adapt their practices and policies in advance of or in response to legislative changes. By taking a stance on such a sensitive topic, Google demonstrated its dedication to user privacy and established itself as a tech industry leader in digital rights and legal advocacy.

⁴⁷ Bhuiyan, J. (2024, January 17). Google promised to delete location data on abortion clinic visits. It didn't, study says. The Guardian; The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/jan/16/google-keeps-location-history-data-abortion-clinics-despite-delete-pledge#:~:text=Now%2C%20a%20new%20study%20shows>

This shift reflects a deeper appreciation of companies' responsibility in advocating for and adopting practices that safeguard individual rights and liberties, particularly in areas where laws and policies may fall short.

2.4 The evil seven

The above categories and case studies highlight the issues Brand activists must focus on⁴⁸. Given that, the next question is which concern a company should choose. The answer depends on consumers' interests.

Sarkar and Kotler have identified seven problems, the so-called '7 Evils' that plague modern society and that brands operating on a global scale are called upon to solve:

- Climate change: i.e., all phenomena such as heat waves, forest fires, floods, hurricanes, destruction of natural ecosystems, and extinction of protected species.
- Inequality: The disparity between rich and poor is one way of assessing social and gender inequality. The ever-increasing gap between the 1% of the population who are wealthy and the remaining 99% creates the basis for an unjust society.
- Extremism: this term refers to any form of hatred and intolerance towards groups of people based on their ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation, leading individuals with a strong sense of identity and belonging to carry out terrorist acts or foment general social unrest.
- Migration: the increasingly pervasive problem of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from the world's poorest countries due to war and poverty.
- Education: The issue concerning access to education and acquiring knowledge and skills necessary to enter the job market.
- Corruption: A problem common to all countries in the world stems from the dishonesty of the political class that should represent the people or those who seek to bribe power holders for their gain.
- Population: The global demographic growth represents a precondition for future conflict scenarios over the scramble for resources, particularly water, energy, food, land, transportation, and education. This is closely linked to the concept of carrying capacity. This fundamental metric determines the number of humans and other living

⁴⁸ Kotler, P. and Sarkar, C. (2017). 'Finally, Brand Activism!' – Philip Kotler and Christian Sarkar. [online] The Marketing Journal. Available at: <https://www.marketingjournal.org/finally-brand-activism-philip-kotler-and-christian-sarkar/>.

organisms, such as animals and plants, that can simultaneously inhabit the same territory without degrading it.

2.5 The relevance of Brand Activism in the modern era: Brand activism as a reputation amplifier

In the modern era, successful marketing strongly depends on understanding the target demographic, whose values, ideas, and priorities constantly change. To date, studies have focused on the perception of Generation Z and millennials of Brand Activism and its positive effect on Brand Loyalty and Brand Awareness (Nguyen, 2022)⁴⁹ (Sachdev, Chahal e Jain, 2021)⁵⁰. This unpredictability complicates marketers' roles, especially as customers get more engaged with sociopolitical issues. According to a Washington Post and Kaiser Family Foundation survey⁵¹, one in every five Americans has participated in some form of political protest since 2016, and many want to increase their political activity in the future years. Furthermore, Edelman's study (Edelman, 2021-2022)⁵² demonstrates that today's customers are becoming more sceptical, with 60% expressing dissatisfaction with the public sector. As a result, marketers understand the growing relevance of tackling social issues. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is no longer enough; firms are being challenged to evolve from "philanthropists" to "protagonists" in influencing the common good. Taking a firm stance on contentious issues can help to promote brand loyalty, as trust is a valued intangible asset. As a result, profit margins may grow. It is no longer true that a company's primary goal is to sell products or services and make a profit. Many businesses are now employing what is known as "social issues marketing" (PSA Research Center - PSA Research Center, 2019)⁵³, though not all of these initiatives are well received. On the other hand, some businesses try to avoid these delicate subjects, walking the fine line between relevancy and controversy. Companies may use a variety of techniques to navigate the difficult environment of brand activism, depending on their risk tolerance and the specific social problems they wish to address. These methods range from remaining silent to taking a strong, conspicuous stance

⁴⁹ Nguyen, D., Le, D., Truong, L., Truong, N., & Vu, V. (2022). The effect of Generation Z's perceptions of brand activism on brand loyalty: evidence from Vietnam. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/apjml-02-2022-0165>.

⁵⁰ Sachdev, N., Chahal, S., & Jain, S. (s.d.). Study of Brand Activism on Millennials and Generation Z. *Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting*.

⁵¹ KFF, The Kaiser Family Foundation/Washington Post Survey on Political Rallygoing and Activism, <https://www.kff.org/>

⁵² Edelman, Edelman Trust Barometer 2021, Edelman Trust Barometer Annual Global Study, (2021), Edelman. (2022, January 18). 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer. Edelman. <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2022-trust-barometer>.

⁵³ PSA Research Center, Social Issues Marketing, <https://www.psaresearch.com/>

on contentious issues. The following are some common approaches brands might take when considering activism:

- **The "head in the sand" approach**

This is the most risk-averse strategy, in which a brand chooses to remain neutral and avoid dealing with any sociopolitical problems. Brands that chose this method avoid making public remarks or supporting activist causes, instead focusing only on their products. However, this method is not without risks. In today's hyper-connected world, customers want companies to be honest and values-driven; keeping mute can lead to irrelevance. Furthermore, a firm that chooses to remain silent on significant social issues may face criticism or backlash if the issues have a direct influence on its sector or consumer base. Uber is a well-known example, having faced criticism during protests at JFK Airport over the Muslim travel ban. The company's decision to continue offering services at the airport without joining in the demonstrations spurred the #deleteuber movement, with thousands of customers deleting the app in anger (3 Marketing Disasters That Could Have Been Prevented by Social Listening, n.d.)⁵⁴.

- **Value-Based Approach**

Brands can take a more proactive but reasonably safe approach by promoting their core principles rather than engaging in direct political conversation. Many businesses emphasise their mission statements and principles on their websites and social media, explaining what they stand for without getting involved in contentious matters. This method enables firms to connect with consumers who share their beliefs while not alienating those who may disagree on specific political issues. The brand's behaviours must correspond with its proclaimed ideals for this technique to be effective. For example, if a brand prioritises diversity and inclusiveness, it should reflect this in its employment procedures and company culture. This connection is crucial for establishing customer trust and avoiding charges of "woke-washing," which accuses brands of adopting social causes for profit rather than genuine devotion.

⁵⁴ 3 marketing disasters that could have been prevented by social listening. (n.d.). Awario Blog. <https://awario.com/blog/3-marketing-disasters-that-could-have-been-prevented-by-social-listening/>

- **Purpose-driven Marketing**

Brands that practice purpose-driven marketing take a step further by incorporating social concerns into their overall marketing strategies. However, they tend to focus on less contentious, widely supported themes. Instead of participating in open political speech, some corporations use well-known social movements to create emotional ties with their customers. An excellent example is the Always' #LikeAGirl campaign, which boosted young girls' self-esteem (Always, 2014)⁵⁵. The campaign resonated with a huge audience because it addressed gender equality in an uplifting manner, avoiding polarising conversations while linking the company with a socially vital topic. Purpose-driven marketing allows organisations to create strong emotional connections with their target audience while avoiding potential blowback from more controversial issues.

- **Addressing Contentious Issues Without Taking a Clear Position**

Some companies take a middle-ground strategy, tackling difficult societal issues without fully backing one side. This method allows businesses to generate "buzz", as these ads typically provoke public discussion. However, it has a larger risk, since the brand may be scolded for being too unclear or failing to take an assertive enough position. This approach has the advantage of providing flexibility. If the campaign is poorly received, the brand can apologise before causing significant harm to its reputation. This strategy can create even more exposure in some cases since both the initial event and the brand's response inspire discourse. This method is frequently used by businesses that are careful about their social position but still want to engage in important discussions. However, there is a danger that some consumers would see this as a lack of true dedication, losing confidence over time

- **Taking a Bold Stand (positioning)**

At the highest level of risk, some brands take outspoken positions on controversial issues, directly engaging in sociopolitical disputes. These brands frequently go beyond mere words, backing up their claims with tangible actions like donations to specific causes or collaborations with activist organisations. By adopting a firm stance, some businesses hope to associate themselves with particular values and

⁵⁵ Lee, M., & Yoon, H. (2020). When Brand Activism Advertising Campaign Goes Viral: An Analysis of Always #LikeAGirl Video Networks on YouTube. *The International Journal of Advanced Culture Technology*, 8, 146-158. <https://doi.org/10.17703/IJACT.2020.8.2.146>.

attract customers who share their convictions. This method, however, involves substantial risks, as it may alienate customers who disagree with the brand's stance. Nike's "Dream Crazy" commercial, which featured Colin Kaepernick, for example, strongly supported racial justice and anti-police brutality demonstrations (Youn, 2018)⁵⁶. While the ad drew criticism for backing Kaepernick's activism, Nike's sales increased by 31%⁵⁷, illustrating that a well-executed and sincere statement can resonate powerfully with the proper audience. Brands that take this approach must be prepared for polarised reactions and have to be willing to defend their position even in the face of criticism.

Keeping a consistent path based on public opinion is one of the most difficult challenges in periodically reviewing the gap between a company's perceived ideals and its stakeholders' expectations.

To overcome this issue, it can be helpful to use a new approach, adopting a more uniform manner of assessing a brand's commitment to social activity. This method is founded on the idea of the common good. Wikipedia defines the common good: 'That is shared and beneficial to all or most community members. Alternatively, it is realised by active citizenship, collective action, and political involvement.

But what exactly is meant by "community?" For multinational corporations, a community can be local, regional, or global. How employees are handled worldwide is critical. Polluting one region of the globe to benefit from another is not a sustainable approach; rather, it is an example of irresponsible behaviour. From this perspective, we define regressive corporate activism as a collection of acts detrimental to the common good, whereas progressive activism aims to enhance the common good.

⁵⁶ Youn, S. (2018, September 5). Nike's Colin Kaepernick "Just Do It" campaign is controversial, but on brand: Experts. ABC News; ABC News.

⁵⁷ Bloomberg, After Short-Lived Kaepernick Dip, Nike Hits an All-Time High, <https://www.bloomberg.com/>

2.5.1 The Concept of Justice

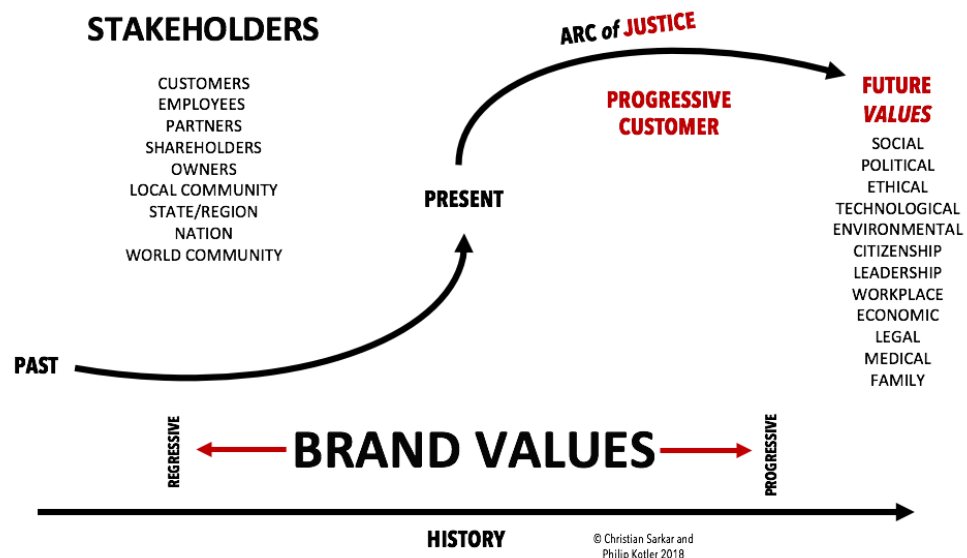


Figure 8: The Arc of Justice.

Source: Kotler, P., & Sarkar, C. (2020). Brand Activism: From Purpose to Action.

In a time when transparency is considered an absolute necessity, the most suitable approach aims to achieve justice. All present and future actions can influence and jeopardise the company's reputation, reflected in Brand Equity.

The thirst for brand activism forces companies to take a side and stop being neutral. Failure to do so can prevent a company from having a bright future.

In addition to being regarded as a point of parity with other corporations, there are other advantages to brand activism:

- **Competitive Advantage and Market Share Growth:** As consumers choose products from brands that match their values, businesses can gain a competitive advantage and expand their market share.
- **Positioning and Premium Pricing:** Clients, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, are more likely to support businesses that promote causes they believe in, even if it means paying more money.
- **Increased Customer Loyalty:** Brands that successfully meet consumers' emotional needs and resonate with consumer personas by sharing their expectations can enjoy high levels of loyalty. Socially engaged brands almost always show a high rate of customer retention.

- **Corporate Culture:** Brand activism does not only yield positive results in the external competitive arena. Socially responsible companies can translate their positive societal impact into effective internal communication, making employees feel increasingly motivated as they become aware of working for a just cause. This can serve as a powerful incentive for current employees and a compelling attraction for potential future employees.
- **Increased Awareness and Positive Word of Mouth:** Brand activism helps boost brand awareness and generates positive word-of-mouth, contributing to a stronger and more favourable brand image.

2.6 The importance of authentic activism

Real brand advocacy aims to promote social, environmental, legal, economic, or political goals for the benefit of society. It's not just vital to tackle things attentively; it's also prudent for business. When done correctly, brand activism enables businesses to build stronger customer ties, generating emotional loyalty that may last over time.

Environmental and societal concerns are massive and need long-term commitment rather than short-lived initiatives over the Christmas season. Consumers nowadays are increasingly aware of ecological challenges and want actual action. They recognise that significant change takes time and that fast remedies are unrealistic. Interestingly, many individuals today feel that brands have greater influence than institutions in driving beneficial cultural change (Edelman, 2022). Customers who strive to achieve their sustainability goals are more drawn to firms that share their values and exhibit genuine long-term commitment.

However, it is important that companies not just talk the talk but genuinely act on it⁵⁸. The 2020 murder of George Floyd sparked a global backlash, with brands like McDonald's and Target publicly condemning police violence and pledging support for racial fairness. While some businesses had established activist credentials, others were chastised for issuing ambiguous, reactionary remarks with little depth. On the other hand, Nike demonstrated a strong example of brand advocacy that was done correctly. Nike's "For Once, Don't Do It" ad flipped its famous motto and issued an assertive call to action against racial injustice. The corporation has advocated for social justice for years through initiatives such as the Equality

⁵⁸ Horst P., Marketing in the #FakeNews Era: New Rules for a New Reality of Tribalism, Activism, and Loss of Trust, (2018)

campaign and its engagement with Colin Kaepernick (Farinella, 2024)⁵⁹. Nike's advocacy received amazing feedback, not just in terms of brand perception but also financially—Nike witnessed a 31% spike in sales following the Kaepernick campaign.

In contrast, Disney's well-intentioned but badly received social media statement in response to the George Floyd demonstrations prompted anger. Consumers were eager to criticise Disney's history, citing events that revealed systemic faults that the firm had failed to resolve properly. Farinella indicates that customers may quickly discern insincerity. Before publishing pronouncements, businesses should take the time to do internal research and make genuine, severe commitments to issues.

Brand activism should be more than a superficial reaction to current events. Instead, it should be incorporated into the brand's fundamental beliefs and strategy. Companies must make activism a distinguishing feature of their identity and insist that it constantly informs their business and communication strategies. Farinella also points out that rushing to deliver pronouncements requires taking meaningful action. Instead, developing a long-term plan that promotes social or environmental problems is a superior option since it will benefit a brand's reach, loyalty, and financial success in the long run⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ Farinella, D. (2024, August 12). Council Post: Fly Your Brand Flag: The Importance Of Authentic Brand Activism. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesagencycouncil/2021/03/08/fly-your-brand-flag-the-importance-of-authentic-brand-activism/>

⁶⁰ Farinella, D. (2024, August 12). Council Post: Fly Your Brand Flag: The Importance Of Authentic Brand Activism. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesagencycouncil/2021/03/08/fly-your-brand-flag-the-importance-of-authentic-brand-activism/>

CHAPTER III – GUCCI EQUILIBRIUM

3.1 Gucci's History and Development



Figure 9: Gucci logo, <https://www.gucci.com/us/en/>

Gucci is an Italian fashion brand active in high fashion and luxury. It is known worldwide and is now an icon of the Dolce Vita and Italian style⁶¹. The main products of the fashion house include leather goods, shoes, accessories, clothing, jewellery, watches, cosmetics, perfumes, and a collection of home furnishings and decorative accessories. The Italian fashion house was founded in 1921 in Florence by the leatherworker Guccio Gucci, who decided to create an eponymous brand that deals with leather goods, luggage, and gloves⁶². The creator used his international experience, acquired during his travels and his work at the Savoy Hotel in London as a saddler, to create a brand with a cosmopolitan taste that aligned with the taste of the aristocracy of the time. Drawing on past experiences, the house style was mainly inspired by equestrianism; Guccio Gucci's shop began to achieve enormous success thanks to luxury leather goods and equestrian items⁶³. However, it was only in 1925 that Gucci became famous for producing an iconic travel bag. The saddle girth inspired even the unmistakable green-red-green colour scheme. During the Fascist era, they experimented with poor materials such as jute, hemp and linen, giving rise to iconic lines. After the war, the company passed to his sons, Aldo, Rodolfo, and Vasco, who managed to make it thrive despite the not-too-distant difficult period of the war. During these years, the Italian brand began to experience one of its most flourishing periods: in 1947, the iconic Bamboo bag was created⁶⁴, followed a few years later by the famous leather loafer. With the death of Guccio

⁶¹ Tokatli, N. (2013). Doing a Gucci: the transformation of an Italian fashion firm into a global powerhouse in a 'Los Angelesizing' world. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 13(2), 239-255.

⁶² Gucci. (2023, August 29). Wikipedia. <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gucci>

⁶³ Emotions in Florence, 2021, Gucci - History of a Fashion dynasty, https://www.emotionsinflorence.com/blog/history_of_gucci_dynasty.html

⁶⁴ Pantano I., Gucci Bamboo Bag, la storia di un'icona che ritorna nel tempo, 2021; <https://www.vogue.it/moda/article/gucci-bamboo-bag-storia-modello-foto>.

in 1953, his sons inherited the company, and the first boutique opened in New York, followed by London, Palm Beach, and Paris. The motto “Quality is remembered long after price is forgotten” was developed and displayed in all the shops, starting with the one that opened in New York in the mid-1950s⁶⁵. Gucci's international success was unstoppable; the prints and the double G logo contributed to its recognition so much that in 1966, Rodolfo created the iconic "Flora" scarf for Princess Grace Kelly⁶⁶.

Furthermore, numerous celebrities, like Audrey Hepburn, Liz Taylor, Peter Sellers, and Samuel Beckett, began to wear the brand's clothing, including First Lady Jackie Kennedy, to whom the eponymous bag is dedicated. The Gucci loafer with the bit detail was added to the Costume Institute's permanent collection at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Following the brand's rise in America, the brand became immensely popular among Hollywood icons, including Jacqueline Kennedy, to whom the renowned 'Jackie' bag was dedicated.⁶⁷ The popularity of Gucci exploded in the 1970s, so much so that it became the most counterfeited brand in the world. This marked the beginning of the brand's many legal battles against counterfeiting.

Gucci is also known for the tense atmosphere that characterised family and business relationships. Paolo Gucci, son of Aldo, founded his brand with the name Gucci, triggering numerous reactions. The brand was reabsorbed into the parent company. In 1982, the Italian Maison became a public company, with Rodolfo holding half the shares and the remaining 50% divided between Aldo and his children. In 1988, 47.8% of Gucci's shares were acquired by the investment fund Investcorp, based in Bahrain, which completed the acquisition of all the group's shares only in 1993. From then on, the Gucci family was no longer involved in the company's management.

During the 70s, the modern version of the logo with the double G and the coloured ribbon was developed. The basic structure of the logo remained the same but was reworked in several versions until the company was sold in the 1990s, and designer Tom Ford was chosen as creative director for the ready-to-wear line. He introduced more tapered letters and more provocative style collections. Tom Ford remained at the head of the fashion house for a decade before passing the baton to Alessandro Michele, who introduced a more androgynous design characterised by brighter, more intense colours and, in 2019, the overlapping

⁶⁵ Mancini, Gucci: un viaggio nella storia del brand, 2020;

<https://www.mancinijuniorblog.com/2020/02/12/gucci/>.

⁶⁶ Masetti A., Gucci Flora...not only a scarf, 2012;

<https://www.thefashioncommentator.com/it/2012/06/gucci-floranot-only-scarf.html>.

⁶⁷ Gill N. (2022). A Brief History of the Iconic Gucci Jackie Bag. <https://editorialist.com/fashion/gucci-jackie-bag>

characters of the right-facing G. The fashion house has been part of the Kering group since 2001, following a feud between them and the giant LVMH. In 2021, the luxury house closed with a turnover of 9.73 billion euros, with a growth of 31%, accounting for half of the turnover of the entire luxury group, which closed with a total turnover of 17.6 billion.

3.1.1 Creative Leadership: A Journey of Tradition and Innovation

From the beginning, Guccio focused on creating a strong brand identity for Gucci, using symbols like the bit and stirrup from the equestrian world and incorporating red and green colours that also linked to this theme. He combined this with high-quality craftsmanship and the unmistakable double G logo, which stood for his initials.

After Aldo and Rodolfo Gucci passed away, the family-run creative leadership faded. Internal family disputes within the third generation threatened the brand, which was already struggling with many counterfeiting issues.

Dawn Mello played a crucial role in Gucci's revival by choosing Tom Ford, a young and then-unknown Texan designer, as her successor in 1994. Ford brought a fresh perspective to Gucci, blending classic and modern elements with tradition and innovation. He gave the brand a new, bold image, focusing on sensual and provocative designs that used leather, metal, and fur, empowering women in the process.

Tom Ford's first official collection, which debuted in the spring/summer of 1995, was a turning point. It was a daring new vision for Gucci and triggered a fashion revolution in the 1990s. His designs, which included undone satin shirts combined with low-waisted velvet slacks in rich blues, greens, and reds, demonstrated a bold embracing of sex appeal.

Dawn Mello's efforts, while frequently unnoticed, were critical to Gucci's recovery. As creative director, she relocated the company's headquarters to Florence and collaborated with local craftspeople to freshen and update the brand's offerings. This included resurrecting the bamboo-handle bags that Lady D famously wore, as well as the distinctive bit-detail loafers, which helped Gucci's prestige and exclusivity.⁶⁸.

⁶⁸ Pantano I., Gucci Bamboo Bag, la storia di un'icona che ritorna nel tempo, 2021; <https://www.vogue.it/moda/article/gucci-bamboo-bag-storia-modello-foto>.



Figure 10: Runway show for Gucci when Tom Ford was the creative director,
<https://www.vogue.it/moda/article/gucci-tom-ford-migliori-capi-vintage>

Unfortunately, the Tom Ford era ended in November 2003, when both Ford and CEO Domenico de Sole left the company, and they helped revive it. In 2004, Alessandra Facchinetti briefly took over the women's line before Frida Giannini, previously the accessories director, stepped in. Giannini played a significant role in the success of Gucci's leather collections and the creation of glamorous evening gowns and suits worn by celebrities like Blake Lively and James Franco.

The second major transformation at Gucci came with Alessandro Michele⁶⁹, who became creative director in 2015. His debut collection represented a departure from the past while yet respecting it. Michele's style was varied, with nods to past creative directors and Guccio Gucci himself. His designs were romantic, quirky, and decidedly genderless. Michele also

⁶⁹ Jackson, T., & Haid, C. (2002). Gucci Group-the new family of luxury brands. (2), 161-172.

honoured the brand's past by restoring the famous double G emblem and dedicated two chambers at the Gucci Museum in Florence to Tom Ford's legendary creations.

Michele also launched Gucci Beauty, focused on luxury makeup and fragrances, and introduced the brand's first high jewellery line. His unique, countercultural personality was evident in the first Gucci Beauty campaign, which celebrated beauty as imperfection and emphasised the diversity and uniqueness of each individual. The campaign's message, "Be bold. Be bright. Be beautiful," was reflected in images of imperfect smiles proudly wearing Gucci lipsticks.

With its 1980s soundtrack, the ad connected the past with contemporary themes, focusing on freedom of expression. It wasn't just aimed at women; the lipstick was designed for anyone who wanted to wear it. "It's time to free men from the idea that makeup is just for women. Makeup is a complete expression of freedom because wearing lipstick means embracing the enhanced version of who you want to be."⁷⁰

Alessandro Michele stood out from previous creative directors by creating a universe where masculinity and femininity blended together. He introduced post-gender designs with a touch of Dramatic Renaissance, not only in his collections but also in the venues he chose for his shows. Recently, Michele opted for historical and cultural locations like Castel del Monte in Puglia for his Cosmogonies collection, a symbol of esotericism and magic⁷¹. He also revived Gucci's image as a trendsetter through an unexpected collaboration with Balenciaga, another Kering group brand. The show, celebrating Gucci's centenary, was full of references and influences, from nods to Tom Ford's style to reimagined Balenciaga pieces, all while honouring the brand's roots, such as the Savoy Hotel, where Guccio Gucci once worked.

"The myth of the foundation is reborn in the light of the present"⁷², Michele explained.

Alessandro Michele has currently left the brand and moved to be the creative director for the Valentino Maison. "There are times when paths diverge because of the different perspectives each of us may have," said the now ex-creative director. Following his departure, the collection became much more focused on the past, taking influence from 90's designs, as

⁷⁰ Tempestini G., La nuova campagna di Gucci ci mostra finalmente la bellezza come imperfezione, 2019; <https://www.ninjamarketing.it/2019/05/16/bellezza-come-imperfezione-gucci-beauty/>

⁷¹ Vertua S., Gucci Cosmogonie: la sfilata Resort 2023 a Castel del Monte, 2022;

<https://www.lofficielitalia.com/fashion-week/gucci-cosmogonie-sfilata-resort-2023-foto-collezione-look>

⁷² Cantarini G., Gucci e Balenciaga insieme per i 100 anni del brand, 2021;

<https://www.lofficielitalia.com/fashion-week/gucci-collezione-uomo-donna-collaborazione-balenciaga-sfilata-immagini-look>

indicated by using an old logo pulled from the archive⁷³. Everything that Alessandro Michele has created in the previous five years now has the significance of an inheritance, one that contributes equally to that of Tom Ford and Frida Giannini. Sabato de Sarno was added to this legacy in 2023. his style is definitely more understated though certainly not bland, characterised by a very particular use of colour and a skilful use of volume, a legacy of his work in couture.



Figure 11: Aria collection by Gucci, <https://www.farfetch.com/it/style-guide/brands/gucci-x-balenciaga-collaboration-the-aria-collection/>

3.1.2 Gucci: Embracing Sustainability and Digital Innovation

Under Alessandro Michele's creative direction and Marco Bizzarri's leadership, Gucci has experienced tremendous updates, combining a new style with the classic attributes of Italian workmanship. The brand's strategy strikes a mix between innovation and commercial practicality, with the goal of expanding its consumer base through a more comprehensive lifestyle approach (Raule, 2019)⁷⁴. This new perspective has brought younger generations closer to the company, creating an environment of never-ending surprise and innovation while encouraging freedom of expression. Gucci distinguishes itself with its inclusive image and use of digital media. This strategy stands out thanks to constant experimentation and

⁷³ The Gucci Men's Fall Winter 2023 Fashion Show. (n.d.). Wwww.youtube.com. Retrieved February 26, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8s6OZCpgto>

⁷⁴ Raule J., 2019, La strategia che ha portato Gucci al successo, in Il Post Moda, <https://www.ilpost.it/2019/09/27/merchandising-gucci/>

innovation, which challenge the established status quo, especially in terms of gender fluidity. The brand's promotion technique is consistent throughout collections, intended for a wide audience rather than specific groups. According to the Business of Fashion, Gucci's success has been a consequence of its inclusion, which has allowed it to attract a bigger consumer pool. The brand's leadership has steered away from the hyper-sexualized image popularised by Tom Ford until 2004 (Fernandez and Crump, 2019)⁷⁵, instead attracting customers with open-minded attitudes who are willing to invest in quality products without being confined to specific age or gender groups. The unified vision is further evidenced by the shared creative direction across both men's and women's fashion segments.

Although rooted in tradition, Gucci has evolved to embrace a revolutionary approach, particularly in its engagement with social media as a new communication channel. The brand stands out on Instagram, which accounts for approximately 90% of digital interactions in the luxury sector (Napoli, 2017)⁷⁶. From the start, Gucci has effectively utilised popular tools on the platform to promote its products and brand image.

3.1.3 Social media communication strategy

Gucci's digital communication strategy has always been associated with exclusivity. Still, social media and the rise of Millennials and Gen-Z consumers have democratised the industry, forcing brands to adapt their products and communication strategies.

Social networks follow customers' increasingly solid need to express themselves and form relationships between the business and their community.

Instagram is Gucci's leading social media platform (with over 52.3 million followers)⁷⁷, followed by Facebook with 20.9M⁷⁸, Twitter with 7.2M⁷⁹, and numerous online news sites. Furthermore, the brand's success is attributable mainly to communicating a lifestyle that people want to copy; a strong presence on social media is backed up by a high level of consumer involvement.

⁷⁵ Fernandez C. e Crump H., 2019, Case Study: Decoding Gucci's Merchandising Success, Business of Fashion,

<https://www.businessoffashion.com/case-studies/luxury/case-study-gucci-merchandising-strategy-trends/>

⁷⁶ Napoli C., 2017, The Gen Z equation: a WGSN project,

https://www.wgsn.com/assets/marketing/toprightbox_assets/images/Gen_Z_Equation.pdf

⁷⁷ Gucci. (2018). Gucci. Instagram.com. <https://www.instagram.com/gucci/>

⁷⁸ Gucci. (2020). Facebook.com. <https://www.facebook.com/GUCCI/>

⁷⁹ Gucci. (2024). X (Formerly Twitter).

https://x.com/gucci?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor&mx=2

In addition, in 2022, the Italian fashion brand redesigned its website, making it more user-friendly and accessible across many devices. This digital tailoring, which favoured feature display, resulted in a 150% increase in traffic over the previous year.

As a result, it is clear that Gucci, despite its traditional roots, can develop a highly interactive platform for multimedia digital communication that immerses the user in the company's reality, blurring the line between the physical shop and the online environment.

Alessandro Michele felt that digital media fuels innovation, making it an essential source of the new visual culture now required in the industry. Gucci's digital strategy has been carefully crafted, seamlessly integrating e-commerce, social media, digital marketing, and mobile applications. The brand knows how to effectively employ the visual characteristics of the new digital platforms, regularly updating all channels with videos or behind-the-scenes photographs from fashion shows, parties, events, campaigns, and so on. A practical example is Facebook Live, which broadcasts the brand's fashion shows. As a result, the company has established a consolidated relationship with its customers. Gucci has demonstrated that a solid digital presence based on a defined brand identity and supported by a strategic framework may significantly affect a company's future performance.

Furthermore, Gucci promotes its artistic collaborations through digital platforms, creating a self-reinforcing loop in which artistic collaborations add value to collections while inspiring future collaborations. They also allow for the creation of new material for internet platforms, which enhances sales and considerably increases Gucci's creative prominence⁸⁰.

Gucci appears to have understood the factors that drive success in a market where keeping an increasingly educated client base is critical, as is catching Millennials' interest. As a result, Gucci has worked to keep its clients informed and engaged, specifically through brand advocacy campaigns. As a result, in addition to its official Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts, the company decided to create a page on each social media site, just for Gucci Equilibrium, to give the necessary space to its activism projects.

3.2 Gucci Equilibrium: Planet, People and Chime for Change

Among all the brands of the Kering group, voted the second most sustainable company in the world in 2019, the Italian fashion house Gucci is the pioneer of environmental and social

⁸⁰ Cabigiosu, A. (2020). The Kering Group and Gucci's Success. In Palgrave Macmillan, Cham

initiatives and has earned the title of 'most sustainable fashion corporate'⁸¹. "This is the heart of Gucci's mission to bring positive change to secure our collective future".

In fact, 'Gucci Equilibrium' is a collection of their merits, excellent qualities, and goals. It is the equality of their aesthetic goods and their ethics. Gucci specifies a 'Culture of Purpose' that outlines the expectations of its clients, workers, suppliers, and all individuals within the Gucci group. However, integrity is a high-value commodity that Gucci must symbolise to fulfil its true mission. Thus, this is the condition of balance required for innovation, establishment, and improvement.

It demonstrates the necessity of innovation and pioneering ways to manage the proper influence on people and nature in order to have sustainable values.

The notion of equilibrium states that they aim to provide extremely high quality to their clientele while maintaining positive environmental and social effects.

The "Culture of Purpose" is based on three fundamental foundations: the environment and people.

Novel paradigms for sustainable innovation are now in 'Gucci Equilibrium'. As a result, scheduling its aim inspires all of Gucci's operations regarding those key underpinnings.

Furthermore, the 'Culture of Purpose' may help individuals manage their time and determine their skills. As a result, they devote increasing amounts of effort to environmental preservation and sustainability.



Figure 12: Gucci Equilibrium Logo, <https://www.vestilana.it/gucci-equilibrium/>

⁸¹ Disko. (n.d.). Sostenibilità. Ww.kering.com. <https://www.kering.com/it/approfondimenti/sostenibilita>

3.2.1 Gucci Equilibrium Environmental background

Gucci's "Culture of Purpose" project is crucial in its efforts to preserve the environment and enhance sustainability. This organisational culture is deeply ingrained in the company's mission to attain greater awareness of environmental sustainability throughout Gucci's whole framework. Emphasis is placed on harmonising high-end fashion with conscientious ecological measures. Presented below is Gucci's approach to establishing its environmental framework:

- **In-Depth Environmental Impact Assessment:** Gucci has decided to analyse and assess its environmental impact (EIA), not just within the company but also over the whole lifespan of its goods. The analysis examines both immediate and indirect consequences of its activities, ranging from acquiring raw materials to producing, distributing, and even consuming products by end-users. Gucci guarantees a comprehensive perspective on sustainability by measuring their industrial operations' social and financial effects on the environment. In addition, they have established a thorough environmental evaluation system that monitors and presents pertinent environmental results. This level of openness enables the company to evaluate and enhance its ecological management strategies consistently.
- **Reducing Resource Consumption and Waste:** One of the fundamental principles of Gucci's environmental initiatives is reducing energy, water, and other natural resources at all stages of its commercial operations. This applies to every aspect of their activities, encompassing retail establishments, managerial offices, manufacturing facilities, and distribution hubs. Gucci is dedicated to minimising waste and emissions, guaranteeing a substantial reduction in the discharge of dangerous compounds into the environment. The brand strives to reduce its environmental footprint by optimising resource use while ensuring operational effectiveness.
- **Sustainable Packaging Initiatives:** Gucci prioritises the implementation of ecological packaging throughout its operations. The brand's main goal is to reduce the amount of packaging materials used and prioritise using recycled or environmentally friendly materials. The previously mentioned transition aims to alleviate the environmental consequences of packaging waste and diminish its role in the deterioration of ecosystems and climate change. In addition, Gucci makes a deliberate effort to procure raw materials for packaging from officially approved sustainable sources.

Moreover, the corporation has implemented substantial measures to eliminate hazardous substances from its goods and manufacturing procedures. This is crucial for ensuring the defence of human health and preserving the world's ecological systems.

3.2.2 Gucci Equilibrium initiative description

With the appointment of Alessandro Michele as creative director, Gucci has strengthened its activist image, becoming one of the first luxury companies to embrace inclusiveness and diversity, as well as social and environmental activism. Among all the businesses in the Kering Group, designated the world's second most sustainable corporation in 2019, one stands out as a pioneer in environmental and social initiatives: the Italian Maison Gucci, which gained the title of "Most Sustainable Fashion Corporate." Following Stella McCartney's departure, the French conglomerate turned to Gucci, the emerging star, to spearhead the business's activism efforts.⁸²

Kering has long been a sustainability pioneer. It is dedicated to humanitarian issues such as supporting female victims of abuse, for which it established the Kering Foundation in 2019. In various instances, the CEO has publicly shared his views on global concerns, making key choices and taking significant steps to position the luxury group as a sustainability leader. In 2017, during the Day of the Girl and Kering Talk 2017, Marco Bizzarri⁸³, President and CEO of Gucci, revealed the brand's three essential goals:

- Environment: Gucci's new environmental policy reflects a continuous dedication to lowering its environmental effect by developing luxury retail's most sustainable, traceable, and transparent standards.
- People: Gucci is devoted to improving people's lives by helping communities. It was one of the first businesses to advocate for women's rights, investing in initiatives to empower women and close the gender gap, all while supporting values such as diversity and inclusiveness.
- New models: Using innovative technology, the Italian company aims to rethink production processes, increase supply chain efficiency, and establish logistical platforms.

⁸² Gucci Equilibrium – Gucci Equilibrium. (n.d.). <https://equilibrium.gucci.com>.

⁸³ 2017 Kering Talk featuring Marco Bizzarri as guest of honour at London College of Fashion, 2017; <https://www.kering.com/en/news/2017-talk-featuring-marco-bizzarri-as-guest-honour-at-london-college-fashion>

Luxury labels such as Gucci, regarded as unreachable by the majority, have rarely been connected with social or environmental concerns. Gucci's new promise is to gradually separate itself from its previous, austere image in favour of an identity in which art, craftsmanship, luxury, sustainability, and activism are integrated into a coherent and, most crucially, credible composition. "I genuinely believe that creativity and diversity are inextricably linked in our industry. And the more we are exposed to different points of view and experiences, the more we nurture creativity, culture and company growth," stated Marco Bizzarri. Gucci's new brand identity has adopted a strong activist position, making it one of the first luxury companies to participate in political, cultural, social, and environmental discussions. The creative director and CEO rapidly identified and linked market trends with new customer demand for businesses committed to an inclusive and respectful environment.

Gucci has participated in several efforts throughout the years. In 2018, the Maison became the first luxury brand to make a political statement against gun legislation, giving more than \$500,000 to the "March For Our Lives," a protest campaign organised by student activists and the families of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School massacre survivors.

Gucci's decision to support the cause went beyond financial contributions; the company utilised its politically engaged fan base. The decision was based on the fact that the protest's major organisers and participants were young students, an important demographic sector for Gucci. In addition, on World Environment Day 2018, Gucci established Gucci Equilibrium, a webpage dedicated to its environmental and social best practices. The site exemplifies the brand's dedication to creating good change for people and the environment.

" Guided by the creativity and collaborative spirit that are part of our identity, we work to reduce our environmental impact and protect nature; at the same time, we prioritise inclusion and respect so that everyone in our #GucciCommunity is free to express themselves in their full authenticity and diversity"⁸⁴.

Gucci Equilibrium acts as a repository for the brand's beliefs and efforts to enhance environmental and social well-being, all while developing its "Culture of Purpose" for a brighter future based on dedication and cooperation.

The site is separated into three sections: Planet, People, and Chime for Change, each reflecting one aspect of the brand's advocacy.

⁸⁴ Gucci Equilibrium – Gucci Equilibrium. (n.d.). <https://equilibrium.gucci.com>.

3.2.3 Gucci Equilibrium: Planet

In the "Planet" part, Gucci pledges to reduce its environmental footprint throughout its supply chain and develop sensible climate solutions to safeguard and restore nature for the future. The Italian design brand sees the world holistically as a complex ecosystem where every human being must play a role, and collective effort may result in sound change. Gucci is dedicated to being upfront about the measures that drive its ambitious ambitions, which it hopes to reach by 2025. These objectives include creating sustainable sourcing options, low-impact materials, manufacturing efficiency, and circular economy ideas to help create a better tomorrow⁸⁵.

Following Stella McCartney, Gucci was one of the first luxury companies to remove animal fur from its collections and go fur-free. Beginning with the Spring-Summer 2018 collection, Gucci formally removed fur from all of its labels, a hazardous move that cost the company some clients who were loyal to an old luxury mentality. However, the decision was effective because it pushed the brand closer to a customer sector that demanded change in the premium apparel business.

In keeping with its fur-free philosophy, Gucci created The Lion's Share Fund, a one-of-a-kind fundraising drive for animal conservation aimed at tackling the global climate and biodiversity crises. Marco Bizzarri⁸⁶, CEO and President of Gucci, stated, "Nature and wildlife are a constant source of inspiration for Gucci and are an integral part of our narrative, through our collections and campaigns — we are committed to wildlife conservation." This effort seeks to conserve 1 million hectares of wilderness and ensure animal freedom by minimising poaching.

Another significant environmental issue Gucci shares is the Carbon Neutral issue, which encourages industry leaders to take additional actions to reduce their sector's ecological effect. "Science tells us that long-term reduction targets are not enough, and we must act collectively to create a future where nature is restored and protected," said Gucci's boss. The brand is dedicated to lowering CO2 emissions from its operations and offsetting residual emissions yearly. This offset is accomplished through the REDD+ initiative (Reducing

⁸⁵ Gucci Equilibrium è L'impegno Del Marchio Verso «Persone E Pianeta» Vesti La Natura. (2022, July 11). Vesti La Natura. <https://www.vestilanatura.it/gucci-equilibrium/>.

⁸⁶ 2017 Kering Talk featuring Marco Bizzarri as guest of honour at London College of Fashion, 2017; <https://www.kering.com/en/news/2017-talk-featuring-marco-bizzarri-as-guest-honour-at-london-college-fashion>

Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), which mitigates climate change, protects ecosystems, and decreases emissions beginning with the supply chain⁸⁷.

In line with its core business, Gucci released its first sustainable collection, Gucci Off The Grid, which supports material and fabric regeneration while limiting the usage of new raw materials and waste. The line contains accessories, ready-to-wear, and travel products manufactured from recycled, regenerated, organic, and renewable raw materials sourced from sustainable resources. The collection's principal material is regenerated nylon, or Econyl, a fibre from pre- and post-consumer nylon waste such as old carpets and abandoned fishing nets. Gucci's innovative regeneration technologies may turn dangerous plastic items from marine ecosystems and landfills into high-quality yarns.

To promote circular upcycling, the trash generated by this collection is recycled to make new Econyl clothing⁸⁸. This collection debuted in June 2020 and was a big hit, especially among younger generations such as Millennials and Generation Z, who are more concerned with environmental concerns.



Figure 13: Gucci Grid Ad, <https://www.gucci.com/it/it/st/stories/article/off-the-grid-collection-shoppable>

In this regard, Gucci cooperated with Grimcookies, a well-known custom content maker, and digitally recreated various pieces from the Gucci Off The Grid collection to embrace

⁸⁷ Gucci: Come Generare Un Cambiamento Positivo Per Le Persone E Per Il Pianeta, 2021; <https://valored.it/news/gucci-equilibrium-impact-report/>

⁸⁸ La visione circolare di Gucci – Gucci Equilibrium. (2023, March 10). Gucci.com. <https://equilibrium.gucci.com/it/guccis-circular-vision/>.

virtual communities, such as The Sims 4⁸⁹. Gucci hoped this project would encourage young creatives while making positive changes for people and the environment.

The collection is designed for the digital community and maintains its design, allowing characters in the game to wear hats, shoes, and bags from the collection. Grimcookies digitalised select collection products and the entire marketing campaign, which featured Jane Fonda as a testimonial.

The Italian brand also worked with another YouTube personality, content producer Harrie, who made a video about building a treehouse inspired by the Off The Grid line. In the film, Harrie designs and builds a house from eco-friendly materials and demonstrates imaginative ways to reuse wind turbines, hanging gardens, and recycled furniture. Gucci's mission is to educate young people on the need to incorporate environmental and ecological concerns into all we do.



Figure 14: “Gucci Off the Grid | Grimcookies x Gucci | CC pack reveal + more” video,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nopCtmN5kU>

Following their commitment to sustainability, Gucci debuted new eco-friendly packaging in 2021, designed in a unique shade of green created by creative director Alessandro Michele. Gucci's commitment to being an environmentally friendly business extends to its packaging, which is frequently ignored when addressing sustainability. Gucci's invention honours the

⁸⁹ Gucci Off the Grid | Grimcookies x Gucci | CC pack reveal + more. (n.d.). Wwww.youtube.com.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nopCtmN5kU>.

ceremony of unwrapping while also respecting the environment⁹⁰. The green packaging was designed to reduce environmental effects using paper and cardboard produced from sustainably managed forests. Green paper uses less ink and is entirely recyclable because it is not plastic-coated. Additionally, Gucci is introducing more sustainable materials into its operations and wants to eradicate all single-use plastic by 2030 under the Fashion Pact, which is agreed upon by its parent company, Kering.

Gucci's brand involvement extends beyond environmental efforts to include political and social problems.

3.2.4 Gucci Equilibrium: People

Gucci's Brand activism goes beyond the environmental dimension and reaches into the political and social dimensions.

The second component of Gucci Equilibrium, under "People," highlights the company's strong dedication to these issues. Gucci doesn't only make comments; it also takes actual steps to effect positive change.

“What we stand for and how we behave towards each other define the essence of who we are. Our creative vision is fuelled by the desire to give people a voice to live according to their nature so that all members of our global community freely express the authentic diversity of their being. The totality of our differences is the richness that makes us thrive, and that is why we foster an environment based on respect, inclusiveness on diversity, where everyone is considered equal,” states the introduction to Gucci Equilibrium's new "People" section, a vision shared by both the CEO and the creative director.



⁹⁰ La nuova confezione sostenibile di Gucci, 2021; <https://equilibrium.gucci.com/it/introducing-guccis-new-sustainable-packaging/>

Figure 15: “Gucci Off the Grid | Grimcookies x Gucci | CC pack reveal + more” video,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nopCtmN5kU>

Gucci's commitment to creating good social change increased in 2019 by creating the Gucci Changemakers Fund aims to accelerate significant development in different communities by sponsoring local organisations⁹¹. This \$5 million fund will get \$1 million annually for five years. It will help non-profit groups committed to equal opportunity, social justice, the arts, culture, and education. The program primarily aims at communities in 12 North American cities: Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Toronto, and Washington, DC.

The Impact Fund is funded by Gucci's Changemakers North America Scholarship Program, which aspires to nurture the next generation of creative and design talent. The scholarship program, launched in collaboration with the Impact Fund, aims to help university students from these cities pursue careers in the fashion industry. Every year, 12 outstanding students from these areas are awarded scholarships to pursue their education and creative development, showcasing Gucci's commitment to diversity and inclusion in the design profession.

Gucci's goals go beyond cash contributions. Gucci Changemakers was formed on a strong desire to inspire people to live lives of self-expression, honesty, and creativity. According to the brand, "What we stand for and how we treat one another is at the heart of who we are." Our creative vision is motivated by a desire to allow people to live lives of self-expression, guaranteeing that everyone in our global community may be their authentic and unique selves. Our combined differences will allow us to grow, and we cultivate a courteous, inclusive, and varied environment, with everyone treated equally" (Gucci Changemakers North America: 2024 Scholarship Recipients – Gucci Equilibrium, 2024)⁹².

Gucci has also invested in documentaries addressing global societal concerns by telling fascinating, intimate tales that question the status quo. Gucci's dedication is evident, as it takes action to raise public awareness of the difficulties encountered by less fortunate people. To support this purpose, Gucci launched the Gucci Tribeca Documentary Fund (GTDF), which funds feature-length documentaries under development or post-production. The fund seeks films that address global themes like diversity, gender equality, and active

⁹¹ Gucci Changemakers North America Impact Fund, 2021; <https://equilibrium.gucci.com/it/gucci-changemakers-north-america-impact-fund/>

⁹² Gucci Changemakers North America: 2024 Scholarship Recipients – Gucci Equilibrium. (2024, July 29). Gucci.com. <https://equilibrium.gucci.com/gucci-changemakers-north-america-2024-scholarship-recipients/>

citizenship while also honouring acts of courage that drive social and environmental progress.

Films are chosen based on their ability to convey vital, powerful tales in a humanising and illuminating manner. The fund seeks films that challenge the current quo in terms of both subject matter and form. In addition to funding, the GTDF offers grantees year-round support from the Tribeca Film Institute (TFI), which provides one-on-one coaching and consulting to help these projects complete, negotiate the marketplace, and reach the largest audience. The GTDF also recognises and promotes women and diverse leaders who fight to enhance their communities, futures, and the globe.

Gucci's commitment to social responsibility and positive change grew in 2023, as the company's latest report outlined. Under the People section of Gucci Equilibrium, the brand further solidified its dedication to gender equality and inclusivity. Gucci became the first luxury fashion brand in Italy to be recognised for gender equality in 2023, marking a significant milestone in the company's efforts to create a more equitable workplace. Gucci's distinction builds on its previous success as one of the 2023 Best Places to Work for Disability Inclusion in North America (Impact Report 2023 | Introduction – Gucci Equilibrium, 2023)⁹³.

Diversity remains a key pillar for Gucci, with 63.4% of its employees identifying as female and 57% of management positions held by women, underscoring the brand's ongoing commitment to promoting equal opportunities across all company levels. Additionally, Gucci expanded its Changemakers program by launching Gucci Changemakers London in 2023, awarding €150,000 to three grassroots organisations, furthering its global mission to support underrepresented communities.

The Gucci Changemakers Volunteering Program also had an incredible impact on Gucci employees, with 2,892 volunteers donating over 21,000 hours to 100 non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, the Gucci Changemakers North America Impact Fund awarded \$600,000 to 12 NGO applications, and the Gucci Changemakers North America Scholarship Program donated \$280,000 in scholarships to 12 recipients. These programs demonstrate Gucci's commitment to social change, which combines financial assistance with hands-on staff participation (Impact Report 2023 | Introduction – Gucci Equilibrium, 2023).

3.2.5 Gucci Equilibrium: Chime for Change

⁹³ Impact Report 2023 | Introduction – Gucci Equilibrium. (2023). Gucci.com.
<https://equilibrium.gucci.com/it/impact-report-2023/>



Figure 15: Gucci Chime for Change, <https://www.globalgiving.org/standwithwomen//>

The third and final component of the Gucci Equilibrium webpage is called Chime for Change, which is a global campaign started by Gucci in 2013 to raise awareness, unify, and amplify voices in the battle for gender equality. The initiative, co-founded by Gucci and two worldwide celebrities, Salma Hayek Pinault and Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, aims to create an international community that crosses geographical barriers and brings people together to fight for gender equality.

"My goal is to send a strong and clear message that the entire Gucci community is united and cohesive in supporting gender equality," stated Alessandro Michele, Creative Director of Gucci, during the campaign's premiere. With this core mission, Chime for Change brings people together across countries, generations, and differences, urging them to join a worldwide campaign to achieve gender equality.

Gucci CHIME has funded about \$21.5 million to assist over 500 activities worldwide, collaborating with 185 non-profit partners such as Equality Now, Global Fund for Women, Ms. Foundation for Women, mothers2mothers, UN Women, and several feminist organisations. These initiatives seek to empower women of colour, Indigenous women, young feminists, women and girls with disabilities, transgender and gender-fluid individuals, and other historically marginalised groups. Chime for Change raises these groups' voices, presenting their experiences to a worldwide audience and challenging unfairness and oppression.

In addition, the Italian fashion house works closely with the Kering Foundation to create positive change for women worldwide. In 2020, Chime for Change and the Kering Foundation teamed up to launch #StandWithWomen, a campaign aimed at raising funds for non-profit organisations providing support to women and girls facing gender-based violence, which worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the funds raised, Gucci and Kering have helped women and girls, including women of colour, transgender, Indigenous,

and disabled women, who have experienced limited access to services and resources during this time of crisis.

Moreover, in early 2021, Gucci CHIME took part in the UN Women's Generation Equality Action Coalitions as a corporate sector leader who supports feminist movements and leadership. The Action Coalitions were established to speed up cross-sector activities towards gender equality and provide tangible outcomes for women and girls in all of their variety. Gucci has committed to regulations, programmatic advocacy, and financial efforts to accelerate progress towards gender equality, demonstrating the brand's continued commitment to the subject. The most significant innovation among Gucci's activist initiatives came in 2019, when the brand founded Chime Zine, the first magazine entirely dedicated to amplifying the testimonies of women activists. Edited by Adam Ali and directed artistically by the Italian visual artist MP5, the magazine takes inspiration from Chime for Change⁹⁴. It aims to give visibility to international voices advocating for gender equality and personal freedom. With this publication, Gucci intends to leverage its platform to become a social amplifier, giving a voice to those who might otherwise be unheard.

In 2023, Gucci celebrated a remarkable milestone—the 10th anniversary of Gucci CHIME, a global campaign that has significantly advanced gender equality. Gucci created a striking video series with Academy Award-winning director and long-time CHIME Advisory Board member Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy to celebrate a decade of its impact. This collection of 35 videos offers an array of artists, activists, organisers, and campaigners discussing their views on equality. The honest and passionate stories provide personal anecdotes and spark optimism, encouraging further progress towards gender equality. The series is available on Gucci's social networks and YouTube and will be included on Gucci Equilibrium's social media, expanding the campaign's worldwide impact. (10 Years of Gucci CHIME – Gucci Equilibrium, 2023)⁹⁵.

GUCCI CHIME IN NUMBERS

21.5 million USD raised to support gender equality projects and advocacy in 92 countries

460 projects funded with 182 nonprofit partners and grassroots organizations

Nearly 635,000 girls and women globally have benefitted directly from Gucci CHIME projects, which have also reached more than 3 million families and community members

⁹⁴ Gucci CHIME – Gucci Equilibrium. (2022, March 28). <https://equilibrium.gucci.com/gucci-chime/>.

⁹⁵ Chime For Change; <https://equilibrium.gucci.com/it/chime-for-change/>

Figure 16: Chime for Change in Numbers, <https://equilibrium.gucci.com/10-years-of-gucci-chime/>

Salma Hayek Pinault, Florence Welch, Julia Roberts, and John Legend, who were involved in the movement from the beginning, have returned to raise their voices asking for change. They are joined by new stars such as Idris Elba, Julia Garner, Halle Bailey, Serena Williams, and Jodie Turner-Smith, who all support the cause. The campaign continues to help some of the most vulnerable groups, such as handicapped women, Indigenous women, and women from the Global South, as well as young feminists, transgenders, and non-binary people. Gucci CHIME supports feminist groups and mutual assistance programs, demonstrating its commitment to feminist sustaining ideals and community organisations (10 Years of Gucci CHIME – Gucci Equilibrium, 2023).

Gucci has maintained its commitment to NGOs and grassroots groups fighting for gender equality, demonstrated by a five-year relationship with UN Women's Generation Equality Action Coalitions, in which Gucci leads private sector initiatives centred on Feminist Movements and Leadership. This partnership underscores Gucci's ongoing pledge to drive positive social change and uplift marginalised communities worldwide (10 Years of Gucci CHIME – Gucci Equilibrium, 2023).

CHAPTER IV – EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH

4.1 Research question and model

As highlighted in previous chapters, it is increasingly evident that companies must step up and take a firm position on sustainability issues. While existing literature has repeatedly demonstrated the positive impact of brand activism on Brand Loyalty and Brand Awareness (Nguyen, 2022)⁹⁶ (Sachdev, Chahal and Jain, 2021)⁹⁷, there has been little research examining social brand activism as a tool for enhancing brand image and reputation, which in turn affects brand equity. Several studies have shown that engaging in activism positively influences marketing outcomes by creating competitive advantages and improving brand perception externally (Korshun, 2021)⁹⁸. However, there is still a gap in the literature discussing the importance of social brand activism in the fashion business, particularly with Generation Z's purchasing patterns. Environmental activism has been exhibited by labels such as Patagonia and Stella McCartney, but today having a green approach is no longer optional—it has become a point of parity for all fashion firms. Consumers want brands to have a clear purpose and reason behind their existence (A. R. Fernandes, 2022)⁹⁹, and sustainability is now a fundamental requirement for companies and their customers. Our world and society can no longer withstand the negative consequences of fast fashion and the growing demand for fashionable clothes. As previously said, Generation Z is the main group purchasing fast fashion items. Despite their understanding of sustainability challenges, these customers frequently value price, trends, and a certain level of cynicism over environmental factors when making purchases (Williams and Hodges, 2022)¹⁰⁰.

This study seeks to address the gap in the literature by analysing the role of brand activism in bridging the value-action gap across generations when it comes to clothing purchases. If this gap can be closed through targeted environmental activism, brands could attract younger, sustainability-conscious consumers, gaining significant economic advantages in a thriving and growing market. Studying the impact of brand activism on younger

⁹⁶ Nguyen, D., Lee, D., Truong, L., & Vu, V. (2022). The effect of Generation Z's perceptions of brand activism on brand loyalty: evidence from Vietnam. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*.

⁹⁷ Sachdev, N., Chahal, S., & Jain, S. (s.d.). Study of Brand Activism on Millennials and Generation Z. *Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting*.

⁹⁸ Korschun, D. (2021). Brand Activism Is Here to Stay: Here's Why. *Sciendoo*.

⁹⁹ Fernandes, A. (2022). A management perspective on brand activism. *ANPAD*.

¹⁰⁰ Williams, A., & Hodges, N. (2022). Adolescent Generation Z and sustainable and responsible fashion consumption: exploring the value-action gap. *Emerald Publishing Limited*.

generations within the fashion sector represents a potential contribution to businesses and the well-being of society and the planet. Encouraging Generation Z to buy more sustainable clothing could reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the fashion industry and improve the quality of life for current and future generations. Making sustainability a factor consumers consider during purchases offers clear economic, environmental, and social benefits.

Additionally, this study aims to explore whether brand activism plays a more prominent role when consumers are purchasing for themselves or if it is more relevant in altruistic purchases, such as gifts. Previous studies (Choe et al., 2023)¹⁰¹ show that consumers often spend less than their budget on personal goods but are more likely to spend their entire budget on gifts, with weaker savings goals and lower price sensitivity. This leads to the hypothesis that sustainable fashion items may be more frequently associated with gift purchases since they are generally more expensive. On the other hand, sustainability might be a key factor for the buyer might decide to purchase without considering this factor as it is secondary for the recipient of the gift. this would lead to the assumption that activism is preferable in the case of personal purchases where the buyer does not have to mitigate his or her own values to meet the taste of others. Furthermore, a McKinsey poll (Will Gen Z splurge or save on holiday gifts this year?, 2024)¹⁰² reveals that Millennials and Generation Z, who were born in a period of increased consumerism and economic uncertainty, spend less on gifts. While they were eager to spend on themselves in April of the previous year (Charm et al., 2023), they are now more concerned with finding lower-cost alternatives ("dupes") for high-priced things, notably in fashion, cosmetics, and home décor.

This raises the research question that will be explored in this dissertation:

How does activism impact the willingness to buy a good change as the motivation to buy (a gift vs. for oneself)?

¹⁰¹ Choe, Y., Kan, C., & Polman, E. (2023). Divergent Effects of Budgeting for Gifts versus Personal Purchases. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 50(3). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucad011>

¹⁰² Will Gen Z splurge or save on holiday gifts this year? (2024). Mckinsey.com. <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/email/genz/2023/11/2023-11-14d.html>

The research model was structured as follows:

H1: Consumers are more likely to buy fashion products from brands involved in social activism than from brands that are not, particularly when purchasing for themselves rather than as a gift.

H2: The effect of campaign type, moderated by the purpose of the gift, is mediated by self-brand connections

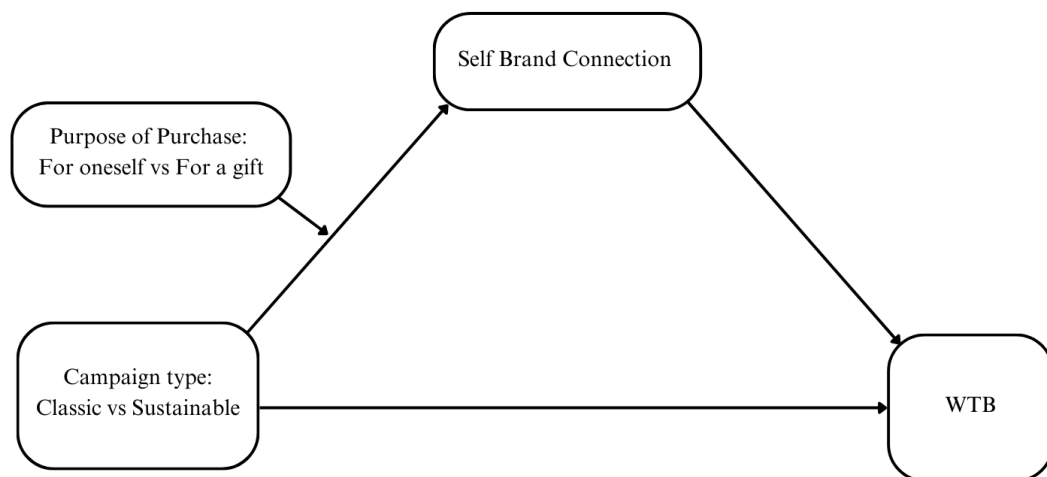


Figure 17: The research model, based on Hayes, A. F. (2013). Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach. Guilford Press.

The image shows a modified version of the model 7 diagram. The structure aims to analyse the conditional indirect effects and moderation factors. With this in mind, the conceptual diagram is structured as follows:

- X (Independent Variable): *Campaign Type* (Classic vs Sustainable)
- Y (Dependent Variable): Willingness to Buy (WTB)
- M (Mediating Variable): Self-brand connection (how connected individuals feel to the brand).
- W (Moderating Variable): Purpose of Purchase (For oneself vs For a gift)

The image above illustrates the following relationships:

- X (Campaign Type) directly affects M (Purpose of Purchase). The style of promotion (traditional or sustainable) influences whether the product is purchased for personal use or as a gift.
- W (Purpose of Purchase) influences the link between X and M_i . In other words, the degree or type of the campaign's influence on how attached consumers feel to a brand differs depending on what the goal of their purchase is.
- M (Self-brand connection) influences Y (willingness to buy). How connected people feel to a brand influences how likely they are to purchase it.

4.2 Methodological approach

4.2.1 Methodology and study

This experimental study consists of a conclusive causal between-subjects 2x2 research design. The experiment findings are conveyed through questionnaire responses acquired via a self-administered survey performed in Italy in September 2024 using the internet platform Qualtrics XM and its Extensions Process 4.2. The survey respondents were chosen using a non-probabilistic sampling approach. In particular, it was decided to adopt a convenience technique, which takes advantage of the ease and speed with which the constituents of the sample population can be reached and selected. This technology has no economic expenses and is favourable regarding fast data collecting speed and reaction rate. Considering the target sample, it was determined to include respondents of all ages by collecting data from both female and male individuals since demographic characteristics were not expected to have a statistically significant impact on the outcomes of the experimental study.

4.2.2 Participants and sampling procedure

The survey was handed to 154 people, and 152 respondents actively engaged in the experimental study by answering all questions on the survey's structure entirely and comprehensively. The two incomplete answers have been initially selected and then eliminated from the dataset during the data-cleaning phase. The respondents were contacted using an anonymous link from the Qualtrics XM website, which was then delivered by messaging apps and social media networks as main distribution channels (WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram). The target population sample reached by the survey

mainly included university students (45,4%; 69/152), undergraduates, and new employees 34,9% (53/152) located in different cities in Italy (88,2%; 134/152) and abroad (11,8%; 18/152). Therefore, following this assumption, the average age of the respondents was 33,34 years, although the age range fluctuated between a minimum of 14 and a maximum of 80 years. Regarding the respondents' gender, the prevalent gender of the sample was female, representing 51,3% (78/136), while the male gender was characterised by 42,8% (65/136). The remaining 6% (9/152) respondents preferred not to identify themselves with a specific gender (5,3%; 8/152) or selected the third gender/non-binary option (0,7%; 1/152). Moreover, socially speaking, 90,1% (137/152) of respondents support social causes, 39,5% (60/152) are leftist, centre (25%; 38/152) and no-political orientation (23%; 35/152) are in the middle, the right party people are 12,5% (14/152).

Data collection and questionnaire composition

To carry out the experimental investigation, a questionnaire comprising 38 questions, 32 of which were specific and 6 of which were demographic, was created.

To manipulate the independent variable (type of company: sustainable vs. classic) and the moderating variable (purpose of purchase: gift vs. personal), it was essential to create four visual stimuli, each different from the other and characterised by the combination of the X and W conditions.



Figure 18: The four scenarios of the survey

The first scenario consists of an image of a classic luxury fashion brand advertisement characterised by a personal purchase purpose.

The second scenario consists of an image of a classic luxury fashion brand advertisement with a purchase objective for a gift.

The third scenario involves an image of a socially sustainable luxury fashion brand advertisement characterised by a personal purchase target.

The fourth scenario appears to be an image of an advertisement of a socially sustainable luxury fashion brand characterised by a purchase objective for a gift.

As previously stated, data were obtained using a questionnaire split into four major sections. The questionnaire starts off with a brief introduction that outlines the academic goal of the experimental investigation. In addition, after including the university's credentials, complete compliance with privacy regulations regarding the anonymity policy on data collection and management was ensured.

The second segment of the survey is a randomised block with four distinct scenarios. To ensure a consistent number of exposures to all four visual stimuli, a randomisation process was essential within the questionnaire. To avoid potential cognitive bias and brand sentiment bias, all scenarios are represented by mock-ups of advertisements of a luxury fashion brand without any reference to registered trademarks. Therefore, all visual conditions were realised through the use of Canva.

The third section of the poll was shown to respondents after they had observed one of the four situations. This block of the questionnaire consisted primarily of Likert scale items. The first three concerning the dependent variable (purchase intention), one about the first control variable (WTP), seven concerning the second control variable (brand image), eight relating to the third control variable (WOM) five concerning the fourth control variable (expertise) 5 concerning the fifth control variable (trust) 2 concerning the sixth control variable (self-communication) one concerning the manipulation check of X and one regarding the manipulation check of W. All the questions mentioned above were assessed employing a Likert scale based on 7 rating points.

The first scale, relating to the dependent variable, is derived from the scale prevalidated Baker, Michael J. and Gilbert A. Churchill, Jr. (1977), “The Impact of Physically Attractive Models on Advertising Evaluations”¹⁰³.

The second scale, relating to the second control variable, is derived from the scale prevalidated by Sengupta, Jaideep and Gita Venkataramani Johar (2002), “Effects of Inconsistent Attribute Information on the Predictive Value of Product Attitudes: Toward a Resolution of Opposing Perspectives,”¹⁰⁴.

The third scale, relative to the third control variable, is derived from the scale prevalidated by Arnett, Dennis B., Steve D. German, and Shelby D. Hunt (2003), “The Identity Salience Model of Relationship Marketing Success: The Case of Nonprofit Marketing,”¹⁰⁵.

The fourth scale, relative to the sixth control variable, is derived from the scale prevalidated by Escalas, Jennifer Edson and James R. Bettman (2003), “You Are What They Eat: The Influence of Reference Groups on Consumers’ Connections to Brands”¹⁰⁶.

All the scales mentioned above have been adjusted according to the needs of this experimental research.

Finally, the fourth and final section of the questionnaire comprises the six demographic questions block, in which the respondents were asked about their social activism inclination, political orientation, gender, age, occupation, and location.

4.3 Experimental results

4.3.1 Data analysis

The Qualtrics XM questionnaire data were transferred to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) statistical software for processing.

Initially, six factorial analyses were conducted to investigate and validate the items of the scales utilised in the conceptual model of the experimental investigation. Specifically, principal component analysis was used as an extraction approach, with Varimax as a

¹⁰³ Baker, Michael J. and Gilbert A. Churchill, Jr. (1977), “The Impact of Physically Attractive Models on Advertising Evaluations,” JMR, 14 (November), 538-555

¹⁰⁴ Sengupta, Jaideep and Gita Venkataramani Johar (2002), “Effects of Inconsistent Attribute Information on the Predictive Value of Product Attitudes: Toward a Resolution of Opposing Perspectives,” JCR, 29 (June), 39-56.

¹⁰⁵ Arnett, Dennis B., Steve D. German, and Shelby D. Hunt (2003), “The Identity Salience Model of Relationship Marketing Success: The Case of Nonprofit Marketing,” JM, 67 (April), 89-105.

¹⁰⁶ Escalas, Jennifer Edson and James R. Bettman (2003), “You Are What They Eat: The Influence of Reference Groups on Consumers’ Connections to Brands,” Journal of Consumer Psychology, 13 (3), 339-348.

rotation technique. To determine how many components to extract, the table of total explained variance was examined, ensuring that, according to Kaiser's criteria, the eigenvalues were larger than one and the cumulative variance in percent was greater than 60%. Both the commonalities table and component matrix were observed. Specifically, all items had an extraction value larger than 0.5 and a loading score greater than 0.3. Therefore, it was chosen to preserve and validate the entire scale. After validating all the scales, six reliability tests were carried out to verify the level of reliability of all the scales considered. In particular, I observed the Cronbach α value of all theoretical constructs, ensuring that it was above 60%. The coefficient alpha, often known as Cronbach's alpha, is the average of all potential split-half coefficients obtained by various scale item splitting methods. This coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, and a value of 0.6 or lower often implies poor internal consistency dependability.

4.3.2 Hypotheses results

To examine the validity of the mediation hypothesis and the moderate mediation hypothesis two regression analyses were performed using models 1 and 7 of Andrew F. Hayes' Process Macro V4.2 for SPSS. The model 1 was used to investigate the effect of moderation, whereas the model 7 allowed for the testing of moderation. These models will enable you to explore the interaction between the independent variable (Activism Type: sustainable vs classic) and the moderator variable (Purpose of the purchase) on the mediator variable (self-brand connection), as well as the indirect effect of the mediator on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

In both models, a 95% confidence interval was used with a significance level (alpha) of 5%. The bootstrap method was used to estimate the confidence intervals, using 5000 iterations to ensure a robust estimate of the indirect effects. One critical aspect of interpreting results has been ensuring that the extremes of confidence intervals (Lower Level of Confidence Interval, LLCI, and Upper Level of Confidence Interval, ULCI) do not contain zero, which indicates a statistically significant effect. If the limits of the confidence interval matched the sign (both positive and negative), it may be concluded that the impact was substantial; otherwise, the hypothesis was not confirmed.

4.3.2.1 Model 1

Hayes (2013) describes Model 1 as a basic moderation model that tests whether a moderator (Purpose of the purchase) influences the connection between an independent variable (X) and a dependent variable (WTB). This model evaluates whether the extent or direction of activism's influence on WTB differs with different levels of self. In this case, moderation is determined by examining the interaction term between activism and self (X*W). A substantial interaction term indicates that W influences the effect of X on Y. Concerning model 1, Y=WTB, X=activism and W=self, the model summary is:

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	Df2	p
0,2788	0,0777	1,8134	4,2148	3,0000	150,0000	0,068

Through the model summary, we can get important information regarding the moderation model's overall fit. The R^2 score measures the extent to which variance in the dependent variable (Y) is explained by the independent variable (X), moderator (W), and interaction term (X*W). Concerning the relationship between activism (X) and willingness to buy (Y), the moderation analysis, based on Hayes' (2013) Model 1, indicates that self-brand connection (W) influences this relationship depending on whether the consumer is purchasing for themselves or as a gift. The model summary reveals an R^2 value of 0.4273, suggesting that 42.7% of the variance in willingness to buy is accounted for by activism, self-brand connection, and their interaction. The overall model is statistically significant, evidenced by the F-test result of $F(2,150) = 55.9679$, with a p-value less than .001. Also, the model shows:

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	4,4828	,2501	17,9264	,0000	3,9887	4,9769
activism	0,0909	,3236	,2809	,7792	-,5485	,7303
purpose_self	-0,5494	,3284	-1,6729	,0964	-1, 1984	,0995
Interaction	0,9599	,4396	2,1838	,0305	,0914	1,8284

With regard to the first part of the indirect effect (X-Y), through the observation of the output, a p-value of 0.7792, an adverse confidence interval (LLCI=-0.5485; ULCI=0.7303), and a positive beta regression coefficient of 0.0909 could be noted. Therefore, this section of the indirect effect was not statistically significant. However, the moderation effect becomes more pronounced when examining conditional effects. When the self (W) is 0 (indicating purchases made as gifts), the indirect effect of activism on

willingness to buy is not statistically significant, with an effect value of 0.0909 and a p-value exceeding .05. Thus, this finding suggests that activism does not significantly influence willingness to buy when the purchase is intended for someone else. However, when the purchase is made for oneself, and it therefore has a value of 1, the effect becomes statistically significant with an effect value of 1,0508, a p-value of 0,005 and a favourable confidence interval (LLCI= 0,4629; ULCI= 1,6386).

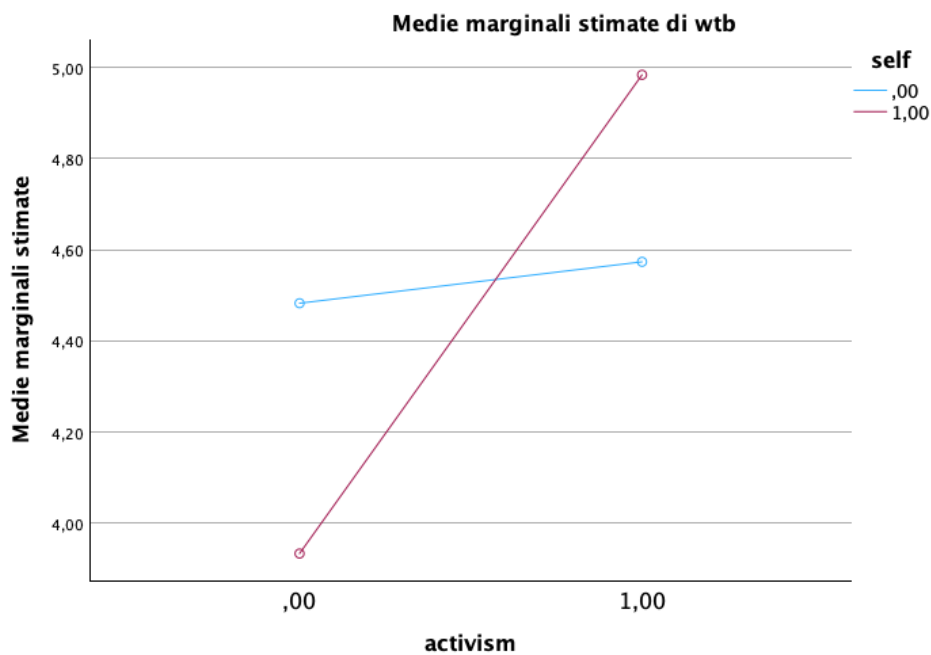


Figure 20: ANOVA graph of model 1

4.3.2.2 Model 7

Hayes' Model 7 is a moderated mediation model that examines whether the mediation impact of an independent variable (X) on a dependent variable (Y) via a mediator (M) is reliant on a moderator (W). In other words, it investigates whether the degree of X's indirect influence on Y through M varies with the level of W. This model expands the classic mediation model by including a moderating variable, which alters the connection between the independent variable and the mediator, therefore changing the whole mediation process. Regarding model 7, Y=WTB, X=activism, W=self and M= self-brand communication, the model summary is:

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	Df2	p
0,2504	0,0627	2,4391	3,3234	3,0000	149,0000	0,215

The model summary focuses on determining how effectively the independent variable (activism), moderator (Purpose of the purchase), and the interaction term (XW) predict the mediator (self-brand connection) and, eventually, the dependent variable (WTB). R^2 values indicate the variance the model explains in the mediator and the dependent variables. The outcome variable for self-brand communication is:

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	4,1786	,2951	14, 1576	,0000	3,5954	4,7618
activism	,0540	,3793	,1423	,8870	-,6954	,8034
purpose_self	-, 6911	,3848	-1,7958	,0746	-1,4515	,0693
Interaction	1,0061	,5127	1,9623	,0516	-, 0070	2,0193

The outcome variable for WTB is:

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2,0933	,2429	8,6172	,0000	1,6133	2,5733
activism	,3053	,1753	1,7422	,0835	-, 0410	,6516
self-brand connections	,5419	,0547	9,9056	,0000	,4338	2,5733

About the first part of the outcome variable table, the indirect effect (X-M), a p-value of 0.8870, an adverse confidence interval (LLCI=-0.6954; ULCI=0.8034) and a positive beta regression coefficient of 0.0540 could be noted. Therefore, this section of the indirect effect was statistically not significant. However, it is essential to consider that even here, when the self (W) is 0 (indicating purchases made as gifts), the indirect effect of activism on willingness to buy is not statistically significant, with an effect value of 0.0504 and a p-value exceeding .05. However, when the purchase is made for oneself, and it has a value of 1, the effect becomes statistically significant with an effect value of 1,0601, a p-value of 0,025 and a favourable confidence interval (LLCI= 0,3783; ULCI= 1,17419). Thus, this finding suggests that activism does not significantly influence self-brand connections when the purchase is intended for someone else.

Concerning the second section of the outcome variable table, the indirect effect (M-Y) a p-value of 0.0000, a favourable confidence interval (LLCI=0.4338; ULCI=0.6500) and a positive beta regression coefficient of 0.5419 were noted. Therefore, this section of the

indirect effect was statistically significant. This section also confirms that when self equals 0, it doesn't significantly impact willingness to buy, but it does when self equals 1. As far as the joint interaction effect ($X*W-M$) is concerned, through observation of the output of model 7, a p-value of 0.0516, an adverse confidence interval (LLCI=-0.0070; ULCI=2.0193) and a positive beta regression coefficient of 1.0061 were noted. Therefore, this section of the indirect effect was not statistically significant. Had we decided to take 10% instead of 5% as the reference alpha, the effect would have been marginally significant ($P\text{-value}=0.0516 < \alpha=10\%$). Finally, considering the model's Index of Moderated Mediation, we can assess the strength of the indirect effect of the independent variable activism on the dependent variable willingness to buy through the mediator self-brand connection, identifying how the mediation effect changes at different levels of moderation. Specifically, the index is displayed as 0.5452 with a bootstrap standard error of 0.2835. The bootstrap confidence interval doesn't contain zero (BootLLCI= 0.1530; BootULCI=1.1383), indicating statistical significance. This shows that the indirect influence of activism on willingness to buy varies significantly depending on the value taken by the moderator *Purpose of the purchase* and whether the purchase is made for oneself or others. In practical terms, this research shows that activism has a greater impact on consumers' propensity to purchase when buying for themselves (self = 1) than when buying for others (self = 0). The index points out the importance of considering consumer motivation in marketing strategies, as activism's impact on purchasing behaviour relies on the self-brand connection, which fluctuates based on the consumer's intent.

4.4 General discussion and conclusion

4.4.1 Theoretical contributions

This dissertation adds considerably to the research by addressing a gap in consumer purchasing behaviour patterns regarding the fashion and luxury sectors, especially brand activism. While many studies have looked at the function of brand activism in other sectors, there is a definite need for a better understanding of its influence on the fashion industry. While numerous studies have explored the role of brand activism across various industries, there is a clear need for a deeper understanding of its impact on the fashion industry. Most existing literature focuses heavily on brand activism's influence within

other sectors, such as consumer goods or social causes (Lee & Yoon, 2020)¹⁰⁷. Still, relatively little has been done to explore its effects within fashion, especially luxury brands.

Furthermore, a large part of the research has centred on younger consumer groups, specifically Gen Z and millennials, who are frequently identified as the primary demographic engaged with brand activism (Shetty, Venkataramaiah, & Anand, 2019)¹⁰⁸; (Sachdev, Chahal, & Jain, 2021)¹⁰⁹. Although these studies have offered useful insights into these generations' perceptions of brand activism, a more nuanced study that takes into account diverse portions of the customer base, as well as the unique context of fashion, remains necessary. For example, while Shetty et al. (2019) focus on millennials' general attitudes towards activism, they do not investigate how this translates into purchasing behaviour in the fashion industry, leaving a theoretical gap in understanding how brand activism influences consumer decisions in this context.

Another crucial area for improvement in the current literature is regional bias. Much of the study on brand activism has taken place in markets such as the United States and Northern Europe, where the cultural backdrop and consumer views towards activism may differ dramatically from those in other countries, such as Italy. Despite Italy's importance in the global fashion business, no significant research has been done to examine the impact of brand activism on Italian customers. This study tries to bridge that gap by providing insights into how Italian consumers respond to brand activism, particularly in the luxury fashion industry, where social and environmental responsibility may have different implications than in other markets.

Moreover, more research needs to explore the relationship between brand activism and specific consumer actions, such as the distinction between purchasing for oneself versus purchasing as part of gift-giving. This research addresses this deficiency by examining how consumers respond to brand activism in selfish and selfless purchasing contexts, which still needs to be explored. According to theoretical frameworks, while brand activism can increase a company's moral appeal, its impact on practical consumer choices, such as gift-giving, should be investigated further.

¹⁰⁷ Lee, M., & Yoon, H. (2020). When Brand Activism Advertising Campaign Goes Viral: An Analysis of Always #LikeAGirl Video Networks on YouTube. *The International Journal of Advanced Culture Technology*, 8, 146-158. <https://doi.org/10.17703/IJACT.2020.8.2.146>.

¹⁰⁸ Shetty, A., Venkataramaiah, N., & Anand, K. (2019). Brand activism and millennials: an empirical investigation into the perception of millennials towards brand activism. *Problems and perspectives in management*, 17, 163-175. [https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.17\(4\).2019.14](https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.17(4).2019.14).

¹⁰⁹ Sachdev, N., Chahal, S., & Jain, S. (2021). Study of Brand Activism on Millennials and Generation Z. *Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting*. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajeba/2021/v21i1630484>.

The new study also helps to resolve discrepancies in the literature about the impact of activism on consumer purchasing behaviour. Some studies suggest brand activism has a positive effect, while others report consumer scepticism or backlash, leading to confusion over its net impact. By focusing on the fashion sector, this research provides a clearer understanding of how activism campaigns, when tied to tangible initiatives like sustainability, fair wages, and job security, can positively influence consumer behaviour. This supports the view that adopting ethical practices enhances consumer motivation to purchase and increases their willingness to pay premium prices for products they perceive as aligned with their values. The findings corroborate previous research that indicates consumers are increasingly drawn to brands that demonstrate social responsibility (Lee & Yoon, 2020), but in this case, within the specific and often under-explored context of fashion and luxury.

As discussed in the papers by Lee & Yoon (2020)¹¹⁰, Sachdev, Chahal, & Jain (2021)¹¹¹, and Shetty, Venkataramaiah, & Anand (2019)¹¹², brand activism has been shown to influence consumers' willingness to buy positively. For instance, Lee & Yoon (2020) demonstrated how the viral success of the Always #LikeAGirl campaign significantly enhanced consumer engagement and brand perception, leading to increased purchase intentions. Similarly, Sachdev et al. (2021) and Shetty et al. (2019) discovered that Millennials and Generation Z are more inclined to support businesses that promote social concerns, including sustainability and fair worker treatment. Consistent with these findings, my poll demonstrates that the sample indicated a more vital "willingness to buy" when businesses were viewed as activists and demonstrated concern for their employees. However, contrary to the research by Lok & Dunn (2022)¹¹³, which explored the benefits of prosocial spending, my study shows that brand activism was not linked to a higher intention to purchase gifts. Instead, respondents deemed brand activism more critical when making purchases for themselves, suggesting that personal values weigh heavily in individual purchasing decisions.

¹¹⁰ Lee, M., & Yoon, H. (2020). When Brand Activism Advertising Campaign Goes Viral: An Analysis of Always #LikeAGirl Video Networks on YouTube. *The International Journal of Advanced Culture Technology*, 8, 146-158. <https://doi.org/10.17703/IJACT.2020.8.2.146>

¹¹¹ Sachdev, N., Chahal, S., & Jain, S. (2021). Study of Brand Activism on Millennials and Generation Z. *Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting*. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajeba/2021/v21i1630484>

¹¹² Shetty, A., Venkataramaiah, N., & Anand, K. (2019). Brand activism and millennials: an empirical investigation into the perception of millennials towards brand activism. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 17, 163-175. [https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.17\(4\).2019.14](https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.17(4).2019.14)

¹¹³ Lok, I., & Dunn, E. (2022). Are the benefits of prosocial spending and buying time moderated by age, gender, or income?. *PLoS ONE*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0269636>.

Instead, respondents in my study considered brand activism more important when making purchases for themselves, suggesting that personal values and ethical considerations weigh heavily in individual purchasing decisions. This finding indicates that when consumers buy for themselves, they are more likely to align their purchases with brands whose activism reflects their beliefs and values. It suggests a deeper degree of personal connection and identity creation, in which customers perceive their purchases as an extension of their ethical position. A customer, for example, may experience a feeling of pride or duty when they support a company that promotes sustainability, fair pay, or worker rights since it allows them to actively contribute to the causes they believe in. In contrast, in gift-buying circumstances, the emphasis switches to the recipient's choices rather than the buyer's ideals. In such circumstances, the significance of brand activism is overshadowed by factors such as the recipient's taste or the appropriateness of the present, which may explain why brand activism had no substantial impact on gift-purchasing intentions. This research supports the notion that shopping for oneself may be a more personal, value-driven behaviour, with customers encouraged to make decisions that represent their own ideals and social identity.

4.4.2 Managerial implications

This paper has presented remarkable insights that companies might want to explore. According to the study, brand activism has a greater influence on buyers while shopping for oneself than when buying presents for others. As a manager, I would utilise this information to build highly targeted advertising campaigns that emphasise the personal connection. The goal is to connect with customers emotionally by stressing how their shopping selections reflect their views and ethical concerns. For example, I would launch a campaign called "Wear Your Values" to encourage shoppers to invest in goods that represent their beliefs, especially social sustainability and ethical work practices. This initiative would give consumers the feeling that they are actively participating in a campaign that encourages workers' rightful treatment rather than merely purchasing a product, making it a more personal purchase.

To deepen this personal connection, I would plan events that highlight the organization's advocacy. For example, companies might hold pop-up events in major cities, form influencer collaborations, and release limited-edition pieces that aim to showcase the stories behind their products, with a focus on the people who manufacture them and the ethical production processes they employ. Brands may build emotional connections with

customers by telling authentic tales about their staff members and working conditions. This would assist to position the brand as more than simply a fashion label, but also as a social change champion, allowing self-purchasers to feel proud and linked to the company's values while wearing its products. This method may boost the brand's image and equity by fostering emotional connections. Brands can portray themselves as socially responsible by consistently stressing their commitment to sustainable working practices. This would promote brand loyalty since customers are more inclined to remain with businesses that they feel have a good global influence. Furthermore, using these concepts across all marketing channels ensures that every consumer touchpoint reinforces the message, improving customer engagement and advocacy.

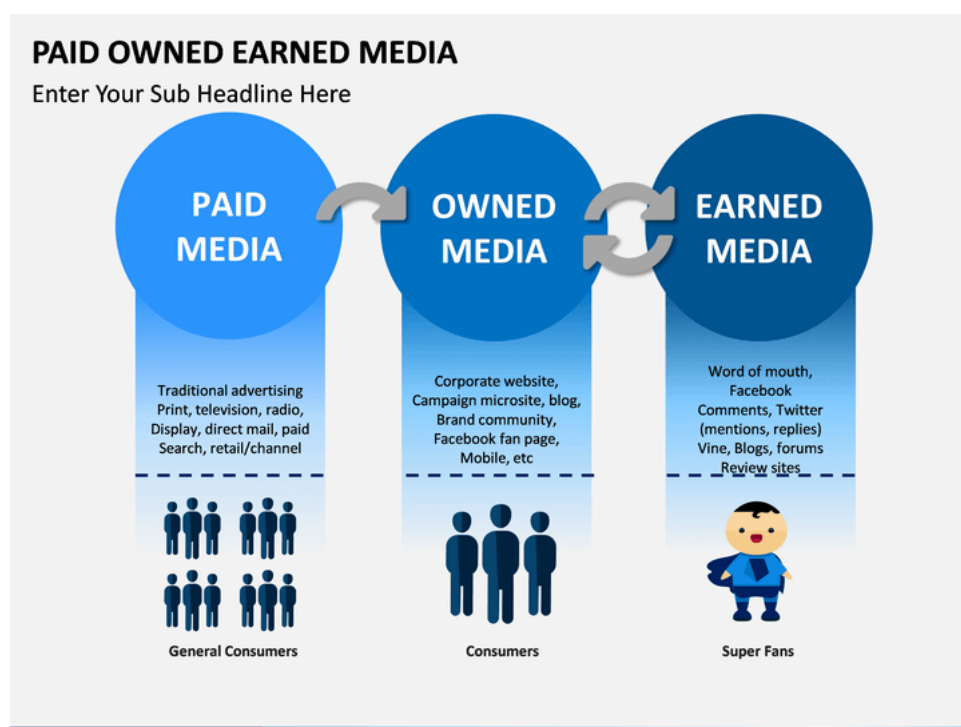


Figure 21: POE model,

<https://cdn.sketchbubble.com/pub/media/catalog/product/cache/1/image/720x540/c96a280f94e22e3ee3823dd0a1a87606/p/a/paid-owned-earned-slide1.png>

In terms of media strategy, I would use the POE model (paid, owned, and earned) to optimise the campaign's effect, particularly through earned media. Rather than relying solely on paid promotion, the emphasis would be on creating organic, word-of-mouth buzz and encouraging customers to share their experiences with the company and its activism campaigns on social media, as well as collaborating with influencers who genuinely support ethical fashion to amp up the message and generate valuable earned publicity. By increasing the awareness of these stories, they may avoid costly sponsored advertisements

and instead allow the brand's principles to drive organic development. This would also assist to build consumer trust over time by demonstrating real-life experiences from people who share their interests.

This emphasis on earned media reduces the cost of advertising while increasing the credibility of the brand's message. People are more likely to believe recommendations from their peers or influencers they follow rather than traditional advertisements. This strategy encourages long-term brand loyalty by making customers feel more connected to the company's ideals and the movement it represents. As a consequence, the brand can benefit from it at every point of the customer journey, from awareness to consideration, purchase, and advocacy, resulting in more revenue and profitability.

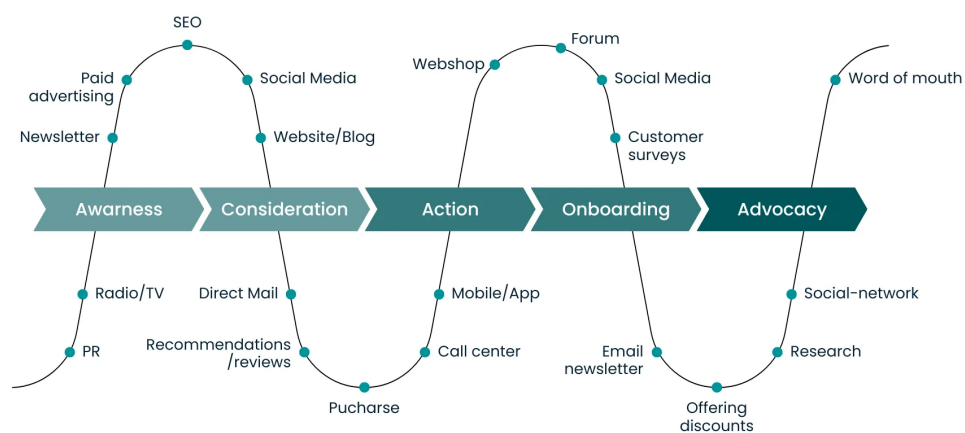


Figure 22: Customer Journey Map, <https://survalyzer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Customer-Journey-Map-Diagram-Brainstorm.png>

Brands may even gain a competitive edge by emphasising brand activism in marketing, particularly among self-buyers. In the long run, this might boost market share as consumers continue to look for firms that match their values.

As more consumers become aware of social sustainability, the brand may even gain a dominant position in the sector, particularly among ethically conscious shoppers. Activist fashion firms should also consider the fact that Generation Z and Millennials represent an important portion of the fashion sector, and being able to 'attract' them would result in better sales.

4.4.3 Limitations and Future Research

First and foremost, the questionnaire's language poses a significant limitation.

Although giving the poll in English allowed for a more diverse variety of replies, the majority of respondents were Italian. Many may not have been competent in English, limiting their capacity to react appropriately (Monetta et al., 2009)¹¹⁴. In future research, it would be preferable to administer the survey in the respondents' native language when focussing on a certain nation or demography, such as administering the survey in Italian for a mostly Italian sample. This would increase answer quality and better represent participants' actual thoughts.

Second, our study focused solely on clothes, a product category commonly linked with female customers who regularly utilise it to express their identity (Guy et al., 2000)¹¹⁵ and desires, whereas males typically do not. While this approach offered useful data, it restricted the results' generalisability to diverse customer groups. Future research should include conducting separate polls for male and female respondents or limiting the study to one gender in order to provide more precise and focused results. Examining other product categories within the fashion and luxury industries, such as accessories or footwear, may provide different results.

Another restriction is the generation analysed in the study. This study looked at people of all ages, but while Generations Y and Z have grown up in an era of increased consumerism, older generations, such as Generation X and Baby Boomers, have lived in different historical and economic contexts and may exhibit more altruistic behaviours as a result of their life experiences and financial resources. Future studies could divide the sample by age group, allowing for a comparative analysis between different generations and providing a more comprehensive understanding of how social activism influences purchasing decisions across different generations.

Moreover, the quantitative nature of this study responds to the surface-level depth of findings. While a quantitative approach helped collect a large amount of data from a larger sample, it can only address the surface of consumer motivations and attitudes. Future research could adopt qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups,

¹¹⁴ Pell, M., Monetta, L., Paulmann, S., & Kotz, S. (2009). Recognizing Emotions in a Foreign Language. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 33, 107-120. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10919-008-0065-7>.

¹¹⁵ Guy, A., & Banim, M. (2000). Personal Collections: Women's clothing use and identity. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 9, 313 - 327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713678000>.

which, although more time-consuming, would offer richer and more detailed information into the reasons for consumer behaviour attitudes toward social brand activism.

In addition, the study relied on traditional survey methods, which measure self-reported behaviours and perceptions. Future studies might look at more novel approaches, such as neuromarketing technologies. Eye tracking to measure attention, galvanic skin response (GSR) to measure physiological arousal, and EEG (electroencephalography) to monitor brain activity could provide a more objective assessment of consumer reactions to marketing stimuli, providing deeper insights into how social activism messaging impacts attention and emotional engagement (Alsharif et al., 2023)¹¹⁶.

Finally, including other variables or mediators may broaden the study model. For example, using consumer participation as a mediator may provide a more comprehensive view of how social brand activism affects purchase decisions. Future research might look at other moderating or mediating elements, such as trust or perceived brand authenticity, to help refine the model and improve our knowledge of the mechanisms that drive customer behaviour in response to brand activism.

¹¹⁶ Alsharif, A., Salleh, N., Abdullah, M., Khraiwish, A., & Ashaari, A. (2023). Neuromarketing Tools Used in the Marketing Mix: A Systematic Literature and Future Research Agenda. *SAGE Open*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231156563>.

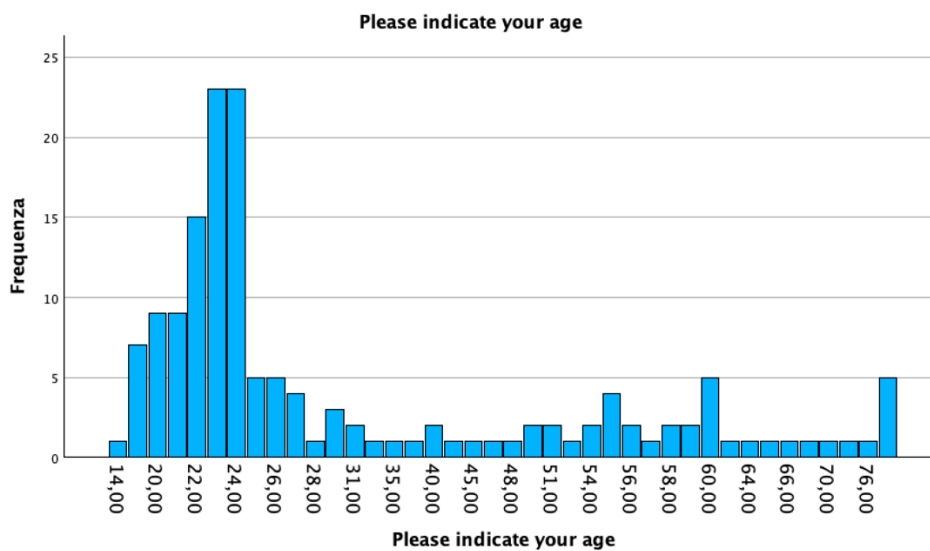
APPENDIX

Descriptive statistics: age

Statistiche

Please indicate your age

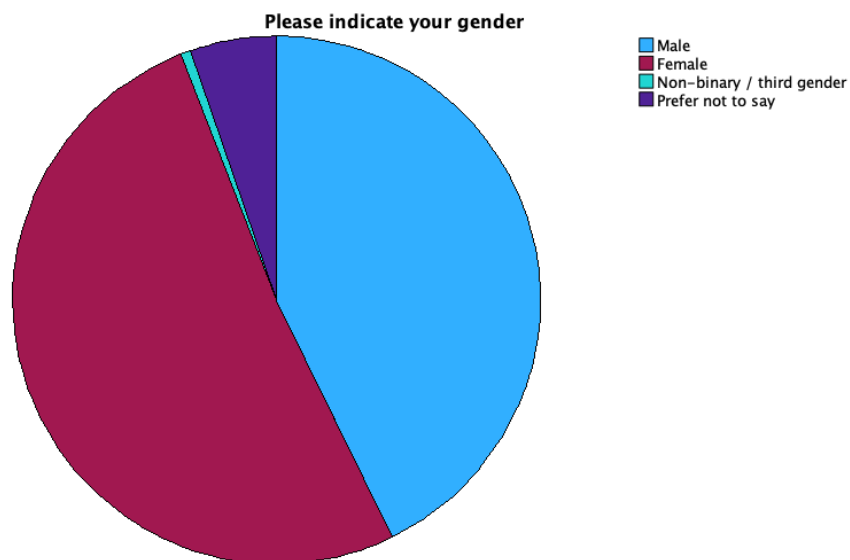
N	Valido	152
	Mancante	2
Media		33,3355
Mediana		24,0000
Deviazione std.		17,34494
Varianza		300,847
Intervallo		66,00
Minimo		14,00
Massimo		80,00



Descriptive statistics: gender

Please indicate your gender

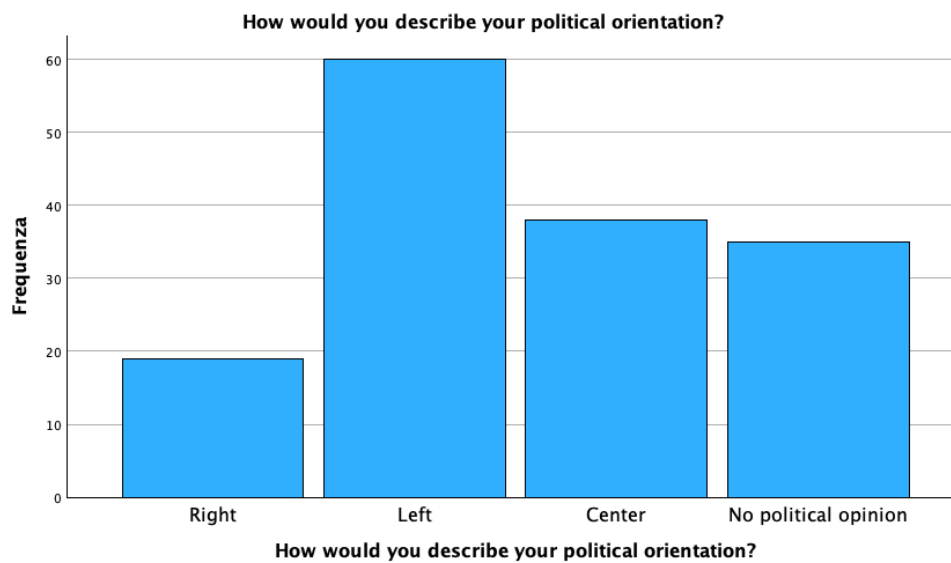
		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Male	65	42,2	42,8	42,8
	Female	78	50,6	51,3	94,1
	Non-binary / third gender	1	,6	,7	94,7
	Prefer not to say	8	5,2	5,3	100,0
	Totale	152	98,7	100,0	
Mancante	Sistema	2	1,3		
Totale		154	100,0		



Descriptive statistics: political orientation

How would you describe your political orientation?

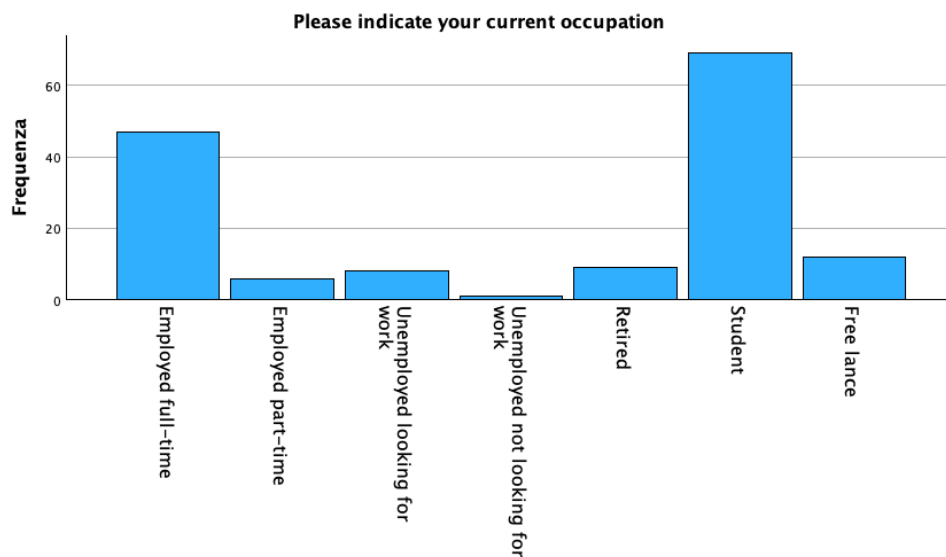
		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Right	19	12,3	12,5	12,5
	Left	60	39,0	39,5	52,0
	Center	38	24,7	25,0	77,0
	No political opinion	35	22,7	23,0	100,0
	Totale	152	98,7	100,0	
Mancante	Sistema	2	1,3		
Totale		154	100,0		



Descriptive statistics: occupation

Please indicate your current occupation

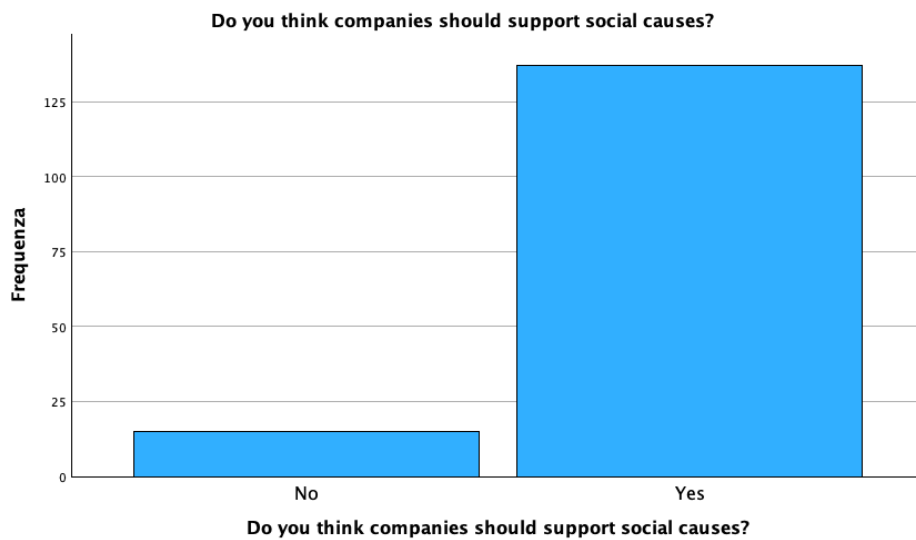
		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Employed full-time	47	30,5	30,9	30,9
	Employed part-time	6	3,9	3,9	34,9
	Unemployed looking for work	8	5,2	5,3	40,1
	Unemployed not looking for work	1	,6	,7	40,8
	Retired	9	5,8	5,9	46,7
	Student	69	44,8	45,4	92,1
	Free lance	12	7,8	7,9	100,0
	Totale	152	98,7	100,0	
Mancante	Sistema	2	1,3		
Totale		154	100,0		



Descriptive statistics: social activism

Do you think companies should support social causes?

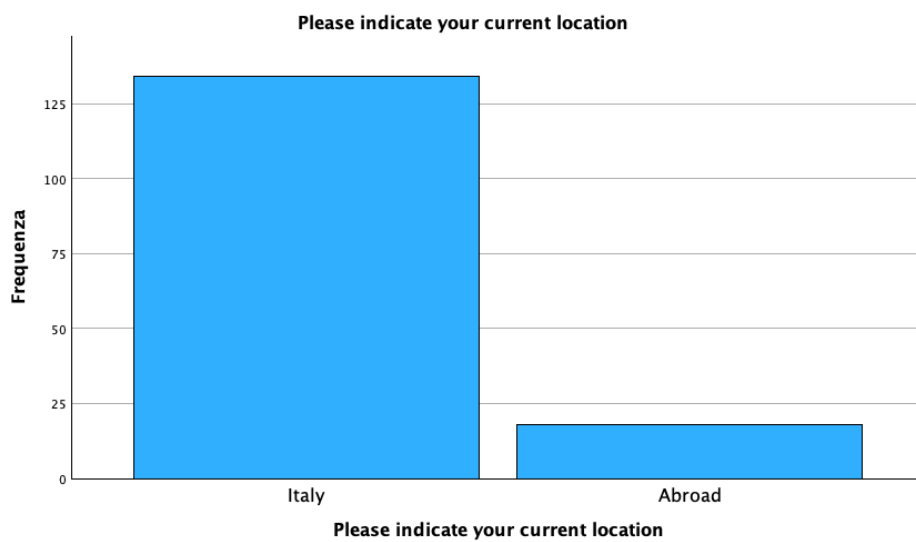
		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	No	15	9,7	9,9	9,9
	Yes	137	89,0	90,1	100,0
	Totale	152	98,7	100,0	
Mancante	Sistema	2	1,3		
Totale		154	100,0		



Descriptive statistics: location

Please indicate your current location

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Italy	134	87,0	88,2	88,2
	Abroad	18	11,7	11,8	100,0
	Totale	152	98,7	100,0	
Mancante	Sistema	2	1,3		
Totale		154	100,0		



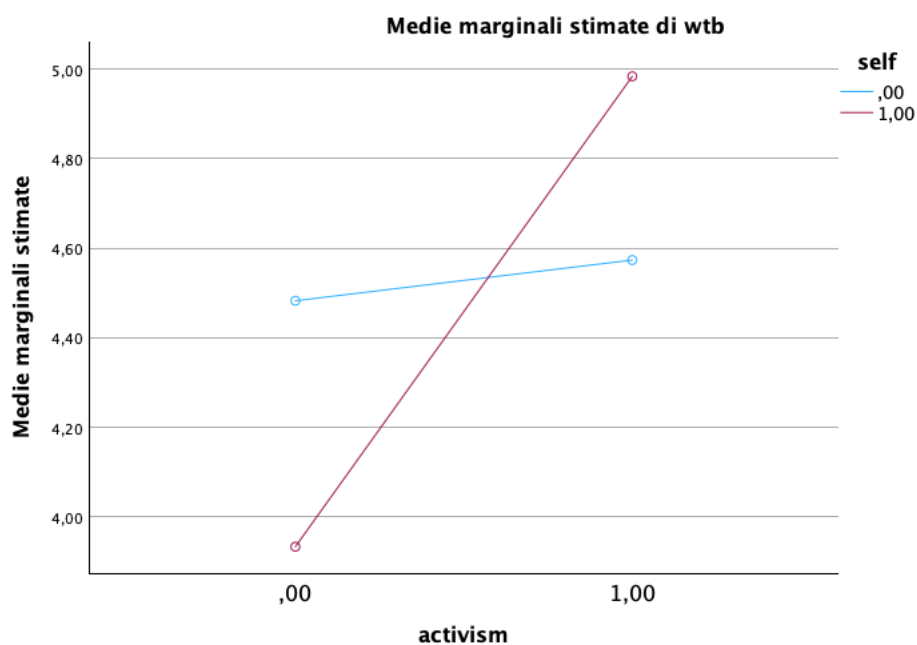
One-Way ANOVA – Wtb*self-activism

Test di effetti tra soggetti

Variabile dipendente: wtb

Origine	Somma dei quadrati di tipo III	df	Media quadratica	F	Sig.
Modello corretto	22,929 ^a	3	7,643	4,215	,007
Intercepta	3032,055	1	3032,055	1672,002	<,001
self	,181	1	,181	,100	,752
activism	12,233	1	12,233	6,746	,010
self * activism	8,648	1	8,648	4,769	,031
Errore	272,014	150	1,813		
Totale	3416,444	154			
Totale corretto	294,944	153			

a. R-quadro = ,078 (R-quadro adattato = ,059)



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