Journal of Promotional Communications

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information: http://

Exploring Millennials' Asymmetric Brand Attitudes held towards Brands who Practise Brand Activism

Jonathan Oliver Shaw and Stuart Armon

To cite this article: Shaw, J.O. and Armon, S. 2024. Exploring Millennials' Asymmetric Brand Attitudes held towards Brands who Practise Brand Activism. *Journal of Promotional Communications,* 10 (1), 54-72.

Jonathan Oliver Shaw[1] and Stuart Armon[2]

Exploring Millennials' Asymmetric Brand Attitudes held towards Brands who Practise Brand Activism

This research paper explores Millennials' asymmetric attitudes towards brand activism and the factors that contribute to these attitudes. Existing literature has outlined the cultural shift of brands engaging with socio-political issues, however, the amalgamation of Millennials' willingness to voice opinions and their awareness of social issues has been overlooked in previous studies. This study looks at their opinions towards brand activism to understand what factors catalyse asymmetry in their attitudes, with the aim of assisting brands in mitigating any negative effects. This study employed eight qualitative semi-structured interviews with participants aged 22-40 and learned their attitudes towards brand activism signify levels of asymmetry. Respondents had an expectation for brands to be involved with such issues, built off of their own personal 'moral expectation' and if brands did not meet such expectations, respondents signified that they would avoid them. Conversely, respondents illustrated that they were unlikely to honour a brand for meeting such expectations, thus demonstrating the asymmetry. Following the findings, this paper develops pillars of best practice, assisting in the understanding of the importance of managing activism effectively. It's here that the study suggests that marketing practitioners approach activist issues with Caution and Thought, Authenticity and Action.

Keywords: Brand Activism, Socio-Political Issues, Asymmetric Attitudes

Shaw, J.O. and Armon, S. 2024. Exploring Millennials' Asymmetric Brand Attitudes held towards Brands who Practise Brand Activism. *Journal of Promotional Communications*, 10 (1) 54-72.

INTRODUCTION

In an era of pervasive communications, many brands who previously would have kept a judicious reticence are now actively displaying their stances on socio- political issues (Peters and Silverman 2016), such as Nike's backing of BLM through their "Dream Crazy" campaign alongside Colin Kaepernick (Nike 2018) and Patagonia's long-standing affiliation with activist causes (Trapp 2020). Such brands do so in hope that the motives behind such activism will align with the inner values of their target audience to drive brand affinity. Brand activism, as it is now commonly referred to, takes place when a brand takes a stand on controversial, socio-political issues (Sarkar and Kotler 2018; Moorman

[1] Account Manager at adam&eveDDB, London, UK.

[2] Faculty of Media and Communication, Bournemouth University, Poole, UK. Email: sarmon@bournemouth.ac.uk.

2020), which some frame as a marketing strategy, such as Vredenburg et al. (2020) and Bhagwat et al. (2020).

Brand activism can yield lucrative results for a company and have a notably prolonged impact on a brand's bottom line. For instance, Lyft's action against President Trump's Muslim Immigration ban in 2017, led to Lyft's App Store downloads surpassing Uber's for the first time in their combined history (Hook and Badkar 2017). However, with the increasing polarisation of political attitudes (Surridge 2021), the rise of cancel culture amongst Millennials (Bouvier 2020) and consumers' ability to vocalise issues on social media (Platon 2019), there has never been a more hazardous time to take a stance. Once brands engage in activism, their messaging and motives immediately face scrutiny (Holt 2002) where consumers often grow cynical of the authenticity behind their actions (Du et al. 2010; Kotler and Sarkar 2017; Moorman 2020; Vredenburg et al. 2020). Consequently, inauthentic activism is a substantial risk for brands, which could result in widespread backlash and boycotting (Hong 2018). In this study, the research aims to discover how to circumnavigate such negative reactions, which could be damaging for brands in the long-term.

Brand activism offers the chance for marketing practitioners to engage with socio-political issues, where scholars have established its controversial nature due to a lack of societal consensus (Kotler and Sarkar 2017). Vredenburg et al.'s typology of authentic brand activism (2020) notes the alignment of brand values and action, thus allowing for consumers to evaluate whether their values match. Through this evaluation, consumers develop a level of consumer-brand identification (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003), where scholars suggest that high levels of similarity between brand and consumer should result in positive brand attitudes (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012). Conversely, Muherkjee and Althuizen (2020) posit the notion of asymmetric brand attitudes towards activism, where, due to consumers moral expectations, they are unlikely "to reward a brand for doing what they consider to be expected" (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020, p.774).

Mukherjee and Althuizen's (2020) study exists as the solitary in-depth study into asymmetric brand attitudes in the era of brand activism, uncovering insights that could potentially worry marketing practitioners. Whilst the study looks at consumers across all demographics, perhaps the generation that should concern marketing practitioners the most is Millennials. The amalgamation of Millennials' strength of opinion on social issues compared to other generations (The Millennial Impact Report 2019), willingness to share their thoughts on social media (Oakley 2015) and desire to either reward or punish a company for activism discrepancies (Cone Communications 2008; Hong 2018) warrants the attention of brand managers. This study, therefore, reveals insights related to asymmetry in Millennials' attitudes towards brands engaging in activism, with the ability to develop a strategy of best practice.

LITERATRE REVIEW

Brand Activism

It is necessary to clarify exactly what is meant by brand activism, as in recent years a precise definition has proven elusive. As Vredenburg et al. note, when a brand's values and purpose match with its prosocial practice "they are actively engaging in prosocial brand activism" (p.444). This is also known as progressive brand activism (Sarkar and Kotler 2018), where companies are more than profit-seeking entities, but actively endorsing social change. However, Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) definition is different from Manfredi-Sanchéz's, who notes that brand activism is: "A strategy that seeks to influence consumers by means of campaigns created and sustained by political values." (2019, p.343). The notable difference comes from

the use of the word "strategy", whereby the implication is that the actions of the business are actively selected with the goal of being seen as an activist brand for the sake of brand image (Shetty et al. 2019). This notion is asserted by Lekakis (2013, p.9), who questions whether the utilization of activism is merely a "neoliberal fallacy" which is solely benefitting the brand rather than the consumer, who are under the illusion they are engaging in an act of social good. This is where controversy surrounding authenticity arises within brand activism, where Tata et al. (2013) note that maximisation of profits through brand activism should not be seen as a purpose, but instead should be seen as an outcome. Chadwick and Zipp (2018) concur, whereby they question whether Nike's use of Colin Kaepernick (Nike 2018) undermines the campaign it's supporting, by using it for commercial gain. It's here that the development of negative attitudes towards brands who practise activism may arise (Hong 2018), where the importance of authenticity has been discussed in literature (Vredenburg et al. 2020), but an understanding of consumer expectations of brand activism is needed, to mitigate potential negative effects.

Scherrer and Palazzo noted (2011) that the use of activism is often rationalised as it offers a competitive advantage through the moral legitimacy of a good cause, beyond specific business interests (Manfredi-Sanchez 2019). However, Vredenburg et al. go on to argue that brands should refrain from activism: "Unless they can do so in a brand consistent way that connects with target markets in an authentic way." (2020, p.444). This notion is supported by Shetty et al. (2019) who believe brands should only engage in brand activism if they have sufficient knowledge and experience on how their consumers will react to it. Once a consumer starts to identify such inconsistencies in the authenticity of their activism, brands can become victims of their own work, which many scholars believe can greatly damage brand image (Du et al. 2010; Alhouti et al. 2016; Vredenburg et al. 2020). Additionally, if consumers' morals and beliefs are not well aligned with the activist stance of the brand, there is a danger of a strong negative reaction (Fox 2017). These strong reactions can also pose a threat to consumers who agree with the brands' stance, who may feel disillusioned in their beliefs towards the brand (Nail et al. 2009; Hong 2018) – further highlighting the potential divisive and high-risk nature of brand activism. Interestingly, Moorman (2020), draws on Bhagwat et al.'s (2020) definition, which notes that one of the key elements of brand activism lies within the partisan nature of the issue, further demonstrating how academics believe controversy inherently lies within the heart of brand activism.

In summary, research has highlighted the importance of communicating the authenticity of a brands' activist practices and the pitfalls of consumer backlash (Hoppner and Vadakkepatt 2019). It also identifies contrasting notions of brand activism amongst key studies and fails to provide a central, agreed definition of brand activism. Further, there is disagreement between academics as to whether certain brands have license to engage in activism. There is clearly a need to explore this from a consumer perspective, understanding whether consumers believe brands have license to engage in activism, and their rationale behind it.

Millennial Interaction with Socio-Political Issues

Strauss and Howe are believed to be the first scholars to introduce the label of 'Millennial' in their 1991 book "Generations", where the term is used to describe anyone born between the mid 1980s and early 2000s. Some scholars have refined this range, with others classifying the dates as 1981-99 (Park and Gursoy 2012), 1980-2000 (Cennamo and Gardner 2008), 1977-2000 (Srinivasan 2012) or 1979-94 (Smola and Sutton 2002). Within this study, Becton et al.'s (2014) definition of a Millennial will be employed, where they define it as anyone born between 1983-1999. The definition has been selected as it represents an equal age range of 16 years, compared to the previous generation, Generation X, born between 1965 and 1982 (Pew Research Centre 2019). Whilst the dates are debated, there is little debate amongst anthropologists that Millennials share common traits, ethics and beliefs (Bolton et al. 2013). One such trait that past literature has highlighted is that Millennials are globally educated and

socially aware (Becton et al. 2014; Oakley 2015), having experienced potent shared experiences such as tsunamis, droughts and other natural events (Srinvasan 2012), as well as socio-political events such as wars, political disasters, economic uncertainty and civil unrest (Bolton et al. 2013). Generally, Millennials view themselves with confidence and strength of opinion which they are not afraid to share (Oakley 2015). These notions are further supported by The Millennial Impact Report, an extensive 10-year study looking at over 150,000 Millennials, where the report found they possessed a deep-rooted care for social issues such as; racial discrimination, education and equal employment (The Millennial Impact Report 2019). The degree of passion that Millennials showed towards these issues is reportedly unseen from previous generations (The Millennial Impact Report 2019). Shetty et al. further support earlier literature by noting that the generation in question believe the "onus is on them to make the world a better place to live" (2019, p.164) due to their concern with the well-being of their communities.

Academics have also highlighted the early and repeated exposure Millennials have had to technology, making them the first digitally native generation (Immordino- Yang et al. 2012). The age of social media and digital technology has enveloped their lives since birth, which has impacted their "cognitive, emotional and social outcomes" (Immordino-Yang et al. 2012). Scholars generally agree that Millennials are frequent and intense users of social media (Bolton et al. 2013), being three times more likely to explore new products via social media, voice their opinions and speak to friends and family, than any other generation (Market Strategies 2014). Academics such as Bolton et al. (2013) and Manfredi-Sanchez (2020) have also stated that Millennials wish to express their socio-political views through their support for brands through methods such as social media engagement and through their power to purchase. In summary, the literature draws strong conclusions of shared experiences amongst Millennials (Srinvasan 2012; Oakley 2015), leading to shared traits, ethics and beliefs (Bolton et al. 2013) and ultimately, an acute social awareness (The Millennial Impact Report 2019).
This study investigates how their shared traits and social awareness may affect their stance in the domain of brand activism, exploring whether their opinions towards activism are also 'shared'.

Brand Activism and Millennials

Having outlined the literature surrounding the interaction of Millennials with social, political and cultural issues, the following part of this review looks into the relationship between brand activism and the generation in question. Not only are Millennials increasingly aware of socio-political issues, but they are also becoming increasingly aware of how brands engage with them. YPulse, a leader in Millennial research, highlighted that "more young shoppers are putting their money where their beliefs are" (YPulse 2018). This is verified by 87 percent of 13-35-year-olds, who assert that brands have a duty to take a stance on such issues (YPulse 2018). Further research from Cone Communications has shown that Millennials are willing to either reward or punish a company if they notice discrepancies within their dedication to activism (2015), corroborated by studies conducted by Hong (2019). Additionally, 1003 participants aged between 18-34 were analysed on their perceptions of activist brands efforts (Cone Communications 2015). Overwhelmingly, nine out of ten participants revealed their inclination to switch to a brand that supported a certain cause they believed in (Cone Communications 2015).

Whilst these studies are vastly advantageous for offering insight into attitudes of young people towards brand activism, they are limited by two main issues. One lies within the sample, where participants were between the ages of 13-35 and 18-34 respectively, therefore, they are not exclusively Millennial attitudes being studied. Secondly, results are based upon data from 2015, which poses questions on its relevance in a dynamic landscape, where due to the ever-evolving nature of socio- political issues, opinions can change during this period. Shetty et al.'s

2019 investigation offers what may be the most relevant analysis of Millennials' interaction with brand activism, by stipulating that brands "cannot afford to be a neutral spectator" (2019, p.164) as Millennials now have greater expectations of what a brand should stand for. The findings indicate that Millennials prefer to purchase a brand if it supports socio-political issues because they are more socially and politically aware than other generations, therefore it: "Pays for the brands to adopt activism to engage, attract, and retain the Millennials" (Shetty et al. 2019, p.164). Benner also notes (2018, p.8) that due to the progressive values of the Millennial generation, "brands must tap into the political energy that generation created". This further corroborates the literature reviewed in Section 2.2, whereby academics such as Bolton et al. (2013) assert the concept of Millennials sharing common traits, which have been developed through social, political, and cultural experiences. Whilst Shetty et al.'s work (2019) is helpful in offering insights towards our understanding of the relationship between Millennials and brand activism, the study employs a sample limited to participants from Bangalore, India, therefore demonstrating a lack of global perspective. This ultimately poses questions surrounding a UK perspective, presenting the opportunity for this study to research this issue.

The literature reviewed within this section highlights the affinity between Millennials and brand activism, where there is a genuine care about a brand's values and subsequent prosocial activity. Many academics support the notion that Millennials expect a brand to act a certain way, one that matches their own personal values, whereby if a brand starts to act in an inconsistent way, consumers identify such irregularities and may start to dispute the authenticity of the brand (Korschun 2017). However, whilst the aforementioned studies are useful in progressing our understanding of Millennial attitudes towards brand activism, notably, the studies adopt a quantitative methodology. Whilst a quantitative methodology allows us to understand the relationship between Millennial attitudes and brand activism in a measurable format, using qualitative research helps bring together components of a conversational debate by applying context (Bryman 2015; Amalki 2016). Further to this, this leaves the opportunity for this study to gain developing context and uncover deep insights on Millennial attitudes towards brand activism through the use of qualitative methods (Patton 2002; Braun and Clarke 2015).

Asymmetric Brand Attitudes

The application of the concept of asymmetric brand attitudes has been established for some time, where the work of Kalwani et al. (1990) demonstrated that consumers have asymmetric brand attitudes towards purchase prices. The study found that consumers were more resistant to the prospect of a loss than the prospect of a gain. However, issues arise as research findings into asymmetric consumer attitudes have been inconsistent and contradictory, where Krishnamurthi et al. (1992) challenged Kalwani et al.'s study (1990) and subsequently furthered the knowledge on the asymmetry of consumer response in brand choice decisions where price was an influence. Results found that despite their loyalty to their favourite brands, consumers are focused on the need satisfying properties of the product rather than any price-based gains or losses (Krishnamurthi et al. 1992). Although this extensive study is useful in highlighting the significance of asymmetric consumer attitudes, the drawbacks of this study are twofold. Firstly, having been conducted in 1992, the results could be deemed as outdated, since the commercial landscape has developed greatly since the study was conducted (Maday 2020). Secondly, and most pertinently, the study focused on the variable of price fluctuation as an influence on consumer brand attitudes and fails to address more current influences towards consumer brand attitudes, such as how the brand acts on social issues, the cultural context in which the brand sits, technological advances and economic affairs. Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) were the first to apply it to brand activism, where within the paper, they raise the concept of asymmetric effect of brand activism, where they comment that brand activism: "Provides consumers with an opportunity to assess the level of self-brand similarity in the context of moral judgments."

(Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020, p.773). Their notion is built off of studies from Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) and Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012), who themselves have developed the consumer-brand identification theory, which proposes that if their own values match with that of the brands values, there is a higher chance of brand affinity and positive brand attitudes. Mukherjee and Althuizen's study (2020) consistently concluded that consumer behaviour is asymmetric, where attitudes are negative when there is disagreement in the alignment of morals and self-brand values, and no noticeable effect when there is agreement, thus furthering the knowledge of consumer-brand identification.

Jost et al. (2017) note that those who politically align as liberal are more likely to be affected by asymmetric brand attitudes towards brand activism than those who align with conservatism. This is particularly pertinent as Pew Research Centre (2018) have also outlined how Millennials are the most liberal of all generations, thus showing a need for an understanding into how Millennials' interaction with brand activism has an effect on asymmetric brand attitudes. Given the literature reviewed in sections 2.2 and 2.3, there have been no studies performed to investigate the prevalence of Millennial asymmetric brand attitudes as a result of brand activism. There is a need for research to understand the relationship between Millennials and asymmetric brand attitudes on brand activism, specifically consumers from the UK, to help brands understand what best practise may be when approaching this consumer group on prosocial issues.

METHODOLOGY

Research aim of this study was to understand and interpret the views of Millennial consumers towards brands who practise activism, assessing the level of asymmetry in the brand attitudes towards them. Specifically, we explored the extent of asymmetric brand attitudes that Millennials hold towards brands who practice activism and the factors that contribute to such attitudes. We also sought to understand what approach may be regarded as best practice when engaging in activism to a core consumer base of Millennials. Epistemologically speaking, the subjective nature of attitudes towards a brands' stance on social issues lends itself towards interpretivism. Thus, an interpretive epistemology was employed for this study, as it looks to provide new interpretations of social phenomena (Bryman 2015), which are "time and context dependent" (de Villiers 2005, p.12).

As the socio-political issues being studied are in a cyclical state of construction and reconstruction (Bryman 2015), it was considered that the study would supplement a constructivist stance. Ontologically speaking, constructivism maintains that social phenomena and their subsequent meanings are perpetually revised by the human mind which includes multiple subjective realities. Subsequently, this allowed the study to take an inductive approach. Inductive researchers feed their theory into the existing knowledge that the field holds, where theory is the outcome of the study (Bryman 2015). Due to brands practising prosocial activism being a recent phenomenon (Sarkar and Kotler 2018), there is currently a lack of knowledge on how Millennials interpret such actions, thus demonstrating how the observations and findings of the study needed to be fed back into theory.

From the ontological and epistemological considerations a qualitative method was deemed the most suitable for understanding and interpreting Millennials' attitudes. Qualitative research methods allow for context to be established amongst the data (Patton 2002), whilst also providing deep insights from participants through its open-ended and organic nature (Braun and Clarke 2015), resulting in a greater understanding of the subjective nature of consumers' brand attitudes.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as they offer depth of knowledge on a subject (Bell 1999; Bryman 2012). As Bell stated (1999), there is greater freedom to an interview

compared to a survey, with the semi-structured nature allowing for the researcher to clarify certain points from the participant, thus allowing for greater insight on emotions, opinions, and beliefs (Dudovskiy 2018), pertaining to the attitudinal nature of the study. These intricacies in responses may be particularly evident when discussing sensitive topics such as activism (Barriball and While 1994). Bristol and Fern (1993) note the use of qualitative methodologies such as semi-structured interviews when studying brand attitudes can elicit more authentic and truthful attitudes from participants. Scholars attribute this phenomenon to social facilitation theory, which suggests the mere presence of an interviewer increases self-awareness on one's attitudes, thus resulting in a depth of response (Allport 1924; Scheier and Carver 1977). Due to the sensitive nature of expressing opinions towards controversial subjects (Farquhar 2011), focus groups were deemed as an unsuitable research method.

As the research question focuses on Millennials, the population was subsequently defined as individuals born between 1983-1999, which employs Becton et al.'s (2012) definition of a Millennial, as mentioned in Section 2.2.1. Millennial shoppers are three times more likely to voice their opinions on both products and social issues than any other generation (Market Strategies 2014). Subsequently, the sample for this study consisted of 8 adults aged between 22-40 who are UK residents, evenly split between males and females. Due to the inclusion criteria in place for this study, it was deemed that purposive sampling pertained to the aims of the research. This sampling approach was best suited as there were specific criteria for inclusion, allowing the researcher to select the most suitable participants (Marshall 1996). Cresswell (2007) asserts the importance of giving the researcher license to acquire participants who are willing to openly and honestly share "their story" (Cresswell 2007, p.133). Whilst the sample is evidently not representative of the whole Millennial generation, this was not the aim of the research project. Appreciation has been given around the fact that there is a difference in the lower and upper limits of the age ranges, which means that there may be differences in economic status, life stages and outlook on brands. However, it is acknowledged that this sample is not designed to be representative of the generation due to the exploratory nature of the study. Despite it possibly being seen as a limitation of the study (Quest 2019), the research purpose was to gain a deep understanding of attitudes, rather than an understanding of the prevalence of identified attitudes, something that future studies could investigate.

To collect the data, eight semi-structured interviews were undertaken to investigate the research aim and objectives. The interviews were conducted between the 15th April 2021 and the 21st April 2021 using Zoom video calls. Interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. The video calls were recorded via the Zoom desktop application, where they were then exported into a password protected folder. Once the data collection stage had been completed, transcripts were produced to allow for thematic analysis. Thematic analysis pertains to the inductive approach to the research, where it acts to uncover new themes within a field of study (Braun and Clarke 2015; Dudovskiy 2018), where scholars note that the system of highlighting common themes within the data reinforces the notion that such themes are consistent and therefore reliably building theory within the field (Miles and Huberman 1994).

As utilised by other studies within the field (Johansson et al. 2020), Bryman and Bell's trustworthiness criteria (2015), is adopted in order to evaluate the quality of research, constituted of four dimensions; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. As maintained by scholars, the credibility of semi-structured interviews is often questioned due to a notable paucity of consistency across social realities (Denscombe 2014). In order to combat this, the researcher sought to verify the findings with the participants (Bryman 2012).

Transferability is the concept of investigating whether the results "hold in some other context" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p.316). A lack of transferability is often scrutinised in qualitative studies, due to their focus on cultural depth over breadth of insight. To combat this, thick descriptions (Ryle 1949) were produced within the study to provide context, emotion and an understanding of how generalised the results are (Ponterotto 2015). Dependability studies the

accuracy and consistency of the study across an identical context (Bitsch 2005), where findings should be stable by employing an auditing approach (Miles and Huberman 1994; Bitsch 2005; Bryman and Bell 2015). The audit follows the research process, where interview guides, summaries and transcripts have all been made accessible to aid the dependability and trustworthiness of the study. Confirmability analyses the objectivity of the study, particularly the potential for researcher bias to encroach on the data. Whilst scholars assert absolute objectivity is unattainable (Bryman and Bell 2015), a study must demonstrate evidence of acting in good faith. It may be concluded that the study could suffer from social desirability bias, whereby the participants give answers they believe will project a good image onto themselves (Lavrakas 2008), further catalysed by themes such as brand activism arising within the interview. To ensure confirmability within the study, the researchers' assumptions will be bracketed, where researcher bias would be set aside before conducting research, to help mitigate over-interpretation of responses (Given 2008). The study conformed to Bournemouth University's ethics framework and received ethical approval.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Consumer-Brand Identification

Scholars assert that consumer-brand identification (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003) is intrinsically linked to the theory of asymmetric brand attitudes, where the consumer will create a "moral expectation" (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020, p.773) of how they expect brands to behave. When asked about the importance of using brands who share similar traits, values and ethics to themselves, all participants confirmed that it is of importance to them (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012), illustrated by Participant F: "I want to be a consumer working with brands that align with my values, socially and ethically…" Participant D stated that purchase decisions would be affected if a brand's "values were fundamentally different to mine", with participant B asserting "I wouldn't buy into a brand that doesn't stand up for what I believe in". Here, the participants highlight that brands acting below their moral expectation would affect their brand attitudes, and ultimately purchase decisions. This corroborates the findings of Shetty et al. (2019) who quantitively demonstrated that Millennials' purchase decisions are influenced by a brand's unethical behaviour.

However, when delving deeper into understanding how these purchase decisions were affected, Shetty et al.'s (2019) findings posit that Millennials actively try to support a brand who share similar activist values. Findings within this study contrasted this, where participants claimed they would actively try to avoid brands who didn't share activist values with themselves. However, due to the presence of questions relating to values, ethics and morals, questions arise as to the level of social response bias exhibited by participants within these results. Holden and Passey (2009) note that semi-structured interviews have a tendency to elicit responses that are seen as socially acceptable, leading respondents to exaggerate their opinions to be seen in a more desirable light. In light of this implication, it's likely that whilst many participants do actively try to avoid brands that don't share the same values, the likelihood is that this isn't always the case in action. Some participants held the self-awareness to comment on this themselves, where Participant C noted that they "hypothetically" want to try to avoid such brands, but noted that "in reality, it doesn't always translate that way".

When exploring whether prosocial brand activism (where the brand has taken the 'right' moral stand within the consumer's beliefs) has an effect on consumer-brand identification, there was a somewhat mixed response from participants. Participant F was the only respondent to express that it would positively change their attitudes, but then went on to question how "submerged they are within the issue", illustrating doubts of authenticity. Participants A, B and G were largely indifferent, noting that "I don't have strong opinions (towards brands)" (Participant A), and "neutral feelings" (Participant G) lead them to their responses. Their

responses demonstrate a low level of consumer-brand identification, where their apathy towards prosocial brand activism meant they did not take the opportunity to assess whether their values aligned with the brand. Most notably, Participant E suggested that because: "I already like them (the brand), I use them because they're similar to me. So, my opinion could only change in a negative light" (Participant E). As the participant has noted that their "opinion could only change in a negative light" (Participant E), this refutes previous literature which argues high levels of consumer-brand identification provide more positive brand attitudes (Graeff 1996; Sirgy et al. 2008; Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012). The disparity in the participants responses reinforces existing studies which highlight the dangers of practising brand activism (Du et al. 2010; Alhouti et al. 2016; Vredenburg et al. 2020), where there are few benefits for a brand in taking the 'right' moral stance.

However, when participants were asked whether a neutral stance on brand activism has an effect on their attitudes, there was a stronger consensus from participants. Participants A, C, F, G and H all suggested that an absence of brand activism is seen in a "negative way for not speaking up" (Participant H), with Participant F noting that they would question "why a brand isn't getting involved, especially in bigger social issues". The participants' concerns with brands staying neutral were at their most prevalent when discussing issues which were "the most immediate" (Participant A) to the brand's purpose, where participants noted that if "they don't say anything… there will be a negative impact" (Participant C). In general, participants were careful in indicating their concerns over brands staying neutral were limited to immediate issues facing the brand, rather than all issues in general, citing that they "don't expect brands to jump on every single cause" (Participant D).

Assessing the responses to questions surrounding both prosocial and neutral stances in brand activism, the results suggest there is a level of asymmetry in the attitudes towards brands, contributing to RO1. When asked about brands practicing activism, there was a lack of consistency in responses, with no noticeable positive effect on brand attitudes, even when levels of consumer-brand identification were high. In contrast, when brands took a neutral stance, it adversely impacted the level of consumer-brand identification, where the consumer is aware of the brand not sharing the same expected values as themselves, leading to diminished brand attitudes.

Expectations of Brand Activism

Scholars posit that when consumer and brand values align (thus, levels of consumer-brand identification are present), this is the consumers' moral expectation of how brands should behave, it does not mean there is a positive impact on brand attitudes, as this is the minimum they accept (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012). Both participants A and C recognised this moral expectation, when they spoke of a moral and ethical "baseline" (Participant C) that they expect brands to operate to, demonstrating the theory of "ought to" behaviour (Higgins 1998). When asked about whether they expect brands to act in an activist way, participants generally said they expected brands to do so with Participant D commenting that "I think more and more now, I do (expect it)". Participant B corroborates this, by saying that they expect it, as "it's not a new thing". Notably, Participant C commented that there is a broader societal pressure: "People expect you to, and if you don't say something, it's going to affect you negatively."

These findings corroborate existing literature within the field, where scholars maintain that brands have an obligation to act morally and ethically, much like how members of society interact (Turiel 1985; Gilligan and Wiggins 1987). Therefore, this is behaviour that the consumer morally expects, meaning it is highly unlikely for the consumer to look favourably upon a brand for eliciting behaviour that they "ought to" display (Higgins 1998). Subsequently, this displays a level of asymmetry in the consumers' attitudes, whereby there is no positive outcome on brand attitudes if they practice it. As demonstrated within the findings, the inherent

nature of an expectation means that if consumers' requirements are not met, this will lead to a decrease in brand attitudes.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the expectations the respondents had towards brand activism is how some participants used the dimension of time as a measurement for expectations. As quoted above, Participant D noted that "more and more" they expect it, and Participant B noted that it's "not a new thing". Participant H proposed that "right now, you'd expect all brands to be doing it with what's going on", alluding to the heightened awareness of socio-political issues that Millennials may possess, substantiating previous literature that brands must harness the "political energy that the generation created" (Benner 2018, p.8).

Brand activism as a trend

Whilst it is evident from the previous section that most participants felt that they expected brands to be activist in today's social landscape, some participants went a step further to question whether the public's desire for brand activism currently can be seen as a trend that brands are exploiting. Where the vast majority of participants agreed that brand activism is a trend, there was a split in feelings towards the issue, where the majority of participants felt negatively towards it. Participant H noted that "all brands are doing it, it's fashionable to care about these issues", with the implication that the motive behind their activism was "financial gain" (Participant C). Participant D noted that they were able to "see straight through it", illustrating an acute awareness and cynicism towards the 'trend'. These findings support evidential observations that brands can become victims of their own doing when approaching activism as a trend (Du et al. 2010; Vredenburg et al. 2020). This negative framing of a trend was further reinforced by Participant C, who stated: "If your brand activism only occurs at times when something is in the news, that's a PR stunt, that's not brand activism."

A few participants were cautious to frame it as a cultural shift (Benner 2018) rather than a trend, accepting that "it's a good trend" (Participant F) and that "it's seen as the new norm" (Participant H), supporting Benner's findings (2018), which suggests that brands feel more inclined to practise activism as it has become more mainstream with Millennial consumers. Whilst these responses were less cynical of the brand's actions, they still did not elicit positive attitudes towards the brand itself, supporting existing literature (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020). Instead, it could be concluded that these positive attitudes were instead directed towards society and its acceptance of activism being the new normal.

Looking at these findings, there is a tension between Millennials expecting activism and Millennials' attitudes towards those that practice it. Whilst some participants noted it was a "good trend" (Participant H), findings in previous sections demonstrate that generally the participants would not reward brands for practising activism, thus strengthening Carr et al.'s claim (2012), that Millennials refuse to admit the merit of brands espousing a controversial issue. In contrast, participants were quick to highlight their opinions on how it was a trend being exploited by brands, where subsequently consumers become disillusioned in their beliefs towards the brand (Nail et al. 2009). Participants seeing brand activism as a trend is a factor in contributing to asymmetry brand attitudes, thus satisfying RO1, where inconsistencies within activism can lead to consumer backlash (Du et al. 2010; Alhouti et al. 2016).

Authenticity in Brand Activism

When approaching RO2, it was important to understand the necessary aspects which consumers expect to feature in brand activism, to help build a concept of best practice. A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense that respondents all exhibited a level of expectation for authenticity when brands approach activism. Some participants explicitly used the words "authentic" or "inauthentic" to describe brand activism:

> "I think for me, when you're a brand being an activist about something, to do it well you have to be inherently authentic about it." (Participant A)

> "It feels authentic, it doesn't feel like 'one off', it feels that they routinely try to support different charities and different movements." (Participant C)

The results illustrated a wide awareness of authenticity within the domain of brand activism, where Participant B went as far as defining authenticity, where they described it as: "Authenticity means that you're living your values through more than just a marketing moment" (Participant B). Those who did not explicitly use the words still indicated feelings towards the importance of authenticity, where, building on the findings surrounding brand activism as a trend, participants were able to distinguish when their activism did not align with their brand purpose (Benner 2018). Participant C outlined that: "Brand activism has to align to the purpose of an organization, because otherwise it just feels really inauthentic." Whether defined explicitly or not, this illustrates the importance of authenticity to Millennials when brands are approaching activist causes. For example, Participant D noted that:"You know that they're not just doing it to be seen to be jumping on that bandwagon, and that they're actually making a difference." Whilst some demonstrated the need for authenticity, others warned of the dangers of a brand being seen as inauthentic. The phrase "inauthentic" was widely used, where many participants also used phrases such as "greenwashing" (Participant A, Participant D, Participant E, Participant H) or "wokewashing" (Participant C, Participant D, Participant E), where all participants who mentioned the phrases showed negative reactions towards them. These findings are consistent with previous studies, where inauthentic and insincere activism could result in widespread backlash from Millennials (Shetty et al. 2019), with the danger of a boycott becoming feasible (Garfield 2018).

The findings support previous literature, which proposes the dangers of inauthentic activism, risking the alienation of a consumer group. Further, the findings demonstrated widespread and fervent disdain towards greenwashing and wokewashing, where participants grew sceptical to unrealistic claims made by brands. Here, participants' responses aligned with Lekakis' (2013, p.34) notion that brand activism is: "No more than a neoliberal fallacy that benefits the producers at the expense of consumers." Further to this, Manfredi-Sanchez (2019, p.346) suggests that when consumers engage with activist brands, they're "under the impression they are participating in a fair trade", whereas findings within this section would demonstrate that Millennial consumers would only deem it a fair trade if they deemed it as authentic activism. It is evident that the majority of participants demonstrated an astute understanding of the commercialism of brand activism, a concept which scholars have noted as a growing issue (Basci 2014). The findings are clear in demonstrating a need for authenticity when brands engage in activism, in part, helping to satisfy RO2. Significantly, these findings contribute to our knowledge of how brands should mitigate negative reactions towards activism, where it is evident brands must not practice activism based on the motivations of publicity or financial gain (Hermann 2020).

Mitigating Negative Effects and Exploring Best Practice

With RO2 looking to build a concept of best practice and mitigate negative effects, participants were asked how they would want brands to behave when approaching activist issues, offering them an open floor to go into detail on their expectations of brand activism. There were three strong themes captured within the responses:

An important theme that emerged from the interviews was the participants' desire for brands to approach such issues with "caution" (Participant C) and "careful thought and planning" (Participant H). Six out of eight participants stressed the same underlying message, where brands should be "sensitive" (Participant E) to which issues they engage with. Some participants even went as far as to suggesting that a brand should have: "A fundamental process that asks whether they should be involved in this conversation. They need to ask themselves 'are our audience affected by the issue?'" (Participant D) Within the same theme, participants C, D and E used the phrase "meaningful", highlighting a demand for genuine communication,

where the participants attributed the phrase to how relevant the activism was to their audience. This demonstrates a need for brands to understand which issues are most immediate and resonant with their consumer base, taking time to choose the most pertinent issues to engage with.

A strong theme throughout the interview as a whole, authenticity was explicitly referenced within responses to this question by six out of eight participants. The consensus amongst participants was that authenticity is where the activism should "match the values of the brand" (Participant E), supporting Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) value-driven typology of authentic brand activism. Interestingly, Participant D used Ben & Jerry's as an example: "Some would say an ice cream brand can't talk about politics, but what Ben and Jerry's have done is incredible. They really get behind it and make changes… but you can see that this is how it started for them, it's their ethos, it's authentic." Whilst some would deem an ice cream brand to have little license to voice their opinions on such complex issues, their long-standing values aligned with their prosocial action (Vredenburg et al. 2020) has allowed them to command the attention of consumers. Thus, proving the potency that authentic brand activism can have upon a brand. Besides Participant F, all participants demonstrated a demand for following through with "action", where they were often of the belief that in order for the brand activism to be seen as worthwhile, the stance of the brand must be translated into action. Participant H wished for "action that goes far beyond empty promises", where Participant C notes that brands "must have a real purpose which they should plan to follow through with action", demonstrating an expectation for brands to truly enact change. These results strongly corroborate earlier studies (Hermann 2020; Araf and Dahlin 2020), which posit that if a brand lacks proof of significant action, the activism can easily be branded as inadequate and inauthentic.

Through the satisfaction of the research aim and objectives, this study has provided some salient insights on Millennial attitudes towards brand activism. RO1 consistently found the participants demonstrated a level of asymmetric brand attitudes towards activism. There was little evidence of brand activism having a positive effect on brand attitudes, whereas due to the high-risk nature of engaging with controversial issues there were notable negative effects on brand attitude. The study identified contributing factors to the asymmetric attitudes, such as the level of expectation Millennials hold over brands and the theory of consumer-brand identification (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Within RO2, participants demonstrated Authenticity, Caution and Thought, and Action as the basis for best practice, providing insight on how brands should approach brand activism.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to understand and interpret the views of Millennial consumers towards brands who have activist stances or practise activism, assessing the level of asymmetry in attitudes towards them. Within this chapter, the key conclusions from the study have been summarised. Findings within RO1 demonstrate the inherent complexity of approaching brand activism with an increasingly divided society (Vredenburg et al. 2020). In fulfilling RO1, responses signified the importance of moral expectations, where the majority of participants noted they would not think favourably of a brand for displaying "ought to" social behaviour (Higgins 1998). In contrast, when a participant disagreed with a brand's stance, the brand failed to meet their moral expectations, thus participants agreed it would affect their attitudes towards the brand. There was little evidence of brand activism having a positive effect on attitudes, where in contrast, a neutral stance negatively impacted the level of consumer-brand identification and subsequently, brand attitudes. It can be concluded that Millennial attitudes towards brand activism demonstrate a level of asymmetry, consistent with existing literature (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020). RO1 was additionally fulfilled with an investigation into

uncovering factors which contributed towards the asymmetric attitudes. Here, participants reported they expected brands to get involved with activist issues, with many seeing it as a reasonable expectation. Thus, with the nature of an expectation, brands are unlikely to be rewarded by the consumer for meeting them (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020), as it is expected. Interestingly, participants were acutely aware of the societal pressure that brands face to speak up, highlighting the issue with consumer expectations of brand activism, where brands may subsequently feel they must speak up. In this instance, brands may rush their activist actions resulting in a lack of authenticity, rigour and sense of purpose, which ultimately could be to the detriment of brand attitudes. Thus, it is concluded that the expectation which Millennials put on brands is a contributing factor to asymmetric attitudes. However, further research is suggested to understand if and how brands are using consumer data to build effective, meaningful activist action plans.

Further to this, the investigation into RO1's aim to uncover contributing factors towards asymmetry drew clear findings from most participants who considered brand activism as a trend, disputing previous studies (Benner 2018; Herman 2020). However, results were less clear when probed on their interpretation of brand activism being a 'trend', with some responses demonstrating a fervent cynicism towards the concept. Some participants elicited opinions on how it was being exploited for short-term financial gain, highlighting an awareness of the commercialisation of brand activism (Hermann 2020; Vredenburg et al. 2020). Contrastingly, some participants interpreted 'trend' as a cultural shift in the way brands engage with activism. RO2's exploration of what approach may be deemed as best practice demonstrated a unanimous desire for authenticity within brand activism. It was clear that Vredenburg et al.'s theory of authentic brand activism (2020) rang true with Millennials, where some participants demonstrated an understanding of authenticity to be the alignment of values and action. What was clear was a fervent contempt for the commercialisation of activist issues, where greenwashing and wokewashing were used as buzzwords to channel their emotions of distrust (Kapitan et al. 2019). Alongside the recommendations of previous literature (Basci 2014), brands are advised to distance the product or service from their activist communications, with the aim of mitigating consumer suspicions around brands exploiting it. In investigating RO2, it was imperative to build out pillars of best practice where the respondents identified three strong themes; Caution and Thought, Authenticity and Action. Caution and Thought signifies a need for brands to approach activist issues with sensitivity and prior planning, consistent with previous studies (Hermann 2020; Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020), where: "Well-researched brand activism efforts are far less likely to inspire widespread backlash." (Benner 2018, p.81) Authenticity reinforces the aforementioned desire for value-driven communication and action, where Vredenburg et al.'s authenticity typology (2020) can act as a framework for brands. Action looks at the ways in which brands espouse prosocial change, acting upon messaging. As scholars note (Benner 2018), the action taken must be consistent and timely; brands must provide proof of significant action or potentially face boycotts (Hong 2018; Araf and Dahlin 2020).

The findings of this study have several important implications for brand managers, where findings related to Millennials' asymmetric brand attitudes have contributed to our understanding of the importance of managing activist issues. Whilst the study outlines the inherent risk attributed to brand activism, theory has also been advanced to help brand managers mitigate such risks, by looking at factors which influence asymmetric attitudes. The creation of the pillars of best practice in Caution and Thought, Authenticity and Action, allow for a foundation for authentic brand activist strategies to be developed from. Whilst the research warns of the perils of inauthentic activism, this study should not be interpreted as a deterrent for brand managers to shy away from taking the right moral stance. Instead, this study should be seen as a guide to assist brands in embracing authentic activism.

Due to the study addressing themes such as activism and social issues, the study may have suffered from social-desirability bias, thus increasing the difficulty to attain reliable findings. Further research would benefit from employing the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne and Marlowe 1960) as a supplementary self-reported questionnaire to the interview, helping to distinguish responses which suffer from such bias.
Additionally, previous research has shown that political opinions amongst Millennials are increasingly polarized (Pew Research Centre 2018; Jost et al. 2020), meaning the chances of alienating a consumer segment is heightened due to contrasting moral expectations. Further research is needed to understand the effect of their political stance on their opinion towards brands who practise activism, which will help to further the development of best practice.

Conflict of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

REFERENCES

Alhouti, S., Johnson, C. and Holloway, B., 2016. Corporate social responsibility authenticity: Investigating its antecedents and outcomes. *Journal of Business Research* [online], 69 (3), 1242-1249. Available from: https://ideas.repec.org/a/eee/jbrese/v69y2016i3p1242-1249.html [Accessed 20 Jan 2021].

Allport, F., 1924. The group fallacy in relation to social science. *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology and Social Psychology* [online], 19 (1), 60-73. Available from: https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2005-13911-007 [Accessed 15 Apr 2021].

Araf, D. and Dahlin, E., 2020. How Brand Activism Affects Consumer Attitude: A study on Swedish consumers' attitudes towards companies using brand activism, with the Black Lives Matter movement as context. Undergraduate Thesis. Uppsala University.

Barriball, K. and While, A., 1994. Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: a discussion paper. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* [online], 19 (2), 328-335. Available from: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01088.x [Accessed 14 Apr 2021].

Basci, E., 2014. A Revisited Concept of Anti-Consumption for Marketing. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 5 (7), 160-168.

Becton, J., Walker, H. and Jones-Farmer, A., 2014. Generational differences in workplace behavior. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 44 (3), 175-189.

Bell, J., 1999. Doing your research project. 2nd ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Benner, P., 1994. *The Tradition and Skill of Interpretive Phenomenology in Studying Health, Illness, and Caring Practices*. 1st ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Benner, R., 2018. BRAND ACTIVISM: WORKING TOWARD PROGRESSIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN ADVERTISING. Undergraduate Thesis. University of Oregon.

Bhagwat, Y., Warren, N., Beck, J. and Watson, G., 2020. Corporate Sociopolitical Activism and Firm Value. *Journal of Marketing*, 84 (5), 1-21.

Bhattacharya, C. and Sen, S., 2003. Consumer–Company Identification: A Framework for Understanding Consumers' Relationships with Companies. *Journal of Marketing* [online], 67 (2), 76-88. Available from: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1509/jmkg.67.2.76.18609 [Accessed 1 Mar 2021].

Bitsch, V., 2005. Qualitative research: A grounded theory example and evaluation criteria. *Journal of Agribusiness, 23* (3), 75-91.

Bolton, R., Parasuraman, P., Hoefnagels, A., Migchels, N., Kabadayi, S., Gruber, T., Komarova Loureiro, Y. and Solnet, D., 2013. Understanding Generation Y and their use of social media: a review and research agenda. *Journal of Service Management,* 24 (3), 245-267.

Bouvier, G., 2020. Racist call-outs and cancel culture on Twitter: The limitations of the platform's ability to define issues of social justice. *Discourse, Context & Media* [online], 38, 100431. Available from: https://www.sciencedirectcom.libezproxy.bournemouth.ac.uk/science/article/pii/S2211695820300647?via%3Dihub [Accessed 11 Apr 2021].

Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2015. *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Bristol, T. and Fern, E., 1993. Using Qualitative Techniques to Explore Consumer Attitudes: Insights From Group Process Theories. *Advances in Consumer Research,* 20 (2), 444-449.

Bryman, A., 2012. *Social Research Methods*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A., 2015. *Social Research Methods*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. and Bell, E., 2011. *Business Research Methods*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carr, D., Gotlieb, M., Lee, N. and Shah, D., 2012. Examining Overconsumption, Competitive Consumption, and Conscious Consumption from 1994 to 2004. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* [online], 644 (1), 220-233. Available from: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0002716212449452 [Accessed 7 Apr 2021].

Cennamo, L. and Gardner, D., 2008. Generational differences in work values, outcomes and person-organisation values fit. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23 (8), 891-906.

Chadwick, S. and Zipp, S., 2018. Nike, Colin Kaepernick and the pitfalls of 'woke' corporate branding [online]. *The Conversation*. Available from: https://theconversation.com/nike-colin-kaepernick-and-the-pitfalls-of-woke-corporate-branding-102922 [Accessed 8 Jan 2021].

Cone Communications, 2015. 2015 Cone Communications Millennial CSR Study [online]. *Boston: Cone Communications.* Available from: https://www.conecomm.com/research-blog/2015-cone-communications-millennial-csr-study [Accessed 25 Jan 2021].

Cresswell, J., 2007. *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches.* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Crowne, D. and Marlowe, D., 1960. A new scale of social desirability independent of psychopathology. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 24 (4), 349-354.

De Villiers, R., 2005. Interpretive research models for Informatics: Action research, grounded theory, and the family of design - and development research. *Alternation*, 12 (2), 10-52.

Denscombe, M., 2014. *The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects*. 1st ed. London: McGraw-Hill Education.

Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. and Sen, S., 2010. Maximizing Business Returns to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): The Role of CSR Communication. *International Journal of Management* Reviews [online], 12 (1), 8-19. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228118694_Maximizing_Business_Returns_to_Corporate_Social_Responsibility_CSR_The_Role_of_CSR_Communication [Accessed 16 Jan 2021].

Dudovskiy, J., 2018. *The Ultimate Guide to Writing a Dissertation in Business Studies: A Step-by-Step Assistance*. 4th ed. London: ResearchMethodology.net.

Farquhar, C., 1999. Are Focus Groups Suitable for 'Sensitive' Topics?. In: Barbour, R. and Kitzinger, J. *Developing Focus Group Research.* New York: Sage, 47-58.

Fox, M., 2017. Marcus Lemonis: If you're OK with what Trump said, don't shop at my business [online]. CNBC. Available from: https://www.cnbc.com/2017/08/16/marcus- lemonis-if-youre-ok-with-what-trump-said-dont-shop-at-my-business.html [Accessed 14 Jan 2021].

Garfield, L., 2018. Gun-control activists aren't backing down on a boycott of Apple, Amazon, and FedEx — here's how it could affect sales [online]. *Business Insider*. Available from:

https://www.businessinsider.com/nra-boycott-companies-brands-will-it-work-2018-2?r=US&IR=T [Accessed 15 Jan 2021].

Gilligan, C. and Wiggins, G., 1990. The Origins of Morality in Early Childhood Relationships. In: Kagan, J. and Lamb, S. *The Emergence of Morality in Young Children* [online]. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 277-300. Available from: https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=RuZSAQqnk1oC&oi=fnd&pg=PA277&ots=XI_pWZIDJ9&sig=nnVnDWQzP7kXtf80JCf6Hd6CQd8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage &q&f=false [Accessed 13 Apr 2021].

Given, L., 2008. Bracketing. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*.

Graeff, T., 1996. Image congruence effects on product evaluations: The role of self-monitoring and public/private consumption. *Psychology and Marketing*, 13 (5), 481-499.

H&M, 2021. Conscious – Sustainable Style | H&M GB [online]. H&M. Available from: https://www2.hm.com/en_gb/ladies/shop-by-concept/conscious-sustainable-style.html [Accessed 20 Apr 2021].

Hermann, A., 2020. *Ensuring Brand Activism in Integrated Marketing Communications Campaigns Resonates with Millennial Consumers*. Honour Thesis. University of Mississippi.

Higgins, E., 1998. Promotion and Prevention: Regulatory Focus as A Motivational Principle. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* [online], 30, 1-46. Available from: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0065260108603810 [Accessed 11 Apr 2021].

Holden, R. and Passey, J., 2009. Social desirability. In: Leary, M. and Hoyle, R. *Handbook of individual differences in social behavior* [online]. Guildford: The Guildford Press, 441-454. Available from: https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2009-12071-030 [Accessed 20 Apr 2021].

Holt, D., 2002. Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding. *Journal of Consumer Research* [online], 29 (1), 70-90. Available from: https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article-abstract/29/1/70/1796224 [Accessed 17 Apr 2021].

Hong, C., 2018. Boycotting or Buycotting? *An Investigation of Consumer Emotional Responses Towards Brand Activism*. DPhil. University of Miami.

Hoppner, J. and Vadakkepatt, G., 2019. Examining moral authority in the marketplace: A conceptualization and framework. *Journal of Business Research,* 95, 417-427.

Immordino-Yang, M., Christodoulou, J. and Singh, V., 2012. Rest Is Not Idleness. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 7 (4), 352-364.

Johansson, S., Lindström, E. and Liu, J., 2020. *Perceived Greenwashing: A Study of Attitudes*. Undergraduate. Linneuniversitetet.

Jost, J., Langer, M. and Singh, V., 2017. The Politics of Buying, Boycotting, Complaining, and Disputing: An Extension of the Research Program by Jung, Garbarino, Briley, and Wynhausen. *Journal of Consumer Research* [online], 44 (3), 503-510. Available from: https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article-abstract/44/3/503/4091330?redirectedFrom=fulltext [Accessed 3 Mar 2021].

Kalwani, M., Yim, C., Rinne, H. and Sugita, Y., 1990. A Price Expectations Model of Customer Brand Choice. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 27 (3), 251-262.

Kapitan, S., Kennedy, A. and Berth, N., 2019. Sustainably superior versus greenwasher: A scale measure of B2B sustainability positioning. *Industrial Marketing Management* [online], 76, 84-97. Available from: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0019850117309434?casa_token=ZOW yUisTyJcAAAAA:CIY0yH4mLzPBAQ585_cTMFzc1sNN0-W0L2jBcEcBHXSaWTBQBSXaV8jHulyJQj2Bz4XHKY40 [Accessed 7 Apr 2021].

Korschun, D., 2017. Column: Should companies stay politically neutral? [online]. PBS NewsHour. Available from: https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/column-companies- stay-politically-neutral [Accessed 19 Jan 2021].

Kotler, P. and Sarkar, C., 2021. "Finally, Brand Activism!" – Philip Kotler and Christian Sarkar [online]. *Marketingjournal.org*. Available from: https://www.marketingjournal.org/finally-brand-activism-philip-kotler-and-christian-sarkar/ [Accessed 2 Apr 2021].

Krishnamurthi, L., Mazumdar, T. and Raj, S., 1992. Asymmetric Response to Price in Consumer Brand Choice and Purchase Quantity Decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research* [online], 19 (3), 387. Available from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2489396?seq=1 [Accessed 30 Jan 2021].

Lavrakas, P., 2008. Purposive Sample. *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*.

Lekakis, E., 2013. *Coffee activism and the politics of fair trade and ethical consumption in the global north*. 1st ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E., 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Maday, J., 2020. The History of E-commerce: A Long and Winding Road [online]. *The Future of Customer Engagement and Experience*. Available from: https://www.the-future-of-commerce.com/2020/01/30/history-of-e-commerce/ [Accessed 2 Feb 2021].

Manfredi-Sánchez, J., 2019. Brand activism. *Communication & Society* [online], 32 (4), 343-359. Available from: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/237425498.pdf [Accessed 19 Nov 2020].

Market Strategies, 2014. Millennial shoppers trust social media more but diversify beyond Facebook [online]. *Livonia: Business Wire*. Available from: https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20140610006258/en/Market-Strategies-Study- Millennial-shoppers-trust-social-media-more-but-diversify-beyond-Facebook [Accessed 19 Jan 2021].

Marshall, M., 1996. Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice,* 13 (6), 522-525.

Miles, M. and Huberman, A., 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An expanded source book*. 1st ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Moorman, C., 2020. Commentary: Brand Activism in a Political World. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 39 (4), 388-392.

Mukherjee, S. and Althuizen, N., 2020. Brand activism: Does courting controversy help or hurt a brand?. International *Journal of Research in Marketing,* 37 (4), 772-788.

Nail, P., McGregor, I., Drinkwater, A., Steele, G. and Thompson, A., 2009. Threat causes liberals to think like conservatives. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45 (4), 901-907.

Nike, 2018. Nike's New Just Do It Campaign [online]. Nike News. Available from: https://news.nike.com/featured_video/just-do-it-dream-crazy-film [Accessed 9 Feb 2021].

Oakley, F., 2015. *GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE FREQUENCY AND IMPORTANCE OF MEANINGFUL WORK*. MSc Thesis. University of Canterbury.

Park, J. and Gursoy, D., 2012. Generation effects on work engagement among U.S. hotel employees. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 31 (4), 1195-1202.

Patton, M., 2002. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Peters, M. and Silverman, R., 2016. Big Business Speaks Up on Social Issues [online]. WSJ. Available from: https://www.wsj.com/articles/big-business-speaks-up-on-social-issues-1460936193 [Accessed 21 Mar 2021].

Pew Research Center, 2018. The Generation Gap in American Politics [online]. Washington DC: Pew Research Center. Available from:

https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/03/01/the-generation-gap-in-american-politics/ [Accessed 6 Mar 2021].

Pew Research Center, 2019. Generation dominates online searches for information on the post-Millennial generation [online]. Washington DC: Pew Research Center. Available from: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/ft_19-01-17_defininggenerations_generationzdominates/ [Accessed 16 Jan 2021].

Platon, O., 2019. EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE CONSUMER BRAND BOYCOTTS ON BRAND EQUITY. *Challenges of the Knowledge Society*, 5, 1084-1088.

Ponterotto, J., 2015. Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept Thick Description. *The Qualitative Report,* 11 (3).

Qu, S. and Dumay, J., 2011. The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 8 (3), 238-264.

Quest, J., 2019. "*To explore the tangible attributes contributing to Brand Meaning. A study of local food brands*. DPhil. Bournemouth University.

Ryle, G., 1949. Concept of the mind. 1st ed. New York: Hutchinson and Company.

Sarkar, C. and Kotler, P., n.d. *Brand activism*. 2nd ed. Chicago: IDEA BITE PRESS.

Scheier, M. and Carver, C., 1977. Self-focused attention and the experience of emotion: Attraction, repulsion, elation, and depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* [online], 35 (9), 625-636. Available from: https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1979-25260-001 [Accessed 16 Apr 2021].

Shetty, S., Belavadi Venkataramaiah, N. and Anand, K., 2019. Brand activism and millennials: an empirical investigation into the perception of millennials towards brand activism. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 17 (4), 163-175.

Sirgy, M., Lee, D., Johar, J. and Tidwell, J., 2008. Effect of self-congruity with sponsorship on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research* [online], 61 (10), 1091-1097. Available from: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296307002901 [Accessed 14 Apr 2021].

Smola, K. and Sutton, C., 2002. Generational differences: revisiting generational work values for the new millennium. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 23 (4), 363-382.

Sprout Social, 2017. #BrandsGetReal: Championing Change in the Age of Social Media [online]. *Chicago: Sprout Social.* Available from: https://sproutsocial.com/insights/data/championing-change-in-the-age-of-social-media/ [Accessed 31 Mar 2021].

Srinivasan, V., 2012. Multi generations in the workforce: Building collaboration. *IIMB Management Review*, 24 (1), 48-66.

Stokburger-Sauer, N., Ratneshwar, S. and Sen, S., 2012. Drivers of consumer–brand identification. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* [online], 29 (4), 406-418. Available from: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167811612000572#! [Accessed 2 Mar 2021].

Strauss, W. and Howe, N., 1991. *Generations*. 1st ed. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

Surridge, P., 2020. Britain's Choice: Polarisation or Cohesion. *The Political Quarterly* [online], 92 (1), 119-124. Available from: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1467-923X.12943 [Accessed 13 Apr 2021].

Tata, R., Hart, S., Sharma, A. and Sarkar, C., 2013. Why Making Money Is Not Enough [online]. *MIT Sloan Management Review*. Available from: https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/why-making-money-is-not-enough/ [Accessed 28 Jan 2021].

The Millennial Impact Report, 2019. 10 Years Looking Back [online]. *The Millennial Impact Report*. Available from: http://www.themillennialimpact.com/ [Accessed 18 Jan 2021].

Trapp, R., 2020. Patagonia Used To Be A Maverick, But Now Activism Is Mainstream [online]. *Forbes*. Available from: https://www.forbes.com/sites/rogertrapp/2020/10/30/patagonia-used-to-be-a-maverick-but-now-activism-is-mainstream/?sh=1cfa158b623c [Accessed 15 May 2021].

Turiel, E., 1985. *The development of social knowledge*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Vredenburg, J., Kapitan, S., Spry, A. and Kemper, J., 2020. Brands Taking a Stand: Authentic Brand Activism or Woke Washing?. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 39 (4), 444-460.

YPulse, 2018. 10 BRANDS MILLENNIALS & GEN Z SAY DO THE MOST (AND LEAST) SOCIAL GOOD [online]. *Boston: YPulse.* Available from: https://www.ypulse.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/10_Brands_Millennials_Gen_Z_Say_Do_The_Most_Least_Soci al_Good_02.19.2018.pdf [Accessed 23 Jan 2021].