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# Exploring the role of issue involvement and brand attachment in shaping consumer response toward corporate social advocacy (CSA) initiatives: the case of Nike's Colin Kaepernick campaign

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## ABSTRACT

This study adopts the consumer-centric perspective, through the lens of the consumer involvement theory and stakeholder theory, to examine the role of consumer involvement in shaping individuals' attitudinal and behavioural responses toward Nike's 30th Anniversary ad campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick. Specifically, a survey ( $N=345$ ) was conducted to examine how consumers' cognitive and affective involvement regarding the issue of NFL national anthem protests, their brand attachment, and brand attitude guide their attitudes and word-of-mouth intentions in response to Nike's corporate social advocacy practices. The findings of this study suggested that consumers' support for a company's CSA efforts could depend on their involvement in the social issue that a brand chose as well as their involvement in the brand. Moreover, the interaction of issue involvement and brand attachment factors can serve as a segmentation strategy to cement brand loyalty and strengthen the relationship with the existing stakeholders whose issue attitude was congruent with the corporation's stances. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

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## Introduction

Colin Kaepernick, the former professional NFL football player, has been in the spotlight since he 'took a knee' during the national anthem in a silent protest of racial inequality and police brutality in the United States. In 2018, Nike launched its 30th annual 'Just Do It' campaign, which features Kaepernick as the face of the campaign and reads, 'Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.' In the aftermath of the backlash against the campaign, questions have arisen about what role companies should take in terms of sociopolitical issues.

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At present, given the increased societal expectations for companies to be socially responsible, corporations have exerted tremendous efforts on corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. Moreover, as society has evolved, 80% of stakeholders – particularly young consumers – are expecting corporations, as a part of a civic society, to take a lead in fighting social injustice issues that are deeply affecting the world (Edelman 2020). Such expectation has led to a new emerging trend recently where corporations have increasingly expanded the scope of their nonmarket activities by taking a definitive stance and advocating for controversial sociopolitical issues, an approach that is known as corporate social advocacy (CSA; Dodd and Supa 2015), a newly developed concept that was built upon CSR. Nike's campaign that features Kaepernick is a clear example of CSA.

Although a growing number of researchers have started to investigate the topic of CSA, the question of which social responsibility programs should be adopted by a company is mainly answered from the corporate perspective (Champlin et al. 2019). For example, CSA campaigns were found to receive more consumer support when the issue discussed in the campaign is relevant to the company's business (Austin, Gaither, and Gaither 2019) or when individuals perceive the motives of the engagement valuable but not profitable (Kim et al. 2020). However, scholars have advocated that companies should consider adopting a consumer-centred emphasis (i.e. individual differences) in proposing their social responsibility activities (Bhattacharya, Sen, and Korschun 2011; Christopher and Luke 2013), particularly in terms of CSA activities that imply that companies intend to take a stance on only one side of controversial issues.

Thus, adopting the consumer involvement theory and stakeholder theory, this study aims to extend the CSA research line through the consumer-centric perspectives. Specifically, using a case study investigation into Nike's Colin Kaepernick campaign, this study considers how consumers' issue and brand involvement and the joint effect of these two variables shape their attitudes toward the campaign. Moreover, this study investigates whether attitudes toward the campaign affect individuals' word of mouth (WOM) intentions toward the company.

The findings provide important theoretical implications for CSA scholars and practical implications for companies. This study initially offers new insights for CSA literature by integrating research from CSR and cause-related marketing and provides directions for future research on understanding the consumers' responses toward companies' CSA efforts. In addition, the information will be arguably valuable for corporations who plan to take stances on sociopolitical issues. The findings can serve as a guidance for the selection of the issues and strategies to enhance the consumers' perceived fit between the company and its CSA programs. Such strategic planning may possibly guide consumer responses and the degree to which they are likely to support the company's CSA efforts (e.g. positive word of mouth, PWOM).

## Literature review

### *Corporations as issue advocates: Nike's Colin Kaepernick campaign*

Outside of investing huge amounts of money in political advocacy and hiring lobbyists, corporations have started to take a public stance on political and social issues

(Saffer, Yang, and Qu 2019). For example, DICK'S Sporting Goods has openly expressed support for gun control reform. Gillette has launched a new campaign against toxic masculinity in the wake of the #MeToo Movement (Hoffmann et al. 2020). Ben and Jerry's has publicly stated its support for the Black Lives Matter Movement since 2016 (Ciszek and Logan 2018). Since Dodd and Supa (2015) coined the term CSA to refer to the act of a company taking a public stance on sociopolitical issues, a growing number of researchers have begun to differentiate CSA from its relevant theoretical concept, CSR (Kim et al. 2020). Although organizations aim to increase their profits and positive reputation by CSR activities, organizations intend to depict their values by taking a stance on one side of a controversial sociopolitical issue (Wilcox 2019).

Although CSR and CSA literature share similar antecedents of consumer attitudes and behaviours toward companies' pro-social activities (e.g. company-cause fit, attributions of motives), researchers have argued that individuals' view of a social issue have stronger impact on their responses to CSA compared to their reactions to CSR (Austin et al. 2019). CSR programs primarily focus on social issues with which most individuals agree, such as sustainability and healthy equality. Therefore, CSR research have mainly focused on the question of how CSR can draw positive influences to companies, such as increasing merchandise purchase (Diehl, Terlutter, and Mueller 2016), improving product attitudes (Lee and Haley 2019), and encouraging positive WOM (Li, Overton, and Bhalla 2020). In contrast, CSA activities normally involve controversial social issues that require companies to pick a side (Rim, Lee, and Yoo 2020). The potential divisive characteristics of CSA actions contribute to the switch of academic attention to negative outcomes of such programs, including negative WOM and boycott behaviours (e.g. Kim et al. 2020; Rim et al. 2020).

For an in-depth understanding of CSA effects from the consumer perspective, this study uses a real-world example: Nike's 30th Anniversary 'Just Do It' campaign. By featuring Colin Kaepernick, this campaign celebrates diversity in the contexts of race, gender, religion, and physical ability (Hoffmann et al. 2020). Kaepernick is a former football player who took a knee during the pregame national anthem in 2016 to protest against police brutality against racial minorities in the US. Kaepernick stated that 'I'm not going to stand up to show pride for a country that oppresses black people and people of colour' (NFL.com 2016). Kaepernick's refusal to stand for the national anthem has sparked substantial controversies in the US. Some people applaud the national anthem protest initiated by Kaepernick, whereas others viewed the protest as disrespectful towards military personnel and the country. Such mixed attitudes among the public polarized consumers' responses toward Nike's campaign. Some supported the campaign by sharing, liking, and commenting on Nike's social media posts (Park and Jiang 2020), whereas others boycotted Nike and shared anti-Nike content online (Hoffmann et al. 2020). Despite the polarizing reactions toward the campaign, both online sales of Nike products and its stock substantially increased after the launch of the campaign (Gleeson 2018).

### ***Antecedents of CSA perception: theoretical framework of involvement***

Despite increased scholarly attention made to CSA, the majority of existing research has focused on the topic from the corporate perspective (Abitbol et al. 2018; Dodd

and Supa 2015; Gaither, Austin, and Collins 2018). More recently, researchers have found that consumer responses toward CSA and companies vary depending on individual differences (Austin et al. 2019; Parcha and Kingsley Westerman 2020). For example, liberals were found more likely to believe companies should advocate more social issues, whereas conservatives tend to believe that companies should take a stance on a social issue only when the issue is relevant to their business or product (Austin et al. 2019). However, research on the effects of individual differences on attitudes toward companies' CSA efforts is still lacking (Gaither et al. 2018). More studies on the determinants of individuals' view of and support for CSA are needed for companies to maximize benefits and minimize the risks from engaging in CSA.

As previous literature has suggested, stakeholders develop knowledge to understand a company's social responsibility efforts and use this knowledge to evaluate whether such efforts are appropriate (Nan and Heo 2007). From the stakeholder/consumer perspective, scholars found that individuals' closeness to a company or their caring about the causes can shape their perceptions toward the company's CSR practices (Bhattacharya et al. 2011; Lu, Wei, and Li 2015). However, few efforts have been made to investigate the potential factors that may form and shape consumers' perception of a company's CSA initiatives (Gaither et al. 2018). Thus, this study adopts the consumer involvement theory to fill the gap and understand what may improve the effectiveness of CSA campaigns. The consumer involvement theory has always been the central focus in marketing, advertising, and consumer behaviour research for several decades (Laurent and Kapferer 1985; Martín, Camarero, and José 2011). The degree of consumer involvement in issues, products, or brands affects individuals' attitude formation and decision-making processes. Several classic theories have considered involvement as an essential strategy in persuasion communication, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) and the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Chaiken 1980). Zaichkowsky defined involvement as 'a person's perceived relevance of an object based on inherent needs, values, and interests' (p. 342). However, the term of involvement has been utilized to describe a number of different concepts. This study begins with two important involvement components of consumers' decision-making processes in developing attitudinal and behavioural responses toward a company's message contents, that is, issue involvement and brand attachment.

### ***Issue involvement: cognitive and affective involvement***

Issue involvement refers to a perceived connection between an individual and an issue because of personal interest, commitment, or issue importance to one's own life (Costley 1988). Involvement with an issue or cause has been extensively studied in a wide range of disciplines and shown to affect individuals' thinking and decision-making processes (Johnson and Eagly 1989). In line with research in other fields, CSR literature also suggested that consumer involvement with the cause or issue the company is advocating for can play an important role in consumers' perceptions of CSR activities (Hoeffler and Keller 2002; Holiday et al. 2020; Trimble and Rifon 2006). Scholars have suggested that stakeholders have their own personal preferences for certain types of cause. One may believe, for example, that sustainability is an important social issue today, whereas another person may be particularly involved in

gender/racial equality issues because of their personal experiences and connection with the issues. Issues that elicit consumer attention or emotions may influence the ways that they interpret and respond to companies' social responsibility activities (Bhattacharya et al. 2011).

Consumers with high involvement in a cause or an issue are shown to be more likely to exert attention, time, or other resources to social responsibility campaigns, thereby formulating their cognitive responses to CSR activities (Hoeffler and Keller 2002; Lafferty and Goldsmith 2005). Moreover, high involvement in a cause allows consumers to have more confidence and certainty to evaluate corporate actions toward the issue, which helps consumers form and shape their thoughts about the programs and the company (Lu et al. 2015).

Although the role of consumers' involvement in causes has recently elicited attention, the majority of current studies have measured the factor from a general perspective. To understand its effect on consumers' perceptions toward corporate actions for social issues, the present work adopted the conceptualization and operationalization of involvement from the consumer psychology literature. Specifically, this study assessed the effects of issue involvement on CSA perceptions from two aspects: cognitive and affective involvement. Previous literature has suggested that when processing corporate messages, consumers may be involved cognitively (thinking) or affectively (feeling) (Johnson and Eagly 1989; Matthes 2013). Cognitive involvement refers to individuals' relevance related to message contents, which primarily focuses on the analytical or cognitive aspects of an issue. Thus, the concept is related to other concepts that have been studied over the years, including information sufficiency, levels of knowledge, or personal support (Kahlor 2010; McKeever et al. 2016). By contrast, affective involvement generally refers to feelings and emotional attachments toward message contents.

Both types of involvement have shown to be influential in consumer persuasion. However, scholars believe that cognitive and affective involvement affect consumers' information processing in different ways (Park and Young 1986), suggesting that they are independent constructs from each other. Although consumers must have a certain amount of knowledge or information about message contents to be involved, they are also likely to feel a certain amount of emotion toward the subject. These feelings can affect consumers' attitudinal and behavioural responses as much, if not more than, awareness and knowledge or cognitive involvement (Matthes 2013; McKeever et al. 2016). A substantial amount of research has suggested that consumers will possess more favourable attitudes toward message contents when they are positively affectively involved, and vice versa (Putrevu and Lord 1994).

Specifically, cognitive involvement has been studied in CSR literature. Previous research has found that consumers who are highly cognitively involved with a cause will usually hold strong and positive perceptions toward the cause, thereby possessing favourable attitudes toward an organization's actions for the cause (Haley 1996; Kim, Haley, and Lee 2008; Lu et al. 2015). However, prior studies in CSR research often operationalized cognitive involvement by mixing indicators of issue salience (i.e. it is an important issue for me) and measures of issue position (i.e. I am supportive of this issue) (Lee and Ahn 2013; Lee, O'Donnell, and Hust 2019). Although the internal validity of such operationalization was reported across many CSR studies, issue salience and issue position can be distinguished and may not be exchanged, particularly in

CSA contexts. For example, when it comes to a controversial social issue, on one hand, a person may pay a great amount of attention to the issue due to his/her personal support of the issue. On the other hand, one may display great concerns of the issue because he or she completely disapproves such a situation. Given that individuals' view of an issue has been recognized as a critical factor in shaping consumer behaviour towards CSA (Austin et al. 2019), the authors believe that measuring cognitive involvement from both perspectives of issue salience and issue position separately may better benefit CSA research. Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1a: Issue salience regarding NFL players' national anthem protest will be positively associated with favourable attitude towards Nike's campaign.

H1b: Issue position on NFL players' national anthem protest will be positively associated with favourable attitude towards Nike's campaign.

Affective involvement is made up of feeling states and was widely found to influence consumer behaviour, such as online shopping intentions, brand loyalty, and patronage intentions (Kim and Sung 2009; Shang, Chen, and Liao 2006). Positive feeling states, such as the emotions of happiness or satisfaction, may increase consumers' likelihood to spend more time in the store, purchase products, and hold more favourable attitudes toward the store (Jiang et al. 2010). In contrast, negative feeling states, including the emotions of anger and disappointment, may reduce consumers' willingness to perform patronage behaviours (Kang, Mun, and Johnson 2015). Although the affective side of involvement seems underexplored in CSR or CSA research, its influences on consumer behaviour are well documented in literature (Kim and Sung 2009).

To the best of the authors' knowledge, although some efforts have been made to examine the role of issue involvement in forming consumers' attitudes toward corporate actions for social issues, most of these studies indistinctively measured cognitive and affective involvement (Kim and Sung 2009). Given that both types of involvement have been demonstrated to play critical roles in shaping consumers' attitudes and behaviours, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H2a: Positive affective involvement with NFL players' national anthem protest will be positively associated with favourable attitude towards Nike's campaign.

H2b: Negative affective involvement with NFL players' national anthem protest will be negatively associated with favourable attitude towards Nike's campaign.

### **Brand attachment: brand-self connection and brand attitude**

Another type of involvement that may shape consumer attitudes toward a brand or its product/message is brand attachment. Although consumers' evaluations of a brand (e.g. brand attitude) have often been studied as outcomes of a brand's CSR efforts (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill 2006; Ferrell et al. 2019), few studies have examined brand attachment factors as predictors of consumers' reactions to the brand's CSR practices. However, consumers represent an important stakeholder group for a brand, and their existing attitude toward the brand should have important roles to play in shaping perceptions about the brand's actions for social issues.

Similar to the definition of issue involvement, brand attachment also refers to a type of personal relationship, not with a specific issue but with a specific brand

(Fournier 1998; Keller 2003; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Brands devote a great amount of resources to the development of the relationship with their consumers, intending to establish and sustain a bond with them. Such relationships ultimately contribute to consumption behaviours and a strong ability to withstand a brand's poor performance. (Keller, Apéria, and Georgson 2008; Morgan and Hunt 1994). The strong connection between the brand and the consumers create an attachment (Schultz, Kleine, and Kernan 1989). Brand attachment is a general and complex construct that can be assessed in several ways. One important factor that reflects the concept of brand attachment is brand-self connection (Park et al. 2010).

Brand-self connection, a concept that originated from self-congruity theory, is defined as an evaluation that consumers make based on the similarities and differences between a brand and their own set of personality, images, or values (Johar and Sirgy 1991). Consumers often compare themselves with a brand to see whether the brand matches their personality or represents their values (Johar and Sirgy 1991). They choose or prefer brands or products with values or symbolic meanings that are consistent with their self-identity because the attributes that consumers use to define a brand also define themselves (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994, 239). An extensive amount of research has shown that high brand attachment between consumer self-identity and brand image/value leads to positive brand and product attitudes (Jamal and Goode 2001). In addition to the influence on brand attitudes and preferences, the amount of attachment is also found to affect consumers' reactions to corporate actions for social issues (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). Consumers tend to consider the degree of congruity between self-concept and a brand's identity when evaluating the brand's advocacy messages (Goldsmith and Yimin 2014). However, outside of these studies, research that consciously links brand attachment to a brand's CSR or CSA initiatives are limited. By drawing together the theoretical discussion concerning brand attachment, self-congruity, and consumer responses to product attitudes, buying intentions, and brand loyalty, we can develop the following hypothesis for empirical testing:

H3: High brand-self connection will be positively associated with favourable attitude towards Nike's campaign.

Another type of brand attachment is consumers' attitude valence and strength toward a brand. Attitude is defined as an individual's constantly positive or negative evaluation, tendencies, and feelings toward an object (Kotler and Armstrong 2010). Brand attitude is conceptualized as consumers' favourable or unfavourable feelings of a particular brand (Kotler and Armstrong 2010). Deliberate thought about a brand can generate strong attitude results (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Consumers are often reluctant to change their evaluation of a brand when attitudes are shaped over time by their own experiences (Boone and Kurtz 2002). Therefore, brand attitude is considered one of the most popular and reliable cognitive predictors of consumer behaviour towards a brand (e.g. responses to brand message contents or products; Erdem, Swait, and Valenzuela 2006).

However, little research has studied brand attitude as a predictor of consumers' responses to a brand's social responsibility efforts. On the basis of previous studies in consumer psychology literature, when the attitude towards a brand is positive, consumers will anchor on the brand and adjust their evaluations on the brand's action



toward the cause accordingly (Lafferty and Goldsmith 2005). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Positive brand attitude valence will be positively associated with favourable attitude towards Nike's campaign.

### ***Matching between issue involvement and Brand attachment factors: stakeholder theory***

Besides the potential linear relationships, this study moves a step forward to investigate the two-way interaction effect of issue involvement and brand attachment factors on individuals' attitudes toward a CSA campaign message through a lens of stakeholder theory. Stakeholder theory addresses the importance of relationship management between organizations and their stakeholders through different strategies, requiring the organizations value impacts beyond financial performance (Reiter 2016). It emphasizes the importance of the segmentation of stakeholders into meaningful categories that help corporations understand how different stakeholder groups impact business operations (Rowley 1997). According to stakeholder theory, CSA can serve as an effective segmentation strategy to establish and reinforce with some stakeholder groups, whereas cutting ties with those whose values no longer align with the organizations (Gaither et al. 2018).

As previous research has found, adopting a clear stance on politically social issues may be a double-edged sword for corporations (Austin et al. 2019). The advocacy action may strengthen brand loyalty among like-minded consumers, employees, and other stakeholders (Dodd 2018). The great amount of the attention to the action and the subsequent social movements may also attract a new stakeholder group who shares similar ideologies but was not engaged with the brand previously (King 2008). However, such advocacy may also trigger criticism, boycotts, and other protests, driving away the existing stakeholder groups with whom beliefs may no longer be consistent with the corporations (Dodd 2018). Using issue involvement and brand attachment factors as the segmentation criteria, this study examines the interactive effects of individuals' attitudes toward a social issue and toward a brand on their assessment of the brand's CSA engagement. Thus, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1a-b: Are there significant differences in attitudes toward Nike's campaign, if any, between high and low cognitive involvement groups concerning national anthem protests, when perceiving different levels of brand-self connection (a) and when holding different levels of attitudes toward Nike (b)?

RQ2a-b: Are there significant differences in attitudes toward Nike's campaign, if any, between high and low affective involvement groups concerning national anthem protests, when perceiving different levels of brand-self connection (a) and when holding different levels of attitudes toward Nike (b)?

### ***Outcomes of CSA perception: word of mouth***

Despite the increasing public demand for CSA, Rim et al. (2020) argued that the public's responses to CSA can be polarizing due to the potential divisiveness of CSA. CSA

can result in brand boycott or brand advocacy based on individuals' values on the issue. In other words, companies can obtain important public support by CSA when their values on a social issue is consistent with that of their key consumers. Research has shown that consumers are more likely to perform patronage behaviours when the corporations' stance on an issue is consistent with theirs, such as brand advocacy behaviours (Xie, Bagozzi, and Grønhaug 2015) and purchase intentions (Sen, Bhattacharya, and Korschun 2006).

CSR research have focused on positive WOM (PWOM), which refers to consumers' willingness to talk positively about products, services, or companies (Tong and Wong 2014). PWOM has been considered as a more trustworthy source compared to other information sources because PWOM is shared and disseminated by individual consumers without commercial interests (Chu and Kim 2018). Such advantage drives companies to invest a substantial amount of resources to increase consumers' PWOM (Chu, Chen, and Sung 2016). Researchers have found that consumers' positive attitudes toward companies' prosocial activities, such as CSR, are positively associated with their PWOM (Kim et al. 2017; Plewa et al. 2015). Thus, we posit the following hypothesis:

H5: Favourable attitudes towards Nike's campaign will be positively associated with PWOM.

Despite companies' efforts to demonstrate their values by CSR or CSA, consumers do not always positively respond to such efforts (Abitbol et al. 2018; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz 2006). Research has shown that consumers display less favourable attitudes toward corporations' CSR when they are sceptical about the companies' motives of CSR activities and infer self-benefit motives (Foreh and Grier 2003). Consumers' negative view of CSR also appeared to decrease their positive behavioural intentions, such as to engage with PWOM (Skarmas, Leonidou, and Saridakis 2014) and purchase intentions (Elving 2013). Researchers have started to investigate the determinants of consumers' negative WOM (NWOM), which refers to consumers' intention to talk negatively about companies and their products (Balaji, Khong, and Chong 2016). Research has also shown that consumers' negative attitudes toward companies' CSR lead to increased NWOM (Leonidou and Skarmas 2017) and boycott behaviours (Klein, Smith, and Joh 2004).

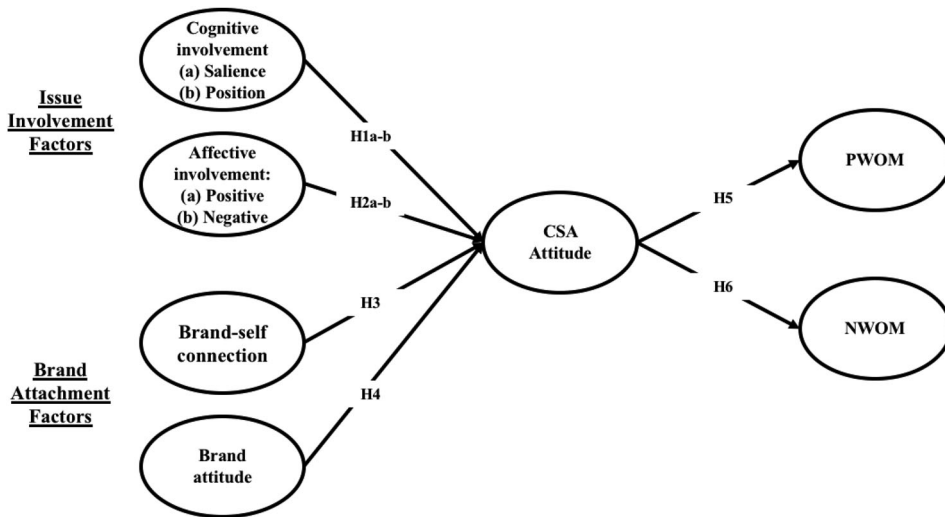
In CSA research, scholars have found that corporations' advocacy actions may contribute to boycotting (Abitbol et al. 2018; Rim et al. 2020). Rim et al.'s (2020) study showed that conservative individuals were highly likely to recommend boycotting Starbucks and Budweiser when the two companies took a stance on President Trump's immigration ban of 2017. Although Nike's campaign received substantial support from some consumers, others displayed negative attitudes and behaviours toward Nike, such as burning Nike products and recommending boycotting Nike on social media (Wang and Siegl, 2018). On this basis, we propose the following:

H6: Favourable attitude towards Nike's campaign will be negatively associated with NWOM.

Figure 1 shows the proposed model with the study hypotheses.

## Method

This study used an online survey methodology to investigate how consumers respond to a company's CSA initiatives. A Qualtrics panel was selected to recruit a national



**Figure 1.** Proposed model.

sample who meets the study criteria of having U.S. citizens who have seen or heard about Nike's 30th anniversary 'Just Do It' campaign. After the approval of the university's institutional review board, each participant received a consent form before participating in the study. Data collection was completed in March 2019. To test the measurement wording, the survey flow, and the estimation time to complete the survey, a pretest was conducted using a Qualtrics panel ( $N=50$ ). The pretest sample was not included in the final sample of the study.

To gather data that closely mirrors the U.S. Census, quota sampling was used. Specifically, quotas were set for the age, gender, and political ideology categories. Specifically, a 50/50 gender split was requested, and equal responses within the following age categories were obtained: 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, and 55+. A total of 345 participants completed the survey successfully. The sample contains 194 (56.2%) men, 148 (42.9%) women, 1 (0.3%) people who answered other, and 2 (0.6%) who preferred not to answer. In addition, a one-third political ideology split was also requested. The final sample included 121 participants who identified themselves as democrats (35.1%), 99 who identified themselves as republicans (28.7%), 116 who identified themselves as independent (33.6%), and 9 participants have no preference (2.6%). The average age of the participants was 46.09 ( $SD=16.27$ ), and more than four-fifths of participants were Caucasian ( $n=284$ , 82.3%).

## Measures

The key variables of the modified model were measured via a seven-point Likert-type scales, with 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. Table 1 shows the complete question items.

*Cognitive involvement* was measured with two dimensions: issue salience and issue position. Issue salience was measured using 10 items on a seven-point semantic differential scale that was adopted from Becker-Olsen et al. (2006). Participants were asked

**Table 1.** Confirmatory factor analysis of measurement model.

Measurement items	AVE	Factor reliability (alpha)	Indicator reliability	Standardized factor loadings
Cognitive involvement – issue salience	.802	.973		
Unimportant: important			.748	.865*
Of no concern to me: of concern to me			.637	.798*
Means nothing to me: means a lot to me			.824	.908*
Worthless: valuable			.848	.921*
Trivial: fundamental			.835	.914*
Insignificant: significant			.856	.925*
Does not matter to me : matters to me			.803	.896*
Nonessential: essential			.856	.925*
Superfluous: vital			.810	.900*
Cognitive involvement – issue position	.915	.977		
Not beneficial to society: beneficial to society			.887	.942*
Harmful to society: benign to society			.945	.972*
Negative: positive			.953	.976*
Undesirable: desirable			.878	.937*
Affective involvement – positive emotions	.955	.984		
I feel hopeful			.953	.976*
I feel encouraged			.962	.981*
I feel optimistic			.951	.975*
Affective involvement – negative emotions	.871	.953		
I feel angry			.852	.923*
I feel irritated			.841	.971*
I feel annoyed			.922	.960*
Brand-self connection	.862	.949		
My sense of Nike matches my sense of who I am			.762	.873*
I am similar to what I think Nike represents			.895	.946*
I am similar to how I perceive Nike			.929	.964*
Brand attitude	.957	.985		
Dislike: like			.953	.976*
Negative: positive			.956	.978*
Unfavourable: favourable			.962	.981*
CSA attitude	.982	.990		
I would talk positively about Nike's decision to take a stance on this issue			.982	.991*
I would talk positively about Nike's decision to take a stance on this issue			.982	.991*
Positive WOM	.972	.990		
I would say positive things about Nike			.966	.983*
I would recommend Nike to others			.978	.989*
I would recommend Nike to someone else who seeks my advice			.870	.985*
Negative WOM	.912	.971		
I would like to complain to my friends and relatives about Nike			.912	.955*
I would say negative things about Nike to other people			.935	.967*
I would like to warn my friends and relatives not to buy Nike's products			.903	.950*

\* $p < .001$ .

\*Note: All standardized factor loadings of each item were larger than 0.5 and significant at  $p < .001$  level. The confirmatory factor analysis from the measurement model shows that each indicator per construct loads on one and only dimension, implying no double loadings. In addition, the errors of those items per construct were shown to be uncorrelated with each other. Thus, all multi-items variables in this study consisted of only one dimension.

about their perceived relevance to the issue of NFL players' national anthem protests ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 1.99$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.97$ ). Some example items include 'unimportant/important,' 'worthless/valuable,' and 'means nothing to me/means a lot to me.' Issue position was measured using four items. Participants were asked about their position on the issue of NFL players' national anthem protests ( $M = 4.12$ ,

$SD = 2.15$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.97$ ). Some example items include 'the issue is not beneficial to society/beneficial to society,' and 'harmful to society/benign to society.'

*Affective involvement* was measured using the Differential Emotions Scale (Izard et al. 1974) on a seven-point scale (1 = none of this emotion and 7 = a great deal of this emotion). Participants were asked about how they feel about the action of NFL player kneeling during the national anthem in protest against racism. Items were listed into two polarized sets of emotions: (1) negative emotions: angry, irritated, and annoyed ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 2.27$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.95$ ); and (2) positive emotions: hopeful, encouraged, and optimistic ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 2.32$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.98$ ).

*Brand-self connection* was measured with four items adapted from Du, Bhattacharya, and Se (2007). Examples of the items include, 'My sense of Nike matches my sense of who I am,' and 'the image I have of Nike fits in with my self-image' ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 1.93$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.95$ ).

*Brand attitude* was measured by a seven-point semantic differential scale adapted from Rodgers (2003). Included items were dislike/like, unfavourable/favourable, and negative/positive ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 2.20$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.98$ ).

*CSA attitude* was measured using two items on adapted from (Bhattacharya, Korschun, and Sen 2009). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements, such as, 'I would like to support Nike's decision to take a stance on this issue,' and 'I would talk positively about Nike's decision to take a stance on this issue' ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.99$ ).

*PWOM* was measured using three items adapted from Alexandrov, Lilly, and Babakus (2013). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements with regard to Nike's support of Colin Kaepernick, such as, 'I would say positive things about Nike,' 'I would recommend Nike to others,' and 'I would recommend Nike to someone else who seeks my advice' ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 2.13$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.99$ ).

*NWOM* was measured using three items adapted from Alexandrov et al (2013). Participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements regarding Nike's support of Colin Kaepernick, 'I would like to warn my friends and relatives not to buy Nike's products,' 'I would like to complain to my friends and relatives about Nike,' and 'I would say negative things about Nike to other people' ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 2.13$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .97$ ).

*Covariates*. The demographic characteristics of participants, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, and political ideology, were included as covariates in the analyses. Specifically, prior study suggested that the perceptions of the appropriateness of the politicization of sports affects consumer attitude towards a company that takes a stance on the action of NFL player kneeling in protest against racism (Kim et al. 2020). Such perceptions were found to be shaped by individuals' political orientations. As political ideology plays an important role in this context, this study included the factor as a covariate.

## Data analysis

SPSS was used to conduct preliminary analyses, such as deleting invalid responses and reliability coefficients calculation. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling (SEM) were calculated using Mplus to examine the hypotheses proposed in

**Table 2.** Correlations among study variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Cognitive involvement – issue salience	–								
2. Cognitive involvement – issue importance	.44**	–							
3. Affective involvement – positive	.29**	.39**	–						
4. Affective involvement – negative	–.32**	–.34**	–.39**	–					
5. Brand-self connection	.34**	.31**	–.27**	.32**	–				
6. Brand attitude	.38**	.34**	–.28**	.26**	.35**	–			
7. CSA attitude	.34**	.28**	–.16**	.24**	.28**	.35*	–		
8. PWOM	.35**	.24**	–.27**	.28**	.29**	.29*	.32**	–	
9. NWOM	–.27**	–.26**	.26**	–.32**	–.39**	–.26**	–.27**	–.38**	–

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

this study. In addition, to investigate differences between different groups along issue involvement and brand attachment factors for CSA attitude, a series of two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted and Tukey's post-hoc was further used to study group differences.

## Results

### Model testing

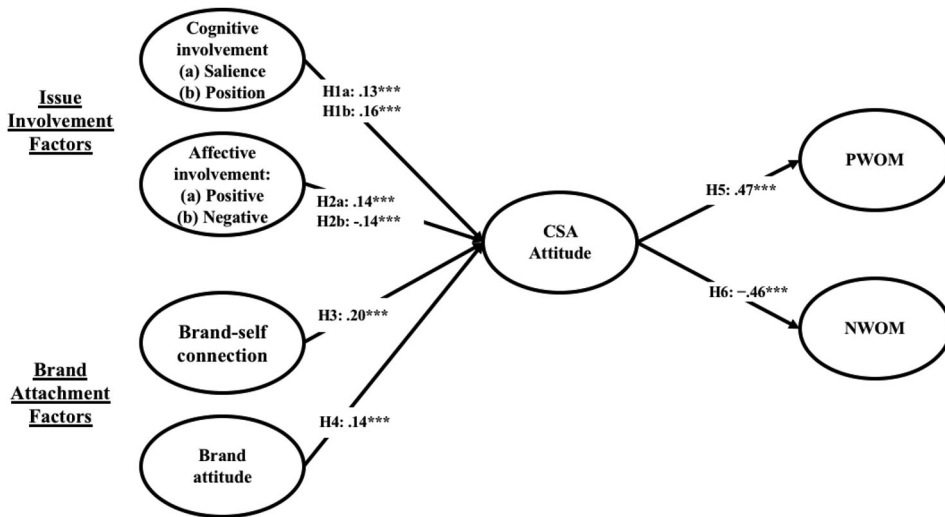
Prior to testing the proposed model, multicollinearity between exogenous variables was checked. The variance inflation factor (VIF) test was conducted to detect multicollinearity. The results of VIF tests showed that no VIF values were  $>10$ . The cutoff values used to detect multicollinearity were recommended by Belsley, Kuh, and Welsch (1980).

The results of CFA demonstrated reasonable model fits for the measurement model: [ $\chi^2(605) = 4157.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.97; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.96; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06, with a 90% confidence interval ranging from 0.05 to 0.06; and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.05]. Table 1 shows all measurement items. All the factor loading values were significant and above the threshold value of 0.5, providing support for convergent validity of the measurement model (Stevens 1992). The correlation coefficients among the variables used in this study are within .26 and .38, which supports the discriminant validity between constructs (See Table 2).

The researchers thus proceeded to test the structural models. As the hypothesized models fit the data well on the basis of the cutoff values: [ $\chi^2(607) = 4232.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.95; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.94; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06, with a 90% confidence interval ranging from 0.06 to 0.07; and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.05]. Figure 2 depicts the final model.

### Hypothesis testing

This study first included several demographic characteristics, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, and political ideology, as covariates. The findings showed that age and gender are related to individuals' attitudes toward the campaign. Namely, people who are younger or female are more likely to hold favourable attitudes toward the message (age:  $\beta = -0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .05$ ; gender (female as 0):  $\beta = -0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,



**Figure 2.** The results of structural equation modelling. Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

$p < .05$ ). Additionally, this study also found that individuals who identified themselves as a democrat would also more likely to favour the campaign ( $\beta = -0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, race/ethnicity is not correlated with the favourability of attitudes toward the campaign.

H1 examined the relationship between cognitive involvement (i.e. issue salience and issue position) and attitudes toward Nike's campaign. Participants displayed more positive attitudes toward the campaigns when they found the issue more important or meaningful to them ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Meanwhile, the findings suggested that the public would be more likely to like such CSA campaigns when they were supportive of the protest ( $\beta = 0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

H2 investigated the relationship between affective involvement and attitudes toward Nike's campaign. The results showed that when the public possessed more positive feelings toward NFL players' national anthem protest, they would be more likely to favour such CSA efforts and vice versa (positive affective involvement:  $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ; negative affective involvement:  $\beta = -0.14$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, H2a and H2b were supported.

H3 predicted a positive relationship between brand-self connection and attitudes toward Nike's campaign. The findings showed that when participants perceived higher brand-self connection, their liking of such a CSA campaign increased ( $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, H3 was supported.

H4 suggested a positive relationship between brand attitude and attitudes toward Nike's campaign. Participants displayed a greater liking of the campaign when they possessed a more positive attitude toward the brand ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ), offering support for H4.

Favourable attitudes toward Nike's campaign were positively associated with PWOM ( $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and negatively associated with NWOM ( $\beta = -0.46$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, H5 and H6 were supported.

### Research question answering

To answer RQ1 and RQ2, the scales of cognitive involvement, positive and negative affective involvement, brand-self connection, and brand attitude were converted into categorical variables. Using the midpoint of the Likert scale, we categorized the responses lower than the value of 4 into the low-level group and those higher than the value of 4 into the high-level group.

RQ1a-b asked if there is any difference in attitudes toward Nike's campaign between high and low issue salience groups concerning national anthem protests, when perceiving different levels of brand-self connection (a) and when holding different levels of attitudes toward Nike (b). The results of a series of two-way ANOVA analysis found a significant interaction effect between issue salience and brand-self connection ( $F(3, 342) = 148.36, p < .001$ ) and between issue salience and brand attitude ( $F(3, 342) = 124.49, p < .001$ ). Tukey's post hoc test shows that the group that perceives high issue salience and strong brand attachment holds the greatest favourability toward Nike's CSA campaign as compared to the other groups. In addition, a significant interaction effect was also found between issue position and brand-self connection ( $F(3, 342) = 117.30, p < .001$ ) and between issue position and brand attitude ( $F(3, 342) = 125.45, p < .001$ ). Tukey's post hoc test shows that the group that perceives high issue support and strong brand attachment holds the greatest favourability toward Nike's CSA campaign as compared to the other groups.

RQ2a-b asked if there is any difference in attitudes toward Nike's campaign between high and low affective involvement groups concerning national anthem protests, when perceiving different levels of brand-self connection (a) and when holding different levels of attitudes toward Nike (b). Results of a series of two-way ANOVA analysis found a significant interaction effect between positive affective involvement and brand-self connection ( $F(3, 342) = 171.13, p < .001$ ) and between positive affective involvement and brand attitude ( $F(3, 342) = 150.76, p < .001$ ). Tukey's post hoc test shows that the group that perceives high positive emotions toward the issue and strong brand attachment holds the greatest favourability toward Nike's CSA campaign as compared to the other groups. In addition, a significant interaction effect was also found between negative affective involvement and brand-self connection ( $F(3, 342) = 204.90, p < .001$ ) and between negative affective involvement and brand attitude ( $F(3, 342) = 163.85, p < .001$ ). Tukey's post hoc test shows that the group that perceives high negative emotions toward the issue and low brand attachment holds the least favourability toward Nike's CSA campaign as compared to the other groups.

Table 3 demonstrates the impacts on attitudes toward CSA for the interaction of issue involvement concerning national anthem protests and brand attachment.

### Discussion

Nowadays companies are increasingly weighing in on key politically charged social issues (Austin et al. 2019), including Gillette's advertisement addressing the issue of toxic masculinity, Airbnb's support for inclusion in response to the Trump administration's travel restrictions, and Patagonia's lawsuit against the reduction of public lands in Utah by Trump administration. Additional research about CSA and consumer



**Table 3.** Interaction of issue involvement and brand attachment factors on CSA attitude.

<i>Issue salience x brand-self connection</i>		
	High brand-self connection	Low brand-self connection
High involvement	6.23 ( <i>n</i> = 110)	4.90 ( <i>n</i> = 57)
Low involvement	4.37 ( <i>n</i> = 85)	2.75 ( <i>n</i> = 99)
<i>Issue salience x brand attitude</i>		
	High brand attitude	Low brand attitude
High involvement	6.11 ( <i>n</i> = 102)	4.66 ( <i>n</i> = 63)
Low involvement	4.39 ( <i>n</i> = 88)	2.52 ( <i>n</i> = 92)
<i>Issue position x brand-self connection</i>		
	High brand-self connection	Low brand-self connection
High involvement	6.26 ( <i>n</i> = 115)	5.00 ( <i>n</i> = 64)
Low involvement	4.47 ( <i>n</i> = 65)	2.31 ( <i>n</i> = 91)
<i>Issue position x brand attitude</i>		
	High brand attitude	Low brand attitude
High involvement	6.26 ( <i>n</i> = 105)	5.10 ( <i>n</i> = 68)
Low involvement	4.32 ( <i>n</i> = 74)	2.58 ( <i>n</i> = 98)
<i>Positive affective involvement x brand-self connection</i>		
	High brand-self connection	Low brand-self connection
High involvement	6.31 ( <i>n</i> = 113)	5.05 ( <i>n</i> = 56)
Low involvement	4.21 ( <i>n</i> = 68)	2.90 ( <i>n</i> = 108)
<i>Positive affective involvement c brand attitude</i>		
	High brand attitude	Low brand attitude
High involvement	6.25 ( <i>n</i> = 106)	5.58 ( <i>n</i> = 64)
Low involvement	4.15 ( <i>n</i> = 78)	2.95 ( <i>n</i> = 97)
<i>Negative affective involvement x brand-self connection</i>		
	High brand-self connection	Low brand-self connection
High involvement	4.22 ( <i>n</i> = 56)	2.23 ( <i>n</i> = 84)
Low involvement	6.25 ( <i>n</i> = 94)	4.85 ( <i>n</i> = 111)
<i>Negative affective involvement x brand attitude</i>		
	High brand attitude	Low brand attitude
High involvement	4.14 ( <i>n</i> = 53)	2.26 ( <i>n</i> = 90)
Low involvement	6.21 ( <i>n</i> = 93)	4.76 ( <i>n</i> = 109)

attitudes and behaviours is needed (Gaither et al. 2018). The present study investigated how consumer involvement in both an issue and a brand influence their attitudes and WOM intentions in response to a CSA campaign message.

The findings of this study contribute to the body of CSR research by focusing on consumer-centric perspectives, investigating the interactive effects between issue and brand involvement in shaping consumer attitude and behaviour. Such approaches echoed previous studies that advocate the importance of consumer individual differences in interpreting social responsibility practices (Bhattacharya et al. 2011; Christopher and Luke 2013). Moreover, our findings specifically contribute to the growing body of literature in CSA, a unique and newly developed form of CSR that requires more academic attention (Gaither et al. 2018). Recent research in CSA has acknowledged the importance of 'issue' itself in affecting consumer response because the issue presented in CSA activities are normally largely debated in society (Parcha and Kingsley Westerman 2020). The controversy embedded in the issue would significantly affect consumer perceptions toward the company that take a stance on the specific issue. This study took in account this argument and investigated how such factor interacts with consumer attitude toward the brand that chose to take a definitive stance on the controversial sociopolitical issue.

Using a real-life example of Nike's CSA activities, this study offers theoretical contributions by investigating which strategies may improve the effectiveness of CSA

campaigns from the lens of consumer involvement theory and stakeholder theory. Previous literature that examines the antecedents of consumer attitude toward a company's social responsibility efforts have mainly focused on the characteristics from a corporate perspective, such as a company's credibility or financial performance (e.g. Alcañiz, Cáceres, and Pérez 2010; Stanaland, Lwin, and Murphy 2011). However, consumers represent an important stakeholder group for a brand. Their existing attitude toward the cause and the brand should have important roles to play in shaping perceptions about the brand's actions for social issues. Particularly, when participating in activist efforts, the engagement may simultaneously isolate stakeholder groups while attracting others (Dodd and Supa 2015). Thus, adopting a consumer-centric perspective is essential for those who are seeking to formulate strategies for a CSA activity to advance corporations' CSA practices.

Consistent with the consumer involvement theory, the findings of this study suggested that consumers' support for a company's CSA efforts could depend on their involvement in the social issue that the company chose. In addition, consumers' emotional reactions toward NFL players' national anthem protests can also influence their support for the campaign and the company. In accordance to the arguments from previous research (Kim et al. 2008; Lu et al. 2015), consumers that found the social issue important, meaningful, and/or positively emotional are more likely to show support for such campaign and the company that chose to advocate for the issue. Moreover, individuals whose views on the issue align with the company's stance are also found to hold more favourable attitudes toward the campaign. On the other hand, consumers may feel alienated when negative affective involvement occurs due to the opposing value from the company's stance on the social issue. This result reinforces research findings that show the influence of affective involvement on consumer behaviour (Kang et al. 2015; Vakratsas and Ambler 1999). Although issue involvement has always been shown to play a significant role in consumer behaviour, such involvement can be particularly important for CSA because companies can take a stance on only one side of controversial issues via CSA.

In addition, consumer involvement in a brand influenced their attitudinal and behavioural responses toward a company's CSA efforts. People identify with brands with which they believe they share similar identities (Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). With the application of this logic to the findings of the present study, consumers who share similar personalities and values with a brand are likely to approve of the brand's stances on social issues (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, and Braig 2004). A recent poll by *ESPN* showed that the primary target consumers of Nike are Generation Z and millennials who value brands that are socially active. This specific population ranked the highest among all age groups in terms of approval of Nike's choice to feature Colin Kaepernick in the campaign (Rovell 2018). Our findings of the relationship between brand-self connection and CSA attitude may explain such a pattern. Specifically, consumers who perceive that the core values of Nike are consistent with their self-concept and/or identify with Nike are highly likely to approve Nike's stances and support Nike's corporate goals.

Another important contribution of this study is to apply theoretical frameworks used in CSR and cause marketing research to a growing business practice of CSA.

Consistent with the findings from previous CSR research (e.g. Abitbol et al. 2018; Rim et al. 2020), we found that individuals' favourable attitudes toward corporations' CSA were associated with positive WOM behaviours. Individuals' positive attitudes toward companies that practice CSA also appeared to lessen their intention to talk negatively about the companies. The results indicated that companies should develop message strategies that could increase the public's positive attitudes toward their CSA campaigns and advertising.

This study then conducted further analysis in order to offer insight on how a brand can encourage the favourability of attitudes towards CSA initiatives. Guided by stakeholder theory and audience segmentation research, we provided empirical evidence on how the interaction of issue involvement and brand attachment factors can serve as a segmentation strategy to increase consumer attitude towards CSA, thereby enhancing the likelihood of positive WOM towards the company. Our findings indicated that overall, attitudes toward Nike's campaign are most favourable when individuals believe that issue of national anthem protests is important, support such protest actions by the athletes, and feel positive about the actions while they also hold a favourable attitude toward Nike and perceive connection between the company and themselves. The findings reflected the notion of stakeholder theory, suggesting that CSA can serve as an opportunity to cement brand loyalty and strengthen the relationship with the existing stakeholders whose issue attitude was congruent with the corporation's stances (Austin et al. 2019). Interestingly, those who dislike the brand or perceive low brand-self connection but find the issue of national anthem protests important or support such actions hold the second greatest favourable attitude towards the campaign. In other words, CSA may serve as a bridge that connects the existing deviated stakeholders or attract new stakeholders who were originally not engaged with the brand. The group of consumers who originally perceived low attachment with the brand may inclined to approve the brand's action when it advocates on a social issue that they are supportive of.

On the other hand, our findings suggested that, when participants hold a negative attitude towards the issue of national anthem protests or oppose such actions while perceiving low brand attachment, the favourability of attitudes towards the campaign was lowest. Those whose issue attitude that is incongruent with the organization's stance but with strong brand attachment hold the second lowest favourable attitude towards the campaign. In other words, the findings indicated that anti-stances toward the issue of national anthem protests might impact consumers more so, regardless of their brand attachment perceptions. The results echoed previous research that demonstrated the risks and the challenges due to the potential divisiveness of CSA (Austin et al. 2019), indicating that individuals' view of a social issue have significant impact on consumer behaviour towards CSA (Austin et al. 2019). The findings once again highlighted, as stakeholder theory posits, the importance of developing, advancing, and prioritizing some stakeholder groups and separating from others (Gaither et al. 2018).

### ***Practical implications***

In addition to offering theoretical insights into CSA communication and public relations scholarship, this study provides a direction for companies who plan to take a

stance on sociopolitical issues. As companies continue to engage in CSA, they must acknowledge that consumers may show more support for their actions when they perceive the relevance and meaningfulness of the sociopolitical cause. This acknowledgment can be done in many ways. People want to see that companies are advocating for issues they care about. When selecting a cause, companies can explore potential options by asking their core consumers regarding their perceived importance or feelings about those causes. The cognitive or affective connection between consumers and cause may improve their attitudes toward CSA initiatives. Moreover, companies can improve the relevance of a cause by tapping the local aspects of the cause into initiatives. The emphasis on the local influence of a cause may enable consumers to capture personal relevance to the cause, thereby showing positive attitudes toward the initiatives (Hoeffler and Keller 2002). Companies can also include emotionally involving stories or visual depictions regarding the cause, such that consumers can automatically tap into affective involvement and then express support toward the messages.

Furthermore, company efforts, such as reinforcing brand-self connection or improving brand attitude, may help shape consumer attitudes toward CSA engagement. To do so, mutual relationships between companies and their target consumers play an increasingly important role. For example, companies may create programs, such as loyalty accounts and frequently update the target audience profile by asking their perceptions regarding the brand's values, identity, and personality; the value orientation they represent; and their attitudes toward the brand. Improving the correspondence between brand values/personality and consumers' self-concept and consumer attitudes toward the brand may help establish a healthy relationship between two parties, which may yield a positive effect on their support toward the CSA messages.

### **Limitations and future directions**

This study has some limitations that need to be addressed. First, this study used a real example of Nike's CSA activities. Although case studies allow for in-depth understanding, the result may not apply to other case scenarios. Investigating the role of CSA initiatives by including multiple controversial advertisements and adding issue-specific factors would be worthwhile. In future investigations, including scandalous advertisements from different contexts might be possible. Therefore, having advertisements that emphasize or focus on different social issues or movements would help in having a clearer understanding. Such a study may reveal possible condition effects attribute to the differences across cases. Scholars explicitly incorporating those attributes, such as the scope of business, the size of business, and others, may shed additional light in CSA research.

Another limitation of the study is the data collection. The subjects' responses were collected a few months after the campaign. Although the data collection was conducted around the time of the Super Bowl, in which the campaign re-garnered great attention and discussion, consumers' attitudinal and behavioural intentions might have shifted during that period. Moreover, this study did not show the participants the campaign message again before they moved on to the questionnaire. Participants may not process the message in the same way or with the same intensity. Particularly,

advertisements that focus on social issues tend to be a long-term goal for companies to build a relationship with their audience (Coombs and Holladay 2009). Thus, a more valuable approach would be to measure consumers' responses around the time when the conversation about the campaign was still happening and compare the findings with their responses a few months after. This approach could assist strategic communicators to see the short- and long-term effects of their CSA advertising campaigns.

Third, the sample of this study mirrored the U.S. Census that the number of participants from each ethnicity category were not equally balanced. Future studies can request equal responses from each ethnicity category to compare the similarities and differences across different groups of race and ethnicity in response to a CSA campaign that promotes racial equality. Moreover, this study categorized the responses into high and low groups by using the midpoint of the Likert scale, which separates positive answers (e.g. strongly agree and agree) and negative answers (e.g. strongly disagree and disagree) into two groups. Although the categorization with the ANOVA analysis showed significant findings, the statistical power to detect the differences among groups may decrease due to such categorization approach. Future experimental research that strategically and purposely categorize the sample with the variables in this study may help validate our findings.

Moreover, it is important to note that two primary predictors in CSR attitude research – the brand-cause-fit and the perceived authenticity of the engagement – were not included in this study. Although one can assume both perceptions exist among consumers because Nike has a long history of standing against racial inequality and supporting minority athletes, we did not measure such perceptions, thus it is impossible to understand whether or to what extent, if any, such variables may influence the findings of this study. Future studies can conduct experiments based on the findings of this study with the addition of these variables and advertising message variables (e.g. message appeals and story frames) for a better understanding of CSA message effects.

Finally, in a time of political divisiveness, consumers' response to corporations' CSA efforts may be significantly affected by individuals' political ideology. Although this study considered political ideology as a covariate, future studies can incorporate such important factor and explore how its interactive relationships with consumers' issue involvement and brand attachment affect consumer outcomes toward CSA.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to a growing body of CSA communication and advertising by its inclusion of consumer-centric factors as antecedents to examining consumers' attitudinal and behavioural responses toward a CSA campaign. Specific findings on the effects of issue involvement and brand attachment offer companies and leadership with key insights upon which they can advance their CSA practices.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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