

# Brand Activism

SWOCC 87



# Brand Activism



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Als begunstiger van SWOCC maak je wetenschappelijk onderzoek mogelijk. Je slaat een brug tussen wetenschap en praktijk!



Prof. dr. ir. Peeter Verlegh

Amsterdam, February 2023

*To my daughters – and to the children of everyone who is working in marketing.  
Let's show them that our work can actually help make this world a better place.*

## Samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)

In de afgelopen jaren zagen we een aantal veelbesproken voorbeelden van merkactivisme, van merken als Nike, Patagonia en Ben & Jerry's. Merkactivisme is gedefinieerd als "het publiekelijk innemen van een standpunt over een sociaal of politiek onderwerp, door een merk of iemand die met het merk geassocieerd wordt". De nadruk op publiekelijk is belangrijk: merkactivisme is niet hetzelfde als "goed doen als niemand kijkt". Een activistisch merk spreekt zich uit, en deelt haar mening met de rest van de wereld. In een wereld waarin de meningen over veel onderwerpen vaak sterk verdeeld zijn betekent dit dat merkactivisme niet gratis is: je wint de harten van sommige consumenten, maar verliest ook anderen die het niet eens met je zijn. Het publiekelijke karakter en de relatie tot meer controversiële onderwerpen zijn tevens het belangrijkste verschil met "maatschappelijk verantwoord ondernemen" (MVO), of in het Engels: corporate social responsibility (CSR). Merkactivisme moet om twee redenen ook niet verward worden met "purpose". Ten eerste is purpose een veel breder begrip. Merkactivisme is altijd gerelateerd aan een sociaal of politiek onderwerp, terwijl purpose ook kan refereren aan een benefit ("we willen goedkoop vliegen bereikbaar maken voor iedereen") of aan een cultureel aspect ("alles voor een glimlach"). Maar zelfs als een merk wel een meer sociaal-maatschappelijk georiënteerde purpose heeft (denk aan Patagonia's "we're in business for our home planet"), dan nog is er een belangrijk verschil met activisme. Purpose is de drijvende kracht achter het merk, terwijl activisme een activiteit is, gericht op het publiek ondersteunen van een onderwerp. Terug naar Patagonia: de purpose is "we are in business to save our home planet", maar hun activisme bestaat uit campagnes als "vote the assholes out" in de Amerikaanse verkiezingen van 2020, of de publieke veroordeling van Trump's besluit in 2016 om publiek land (natuurgebieden) te commercialiseren. In plaats van dit soort campagnes had het merk natuurlijk haar purpose kunnen uitdragen door producten te maken met een minimale impact op het milieu, en stilletjes kunnen lobbyen op de achtergrond, in samenwerking met NGOs.

Er zijn grofweg twee motieven voor merkactivisme. De eerste reden is dat merken willen bijdragen aan sociale veranderingen, bijvoorbeeld door bewustwording te creëren over een bepaald onderwerp. De tweede is meer gericht op eigenbelang, gericht op het vestigen van een bepaalde reputatie of imago, en direct winstgerelateerde factoren als een toename in verkopen, merktrouw of willingness to pay. In een ideale wereld kunnen deze twee doelstellingen gecombineerd worden. In hoofdstuk 3 van deze publicatie wordt het "aligned activism model" gepresenteerd. Dit model stelt dat activistische merken op zoek moeten gaan naar hun "A-spot" door zich toe te leggen op issues die in lijn zijn met hun purpose en hun gedrag (in heden en verleden), maar ook in lijn met de mening en waarden van hun huidige en potentiële klanten, en – misschien nog wel belangrijker – hun medewerkers.

Als onderdeel van dit onderzoek heb ik een survey uitgevoerd onder 1019 Nederlandse consumenten. De resultaten laten zien dat zij gematigd positief zijn over merkactivisme, met gelijke delen voor, tegen en neutraal. In lijn met experimenteel onderzoek (voornamelijk uit de VS) vonden we dat merkactivisme voor 25% van de Nederlandse consumenten een "reason to buy" is, maar ook dat het voor een grotere groep (38%) een "reason not to buy" kan zijn, als men het oneens is met het merk. Op zichzelf hoeft dit geen reden te zijn om activisme te mijden. Een simpele analyse laat zien dat het netto effect van activisme positief is zolang de proportie van mensen die het eens zijn met je standpunt duidelijk groter is dan de proportie van mensen die je merk koopt (je marktaandeel). Zelfs als 20 procent van de markt regelmatig je merk koopt zal merkactivisme je meestal netto geen klanten kosten (zie pagina 32).

Over onze vragen heen zien we consequent dat jongere consumenten (18-35) het meest positief staan tegenover merkactivisme, terwijl oudere consumenten (66 plus) het meest negatief zijn. Ook blijkt dat mensen die zichzelf "links" op het politieke spectrum plaatsen beduidend positiever zijn over merkactivisme dan mensen die zichzelf als rechts beschouwen. Deze verschillen tellen op: jonge, linkse consumenten zijn dus het meest gevoelig voor merkactivisme en oudere, rechtse mensen het minst. Tot slot onderzocht ik welke onderwerpen mensen het meest geschikt vonden voor merkactivisme. Hieruit bleek dat mensen positief waren als merken zich uitspraken over zaken die gerelateerd zijn aan bedrijfsvoering (klimaatverandering, vervuiling, fair trade) of over onderwerpen die universeel als "goed" gezien worden (mensenrechten, vrijheid van meningsuiting, anti-racisme). Meer controversiële onderwerpen als LHBTi rechten, vluchtelingen, abortus of het slavernijverleden werden minder geschikt gevonden. Details zijn te vinden in Tabel 5 (pagina 24).

Er is niet heel veel onderzoek gedaan naar de vraag of investeerders gelukkig zijn met merkactivisme. De beschikbare studies suggereren dat de reactie is opgeschoven van negatief aan het begin van deze eeuw naar meer positief in recentere jaren, gemeten aan de hand van het effect van activisme op aandelenwaarde. Investeerders lijken nog steeds huiverig voor radicale standpunten. Merken hebben aanzienlijke marketingbudgetten en veel relevante kennis en vaardigheden, waardoor zij zeker een duidelijke invloed zouden kunnen hebben op maatschappelijk issues. Dit kan (1) door de awareness te vergroten over het onderwerp, (2) door de mening te beïnvloeden van consumenten en andere stakeholders, en (3) door de kloof tussen intentie en gedrag te verkleinen. Dit laatste is onder andere mogelijk door het uitoefenen van morele druk (bijvoorbeeld door gewenst gedrag te laten zien en te normaliseren) of door gewenst gedrag makkelijker te maken, door consumenten toegang te bieden tot producten en diensten die hen in staat stellen om bij te dragen aan een beter wereld. Voorbeelden hiervan zijn de vleesvrije opties van de Vegetarische Slager, de milieuvriendelijke huishoudproducten van Seventh Generation of het maatschappelijk verantwoorde bankieren van Triodos en ASN.

Merken die zich uitspreken over maatschappelijke onderwerpen kunnen bijdragen aan positieve verandering, en consumenten en medewerkers aan zich binden. Maar niet elk merk hoeft activistisch te zijn: het werkt pas als het past bij je purpose, en vertaald is in gedrag.

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# Voorwoord

Merkactivisme - in dit boek gedefinieerd door Peeter Verlegh als: "het publiekelijk innemen van een standpunt over een sociaal of politiek onderwerp, door een merk of iemand die met het merk geassocieerd wordt" - is feitelijk het bestaansrecht van SIRE.

SIRE is opgericht om met creativiteit maatschappelijke issues op de kaart te zetten bij het grote publiek. Wij schudden mensen wakker en bewegen hen wat aan maatschappelijke miststanden te doen. De maatschappij. Dat ben jij. Dat is onze purpose. Met campagnes brengen we deze purpose tot leven. Denk aan #DOESLIEF, een campagne waarin wij Nederland opriepen om minder hufterig gedrag te vertonen. Of positief gezegd om aardiger te zijn voor elkaar. Deze oproep werd breed opgepakt in de samenleving. Mensen spraken elkaar aan op hun gedrag. En #DOESLIEF werd een gevleugelde uitspraak. Voor ons een bewijs dat activisme werkt. Daarom is het zo belangrijk dat SWOCC deze publicatie uitbrengt om merkactivisme van een serieus theoretisch kader te voorzien. Onderbouwd met feiten en cijfers.

SIRE is een activistisch merk avant la lettre. Jarenlang waren wij een witte raaf in het reclameland. Vrijwel de enige die creativiteit van reclamemakers aanwendden om maatschappelijke misstanden aan te pakken. Gelukkig is dat de laatste jaren veranderd. Naast NGO's zijn er steeds meer merken die zich uitspreken tegen maatschappelijke mistanden. Denk aan Nike, Dove en Patagonia. Activisme is voor sommige merken zelfs strategie geworden. Zo lijkt het Patagonia niet meer te gaan over het verkopen van outdoor producten, maar om het redden van de planeet. Voor Patagonia is merkactivisme eigenlijk merkidealisme geworden. Voor Nike daarentegen is activisme een strategie om meer winst te maken. Beide strategieën spreken ons aan. Zolang het doel: strijd tegen de misstanden maar oprecht en authentiek gevoerd wordt. En dat doen Nike en Patagonia.

Sterker nog, authenticiteit en oprechtheid zijn de belangrijkste succescriteria voor geslaagd merkactivisme, is onze ervaring. De ontvanger wil voelen dat je echt meent wat je zegt. Daarom zijn Patagonia en Nike zulke treffende voorbeelden. Bij SIRE ging het aanvankelijk meer over activisme dan over merkactivisme. Wij richtten ons primair op de maatschappelijke misstand. En niet op SIRE. Maar in de complexe wereld van vandaag merken we steeds vaker hoe belangrijk het merk SIRE is. Het merk SIRE maakt de boodschap betrouwbaar en geloofwaardig, geeft autoriteit. Dat is een belangrijke voorwaarde om aandacht te krijgen voor een maatschappelijk issue in de media of om bekende rolmodellen aan ons te binden.

Merkactivisme is 55 jaar na onze oprichting een professionele en effectieve strategie gebleken om merken scherp te positioneren, omdat steeds meer consumenten

kritischer zijn over de rol van bedrijven en organisaties in de maatschappij. En wij vinden dat merken verantwoordelijkheid hebben om misstanden te bestrijden. Dat juichen wij toe, want hoe meer misstanden er worden aangepakt, des te beter. Daarom is dit boek ook zo relevant. Peeter Verlegh is de eerste wetenschapper die dit belangrijke onderwerp serieuze verdieping geeft in het boek dat voor u ligt. Hij laat zien dat merkactivisme, mits geloofwaardig uitgevoerd, werkt. Een mooie inspiratiebron voor merken. Maar ook voor ons. Want hoe meer mensen wij weten te mobiliseren, hoe effectiever ons werk.

Marc Oosterhout – voorzitter SIRE, Stichting Ideële Reclame  
Lucy van der Helm – directeur SIRE, Stichting Ideële Reclame

# 1

## What is Brand activism (and what is it not)

In the 2022 edition of their global Trust barometer, Edelman signals a decline (they even use the term “collapse”) in trust in democracy and government. This decline is paired with a strong belief that business should do more to address societal problems such as climate change and (economic) inequality. The Edelman report concludes that societal leadership has become a core function of business. Philosopher - and former SWOCC fellow - Martin Kornberger (2010) has noted that brands play a key role in this function. In his book “Brand Society” he argues that brands are “the soul of organizations”, which connect organizations with people on the outside (consumers) and on the inside (employees, management). Brands enable people to identify with organizations, and see themselves as part of a greater whole. In a world where a sense of identity is becoming more and more important to people (see Fukuyama, 2018 for an in-depth treatment of this phenomenon), it should be no surprise that consumers and employees express a great interest in “meaningful brands” (Havas 2021), which represent their values and can help them express their identity to others.

Brands cater to these needs and fuel them by expressing their views and engaging in actions on societal and political issues. This practice is commonly referred to as *brand activism*. Some recent and well-known examples include Always’ #LikeAGirl campaign to promote female empowerment, Nike’s stance for racial justice supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, Patagonia’s climate change activism, and the campaigns for refugee rights by Starbucks and Coca-Cola. This book contains many more examples, and discusses relevant academic literature on this topic. But before continuing, it is useful to define the concept of brand activism and separate it from other – related – constructs. This is done in the next paragraphs, which answer the questions “what is brand activism?” and “what is it not?”. After answering the first question in section 1.1, and discussing different types and facets of brand activism in section 1.2, the concept is further clarified in section 1.3, which describes how brand activism differs from corporate social responsibility (CSR), lobbying, and brand purpose.

### 1.1 Defining brand activism

Brand activism has been defined as “the act of publicly taking a stand on divisive social or political issues by a brand or an individual associated with a brand” (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 773). There are three important elements in this definition.

First, there is an emphasis on *publicly* – the brand is not working behind the scenes, engaged in a lobby with governments or NGOs. Nor is it “doing good while nobody is watching” and quietly making changes in its policies or products. No: the brand speaks up to make its opinion known to the world in the form of a PR statement, an advertising campaign, a product design, or a combination of those.

The public nature of brand activism is especially relevant in combination with the second key element of the definition, which is the focus on *divisive* social or political issues. The word *divisive* implies that there are proponents and opponents. Not everybody agrees with you. This is what sets BA apart from corporate social responsibility (CSR). I will discuss this distinction in more detail later, but perhaps it is good to observe already that this distinction is perhaps more of a continuum than a dichotomy. Examples on the one end of the continuum include brands like Lululemon, Victoria's secret and Levi-Strauss, which have taken a stance on the changes in abortion law, a very divisive issue in contemporary American society. On the other end of the continuum, there are issues that more or less everybody agrees upon: it is hard to find a company that does not (claim to) reduce their environmental impact or avoid child labor. Such actions have become the foundation of responsible business practice, although a clear stance on these issues can perhaps still be qualified as brand activism.

The more controversial the issue, the more clear the division between opponents and proponents - and the more likely that brand activism comes at a cost. In every highly divisive issue, there is a percentage of the brand's current and potential customers that will disagree with the brand's stand. And if the brand speaks out loud enough and the issue is important enough to those customers, you run the risk of losing them. But divisiveness and controversy also have an upside. More divisive issues are more relevant to consumers' identities, and have greater signaling power. If everyone in a society agrees on an issue, your opinion on the issue cannot be used as a marker of your identity, because it doesn't distinguish you from other people. It doesn't distinguish the “ingroup” of people who you want to belong to from the “outgroup” of people that you do not want to belong to (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). The same goes for brands that are associated with the issue: brand activism loses part of its impact on consumers when it is focused on an issue that everyone agrees on. It becomes “safer” because you don't run the risk of offending a part of your potential customers. But activism also becomes less powerful when it is less extreme, because it loses its appeal to consumers' identities (See Berger and Heath, 2008 for a general discussion on identity signals).

Third, and final, note the last part of the sentence: “by a brand or an individual associated with a brand”. This is important because it implies that brand activism also involves public statements made by CEOs and other senior management, and by brand spokespersons. This assumption is confirmed by the research of Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020), who find similar effects for all three types of sources, although their results also suggest that the effects of stand taking on brand evaluations were much weaker when such person made the remarks as a private person, detaching themselves from the company/brand policy.

## 1.2 Different shades of brand activism: aims and forms

Brand activism can serve different types of aims and take different types of forms. Why do companies engage in brand activism? What are they trying to achieve? Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry and Kemper (2020) distinguish between two types of aims, which I would like to label as intrinsic (focused on the issue itself) and extrinsic (focused on the benefits for the brand). Intrinsically motivated brand activism focuses on the issue. Its goal is to raise awareness of the issue, and encourage socio-political change. To achieve these goals, brands often support a cause in financial or other ways. This can be done either directly – by allocating company funds and resources to the achievement of societal goals, or indirectly, by pairing with an activist group or non-governmental organization (NGO) that advocates the stand. Extrinsically motivated brand activism seeks benefits for the company, in terms of reputation (brand image) and economic gain (increased sales, loyalty, willingness to pay), established through consumers' appreciation of the brand's association with the issue. These two types of motives are not mutually exclusive, and I would expect that it is rare to find them in their pure forms. In fact, I would argue that brands should strive to combine these motivations. To help them achieve this, chapter three of this publication presents the aligned activism model, which proposes that there is an “A-spot” where brands engage in activism that aligns with its purpose and its (current and past) behavior, advocating a stance that is in line with the opinion and values of their current and potential customers and – importantly – their employees. Positioning brand activism at the A-spot should help maximize its impact on the issue, on consumers and on the organization.

Brand activism is the act of publicly taking a stand on a societal issue. But what is the exact nature of this act? Without engaging in a long discussion about what is and what is not an act, it is important to recognize that brand activism can refer to many different types of acts. At its simplest level, brand activism may be the act of referring to a certain cause or issue in the brand's communication. Think of flying the rainbow flag on the brand's corporate building(s), or posting rainbow-themed content on social media (a classic example is Oreo displaying a six-layer rainbow version of its famous cookie as a Facebook profile picture during Pride in 2012). A brand may show even more commitment by issuing activism-themed products that consumers can actually buy, like Vans' rainbow-striped sneakers, or Budweiser's Pride-themed can-holders. Such products are often linked to cause-related marketing campaigns, in which part of the revenues are donated to a charity that is related to the issue.

At an even higher level of commitment, the word “activism” is taken more literally, as the brand – or its mother-company – engages in behaviors that actively support the issue, either monetary (like Patagonia donating its Black Friday turnover to non-profit environmental groups), or “in kind” (like Starbucks' pledge to hire 10,000 refugees). Another example are media-based campaigns where brands spend (part of) their advertising budgets to push social issues. Think of Dove's “Campaign for Real Beauty”, Always' “Like a girl” or Gillette's “Be the man you can be.” At this



level of commitment, brand activism often takes the form of an integrated campaign. G-star's "Raw for the oceans" for example, is at the same time a product-line, a long-term collaboration with an NGO ("Parley for the oceans"), and an activist sourcing policy (using plastic taken from the ocean as raw materials for a line of jeans), supported by a multi-media campaign in collaboration with Pharell Williams.

### 1.3 What brand activism is NOT

The definition and examples in sections 1.1 and 1.2 provide a good idea of what brand activism is. But in order to really understand a concept, it is also important to know which things are not included. In sections 1.3.1, 1.3.2 and 1.3.3, I therefore discuss what brand activism is *not*. These sections attempt to further clarify the concept by explaining the differences between brand activism and three related constructs: corporate political activity (commonly known as "lobbying"), corporate social responsibility (CSR), and brand purpose.

#### 1.3.1 Brand activism is not the same as Corporate Political Activity (Lobbying)

Corporate political activity – sometimes referred to as "corporate lobbying" – is a term that is used to describe corporate attempts to shape government policy in ways that are favorable to the firm (Hillman, Keim and Schuler, 2004). Corporate lobbying is explicitly aimed at the promotion of the firm's direct interest. It is therefore different from brand activism, which aims to influence issues that are of interest to society as a whole. The interests can at times be contradicting: a brand that pushes protection of the environment or the well-being of its employees, may constrain its ability to increase profits at the shorter term. There may also, however, be many win-win situations, such as the earlier mentioned example of Starbucks' "dreamer" campaign, where the employment of refugees does not only improve these people's wellbeing, but also provides the company with much-needed personnel.

Although not necessarily part of its definition, corporate political activity is often more hidden and behind-the-scenes than brand activism, which is by definition a public act. Thus, while brand activism generally aims to influence or engage the public (i.e., consumers), corporate political activity often goes on behind closed doors, aiming to influence the politicians or regulators that determine the context in which the firm operates. Note that the two activities are not necessarily mutually exclusive: brand activism can be aimed at changing laws or influencing politicians, and lobbying sometimes involves attempts to influence public opinion.

In conclusion, while brand activism and lobbying are both corporate activities that are aimed at influencing social causes, they differ in the interest they represent (promoting corporate versus social interest) and in form (public by definition versus mostly in private).

#### 1.3.2 Brand activism is not the same as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been defined as the "...inclusion of social and environmental concerns in a company's business operations and interactions with stakeholders" (van Marrewijk, 2003). In addition to obeying the laws that govern their business practice, this means that companies strive to "Do the right thing", and try to be fair and avoid harm to people and the environment. This includes treating suppliers/employees well, and engaging in sustainable business practice. In addition, CSR includes a philanthropic responsibility, in which the company "gives back" to the community, by collaborating with (local) NGOs and governments, and donating to charities. Cause-related marketing is a subset of CSR activities, in which a brand donates a portion of sales or profit to a good cause. Examples include Pampers' 1 pack = 1 vaccine campaign, or the long-running project (RED), that collaborates with brands like Apple, Fiat, and Durex, who make red editions of their products and donate part of the profit on these editions to support research on HIV and other global pandemics. Note that, as the supported cause becomes more controversial, boundaries between cause-related marketing and brand activism become blurry.

Many studies have shown the beneficial effects of CSR activities for brand and companies. A recent meta-analysis of this research integrated the results of 66 studies with a combined sample size of almost 20,000 customers. This analysis showed that CSR activities have strong positive effects across the board, including strong and significant effects on corporate reputation, on employee variables like commitment to the organization, and on consumers' brand awareness, preference, and word of mouth. This study also found a positive and significant effect on financial performance and stakeholder satisfaction. Perhaps some of these findings apply to brand activism as well, but this is by no means given, because there are several important differences between CSR and brand activism. I will briefly discuss these differences below.

First and foremost, CSR encompasses a wide range of corporate activities. Many of these do not take center stage in the company's communication. An often-heard statement is that CSR means companies should "do good while nobody's watching". In line with this idea, most companies duly file reports on their environmental and social impact, and highlight their accomplishments in their annual reports, but make limited efforts in communicating these results to consumers. As a result of this, and because of the complexity of assessing environmental and societal impact, there appears to be little correlation between company's CSR efforts and the public's image of these companies (Peloza, Loock, Cerruti, and Muyot, 2012).

Second, CSR focuses on issues that are widely supported by the general public. Typical issues include environmental protection, fair trade, and responsible treatment of employees. Brand activism, however, is focused on controversial issues, which by definition means that there are people who agree with the brand's

stance, and people who disagree with it. To illustrate this, Hydock, Paharia and Blair (2020) conducted a survey among US consumers, and found that typical CSR issues like preventing pollution, stopping child labor or employee volunteering in local soup kitchens were supported moderately or strongly by an average of 77% of consumers (and opposed by only 2%), whereas more political issues like abortion rights, gun control and illegal immigrant citizenship were supported on average by 33% and opposed by 25% of consumers. In Chapter 2, we will provide a more detailed exploration of Dutch consumers' opinions on issues typical of CSR and brand activism. The difference in controversiality of CSR and brand activism also implies a difference in consumer responses. Whereas the response to CSR is generally positive (De Oliveira Santini et al., 2021), the response to brand activism is much more mixed, and determined to a great extent by consumer-brand alignment: the response is positive if the opinions of consumer and brand are aligned, and negative when their opinions are not aligned (Hydock et al., 2020). This issue is further discussed in Chapter 3.3.

While it is generally agreed upon that brands should behave responsibly toward people and planet, not all consumers find it appropriate for brands to express political opinions. This opinion reflects the classic view that business shouldn't be mixed with politics. Depending on the exact question asked, US surveys found that between 22% and 65% of consumers support the notion of brands taking a stance on social and political issues (Klostermann, Hydock and Decker, 2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020). In chapter two, I will report on a survey that we conducted in order to measure Dutch consumers' opinions about brand activism.

This difference is also reflected in practitioner opinions on CSR and brand activism: while managers are generally positive about CSR, they are much more skeptical and often even outright negative toward brand activism. Based on the annual CMO survey, which interviews board-level marketing managers of US Fortune 500 companies, Moorman (2020) reports that only 18,5 % of CMOs agreed that "it is appropriate for my brand to take a stance on politically-charged issues". In a related question in this survey, 33% of CMOs thought it was appropriate of executives speak out on political issues, while 47% thought it was appropriate to make changes to products and services in response to political issues.

### 1.3.3 Brand activism is not the same as "purpose branding"

In recent years, "purpose branding" or "branding with purpose" has become a popular (or at least widely discussed) approach to branding. In their seminal article on the future of branding, Swaminathan, Sorescu, Steenkamp, O'Guinn and Schmitt (2020, p. 42) argue that "*Brands need to fulfill a broader mission and purpose*", and that "*[T]he firm perspective on branding will need to embrace societal questions [because] organizations or corporate brands are asked to address broader issues including social responsibility, sustainability, and human-resource practices that go beyond profit maximization*". This purpose is embedded in the brand's core values, which prioritize the delivery of certain social and/or environmental benefits

over others (see Vredenburg et al., 2020). A recent study (Knowles, Hunsaker, Grove and James, 2022) proposed a distinction between three different types of "purpose:" competence ("the function that our product serves"); culture ("the intent with which we run our business"); and cause ("the social good to which we aspire"). The authors note that each of these three types of purpose can provide a meaningful "why" for a brand. The three types can be related to the well-known "golden circle" (Sinek, 2009). A competence-based purpose expresses a clear value proposition to consumers, but also reminds employees what is expected from them. In Sinek's terms it captures the "what" - the key benefit that the company delivers to its customers. A competence-based purpose could for example be to deliver the best tasting bread, or the lowest cost airline connections. A culture-based purpose is especially suited for companies seeking to align employees or partners. In Sinek's terms, it describes the brand's "how"- Knowles and colleagues mention Zappos' purpose "to live and deliver WOW to customers". Finally, a cause-based purpose is focused on the brand's contribution to a broader societal goal. An example is Patagonia's "we're in business to save our home planet". Cause-based purposes are similar to the Simon Sinek's "why."

Brand purpose thus differs from brand activism in two important ways. First, purpose is a much broader term, and could be rooted in a brand's competence (the benefit that its products and services deliver), a brand's culture (how the brand delivers this benefit), or it could be rooted in the brand's cause - its "why". Brand activism is always related to a social cause. Although cause-based purposes are most closely aligned with brand activism, however, there is still the second difference between purpose and activism: while a purpose describes the driving principle of a brand, brand activism is a particular activity that is focused on the public advocacy of the brand's stance on societal issues. Since a brand's purpose is defined as the driving force behind all of its major activities, we could indeed say that brand activism is (or at least should be) driven by purpose. Even in a purpose driven, activist company like Patagonia, this means that we can distinguish between the brand's purpose, as encoded in its mission: "we are in business to save our home planet", and its activism, which is exemplified by highly publicized campaigns like "vote the assholes out" during the 2020 US elections, or its stance against the commercialization of public lands (in 2016). Another example is Unilever, whose purpose is "to make sustainable living commonplace". This purpose is connected but not equal to the more concrete activism of (some of) its brands, like the promotion of diversity and equality by Ben & Jerry's.

## 1.4 Key learnings from this chapter

- Engaging in brand activism means that a brand publicly takes a stand on divisive social or political issues.
- Brand activism is *public*, which means that the brand is not trying to “do good while nobody is watching”, but tries to change things in society by speaking up and making its opinion known to the world.
- Brand activism generally focuses on *divisive* social or political issues, which have supporters and opponents. The downside of this is that customers who disagree with the brand’s stance may stop buying the brand. But issues which are divisive are also the ones that are more important to consumers, which can foster consumer identification with the brand.
- Brands can have intrinsic or extrinsic motives for their activism. An intrinsic motivation means that the brand is focused on raising awareness of the issue, and encouraging social change. Extrinsic motivation is focused on benefits for the brand/company in terms of brand image, sales and loyalty. The aligned activism model presented in chapter 3 of this publication can help brands to achieve both goals.
- Brand activism may take different forms: it can be symbolic, like flying the pride flag on social media, or on products like Vans’ rainbow-striped sneakers, but also entail more active support, in the form of donations, corporate policies (like Starbucks’ pledge to hire 10,000 refugees), or by raising awareness like Dove’s “Campaign for Real Beauty”.
- Although the terms are often confused, brand activism is not the same as brand purpose. First of all, brand activism is always related to social and/or political causes, while a brand purpose can also be related to a key consumer benefit (“we provide cheap and easy flights”) or a corporate culture (“everything for a smile”). Second, while a purpose is a general driving principle for a brand, brand activism is an activity that focuses on public advocacy on an issue.

### Bunq & Starbucks: activism means to act

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 reminded Ali Niknam, founder and CEO of Bunq bank, of his personal experience with war. Shortly after the news broke, he wrote a LinkedIn post in which he offered to help Ukrainian immigrants to obtain an HSM (“highly skilled migrant”) visa for the Netherlands. The post went viral, and - according to Niknam - flooded his inbox with requests for help. Niknam stepped up his game and founded - together with several partners - a charity organization named “People for People”. A few weeks after the invasion, the European Union came up with legal solutions for refugees, which reduced the need for visas. But the next challenge for Ukrainian refugees was opening a bank account, which was impossible without a passport. This made it difficult for companies to hire refugees, and for Ukrainians to transfer money to family members who had stayed behind. In response, Bunq offered free digital bank accounts to Ukrainians. The brand activism of Bunq clearly illustrates the “act” in activism, using their organizational resources to help Ukrainian refugees. The company’s actions had an immediate impact on the lives of refugees, and improved Bunq’s image in the fintech community and beyond.

Bunq’s form of activism is similar to that of Starbucks in 2017. In response to US president Trump’s announcement of stricter policies on refugees, Starbucks’ CEO Howard Schulz wrote an open letter to Starbucks employees, stating that the company aimed to hire 10,000 refugees worldwide, as a contribution to the ongoing global refugee crisis. Unlike Bunq’s activism, which was widely supported and admired, Starbucks’ initiative met with a lot of resistance. The campaign triggered calls for boycotts from (republican voting) consumers and political opinion makers working for Fox News. Starbucks’ actions may have motivated right-wing activists a few months later to launch their fake “Dreamer Day” campaign: in fake Starbucks ads, undocumented immigrants (referred to in the US as “Dreamers”) were invited to get a free or discounted drink. The idea was that the immigrants would “out” themselves when they collected their free drinks (Smidt, 2017).

Sources:

**Smidt, R. (2017).** People are warning others about this fake Starbucks ad meant to target immigrants. *Buzzfeed news*, August 6, 2017

**Sylvers, E. & Papachristou, L. (2022).** From pizzerias to tech startups, Ukrainian refugees trickle into Europe’s labor market. *Wall Street Journal*, August 1

**Van Riesen, P. (2022).** Techmiljardairs starten hulpstichting voor Oekraïne *Quotenet*, 28 Februari 2022.

**Wootson jr, C. (2017).** Starbucks promised to hire thousands of refugees - critics want a boycott. *Washington Post*, January 30, 2017.

# 2

## Dutch consumers' opinions about brand activism

Now that we have defined brand activism, and differentiated it from similar concepts like lobbying, CSR and purpose branding, it is time to look at Dutch consumers' opinions about the subject. In this chapter, we will provide some data from a survey that was administered to a sample of 1016 Dutch consumers, representative of the Dutch population in terms of gender, age and education. The survey was administered in July 2022. In this questionnaire, we first presented participants with an introduction on brand activism and a list of 15 topics (presented in a different random order for each individual respondent). The topics on this list were based on actual campaigns, as well as brainstorm sessions with experts and consumers. After answering these questions, participants were asked about their opinion toward brand activism in general. The next part of this questionnaire assessed the impact of brand activism on other evaluations of the brand/company. Specifically, participants were asked how brand activism influences their consumer behavior, their perceptions of a company as (potential) employer, and the extent to which brands influence their opinions about social issues.

### 2.1 Opinion toward brand activism in general

To obtain insights into consumers opinions about brand activism, we asked them to give their opinion on a set of five items. This was done on seven point scales, running from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). In the table below, you can see their answers. It reports the mean score and standard deviation (for those who are interested in the distribution), as well as the percentage of respondents who agreed with the positively worded item (this means they scored 5,6 or 7), or disagreed with it (score = 1, 2 or 3).

Table 2.1 Participant's opinions toward brand activism on a 7-point scale, with midpoint = 4.

Item	Mean (SD)	agree	disagree
Bad/ good idea	3.97 (1.80)	40%	34%
Brands should (never/always) do this	3.88 (1.68)	35%	33%
Don't like it at all / like it a lot	3.72 (1.72)	32%	37%
Not important at all / very important	3.94 (1.72)	36%	32%
Don't support at all / fully support	3.89 (1.76)	36%	34%
Average (see text below)	3.88 (1.57)	34%	34%

(SD = Standard Deviation. The higher this number, the more variation in people's opinions.)

For further analyses, I calculated the average score across these five questions<sup>1</sup>. This average is a good representation of consumers' opinions toward brand activism. The distribution of this score is shown in the figure below. It gives an impression of the percentage of Dutch consumers supporting brand activism, with 17% of participants scoring at the lowest end of the scale (between 1 and 2), and 10,8% at the highest (between 6 and 7). Other scores can be read from the figure.

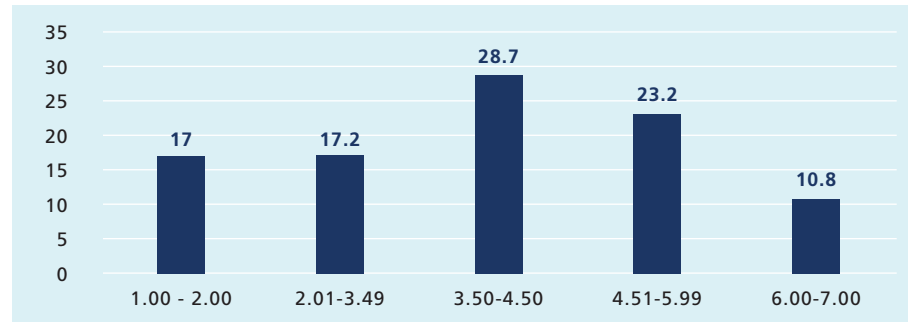


Figure 2.1 Distribution of consumers' opinions toward brand activism. Horizontal axis: score on brand activism index; Vertical axis: percentage of respondents giving the score

I conducted a number of follow-up analyses to examine whether the support for brand activism varied with age, education, gender and political orientation. The most remarkable results are given below:

- Support for brand activism decreases with age ( $r = -.15$ ). This relationship is not strong, but still significant at  $p < .001$ . To illustrate what this means: the average score for consumers 18-35 was 4.19 (42% in favor; 27% against), while for 66 and older it was 3.52 (27% in favor; 44% against).
- Men and women did not significantly differ in their support for brand activism<sup>2</sup>.
- Respondents with a university degree (13%) were more supportive of brand activism than others (4.21 vs 3.85). Differences between other levels of education (HBO, MBO or high school) were not significant.
- To examine the relationship with political orientation, a standard one-item scale for political orientation was included, running from 1 (left-wing) to 9 (right-wing). Support for brand activism was higher for people who identified themselves as left-wing oriented (scores 6 to 9), than for right-wing oriented (scores 1 to 4). The difference was large at 4.25 versus 3.38, and the correlation between the two variables was also significant ( $r = -.24$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Of the left-wing consumers, 45% favored brand activism, and

<sup>1</sup> A factor analysis (PCA) showed that the items loaded on a single dimension, indicating that the items could be combined to form an overall index of participants' opinion toward brand activism. The reliability of this index was high (Cronbach's alpha = .95).

<sup>2</sup> Within our sample, 4 respondents chose to identify as neither male nor female, and 5 respondents preferred not to answer. Because of these small cell sizes, averages are not reported for these groups.

28% opposed it. This was reversed for right-wing consumers, of whom 24% favored activism and 46% opposed.

These results suggest that brand activism is most acceptable to consumers who are younger, and left wing in terms of political orientation. Brands focusing on this segment may expect a more favorable response when they engage with social and political issues.

## 2.2 Influence of brand activism on brand/company evaluations

The academic literature indicates a range of effects of brand activism on the behavior of consumers, employees and other stakeholders (discussed in Chapter 4). This paragraph describes how Dutch participants perceive the impact of brand activism on their evaluations of the brand/company, and of the issue at hand. Specifically, participants were asked how brand activism influences their purchase decisions, their evaluation of the company as a (potential) employer, and the extent to which brands are able to influence their opinions about social issues.

### 2.2.1 Influence on brand evaluations

We measured influence on brand evaluations with five questions, all on 5-point scales that captured (1) how important it was for participants that a brand agreed with them on important societal issues, (2) whether participants were willing to pay a bit more for a brand that expressed its opinion about important social issues. In addition, we asked them whether agreement on an important topic was a reason to buy the brand, and whether *disagreement* was a reason not to buy it. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2.2 Influence of brand activism on brand evaluation (five-point scale, midpoint = 3)

Item	Mean (SD)	agree	disagree
It is important to me that the brands I buy have the same opinion on important societal issues.	2.85 (1.06)	28%	32%
I am willing to pay a bit more for a brand that takes a stand on a topic that I find important.	2.51 (1.19)	23%	50%
If I AGREE with a brand on an important topic, then this is a reason to buy the brand.	2.67 (1.15)	25%	41%
If I DISAGREE with a brand on an important topic, then this is a reason not to buy the brand.	3.02 (1.23)	38%	32%

In our representative sample of Dutch consumers, 28% of participants found it important that the brands they buy share their opinions on important societal issues. A similar proportion (32%) disagreed with this statement. When asked whether they are willing to pay more for a brand that supports an issue that is important to them, the response is a little less supportive: 23% of Dutch consumers is willing to pay a bit more for such brands, but 50% is not willing to do so. In line with earlier research suggesting a negativity bias (see chapter 3.2.1) in brand

activism (Hydock et al., 2020), the results show that consumers respond significantly more strongly to brands that *disagree* with them than to brands that *agree* with them. Specifically, 38% of the participants indicated that disagreement in opinions about an important societal issue would be a reason NOT to buy a brand, but only 25% indicated that agreement would be a reason to buy. Follow-up analyses showed that the influence of brand activism varied with age, education, gender and political orientation. The most remarkable results are given below:

The influence of brand activism decreases with age, with correlations between -.16 and -.19 for the four questions in Table 2. Consumers under 35 scored about half a scale point higher than consumers older than 65. These younger consumers find it more important that a brand agrees with them on important social topics, and are also more willing to pay a bit more for the brand if this is the case.

There was no significant difference between men and women for these questions. The influence of brand activism was substantially higher for people who identified themselves as left-wing oriented. For “willingness to pay a bit more”, for example, the mean was 2.82 for left-wing consumers, and 2.16 for right-wing consumers.

### 2.2.2 Influence on employer attractiveness

A full investigation of the influence of brand activism on employer perceptions falls outside the scope of this study, but two statements were included to get a first impression. The first item was “*I can only work for an organization that has the same opinion about important social issues as me*” and the second item was “*I don’t like it when the organization I work for speaks out about societal issues*”. Respondents indicated their agreement with these statements on a 5-point scale, ranging from completely disagree to completely agree.

Table 2.3 Influence of brand activism on employer perceptions (five-point scale, midpoint = 3)

Item (English)	Mean (SD)	agree	disagree
I can only work for an organization that has the same opinion about important social issues as I do.	3.03 (1.09)	36%	28%
I don’t like it when the organization I work for speaks out about societal issues.	2.86 (1.08)	25%	34%

While it is likely that the “real” answers to these questions depend on the issue at stake, and on the extent to which the employee agrees with the opinion, the results do suggest that most respondents wouldn’t mind if their organization would speak out about social issues (only 25% indicates that they don’t like this). In fact, 36% agrees that they can only work for an organization that has the same opinion about important social issues.

The results again show that the influence of brand activism was substantially higher for consumers who are left-wing oriented. For example, left-wing consumers agreed more with the statement that they could only work for organizations who shared

their opinion on important societal issues (3.27 versus 2.77). The answers to the questions in Table 3 showed only limited variation by education, gender or age.

Together, these results suggest that brand activism has more impact on employees than on customers. A sizeable group of participants (36%) indicated that they could only work for an organization that shares their opinion on important social issues, and only 25% of people don’t like it if their organization speaks out on social issues.

### 2.2.3 Influence on opinions about social issues

So far, we have looked at the impact of brand activism on evaluations of the company and its products. But how about the issue at stake? Can brand activism influence how consumers think about an issue? Of course, this impact will depend on the creativity of the campaign, and on media investments, but it is interesting to assess whether consumers themselves think that they are sensitive to brand’s advocacy of social issues. This was measured with three statements asking consumers (1) whether they listen to brands’ opinions, (2) whether brands are able to make them think about an issue, and (3) whether brand activism can change their opinions. The questions and answers (on 5-point Likert scales) can be seen in Table 4 below. The results suggest that a minority (26%) of consumers is willing to listen to brands, and admits that brands make them think about a social issue (also 26%), and an even smaller group admits that brand activism can change their opinions (20%).

Table 2.4 How brand activism influences consumer opinions (five-point scale, midpoint = 3)

Item (English)	Mean (SD)	agree	disagree
When big brands/companies speak up about a certain issue, I listen to their opinion.	2.76 (1.05)	26%	38%
If my favorite brands have an opinion about a social issue, I will think more about this issue.	2.77 (1.04)	26%	38%
When a brand that I appreciate speak up about a certain topic, it can change my opinion.	2.66 (0.99)	20%	40%

As with the other questions, the influence of brand activism was substantially higher for consumers who are left-wing oriented. For example, left-wing consumers were substantially more willing to listen to the opinions of brands (2.95 versus 2.56). There was only limited variation by education, gender or age.

In general, Dutch consumers show a somewhat skeptic response to brands (big brands, favorite brands) that speak up about social issues. The percentage who says they are not willing to listen (38%) is higher than the percentage that does want to listen (26%). But this is a general response. The next section (2.3) will examine to what extent this opinion varies across topics.

## 2.3 What issues should brands (not) speak up about?

Brands can speak up about many different issues – but consumers are likely to regard some issues more appropriate than others. Participants were presented with

a list of 15 issues that brands could speak up about, selected from existing campaigns, extended with a number of issues selected by experts. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they found these issues appropriate for brand activism. The exact wording of this question is given below.

*Brands nowadays frequently share their opinion on societal issues, for example via social media, a press release or an advertising campaign. Below you can find a list of subjects about which brands sometimes share their opinion. Please indicate – for each subject – whether you think that brands should share their opinion about it. Please note that we ask is about whether they speak up or not, and not whether they are “fore” or “against” the issue.*

For each subject, respondents could indicate whether they thought it was appropriate for brands to speak up or not, on a five-point scale ranging from “I think it is not good at all if brands speak up about this subject” (1) to “I think it is very good if brands speak up about this subject”. Subjects were presented in random order. We list them in Table 5, in the order of their average score. In addition, we list the percentage in favor (score 4 or 5) and against (score 1 or 2) speaking out on a topic. The last two columns list the correlations with political orientation (left-right) and age. Each correlation is significant at  $p < .01$ . Non-significant correlations are not shown.

Table 2.5 Appropriateness scores for 15 brand activism topics (5-point scale)

Item (English)	Mean (SD)	in favor	against	r, pol	r, age
Fair trade	3.88 (1.10)	68%	9%	-.22	-.15
Environmental pollution	3.75 (1.16)	67%	13%	-.20	-.15
Human rights	3.69 (1.24)	65%	15%	-.20	-.19
Climate change	3.63 (1.21)	61%	16%	-.22	-.17
Freedom of speech	3.61 (1.25)	59%	16%	-.15	-.12
Racism	3.55 (1.30)	60%	20%	-.25	-.16
LGBTQ rights	3.30 (1.31)	47%	24%	-.24	-.17
The war in Ukraine	3.19 (1.28)	45%	26%	-.09	-
Refugee rights	3.01 (1.26)	37%	32%	-.25	-.11
Abortion	2.82 (1.39)	33%	40%	-.13	-.24
The Dutch slavery past	2.82 (1.31)	31%	37%	-.26	-.13
Farmers' protests	2.78 (1.26)	29%	38%	-	-
Covid measures (vaccines, masking)	2.73 (1.27)	27%	40%	-.10	-
“Zwarte Piet”	2.47 (1.31)	21%	51%	-.12	-.13
Support for a political party	2.12 (1.15)	13%	64%	-	-

Table 5 shows consumers' opinions about the topics that brands can speak up about. The results show remarkable differences between topics. First, there is a set of topics for which it is generally seen as appropriate when a brand speak up about them: fair trade, environmental pollution, human rights and climate change. These

are topics that are closely related to business itself, and consumers apparently find it appropriate when brands speak up about them: more than 61% of consumers is in favor of this (scores 4 or 5 on the 5-point scale), and only 16% is against (scoring 1 or 2 on the 5-point scale). Similar ratings can be found for “freedom of speech” and “racism.” Another striking similarity between these topics is that they almost universally seen as “bad” (in case of pollution, climate change or racism), or “good” (in case of fair trade, human rights and freedom of speech).

Next to this first set, there is a group of more controversial issues, for which less than 50% of consumers thinks it is a good idea if brands speak up about them: For LGBTQ rights, the war in Ukraine, and Refugee rights we find that 37-47% of consumers are in favor of brand activism, which is less than 50%, but still more than the percentage of consumers who are against brand activism on these topics (24-32%).

Finally, we have a set of issues for which the percentage of consumers who are in favor of activism is smaller than the percentage of consumers who are against. This is the case for Abortion, the Dutch slavery past, the Farmers' protests, and Covid measures, where between 27 and 33% is in favor of activism, and 37-40% thinks that these issues are inappropriate for brand activism. This opposition is even stronger for brand activism on the topic of “Zwarte Piet” (51% against, only 21% in favor). This score may perhaps be due to a general fatigue with this topic, after years of heated debate, and also related to the timing of this survey, which was taken in July, so well before December 5th. Finally, consumers seem to agree that brands should stay away from voicing support for a specific political party: 64% of consumers is against this, and only 13% in favor.

The last two columns in the table show how these opinions vary with age and political orientation. Because correlation coefficients are not always easy to interpret, I will give a few illustrations, that emphasize the amount of variation in the scores that I just discussed. They remind us that it is important to look at differences between segments of consumers. For example, while a majority (around 60%) of left-wing consumers is in favor of brands speaking out about LGBTQ rights or racism, right-wing consumers are much more on the fence (about 35% in favor, and 35% against). For refugee rights and the Dutch slavery past, the variation is even bigger. For refugee rights for example, a majority (52%) of left-wing consumers is in support of brand activism, and only 24% opposes it. For right-wing consumers however, we find 24% in favor, and 44% against.

Political orientation is the strongest determinant of opinions about brand activism, but it is not the only one. The most striking example is the correlation between age and opinions about brand activism related to abortion issues. Among younger consumers (18-35 years old), 48% are in favor of brands speaking out on abortion, and 30% are against. Consumers older than 65 are much more negative, with 23% in favor and 55% against.

## 2.4 Key learnings from this chapter

- Overall, Dutch consumers are mildly positive about brand activism, with about equal numbers being in favor, neutral and against the practice. There is some variation in this opinion: Younger consumers (18-35) are more likely to favor, while consumers older than 65 are likely to oppose brand activism. Also, right wing consumers are much less in favor of brand activism than left-wing consumers.
- Only a minority (23%) of consumers is willing to pay more for brands that take a stand on a topic that they find important. For a similar proportion (25%) of consumers, agreement on important social issues is a reason to buy, but a larger group (38%) of consumers indicates that disagreement on such issues is a reason *not* to buy a brand.
- When brands speak up, about 1 in 4 consumers are willing to listen, think more about the issue, and perhaps are even willing to change their opinion.
- Our survey indicates that 36% of respondents indicated that they could only work for an organization that has the same opinion about important social issues, and only 25% of consumers says that they “don’t like it if their employer speaks out about social issues”.
- Across all of these numbers, the response to brand activism is more favorable for younger consumers, and for consumers who identify themselves as relatively left-wing on the political spectrum. Note that these effects are additive: young, left-leaning consumers are most responsive to brand activism.
- Table 5 gives some insights into consumers opinions about the range of topics that brands can speak up about. Fair trade, human rights and the environment are safe bets, in the sense that a large majority of consumers thinks it is good if brands speak up about these topics. Consumers are less comfortable with brands speaking up (for example) about abortion, the Dutch slavery past, and the farmers’ protests. Also here, there is considerable variation with political orientation and age. For example, a clear majority of left-wing consumers is in favor of brands speaking up about LGBTQ rights or racism, while right-wing consumers are evenly divided across supporting, neutral and opposing. Age also plays a role on some issues.

### Should brands have an opinion? The COVID-19 case

In the spring of 2020, COVID-19 became a pandemic. From governments to consumers, nobody really knew what was going on, and what we should do, except for three things: stay at home, keep your distance and wash your hands. In this setting, brands were looking for ways to respond to this global crisis, trying to find (and communicate!) their relevance to a distressed society. In their analysis of (global) advertising during this time period, Atal and Richey (2021) found two distinct ways in which brands responded. The first was to offer practical help in resolving the crisis, and the second was by offering emotional support, helping consumers cope with this difficult period.

In the Netherlands, one example of practical help was the production of protective face/mouth masks by a consortium of DSM, Aupro (a filter company) and Auping. The first masks were made by hand in Auping’s bedding factory Deventer, and delivered to the Ministry of Health by the end of April 2020. Another example was the production of sanitizing handgel by Bavaria and other breweries, who distilled their alcohol to a high grade suitable for hand sanitizers, and then used their distribution chain to get the new product to health care workers and consumers. While these brands offered direct help in fighting the virus, others provided more indirect support. Auto.nl, for example, engaged a broad coalition of companies under the banner of their “Zorghelden-auto” campaign, in order to provide health care workers with free transport in the form of car loans. This campaign was awarded with a special “Leffie” advertising award for innovative and impactful campaigns.

Emotional support was especially strong at the beginning of the COVID crisis: Coca-Cola’s “we’re in this together” campaign, Nike’s “play for the world” in which athletes showed how to stay in shape at home during a lockdown, and of course the many emotional campaigns that ran in the first months of the crisis, stressing how brands “are there for you in these uncertain times” (please watch the beautiful mash-up created by YouTube creator “Microsoft Sam”.) sometimes culminating in more practical messages urging people to stay home and maintain social distance. Research on these campaigns has shown that worried consumers indeed valued (large, well-known) brands more in times of uncertainty (Verlegh et al., 2021), but also warned that brands should take care not to be dogmatic or assertive (“pushy”) in order to avoid consumer reactance (Shoenberger, Kim and Sun, 2021).

Advertising during the COVID-19 crisis has shown that consumers appreciate brands stepping up to solve societal issues. It also has provided us with a wide range of cases that can provide marketers with inspiration on how to do this (and how not to).



Sources:

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# 3

## Activism: what's your issue?

Our survey suggests that there is a segment of consumers who are open to brand activism, although this seems to depend a lot on the issue at stake: issues like fair trade, the environment and human rights are deemed suitable issues by up to two-thirds of consumers, whereas issues like refugee rights, abortion and COVID receive a much more mixed response. While these numbers present valuable insights into consumers' responses to brand activism on different issues, they ignore the possible variation between brands. In fact, research shows that it is important that there is a match between issue and brand. For the same issue, it can be completely acceptable if brand X speaks up about it, and unacceptable when brand Y does this. In the academic literature this concept is known as *brand-issue alignment* (e.g., Bagwat et al., 2020; Hydock et al., 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020).

In the present chapter, I focus on brand-issue alignment, and some of the related concepts and theories that may help brands determine which issues they can credibly advocate. The chapter starts with the view from within, exploring how brands can determine which issues are suitable for them. Next, the role of consumers is explored. The impact of brand activism - in terms of organizational outcomes, but also in terms of its societal impact, depends on the extent to which a brand's (target) consumers are aligned with the brand's stance, but also on the extent to which consumers perceive the brand's activism to be authentic. At the end of the chapter, I combine these views into the Aligned Activism Model, which visualizes how these different facets (brand-issue alignment, consumer-issue alignment, and perceived authenticity) enable brands to find their A-spot, where the brand's activism is aligned with its "best self", but also with the opinion and values of their (target) consumers. Consumers perceive A-spot activism as authentic, because it fits with the brand and the behavior of the organization.

### 3.1 Brand-issue alignment: the brand's perspective

While there are a number of papers examining brand-issue alignment from a consumer perspective, I am not aware of academic research examining the topic from the perspective of the brand. As a starting point, I therefore use the big ideal model, which was developed by Ogilvy as a branding strategy tool (see Shaw & Mitchell, 2011 for a discussion). This model defines a "big ideal" as "the concise description of the ideal at the heart of a brand or a company identity - its deeply held conviction on how the world, or some particular part of it, should be" (p. 7). In terms of the classification by Knowles and colleagues (see chapter 1.3.3), the big ideal can be regarded as a cause-based brand purpose, that relates the brand to a social cause.

Shaw and Mitchell (2011) propose a highly structured format for formulating a “big ideal”:

*“(Brand) believes the world would be a better place if ...”*

The authors note that the blank space at the end of the sentence should be filled with “something that feels interesting, maybe even provocative, and quite specific to that brand”. The model proposes that the big ideal exists at the intersection of (1) the brand’s best self, and (2) a cultural tension.

While the concept of “cultural tension” is not explicitly defined by the authors, their examples indicate that it refers to social issues that evoke differences in opinion – implying that there is a substantial number of people who find the issue important, perhaps even to the extent that it is central to their identity (I will return to this aspect later, in section 3.2.3), and also that there are opponents and proponents. In this sense, it is interesting to note that Mitchell and Shaw’s operationalization seems at odds with the link between brand activism and the United Nations’ Social Development Goals (SDGs) that is proposed by Sarkar and Kotler (2018). SDGs are relatively broad goals that are thought to be universally supported by citizens of UN nations (although surveys show differences in the extent to which they are supported). Sarkar and Kotler thus seem to attach less importance to the element of “tension” or controversy in brand activism. Mitchell and Shaw also suggest that the cultural tensions should be concrete: they should not refer to abstract and “lofty” values, but instead pertain to tangible issues that are clearly defined. As Mitchell and Shaw - but also Aaker (2022) - argued, brands should set clear (and measurable) goals for these issues, because it allows organizations (and stakeholders) to monitor progress on these goals, and adds credibility to their claims.

In the model of Mitchell and Shaw (p. 23), the “brand’s best self” refers to the “little pieces of magic that comprise the brand’s essence [which] uniquely makes or could make the brand great”. In academic terms, the brand’s best self is related to the concept of brand vision, defined by Keller (2014) as the central element of the brand’s positioning that transcends its current manifestations. Keller notes that a well-formulated brand vision connects the past, the present and the future of the brand. To illustrate this, he discusses the brand vision of the “Crayola” brand. This brand has a long history of making crayons and related coloring and drawing products. To capture its expanding portfolio of products, Crayola formulated their brand vision as “colorful arts and crafts for kids”. This formulation has the form of a “brand mantra”: a simple, yet inspiring description of the brand’s essence, that describes what the brand represents to consumers. Another example mentioned by Keller is Disney’s mantra of providing “fun family entertainment”.

According to the big ideal model, brands can find their big ideal at the intersection of the brand’s best self and a cultural tension. More precisely, Mitchell and Shaw propose that the big ideal is the brand’s answer to a cultural tension, an answer that the brand can provide because of its best self (uniquely) enables it to do so.

They note, however, that this is only the foundation: the answer that the brand provides should be “captured concisely and delivered genuinely, excite various groups of people, and get noticed and inspire creative thinking” (Shaw and Mitchell, 2011, p.23).

Following these guidelines, a suitable big ideal for Crayola could perhaps be to address the lack of high-quality education for underprivileged groups (or, to put it differently, the inequalities in the quality of education, as described for example in the book by former SWOCC-director Marjolein Moorman (2022)). Using their best-self mantra of “colorful arts and crafts for kids” as a starting point, Crayola could perhaps formulate their big ideal as “enabling kids to imagine a better world” – or, following the guidelines of Mitchell and Shaw more closely: “Crayola believes the world would be a better place if all kids would be able to imagine a better world”. Similarly, we can imagine Disney addressing the tension that exists in the acceptance of non-traditional family forms. With “fun family entertainment” as their best self, Disney’s big ideal could be to promote an inclusive view of the family, which might perhaps be formulated as “Disney endorses and supports the acceptance of non-traditional family forms”. Note that big ideal is a choice: Disney’s best self would lend itself equally well to address the needs of conservative parents, who feel threatened by an environment in which their children are confronted with changing (progressive) values. In this alternative universe, Disney could formulate their big ideal as “Disney endorses Christian family values, helping mothers and fathers to protect their children”. Disney would make their choice based on the history of the brand, the vision of its leadership, the values of its employees and the extent to which the big ideal resonates with their customers and other stakeholders.

### 3.2 Consumer-issue alignment

Consumer-issue alignment is the key determinant of consumer responses to brand activism. All other things equal, consumers who agree with the brand will have a positive response to brand activism, while those who disagree with the brand will have a more negative response.

An interesting example of this pattern can be found in an event study that examined how the sales of Goya beans products (a popular brand for beans and other Latin-American foods) were influenced by the CEO’s public endorsement of President Trump (Liukonyte, Tuchman and Zhu, 2022). After endorsing Trump on multiple occasions, the CEO of Goya was invited to the White House in June 2020 – an event that was followed by several posts on social media where Trump and his family praised or showed Goya’s products. In response, Democrats and Trump opponents called for a boycott of Goya products. Econometric analyses showed that sales of Goya products increased in districts with a Republican majority, but not in districts with a Democrat majority.

Further empirical tests of this notion have shown a remarkable asymmetry in these effects (Hydock et al., 2020; Mukherjee & Althuisen, 2020): the unfavorable response

of those who disagree with the brand's stance is stronger than the favorable response of those who agree with the stance. In this paragraph, we will discuss this finding, and explore what it means for brand activism.

### 3.2.1 Negativity bias

A broad range of psychological research in many different settings has demonstrated the existence of a *negativity bias*. Reviewing this literature, Baumeister and colleagues sum up the findings from this research as follows: "*Events that are negatively valenced (e.g., losing money, being abandoned by friends, and receiving criticism) will have a greater impact on the individual than positively valenced events of the same type (e.g., winning money, gaining friends, and receiving praise)*" (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs, 2001; p. 323). Those who are familiar with behavioral economics may be reminded of Kahneman's famous observation that "losses loom larger than gains" – in other words, you are more upset with losing 10 euros than you are happy with winning 10. Based on this literature, Hydock and colleagues suggest that the strength of the negativity bias could be a factor 2, so that the negative impact would be twice as big as the positive impact (but on the next page, I will discuss why the negativity bias may be smaller for political/social issues).

According to Baumeister and colleagues, this negativity bias occurs for three reasons:

- a. people *pay more attention* to messages they disagree with,
- b. people *better remember* messages they disagree with, and
- c. *decisions are affected more* by messages that people disagree with.

The negativity bias implies that the negative potential of brand activism is bigger than its positive potential. But there are two important countervailing forces that should be considered. The first force - and this is perhaps the most important one - is the ratio between market share of the brand and the "market shares" of supporters versus opponents of the advocated issue (perhaps "opinion share" is a better word). The second force is the level of involvement with the issue. I will discuss both issues below.

### 3.2.2 Share of opinion versus share of market

Hydock and colleagues (2020) explain and demonstrate how the net impact of brand activism on brand preference is determined by the ratio of the market share of the brand and the amount of support for the advocated issue. For sake of clarity, I will use the term "opinion share" to refer to the percentage of people who have a certain opinion about an issue: If 40% of the people agree with brand, the opinion share of the brand's opinion is 40%. Hydock and colleagues show that brand activism can have a positive effect on market shares if the opinion share is larger than the current market share. They note, however, that the effect of a possible negativity bias should be considered. Let's see how this works:

When a brand speaks out on a controversial issue, there will be people who agree and people who disagree. For those who agree, your activism may be a reason to buy your brand). For those who *disagree*, it may be a reason not to buy the brand. Negativity bias suggests that the second effect may be twice as big as the effect on the first group. To estimate the effect on the brand, however, we should consider the brand's market share. For many brands, a market share of around 20% would be very nice. This means that 200 out of 1000 people buy your brand, while 800 people do *not* buy your brand. For the positive effect of brand activism, these 800 non-buyers are the most important (because your activism may persuade them to buy your brand). For the negative effect, the 200 buyers are the most important (because your activism may lead them to stop buying your brand).

Now consider the role of the "opinion share" of your stance. Let's suppose you have found an issue that divides the population neatly in half: 50% supports, 50% opponents. This would mean that out of the 800 people who don't buy your brand, 400 people agree and 400 people disagree. And let's further suppose that your activism is so clear and convincing that it would win the hearts of 10% of these people, and persuade them to buy your brand. This means that your activism has won 40 new buyers. The other 360 people still won't buy your brand. But activism is controversial, and you may also lose people. How many would you lose in this example? You started with 200 buyers. Of these 200, 50% disagree with you, which is equal to 100 customers. If the negative effect of your activism were just as strong as the positive effect, you would lose 10% of these 100 customers, which equals 10 customers, and which is a lot less than the 40 new customers you gained. The difference between these numbers is a function of the ratio of buyers and non-buyers. As Sharp explains in his "How brands grow" the number of nonbuyers is usually much larger than the number of buyers. In this case, this difference works to your advantage. Even if the negativity bias would indeed be a factor 2, you would lose only 20 customers - still considerably less than the 40 new customers you gained.

### 3.2.3 Consumer issue involvement

In addition to consumer alignment with the issue (does a consumer agree or disagree with your stance), consumers' responses to brand activism is determined by their involvement with the issue. Brand activism will have a stronger impact on those consumers who are more involved with the issue. Although researchers distinguish between various types of involvement, value-relevant involvement seems to be the most important in this context. Value-relevant involvement is based on the extent to which an issue is tied to one's identity – it is higher if the issue is an important part of how we view ourselves, or in other words, if it is related to the social and personal values that are central to us. At higher levels of value-relevant involvement, people's opinions about an issue have a stronger influence on their behavior (Cho and Boster, 2005). Recent research conducted in Germany (Jungblut and Johnen, 2021) demonstrates the importance of value-relevance: while this study confirmed the existence of a negativity bias (i.e., consumers were more likely to boycott a brand if they disagreed with it than they were to "boycott" (support

a brand if they agreed with them), they also found that this negativity bias disappeared at higher levels of political interest. More specifically, the positive responses of consumers who agreed with the brand became stronger when the issue was more relevant to their values. Negative responses were not influenced by value-relevance.

For issues that are directly related to one's identity (think for example of issues related to gender or ethnicity), involvement will be (much) higher for people who are part of the supported community or closely related to it. To make it more tangible: For the parents of a girl who identified as lesbian, or for an employee who identifies as non-binary, there is tremendous value in knowing that they have an ally in a brand they buy or (want to) work for. This value is likely to be much higher than any negative impact this may have on people who disagree with a brand's decision to support the LGBTQ+ community (read Jacobson, Williams and Wong, 2022 for more background). Value-relevance is therefore an important variable to consider when we seek to understand or predict consumer responses to a brand's stance. In addition to influencing the strength of one's attachment to the activist brand, involvement also narrows the "latitude of acceptance" and enhances the so-called "latitude of rejection". In other words, highly involved consumers are more likely to find fault with brands that don't fully support them (Cho and Boster, 2005).

### 3.3 Perceptions of brand-issue alignment: authenticity

The previous paragraphs focused on how people's responses to brand activism are influenced by their alignment with the brand's stance: consumers respond favorably to brand activism when they agree with the brand's stance, especially when the issue is value-relevant to them. In this paragraph, we introduce authenticity as a second factor that determines consumer responses. Specifically, we will argue that consumers will only respond favorably to brand activism if they perceive the activism to be authentic. Inauthentic activism will not lead to positive brand responses, and may even backfire (Hydock et al., 2020; Mirzaei, Wilkie and Siuki, 2022). In order to be perceived as authentic, Vredenburg and colleagues (2020) that brands need to have a "clear purpose- and value-driven communication around an activist stance on sociopolitical issues while also engaging in prosocial corporate practice". (p. 449). In other words, activism is perceived as authentic if it (1) fits with the brand's purpose and values, (2) is aligned with corporate practice, and (3) communicated with the proper tone of voice.

#### 3.3.1 Fit with the brand

While some consumers may be explicitly aware of a brand's values and purpose, most of them will have a more implicit awareness of them, built by (often years of) exposure to its products, advertising, and other forms of communication. Consumers' mental networks of brand associations include knowledge and opinions about the brand's values and morals. In CSR literature, the importance of the fit between CSR and corporate or brand image has long been recognized. In two experimental

studies using choice-based conjoint analysis, Pracejus and Olson (2004) show that a high (versus low) fit between cause and brand can result in five to ten times more donations in the context of cause-related marketing campaigns.

The CSR literature has shown that fit can be based on functional associations or brand image associations (e.g., Bigne et al., 2012; Sen, Du and Bhattacharya, 2016). Functional associations include associations related to:

- Corporate abilities (think for example of the long-term involvement of TNT/ TPG in the United Nations world food program, which was based on the logistic competencies of the corporate partner),
- Functional benefits of a brand's product and services (think for example of the Spanish water-brand Auara, which is a social enterprise that uses all of its profits to provide drinking water in developing countries),
- The brand's customers (think of Pampers' 1 pack – 1 vaccine program that supplies UNICEF with vaccines for children's diseases in developing countries)
- The brand's geographical location: De Jong and van der Meer (2017) mention the example of a (not further identified) Dutch printing house whose CSR activities focus specifically on their own region.

Importantly, a high functional fit can sometimes induce skepticism, because it may lead consumers to question the brand's motives. An experiment by Forehand and Grier (2003) for example, showed how consumers respond favorably when a software brand like Microsoft has a CSR program fighting illiteracy in developing countries, but become skeptic (and outright negative) when the brand focuses on *computer* illiteracy, because this leads consumers to infer that the company will eventually benefit from such a program. This study also shows that such negative thoughts can be mitigated by open and honest communication about possible dual motives.

In addition to functional associations, the fit between a brand and an issue is driven by brand image related associations. Image related associations include:

- Symbolic associations, which are related to the brand's personality, and the personality traits that consumers may express by buying or using it. Think of the tough personality of Jeep, or the elegant personality associated with Chanel.
- Associations with a (cultural) identity – think for example of the Dutch brand Patta, which is strongly embedded in street culture.
- CSR associations, which reflect the brand's status and activities related to its perceived societal obligations: Do consumers feel that the organization pays sufficient attention to the wellbeing of its employees, society and the environment? In other words: Do they see the brand as a good citizen?

### 3.3.2 Alignment with corporate practice

Perceptions of authenticity are influenced to a large extent by the perceived consistency of the actor – in this case: the brand and the organization behind it (Morhart, Malar, Guevremont, Girardin and Grohmann, 2015). Brand activism is more likely to be perceived as authentic if it is in line with consumers' perceptions of the brand's track record: is the (current) activism aligned with the brand's past behaviors? Terms like "greenwashing" and "wokewashing" have been used to describe the practice where brands try to establish a "green" or "woke" image by paying lip service to sustainability or more general (progressive) social causes in their advertising, without changing their behaviors in order to be more sustainable or socially responsible (see Mirzaei, Wilkie and Siuki, 2022). Interestingly, Hydock and colleagues (2020) found that perceived inauthenticity seems to reduce the positive impact of activism on consumers who agree with the brand, but it does not reduce the negative impact on consumers who disagree with the brand. In other words, if consumers agree with a brand, they feel that the activism must be authentic in order to appreciate it. But when consumers disagree with the brand, it doesn't matter whether the campaign is authentic or not – what drives consumer responses is their disagreement with the expressed view.

If there is a large enough gap between the brand's social and political activities on the one hand, and their internal values and behaviors on the other, the brand's behavior may even be characterized as corporate hypocrisy. Think for example of an activist company with poor labor circumstances, or non-sustainable business practice. This practice has been shown to have strong negative consequences on the behavior of consumers, such as a negative impact on buying (intentions) and a lower willingness to pay (Wagner, Korschun and Troebs, 2020). Other research has found a negative impact on employee wellbeing and retention, which can be attributed at least in part to feelings of disappointment and tension experienced by the employees (Scheidler, Edinger-Schons, Spanjol and Wieseke, 2019).

As noted by Korschun and Smith (2018), special attention should be paid to the brand's prior history of activism: does the brand show leadership on the issue (do they "own it"?), and does the brand have a reputation for speaking out in general? Anecdotal evidence of this idea can be found in the positive reception of Nike's "Dream Crazy" campaign with Colin Kaepernick: some authors have attributed this success to Nike's history of supporting athletes of color like the Williams sisters and Tiger Woods, and speaking out against discrimination, from being the first to feature an HIV positive athlete in the eighties, to a large campaign against anti-Islam sentiment in 2017 (Avery and Pauwels, 2018). This line was continued after the campaign, for example by the 2021 release of the "We play real" film which celebrates the achievements of black female athletes.

Empirical evidence for this effect is provided in a recent study of "Black-out Tuesday" (Wang, Qin, Luo and Kou, 2022). In June 2020, major brands - including 31% of the Fortune 100 showed their support of the Black Lives Matter movement by posting black squares on their Instagram accounts. Using advanced econometric

analyses, Wang and colleagues were able to show that participation in this event had a negative impact on consumers' engagement with the Instagram channels of these brands, especially for brands that did not previously speak out on this topic, and that were not otherwise involved with the BLM movement (see the discussion on "slacktivism" and consumer empowerment in section 4.1).

This does not mean, however, that companies are not allowed to benefit from their activism. Korschun and Smith (2018) note that consumers expect from companies that they make profits – they are not charities. Recent research on consumer responses to sustainability efforts (Wallach and Popovich, 2022) shows in fact that consumers find brands more authentic and credible when they communicate openly that their sustainability efforts are not only benefitting the planet, but also are beneficial to the company's financial bottom-line: consumers recognize that companies are always driven by financial motives, and that they are (at least in part) doing good because this helps them to do well.

### 3.3.3 Finding the right tone of voice

Authenticity is not only related to the brand and its behaviors, but also to the way the brand communicates its (activist) message. Based on an extensive review of the literature, Becker, Wiegand and Reinartz (2019) distinguish four dimensions of authenticity in advertising: (1) preserving brand essence, (2) honoring brand heritage, (3) telling a story that connects to consumers' everyday lives, and (4) communicating a realistic and nonexaggerated message.

The first two dimensions are related to each other, because they both reflect this idea that brand communications should represent the "truth" about the brand. Brand essence pertains to the degree to which a brand's communications reflects the brand's image and personality, and the extent to which its design and style are consistent in terms of language, themes and use of colors. To honor brand heritage, the communication should relate to the brand's traditions, history, or place of origin. Authentic brand activism means that the brand advocates a stance that is aligned with its "best self", but also that it communicates this stance in a manner that is consistent with its regular tone of voice, imagery and personality. A brand like Ben & Jerry's communicates its activism in a way that is consistent with its DNA: irreverent, passionate, and always with a sense of humor.

The third dimension emphasizes the importance of presenting a message that consumers connect the issue to their everyday lives. Storytelling can be a way to achieve this. As Bublitz and colleagues (2016) explain, stories provide a "hook" that helps the brand draw in the audience, communicating the message in a way that lets the consumer step into the shoes of the people who are affected by the social issue at hand. Aaker (2022) notes that stories make it easier for the audience to process its theme and accept its major points. They invoke an emotional response (pride, gratitude, anger) that can motivate a desire to help or drive behavior which can change the status quo.

Finally, activist messages are authentic when they are realistic and not exaggerated. The information that is presented should be correct, and not contain inflated or exaggerated numbers of statements (Becker et al., 2019; Aaker, 2022). The need for realism and accuracy also pertains to the goal that is set by the brand. This should be attainable, and avoid wishful thinking or boasting. Brands need to be able to support their claims with (independent) evidence, precisely because the brand asks consumers for their support on an important social issue. The tone of voice of brand activism should not be belittling or overly directive. In a meta-analysis, Rains (2013) shows that consumers display reactance against messages that threaten their freedom (think of “you should do X” or “we must act now”), and respond more favorably to messages that are empathic (“you can help this person”) or emphasize the ability to choose whether they want to engage with the issue or not.

### 3.4 The aligned activism model

The aligned activism model (shown below) summarizes the literature reviewed above. It extends Shaw and Mitchell’s (2011) “big ideal” model by taking a closer look at the role of consumers, in terms of their own alignment with the issue (opinion and involvement), and in terms of their perceptions of the authenticity of the brand’s activism, which is in turn determined by the perceived fit of the issue with the brand’s purpose and values, and its alignment with corporate practice. In the center of the model is the A-spot, where brands engage in activism on an issue that is aligned with their “best self” and with the opinion and values of their (target) consumers, and that is perceived by those consumers as authentic, because it fits with the brand and the behavior of the company behind it.

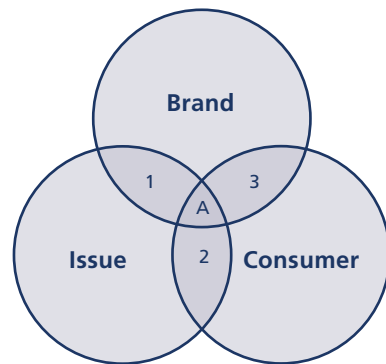


Figure 3.1 The Aligned Activism Model

- 1: Brand-issue alignment: the overlap between the brand’s “best self” and the issue
- 2: Consumer-issue alignment: consumer attitude & involvement toward the issue
- 3: Consumer Perceptions of the authenticity of the brand’s activism
- A: The A-Spot: a brand’s authentic activism regarding an issue that fits their “best self” and is aligned with the opinion of their (target) consumers

### 3.5 Key learnings from this chapter

- To have an optimal impact on the issue and on the organization itself, brand activism should be aligned with the brand’s big ideal. The big ideal is the brand’s answer to a cultural tension; an answer that the brand can provide because it is aligned with the brand’s best self. This ideal should be able to excite organization and stakeholders by inspiring creative thinking.
- In addition to being aligned with the brand’s best self, brand activism should be aligned with its (potential) customers. All other things equal, consumers who agree with the brand will have a positive response to brand activism, while those who disagree with the brand will have a more negative response.
- Research suggests a negativity bias: the negative response of those who disagree with the brand’s stance may be stronger than the favorable response of those who agree with the stance. But this does not mean that brand activism is bad for your brand. In fact, as long as your opinion share (the number of customers who agree with you) is larger than your market share, the net effect is likely to be positive. Especially when the issue you are advocating is important to your target group.
- Consumers will only respond favorably to brand activism if they perceive the activism to be authentic. This means that the activism should (1) fit with the brand’s purpose and values, and (2) be aligned with its corporate practice.
- Fit with the brand can be based on functional associations – these are related to the brand’s competences, products and consumers, or on the brand’s symbolic associations, which are related to the brand’s personality or its cultural identity.
- Alignment with corporate practice means that the activism should be in line with the brand’s (perceived) track record. Long term commitment to the issue (“owning it”), and engagement with core interest groups can be helpful here.
- Authenticity is not only related to the brand and its behaviors, but also to the way the brand communicates its (activist) message. Brand communications should represent the “truth” about the brand, and represent the brand’s essence and honor brand heritage by being consistent with the brand’s regular tone of voice, imagery and personality.
- Authentic activism connects the issue to consumers’ everyday lives. Brands can use storytelling to provide a “hook” that helps the brand draw in their audience and motivate consumers to act. These messages should be realistic and not exaggerate, and not be belittling or overly directive, giving consumers the freedom to choose whether they want to engage with the issue or not.

## Gillette: the need for authenticity

In 2017, on the day after the inauguration of Donald Trump, women in the US marched the streets to draw attention to abuse, harassment and misogyny. In the wake of the #metoo movement, around 5 million women participated in the US alone, while similar marches in cities like Paris and Mexico City also drew hundreds of thousands of participants. Over the course of time, several brands aligned with this movement. Durex, for example, ran a number of high-profile campaigns highlighting the importance of sexual consent, and Twitter announced that they “stand with women”. While debate ensued over the integrity of some of these campaigns, the response to the endorsements was generally favorable.

However, one brand stood out in a negative way: Gillette. Playing on their classic “The best a man can get” – slogan, the brand launched “We Believe: The Best Men Can Be”. Contrary to their history of simply showing smooth, athletic and sexy men, Gillette took an outright activist stance in this campaign, explicit condemning toxic male behavior and urging men to behave better and set a good example for their sons. In addition to advocating for a more responsible model of masculinity, they pledged a three-year commitment to donate to organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

The video, however, became one of the most disliked videos on YouTube, and Marketing Week reported the campaign to have negative effects on sales. It is widely perceived as an example of woke-washing. The source of this negative response may be found in two things: first of all, the message is at odds with Gillette’s history of celebrating jock culture and sex appeal. With “The best a man can get” the brand had for decades encouraged men to get out and take what they can from life. This positioning is at odds with advocating the caring and nurturing side of men, and this makes it likely that consumers will not “buy” the stance. It is likely that this negative response was enhanced by the second factor: the assertive and lecturing tone of the campaign. Research by Kronrod, Grinstein and Wathieu (2012) has shown that assertive language is more likely to trigger reactance in people who disagree or are not fully aligned with the message. In other words: after decades of celebrating extreme masculinity, Gillette turned 180 degrees and told men they have been doing things wrong all the time. And while a segment of (male) customers did not like the campaign because they felt accused and attacked by “their” brand, the segment of consumers who were more aligned with the brand did not feel it was authentic.

Although some may say that the controversy of the campaign may have created a lot of attention for Gillette which is likely to have lifted brand awareness, most brand managers would be weary of the negative effects on brand image,

and the danger of consumer boycotting. To those, the Gillette campaign underlines the importance of brand-issue alignment, and the role of tone of voice: an assertive tone on a political stance may be too much to handle for consumers, and may be more “effective” in triggering opponents than in raising support for the issue (and the brand).

After this tumultuous launch, Gillette went on to release another campaign the following year titled “First Shave”, in which they portray a recently transitioned trans-man learning to share from his father. Made with more integrity, and a tone of voice that was celebratory and uplifting rather than accusational, this campaign was much better received by consumers. In recent years, Gillette has continued their development toward a more inclusive marketing communication strategy, and it is interesting to see how their brand developed from “the best a man can get” to “my best self”.

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# 4

## The impact of brand activism

The first three chapters of this book provided insights into the nature of brand activism, consumers' opinions about it, and how brands can select an issue to focus on. This chapter will discuss how brand activism influences different stakeholders. The chapter is summarized in the figure below. In the first paragraph, I discuss the impact of activism on consumers, and the factors that moderate this impact. The second paragraph discusses the impact of brand activism on employees (could brand activism help attract, motivate, and retain employees?). The third paragraph looks at the financial impact of brand activism: how do investors respond to brand activism, and how does it affect stock prices? Finally, the fourth paragraph of this chapter discusses the impact on the issue itself, and tries to answer the question of whether brands are good activists. For some of these questions, empirical data is available. For others, I draw on parallels with other contexts.

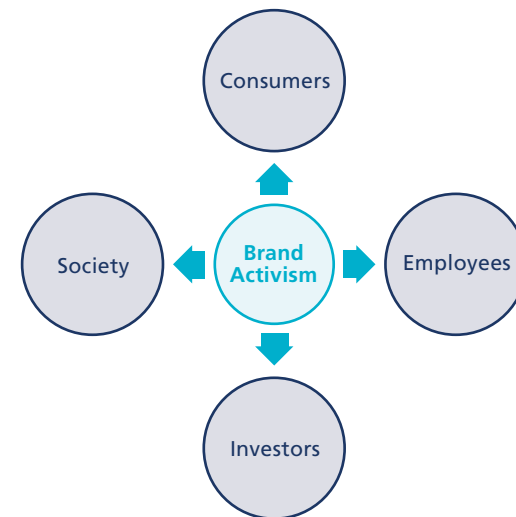


Figure 4.1 The impact of brand activism

### 4.1 The impact of brand activism on consumers

A number of papers has examined the impact of brand activism on consumers. This research will be discussed in this paragraph. The idea here is not to be exhaustive and discuss all studies, but to present an overview of the major findings and studies. The section will be divided into two subsections. Section 4.1.1 reviews studies that capture the impact of brand activism on consumer evaluations and preferences, and 4.1.2 delves into the psychological mechanisms underlying these effects.



### 4.1.1 Impact of brand activism on evaluations of brands and products

In four studies, conducted among consumers from the US, France, and the UK, Mukherjee and Althuisen (2020) examined how brand activism with regard to several issues ((illegal) immigrants, refugee rights and abortion) influenced consumers' brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Throughout the four studies, the authors consistently found a significant negative effect of activism on consumers who disagreed with the brand's stance, and no effect on consumers who agreed with the brand's stance. In their four experiments, the authors never found a significant positive effect of brand activism on consumers who agree with the brand. This pattern of findings is in line with the negativity bias discussed in section 3.2.1. Note however, that the lack of positive effects of activism can also be due to the methodology used in this research. Specifically, to compare the impact on consumers who agreed and consumers who disagreed with the brand's stance, the authors grouped together consumers who slightly agreed and consumers who agreed completely, on a four-point scale that forced respondents to either agree or disagree. As discussed in section 3.2.3, the effects of brand activism are strongest for people who find issue very important. When moderate and strong supporters are grouped together, the analysis is therefore more likely to produce less strong (insignificant) results.

In another article, published around the same time (Hydock, Paharia and Blair, 2020), the authors do find both positive and negative effects of brand activism. Their study reports six experiments examining a wide range of issues (refugees, transgender bathrooms, abortion and gun control in US samples, and Brexit in a UK sample). The paper ends with a Facebook study, where the authors examine the clickthrough rate for ads that are either aligned or misaligned with the consumers' political orientation. Unlike Mukherjee and Althuisen (2020), however, the authors not only found negative effects for consumers who disagree with the brand, but also significant *positive* effects for people who agree with the brand, although these effects are (in some of the studies) weaker than the negative effects for people who disagree (see my discussion in section 3.2.1). The same pattern was obtained in a German study (Jungblut and Johnen, 2021) looking at the effects of LGBT-focused advertising on consumer's brand image.

The discrepancy in the findings of these studies may be related to the extent to which consumers feel that the brand's opinion is personally relevant to them. This varies with the level of agreement or disagreement. Perhaps the positive response to brand activism occurs only when consumers strongly agree with the brand. To examine this idea, I conducted an experiment that allows for a more fine-grained analysis<sup>3</sup>. In this study, 200 US consumers (members of an online panel, age 18-70) were shown a press release of a large FMCG brand. They were randomly divided into two groups. Group one was shown a press release in which the brand announced

<sup>3</sup> The description here is abbreviated – a more detailed report on the study can be obtained from the author

its support for LGBT rights, and spoke out against discriminating state legislation. Group two was shown a neutral press release of equal length and style. After reading the message, they were asked for their evaluation of the brand, but also for their attitude toward the LGBT rights, using a scale developed by Brewer (2003).

The results were in line with the alignment model, and showed that consumers' responses to the activism were correlated with their attitude toward LGBT rights. Data analysis using a method known as the Johnson-Neyman technique, showed that the effect of brand activism was negative and significant for consumers with a score between 1 and 4.98 on the LGBT attitude scale, not significant for consumer scoring between 4.98 and 6.53 on this scale, and significant and positive only for those who scored 6.53 and higher (the maximum scale value was 7.00). At first sight, this result looks like bad news for brand activism: there is a clear negativity bias, and the effects of activism are negative even beyond the midpoint of the scale (on a scale from 1 to 7, the midpoint is 4). Significant *positive* effects are found only for people with a very high score on the LGBT-attitude scale (higher than 6.5 on a 7-point scale).

When we look at the distribution of scores in the sample, however, this conclusion changes dramatically. Only 12% of the sample scored between 1 and 5 on the LGBT-attitude scale, while 65% of the sample scored above 6.5. Taking into account the sample distribution of the opinions on the issue leads to a more nuanced picture of the negativity bias in the alignment model. On the one hand, there is clear support for a negativity bias, as brand activism had a negative effect for participants with a moderately low or neutral score (between 1 and 4.93), and only had a positive effect on consumers with a very strong agreement with the brand's stance (6.5 or higher on a seven-point scale). On the other hand, however, the overall effect of activism in this sample was positive, because a large majority of the sample (65%) held a strongly favorable attitude toward LGBT rights.

The results of this experiment clearly illustrate the importance of in-depth research of your brand audience, in order to understand and predict the effect of brand activism on consumer responses. If a brand raises its voice about an issue on which their customers have a strong opinion, those customers will react positively.

### 4.1.2 The psychological mechanism(s) behind the effect on consumers

Having established the effects of brand activism on consumers, let's focus on the psychological mechanism underlying this effect. Why does brand activism have a positive effect on consumers' brand evaluations?

#### **Brand identification**

Research in psychology and consumer behavior has shown that people use brands to establish their identity and express themselves. This contributes to the importance they can attach to brands, and the connection they feel with them. Brand identification refers to the extent to which consumers see the brand as part of their

selves, and experience cognitive and emotional connections with the brand. It can be measured by the self-brand connection scale, that includes items such as “I can identify with this brand”, “I feel a personal connection with this brand”, and “this brand reflects who I am”. In all studies discussed in the previous section (4.1.1), such a measure was included, with analyses showing that the influence of brand activism could be explained by the fact that consumers feel a strong connection with the brand when the brand expresses an opinion that is important to them. Conversely, they identify less with the brand when they disagree with its stance. Prior research has shown that an increase in brand identification is associated with greater brand loyalty. It also fosters word of mouth (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012).

The importance of brand identification is further enhanced as the brand becomes more closely associated with a particular issue. Such closer association may lead to a more social process, where the brand can be used to signal a certain (social) identity to others, and express one’s group membership (or desired membership). In other words, when the brand becomes more closely related with an issue, consumers can use the brand to signal that they support this cause – think of Patagonia’s close association with nature and environment, which has turned the brand into symbol or badge for consumers who want to associate themselves with this cause and express this identity to others. Brands may foster this symbolism, and even be careful about the (type of) consumers they want to associate themselves with. Such behavior could recently be observed in a heated discussion on LinkedIn, where Patagonia’s Benelux country manager urged a conservative (VVD) politician to stop wearing the brand in public, and invited her to send her Patagonia sweater to him, so that he could give her back the money. The post was later removed but signals the importance of social identities to activist brands (see Boon, 2022 for a column on this incident).

### **Emotional responses**

In another recent study, Garg and Saluja (2022) found that consumer responses to brand activism can also be explained through an emotional path. The study found that consumers who agree with a brand’s stance feel happier with the brand, and are proud about “their” brand’s engagement with the issue. The effects were reversed for consumers who disagreed with the issue. In a follow-up study, the authors found that these emotional responses were found only when the brand made an actual contribution to the issue. If the brand didn’t show actual involvement, and only paid “lip service” to the issue, there was no significant emotional response from people who agree with the brand. Notably, consumers who disagree with the brand’s stance still showed a negative response, regardless of whether the brand was actively involved or not. In both studies, no evidence was found for an effect of gratitude. It seems plausible, however, that this emotion becomes stronger when the issue is more personally relevant to the consumer.

### **Consumer Empowerment**

Qualitative research by Hajdas and Kleczek (2021) proposed one more mechanism for brand activism effects. In their research, the authors explored the role of consumer empowerment. By taking a stance on a political issue, the brand provides

consumers with an opportunity to actively engage with the issue – it enables them to “do something”. Brand activism provides consumers with a structural means of empowerment, especially when it enables them to support the organization or cause by financial or other means. In addition, it provides them with a psychological sense of empowerment that boosts self-esteem and gives them a sense of accomplishment. Related research by Kristofferson, White and Peloza (2014) found that such empowerment may have both positive and negative consequences: on the one hand, it may trigger a chain of commitment and consistency, as consumers feel the urge to act consistent with the commitment that they express by purchasing the product. On the other hand, consumers may feel that purchasing the activist brand (or perhaps even “liking” or sharing their social media post) relieves them from their responsibility to engage in further action, a phenomenon known as “slacktivism”.

## **4.2 The impact of brand activism on future and current employees**

Similar to consumers, the behavior and motivation of future and current employees may be influenced by brand activism. Several studies have examined the impact of brand activism and related constructs on such variables. These studies often focus on CEO activism, which is a specific form of brand activism where the activist message is distributed by the CEO, via social media (most often Twitter), a press release or in an interview. I review them below.

### **4.2.1 Impact on job seekers**

To study the impact of brand activism on job seekers, Roth and colleagues (2022) designed an experiment in which they showed 70 MBA and 224 upper-level business students a website on a fictional company. Participants were randomly assigned to a website showing either a pro or contra gun control message from the company. The results showed that alignment between organizational stance and the participant’s opinion had a positive effect on the extent to which participants liked the organization and thought they would enjoy working for it. In a different article, Appels (2022) reports a set of four studies using more than 1100 actual job seekers from the US recruited through online research platforms. His studies were focused on activist statements by CEOs. Using different examples (including statements pro or contra gun control, but also pro and contra gendered bathroom, his research shows that job seekers’ alignment with activist CEO statements leads to an increase in employer attractiveness and job pursuit intentions. Similar to research in the consumer domain (Hydock et al., 2020; Mukherjee and Althuizen, 2020), the findings of Appels suggest that the negative effect of misalignment was stronger than the positive effect of alignment.

### **4.2.2 Impact on current employees**

A large body of research in management and organizational psychology has shown that the congruence (another word for alignment) between values of the organization and values of the employees has a positive impact on employees, as measured

by their performance, citizenship behavior, well-being and various other measures (for an overview, see SWOCC publication 62 “Waarden aan het werk” by Joost Verhoeven and Claertje ter Hoeven). More recently, Aaker (2022) points out that working for a company with a social mission, inspires employees and makes them feel that they work for an organization that they are proud to be associated with – they understand why their company exists and why they go to work. The purpose or mission is in a good position to inspire because it is at the front of the parade, and it does not have a broad communication brief.

Because company activism is a recent phenomenon, there has been little research on this specific subject. One important exception is the recent study by Adam Wowak and colleagues. To measure the effect of activism on existing (current) employees of an organization, Wowak, Busenbark and Hambrick (2022) used a very inventive approach. Instead of collecting survey data, these authors relied on secondary data measuring the actual behavior of employees to CEO activism. In 2016, nearly 100 company CEOs signed a letter against the “bathroom bill” which the state of North Carolina rolled back a number of anti-discriminatory protections for LGBTQ individuals, including the right to use public bathrooms based on one’s gender identity rather than biological gender (hence the nickname “bathroom bill”). This created the opportunity for a “natural experiment” in which some aspect of the behavior of employees from companies whose CEO had signed the bill could be compared to the behavior of employees from companies whose CEO had *not* signed the bill. For this study, the researchers looked at differences in terms of the ratings that the companies received on “Glassdoor”, which is an online evaluation platform for companies, where employees leave anonymous reviews of their employers. In addition to this, the researchers analyzed donation data for political parties, to establish the extent to which employees of a company were oriented more to the Democratic Party or to the Republican Party (the Republicans favored the bathroom bill, and the Democrats opposed it). Obviously, the researchers needed to control statistically for all kinds of natural variations between the two groups of companies. After doing so, the results showed that the organizational commitment of employees was influenced significantly by the extent to which the activism of the CEO was aligned with the political orientation of the employees. The negativity bias that was found for job seekers and consumers was not found in this study, perhaps because employees are much more personally involved with the opinion of the CEO than job seekers or consumers. An interesting question here is whether it is good or bad that CEO activism deters nonaligned employees: on the one hand, an activist CEO might result in a team of employees that is more coherent and shares a strong common culture. On the other hand, it might be detrimental to the (political) diversity of the organization if an activist CEO “scares off” employees with different political views.

### 4.3 The impact of brand activism on investors

When Nike’s famous (infamous?) Colin Kaepernick ad launched, there were numerous reports on the campaign’s negative effect on Nike’s stock price, following media coverage of negative consumer reactions on the day of launch. Later reports

were more positive in tone, pointing out that three days later, Nike’s stock price had bounced back and risen to a new high. Another - perhaps less known - example of turbulent market responses to activism is provided by the US retail chain Dick’s Sporting Goods. In 2018, after yet another high school shooting, this company announced that they would stop selling rifles. This move was welcomed by many members of the general public, but also received considerable pushback from gun manufacturers, the National Rifle Association, and some of the company’s employees. Shortly after the announcement, the company reported a drop in sales, but in the longer term its stock prices showed a steady increase, which the company itself attributed to the positive effect of their activism on brand loyalty and goodwill (Eilert and Nappier Cherup, 2020). Two academic studies have investigated the impact of brand activism on stock prices in more systematic way, using a methodology known as “event study”. An event study is a statistical method that is used to examine stock market responses to a specific event, such as a new product launch, an acquisition, or some other announcement by the company. Often, these studies combine data on a set of events and establish the average impact of a specific type of event on stock market prices. Using statistical tools, the methodology captures the “abnormal” fluctuations in stock price in a specific window of time after the event. In this way, researchers can assess investors’ responses to the event.

Two studies have investigated investor responses to brand activism (or “corporate sociopolitical activism”). For the first study (Bhagwat et al., 2020), researchers collected data on 293 events involving 149 US-based firms between January 2011 and October 2016, and examined the movement of stock prices after events that were coded as “activist announcements”. Examples included announcements such as Twitter’s introduction of a special Black Lives Matter emoji, JCPenney’s 2012 Mothers’ Day ad with two lesbian mothers, and Lowe’s decision to stop advertising on a reality show focusing on Muslims. The study found that, on average, investors respond negatively to corporate activism, with a significant negative effect of a 0.4% drop in shareholder value. This effect was significantly stronger (more negative) when the company was perceived to have more conservative customers and employees (most of the activism was progressive), and when the event deviated more from government standpoints and policies. The negative effect was mitigated (became less negative) when company communications linked the event to business interests, or when the event constituted a shared action with the brands (i.e., a collective stance taken by multiple brands at the same time). The second study (Mkrtchyan, Sandvik and Zhu, 2022) focused on CEO activism, and analyzed a more extensive set of 1402 events collected from January 2011 to December 2019, where CEOs of large firms (in the S&P 500) communicated their opinions on socio-political issues. The data showed a rapid increase in the proportion of S&P 500 CEOs making such statements (from 1% in 2011 to 10% in 2016, 16% in 2017, 25% in 2018 and 38% in 2019). The most popular topics were issues related to LGBT equality, the environment, inclusion, and renewable energy. Contrary to the first study, this study found a significant *positive* market response to activism of 0.12-0.17%. In their paper, the authors make an attempt to distinguish between CEO announcements that reflect standpoints of the firm and announcements that merely reflect views of

the individual CEO. The results show no significant differences between firm activism and CEO activism.

The two academic studies on the subject provide different answers to the question of investor responses to brand activism. While the first study (Bhagwat et al., 2020) shows a significant negative effect, the second study (Mkrtchyan, Sandvik and Zhu, 2022) shows a significant positive effect. Some important differences between the studies should be noted. First of all, the Bhagwat et al. is based on a much smaller sample of events (293 vs 1402). As Mkrtchyan and colleagues point out, the number of activist events has increased dramatically over the years. In 2016 (the last year of data in Bhagwat et al.), a mere 10% of CEOs engaged in activism. In 2019, this had increased to 38%. A simple count shows that more than two-thirds of the data in the study of Mkrtchyan and colleagues was collected after 2016. It thus seems that investor response to activism has become more positive.

This conclusion was confirmed in our own analysis of more recent data from US-based companies (2018-2022) where we also found a substantial positive response of stock prices to brand activism (Herhausen, Verlegh, Anik, and Sotgiu, 2022). A second difference that should be noted is that Mkrtchyan and colleagues included much more “mild” instances of activism, compared to the stronger actions examined by Bhagwat and colleagues. Both papers include analyses suggesting that this may have played a role: Mkrtchyan and colleagues found that investors respond less favorably to statements that are more vivid and outspoken. Similarly, Bhagwat and colleagues find that investor responses are more negative when the stand that is taken is more extreme (i.e., deviates more from the viewpoints of the company and current government policy), they also find that investor responses become more negative when the activism involves actions in addition to words. Although the two studies also differ in other respects, their results seem to suggest that investor responses to brand activism in more recent years have shifted from negative to positive, although they seem to be wary of more radical viewpoints.

#### 4.4 The impact of brand activism on the issue

As a community which is focused on branding, communication and marketing, our attention is almost automatically drawn to the impact of brand activism on consumers, brands, and companies. But what about the issue, and society at large? Are brands good activists, and how should we as a society feel about their engagement? There is not much research on these questions, but I will try to address them in this paragraph.

Two studies may help answer the question of whether brands are (can be) good advocates for a cause. The first is an experiment by Chatterji and Toffel (2019), which investigated voters' responses to a political statement opposing an Indiana state law that was restricting LGBT-rights. The results showed that the statement to this response did not differ when it was made by either Apple CEO Tim Cook (who did actually make such a statement), or the mayor of Indianapolis, suggesting that

he was at least as good a spokesperson as a local political leader. Of course, this is a particular one-off example, that involves a CEO, who is a representative of his brand, but at the same time also a celebrity, with a history of speaking up about LGBT issues. Perhaps more informative are the results of the second relevant study, which used data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dastidar, Sunder and Shah, 2022). These authors examined the relationship between TV advertising related to COVID-19 (split into government/public advertising, and commercial brand advertising), and changes in social mobility data (using data that measured crowding/ social distancing based on GPS localization data of cell phones). Using advanced econometric techniques, these authors found that brand's COVID-19 advertising (see textbox on p. XX for a reflection on this) had a positive influence on social distancing behavior, when controlling for the effect of government policies (mask mandates, lockdowns). In contrast, government advertising had no effects on such behavior, and when it was combined with restrictive policies, it even had a negative effect, suggesting that citizens reacted against government advice. Examining completely different cases, both these studies suggest that brands can be effective advocates for social issues. Combined with large marketing budgets and competence, brands are well-equipped to make a difference if they feel like doing so.

In an extensive theoretical analysis, Eilert and Nappier Cherup (2020) provide a more detailed overview of the ways in which brands can help advance social causes, focusing on three mechanisms: (1) raising awareness, (2) influencing attitudes, and (3) closing the intention-behavior gap. Raising issue awareness is key element of making progress on social issues. Using their creative talents and their considerable reach, brands can be very powerful agents in increasing awareness on social issues. In this way, brand can play an important role in remedying the shortage of knowledge among segments of the public that are difficult to reach by governments and NGOs. Once awareness is established, brands can play a role in influencing attitudes and closing the intention-behavior gap. Brands may achieve this by applying normative pressure or by facilitating desired behaviors. Normative pressure can be created by normalizing issues, for example by displaying a greater diversity of bodies and genders in advertising. In other cases, it normative pressure can be built by de-normalizing practices, for example by removing “Zwarte Piet” from packaging and shop floors – a good case is Bol.com, who was one of the first major retailers that publicly announced they would ban the character. Facilitation of behaviors can help close the intention-behavior gap. This be achieved by providing consumers with accessible alternatives, such as vegan food options, or climate-friendly variants of household products.

An interesting observation was made by Aaker (2022), in his recent book on purpose branding. He notes that businesses can complement governments and NGOs in addressing societal issues. Companies have extensive ability and experience in managing change, and can act independent of voter preference. They are agile organizations that are able to act quickly and to adapt their programs when circumstances change, and are able to develop and then scale solutions. Government entities are generally more effective in implementing solutions at a larger scale, addressing issues that are supported by a politically meaningful part of society.

## 4.5 Key learnings of this chapter

- Brand activism influences consumers' brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and preferences. A negativity bias in this effect means that the negative impact of brand activism on consumers who disagree may be stronger than the positive effect on consumers who agree with you. This simple observation ignores two important things: (1) the percentage of consumers who agree with you (your opinion share) is likely to be larger than your market share, which leaves plenty of room for a positive market-level effect. (2) the impact of brand activism is especially strong for people who are highly involved with the topic – and these might often be found among the groups of consumers you seek to support.
- The effect of brand activism on consumers can be explained by three different psychological mechanisms:
  1. *brand identification*: by associating itself with an issue that is important to consumers, the brand establishes a connection with the identity that consumers value and seek to express to others.
  2. *emotional responses*: brand activism can make consumers feel happier with their brand, and establish a feeling of pride.
  3. *consumer empowerment*: activist brands provide consumers with an opportunity to engage with a social issue, enabling them to “do something”. But beware of slacktivism – a reduced sense of urgency that can occur when consumers feel that their purchase of an activist brand means they have “done enough”.
- Employees prefer to work for brands that share the employee's values and opinions on important social issues. This has been found for job seekers, but also for current employees. For jobseekers, the negative effects of misalignment may be even stronger than the positive effects of alignment. For current employees, the effect is equally strong in both cases.
- Although older studies of stock market responses suggest that investors may have a negative response to brand activism, more recent data shows a positive response, although investors seem to remain wary of organizations that take extreme stances.
- With large marketing budgets and appropriate competences, brands are well-equipped to make a difference on social issues. Brand activism can raise awareness, influence people's attitudes toward the issue, and close the intention-behavior gap by showing that a behavior is (or is not) normatively accepted in society, or by helping consumers to align their behaviors with their preferences (for example by providing wider access to vegan food options, climate-friendly products, or clothing that is not gender-normative).

### Oatly: controversy, apology, and engagement

Pro-vegan; anti-dairy activism is part of Oatly's DNA, and has taken a central place in their brand communication throughout the history of the brand. But even a brand like Oatly makes mistakes – although you have to admit: they handle them with elegance...

In February 2022, Oatly shared an Instagram post showcasing a set of clothing patches with statements like “100% vegan, 10% of the time”, “Justice for planet Earth from 8 – 9 AM” and “Breakfast time climate warrior”. In a playful manner, the post celebrated how small changes can meaningfully contribute to the planet and human welfare. Unfortunately, the post offended part of the brand's core community of users, who felt that the did not show appreciation for the dedication of their traditional long-term customers, who are often “100% vegan, 100% of the time”.

In response to the protests of these customers, Oatly apologized in a follow-up post, five days later, with a picture of a clothing patch that was shaped like a trophy, stating “a world-class plant-based screw-up”. In an extremely transparent post, they acknowledged their insensitivity towards the vegan community, and promised to do better in the future. Here is an insightful quote from their text: “...we were looking for a humorous, quippy way to encourage people to make small dietary choices that can help us reduce our reliance on dairy and take a step toward a plant-based diet.... Last week's attempt was a failure, but we're committed to getting it right next time”. The apology was well received and seemed to patch up (sorry for that pun) the relationship with the vegan community.

This case illustrates how activism requires sensitivity and openness toward the communities and causes that the brand chooses to represent. In the case of Oatly, this was backed up by a longstanding commitment to their “big ideal”. It also shows the importance of continuous engagement. In the strategy of Oatly, this means that the brand does not shy away from controversy, and is continuously looking for ways to trigger their customers and other stakeholders.

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Oatly's Instagram feed, posts of February 3 and February 8, 2022

# 5

## Conclusion: discover your brand's inner activist

Brands are in a unique position to establish social change and make progress on social issues. They have an enormous reach and visibility among consumers and other stakeholders, possess ample capabilities in management and marketing, and have considerable marketing budgets at their disposal. An activist brand can use these resources to achieve societal goals set by its management. Advertising messages can be crafted to raise awareness for societal issues and influence people's attitudes to build support. By making choices that express their opinions, brands can influence what consumers see and hear on a daily basis, thereby influencing their beliefs about what is (and what is not) accepted in society. By adjusting their product ranges, pricing and distribution, brands can nudge consumers toward choices and behaviors that make a difference on the challenges that face our society.

In addition to leading (or at least contributing to) social transformation, brand activism can elicit favorable emotional responses in consumers and employees, and enhance the extent to which people feel attached to the brand and identify with it. Activism shows what a brand stands for, and injects meaning into the brand. To "unlock" these benefits, and maximize the value of activism for the brand and the issue it chooses to advocate, brand activism should be (1) aligned with the brand's purpose and values, (2) aligned with the values and opinions of its customers (or the consumers that the brand seeks to target), and (3) make its stance in a way that is meaningful and authentic – in line with the brand's offerings and heritage, and in line with the behavior of the organization behind the brand.

This book offers an overview of the relevant research on brand activism, enhanced with examples and insights from adjacent literature. The findings show that raising your voice on societal issues may be beneficial to both society and the organization. The book offers guidance and helps brands manage the risks and benefits associated with brand activism. But above all, it is aimed at providing a deeper understanding of how activism works. I hope that this book inspires you to discover your inner brand activist. That it makes you engage in informed discussions with colleagues in your organization and in the field of marketing, but also with society at large. The knowledge in this book could enrich these conversations.

Not every brand needs to engage in activism – but every brand should think about it, and be able to explain why it does or does not want to act on broader societal challenges. In this sense, this publication provides brands with a framework, but also gives them some homework. Take it serious! Together with your consumers and your employees, I will be checking whether you did a good job.

## 5.1 Acknowledgement

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## Summary

In the past years, we have seen a number of high-profile examples of brand activism, from brands like Nike, Patagonia and Ben & Jerry's. Brand activism is defined as "the act of publicly taking a stand on divisive social or political issues by a brand or an individual associated with a brand". Take a look at this definition, and note the emphasis on *publicly*: the brand is not "doing good while nobody is watching", but it speaks up and advocates, voicing its opinion to the world. In a world where people are strongly divided on many social or political issues, this means that brand activism comes at a cost: you may win the hearts of some consumers, but you also lose those who do not agree with you. This is precisely what sets brand activism apart from its vanilla brother, corporate social responsibility (CSR). Brand activism is also not the same as "brand purpose". First of all, brand activism is always related to social and/or political causes, while a brand purpose may also be related to a key benefit ("we offer cheap and easy flights for everyone"), or to the brand's culture ("everything for a smile"). Even when a brand's purpose is linked to a social cause (as in the case of Patagonia's "we're in business to save our home planet"), there is a second difference between purpose and activism. While purpose describes the driving principle of a brand, brand activism is a particular activity that is focused on the public advocacy of the brand's stance on societal issues. Even in a purpose driven, activist company like Patagonia, this means that we can distinguish between the brand's purpose, as encoded in its mission: "we are in business to save our home planet", and its activism, which is exemplified by its - highly publicized - campaigns like "vote the assholes out" during the 2020 US elections, or its stance against the commercialization of public lands (in 2016). The brand chose to be activist, rather than pursue its purpose quietly behind the scenes, by minimizing its environmental impact, lobbying with governments, and collaborating with NGOs.

There are roughly two reasons why brands engage in activism: the first is to raise awareness of an issue, and encourage socio-political change. The second is to seek benefits in terms of reputation (brand image) and economic gain (increased sales, loyalty, willingness to pay). In an ideal world, those two goals can be combined. Chapter three of this publication presents the aligned activism model, which proposes that there is an "A-spot". In the A-spot, brands engage in activism that aligns with its purpose and behavior, advocating a stance that is in line with the opinion and values of their customers and employees.

As part of this research, I conducted a survey among 1019 Dutch consumers. The results suggest that these consumers are mildly positive about brand activism, with about equal numbers being in favor, neutral and against the practice. In line with experimental research on activism we find that agreement on an issue is a reason to buy a brand for 25% of Dutch consumers, while for a larger group (38%), disagreement is a reason *not* to buy a brand. This should not, however, discourage brands

from being activist: a simple numerical analysis suggests that the net effect on the brand will be positive as long as the proportion of consumers who agree with the brand is larger than the proportion of people who buy the brand (its market share). Even for brands with market shares of up to 20 or 30 percent, this usually means that brand activism is more likely to help rather than hurt the brand (see page 32 for this argument).

Across all our questions, we consistently find that younger consumers (18-35) are most supportive of brand activism, while older consumers (66 and older) respond more negatively. Also, consumers who identify themselves as more left-wing on the political spectrum are more supportive of brand activism than right-leaning consumers. Note that these effects are additive: young, left-leaning consumers show the most positive responses. In addition to these overall opinions, we examined for a variety of issues whether consumers thought it was appropriate for brands to take a stand on them. We find that brand activism is generally seen as appropriate for topics related to the business process itself (climate change, pollution, fair trade) or that are universally seen as “good” (human rights, free speech, anti-racism). For more controversial issues, like LGBTQ rights, refugee rights, abortion or the Dutch slavery past, there is more variation on whether or not a brand should share its opinion – for details, see Table 5 on page 24.

Although there is not a lot of research on the issue, the existing evidence suggests that investor responses to brand activism initially were negative, but in recent years have shifted to the positive side, with evidence for a positive effect of brand activism on company value, as measured through stock prices. Investors still, however, seem to be wary of too radical viewpoints. With their large marketing budgets and considerable competences, brands seem well-equipped to make a difference on social issues. Specifically, there are three ways in which brands can help advance social causes, by (1) raising awareness, (2) influencing attitudes of consumers and other stakeholders, and (3) closing the intention-behavior gap, by applying normative pressure (normalizing positive behaviors), or by facilitating desired behaviors by providing easy access to products and services that help consumers who achieve their goals of promoting a better world, for example by providing consumers with good and accessible alternatives, like the meat-free options of The Vegetarian Butcher, the climate-friendly variants of household products of Seventh Generation or the socially responsible investments of Triodos or ASN banks.

Brands that speak out on social issues can contribute to positive change, and create stronger ties with consumers and employees. But not every brand has to be an activist: it only works if it fits with the brand’s purpose and translates into behaviors.

# SWOCC uitgaven 1995-2022

## Publicaties

### 86. Medewerkers als Merkgdragers dr. Joost Verhoeven (2022)

Deze publicatie geeft inzicht in de effectiviteit en werking van merkbeleid, gericht op (1) de realisatie van alignement tussen organisatie/medewerkers en merk en (2) de activatie van merkambassadeurs onder organisatieleden. Hoe raken medewerkers betrokken bij het merk? En hoe kun je medewerkers activeren?

### 85. Brand: Kroniek van het ontstaan en ontwikkeling van merken

Giep Franzen, Mary Hoogerbrugge, Daan Muntinga, Andy Santegoeds, Tijs Timmerman, Rob Revet, Andy Mosmans, Onno Maathuis, Margot Bouwman, Daan de Raaf, Kim Cramer, Esther Overmars, Frank Peters, Peeter Verlegh, Joost Verhoeven, Boris Nihom, Karel Slootman, Jeroen de Bakker, Ronald Laan, Marc Oosterhout, Tom Dobber, Marc van Eck, Guy van Liemt, Peter van Woensel Kooy (2022)

Met “Brand: Kroniek van het ontstaan en de ontwikkeling van merken” staan we stil bij het laatste werk van onze oprichter Giep Franzen. De ontwikkeling van merken heeft Giep tot op de laatste dagen van zijn leven beziggehouden. Zijn laatste teksten zijn door MarketingTribune gepubliceerd in 19 afzonderlijke columns. Het werk van Giep was echter nog niet klaar. SWOCC heeft daarom de teksten gebundeld en aangevuld met de visies van merkprofessionals van nu.

### 84. Sensory Branding dr. Ivar Vermeulen (2021)

Sensory branding – het toevoegen van sensorische stimuli zoals geur, smaak, en tast aan merkcommunicatie – wordt door veel marketingprofessionals gezien als een aantrekkelijke optie om het palet aan communicatiemogelijkheden te vergroten. In deze SWOCC-publicatie wordt ingegaan op de vraag hoe sensory branding verschilt van andere vormen van branding, wat de mogelijkheden zijn voor marketingcommunicatie en hoe je sensory branding effectief kan toepassen in de praktijk.

### 83. Succes met storytelling op sociale media dr. L.M. Willemsen, A.A.B. Flikweert, MA, K. Mazerant, MA en K.P. Stolk, MA (2021)

Het vertellen van verhalen is populair onder zowel merk als mens: het is een krachtige manier van communiceren. In deze publicatie gaat SWOCC op zoek naar de vraag welke factoren bijdragen aan het succes van verhalen die merken delen op sociale media. Hoe vertel je op sociale media een verhaal dat mensen willen horen en doorvertellen? Een verhaal waarmee een merk erin slaagt om consumenten te boeien, betrekken en binden? Kortom, hoe vertel je een succesvol verhaal dat engagement oproept?

### 82. Augmented Reality: mogelijkheden en meerwaarde voor merkcommunicatie Dr. Anne Roos Smink (2021)

Deze publicatie biedt een checklist die inzichtelijk maakt wat Augmented Reality voor een merk kan betekenen, waar aan gedacht moet worden bij de creatieve invulling van de AR ervaring en waar rekening mee moet worden gehouden in de uitvoering.

### 81. Merk als Mens dr. L.M. Willemsen (2020)

In deze publicatie gaan we op zoek naar de betekenis achter het merk als mens. Wat is ervoor nodig om merken te beschouwen als menselijke zielen waarmee consumenten zich willen verbinden? De publicatie biedt een menselijke maat om het merk als mens tot leven te brengen via verschillende vermenselijkingsstrategieën.

### 80. Merkmanagement Modellen: de SWOCC Selectie dr. mr. P.H. Coebergh MBA (2020)

Welke modellen helpen om snel tot de kern van een probleem te komen, gedegen en onderbouwd advies te geven, of gericht onderzoek op te zetten voor de ontwikkeling van effectief merkbeleid? In Merkmanagement Modellen: de SWOCC Selectie wordt een overzicht gegeven van de modellen op het gebied van marketing, merken en communicatie anno 2020.

### 79. Gepersonaliseerde Marketingcommunicatie dr. J. Strycharz (2020)

Dit rapport beschrijft het spanningsveld tussen het bedrijfsleven, de consument en de wetgever bij de inzet van gepersonaliseerde marketingcommunicatie.

**78. Hoe Medewerkers Merken Maken**  
dr. J.W.M. Verhoeven (2019)

Deze publicatie geeft antwoord op de volgende vragen: Op welke manier kunnen organisaties ervoor zorgen dat medewerkers door middel van hun gedrag het merk versterken? Hoe ontwikkel je een sterke merkkultuur? En hoe motiveer je medewerkers om het merk te versterken?

**77. Automated 1-2-1 Communication**

dr. T. Araujo, dr. C. ter Hoeven en dr. W. van Zoonen (2019)

Deze publicatie heeft als doel te laten zien hoe merken strategisch gebruik kunnen maken van de conversational agents voor geautomatiseerde communicatie met consumenten. De publicatie biedt een checklist aan om communicatie-professionals te ondersteunen in dit proces.

**76. Influencer Marketing**

dr. E. van Reijmersdal & dr. T. Domingues Aguiar (2018)

In deze publicatie worden de volgende vragen beantwoord: Wat is influencer marketing? Wie is wie in influencer marketing? Hoe gebruiken merken influencer marketing? En vooral: hoe kan je het beste een samenwerking met influencers aangaan? De publicatie wordt afgesloten met een handige influencer marketing checklist.

**75. Corporate branding and consumers on social media**

dr. T. Araujo (2018)

Gebaseerd op analyses over het social media gedrag van consumenten en bedrijven, geeft deze publicatie antwoord op de vraag welke beslissingen bedrijven dienen te nemen bij het opzetten (of heroverwegen) van hun social media activiteiten om het corporate merk optimaal te benutten.

**74. Brand metrics that matter**

dr. D. Muntinga & dr. S. Bernritter (2017)

Deze publicatie dient als handleiding om de 'metrics that matter' te selecteren, de metrics die merkbeheerders kunnen helpen hun merk écht te laten groeien.

**73. Corporate branding and consumers**

dr. T. Araujo (2017)

Op basis van een literatuurreview en een groot-schalig consumentenonderzoek, laat deze publicatie zien op welke manier corporate branding relevant kan zijn voor consumenten en hoe ze beïnvloed kunnen worden. Zo blijkt dat corporate reputatie en imago, net als corporate ability van het bedrijf en CSR, de klanttevredenheid en loyaliteit beïnvloeden.

**72. Creative Media Advertising**

dr. M.H.C. Meijers, dr. J. Eelen & dr. H.A.M. Voorveld (2016)

CMA maakt verrassend gebruik van alledaagse objecten als reclamemedium waarbij het gekozen medium de boodschap impliciet communiceert. De publicatie geeft aanbevelingen voor effectieve inzet van CMA.

**71. Mediaorkestratie**

dr. H.A.M. Voorveld (2016)

Deze publicatie helpt adverteerders onderbouwde keuzes te maken over de inzet van merkcommunicatie op verschillende (social) media. Een stappenplan voor effectieve media-orkestratie biedt tevens handvatten voor verbetering van het gesprek over media-inzet.

**70. Doelstellingen behalen met contentmarketing**

dr. C.C. Liebrecht (2015)

Welke content kan in welke hoedanigheid ingezet worden om contentmarketingdoelstellingen te behalen? De inzichten in deze publicatie vormen de basis voor de opzet van een effectieve contentmarketingstrategie.

**69. Webcare: van experimenten naar professionaliseren**

dr. L.M. Willemsen & dr. G. van Noort (2015)

Deze publicatie brengt wetenschappelijk onderzoek naar de effecten van webcare in kaart. Het biedt hiermee handvatten voor het formuleren van een effectieve webcarestrategie.

**68. Merken in b2b**

C. Kiksen, MSc (2015)

In deze publicatie onderzoekt SWOCC de rol die het merk speelt in de business-to-businessmarkt. Het wordt duidelijk in welke situaties, op welke momenten en met welke acties b2b-marketeers een aankoopproces kunnen beïnvloeden.

**67. Impliciet meten is weten?**

dr. L. Vandeberg (2014)

Expliciete vraagmethoden geven soms een vertekend of incorrect beeld van wat er in consumenten omgaat. Deze publicatie bespreekt hoe impliciete metingen in dergelijke situaties het onderzoek kunnen verbeteren.

**66. Merkbeheer: het merkmanagement van morgen**

dr. D.G. Muntinga (2014)

Deze publicatie schetst de contouren van een alternatief merkmanagementsysteem gebaseerd op *merkbeheer*. Theoretische en praktische inzichten leiden tot tien uitgangspunten voor het merkmanagement van morgen.

**65. De loyale consument**

dr. J. Eelen (2014)

Deze publicatie zien hoe loyaal FMCG-merken worden aangekocht en wat de relatie is tussen loyaliteit en betrokken (online) merkgerelateerd gedrag van consumenten.

**64. Waarden aan het werk**

dr. J.W.M. Verhoeven & dr. C.L. ter Hoeven (2013)

Een onderzoek naar de wederkerige relatie tussen organisatiemerkwaarden en werkwaarden van medewerkers. De publicatie geeft aanbevelingen om waarden effectief in te zetten voor merk- en personeelsmanagement.

**63. Merkloyaliteit: van routine naar bewust gedrag**

dr. S. de Bakker (2013)

Deze publicatie geeft op basis van een literatuurstudie en expertinterviews inzicht in het fenomeen merkloyaliteit.

**62. Crisiscommunicatie: van ramp tot dialoog**

L. Epping, MSc (2012)

Een gedetailleerde casestudy van de BP oliecrisis, waarbij de effecten van verschillende soorten crisiscommunicatie (pr, nieuwsmedia, sociale media) op de reputatie en beurskoers van BP zijn onderzocht.

**61. De jonge consument**

prof. dr. M.A. Buijzen & dr. E. Rozendaal (2012)

Deze SWOCC-publicatie biedt de inzichten en handvatten die nodig zijn voor verantwoorde commerciële communicatie gericht op kinderen.

**60. Medewerkers als merkambassadeurs**

dr. J.W.M. Verhoeven (2012)

Hoe gedragen medewerkers zich op sociale media en hoe is dit van invloed op het organisatiemerk?

**59. Het organisatiemerk is van iedereen. Samensturende managers, medewerkers en stakeholders**

dr. P. Verhoeven (2011)

SWOCC presenteert een communicatief framing-perspectief op organisatiebranding, waarbij het organisatiemerk wordt gevormd in de interactie tussen de vele verschillende stakeholders.

**58. Postillon d'amour tussen wetenschap en praktijk / Tien onderzoekslijnen**

prof. dr. F. Bronner (2011)

De afscheidsrede van Fred Bronner en een overzicht van de tien onderzoekslijnen waaraan hij in de loop der jaren richting heeft gegeven.

**57. Eye-catching**

S. Boerman, MSc (2011)

Wat maakt dat een tijdschriftlezer wel of juist niet naar een advertentie kijkt? Deze publicatie behandelt de advertentie- en contextkenmerken die de aandacht trekken of afleiden.

**56. De gewapende consument**

drs. D. van Veenendaal, dr. M. Fransen & prof. dr. Edith Smit (2011)

Waarom bieden consumenten weerstand tegen reclame? Welke strategieën hanteert men daarbij? En op welke manier kun je als adverteerder of voorlichter inspelen op deze gewapende consument?

**55. Klantinzicht. Tijd voor een overzicht**

drs. I. Voskuyl & drs. R. van Ossenbruggen (2011)

Het gebruik van klantinzicht is essentieel om feilloos aan te sluiten bij de belevingswereld van de consument, maar hoe zorg je voor een succesvolle implementatie ervan?

**54. Van massa naar mens. Bereksonderzoek in een veranderende mediawereld**  
drs. D. van Veenendaal & drs. J. Faasse (2010)

Wat betekenen fragmentatie, convergentie, crossmediale onvergelykbaarheid voor de toekomst van bereksonderzoek?

**53. Wie is bang van fear appeals? Angstprikkels in sociale marketing**  
prof. dr. P. de Pelsmacker (2010)

Hoe kunnen angstprikkels tot gewenst gedrag aanzetten? Specifieke omstandigheden spelen hierbij een rol.

**52. Het succes van idealen. Merkoriëntatie bij goede doelen organisaties**  
drs. N. Kooiman (2010)

Merkoriëntatie loont, ook voor goede doelen. Hoe kunnen goede doelen organisaties het merk centraal zetten? Een handzaam stappenplan wordt geboden.

**51. Mens, Milieu & Meerwaarde. Nut en noodzaak van MVO**  
drs. M. Doets (2010)

Wat kan MVO voor mijn bedrijf betekenen en hoe kunnen we het implementeren? Wat zijn tien do's en don'ts om het MVO-beleid geloofwaardig over te brengen op de consument.

**50. Liber Amicorum voor Giep Franzen**  
drs. M.C. Hoogerbrugge, dr. M. Moorman, prof. dr. W.F. van Raaij, prof. dr. E.G. Smit & dr. R. van der Vorst (2009)

Een dankbetuiging aan de oprichter van SWOCC, Giep Franzen. De visies van 50 (oud-) SWOCC-ers op de kloof tussen wetenschap en praktijk en de rol van SWOCC hierbinnen.

**49. Brand Portfolio and Brand Architecture Strategies**  
prof. M.P. Franzen (2009)

In deze Engelstalige publicatie is de theorie op het gebied van portfolio-management en merkarchitectuur gebundeld.

**48. Moet je horen... Een onderzoek naar de basis van positieve word-of-mouth**  
drs. B. Nihom (2009)

Welke factoren bepalen de kans dat iemand positieve WOM over een organisatie, merk, product of dienst zal verspreiden? En hoe kunnen deze factoren worden ingezet bij het ontwikkelen van merk- en communicatiestrategie?

**47. Merkoriëntatie als succesrecept**  
drs. I. Voskuyl (2009)

Wat zijn de 'ingrediënten' van merkoriëntatie? Een stappendiagram en een merkoriëntatie checklist bieden de belangrijkste voorwaarden voor het creëren en behouden van een merkgeoriënteerde organisatie.

**46. Merkdessign. Een ruwe diamant in merkenland**  
drs. R. Peeters (2008)

Welke bijdrage kan design leveren? Naast het antwoord op deze vraag, biedt de publicatie een aantal concrete aanbevelingen om design als merkinstrument volledig te benutten.

**45. Onbewust beïnvloed. Hoe reclame werkt zonder dat je het weet én hoe je het meet**  
drs. S. Reus, drs. S. van der Land & dr. M. Moorman (2008)

Deze publicatie zet uiteen hoe reclame onbewust beïnvloedt en hoe deze onbewuste invloed kan worden gemeten.

**44. Een scheve schaats. Over de keerzijde van sportsponsoring**  
drs. D.G. Muntinga (2008)

Hoewel veel sponsorexperts negatieve effecten afdoen als 'onmogelijk', blijkt uit dit onderzoek dat sponsors zich met sportsponsoring wel dégelijk op glad ijs kunnen begeven.

**43. Sportsponsoring in beeld**  
drs. M. Doets (2008)

Deze publicatie schept duidelijkheid in wat een sponsorproject oplevert en, niet onbelangrijk, hoe een bedrijf dit kan onderzoeken.

**42. Reclamebriefing. Een goede brief is het halve werk**  
drs. T. van der Peet (2007)

Met de Brief Toolbox (bouwstenen voor het opstellen van een goede brief), adviezen voor het ideale briefingsproces en tien gouden briefregels is dit een praktisch handboek waarmee u elk briefingstraject kunt doorstaan.

**41. Brand Equity and Brand Value. Principles, measurement and management**  
prof. M.P. Franzen (2007)

Deze publicatie geeft een overzicht van de basisprincipes, meetmethodes en strategische implicaties bij brand equity.

**40. Extreme brand makeover. Het proces van rebranding onderzocht**  
drs. R. Peeters (2007)

Deze publicatie biedt vijftien randvoorwaarden en een stappenmodel voor het succesvol uitvoeren van een re-branding.

**39. Geïntegreerd merkbeleid. Het wiel van de toekomst**  
drs. A. Giling (2006)

In deze publicatie presenteert SWOCC het Integrated Branding Wheel, een toepasbaar model, waarmee bedrijven stapsgewijs worden meegenomen naar een geïntegreerd merkbeleid.

**38. Multimediasynergie**  
prof. dr. F. Bronner (2006)

In deze publicatie wordt beschreven wat de effecten zijn van multimediacampagnes, hoe je deze kunt meten en welke vuistregels je kunt hanteren om het beste resultaat met een multimediale campagne te bereiken.

**37. The SWOCC book of Brand Management Models**  
prof. M.P. Franzen (2006)

In dit Engelstalige boek geeft merkexpert Giep Franzen een overzicht van modellen uit wetenschap en praktijk, op het gebied van verschillende componenten van merkbeleid en merkwerking.

**36. Onderzoek: kennis als fundament (jubileum drieluik)**  
drs. T. van der Peet (2005)

Deze publicatie is een overzichtelijk naslagwerk van tien jaar SWOCC-onderzoek. Ingedeeld in negen thema's, bevat deze publicatie overzichtelijke samenvattingen van alle SWOCC-publicaties, met informatie over wat u in de praktijk met het onderzoek kunt.

**35. Begunstigers: support uit de praktijk (jubileum drieluik)**  
drs. T. van der Peet (2005)

In deze publicatie zet SWOCC alle begunstigers in het zonnetje die de stichting in de eerste tien jaar van haar bestaan hebben gesteund.

**34. Mensen: zij maken het verschil (jubileum drieluik)**  
drs. T. van der Peet (2005)

Deze publicatie vertelt het verhaal van de oprichting van SWOCC. Van een goed idee op een kantoor in Naarden-Vesting, tot een succesvolle stichting aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam.

**33. Tracking anno 2005. Aanbod en ontwikkelingen**  
drs. R. van Oosterom (2005)

Geeft een overzicht van het aanbod en de ontwikkelingen op het gebied van tracking anno 2005. Bovendien bevat de publicatie een checklist als handvat bij het inrichten van een trackingonderzoek en bij de keuze van een geschikt trackinginstrument.

**32. Stretchen in de supermarkt**  
drs. C. Blom (2005)

In het onderzoek zijn de mogelijke succes- en faalfactoren van merkextensions geanalyseerd en worden richtlijnen gegeven voor succesvolle merkextensie-introducties.

**31. In een flits herkend?**  
drs. M. Klerkx en dr. L. van Meurs (2005)

Welke tekst- en beeldcomponenten dragen bij aan de effectiviteit van buitenreclameposters? Deze publicatie biedt een groot aantal praktische vuistregels voor de creatieve invulling van een buitenreclameposter.

**30. Een merk als vriend? De relatiemetafoor toegepast op consument en merk**

drs. M. Tolboom (2004)

Zijn mensen in staat relaties op te bouwen met merken? Deze publicatie biedt een meetinstrument om merkrelaties in de praktijk te meten.

**29. Werking van humor in kaart gebracht**

drs. E. Olsthoorn (2004)

In deze publicatie wordt een overzicht gegeven van de invloed van humor op verschillende communicatiedoelen. Daarnaast is gekeken naar de invloedsfactoren die een mediërende rol hebben bij de werking van humor.

**28. Consumeren in magere tijden.**

**Aldi jam en Douwe Egberts koffie?**

drs. T. van der Peet (2004)

Wat doet een economische recessie met het merkkeuzegedrag en de merktrouw van consumenten?

**27. De logica van likeability**

drs. M. van den Berg, drs. E. Duijnsveld & dr. E.G. Smit (2004)

In deze publicatie wordt beschreven wat 'likeability' precies is en wat de werking hiervan is.

**26. Internal Branding: een introductie**

drs. A. Giling (2003)

Een overzicht van Internal Branding: het belang ervan, de mate waarin Internal Branding verschilt van interne communicatie en de voorwaarden waaraan moet worden voldaan zodat medewerkers hun rol als merkbouwer optimaal vervullen.

**25. Informatie-overvloed.**

**In discussie met de reclamepraktijk**

drs. E. Olsthoorn (2003)

Deze publicatie betreft een vervolgonderzoek op de eerder verschenen publicatie 24 'Aandacht te midden van overvloed'. In dit onderzoek is onderzocht welke consequenties informatie-overvloed in de huidige praktijk en in de toekomst heeft voor reclamebeleid.

**24. Aandacht te midden van overvloed**

drs. E. Olsthoorn (2003)

In deze publicatie wordt antwoord gegeven op de vraag welke gevolgen het toenemende aanbod van media en reclame heeft voor de aandacht die consumenten aan reclame-uitingen schenken.

**23. Merkimago. Bezint eer gij begint**

dr. T. Timmerman (2003)

In deze publicatie (een samenvatting van het proefschrift 'Researching brand images') staat centraal hoe consumenten merken in hun geheugen opslaan en hoe deze geheugeninhoud op een objectieve wijze kan worden vastgelegd in merkimago-onderzoek.

**22. Mediakeuze en reclamestrategie**

drs. E. Heuvelman, drs. I. Koppe & drs. A. van der Lee (2002)

In deze publicatie zijn de mogelijke communicatiedoelstellingen ingedeeld aan de hand van de reclamewerkingsmodellen van Giep Franzen. Op basis van literatuuronderzoek, expert-interviews en een analyse van praktijkcases is gekeken welke mediumtypen het best passen bij elk van de reclamewerkingsmodellen.

**21. Merkpersoonlijkheid langs de meetlat**

drs. E. van den Berge (2002)

In navolging van publicatie 18 'Merkpersoonlijkheid', wordt in deze publicatie inzicht gegeven in de ontwikkeling van de SWOCC Merkpersoonlijkschaal. Ook wordt uitgelegd hoe men de schaal kan toepassen in de praktijk.

**20. De veranderende brievenbus**

drs. A.M. Giling (2002)

In deze publicatie wordt antwoord gegeven op de vraag wat de meerwaarde is van direct e-mail boven direct mail. Deze meerwaarde is onderzocht aan de hand van de criteria communicatievermogen, bereik, kosten en houding.

**19. E-branding: mythe of realiteit?**

drs. H.J. van der Louw (2001)

In deze publicatie wordt uiteengezet wat e-branding is, wat de voor- en nadelen zijn van het 'branden' van merken via internet, in hoeverre merkbeleid op internet anders is dan merkbeleid in de traditionele wereld en ten slotte op welke wijze merken via de marketing-mix op internet aan hun merk kunnen bouwen.

**18. Merkpersoonlijkheid**

drs. M. van den Berg (2001)

In deze publicatie wordt ingegaan op de vraag wat merkpersoonlijkheid is. Beginnend bij de menselijke persoonlijkheidsleer en eindigend bij de praktische toepassing van het concept in het proces van merkontwikkeling.

**17. Internet Advertising**

drs. S.V. de Lange (2001)

Aan de hand van een literatuurstudie wordt een beeld geschetst van de nieuwe reclame-mogelijkheden die internet biedt in vergelijking met traditionele massamedia.

**16. Integrated Marketing Communications**

drs. I. Koppe & drs. D. Zurr (2000)

In deze publicatie wordt ingegaan op achterliggende theorieën van Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) en de manier waarop IMC in organisaties kan worden toegepast.

**15. Tussen droom en werkelijkheid**

drs. T. Sanders (2000)

Wat is merkidentiteit en wat is de relevantie ervan voor ondernemingen? Op basis van het identiteitsprocesmodel wordt uiteengezet hoe kan worden omgegaan met de identiteit van een merk.

**14. Effectiviteit van radioreclame**

drs. J. van As (2000)

Deze publicatie brengt de bestaande kennis over de effectiviteit van radioreclame en de factoren die deze effectiviteit beïnvloeden in kaart.

**13. Reclamemakers aan het woord over reclamestrategieën**

drs. K. Cramer (2000)

Deze publicatie vormt het tweede deel van SWOCC-publicatie 9 'Reclamestrategieën' dat uitkwam in 1998. In dit tweede deel wordt door middel van expertinterviews, groepsinterviews en een analyse van bestaande reclamecampagnes een 'kijkje in de keuken van de reclamepraktijk' gegeven op het gebied van de ontwikkeling van reclamestrategieën.

**12. In het kielzog van Giep Franzen**

dr. B. van den Putte, drs. A. Smit & drs. K. Cramer (1999)

In deze publicatie worden de zeven, door Franzen ontwikkelde, reclamewerkingsmodellen getoetst in de praktijk.

**11. Reclame als zwakke kracht**

drs. A. Aytug (1999)

In deze publicatie wordt het onderscheid beschreven tussen twee reclamewerkings-theorieën: de 'sterke theorie' versus de 'zwakke theorie'

**10. Op zoek naar het merkimago**

drs. M. Bouwman (1999)

In deze publicatie wordt uiteengezet wat imago is en wat imago-onderzoek inhoudt. Er wordt tot slot een aanbeveling gedaan voor het doen van imago-onderzoek.

**9. Reclamestrategieën**

drs. K. Cramer (1998)

In deze publicatie wordt antwoord gegeven op de vraag wat een reclamestrategie precies is en worden de elementen beschreven waaruit een reclamestrategie bestaat. Hiernaast wordt een overzicht gegeven van de factoren in de omgeving van de reclamestrategie die invloed hebben op de keuzen die tijdens de strategie-ontwikkeling worden gemaakt.

**8. Merkrelaties**

drs. D. Bremer (1998)

Wat betekent het begrip merkrelatie en hoe kan men deze relatie onderzoeken? Sociaal psychologische theorieën en gegevens over relaties tussen mensen worden uiteengezet en vervolgens wordt een geschikte methode om merkrelaties te meten besproken.

#### 7. Brand equity

prof. M.P. Franzen (1998)

In deze publicatie wordt, op basis van de huidige (1997) inzichten, het begrip 'brand equity' ontrafeld. Er wordt een overzicht gegeven van de componenten van brand equity en de samenhang daartussen, en aangeven hoe deze onderzocht kunnen worden.

#### 6. Wear-in en Wear-out

drs. W. van Dun & drs. D. Bremer (1997)

In deze publicatie wordt door middel van een literatuurstudie gezocht naar een antwoord op de vraag wat de invloed is van herhaling op de effectiviteit van reclame.

#### 5. Reclame-Irritatie

dr. E.G. Smit, drs. N. Dokter & drs. B. Smith (1997)

Wat is irritatie en welke factoren zijn van invloed op reclame-irritatie? In deze publicatie wordt hierop antwoord gegeven, maar ook de gevolgen van irritatie en wat men hier tegen kan doen worden uiteengezet.

#### 4. Pretesten

drs. M.C. Hoogerbrugge (1997)

In deze publicatie wordt uiteengezet wat onder pretesten wordt verstaan, welke variabelen in een pretest kunnen worden gemeten en wat de mogelijkheden en beperkingen zijn van deze onderzoeksmethode.

#### 3. Tracking

drs. M.C. Hoogerbrugge (1996)

Deze publicatie geeft antwoord op de vragen: wat houdt tracking-onderzoek in, hoe ziet de ideale tracking-studie eruit, en in hoeverre en op welke wijze vindt tracking-onderzoek in Nederland plaats?

#### 2. De Reclame Respons Matrix

prof. M.P. Franzen, drs. C. Goessens & drs. M.C. Hoogerbrugge (1996)

In deze publicatie wordt een overzicht gegeven van reclame-effecten in de vorm van de 'Reclame Respons Matrix'.

#### 1. Het merk op weg naar de 21e eeuw

prof. M.P. Franzen & drs. M.C. Hoogerbrugge (1996)

In deze publicatie wordt beschreven welke functies een merk voor de consument kan hebben, waardoor zij het merk kopen en zullen blijven kopen.

### Dossiers

Naast publicaties geeft SWOCC ook dossiers uit. SWOCC-dossiers worden niet, zoals de SWOCC-publicaties, automatisch aan alle begunstigers toegestuurd, maar kunnen (gratis) door begunstigers van SWOCC worden aangevraagd.

#### 8. Branding the organization

G. Franzen (2014)

Op basis van een grootschalige literatuurstudie wordt een compleet (modellen)overzicht gepresenteerd dat helpt om het organisatiemerk te begrijpen en te managen.

#### 7. Non-spot advertising

drs. K. Cornelis (2007)

Naast een definiëring en omschrijving van de wetgeving, is met behulp van een inhoudsanalyse een beeld geschetst van het gebruik van sponsoring op de Nederlandse televisie.

#### 6. Succesvol adverteren in dagbladen

dr. E.G. Smit, prof. dr. P. Neijens & drs. M. Stuurman (2006)

Dit dossier gaat in op welke factoren (plaatsingskenmerken, advertentiekenmerken en lezerskenmerken) van invloed zijn op het bereik en het effect van dagbladadvertenties.

#### 5. De kracht van adverteren in dagbladen en dagbladmagazines

prof. dr. P. Neijens & dr. E.G. Smit (2003)

Dit dossier biedt inzichten in het bereik en de waardering van advertenties in dagbladen en dagbladmagazines.

#### 4. Merkstrategieën: portfoliomanagement in de financiële dienstverlening

drs. C. Blom & drs. K. Cramer (2002)

In dit onderzoek is onderzocht welke merkportfoliostategieën door financiële dienstverleners worden gebruikt en door welke factoren deze strategieën worden beïnvloed.

#### 3. Informatie-overbelasting 1991-2000

drs. E. Olsthoorn (2002)

Dit dossier is een geactualiseerde versie van het eerder verschenen SWOCC-dossier 'Information overload'.

#### 2. Brand Strategies. Portfolio Management in the Service Industries

drs. K. Cramer (2000)

Dit dossier bevat een promotieplan over merkportfoliostategieën. In dit project wordt gekeken naar de ontvangerskant van de communicatie. Hoe effectief zijn de portfoliostategieën? Begrijpt de consument de merkboodschap? Het onderzoeksterrein is de dienstensector.

#### 1. Information Overload

drs. M. Cats (2000)

In dit dossier zijn tastbare onderzoeksgegevens over de ontwikkelingen in het aanbod van informatie, mediabestedingen, tijdsbesteding aan mediumtypen en het bereik van mediumtypen in kaart gebracht.

### Proefschriften

Bij SWOCC zijn vijf proefschriften verschenen. Hoewel academische proefschriften vaak diepgravende, zeer uitgebreide en ingewikkelde boeken zijn, hebben de SWOCC-proefschriften een relatief grote toegankelijkheid en vooral praktische toepasbaarheid.

#### Packaging design as communicator of product attributes

dr. I. van Ooijen (2016)

In dit proefschrift is het effect van verpakkingsdesignelementen op de perceptie van producteigenschappen onderzocht. Het geeft hiermee inzicht in hoe theorieën met betrekking tot informatieverwerking zijn toe te passen op de manier waarop productverpakkingen

consumenten beïnvloeden in hun product-evaluaties en -keuzes.

#### Catching COBRAs

dr. D.G. Muntinga (2013)

Met het steeds verder toenemende gebruik van sociale media en de invloed die deze hebben, staan bedrijven voor de uitdaging om de merkerelateerde activiteiten van consumenten (Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities: COBRAs) te inspireren en beïnvloeden. In dit proefschrift is daarom onderzocht wat COBRAs definieert en motiveert. Het biedt daarmee praktische inzichten in hoe de betrokkenheid van consumenten met merken op sociale media vergroot kan worden.

#### Onder moeders paraplu? Determinanten en effecten van merkportfoliostategieën

dr. K. Cramer (2005)

Dit proefschrift geeft inzicht in de determinanten en effecten van merkportfoliostategieën, waarbij de relatie tussen individuele merken en het corporate merk centraal staat. Welke strategieën gebruiken ondernemingen om hun merken in onderlinge samenhang te managen? Welke argumenten gaan hieraan vooraf? Hoe komen deze strategieën tot uiting in reclame en hoe reageren consumenten hierop?

#### Researching brand images: the nature and activation of brand representations in memory

dr. T. Timmerman (2002)

Het onderzoek van Tijs Timmerman richt zich op de vraag: wat zijn de bouwstenen van een merkrepresentatie, en op welke wijze wordt de activatie van deze merkrepresentatie beïnvloed door factoren die in een meetmethode zijn vastgelegd?

#### Een schaap in de bus? Een onderzoek naar waarden van de Nederlander

dr. J. Oppenhuisen (2000)

Waarden fungeren als basis voor het maken van keuzes en sturen daarmee het gedrag van mensen. Waarden zijn sterk cultureel gebonden en hierdoor kan buitenlands onderzoek in Nederland slechts beperkt worden toegepast. Om gebruik te kunnen maken van een waardelijst die helemaal is toegesneden op de Nederlandse situatie, is een geheel nieuwe waarde-inventarisatie uitgevoerd.

## Working Paper Series

De SWOCC Working Paper Series bevat oorspronkelijke, niet eerder gepubliceerde artikelen van recent wetenschappelijk onderzoek. Allernieuwste wetenschappelijke inzichten die inspireren tot verdere actie en onderzoek. De papers worden zorgvuldig beoordeeld door toonaangevende wetenschappers en practici. De SWOCC Working Paper Series zijn exclusief beschikbaar voor alle begunstigers van SWOCC.

### Not All Created Equal?

#### The Content Characteristics and Usefulness of Online Consumer Reviews

drs. L. Willemsen, prof. dr. P. Neijens & prof. dr. F. Bronner (2010)

Wat maakt een online review in de ogen van consumenten nuttig? Met dit onderzoek tonen de auteurs aan dat reviews verschillen in inhoud en daarmee ook in waarde voor de consument. Daarmee biedt het onderzoek een waardevol en praktisch inzicht in online consumentengedrag. Het geeft handvatten voor buzz-tracking, webcare en websitebeheer.

### Introducing COBRA's:

#### a holistic exploration of motivations for brand-related social media use

drs. D.G. Muntinga, dr. M. Moorman & prof. dr. E.G. Smit (2009)

*Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities* ('COBRA's') hebben belangrijke gevolgen voor bedrijven en merken. Om effectief op deze gevolgen in te kunnen spelen, is inzicht in de motieven van merkgerelateerd sociaal media gebruik essentieel. Dit onderzoek biedt waardevolle en praktische inzichten in consumentengedrag op sociale media.

## Deze publicatie is mogelijk gemaakt door de begunstigers van SWOCC

37° Celsius	EST.21	Lane Strategy
ABN AMRO	Estian merkmanagement	Li Moon
ABOVO Media	Fama Volat	Linda Glebbeek Concept & communicatie
Adviseerik	Fia Sanders Communicatie	Margot Bouwman
Aegon	FNDMNTL	McDonald's
Aeres	Fontys Economische Hogeschool Tilburg	MediaCom
Ahold	Fontys Hogescholen ICT	MeMo2
Airborne	Fontys Hogeschool Economie en Communicatie	Menzis
Amber	FrieslandCampina	Merkbaar Resultaat
Anneline Sevenster	Geert Kreulen	Merkmij
ANWB	Gemeente Amsterdam	Met Paulien
AP Hogeschool	GfK	Communicatieadvies met Punch
ARP Nederland	Globrands	Metrixlab
Arteveldehogeschool	Growinski	MindShare
ASN Bank	Haagse Hogeschool	Motivaction International
Augusteijn Utrecht	HAN University of Applied Science	Moustache Marketing
Avans Hogeschool	HAN_Communicatie	Mr Koreander
B-GRIP	HanzeMediatheek	MTN
Beekestijn Business School	Hartstichting	N=5
Blauw Research	Havas Lemz	Nationale Nederlanden
Blickfaenger	Havas Media	Nationale Postcode Loterij
Blooming Stories	Haystack Consulting	NDP Nieuwsmedia
BNG Bank	Hekkelman	NHL Stenden Bibliotheek
Bovemij	Hendrik Beerda Brand Consultancy	NORTH
BR-ND	Het Rijk der Verbeelding	Omnicom Media Group
BrandBase	Hill Interactive Media	OMS
Brands and Spaces	Hogeschool Inholland	Oranje Fonds
Brandsparkle	Hogeschool Leiden	Oranjefonds
BVA bond van adverteerders	Hogeschool Rotterdam	Paul Turken
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Counter Content	Houmevast BV	Pontifical
CP Positioneringsadvies	Imperial Tobacco Nederland	PostNL
CPNB Stichting Collectieve Propaganda van het Nederlandse Boek	ING Bank	ProPositions Brand Management
Croonwolter&dros	Interpolis	Publicis Groupe
Curio	IPG Mediabrands	Rabobank Nederland
CZ Zorgverzekeraar	IR Ton JJ Willems	RDB Communicatie
Damen Shipyards Group	IVO   Business Partner Communicatie	Rem Interim HR
DAN DNA	JHS teksten   sterk merk communicatie	Remarkable Europe
DARE Strategy	jodasa communicatie	Renewi
Dawn	Juva	Research to Create
DDB Unlimited	Kan Design	Roorda Reclamebureau
De Combinatie van Factoren	Kantar TNS	Ruigrok NetPanel
De Postioneerders	KPN	Saxion
De Wolven	Kr8werk	SBS
DELA	Krachtig Kiezen	Science4Business
DPG Media	Kremer & Company	Screenforce
DVJ Insights	KU Leuven Libraries Social Sciences	Screw the Line
Energize		SnelStart
Erasmushogeschool Brussel		Sponsorbrein
Essenstam Strategie & Denkwerk		Steam
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The Reputational  
They Visualize Value  
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Total Creation  
Totta  
Uitbijter  
Univé Verzekeringen  
Universiteit van Amsterdam  
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Upstairs Traprenovatie  
UvA Academy  
UWV  
Validators  
Van de Marketing  
van Thiel & company  
VIM Group  
Virtus Communications  
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ZIGT  
Zorg en Zekerheid  
Zuyd Hogeschool

## SWOCC 87

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Stichting Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Commerciële Communicatie (SWOCC) doet fundamenteel wetenschappelijk onderzoek op het gebied van merken, marketing en communicatie. Deze kennis maakt SWOCC toegankelijk voor de praktijk, bijvoorbeeld door het uitbrengen van publicaties en het organiseren van lezingen. De stichting is in 1995 opgericht op initiatief van Giep Franzen en is gelieerd aan de afdeling Communicatiewetenschap van de Universiteit van Amsterdam. SWOCC wordt financieel mogelijk gemaakt door haar begunstigers maar opereert zelfstandig en onafhankelijk. Op dit moment telt SWOCC bijna 200 begunstigers, waaronder adviesbureaus (van pr en reclame tot design en marktonderzoek), adverteerders, non-profit organisaties en zzp'ers.

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# Brand Activism

“You shouldn’t mix business with politics” is a firmly held belief by many managers. But is it still true? In the past years, we have seen a number of high-profile cases of brands embracing a political stance, including Nike, Patagonia and Ben & Jerry’s. Brand activism is defined as “the act of publicly taking a stand on divisive social or political issues by a brand or an individual associated with a brand.” In this publication, we go beyond cases and anecdotes, and provide an overview of theories and findings that can help you get a grip on the issue. Because a lot of research is done in the US, we also present the results of an original study on more than 1000 Dutch consumers and explore their responses to brand activism.



**Peeter Verlegh** is Professor of Marketing at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He studies the relationship between brands and consumers: what role do brands play in consumers’ lives? What can brands do to be (more) meaningful for consumers and for society at large? Not only in his research and teaching practices, but also in his work for SWOCC and the Effie awards, Peeter believes in a strong connection between science and practice. No matter how much he loves all of this, he would gladly give it up to be a professional football player or a rock musician, but a profound lack of talent in both areas forces him to focus on his academic career.