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The Impact of Corporate Brand Activism and
Brand Attachment on Consumer Responses
in the Sportswear Industry

Student name: Meyer, Lennart (l.meyer-1@student.utwente.nl)

Field of study: Communication Sciences (M-COM)

Student number: 2630966

Assessor: Graaf, Shenja van der (UT-BMS) shenja.vandergraaf@utwente.nl

Co-assessor: Galetzka, Mirjam (UT-BMS) m.galetzka@utwente.nl

Abstract

Objectives: It is well-established that the authenticity of CSR marketing and a strong brand attachment positively affects consumer responses in terms of their buying behavior, their loyalty and overall attitude. The objective of this study was to determine if a similar relationship applies to corporate brand activism. Hence, in this context, this research investigated the authenticity of corporate brand activism (authentic vs. inauthentic) and how it impacts consumer responses. Furthermore, it was investigated if brand attachment (strong vs. weak) moderates, and brand reputation mediates this relationship.

Methods: In order to test the three proposed hypotheses of this study, the research conducted an experiment using a combination of convenient and snowball sampling methods. As for the consumer response variables, this research focused on the variables purchase intention, customer loyalty and consumer attitudes. All variables, including the moderator (brand attachment) and mediator (brand reputation) were measured using a 7-point Likert scale.

Results: As a result of the data collection, 217 valid responses were analyzed through SPSS by using a multivariate analyses and *PROCESS* mediator analyses. The findings showed a significant direct effect of perceived corporate brand activism on all three consumer responses (purchase intention, customer loyalty & consumer attitude). The results suggest that brand attachment moderates the main effect on consumer attitudes and that brand reputation fully mediates the effect on purchase intention and customer loyalty. Additionally, the main effect on consumer attitudes is partly mediated by the brand's reputation.

Theoretical and practical implications: These findings contribute to existing theory in the world of marketing in which businesses may increase consumer responses through a more authentic approach of corporate brand activism. Businesses experience more positive purchase intentions, greater customer loyalty and more positive consumer attitudes when they take and communicate an authentic socio-political stance. Hence, the results suggest that businesses should implement some sort of proof of authenticity within their campaigns to trigger positive consumer responses through which purchase intentions, customer loyalty and consumer attitudes increase.

Keywords: Corporate brand activism, brand reputation, brand attachment, consumer attitude, customer loyalty, purchase intention

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1.0 Introduction

In today's marketplaces, more and more corporations are guided by corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Hartsock & Ory, 2018). In order to support good causes, corporations organize volunteer days or donate some of their profits to nonprofit establishments (cause-related marketing). While this kind of corporate behavior is respectable, nowadays conventional CSR is expected instead of being praised. Today, companies follow a newly emerged form of CSR practice, known as corporate brand activism (Hartsock & Ory, 2018). Corporate brand activism was first recognized to be a "trend to watch in 2017" (Kubiak & Ouda, 2020) and consequently triggered the attention of practitioners and the media in 2018 (Moorman, 2018; BGN, 2018). Corporate brand activism emerged from CSR and is considered to be a marketing tactic in which brands seek to stand out by taking public stances on social or political issues instead of solely donating money to good causes or charity work (Moorman, 2020). However, taking public stances on social or political issues has never been more uncertain as it comes with great risks. Within the marketing community, it is commonly known that companies should only raise their voice in regard to socio-political issues if the company is consistently in connection with their target market (Moorman, 2018). This means that the social-political stances should suit the company's values and their ideas portrayed to the customer. Hence, taking public stances as an organization comes with heavy risks for an organization as there is a chance of backfiring or backlashing. Consumers raise their voices vocally in response to establishments' brand activism (Vredenburg et al. 2020).

Examples of failed corporate brand activism include the boycott response towards Gillette razor blades or Pepsi's controversial efforts of taking a stand on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Procter & Gamble's razor brand company Gillette made efforts to take public stances on toxic masculinity by addressing bullying, sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement in their 2019 published video titled "We Believe" (McCluskey, 2019). The video was published on YouTube¹ and received with 901.000 dislikes and only 368.000 likes within the first few weeks of its launch a lot of negative feedback (Al-Muslim, 2019). The initial aim of the commercial was to encourage men to be the "best" by holding each other accountable and reject justifications for bad behavior (Green, 2019). Not everyone understood the

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koPmuEyP3a0>

ad as it was intended, causing hundreds of comments, twitter posts and YouTube videos discussing the video campaign by Gillette. While some people entitled the ad to be propaganda or criticized the way men were painted, others started to boycott Gillette razor blades (Green, 2019). Another example of failed corporate brand activism is Pepsi's effort in taking a public stance towards the 'Black Lives Matter Movement' as it evoked strong negative emotions by its consumers. The Pepsi commercial² featuring Kendall Jenner was aired in 2017 and showed attractive young people holding nonspecific protest signs in the air (Victor, 2017). The protesters were consistently smiling, laughing and hugging leading to the advertisement's climatic scene in which a police officer accepts a can of Pepsi from Kendall Jenner, a white woman. The acceptance of the Pepsi can was then approved by the crowd followed by an appreciative smirk from the police officer. The advertisement led to widespread anger among the consumers accusing the brand of trivializing and disrespecting 'Black Lives Matter'. Shortly after the advertisement was aired, Pepsi decided to take it off its official channels and stated within a press release that "Pepsi was trying to project a global message of unity, peace and understanding. Clearly, we missed the mark and apologize" (Victor, 2017).

One of the most recognized cases of corporate brand activism lies within the sportswear industry. In 2018, American sportswear manufacturer Nike launched an advertising campaign together with American football star Colin Kaepernick (The Guardian Sport, 2019). Prior to the campaign, in 2016, Colin Kaepernick was suspended by the National Football League after taking a knee during the national anthem as a sign of protest against the ongoing police brutality in the United States (The Guardian Sport, 2019). The protest by Kaepernick was severely discussed by the public. However, after Kaepernick took a knee, many others including politicians, followed his intentions of protests (Duarte, 2020). Former American president Donald Trump criticized these protests severely and sparked a brutal clash between protesters and police forces (Graham, 2018). This controversy did not hold Nike back from picking Colin Kaepernick as their ambassador for the company's 30th anniversary advertising campaign (Duarte, 2020). The Nike video advert³ titled "Dream Crazy" starred Colin Kaepernick as the protagonist including other African American athletes such as LeBron James or Serena Williams. Within the first week after the adverts release, Nike's stocks rose by 5%, however, many other Americans showcased their boycott towards Nike on social media by burning their Nike products. Soon later, the focus shifted toward Nike's own diversity

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwvAgDCOdU4>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-grjIUWkoBA>

as a company since public records from 2019 showed that less than 10% of its 300+ vice-presidents worldwide were black (Duarte, 2020). Hence, the blowback which Nike experienced from their “Dream Crazy” campaign showcases the risks involved when brands decide to state their positions publicly.

Another campaign which backfired on Nike happened in 2017. In 2017, Nike released their “Equality” campaign which consisted out of a short black/white video clip (Davies & Quinn, 2017). The ad was narrated by Michael B. Jordan and featured multiple American athletes such as LeBron James, Serena Williams, Kevin Durant, Victor Cruz, Gabby Douglas, soccer star and LGBT activist Megan Rapinoe, and Olympic hurdler Dalilah Muhammad. With this campaign Nike took a public stance on equality and wanted to show that for Nike it is significant that the fairness and respect in sports should not only remain in sports but rather be translated off the field as well (Yates, 2017). Although the intentions behind the equality campaign were positive, the campaign received a lot of negative feedback (Davies & Quinn, 2017). Many viewers criticized the authenticity of the campaign and accused the American sportswear brand to having double standards. Critics of the campaign claimed that the factory workers producing Nike’s products work under unfair conditions for low wages while Nike is using “equality should have no boundaries” as their main tagline of the campaign (Davies & Quinn, 2017).

This raises the question on the authenticity of corporate brand activism and how this authenticity effects consumer responses. Past research has found that authenticity of CSR initiatives have a direct relationship with the brand’s reputation, the consumers intention of making a purchase, customer loyalty, as well as consumer attitudes (Khojastehpour & Johns, 2014; Hur et al., 2013; Afzali & Kim, 2021; Alhouti et al., 2016; Hoang & Nguyen, 2020; Van Rekom et al., 2013; Vahdati et al., 2015; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Ross et al., 1992). Nevertheless, research investigating the authenticity of corporate brand activism and its effect on the same variables have received less attention. The gap in literature therefore lies in investigating this newly emerged form of CSR, its impact, dynamics, as well as the consequences when brands decide to get involved in socio-political topics. Since corporate brand activism has recently emerged from CSR and is a relatively new concept, similar results are expected. Consumer brand attachments are related to customers willingness’s to forgive corporate failures (Whan

Park et al., 2006) which leaves to question to what extent brand attachment influences the relationship between the authenticity of corporate brand activism and consumer responses. Highly attached consumers may forgive a brand for its inauthentic corporate brand activism with no significant impact. In addition to that, the brand's credibility may also be an influential factor of impacting consumers responses towards corporate brand activism. In order to test the impact of corporate brand activism on consumer responses, this experimental research focuses on the sportswear industry and proposes the following research question:

RQ: *To what extent does the authenticity of corporate brand activisms pursued by the sportswear industry, together with brand attachment and credibility, effect its consumers' responses?*

The terminology of consumer responses within this study is associated with the variables of brand reputation, purchase intention, customer loyalty as well as consumer attitude. The justification of these variables is explained within the theoretical framework.

The second chapter (theoretical framework) positions the thesis within existing literature, models, defines the terminologies and ends with the general research model. The third chapter represents the blueprint underpinning this study and draws out the methodology of this research. It also includes the stimuli design, the research procedures, as well as, the measurement scales and participant criteria. This is followed by chapter four which reveals the results of the conducted research followed by the discussion section in chapter five. Last but not least, this study rounds off by stating the overall research limitations, implications, as well as the general conclusion of the study.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, attention is given to the main literatures yielding the theoretical framework for this study. It includes definitions as well as theoretical models in combination with the elaboration of existing literature in the field of corporate social responsibility, corporate brand activism and the variables of consumer responses. Finally, this chapter includes three hypotheses and presents the research model for this study.

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Activism

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a complex procedure in which large amounts of resources are being invested by both, the private and public sectors (Sheehy, 2013). Hence, CSR implicates to be a terminology that requires a cautious definition.

The most frequently used explanation of CSR is the definition by the Commission of the European Communities (Dahlsrud, 2008). The Commission of the European Communities (2001) define CSR as a management concept in which companies voluntarily integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and their interactions with relevant stakeholders. Hence, generally speaking, CSR is understood to being a method used by companies to create a balance of economic, environmental and social obligations. This strategic approach is referred to as the triple bottom line (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2021). The triple bottom line is a concept in which organizations measure their social and environmental impact alongside their financial performances (Książak & Fischbach 2018). Instead of solely concentrating on generating profits, the triple bottom line focuses on profit, people and the planet. Therefore, CSR is a way for organizational entities to take responsibility for their actions within the market and acknowledge its effects on employees, the society as well as the environment (Skrzypczyńska, 2013).

The significance of implementing an accurate CSR concept as a business strategy becomes visible with every operation a business performs (Książak & Fischbach 2018). Companies and their successes strongly rely on securing good relationships with their customers, business partners, suppliers, employees, as well as NGO's. Uddin et al. (2008) mention three

dimensions that increase the significance of CSR in today's society: evolving social expectations, expanding prosperity, as well as globalization. CSR has therefore become a basic need of society as the majority of people prefer to make a purchase from an organization that operates environmentally friendly.

A relatively new emerging concept of CSR is the concept of corporate brand activism. CSR involves cause-related marketing such as the support of non-profit organizations or the funding of charity foundations, however, as described by Sennett and Galmarini (2006), cause marketing is not enough in today's society. Brands nowadays are expected to take a stand on socio-political issues (Swant, 2021). Consumers want companies to deliver more than just a product, service or a vague promise about their "purpose" (Swant, 2021). 54% of consumers expect organizations to actively participate in social conversations (Christie, 2020). Millennials (46%) have the highest expectations towards brands to speak out, followed by the Gen Z with 42%. Only 31% of the Gen Xers and 22% of the Boomers expect brands to take public stance on social or political issues (Christie, 2020).

Corporate brand activism is an evolution of CSR in which corporate brands become active leaders in operating towards a certain cause (Eyada, 2020). This existence of corporate brand activism was developed through the organic expansion and growth of the CSR as well as the environment, social and government (ESG) programs that have been influencing companies and their daily operations across the planet (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). Sarkar and Kotler (2018) define corporate brand activism as a newly emerged marketing and business management concept and propose that "brand activism consists of business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to promote or impede improvements in society" (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018, p. 554). Additionally, they define six broad categories of brand activism (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018): *Social activism* covers areas such as education, healthcare or gender equality; *Political activism* covers areas such as lobbying, voting or the privatization; *Economic activism* covers areas such as tax policies or income equality; *Workplace activism* covers areas such as labor or organizational concerns; *Environmental activism* covers areas such as air/water pollution, emission control or the implementation of environmental policies; *Legal activism* covers areas such as the employment laws or citizenship policies. Compared to traditional CSR, corporate brand

activism is determined by justice and the characteristic that organizations become involved in fundamental issues that face society (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018).

Throughout the years, the views and priorities customer hold on brands' accomplishments have shifted. Instead of solely focusing on technical matters such as the quality of the product itself, customers have started to put more emphasis on corporate brands' social qualities as well (Gugler & Shi, 2009). Werther and Chandler (2005, p.318) revealed that "at least two thirds of 25.000 consumers in the USA, Canada and western Europe form impressions based partly on company's ethics, environmental impact and social responsibility". Consumers have become progressively more aware of organizations societal impact over the span of the last decade (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Maignan, 2001) and particularly demand clear actions from organizations by highlighting irresponsible corporate behavior or callings for boycotts (Snider et al. 2003).

Therefore, this research aims to measure the impact of socio-political activism on consumer responses. It is to be investigated if businesses who claim to be socio-political active trigger more positive consumer responses compared to businesses that are not socio-political active. This study consequently combines the categories of social and political activism that were identified by Sarkar and Kotler (2018).

2.1.1 Progressive and Regressive Brand Activism

Corporate brand activism may be differentiated between progressive and regressive activism (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). Progressive corporate brand activism is an activity in which organizations see themselves having a responsibility in seeking a true impact on societal issues. Additionally, companies performing progressive corporate brand activism are increasingly portrayed as leaders in their industry since they put the existence of their entity on a larger scale rather than being simply profit-seeking (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018).

Regressive corporate brand activism describes businesses that actively pursue policies that "hurt" the common good (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). A commonly used example for this is the tobacco industry (Marketing Journal, 2017). Tobacco companies have denied for many years

the harm of their products towards the consumers. Even after much research (including their own) supported the dangerous consequences of tobacco, tobacco companies continued to promote their products, lobbied politicians for regressive policies. Therefore, regressive corporate brand activism is fulfilled by organizations that pursue procedures and policies hurting the common good in order to maximize their profits (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018).

This research study examines the authenticity of corporate brand activism in the sportswear industry. The sportswear industry generally seeks to have a true impact on society and does not use its lobby to hurt the common good through the implementation of profit-seeking policies. Hence, this study investigates the authenticity of mainly progressive corporate brand activism and how its authenticity impacts consumer responses.

2.1.2 Corporate Brand Activism Typology

Additional research on activism was conducted recently by Vredenburg et al. (2020) who constructed a typology that indicates various types of corporate brand activism depending on the social corporate practices and the marketing messaging activity of an organization (Figure 1). Where Sarkar and Kotler (2018) distinguish between regressive and progressive corporate brand activism, Vredenburg et al. (2020) go further by distinguishing between high/low degrees of marketing activities, as well as high/low degrees of CSR practices (engagement of operations). Consequently, Vredenburg et al.'s typology (2020) of corporate brand activism exposes four types: Absence of corporate brand activism (Q1), silent corporate brand activism (Q2), authentic corporate brand activism (Q3) and inauthentic corporate brand activism (Q4).

The “absence of corporate brand activism” (Q1) is characterized by a low marketing activity in regards to socio-political issues and have yet to adopt prosocial corporate practices. Brands that are in this category operate without consumer expectations of getting involved in corporate brand activism. The majority of organizations operating within this category are situated in business-to-business operations. An example of an organization in the “absence of brand activism” category is the equipment manufacturer Caterpillar. Caterpillar is the world’s largest construction equipment manufacture and has relied on traditional B2B sales without the general public’s involvement.

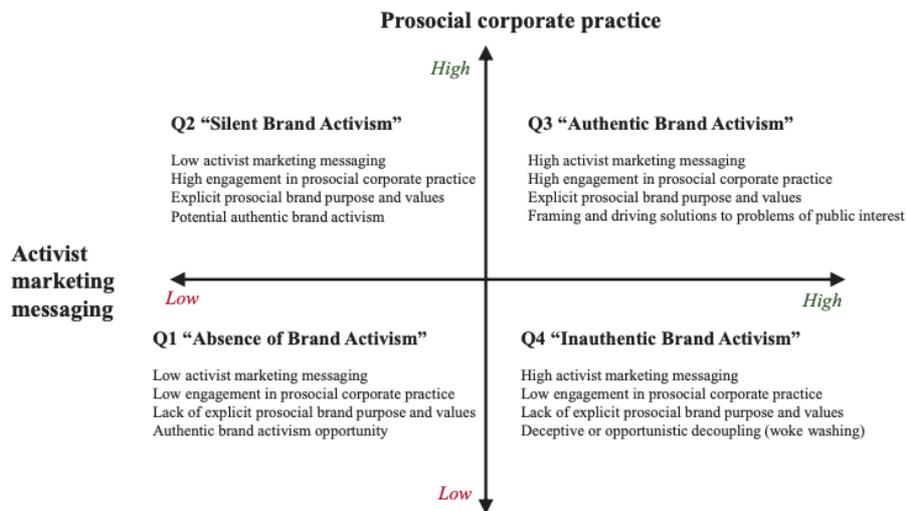


Figure 1: Typology of brand activism by Vredenburg et al.

The second quadrant in Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) typology is the category of “silent corporate brand activism”. Brands that are operating in this category are characterized by a low marketing activity regarding corporate brand activism, however, silent corporate brand activist brands embrace socio-political issues as part of their core mission and/or strategic focuses. With a low marketing activity, brands operating in this quadrant run their prosocial practices quietly “behind the scenes” as these are naturally linked to their purpose and values. An example of a brand that operates in this quadrant would be the Australian clothing label HoMie. The clothing brand from Melbourne aims to move the youth out of homelessness and poverty by giving them a chance of income, job skills and mentorship. Brands within this quadrant tend to be smaller organizations with less brand power in the marketplace, nevertheless, these brands tend to have the least to lose when moving into the marketing arena since they are already exercising prosocial practices.

“Authentic corporate brand activism” (Q3) describes Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) third quadrant. This category of brands is categorized by a high marketing activity, as well as a high engagement in prosocial practices. Brands operating within this quadrant are perceived as authentic as their communication aligns with their corporate practices. Outdoor apparel brand Patagonia is an example of a brand operating in this category. Patagonia’s marketing messages are in sync with their efforts and involvement in progressing social change (i.e.

sustainability, transparency) so that Patagonia can be considered to be performing authentic corporate brand activism.

“Inauthentic corporate brand activism” (Q4) is described by Vredenburg et al. (2020) to be a category in which brands operate with a high marketing message activity regarding socio-political issues but simultaneously showcase a low involvement in prosocial practices. This unalignment of communication and prosocial practice makes operating in this quadrant risky due to the increase in transparency among brand behavior. Brands in this quadrant are considered inauthentic, oftentimes lack in brand purpose and actively hide their absence of practices to generate profits. Due to the misleading claims of brands operating within this quadrant “inauthentic corporate brand activism” is considered to be false signaling and unethical. Woke washing in the context of “inauthentic corporate brand activism” exemplifies the efforts of these brands. Pepsi’s commercial starring Kendall Jenner was described earlier in this study, yet it perfectly demonstrates inauthentic corporate brand activism. In regards to the sportswear industry, Nike’s backlash on their “Equality” or “Dream Crazy” campaigns are examples of inauthentic corporate brand activism. In these cases, brands showcased high engagements in marketing activity, however, the alignment with prosocial practices was lacking.

In respect to Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) typology, this research study explores the alignment between marketing messages (regarding socio-political issues) and prosocial activity effects towards consumers in the sportswear industry. The sportswear industry commonly follows a high marketing message approach towards the public so that in this study, the independent variables (IV) are authentic corporate brand activism (Q3) and inauthentic brand corporate activism (Q4). It is to be investigated if consumers response differently to authentic and inauthentic corporate brand activism.

This leads to question what the dependent variables (DV) are, as well as, what hypotheses this study aims to investigate. Within the next subchapters, the dependent variables of consumer responses are clearly defined and justified on behalf of existing literature. Additionally, a total of three hypotheses are presented.

2.2 Consumer Responses

Consumer responses describe the positive or negative feedback towards a company, its products/services and/or ethics, and reflects the degree of satisfaction that (potential) customers get from their purchases (Link, 2017). Consumer responses help companies to improve the quality of their products or services. In respect to this study, consumer responses associate with the variables of brand reputation, purchase intention, customer loyalty and consumer attitude. All four variables represent the consumer's perception of a brand and demonstrate to what extent consumers response to corporate socio-political initiatives. These variables have been chosen as representative variables of consumer responses as past research has investigated these variables when measuring the impact of CSR authenticity (Khojastehpour & Johns, 2014; Hur et al., 2013; Afzali & Kim, 2021; Alhouti et al., 2016; Hoang & Nguyen, 2020; Van Rekom et al., 2013; Vahdati et al., 2015; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Ross et al., 1992).

Corporate brand reputation is one of the most crucial factors in determining the success for any entity as it refers to how an organization or company is being viewed (Chun 2005; Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster 2011; Gibson et al. 2006). It is an essential business component regardless of the establishment's size in order to increase sales and loyalty among consumers. Therefore, the variable of brand reputation was chosen to be a consumer response for this research study. Past research (Khojastehpour & Johns, 2014; Hur et al., 2013) has investigated the effect of CSR on corporate brand reputation and illustrated a positive relationship. In respect to the accuracy of the initiatives, authentic CSR results in more positive corporate evaluations (Afzali & Kim, 2021). However, no concrete research has been conducted to analyze the relationship between authentic/inauthentic cooperate brand activism and brand reputation. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap in literature and determine this relationship. Since corporate brand activism has emerged from CSR, it is expected that, similar to authentic CSR, authentic corporate brand activism also leads to a stronger brand reputation.

The variable purchase intention was chosen to be a consumer response as it describes the preference a customer holds to buy a specific product or service after evaluation (Younus et al., 2015). Consumer awareness and knowledge about the product/brand plays a severe role

during this evaluation process (Jayachandran et al., 2004; Roa & Monroe, 1988). The feelings that consumers attach to the design and/or packaging of the product also has a significant influence on their purchasing decisions (Fung et al., 2004). Generally speaking, purchase intentions are generated through the relationship between brands and consumers (Payne & Holt, 2001) so that consequently, a highly perceived value of a product results in a higher purchase intention (Chang & Wildt, 1994). In respect to CSR, research (Afzali & Kim, 2021; Alhouti et al., 2016) has discovered a positive association between authentic CSR communication and consumers purchase intentions. CSR authenticity negatively affects consumers' boycott behaviors and positively influence their intention of purchase and loyalty toward a company (Alhouti et al., 2016). Currently no research has investigated the influence of authentic/inauthentic corporate brand activism on purchase intentions. However, as nowadays more socio-political topics are being publicly addressed, the relevance of investigating this topic of corporate brand activism has increased. This study aims to close this gap in literature and expects similar results as discovered in CSR where authentic CSR results in more positive consumer responses as compared to inauthentic CSR. Hence, this study anticipates that authentic corporate brand activism results in higher purchase intentions.

The variable customer loyalty refers to a customer's impulse to maintain an ongoing relationship with the brand or the company (Palmatier et al., 2006). According to Oliver's (1980, p. 34) commonly accepted definition, customer loyalty indicates that a consumer is driven by a deeply held intention to rebuy and/or re-continue their support for an organization in the future. Hence, this study describes customer loyalty as a consumer response. Hoang and Nguyen (2020) investigated to what extent CSR together with customer trust impact the relationship between information quality and customer loyalty. Their research discovered that the customer perception of CSR mediates the effect on customer loyalty. Specifically, with regard to the authenticity of the CSR activity, the perception of the authenticity of an organization greatly impacts the degree of customer loyalty towards that organization (Van Rekom et al., 2013). Based on these findings, this research study subsequently expects to show similar effects between the authenticity of corporate brand activism and customer loyalty. Thus, it is projected that authentic corporate brand activism leads to stronger customer loyalty compared to inauthentic corporate brand activism.

Consumer attitude is a terminology being used in marketing and aids corporations to measure how their products and/or services meet or surpass customers' expectations (Farris et al., 2010). According to Mitchell and Olson (1981, p. 318) consumer attitudes toward a brand describes the "individual's internal evaluation of the brand" and is according to Eagly and Chaiken (1973,p.7) a lasting state "that endures for at least a short period of time and presumably energizes and directs behavior." Therefore, consumer attitude was chosen to be a consumer response variable. It provides guidance and feedback to organizations and may be seen as "summary evaluations" (Zanna & Rempel, 1988). CSR activities have been discovered to have a positive and significant impact on consumer attitudes (Vahdati et al., 2015). Other research revealed that socially responsible activities may generate favorable attitudes towards the company (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Ross et al., 1992). However, in respect to the authenticity, inauthentic CSR marketing actions have been exhibited to produce negative perceptions by consumers towards a company when being engaged in societal supporting activities (Polansky & Wood, 2001). The impact of authentic/inauthentic corporate brand activism on consumer attitudes has currently not been researched. This is a problem because socio-political issues as well as the differentiation between false and accurate information have gained more relevance within recent years due to the interconnectivity of society (Molina et al., 2019). Thus, this research aims to fill this gap in literature and expects a positive relationship.

Altogether, this research study investigates the impact of authentic/inauthentic corporate brand activism and its impact on consumer responses. Similar to the impact of CSR, corporate brand activism is anticipated to show a positive relationship to consumer responses. This leads to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

H1 *Authentic corporate brand activism will result in positive consumer responses and therefore a) stronger brand reputation, b) higher purchase intention, c) stronger customer loyalty and c) more positive consumer attitudes, as compared to inauthentic corporate brand activism.*

2.3 Credibility as mediator

As stated before, it is expected that authentic corporate brand activism will result in more positive consumer responses compared to inauthentic corporate brand activism. The signaling theory provides an explanation for this (Baek et al., 2010). The brand's credibility is a meaningful factor in conveying information effectively. Hence, brand credibility plays an important role in consumers' brand evaluations (Wang & Yang, 2010; Gupta et al., 2016). Past research (Srivastava et al., 2020) has discovered that brand authenticity is positively related to brand credibility and that it plays a mediating role in how consumers evaluate the brand. Putting these findings in the context of this study, credibility is expected to mediate the effect between the authenticity of corporate brand activism and consumer responses. It is anticipated that authentic corporate brand activism signals a high credibility to the consumers and therefore results in more positive responses. Thus, the following hypothesis for such mediator is proposed:

H2 *Credibility mediates the effect of corporate brand activism authenticity on a) brand reputation, b) purchase intention, c) customer loyalty and c) consumer attitudes.*

2.4 Brand Attachment as moderator

Brand attachment may be defined as "the strength of the cognitive and affective bond connecting the brand with the self" (Whan Park et al., 2006, p.195) and describes the relationship between an individual and brand. Apart from the main effect, this study investigates if the variable brand attachment shows an interaction effect. Consumers who feel highly attached towards a brand tend to oversee and/or ignore any negative information they encounter in connection with the brand (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). This is because consumers are more forgiving towards the brands they feel attached to (Japutra, 2014). They see any disappointments or problems as one-time events (Japutra, 2014). Hence, strong brand attachment leads to higher brand forgiveness. In the context of this study, brand attachment is a significant variable as it describes an individual's pre-existing relationship towards a brand. Hence, brand attachment may show an interaction effect between the authenticity of corporate brand activism and consumer responses. It therefore anticipated that authentic

corporate brand activism with strong brand attachments will result in positive consumer responses leading to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

H3 *Authentic corporate brand activism with strong brand attachments will result in positive consumer responses and therefore a) stronger brand reputation, b) higher purchase intention, c) stronger customer loyalty and c) more positive consumer attitudes, as compared to inauthentic corporate brand activism with weak brand attachments.*

2.5 The impact of corporate brand activism

This study aims to get a better understanding of corporate brand activism's impact on consumers, as well as the brand itself. In order to distinguish meaningful gaps within the field of research, it is a necessity to indicate what past investigations in this relatively newly emerged field has revealed.

Mukherjee and Althuizen (2018) investigated how consumers react towards organizations and brands that took the initiative on socio political issues. Their study involved both, unknown and well-known brands, and exposed that when consumers disagree with a brand's stance, the attitude towards that brand decreased. Vice versa however, no significant increase in attitude was discovered when consumers supported the brand's stance.

Besides consumer's attitude towards the brand, it was exposed that this asymmetric effect also applies to consumers' behavioral intentions (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2018). Last but not least, their research showed that when brand's face public backlashes as a consequence of weak brand activism, a decrease in attitude (towards the brand) was discovered by proponents and opponents of the stand.

The study by Mirzaei et al. (2020) goes in more detail about woke washing which is another term for inauthentic corporate brand activism. Their study analyzed two social movement campaigns by Gillette and Nike (i.e. Me too & Black Lives Matter) in which brands performed arguably inauthentic corporate brand activism and discovered that brands oftentimes take political stances with the intention to connect better with their target audiences. Supporting social movements is therefore a convenient method for inauthentic corporate brand activists

to stay relevant in the long run. Another study (Eyada, 2020) made efforts in understanding the relation and impact of corporate brand activism on consumer perceptions. The research (Eyada, 2020) analyzed the advertising messages/concepts of Nike’s advertising campaigns and measured its impact on brand image, profit margins and the overall consumer perception. Eyada (2020) discovered that consumers have shifted in the direction in which they no longer act as passive receivers of the information that is being presented to them. Instead of only absorbing the information that is presented in campaigns, consumers have become more interactive by sharing their values and beliefs as well. Hence, it is the consumers who are setting the expectations in relation to a brand’s mission, vision and values.

This theoretical framework revealed gaps within the literature of corporate brand activism. Figure 2 illustrates the research model of this study and helps visualizing the objective of measuring the relationship between authentic/inauthentic corporate brand activism and consumer responses. Additionally, the research model (figure 2) indicates the interaction effect of brand attachment and credibility acting as a mediating variable.

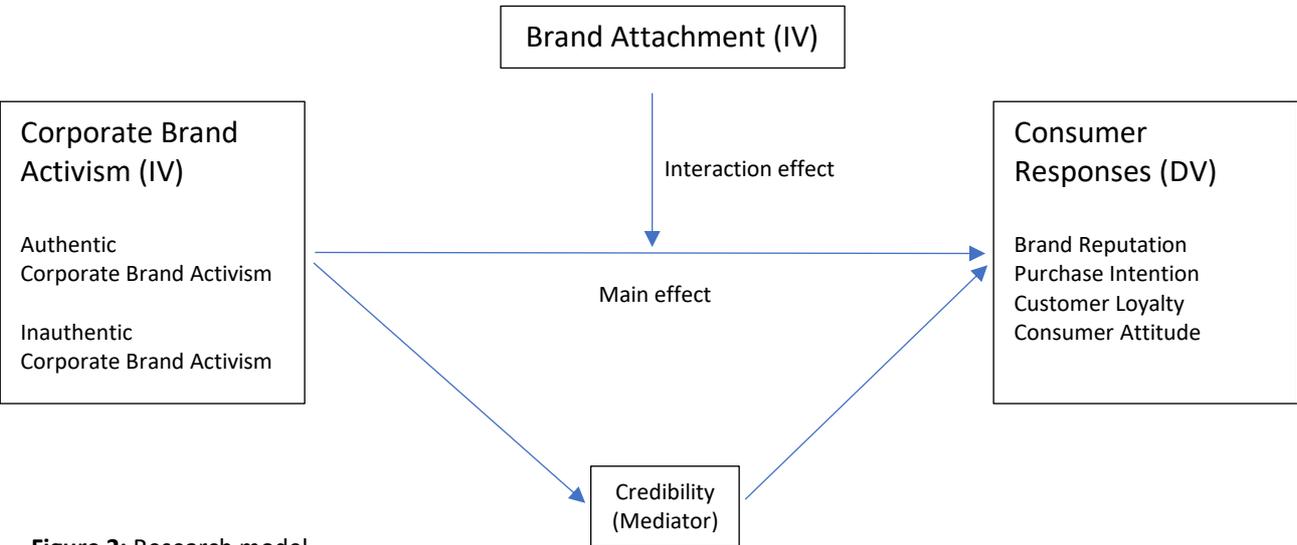


Figure 2: Research model

3.0 Methodology

The conducted research is a 2 (authentic brand activism vs. inauthentic brand activism) x 2 (strong brand attachment vs. weak brand attachment) experimental design (Table 1) in order to determine the extent to which the two independent variables influence consumer responses (brand reputation, purchase intention, customer loyalty and consumer attitude). Brand attachment (strong brand attachment vs. weak brand attachment) served as a moderator between the variables of corporate brand activism (authentic vs. inauthentic) and the impact on consumer responses. Additionally, credibility was intended to serve as a mediator between the main effect of corporate brand activism (authentic vs. inauthentic) and consumer responses. Table 1 visualizes the experimental design which incorporates four experimental conditions.

Table 1: 2x2 Experimental Design

		Brand Attachment	
		Strong Brand Attachment	Weak Brand Attachment
Corporate Brand Activism	Authentic	<i>Condition 1</i> (Authentic Brand Activism + Strong Brand Attachment)	<i>Condition 3</i> (Authentic Brand Activism + Weak Brand Attachment)
	Inauthentic	<i>Condition 2</i> (Inauthentic Brand Activism + Strong Brand Attachment)	<i>Condition 4</i> (Inauthentic Brand Activism + Weak Brand Attachment)

3.1 Stimulus materials

Participants for the authentic corporate brand activism conditions (condition 1 & 3) are first presented with a poster, followed by blogpost extracts. The poster itself visualizes an Afro American Man (Colin Kaepernick) under which one can see the lettering “EQUALITY” and the Nike Swoosh sign. Additionally, the poster states the slogan “If we can be equals in sport, we can be equals everywhere”. Underneath the poster, participants of the experiment are then presented with blogpost extracts on Nike’s 2018 “EQUALITY” campaign starring former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick. The first stimulus (authentic corporate brand activism) purely describes Nike’s bold move of using Colin Kaepernick as the face of their campaign. The blogpost described the campaign as bold since Colin Kaepernick’s sign of protest (taking a knee during the national anthem) triggered diverse emotions among the population. Some people supported Kaepernick’s protest, others however, recognized his actions as disrespectful

towards the country and its fallen soldiers. Although the population was split in emotions, Nike made the decision to take a clear socio-political stance by making Colin Kaepernick the face of their "EQUALITY" campaign. The stimulus describes the choice as bold since Colin Kaepernick is/was seen as a very controversial person by the public.

For the second stimulus, the same poster was presented. However, the text underneath the poster slightly differed from stimulus 1. To enlarge the contrast between authentic and inauthentic corporate brand activism, additional information was added to stimulus 2. In stimulus 2 the participants discovered that Nike's post campaign actions did not fully align with their promoted slogans. Their own leadership diversity was brought into question in the last paragraph. Stimulus 1 was supposed to represent authentic corporate brand activism, whereas stimulus 2 aimed to represent inauthentic corporate brand activism.

In order to test if the stimuli were recognized accordingly, a pre-test was conducted. For this pre-test, 8 individuals (4 participants per stimulus) were conveniently selected and asked to read through the stimuli. After each group read through the given stimulus, both groups were asked within a semi-structured interview to state their opinions, feelings and thoughts about the campaign in order to determine the level of perceived authenticity. In order to support structure for the interview, statements of the perceived brand authenticity scale (PBS-scale) were used (Morhart et al., 2015). Apart from the PBS-scale statements (Appendix 1), the researcher/interviewer asked the interviewees to what extent they believe Nike tried to take a socio-political stance through their campaign.

The main citations and notes of the pre-test (Appendix 2) show that as for stimulus 1 (authentic corporate brand activism), all interviewees stated they like the campaign and that they believe Nike is taking a clear socio-political stance. With quotes like "*When I read about the campaign I got positive feelings*" or "*I think that Nike did something great for supporting this cause*", respondents showed a positive attitude towards the campaign. Additionally, all respondents that were presented with stimulus 1 stated that they believe the campaign is authentic and credible. When asked about the main intention behind this campaign, the majority of respondents stated the purpose was to increase awareness, improve Nike's image and/or increase revenue. As for stimulus 2, the respondents showed more negative emotions

towards the campaign. All respondents that were presented with stimulus 2 judged the campaign as inauthentic and not credible. Quotes such as *“I think it is a marketing trick”* or *“I would say that the campaign has potential but it is not authentic”* show the reluctance towards the campaign.

Altogether, the pre-test was a success. All stimulus 1 interviewees judged the campaign to be authentic and credible whereas the stimulus 2 interviews believed the campaign was inauthentic and not credible.

3.2 Participants

The experiment was carried out between November and December 2021 through a combination of convenient and snowball sampling. Convenient sampling allows for a time efficient and cost-effective data collection. However, in order to avoid biased results as much as possible, each participant that was conveniently selected (97 conveniently selected participants) was asked to choose 5 additional people within their circle to participate in the experiment (snowball sampling). This chosen sampling methods therefore not only characterizes a time efficient and cost-effective data collection, it also pays attention to avoid biased results. The total sample size of the experiment was 296. Overall, 71 responses were counted as invalidated due to incompleteness and 8 additional responses represented preview responses so that these had to be removed from the dataset. After removing all invalid responses the sample size decreased to overall 217 valid results. Table 2 visualizes the demography of the final population sample.

Out of these 217 valid responses, 109 participants were female (50.2%), 107 were male (49.3%), and 1 participant stated to be of other gender (0.5%). Regarding the age of the participants, 180 (82.9%) were between 18 and 29, 8 (3.7%) were between 30 and 39, 3 (1.4%) between 40 and 49 and 26 participants (12%) were 50 years or older. The initial aim was to have 40 respondents per condition. After collecting the data, participants were categorized into four groups (conditions). Prior to showing the participants the research stimuli, 107 participants held a strong brand attachment towards Nike, whereas 110 held a weak brand attachment towards the brand. Based on the manipulation check within the data, 76 (35.0%)

participants have fallen under condition 1, 31 (14.3%) participants under condition 2, 31 (14.3%) under condition 3 and 79 (36.4%) participants were recorded to fall under condition 4. The average time of response was about 18 minutes. Table 2 visualizes the demography of the final population sample.

Table 2: Demography of the sample

		Strong Brand Attachment	Weak Brand Attachment
Authentic Stimulus	Age*	18-29: 93.4% (71)	18-29: 87.1% (27)
		30-39: 1.3% (1)	30-39: 3.2% (1)
		40-49: 0.0% (0)	40-49: 0.0% (0)
		50 or older: 5.3% (4)	50 or older: 9.7% (3)
	Gender*	Male: 44.7% (34)	Male: 58.1% (18)
		Female: 55.3% (42)	Female: 38.7% (12)
		Other: 0.0% (0)	Other: 3.2% (1)
	Purchase frequency*	Never: 7.9% (6)	Never: 19.4% (6)
		1-2 times per year: 63.2% (48)	1-2 times per year: 77.4% (24)
		3-5 times per year: 18.4% (14)	3-5 times per year: 0.0% (0)
		> 5 times per year: 10.5% (8)	> 5 times per year: 3.2% (1)
	Inauthentic Stimulus	Age*	18-29: 83.9% (26)
30-39: 6.5% (2)			30-39: 5.1% (4)
40-49: 3.2% (1)			40-49: 2.5% (2)
50 or older: 6.5% (2)			50 or older: 21.5% (17)
Gender*		Male: 51.6% (16)	Male: 49.4% (39)
		Female: 48.4% (15)	Female: 50.6% (40)
		Other: 0.0% (0)	Other: 0.0% (0)
Purchase frequency*		Never: 3.2% (1)	Never: 45.6% (36)
		1-2 times per year: 77.4% (24)	1-2 times per year: 48.1% (38)
		3-5 times per year: 16.1% (5)	3-5 times per year: 5.1% (4)
		> 5 times per year: 3.2% (1)	> 5 times per year: 1.3% (1)

* percentage divisions

3.3 Procedure

The questionnaire (including the two stimuli) was distributed online (hyperlink) to all participants through Qualtrics. Qualtrics was used not only to distribute the questionnaire, it also served the purpose of tracking the data in order to create a complete dataset. The full

questionnaire can be found in the appendices (Appendix 3). Before participants started their involvement in the experimental study, an informed consent was presented through Qualtrics and a short explanation about the purpose of the study was given. After participants digitally accepted their participation and confirmed that they are above the age of 18, Qualtrics guided the sample group through the different manipulations and questions (including two manipulation check questions). Additionally, throughout the entire experiment, participants were not able to go back to previous questions. This was done in order to avoid that the sample would falsify their own data. As for the questionnaire's structure, all participants were first asked about their brand attachment towards Nike followed by the (randomized) exhibition of one of the two stimulus materials. After the participants read through the stimulus materials, the population sample was asked to give an answer to a variety of questions related to Nike's equality campaign. At the end of the survey, participants were thanked for their involvement.

3.4 Measures

The consumer responses were measured independently from each other using a variety of pre-existing measurement scales. This section discusses the different scales and measurement levels.

For *brand reputation*, the measurement scale by Newburry (2010) was selected which distinguishes four general perceptions towards the reputation of a brand. The respondents were asked to evaluate the items on a 7-point Likert scale in which '1' indicates 'I strongly disagree' and '7' indicates 'I strongly agree'. Table 3 contains the items used to measure brand reputation.

Purchase intention was measured using Spears and Singh's (2012) purchase intention scale which was initially conceptualized to measure the relationship between brand attitudes and purchase intentions. The items used to measure this variable (purchase intention) were the following: 1. Low purchase interest / High purchase interest, 2. Probably not buy / Probably buy 3. Definitely not buy / Definitely buy. The respondents were asked to evaluate these items on a 7-point Likert scale (1= 'I strongly disagree' & 7 = 'I strongly agree'. Table 3 contains the individual items used in order to measure purchase intention.

For *customer loyalty*, the scale by Wong (2004) was chosen due to its high reliability (.90-.92) (Bianchi & Bruno, 2018). Although Wong's (2004) scale measures the loyalty towards a shop, the items within Wong's scale were adapted for the purpose of this study. Similar to the purchase intention scale, respondents were asked to evaluate the items on a 7-point Likert scale in which '1' indicates 'completely disagree' and '7' indicates 'completely agree'. Table 3 shows the items contained in the scale of customer loyalty.

Consumer attitudes was, just like *purchase intention*, measured using Spears and Singh's (2012) measurement scales. This scale was designed to test the relationship between brand attitudes and purchase intentions so that for this experimental study, the scale was applied to the research stimuli. Table 3 shows the items used to measure consumer attitudes.

The mediator *credibility* was measured using Morhart et al.'s (2015) perceived brand authenticity scale (PBA-scale). The PBA-scale consist out of overall 15 statements, however for the purpose of measuring the perceived credibility of the campaign, respondents were presented with the 4 credibility statements of the scale. The sample population was asked to evaluate these items on a 7-point Likert scale (1= 'I strongly disagree' & 7 = 'I strongly agree'). Table 3 contains the individual items used to measure perceived credibility.

The moderator *brand attachment* was measured before presenting the stimuli to the participants using Thomson et al.'s (2005) scale on brand attachment. Participants were asked to state their affection, passion and connection towards Nike so that after reading about the campaign stimuli, the impact on consumer responses would be observable for the researcher. The scale consists of 10 items measuring an individual's emotional attachment towards a brand in respect to their affection, passion and connection. On a 7-point Likert scale (1= "not at all" & 7= "very well") the sample population was asked to describe to what extent the 10 items describe their typical feelings towards Nike. Table 3 contains the individual items used to measure brand attachment. For the data analyses, the mean scores of the 10 items were constructed to give an indication of the individual's degree of brand attachment. Using SPSS, a split around the mean then categorized the degree of brand attachment into a dichotomous variable (strong or weak).

Table 3: Measurement scales

Concept	Question	Source															
Brand Reputation	Based on the campaign that I just learned about, I think that... 1. ...Nike has a good overall reputation; 2. ...Nike is a company I have a good feeling about; 3. ...Nike is a company that I trust; 4. ...Nike is a company that I admire and respect.	Newburry (2010)															
Purchase Intention	Based on the campaign I just learned about, I ... 1. ...have very low purchasing interest of Nike vs. ...have very high purchasing interest of Nike 2. ...would probably not buy Nike's products vs. ...would probably buy Nike's products 3. ...would defiantly not buy Nike's products vs. ...would definitely buy Nike's products 4. ...definitely do not intend to buy Nike's products vs. ...definitely intend to buy Nike's products	Spears and Singh (2012)															
Customer Loyalty	Based on the campaign I just learned about, I will... 1. ...say positive things about Nike to other people; 2. ...recommend Nike to others; 3. ...encourage friends and relatives to buy Nike; 4. ...consider Nike as my first choice.	Wong (2004)															
Consumer Attitude	Based on the campaign I just learned about, I perceive Nike as... 1. ...unfavorable/favorable 2. ...unpleasant/pleasant 3. ...unappealing/appealing 4. ...unlikable/likable 5. ...bad/good	Spears and Singh (2012)															
Credibility	I believe that Nike is.. ...a brand that will not betray me. ...a brand that accomplishes its value promise. ...an honest brand.	Morhart et al. (2015)															
Brand attachment	To what extent do the following words describe your typical feelings towards Nike? <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><u>Affection</u></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><u>Passion</u></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><u>Connection</u></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Affectionate</td> <td>Passionate</td> <td>Connected</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Friendly</td> <td>Delighted</td> <td>Bonded</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Loved</td> <td>Captivated</td> <td>Attached</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Peaceful</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<u>Affection</u>	<u>Passion</u>	<u>Connection</u>	Affectionate	Passionate	Connected	Friendly	Delighted	Bonded	Loved	Captivated	Attached	Peaceful			Thomson et al. (2005)
<u>Affection</u>	<u>Passion</u>	<u>Connection</u>															
Affectionate	Passionate	Connected															
Friendly	Delighted	Bonded															
Loved	Captivated	Attached															
Peaceful																	

3.5 Validity and Reliability

In order to explore if the experimental results are represented by distinct constructs and to check if the outcome is valid, a factor analysis test was conducted. Overall, five factors of importance (latent factors) were determined by SPSS. These latent factors represent the moderator variable of *brand attachment*, the mediating variable of *credibility*, and the four

dependent variables of *brand reputation*, *consumer attitude*, *customer loyalty* and *purchase intention*. SPSS calculated an Eigenvalue of above 1 for 4 of the 5 recognized components. Components with a high Eigenvalue (> 1) represent a real underlying factor. In order for the components of the experiment to be of sufficient power, the cumulative explained variance needs to be larger than 50%. Thus, with an explained variance value of 79.831%, the four components are of sufficient power.

As to the validation of the measurement of factors, the rotated component matrix gives an understanding of the factor analyses. The analyses shows if the constructs are distinct from each other and if they measured what they were intended to measure. In the rotated component matrix (Table 4), almost every component aligns with the measurement criteria of each dependent variable. It is intended that each input variable measures precisely one factor. However with the variable *Brand_Attachment_1* this is not the case. Fortunately, the two cross loading values hold about the same score and do not overlap with the other variable components. Hence, a redistribution of the factor loadings is not necessary. Component 1 therefore aligns with all measurement criteria of brand attachment. Component 2 however does not solely align with all measurement criteria of credibility. The variables of *credibility* (mediator) and *brand reputation* (dependent variable) fall under the same component. This means that the two variables are not distinct from each other, but instead are recognized to measure similar aspects. Additionally, the item *Brand_Reputation_1* was not recognized at all. As a result of this, a new component called *Brand_Reputation_Combined* was established out of *credibility* and *brand reputation (original)*. The remaining components 3, 4 and 5 measures the variables of consumer attitude, customer loyalty and purchase intention as intended. Each value in the rotated component matrix has a value of greater than .60, meaning that the correlation among the constructs is strong. Regarding the validity of the study, the factor analysis indicates enough evidence that the constructs of brand attachment, brand reputation (combined), consumer attitude, customer loyalty, and purchase intention are not only distinct from each other but also hold a strong correlation with its measurement scales.

In order to measure the reliability of the measurement scales, and how closely related the set of items are as a group, the internal consistency had to be measured. This was done through the Cronbach's alpha score. SPSS calculated an alpha coefficient for all three groups to be

above .7 (Table 4). Because of that, the Cronbach's alpha scores of the experimental study suggests that each item of each group has relatively high internal consistency.

Table 4: Factor Analyses (Rotated Component Matrix)

Statements	Factor					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Brand_Attachment_1	.602					.591
Brand_Attachment_2	.674					
Brand_Attachment_3	.676					
Brand_Attachment_4	.697					
Brand_Attachment_5	.758					
Brand_Attachment_6	.780					
Brand_Attachment_7	.831					
Brand_Attachment_8	.802					
Brand_Attachment_9	.826					
Brand_Attachment_10	.727					
Credibility_1		.717				
Credibility_2		.711				
Credibility_3		.777				
Brand_Reputation_1						
Brand_Reputation_2		.649				
Brand_Reputation_3		.715				
Brand_Reputation_4		.606				
Consumer_Attitude_1			.735			
Consumer_Attitude_2			.790			
Consumer_Attitude_3			.807			
Consumer_Attitude_4			.804			
Consumer_Attitude_5			.747			
Customer_Loyalty_1				.723		
Customer_Loyalty_2				.764		
Customer_Loyalty_3				.800		
Customer_Loyalty_4				.751		
Purchase_Intention_1					.655	
Purchase_Intention_2					.806	
Purchase_Intention_3					.841	
Purchase_Intention_4					.870	
Cronbach's alpha	.945	.938	.958	.943	.934	
Explained Variance	52.64%	11.41%	6.34%	3.95%	3.22%	
Eigenvalue	15.79	3.42	1.90	1.18	0.96	

4.0 Results

4.1 Manipulation Check

In order to distinguish if the sample population was able to correctly categorize the intended stimulus material, the survey questionnaire (Appendix 3) included a manipulation check. On a 7-point Likert scale (1= very inauthentic & 7= very authentic) participants were asked to rate the degree of authenticity of the given stimulus at the end of the questionnaire. To check the correlation between the “seen stimuli” (authentic vs. inauthentic) and the “recognized stimuli”, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if the people were able to recognize the presented material correctly. Participants were classified into two groups: the “seen the authentic stimuli” (n= 111) and the “seen the inauthentic stimuli” (n= 106). However, after the boxplots (Figure 3) were assessed, SPSS presented a significant amount of outliers so that in order to check the distribution between the two groups, a cross-table was created (Table 5). For the purpose of creating a clearer overview of the distribution among the 7-point Likert scale, the variable of recognized_stimuli_material was split around the mean. The cross-table shows that the 111 people have seen the authentic stimuli material and 106 the inauthentic stimuli. Within the group of people that have seen the authentic stimuli material 66 (59.5%) were able to classify the given stimuli correctly, whereas 45 (40.5%) stated they read through an inauthentic campaign. Within the group of people that have seen the inauthentic stimuli material, 65 respondents (61.3%) classified the given stimuli correctly. 41 participants (38.7%) that were presented with the inauthentic stimuli material stated to have read through an authentic stimuli material. Hence only around 60% of the participants per stimuli category (authentic vs. inauthentic) were able to recognize the correct stimulus, the manipulation check failed. For the purpose of continuing with the analysis and gaining the most out of the collected data, the researcher continued the analysis in respect to the stimuli that was recognized. Hence, the attitude of perceived authenticity of corporate brand activism was used to measure its impact on consumer responses. Due to the failed experiment the independent variable was adjusted to the attitudes of recognized corporate brand activism authenticity. Doing this allowed the researcher access to more trustworthy results as the research focus lies within the participants perceptions of the brand. Continuing with the data

solely based on the presented stimuli would falsify the true intention of consumers when judging a brand.

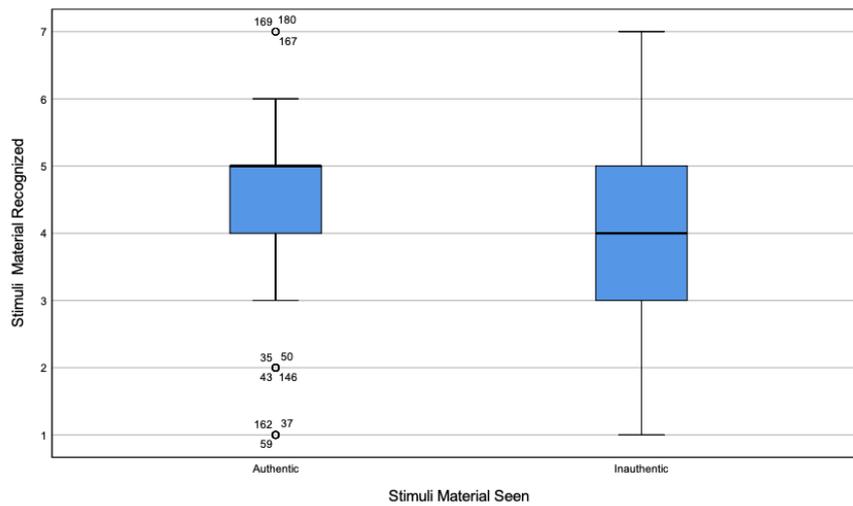


Figure 3: Box-plot stimulus check - outliers

Table 5: Cross-table stimuli check

			Recognized Stimuli Material		
			Dummy		
			Authentic	Inauthentic	Total
Stimuli Material Seen	Authentic	Count	66	45	111
		% within Stimuli Material Seen	59.5%	40.5%	100%
	Inauthentic	Count	41	65	106
		% within Stimuli Material Seen	38.7%	61.3%	100%

4.2 Brand Reputation Combined

As stated in the previous chapter, a new construct called brand reputation (combined) was established. This was done because the factor analysis showed that the measurement items of brand credibility and brand reputation (original) would measure the same construct. As the original research model projected credibility as a mediator and brand reputation (original) as a depended variable, it was then to be determined whether the new construct brand reputation (combined) would remain a mediator or become a depend variable. In order to make this decision a one-way ANOVA between the independent variable (recognized

authenticity) and dependent variable (brand reputation [combined]) was calculated. The conducted ANOVA determined if the brand reputation of Nike was different for groups that recognized the campaign as either authentic or inauthentic. Participants were classified into two groups: inauthentic (n = 110) and authentic (n=107). As a result of the ANOVA, there was a significant effect of the level of recognized authenticity on brand reputation (combined) at the $p < .05$ level: $[F(1, 215) = 98.218, p < .001]$.

As the result of the factor analysis and the stimulus check the initial 3 hypothesis were adjusted to the following:

Main effect (H1): *Authentic corporate brand activism [recognized] will result in positive consumer responses and therefore ~~a) stronger brand reputation~~, a) higher purchase intention, b) stronger customer loyalty and c) more positive consumer attitudes, as compared to inauthentic corporate brand activism [recognized].*

Mediator (H2): ~~Credibility~~ *Brand reputation [combined] mediates the effect of recognized corporate brand activism authenticity on ~~a) brand reputation~~, a) purchase intention, b) customer loyalty and c) consumer attitudes.*

Moderator (H3): *Authentic corporate brand activism [recognized] with strong brand attachments will result in positive consumer responses and therefore ~~a) stronger brand reputation~~, a) higher purchase intention, b) stronger customer loyalty and c) more positive consumer attitudes, as compared to inauthentic corporate brand activism with no or weak brand attachments.*

4.3 Descriptive of consumer responses

For the purpose of examining the variable consumer responses, the dependent variable was divided into three sub-variables: purchase intention, customer loyalty and consumer attitudes. Each condition can be analyzed and interpreted based on their mean scores for that condition. The descriptive statistics of the dependent variables are visualized in table 6. When comparing the mean scores of each condition with each other, it stands out that the mean scores differences within the conditions are lower than expected. The table shows that when

participants recognized the campaign as authentic, the dependent variables have a higher mean compared to when participants recognized the campaign as inauthentic. This direction and distribution among the conditions is the same direction as claimed within the first hypothesis H1, the hypothesis that authentic *corporate brand activism [recognized]* will result in positive consumer responses and therefore ~~a) stronger brand reputation~~, a) higher purchase intention, b) stronger customer loyalty and c) more positive consumer attitudes, as compared to inauthentic corporate brand activism [recognized].

Table 6: Descriptive statistics of the dependent variables

		Brand Attachment			
		Strong Attachment		Weak Attachment	
		Condition 1		Condition 3	
Recognized Corporate Brand Activism	Authentic	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
		Purchase Intention (a)	4.82	1.31	4.41
	Customer Loyalty (a)	4.82	1.02	3.53	1.34
	Consumer Attitude (a)	5.41	1.02	5.05	0.92
		Condition 2		Condition 4	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
	Purchase Intention (a)	4.68	0.98	3.57	1.34
	Customer Loyalty (a)	4.22	1.27	3.11	1.22
	Consumer Attitude (a)	4.94	0.90	3.79	1.15

a) 7-point Likert scale

4.4 Hypotheses analysis

Based on the results of the previous paragraphs all measurements were adjusted to be reliable and valid to proceed with the analysis. Additionally, the independent variable was adjusted to the recognized stimuli instead of using the data of the stimuli that was presented.

In order to test the differences in vectors of means between the independent variables (recognized authenticity & brand attachment) and the dependent variables (purchase intention, customer loyalty & consumer attitude), a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was calculated via SPSS.

Table 7 illustrates the results of the MANOVA that was used in order to assess the significance values for each independent variable on the combination of dependent variables (consumer

responses). The main effect of recognized authenticity showed to have a significant effect on consumer responses [$F(3,211)=10.65$, $p < .001$, Wilk's $\Lambda=0.86$]. The effect of brand attachment on the dependent variables also showed to have a significant effect [$F(3,211)=15.85$, $p < .001$, Wilk's $\Lambda=0.81$]. Last but not least, the interaction effect of brand attachment on recognized authenticity showed a significant effect on consumer responses as well [$F(3,211)=3.87$, $p = .010$, Wilk's $\Lambda=0.94$]. As a result, all independent variables reveal to have a significant effect on consumer responses ($p < .05$).

Next, an analysis of variance was performed which is visualized in table 8. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) served the purpose to analyze the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variables. For the first main effect, the effect of recognized authenticity on purchase intention, customer loyalty and consumer attitudes, the research discovered recognized authenticity of corporate brand activism to have a significant effect on the variable purchase intention [$F(1, 213) = 6.45$, $p = .012$], customer loyalty [$F(1, 213) = 8.19$, $p = .005$] and consumer attitude [$F(1, 213) = 30.16$, $p < .001$].

For the effect of brand attachment on consumer responses, the research discovered a significant effect of on the variable purchase intention [$F(1, 213) = 15.74$, $p = .001$], customer loyalty [$F(1, 213) = 45.74$, $p < .001$] and consumer attitude [$F(1, 213) = 23.36$, $p < .001$].

As for the interaction of the two main effects, recognized authenticity*brand attachment, this research did not discover evidence to believe that the interaction of recognized authenticity and brand attachment would significantly affect the variables purchase intention or customer loyalty. The research discovered a significant interaction of recognized authenticity and brand attachment on the variable consumer attitude [$F(1, 213) = 6.46$, $p = .012$]. Within the hypotheses of this study, it was expected that the interaction of the two main effects (recognized authenticity*brand attachment) would affect the depend variable(s). However, as the MANOVA reveals, interactions shows a significant difference on only one dependent variable ($p < .05$). Figure 4-6 visualize the interactions (recognized authenticity*brand attachment) on purchase intention (figure 4), customer loyalty (figure 5) and consumer attitude (figure 6). Only the interaction plot of the variable consumer attitude (figure 6) plot shows an interaction effect.

Table 7: Multivariate test - Descriptive statistics of the dependent variables

Effect		Value	F	Sig.
Wilk's Lamba	Recognized Authenticity	.868	10.656	.001
	Brand Attachment	.816	15.855	.001
	Recognized Authenticity * Brand Attachment	.948	3.870	.010

Table 8: Multivariate test - Test of between-subjects effects

Source	Dependent Variable	F	Sig.
Recognized Authenticity	Purchase Intention	6.452	.012
	Customer Loyalty	8.198	.005
	Consumer Attitude	30.164	.001
Brand Attachment	Purchase Intention	15.747	.001
	Customer Loyalty	45.741	.001
	Consumer Attitude	23.363	.001
Recognized Authenticity * Brand Attachment	Purchase Intention	3.339	.069
	Customer Loyalty	0.279	.598
	Consumer Attitude	6.468	.012

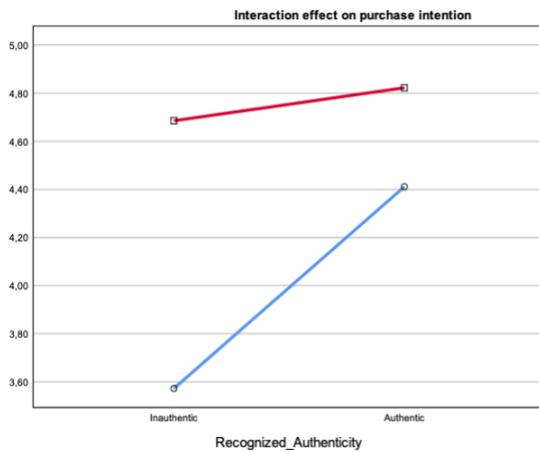


Figure 5: Interaction plot for the dependent variable purchase intention

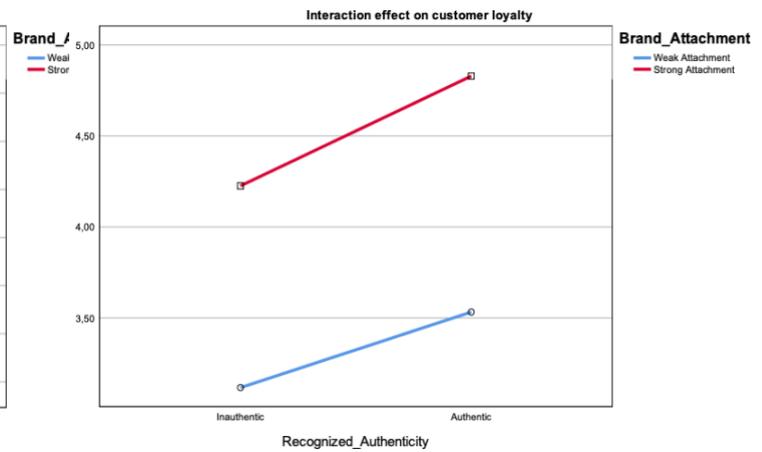


Figure 4: Interaction plot for the dependent variable customer loyalty

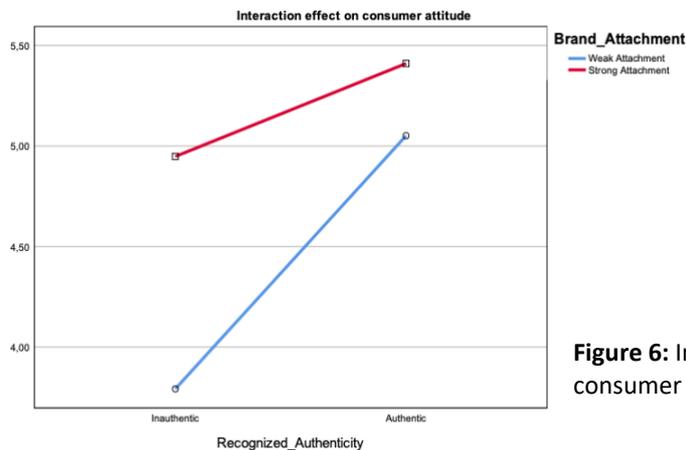


Figure 6: Interaction plot for the dependent variable consumer attitude

4.5 Mediation analyses

The "PROCESS" macro model 4, written by Andrew Hayes (2022), was used to investigate if the new construct brand reputation (combined) showed a significant mediation effect on the main effect. A 95% confidence interval (n=5000) was used to test the significance of the indirect effects mediated by the three dependent variables purchase intention, customer loyalty and consumer attitude. Table 10 and 11 visualize a summary of the results from the mediator analyses.

4.5.1 Mediator analysis purchase intention

The first mediation analysis used the variable *purchase intention* as the outcome variable (Y). The predictor variable (X) for the analysis was the independent variable *recognized authenticity* and the mediator variable (M) for the analysis was the new construct variable *brand reputation (combined)*. The path (direct-effect) from recognized authenticity (X) to brand reputation combined (M) was positive and statistically significant ($b = 1.429$, $s.e. = 1.442$, $p < .001$). The path (direct-effect) from brand reputation combined (M) to purchase intention (Y) was positive and statistically significant ($b = 0.598$, $s.e. = 0.075$; $p < .001$). The path (direct-effect) from recognized authenticity (X) to purchase intention (Y) was negative and statistically insignificant ($b = -0.038$, $s.e. = 0.191$, $p = .842$). The indirect effect is tested using non-parametric bootstrapping. If 0 falls between the lower and upper bound of the 95% confidence interval, then the inference is that the population direct effect is 0. If 0 falls outside the confidence interval, then the indirect effect is inferred to be non-zero. In this case the direct effect (IE = 0.855) is statistically significant: 95%CI = (0.583, 1.140).

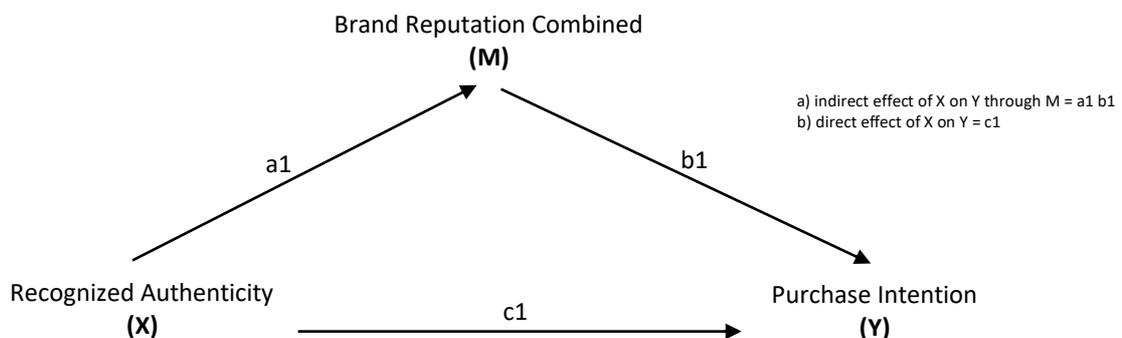


Figure 7: Analysis 1 mediation model for the dependent variable purchase intention

4.5.2 Mediator analysis customer loyalty

The second mediation analysis used the variable *customer loyalty* as the outcome variable (Y). The predictor variable (X) for the analysis was the independent variable *recognized authenticity* and the mediator variable (M) for the analysis was the new construct variable *brand reputation (combined)*. The path (direct-effect) from recognized authenticity (X) to brand reputation combined (M) was positive and statistically significant ($b = 1.429$, $s.e. = 1.442$, $p < .001$). The path (direct-effect) from brand reputation combined (M) to customer loyalty (Y) was positive and statistically significant ($b = 0.865$, $s.e. = 0.059$, $p < .001$). The path (direct-effect) from recognized authenticity (X) to purchase intention (Y) was negative and statistically insignificant ($b = -0.212$, $s.e. = 0.150$, $p = .159$). The indirect effect is tested using non-parametric bootstrapping. If 0 falls between the lower and upper bound of the 95% confidence interval, then the inference is that the population direct effect is 0. If 0 falls outside the confidence interval, then the indirect effect is inferred to be non-zero. In this case the direct effect (IE = 1.236) is statistically significant: $95\%CI = (0.952; 1.544)$.

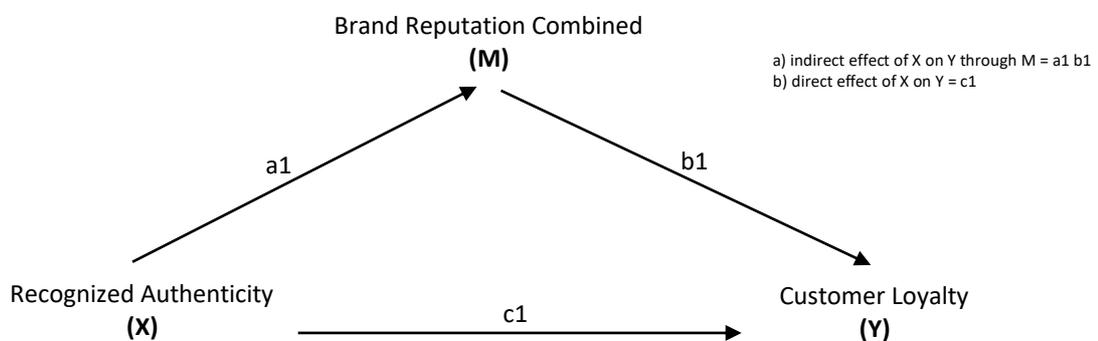


Figure 8: Analysis 2 mediation model for the dependent variable customer loyalty

4.5.3 Mediator analysis consumer attitude

The third mediation analysis used the variable *consumer attitude* as the outcome variable (Y). The predictor variable (X) for the analysis was the independent variable *recognized authenticity* and the mediator variable (M) for the analysis was the new construct variable *brand reputation (combined)*. The path (direct-effect) from recognized authenticity (X) to brand reputation combined (M) was positive and statistically significant ($b = 1.429$, $s.e. = 1.442$;

$p < .001$). The path (direct-effect) from brand reputation combined (M) to customer loyalty (Y) was positive and statistically significant ($b = 0.593$; $s.e. = 0.058$; $p < .001$). The path (direct-effect) from recognized authenticity (X) to purchase intention (Y) was positive and statistically insignificant ($b = 0.339$, $s.e. = 0.149$; $p = .024$). The indirect effect is tested using non-parametric bootstrapping. If 0 falls between the lower and upper bound of the 95% confidence interval, then the inference is that the population direct effect is 0. If 0 falls outside the confidence interval, then the indirect effect is inferred to be non-zero. In this case the direct effect (IE= 0.848) is statistically significant: 95%CI=(0.604; 1.108).

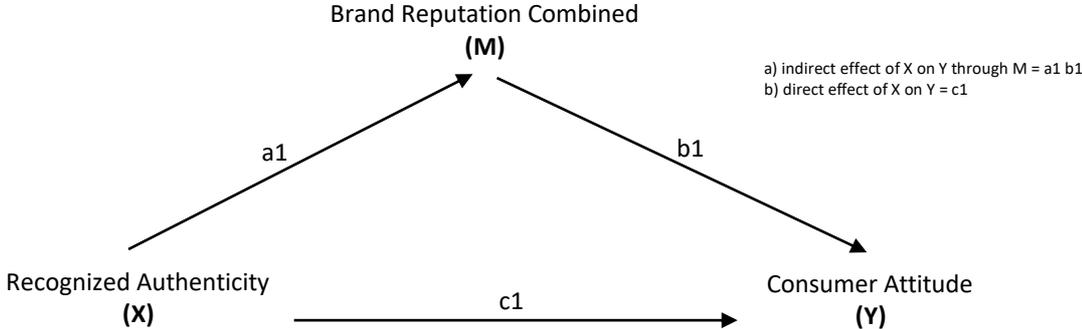


Figure 9: Analysis 3 mediation model for the dependent variable consumer attitude

Table 9: Mediation effect - direct effects

Mediation	Path	b	s.e.	Sig.
Analysis 1	a1	1.429	1.442	.001
	b1	0.598	0.075	.001
	c1	-0.038	0.191	.842
Analysis 2	a1	1.429	1.442	.001
	b1	0.865	0.059	.001
	c1	-0.212	0.150	.159
Analysis 3	a1	1.429	1.442	.001
	b1	0.593	0.058	.001
	c1	0.339	0.149	.024

Table 10: Mediation effect - indirect effects

Mediation	IE (Indirect effect)	CI (Lower bound)	CI (Upper bound)
Analysis 1	0.855	0.583	1.140
Analysis 2	1.236	0.952	1.544
Analysis 3	0.848	0.604	1.108

5.0 Discussion

The study focused on corporate brand activism so as to distinguish if the recognized authenticity (authentic vs. inauthentic) with an interaction of the brand attachment (strong vs. weak) would have an effect on consumer responses (purchase intention, customer loyalty & consumer attitude). Additionally, the research intended to investigate if the brand reputation of the brand would mediate the relationship between the recognized authenticity and the consumer responses. Hence, prior to the experimental study, three different hypotheses were formulated. The following subchapters discuss these hypotheses in relation to the experimental findings and compare these with the conclusions of previous studies. Additionally, the general limitations and future implications of this research are discussed.

5.1 Discussion of the findings

In regards to the first hypothesis, the claim that perceived authentic corporate brand activism results in positive consumer responses can be confirmed (Table 11). Although the experimental study itself was not successful, the collected data discovered enough evidence to confirm that when a campaign was recognized as authentic, it has a positive effect on purchase intentions, customer loyalty and consumer attitudes. The success of using authentic corporate brand activism was also distinguished in other projects, outside of the sportswear industry. Cizek & Logan (2018) looked at ice cream manufacture “Ben & Jerry’s”. Their research discovered that when the brand took a clear and authentic stance on socio-political issues such as the *Black Lives Matter* movement, the supporters of the movement compensated the brand through “boycotts” of purchasing more ice cream. Other research by Key et al. (2021) combined corporate brand activism with storytelling and stated that when a

brand's stance reflects an authentic alignment it will create more loyalty among its consumers and create greater enthusiasm about the brand and its existence.

As mentioned in the literature, corporate brand activism is a newly emerged form of CSR practice which corporations have started to follow in recent years (Hartsock & Ory, 2018). Previous research discovered a direct relationship between the authenticity of CSR initiatives on purchase intentions, customer loyalty, as well as consumer attitudes. Therefore, it was assumed that a similar impact lies within the authenticity of corporate brand activism. This research discovered sufficient evidence to confirm this assumption. This means that when a brand's socio-political stand is perceived as authentic, consumers are more positive towards the company in respect to their purchase intention, their loyalty and attitude as compared to an inauthentic socio-political stance.

As for the third hypothesis, the claim perceived authentic corporate brand activism with strong brand attachments will result in more positive consumer responses and therefore higher purchase intention, stronger customer loyalty and more positive consumer attitudes can be only partially confirmed (Table 11). It was expected that a fit between high brand attachment and authentic brand activism will result in stronger purchase intention, stronger customer loyalty and more positive brand attitudes (and vice versa), however, as mentioned in the previous chapter, there was not enough evidence to fully prove this claim. The research discovered only a significant relationship fit towards the dependent variable of consumer attitudes. This means that when brands choose to take an authentic stance, consumers that hold a strong brand attachment will become more positive towards the brand in respect to their attitude (and vice versa). According to the multivariate analysis the purchase intention or loyalty is not affected by this relationship.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the dependent variable of brand reputation (original) was combined with the credibility variable. Both constructs have shown similar measurement items so that the newly emerged construct became a mediator: brand reputation (combined).

The second hypothesis, the claim that brand reputation [combined] mediates the effect of perceived corporate brand activism on a) purchase intentions, b) customer loyalty, and c) consumer attitudes can also only be partially confirmed (Table 11). The research discovered

that the effect of perceived corporate brand activism (authenticity) on purchase intention and customer loyalty completely disappears when the mediating variable brand reputation [combined] was introduced. This means that brand reputation [combined] fully mediates between corporate brand activism and purchase intention/customer loyalty. However, as for the third depended variable, the study discovered that brand reputation [combined] partially mediates the effect between perceived corporate brand activism and consumer attitudes. The research did not only discover a significant mediating effect on consumer attitudes, but it also indicated that the main effect (indirect effect) between the independent variable *brand activism* (authenticity) and the dependent variable *consumer attitudes* remained significant. As a result of this, the mediation analysis of this study discovered an important element when investigating the relationship between the authenticity of perceived corporate brand activism and consumer responses to the brand, which is that the brand’s reputation plays a significant role. The results have shown that when brand activism is perceived as authentic, it leads to stronger brand reputation which then leads to more positive consumer responses (stronger purchase intention, stronger customer loyalty & more positive consumer attitudes). Hence, companies that perform authentic corporate brand activism may increase their brand’s reputation through which the company increases loyalty and sales.

Table 11: Hypothesis acceptance/rejection

Hypothesis	Confirmed / Rejected
H1 Authentic corporate brand activism [recognized] will result in positive consumer responses and therefore a) higher purchase intention, b) stronger customer loyalty and c) more positive consumer attitudes, as compared to inauthentic corporate brand activism [recognized].	Confirmed
H2 Brand reputation [combined] mediates the effect of recognized corporate brand activism authenticity on a) purchase intention, b) customer loyalty and c) consumer attitudes.	Partially Confirmed
H3 Authentic corporate brand activism [recognized] with strong brand attachments will result in positive consumer responses and therefore a) higher purchase intention, b) stronger customer loyalty and c) more positive consumer attitudes, as compared to inauthentic corporate brand activism with no or weak brand attachments.	Partially Confirmed

5.2 Limitations of the study

This section draws out several limitations of this study followed by implications on future research with the purpose of extending the knowledge of the subject.

Even though the pre-test of the stimulus indicated that the manipulation material was recognized correctly, the manipulation check within the experimental study suggested otherwise. The manipulation check failed and may be explained due to the complexity of the questionnaire. The average response time was about 18 minutes and the two stimuli materials used for the experimental study only showed minor differences within its last paragraphs. 71 participants of the experimental study had to be removed due to incompleteness. Correspondingly, this reveals that participants have apprehended the questionnaire as lengthy and complex. This limitation could have been avoided by paying more attention to making the questionnaire shorter and lowering the complexity of the stimuli materials. It is assumed that participants were not able to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic stimulus materials as they did not fully read the stimuli they were presented (due to their time constraints). The contrast of the inauthentic stimulus could have been increased by stating the contrasting elements of the stimulus at the beginning. As a consequence of the failed experiment, the research based its findings on the stimuli that was recognized instead of the stimulus that was presented. Hence, the research bases its findings on the participant's attitudes. Doing this gave the researcher access to more dependable data, however it is yet a strong limitation of this study. Nevertheless, since respondents based their responses on the stimuli they believed they saw, the study still gives an indication on how the perceived authenticity of corporate brand activism affects consumer responses.

Additionally, the variables of *brand attachment* and *recognized authenticity* were split around its means in order to create dummy variables. This was done since these variables were recorded using a 7-point Likert scale and therefore did not give a clear dichotomous split. It is a limitation of the study since splitting the data around its means is not a clear representation of the respondents. Such a limitation could have been avoided by creating a dichotomous question variable within the questionnaire.

Another limitation of this research is its sampling distribution. The majority of participants of the experimental study were between 18 and 29 years old. Hence, this study's meaningfulness in regards to analyzing a wide age spectrum is limited. This limitation can be explained through the chosen sampling method. Due to time constraints of conducting this research, a convenient sampling and snowball sampling method were chosen. The snowball sampling method aimed to gain access to an older audience.

Furthermore, the measurement items of the variables *brand credibility* and *brand reputation* were combined to a new construct *brand reputation (combined)*. This is a limitation of this research because credibility and brand reputation are not necessarily the same constructs. They present overlaps and differences which have to be taken under consideration. The initial variable brand reputation was excluded from the dependent variables as it was tested as a mediation variable.

Another limitation of this study could possibly lie in the reliability of the chosen measurement scales. The Cronbach's alpha score for almost all variables was above 0.9. This indicates that the measurement items of the different variables are strongly correlated items. A high alpha coefficient indicates that the chosen measurement scales are very reliability, however, a coefficient that is "too" high may risk redundancy in the scale items. Using other measurement scales in future research could give an indication on this. In case future research (using different measurement scales) results in comparable outcomes, it suggests that this research is not facing any redundancy in its scale items.

Finally, it is important to mention that this study only focused on progressive corporate brand activism. This means that the outcomes of the study may only apply to companies who see themselves of having a responsibility in seeking a true impact on socio-political issues. In respect to Vredenburg et al.'s typology (2020), the findings of this study only apply to companies who are actively involved in high marketing messages. Hence, this study does not affect B2B businesses or corporations who operate "behind the scenes".

5.3 Implications

Although, this study was able to distinguish a significant effect of the perceived campaign authenticity on consumer responses, the variable brand attachment has only shown to have a significant moderating effect on consumer attitudes. Additionally, it was discovered that brand reputation (combined) fully mediates the effect on almost all dependent variables.

In relation to the practical implications, businesses working in the sportswear sector can learn from this study that the authenticity of their campaigns (corporate brand activism) matters. When consumers perceive a campaign as authentic, their purchase intentions, customer loyalty and consumer attitude will increase. Sportswear businesses can use this knowledge for their own advantage when designing new marketing campaigns. As the study suggests, businesses should implement some sort of proof of authenticity within their campaigns to trigger positive consumer responses. Furthermore, businesses can learn from the findings that brand reputation has a larger impact on consumer responses compared to the degree of brand attachment. Knowing this, corporations in the sportswear sector should primarily focus on the authenticity of their campaigns and their perceived brand reputation to increase greater purchase intentions, more customer loyalty and more positive consumer attitudes. When implemented correctly, this study may help businesses to increase their overall market performances.

In regards to the theoretical implications, this study provides researchers with valuable information for future research on this topic. Through this research new relationships between the authenticity of corporate brand activism and consumers responses were discovered. However, the degree of brand attachment was discovered to only moderate the effect on consumer attitudes. Through this research it is assumed the variable brand attachment is related to brand forgiveness so that future research should analyze the relationship of brand forgiveness in the context of this research model. Furthermore, the relationship of brand reputation (combined) fully mediates the effect on purchase intentions and customer loyalty. The effect between the perceived authenticity and consumer attitudes remained during this mediation.

6.0 Conclusion

In regards to the research question, based on the findings of the experimental study, it can be concluded that the recognized authenticity of corporate brand activism within the sportswear industry influences consumers responses towards the brand. However, as for the moderating effect of brand attachment, only a significant effect on consumer attitudes has been discovered. Additionally, the research discovered that when the mediator brand reputation was introduced, the main effect on purchase intention and customer loyalty disappeared. The main effect on consumer attitude remained. However, as the stimuli were not recognized correctly, the experimental design failed. Future research should reinsure the findings of this study by adjusting the experimental stimuli and the sample size.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Perceived brand authenticity scale

Concept	Statements
Perceived Brand Authenticity Scale (Morhart et al., 2015)	Nike is..
	<u>Continuity</u>
	Statement 1: ...a brand with a history
	Statement 2: ...a timeless brand
	Statement 3: ...a brand that survives time
	Statement 4: ... a brand that survives trends
	<u>Credibility</u>
	Statement 5: ...a brand that will not betray you
	Statement 6: ...a brand that accomplishes its value promise
	Statement 7: ...an honest brand
	<u>Integrity</u>
	Statement 8: ...a brand that gives back to its consumers
	Statement 9: ...a brand with moral principles
	Statement 10: ...a brand true to a set of moral values
	Statement 11: ...a brand that cares about its consumers
<u>Symbolism</u>	
Statement 12: ...a brand that adds meaning to people's lives	
Statement 13: ...a brand that reflects important values people care about	
Statement 14: ...a brand that connects people with their real selves	
Statement 15: ...a brand that connects people with what is really important	

Appendix 2: Interview notes pre-test stimuli

Stimulus materials	Notes / Citations
Stimulus 1 (Authentic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>"I think a campaign like that is necessary"</i>○ <i>"Nike shows dedication through this campaign"</i>○ <i>"I think Nike did something great for supporting this cause"</i>○ <i>"I think that Nike is showing a great sign"</i>○ <i>"When I read about the campaign I got positive feelings"</i> - Believes the idea behind the campaign is very good- Believes the campaign is credible as Nike is using African American athletes- Nike is taking a socio-political stance- Thinks the main intention is to raise awareness- Believes that by supporting this cause, Nike is positioning themselves socio-politically- It is an original idea- Campaign is credible because Nike is using athletes that have been through inequality and racism- The main intention is to help a cause and increase profits- Thinks the campaign is cool since Nike used a controversial character as the main face- Nike showed character- Thinks Nike wants to take a socio-political stance through their campaign- I think the campaign is credible because Nike used a very controversial person- Main intention behind the campaign is to raise awareness and to improve the image and increase revenue.- Nike is taking a controversial person for their campaign and stood up for the cause- Generally believes that it is an authentic and credible campaign since Nike stood up for a controversial person- Nike is taking a socio-political stance- Make a statement about the George Floyd incident and take advantage to make money
Stimulus 2 (Inauthentic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>"I think it is a marketing trick"</i>○ <i>"I don't think this campaign is credible"</i>○ <i>"I don't like when brand support political movements"</i>○ <i>"I really appreciate when companies are socially responsible and trying to make this world a better place"</i>○ <i>"I would say that the campaign has potential but it is not authentic"</i>

-
- Thinks the campaign significantly amplified the Black Lives Matter movement
 - Thinks that Nike needs to review itself as well
 - Nike doesn't walk the talk
 - Nike is using the cause to increase revenue
 - Believes that Nike is taking a clear socio-political stance
 - Using a mainstream topics and social issues to increase revenue
 - Nike wants to sell more products
 - Nike is also raising public awareness
 - Nice idea
 - Nike took a socio-political stance but the main intention was not the cause itself but to improve their own image in the eyes of the customers
 - Was aware about the campaign
 - Doesn't think the campaign is credible or authentic at all
 - Main intention was to hop on a trend
 - Nike took a risk with their campaign
 - Thinks it's a shame that Nike is not very authentic in their own diversity
 - It takes a lot of time to represent diversity
 - Believes that Nike wants to raise awareness, besides increasing profits

Appendix 3: Experimental study



Welcome!

My name is Lennart Meyer and I am currently enrolled as a master student studying *Communication Science* at the University of Twente in The Netherlands. As part of my master thesis, your participation within this approximately 10min survey would be much appreciated. My study focuses on finding out to what degree (sportswear) brands have an impact on consumer behaviour when they decide to take socio-political stances.

By clicking on the arrow at the bottom of your screen, you can start the survey and you give your agreement that:

- You are 18 years of age or older
- Answers of this questionnaire may be used for educational purposes

In case you wish to withdraw from this survey, you may do so at any time. This survey is anonymous so that after completion no information can be tracked back to your identity. If you choose not to agree, I cannot process your data and you can exit this survey. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact me via e-mail l.meyer-1@student.utwente.nl





Before starting this survey:



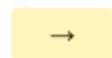
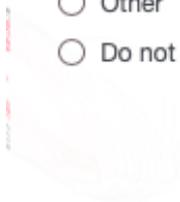
Please indicate your age

- 18-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50 or older



Please indicate your gender

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Do not want to disclose





The next questions focus on the sportswear manufacturer Nike

Are you aware of Nike?

- Yes, I know this brand.
 - No, I have never heard about this brand before.
-

Have you ever bought a Nike product?

- Yes
 - No
-

How frequently do you buy Nike products?

- Never
- 1-2 times per year
- 3-5 times a year
- > 5 times a year





To what extent do the following words describe your typical feelings towards Nike?

	Not at all	Unwell	Somewhat unwell	No feelings	Somewhat well	Well	Very well
Affectionate	<input type="radio"/>						
Friendly	<input type="radio"/>						
Loved	<input type="radio"/>						
Peaceful	<input type="radio"/>						
Passionate	<input type="radio"/>						
Delighted	<input type="radio"/>						
Captivated	<input type="radio"/>						
Connected	<input type="radio"/>						
Bonded	<input type="radio"/>						
Attached	<input type="radio"/>						

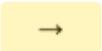
To what extent do you think it is important that brands take socio-political stances?

Not important at all Very important

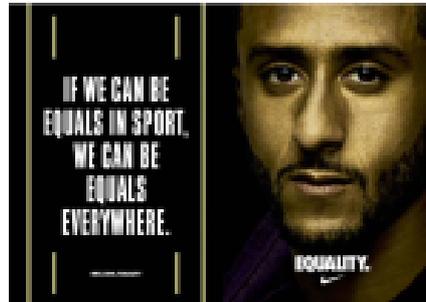




The next page is going to introduce you to one of Nike's past marketing campaigns about equality. Please carefully read through the description and answer the questions that follow.



Authentic Stimulus



"If we can be equals in sport, we can be equals everywhere"

This phrase was used by Nike to promote their equality campaign. The basis of the equality campaign was a short film which featured Nike athletes such as LeBron James, Serena Williams, Kevin Durant and many others amplifying their voices to encourage people to take the fairness and respect they see in sports and translate them off the field.

The main face of Nike's equality campaign was former NFL player Colin Kaepernick. Prior to the campaign, in 2016, Colin Kaepernick was suspended by the NFL for taking a knee during the national anthem as a sign of protest against the ongoing police brutality in the United States. Some supported his sign of protest, others (including former President Trump) criticized his actions. Despite the public controversy, Nike decided to make him the face of their campaign.

The campaign ad was narrated by African American actor Michael B. Jordan, reading a powerful poem that ends with "if we can be equals here, we can be equals everywhere." Additionally to the film, equality t-shirts and shoes were available for purchase through Nike.com and through selected retailers.



Inauthentic Stimulus



"If we can be equals in sport, we can be equals everywhere"

This phrase was used by Nike to promote their equality campaign. The basis of the equality campaign was a short film which featured Nike athletes such as LeBron James, Serena Williams, Kevin Durant and many others amplifying their voices to encourage people to take the fairness and respect they see in sports and translate them off the field.

The main face of Nike's equality campaign was former NFL player Colin Kaepernick. Prior to the campaign, in 2016, Colin Kaepernick was suspended by the NFL for taking a knee during the national anthem as a sign of protest against the ongoing police brutality in the United States. Some supported his sign of protest, others (including former President Trump) criticized his actions. Despite the public controversy, Nike decided to make him the face of their campaign.

The campaign ad was narrated by African American actor Michael B. Jordan, reading a powerful poem that ends with "if we can be equals here, we can be equals everywhere." Additionally to the film, equality t-shirts and shoes were available for purchase through Nike.com and through selected retailers.

Nike's equality campaign was launched in 2018, however in 2019 Nike's own diversity was brought into question as public records have shown that less than 10% of its 300+ vice presidents were black. Additionally, in the same year, Nike extended its official apparel partnership with all 32 NFL teams through 2028. The extended apparel partnership involves a \$1.1 billion contract with the NFL. One of slogans Nike used for its campaign was "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything."



Please answer the following questions in regards to Nike's equality campaign.

To what extent would think Nike's campaign is authentic?

Very inauthentic Very authentic

To what extent would you think Nike is trying to take a socio-political stance through their equality campaign?

Not at all Very much

I believe that Nike is..

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
...a brand that will not betray me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...a brand that accomplishes its value promise.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...an honest brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Based on the campaign that I just learned about, I think that...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
...Nike has a good overall reputation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...Nike is a company I have a good feeling about.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...Nike is a company that I trust.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...Nike is a company that I admire and respect.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Based on the campaign I just learned about, I ...

...have very low purchasing interest in Nike.	<input type="radio"/>	...have very high purchasing interest in Nike.						
...would probably not buy Nike's products.	<input type="radio"/>	...would probably buy Nike's products.						
...would definitely not buy Nike's products.	<input type="radio"/>	...would definitely buy Nike's products.						
...definitely do not intend to buy Nike's products.	<input type="radio"/>	...definitely intend to buy Nike's products.						





Based on the campaign I just learned about, I will...

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither disagree or agree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
...say positive things about Nike to other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... recommend Nike to others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...encourage friends and relatives to buy Nike.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...consider Nike as my first choice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Based on the campaign I just learned about, I perceive Nike as...

unfavorable	<input type="radio"/>	favorable						
unpleasant	<input type="radio"/>	pleasant						
unappealing	<input type="radio"/>	appealing						
unlikable	<input type="radio"/>	likable						
bad	<input type="radio"/>	good						

