

IS BRAND ACTIVISM THE NEW NORMAL? SCALE DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Brands have started “taking a stand” on sociopolitical issues such as racism, social inequality, LGBTQ equality, and the refugee crisis in recent years to influence societal change. Even though brand activism has gotten a lot of attention in the marketing literature recently (Bhagwat et al. 2020; Eilert and Cherup 2020; Hydock, Paharia, and Blair 2020; Korschun et al. 2019; Moorman 2020; Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020; Vredenburg et al. 2020), the effects of brand activism on consumer brand perceptions are still largely unexplored. Understanding such effects is important because consumer responses to brand activism are diverse and controversial. Furthermore, there is no valid and reliable scale to measure brand activism in the literature. As a result, utilizing a multi-method approach, this research conceptualizes, defines, and creates a two-dimensional 8-item brand activism scale from a consumer’s point of view.

The second purpose of this research is to explore the scale’s applicability in different consumer-brand relationship contexts throughout two studies. Specifically, Study 9A examines the effects of brand activism on consumers’ brand evaluation. It also explores whether priming the consumers with a brand activism definition will change the proposed effect. Study 9A results support our prediction that consumers have a higher brand attitude when perceiving the brand as an activist than non-activist. Moreover, priming participants with the definition of brand activism did not change the pattern of the results. In Study 9B, we found that consumers were willingness

to pay (WTP) a price premium for an activist brand compared to a non-activist brand, and this relationship is moderated by gender.

The present research contributes to the marketing and branding literature by presenting novel findings and discussing their associated managerial implications. First, this research makes a significant theoretical contribution by developing and validating a brand activism scale. Moreover, brand managers may benefit from this research as it will help advance their understanding of brand activism and thus foster more satisfactory consumer-brand relationships.

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