

Louvain School of Management

How do cultural values influence consumers' attitudes towards brand activism?

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1. Introduction

More than two-thirds of consumers worldwide reported that they “*choose, switch, avoid or boycott*” brands based on the brand’s stand on societal issues (Edelman, 2018, p. 5), showing that consumption is increasingly values-driven. In response, companies are moving beyond their traditional role as producers and even beyond established social responsibilities, to take explicit positions on divisive socio-political debates, making corporate communication more visible, contested and consequential (Whitler and Barta, 2024; Braga et al., 2024). For example, Nike publicly associated its brand with Colin Kaepernick to engage in initiatives tackling racial inequalities, Starbucks committed to hiring refugees, and Chick-fil-A became involved in the marriage equality debate. Such position statements are referred to as *brand activism*, defined as the strategic use of brand voice and brand actions in public, often on issues where there is no general agreement and reactions are polarized (Cammarota et al., 2023; Vredenburg et al., 2020). While activism can strengthen differentiation and deepen ties with aligned audiences, it also exposes firms to risks such as accusations of inauthenticity, consumer backlash, boycotts, and financial repercussions, making it a high-risk strategic choice (Ahmad et al., 2024; Bhagwat et al., 2020; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020).

From an academic perspective, brand activism remains a “new and fragmented” research domain that needs further empirical validation (Cammarota et al., 2023). Unlike corporate social responsibility, brand activism addresses divisive topics, enhancing both visibility and risk (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Cammarota et al., 2023). Existing studies have mainly examined consumer-brand alignment and disagreement, showing that disagreement tends to reduce brand attitudes and purchase intentions while agreement does not necessarily generate equally strong positive effects (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Other research has focused on perceived authenticity and the risk of opportunistic or inauthentic activism, emphasizing that sincerity plays a central role in consumer evaluations (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Ahmad et al., 2024). Beyond consumer reactions, socio-political engagement also triggers adverse investor responses and firm value declines (Bhagwat et al., 2020). However, while these perspectives advance our understanding of brand activism, current models overlook cross-cultural variability in consumer responses (Cammarota et al., 2023; Braga et al., 2024).

This limitation is particularly critical for global brands operating across diverse markets with often global communication strategies. Activist campaigns designed to resonate in one cultural setting can be seen as inappropriate, illegitimate or provocative in another, exposing firms to avoidable damage and inefficient use of marketing resources (Braga et al., 2024). Because brand activism intersects with highly contested social norms, consumer interpretations are inherently subjective. While prior research in the broader

CSR domain demonstrates that culture fundamentally shapes the interpretation of corporate social signals (Karaosman et al., 2015), these insights remain insufficiently integrated into brand activism models. Given the divisive nature of activism, cultural values likely serve as key boundary conditions dictating how consumers assess a brand's sincerity and appropriateness (Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Despite calls for cross-cultural investigations, existing studies implicitly assume values' universality by testing ideological alignment within single-country samples. This approach treats differences in cultural orientation as contextual background rather than a major factor that influences how people respond to brand activism.

This thesis aims to explain cultural variance in consumer responses to brand activism by positioning cultural values as a central explanatory lens. Building on Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework, this study conceptualizes cultural values as shared priorities that shape moral expectations and risk tolerance in marketplace judgments (Hofstede, 2011). Therefore, the central research question is :

How do cultural values influence consumers' attitudes towards brand activism?

Theoretically, this study integrates cultural values into the consumer-response logic of brand activism, specifying the boundary conditions under which activism creates versus destroys value (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). By doing so, it refines explanations of why identical activist stances can generate different evaluations across cultural contexts (Braga et al., 2024; Hofstede, 2011). Managerially, it aims to provide a clearer framework for anticipating cross-market backlash or support. Given the severe reputational and financial stakes associated with perceived inauthenticity and opportunism, this framework guides global brands in mitigating relationship damage before committing resources to polarizing campaigns (Ahmad et al., 2024; Vredenburg et al., 2020).

To address the research question, the thesis is structured as follows. First, the literature review clarifies the conceptual foundations of brand activism, examines its typologies and key issues such as authenticity and accusations of woke-washing before synthesizing existing research on consumer responses to brand activism. Second, the thesis introduces cultural values as a central explanatory variable and presents the selected cultural framework while justifying its relevance for understanding how cultural orientations shape consumer judgments and reactions. Based on this theoretical background, hypotheses will be developed and empirically tested through a dedicated methodology section outlining the research design, data collection and procedure. The findings are then presented and discussed considering existing literature. The thesis concludes with its main limitations, directions for future research and the theoretical contributions and managerial implications derived from the results.

2. Literature review

2.1. Conceptual foundations of Brand Activism

To understand the current corporate landscape, it is fundamental to first analyze the differences between brand activism and other concepts such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) and secondly to highlight the specific areas of intervention where brand activism operates. The modern market environment as well as evolving regulations require that corporations look beyond basic profit generation to address complex societal challenges. Consequently, business strategies have evolved from basic philanthropic, often not business related, initiatives to more complex engagements with public policy. This section outlines the logical evolution from CSR to CRM, and finally to the emerging concept of Brand Activism. The objective is to clarify the conceptual boundaries that separate these related but distinct strategies to avoid a theoretical confusion.

2.1.1. Corporate social responsibility

In the literature, brand activism is sometimes linked to CSR which represents the foundational concept from which modern corporate social initiatives evolved. According to the European Commission, CSR is defined as *“a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis”* (Bhatti et al., 2022, p. 28).

Historically, CSR has been rooted in the assumption that businesses possess obligations to society that extend beyond mere profit maximization (Bhatti et al., 2022). Operating as a broad umbrella concept that encompasses a wide variety of organizational initiatives rather than a single tactical execution, it balances economic performance with societal good, while addressing both internal and external stakeholders (Herzberg & Rudeloff, 2022), and seeking a "halo effect" that enhances overall corporate reputation (Braga et al., 2024; Shukla et al., 2025). Based on the classification presented by Kotler et al. (2012), CSR initiatives include cause promotion, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, community volunteering, socially responsible business practices and finally, Cause-Related Marketing (Bhatti et al., 2022).

Most importantly, traditional CSR remains primarily focused on the core business of the company. It typically targets generally accepted, non-controversial issues such as poverty reduction, environmental sustainability or disaster relief where societal consensus is high (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020 ; Shukla et al., 2025).

2.1.2. Cause-related marketing

CRM is explicitly identified as one of the most versatile CSR initiatives (Bhatti et al., 2022), demonstrating a shift in corporate philosophy from voluntary philanthropy to a strategic investment logic, operating under the principle of "doing better by doing good" (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988, p. 59). The most widely used definition of CRM was provided by Varadarajan and Menon (1988, p. 60), who describe it as *"the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives"*.

The term CRM was first introduced in 1983 by American Express Company through a campaign promising to donate one penny for every transaction made with its charge card and one dollar for every new card issued to raise funds for the restoration of the Statue of Liberty (Bhatti et al., 2022; Ferraris et al., 2020). The main objectives of CRM are inherently dual : improving corporate objectives and performance while supporting a charitable cause (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Because donations strictly depend on consumer purchases, CRM is distinctively transactional, and marketing driven. It is frequently utilized as a short-term promotional tool within the marketing mix to boost sales, increase coupon redemption rates and differentiate products in highly competitive markets (Bhatti et al., 2022; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988).

2.1.3. The concept of brand activism

While CSR and CRM focus on broad societal consensus and transactional philanthropy (Hydock et al., 2020), brand activism represents a completely different strategic approach. Sarkar and Kotler (2018) were the first to conceptualize this new phenomenon and they define brand activism as *"business efforts to promote, impede or direct social, political, economic and environment reform or stasis with the desire to make improvements in society"* (p. 468). So, brand activism occurs when a company utilizes its corporate or individual brand name to take a highly public stance on partisan and controversial issues (Moorman, 2020).

Brand activism differs significantly from CSR and CRM across several key dimensions, particularly regarding political engagement, polarization potential, ideological positioning and risk exposure but what really distinguishes it, is its controversial nature (Cammarota et al., 2021). According to different researchers, brand activism is inherently ideological and purpose-driven, addressing acute societal threats that lack a universally accepted solution (Herzberg & Rudeloff, 2022; Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Because it addresses divisive topics such as gender rights, immigration, LGBTQIA+ issues and systemic racism, brand activism possesses an extremely high polarization potential

(Vredenburg et al., 2020) and this ideological positioning exposes brands to severe risks (Cammarota et al., 2023; Hydock et al., 2020). While CSR generally elicits positive or ambivalent reactions, brand activism exposes brands to an intense public evaluation and can trigger consumer backlash, brand hate and organized boycotts from those who disagree with the brand's stance (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Shukla et al., 2025). Brand activism also generates a risk of rejection by those who agree with the stance but accuse the brand of lacking sincerity, appropriation or woke-washing (Ahmad et al., 2024). So, divisive topics can give rise to opposition from both sides.

This high-risk environment has led to a conceptual debate in the literature as to whether brand activism represents an extension of CSR or a complete conceptual rupture. Kotler and Sarkar (2017) argue that brand activism is a “natural progression of CSR”, evolving from corporate driven philanthropy to deeply rooted values-driven advocacy (Lou et al., 2024). Conversely, other scholars highlight a clear conceptual rupture. Herzberg and Rudeloff (2022) alongside Pimentel et al. (2024) assert that while CSR is closely tied to a company's core business and long-term operational strategy, brand activism often exhibits a dissolving link to core business activities and can emerge as a spontaneous reaction to sudden political events. Furthermore, Francioni et al. (2025) note that the aggressive communication style of activism separates it fundamentally from the protective, consensus-building nature of CSR.

A central tension in the literature revolves around perceived authenticity. Consumers are increasingly demanding that brands take a stand on social issues but rapidly punish companies that engage in "woke-washing". This topic, which is another risk attached to brand activism, will be further developed later in this review. The following table synthesizes the differences between Brand Activism, CSR and CRM, illustrating how they differ to avoid conceptual confusion :

Table 1: Structured Comparison of Brand Activism, CSR and CRM

	Brand activism	CSR	CRM
Definition	Taking a public stance on controversial sociopolitical issues to drive societal reform.	Integrating social and environmental concerns into business operations on a voluntary basis.	Contributing a specific amount to a cause based on the revenue generated by customer purchases.
Polarization potential	High	Low, barely present	Low
Type of issues addressed	Issues that are socially threatening and controversial.	Generally recognized prosocial topics.	Specific charities or non-controversial community needs.

Consumer expectations	Increasingly in demand among belief-driven consumers but also highly controversial.	Broadly expected as a standard corporate duty.	Viewed favorably as a mutually beneficial initiative.
Typical consumer responses	Polarized: loyalty (buycotts) or severe backlash (boycotts).	Generally positive attitudes and enhanced corporate reputation.	Increased purchase intentions and positive brand image.
Stakeholder focus	Heavily focused on external stakeholders and public opinion.	Broad focus on both internal and external stakeholders.	Primarily focused on consumers and the non-profit organizations with which they partner.
Relation to core business	Often involves a separation from core business activities.	Focuses on core business operations.	Closely tied to marketing and sales objectives.
Underlying logic	Purpose-driven and values-driven ideological positioning.	Normative “do well by doing good” stakeholder management.	Strategic philanthropy treating social causes as a commercial investment.

Note. Characteristics according to: Hydock et al., 2020 and Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Nalick et al., 2016; Sarkar & Kotler, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020, all retrieved from Herzberg & Rudeloff, 2022.

2.2. Typologies of Brand Activism

Brand activism is a multifaceted concept that can manifest in various ways depending on the strategic objectives adopted by the company. To fully comprehend how consumers evaluate these actions, it is necessary to classify the different ways brand activism is perceived. The literature demonstrates that brand activism can be sorted into different categories depending on the type of issue addressed as well as the degree and authenticity of engagement.

2.2.1. Types of causes

Brand activism can intervene in different domains of society. To categorize the wide array of issues that brands support, Sarkar and Kotler (2018) introduced the “Umbrella of Brand Activism” or “Brand Activism Map” which identifies six distinct domains: Social, Legal, Economic, Environmental, Political and Workplace (Cammarota et al., 2023; Eyada, 2020).

Briefly explained, social activism includes areas such as gender equality, LGBTQIA+ rights, education and healthcare (Eyada, 2020). A prominent example is the campaign of Gillette, a brand historically built by praising masculinity “perfection” (Whitler and Barta, 2024), addressing toxic masculinity in the context of the #MeToo movement (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Legal activism deals with for example citizenship, policies and employment laws. This is illustrated by Delta Airlines stopping promotional benefits for National Rifle Association members following national debates on gun reform (Pimentel et al., 2024). Economic activism focuses on income equality and tax policies, as seen when

Walmart actively decided to boost employees' wages to influence economic reform (Pimentel et al., 2024). Environmental activism tackles for example conservation, deforestations, pollution and land-use. Patagonia is a notable example in this domain through its continuous fight for climate change policies and its reliance on sustainable fabrics (Pimentel et al., 2024). Political activism involves partisanship, lobbying, voting and political reform, with brands like Starbucks publicly launching campaigns to hire refugees in response to restrictive immigration policies (Atanga et al., 2022). Finally, workplace activism involves governance matters, labor rights and organizational policies as illustrated by the software company Xero which has engaged in workplace activism, raising awareness of mental health (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

In addition to the specific domains of intervention, brand activism can also be categorized according to the degree of activist messaging or the political intensity. The literature distinguishes between stronger activist positioning and more moderate positioning. Stronger positioning involves heavy activism characterized by frequent communication, assertive tones and urgent calls to action that are designed to mobilize consumers and encourage them to challenge the established order (Cammarota et al., 2026). Conversely, moderate or light positioning relies on a polite, educational tone that primarily seeks to raise awareness rather than provoke immediate political action (Ginder & Johnson, 2025, cited by Cammarota et al., 2026). These distinctions are particularly important in potentially polarizing markets because highly intense and divisive issues can alienate existing customers who hold opposing ideological views (Atanga et al., 2022; Hydock et al., 2020). A brand must carefully calibrate its activism intensity to avoid severe consumer backlash while still maintaining its core activist identity (Cammarota et al., 2026).

2.3. Consumer responses to brand activism

Marketing literature has increasingly shifted from a transactional perspective towards a relational one, where consumers tend to be attracted to and identify with brands that reflect their identity and moral values (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). In this context, brand activism represents a significant relational test. Because it involves publicly engaging with contested issues (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), activism forces consumers to re-evaluate the brand based on their own values, making value congruence highly relevant (Garg & Saluja, 2022; Tuškej et al., 2013). When the values of a brand align with those of the consumer, it fosters consumer-brand identification (Tuškej et al., 2013). Conversely, when a brand violates the main values or moral expectations of consumers, this incongruence weakens the consumer-brand relationship (Lee et al., 2009; Francioni et al., 2025).

Depending on this ideological alignment and the type of activism deployed, the brand's actions will trigger distinct positive or negative responses, which manifest both attitudinally and behaviorally (Cammarota et al., 2026; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Importantly, these responses are also likely to vary depending on the type of cause addressed. As discussed in the previous section, highly intense and divisive issues can alienate existing customers who hold opposing ideological views (Atanga et al., 2022; Hydock et al., 2020), while more moderate positioning may generate less polarized reactions (Cammarota et al., 2026).

Across the different reactions, perceived authenticity emerges as a central evaluative and determinant filter through which consumers assess whether activist engagement is genuinely values-driven or perceived as an "insincere marketing ploy" (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 2; Mirzaei et al., 2022; Lou et al., 2024). Authenticity is reinforced when the brand's public messaging is coherent with its internal corporate practices, when there is a meaningful fit between the brand identity and the cause it defends (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Fritz et al., 2017), and when the engagement appears sustained and consistent over time, rather than opportunistic, as consumers assess whether the brand's commitment reflects deeply rooted values or a reaction to trending topics (Lou et al., 2024; Bulmer et al., 2024). Finally, the brand must demonstrate tangible sacrifice, whether it is financial, reputational or operational, rather than superficial actions (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Garg & Saluja, 2022). All these conditions are consistent with the Woke Activism Authenticity Framework (WAAF, see Appendix 1) developed by Mirzaei et al. (2022) and brands that meet these conditions are more likely to generate positive consumer responses. However, when they are not met, brands fall into "woke-washing"¹ (Sobande, 2020 ; Vredenburg et al., 2020), triggering backlash from ideological opponents but also skepticism, brand hate, and rejection from consumers who actually agree with the cause itself but feel betrayed by the brand's hypocrisy and opportunistic behavior (Ahmad et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2024).

Table 2 summarizes the main consumer responses to brand activism based on the literature, which are examined in detail in the following sections. Importantly, these responses are unlikely to be uniform across individuals. Individual-level cultural values may therefore shape both the direction and intensity of these attitudinal and behavioral responses.

2.3.1. Positive consumer responses

When consumers perceive that a brand's activist stance aligns with their personal values, the shared values may reinforce consumer-brand identification and strengthen the

¹The term "woke" is of African-American origin and is "increasingly used as a byword for social awareness". (Merriam-Webster, 2017)

relationship, driving positive brand attitudes and commitment (Garg & Saluja, 2022; Tuškej et al., 2013). According to consumer-brand identification theory (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), the greater the similarity between the self and the brand, the stronger the consumer-brand identification. This leads to more favorable attitudes towards the brand, greater purchase intentions, and increased brand advocacy (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020).

At the attitudinal level, responses encompass the cognitive and affective evaluations that consumers form after exposure to a brand's activist stance. When ideological alignment occurs and the activism is perceived as authentic, consumers may develop more favorable brand attitudes and stronger brand trust (Vredenburg et al., 2020), although this positive effect is often less pronounced due to the expectation that brands "ought to" behave morally (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 774). Such alignment can also generate positive emotions such as gratitude, elevation or delight (Garg & Saluja, 2022; Wannow et al., 2024), which reinforce consumers' support for the brand's initiatives and may have an impact on their purchasing decisions and brand loyalty (Garg & Saluja, 2022).

Driven by these favorable brand attitudes, these positive evaluations may translate into favorable behavioral support. Purchase intention represents the most direct commercial outcome. When activism aligns with a consumer's ideological orientation and is perceived as authentic, it may increase favorable attitudes towards the brand, but also in willingness to purchase (even paying more) from the brand (Garg & Saluja, 2022).

Authentic activism can also stimulate positive word-of-mouth (WOM) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), as consumers publicly signal alignment with the brand's values (Chu et al., 2022). At its most intense, positive consumer response takes the form of boycotting, where consumers intentionally purchase a brand's products to reward its stance because of the ideological alignment. (Jungblut & Johnen, 2022).

However, the intensity of positive responses may also vary depending on the type of activism and the nature of the cause addressed. Research suggests that activism on moderately controversial social issues, such as gender equality, can generate more favorable brand attitudes than activism on highly contested sociopolitical topics, which tend to polarize audiences more strongly (Atanga et al., 2022). Similarly, the overall favorability of consumer responses may differ depending on the ideological orientation of the cause and the characteristics of the brand engaging in activism (Braga et al., 2024; Hydock et al., 2020). Furthermore, activism that adopts a less confrontational and more educational tone can raise awareness and support among aligned consumers while limiting the risk of strong backlash (Cammarota et al., 2026).

2.3.2. Negative consumer responses

While brand activism may strengthen relationships with aligned consumers, it also exposes brands to severe negative reactions when ideological disagreement occurs. Prior research consistently demonstrates a negativity bias, meaning that ideological disagreement generates stronger negative reactions than ideological agreement generates positive ones (Hydock et al., 2020; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020).

When consumers perceive a value incongruence between their beliefs and the brand's stance, the consumer-brand relationship may weaken. Individuals consider their own beliefs more untouchable and prevailing than the values of others. This is why it is challenging for people to align themselves with a brand's message when there is a strong ideological disagreement (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Such perceived moral transgressions can trigger strong negative emotions such as anger or contempt (Wannow et al., 2024) and may lead to "disidentification", a psychological process in which consumers distance themselves from the brand to protect their own identity and moral self-concept (Lee et al., 2009; Wannow et al., 2024).

At the attitudinal level, when consumers disagree with a brand's stance, perceived value incongruence signals low "self-brand similarity" and leads to a decline in brand attitude (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Political engagement appears particularly sensitive, as some consumers believe brands should not participate in political debates, which may intensify negative attitudinal reactions (Cammarota et al., 2021; Cammarota et al., 2026).

"Stay out of the politics and just make my damn ice cream!" : consumer response to Ben & Jerry's post on the Israel-Palestine conflict (Cammarota et al., 2026, p. 9)

These negative evaluations lead to concrete punitive behaviors. Ideological misalignment or perceived inauthenticity and hypocrisy can reduce purchase intention as consumers seek to distance themselves from the brand (Korschun et al., 2016). Furthermore, disagreement between the consumers and the position taken by the brand may generate negative WOM (NWOM), negative eWOM and online backlash, amplifying reputational damage (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Cammarota et al., 2023; Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022). Digital platforms amplify also these reactions because negative eWOM can escalate into coordinated anti-brand actions and collective opposition such as "firestorms" (digital brand crisis resulting of a big number of eNWOM) (Klostermann et al., 2022, cited by Cammarota et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020) and "trapping" (using technological features to harm the brand) (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022).

The most intense negative behavioral reaction is boycotting, which represents an active and collective form of punishment driven by a perceived moral transgression (Jungblut &

Johnen, 2022). Consistent with the negativity bias, *“the negative effect of boycotting outweighs the positive effect of buycotting”* when there is an ideological misalignment (Hydock et al., 2020 ; Jungblut & Johnen, 2022, p. 1106). In such cases, distancing from the brand is a way for consumers to protect their identity (Lee et al., 2009).

The intensity of negative reactions also varies depending on the type of activism and the level of controversy associated with the cause. Activism addressing highly politicized and contested issues tends to generate significantly less favorable brand attitudes than activism related to more broadly supported social issues (Atanga et al., 2022). For example, an explicitly political statement can provoke strong anti-brand actions such as discrediting campaigns or online backlash (trapping) from consumers who perceive the brand's stance as a violation of their moral values (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022). Moreover, more intense forms of activism, characterized by frequent and forceful messaging on controversial topics, may amplify polarization and alienate not only ideological opponents, but also previously supportive consumers who perceive the brand as excessively politicized (Cammarota et al., 2026). Interestingly, environmental activist campaigns have been found to trigger higher levels of consumer resignation and perceived hypocrisy than social campaigns, which were sometimes viewed as a more legitimate expression of brand values (Moumade et al., 2024).

Taken together, these different responses illustrate how brand activism may either strengthen or weaken the consumer-brand relationship depending on value alignment and perceived authenticity. Although short-term reactions to brand activism often appear asymmetric and mainly negative (Hydock et al., 2020; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), most existing studies focus on short-term reactions to individual activist events and fewer studies have examined how repeated or sustained activism can shape consumer-brand relationships over time. In fact, Bhattacharya & Sen, (2003) explain that sustained engagement with a social issue in an ideological way may over time strengthen the distinctiveness and coherence of a brand's identity, leading to a better consumer-brand identification. Therefore, brand activism could positively influence consumer attitudes, intentions and behavior in the long term (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

Table 2. Synthesis of studies on consumer responses to brand activism

Author(s)	Type of activism	Degree of controversy	Main focus of the study	Key example / Topics	Main consumer responses
Hydock et al. (2020)	Political activism	High	The role of market share in determining whether political activism helps or hurts brands.	Brand stances on transgender bathroom access, abortion, and immigration.	(-) Large-market-share brands tend to lose customers overall when taking a stance; (+) small-market-share brands may gain customers through ideological alignment.
Mukherjee & Althuizen (2020)	Sociopolitical	High	The effect of ideological agreement vs. disagreement on consumer responses.	Immigration; abortion rights; freedom of speech.	(-) Disagreement decreases brand attitude and choice; (+) Agreement yields no significant positive effect, suggesting a negativity bias.
Vredenburg et al. (2020)	Authentic activism vs. woke-washing	/	The alignment required between activist messaging, brand purpose, and prosocial corporate practice.	/	(+) Authentic activism (message-practice alignment) strengthens brand evaluation; (-) inauthentic activism triggers accusations of woke-washing.
Cammarota, Marino & Resciniti (2021)	Social and Legal	High	Consumer sentiment and perceived authenticity across several real-life cases.	Airbnb (immigration, refugees), Gillette (toxic masculinity), Victoria's Secret (LGBTQIA+).	(+) Positive sentiment and support when activism is perceived as authentic; (-) misalignment with corporate values is interpreted as woke-washing and generates strongly negative sentiment.
Jungblut & Johnen (2022)	Sociopolitical activism	High	Boycotting versus buycotting reactions	Fictitious brands addressing gender equality (rainbow cans), gun control, and immigration / border walls.	(-) Boycotting outweighs buycotting; political opponents are more vocal and mobilized than supporters, highlighting the riskiness of brand activism.
Atanga et al. (2022)	Sociopolitical activism	Moderate to High	The impact of issue controversy level on brand	Fictitious hotel "Serenity Inn" (BLM vs. COVID vaccines) and fast-food	(-) Highly controversial issues (e.g. BLM) generate less favorable brand attitudes than moderately controversial ones

			attitude and perceived sincerity.	brand “Maxy” (BLM vs. gender equality).	because motives are perceived as less sincere.
Garg & Saluja (2022)	Sociopolitical (liberal vs. conservative)	High	The role of political ideology in shaping consumer responses to brand activism.	Fictitious clothing brand (“Adventurer”) supporting Black Lives Matter (liberal) or nationalistic hiring policies (conservative).	(+) Consumers respond positively when activism matches their ideology (higher brand attitude, WTP, pride); (-) slacktivism is penalized by all consumers and yields lower attitudes than silence.
Pöyry & Laaksonen (2022)	Sociopolitical activism	High	Consumers’ anti-brand actions in response to activism triggers and their coping strategies.	Fazer’s “Lovebot Blue” campaign targeting online hate speech (linked to immigration debates).	(-) Political anti-brand actions emerge when consumers disagree with the stance, including boycotting, trapping, and discrediting the brand.
Ahmad et al. (2024)	Woke brand activism	/	The consequences of woke-washing on authenticity perceptions and brand attitudes.	Scenarios involving abortion rights, racial equality (BLM), and LGBTQ+ rights, including donations vs. internal HR inconsistency.	(-) Woke-washing is strongly penalized and leads to rejection and negative attitudes, even among consumers who ideologically agree with the stance.
Wannow et al. (2024)	Sociopolitical activism	High	The role of moral emotions in shaping brand attitudes towards activist brands.	Fictitious home-improvement retailer taking a stance on abortion rights and illegal immigration.	(-) Disagreement triggers anger and other condemning emotions, damaging brand attitude; it may also intensify advocacy among opponents of the brand’s stance.
Cammarota et al. (2026)	Social, Political and Environmental	High	The impact of activism intensity (heavy vs. light activism) on consumer polarization.	Ben & Jerry’s Instagram activist communication over 11 years on racism, same-sex marriage, LGBTQIA+ rights, sustainability, and geopolitics (Israel- Palestine).	(+) Loyalty and advocacy among core supporters; (-) heavy activism generates high polarization, negative eWOM, boycott calls, and alienation of former supporters due to perceived “overpoliticization”.

2.4. Cultural Values

2.4.1. Cultural values in consumer behavior

Understanding how consumers evaluate brand activism requires examining the cultural values that shape their perceptions and expectations. Culture is defined as *"the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others"* (Hofstede, 2011, p. 3). Rather than operating as a mere contextual variable, culture functions as a collectively shared system of meaning that guides interpretation, frames perception and structures individuals' understanding of their social and physical surroundings (Möller & Eisend, 2010). Cultural values are relatively stable and internalized guiding principles that shape individuals' attitudes, preferences and behavioral choices. When shared within a group, they form distinctive value priorities at the cultural level (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). By guiding the thoughts and behaviors of a society, they play a strong role in perceptions of brand activism.

Furthermore, these values influence trust formation and can alter the strength of the attitude-behavior relationship (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). In the context of brand activism, culture may directly influence perceptions of legitimacy and appropriateness. A brand is perceived as authentic and legitimate when it is congruent with the moral principles and norms of the culture to which a consumer belongs (Fritz et al., 2017). This is critically important in the context of brand activism. As we have seen, and compared to traditional CSR initiatives, brand activism inherently involves taking a public stance on controversial and highly moralized sociopolitical issues (Shukla et al., 2025). Consequently, consumers rely heavily on their internalized cultural schemas to navigate these complex moral dilemmas. The degree to which an activist message resonates or offends is not absolute but is likely to depend on the consumer's cultural values (Hur & Kim, 2017). In this regard, existing research on cross-cultural customer suggests that cultural differences can explain variances in how customers react to certain phenomena (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011).

Prior research on CSR initiatives provides initial evidence that these cultural orientations can affect prosocial responses and their evaluation : cross-cultural research shows that some consumers tend to develop more positive CSR perceptions, while the effectiveness of CSR initiatives varies significantly depending on consumers' cultural values (Hur & Kim, 2017; Karaosman et al., 2015). For instance, collectivistic consumers tend to have more positive perceptions of CSR because they innately value community solidarity and cooperation. Furthermore, individualistic cultures often expect more "explicit CSR" communication to address social issues, while collectivist cultures value implicit, broader voluntary actions (Matten & Moon, 2008). While these findings relate to CSR rather than brand activism specifically, they suggest that cultural values are likely to play a similar, if

not stronger, moderating role in the context of brand activism, given its more divisive and moralized nature.

Clarifying these mechanisms is essential for understanding how the exact same brand activism initiative may be interpreted differently across various cultural contexts. Since brand activism addresses highly emotional and controversial topics, cultural variations in moral judgment, emotional expression and information processing are likely to influence whether a specific campaign generates behavioral support or severe backlash and punishment.

2.4.2. Cultural dimensions of Hofstede

Several different frameworks exist to analyze cultural values (e.g. Schwartz, Edward T. Hall...), but Hofstede's model is the most established theoretical foundation and most widely adopted to analyze cultural differences in marketing literature (Isaacson et al., 2017; Soares et al., 2007). However, even if it remains dominant, it has been criticized for oversimplifying cultural complexity and for its original country-level design (Soares et al., 2007; Yoo et al., 2011). Originally, it was applied at the national level (Yoo & Shin, 2017) and cross-cultural marketing research has relied on national averages to explain consumer behavior (Yoo et al., 2011), assuming that all individuals within the same country share the exact same culture (Yoo & Donthu, 2002; Yoo et al., 2011). Utilizing national proxies to deduce individual psychological traits could constitute an “ecological fallacy” (*“when ecological or country-level relationships are interpreted as if they are applied to individuals”*, Yoo et al., 2011, p. 195). Because individuals differ in the extent to which they internalize culturally dominant values and practices, significant variations between individuals within the same country exist (Chirkov et al., 2003; Yoo & Shin, 2017). Thus, stereotyping entire populations can mask the real causes behind the behavior. To address these limitations and reach a theoretical precision while avoiding this ecological fallacy, it is more than appropriate to measure cultural values directly at the individual level using validated and reliable instruments (like the CVSCALE) to capture the psychological traits that influence consumer responses (Mazanec et al., 2015).

Considered at the individual level, this framework explains five original dimensions identified by Hofstede (2010):

1. **Individualism-collectivism** represents the relationship between the individual and the group, contrasting self-interest, personal accomplishments (individualism) with group loyalty, where individuals belong to groups that protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (collectivism) (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede, 2010).
2. **Masculinity-Femininity** concerns the dominant social values, contrasting a highly competitive orientation towards achievement, success and assertiveness

(masculinity) against a focus on caring, solidarity and overall quality of life (femininity) (Hofstede, 2010).

3. **Power Distance** reflects the acceptance of unequal power distribution, status privileges and authority and is defined as *“the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally”* (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9).
4. **Uncertainty Avoidance** indicates the degree of tolerance for ambiguity and unstructured situations and to *“the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.”* (Hofstede, 2001, p. 161). Cultures with strong uncertainty avoidance rely on rules, formality and structured situations to mitigate anxiety (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011).
5. **Long-Term Orientation** focuses on the degree to which *“a society exhibits a practical future-oriented perspective rather than a conventional, historic or short-term point of view”* (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011, p. 183). This dimension fosters *“virtues oriented toward future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift”*. (Hofstede, 2001, p. 359)

Although Hofstede introduced in 2010 indulgence vs restraint as a sixth dimension, it is excluded from this study. This newer dimension refers to the level of self-gratification a society allows (Hofstede, 2011) but it has been less used in the literature and empirical research, thus remaining in early phases (Pratesi et al., 2021). In addition, the most extensively validated individual-level instrument, the CVSCALE (Yoo et al., 2011), does not operationalize this dimension. Therefore, to preserve measurement robustness and theoretical alignment, this thesis focuses on the five original established dimensions.

More importantly, few studies examine the five dimensions at the same time. In this thesis, they are all tested simultaneously rather than selecting only one or two. Hofstede's framework is considered an “unclassified multidimensional construct” where individual dimensions are free to vary and interact (Schumann et al., 2010, p. 455). Examining only a single dimension omits controls for other cultural orientations and it thus overlooks the complex processes of thought that drive consumer responses. Therefore, they should not be studied in isolation (Schumann et al., 2010).

Accordingly, despite growing academic interest in brand activism, research clarifying the relationship between Hofstede's cultural dimensions and consumer responses to brand activism remains quite limited and inconsistent. This constitutes the central gap this thesis aims to address. By examining how Hofstede's five cultural dimensions, measured at the individual level and tested simultaneously, have an impact on how consumers interpret and respond to brand activism, this study positions cultural values not as a mere contextual background but as a key explanatory mechanism. These cultural dimensions are therefore expected to influence consumer responses to brand activism.

2.5. Conclusion of the literature review

Brand activism represents a distinct strategic approach that goes beyond traditional CSR and CRM by intentionally taking a public stance on divisive sociopolitical issues (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Moorman, 2020). Within this polarizing environment, perceived authenticity, seen as the alignment between a brand's messaging, values and practices, plays a central role in shaping consumer evaluations (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Vredenburg et al., 2020). When activism is perceived as authentic and ideologically aligned with consumers' values, it can foster positive brand attitudes, trust, positive WOM purchase intentions and boycotting behavior (Garg & Saluja, 2022; Chu et al., 2022). Conversely, ideological disagreement or perceived inauthenticity triggers severe negative reactions including brand attitude decline, loss of trust, negative WOM and boycotts (Hydock et al., 2020; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Ahmad et al., 2024). These responses are shaped by a pronounced negativity bias: the negative effects of disagreement consistently outweigh the positive effects of agreement, reinforcing the strategic vulnerability inherent in brand activism, where the potential losses can easily outweigh the gains depending on the context (Hydock et al., 2020; Bhagwat et al., 2020).

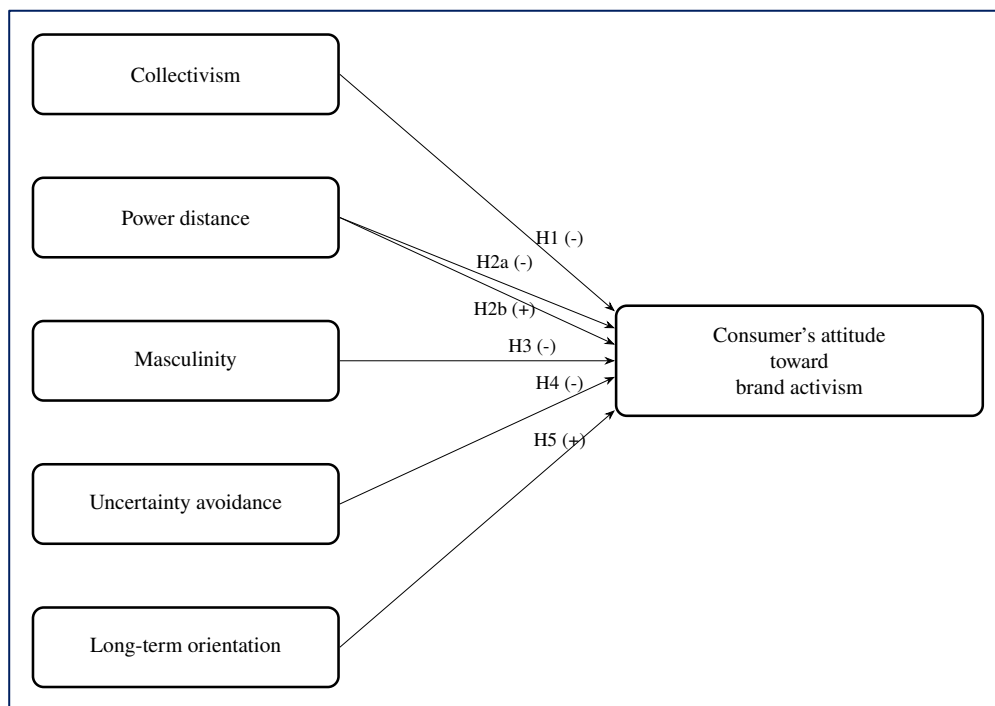
However, the existing literature is mostly based on Western-centric samples and treats cultural orientation as contextual background rather than a main explanatory mechanism (Braga et al., 2024; Shukla et al., 2025). Most studies test ideological alignment within single-country samples, implicitly assuming value universality (Braga et al., 2024; Cammarota et al., 2023) and ignoring evident differences among individuals within the same society (Isaacson et al., 2017; Yoo et al., 2011). This is an important limitation. Because brand activism engages with highly polarizing and value-laden topics, cultural values naturally shape moral expectations and influence consumer judgments (Vredenburg et al., 2020 ; Hofstede, 2011). The absence of clearly specified cultural determinants may explain why the literature produces contradictory findings regarding the net impact of activism, with some scholars documenting severe backlash and others suggesting that sustained activism can foster long-term consumer-brand identification (Hydock et al., 2020; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Wannow et al., 2024).

This constitutes the central gap this thesis aims to address. Taking a purely individual approach for understanding cultural dimensions, avoiding an ecological fallacy, provides a valuable theoretical framework for explaining why activist stances provoke different responses. By measuring Hofstede's five cultural dimensions at the individual level, this study positions cultural values as an explanatory variable rather than a descriptive contextual factor.

3. Hypotheses development

In this research, brand attitude is retained as the main dependent variable. Brand attitude is conceptually defined as a “*relatively enduring, unidimensional summary evaluation of the brand that presumably energizes behavior*” (Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 55). As discussed above, activism has been shown to elicit various distinct responses, but these specific behaviors can be seen as manifestations of the consumer's overall evaluative judgment (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Thus, selecting a global evaluative construct like brand attitude is methodologically coherent instead of isolating a single behavioral response and excluding others, because it captures the underlying attitude that predicts subsequent behavioral responses. (Spears & Singh, 2004). Figure 1 represents the conceptual model summarizing the developed hypotheses and the resulting relationships.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Individualism-Collectivism

The individualism-collectivism dimension describes the extent to which members of a society are integrated into groups (Hofstede, 2011). Collectivism represents a cultural preference for a tightly knit social structure where individuals are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups that protect them in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede, 2011). Collectivist consumers prioritize group welfare, interdependence, and the pursuit of common goals over their own personal interests (Hofstede et al., 2010; De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). For them, maintaining social cohesion and preserving group harmony are considered as societal goals (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). Consequently, they avoid being involved in a

situation that disrupts group cohesion or introduce social tension because direct confrontation of another person is considered undesirable and impolite (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Because of their need for harmony and community solidarity and welfare, they tend to have very positive attitudes towards traditional CSR initiatives (Karaosman et al., 2015), but these traditional prosocial initiatives focus on generally accepted, non-divisive issues that unite society. Unlike CSR, brand activism is about brands taking a public and non-neutral stance on highly contested sociopolitical issues that lack universal societal agreement. This splits public opinion, divides society and generates intense debate. For collectivistic consumers, this disruptive corporate behavior directly threatens the social harmony and consensus they deeply value. Because they value social harmony and try to prevent conflict, collectivists are likely to consider an activist brand's stance as undesirable and disruptive. Additionally, research characterizes boycotting as a conflict-oriented, collectivistic form of political consumerism (Jungblut & Johnen, 2022). Since boycotts rely on the mobilization of large groups to punish a company, collectivists are culturally inclined to join these collective initiatives.

Consequently, because collectivists are well-positioned to collectively punish such disruptions and because brand activism's polarizing nature conflicts with the collectivistic goal of harmony, a higher collectivistic orientation is expected to result in a less favorable evaluative judgment of the activist brand.

H1: Collectivism negatively influences consumers' brand attitude towards a brand engaging in brand activism.

Power Distance

Power distance is defined as the degree to which less powerful members of a community or organization “expect and accept” an unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, 2011). Individuals with a high-power distance orientation value social hierarchy, compliance with formal rules, and respect for authority (Möller & Eisend, 2010). In such value systems, society is expected to maintain a clear social order where individuals accept their assigned positions and obedience to authority is emphasized (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). Because high power distance consumers respect hierarchy and authority, their judgments and behaviors are often guided by formal norms and a desire to conform to the established social order (Yoo & Donthu, 2002), expecting various societal actors, including businesses, to adhere to their traditional roles.

When connecting this cultural orientation to brand activism, two competing theoretical mechanisms emerge. A first perspective suggests a negative consumer response. Brand

activism challenges the status quo, questions policies and disrupts established societal norms (Garg & Saluja, 2022). For individuals who value obedience and strict adherence to social order, this type of corporate behavior may be perceived as inappropriate because they expect companies to remain within their traditional commercial role rather than interfering in political or social matters. Therefore, a higher individual orientation towards power distance may lead to a less favorable evaluation of the activist brand.

At the same time, a competing perspective suggests that power distance may actually foster a positive response to brand activism (Braga et al., 2024). In high power distance value systems, individuals *accept unequal power distributions* and demonstrate deep deference to powerful entities, including large companies (Williams & Zinkin, 2008), and exhibit less reactance to their communications (Möller & Eisend, 2010). Consequently, these consumers have a lower willingness to punish businesses for controversial corporate behavior (Williams & Zinkin, 2008). Furthermore, because individuals high in power distance rely on brands to affirm their social status and their position in the hierarchy (Möller & Eisend, 2010), an activist campaign led by a powerful brand may be perceived as a social status signal rather than a transgression (Braga et al., 2024). Therefore, due to their deference to corporate authority and reluctance to penalize companies, consumers with a high-power distance orientation may evaluate activist brands more favorably. Because these two theoretical perspectives lead to opposing predictions regarding the influence of power distance on consumers' brand attitude, this thesis formulates competing hypotheses.

H2a : Power distance negatively influences consumers' brand attitude towards a brand engaging in brand activism.

H2b : Power distance positively influences consumers' brand attitude towards a brand engaging in brand activism.

Masculinity-Femininity

The masculinity-femininity dimension reflects the dominant values prioritized within a society (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). Masculinity represents a societal preference for achievement, assertiveness, competition and success whereas femininity reflects a stronger emphasis for relationships, modesty, caring for others, and the overall quality of life (Milner et al., 1993).

In the marketplace, consumers with a strong masculine orientation tend to prioritize functional performance, economic success, and status-driven consumption (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). Because they are primarily motivated by success and material advancement, they often expect businesses to focus on competitive performance and financial success rather than making social contributions (Hur & Kim, 2017).

As outlined in section 2.2, brand activism typically involves issues such as social justice, equality and environmental protection. Conceptually, these causes are closely aligned with feminine cultural values, as they emphasize the welfare of society and the protection of vulnerable groups. Highly masculine individuals, since they place less emphasis on communal welfare compared to performance outcomes, are less likely to believe that businesses are inherently responsible for making social contributions (Hur & Kim, 2017). Therefore, consumers with a strong masculine orientation might choose traditional economic interests over collective concerns and may be less likely to perceive sociopolitical engagement as a core responsibility of businesses. Consequently, masculine consumers are more likely to form unfavorable evaluations of brands that engage in such initiatives.

H3: Masculinity negatively influences consumers' brand attitude towards a brand engaging in brand activism.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is defined as the extent to which individuals feel threatened by ambiguous, uncertain or unknown situations (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). Consumers with high uncertainty avoidance tend to seek security, predictability, clear rules and structured environments, reflecting an aversion to risky, unstructured and ambiguous situations (Hofstede, 2011).

This could translate into a preference for safe, structured consumption experiences and for brands that provide stability and minimize uncertainty. Individuals with high uncertainty avoidance generally prefer predictable and non-controversial environments, with a strong disapproval of “*deviant opinions*” (Hofstede, 2011), and they may therefore react negatively to corporate behaviors that introduce ambiguity or social tension. However, again, brand activism involves brands publicly taking positions on controversial sociopolitical issues that often remain unresolved at the societal level. As we have seen, such initiatives can generate public debate, polarization, and potential backlash. For consumers who strongly value predictability and stability, this type of corporate behavior may therefore be perceived as introducing unnecessary uncertainty and friction into the marketplace. Consequently, they are likely to prefer companies that remain neutral, leading to a less favorable judgment of the activist brand.

H4: Uncertainty avoidance negatively influences consumers' brand attitude towards a brand engaging in brand activism.

Long-Term Orientation

Long-term orientation describes how much individuals focus their efforts on the future rather than on the present or the past (Hofstede, 2011). Individuals with a high long-term orientation dimension typically value perseverance, thrift, adaptation to changing circumstances, and the pursuit of enduring, long-term goals (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010). They tend to emphasize enduring relationships, carefully consider the long-term consequences of present actions, and are willing to tolerate immediate problems in order to secure future benefits (Williams & Zinkin, 2008).

Brand activism frequently tackles complex, systemic sociopolitical challenges, such as climate change or social inequality, that cannot be solved overnight and require sustained, long-term commitments from organizations to achieve meaningful societal change (Moumade et al., 2024). Because consumers with high long-term orientation are generally more attentive to long-standing impacts and are more likely to support initiatives that aim to generate sustainable improvements over time, they are more likely to interpret a brand's activist stance as a credible and necessary commitment to enduring societal progress. Consequently, these consumers are more likely to appreciate a brand's willingness to address long-term societal challenges and contribute to a better, more sustainable future, leading to a more favorable overall evaluation of the brand.

H5: Long-term orientation positively influences consumers' brand attitude towards a brand engaging in brand activism.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

This thesis adopts a quantitative, cross-cultural research design. In line with prior experimental research on brand activism (e.g., Atanga et al., 2022; Garg & Saluja, 2022; Ahmad et al., 2024; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), a scenario-based approach was used. Scenario-based designs are well established in consumer research because they allow researchers to control the conditions under which participants are exposed to a stimulus while reducing biases associated with memory retrieval that may occur in recall-based designs. This approach also increases realism by simulating real-world brand communication in a controlled setting, enhancing both internal and external validity (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Francioni et al., 2025).

The scenario presents a fictitious beer brand taking a public stance in support of LGBTQIA+ rights through an Instagram post. Consistent with prior research, a fictitious brand was used to rule out confounding effects from pre-existing consumer beliefs, brand familiarity or prior brand attitudes that would arise with a real brand (Jungblut & Johnen,

2022 ; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Herzberg & Rudeloff, 2022). All respondents were exposed to the same scenario.

4.2. Research context

Among the various domains presented above, the empirical section focuses specifically on social activism related to LGBTQIA+ rights. This issue is used as an illustrative context to examine consumer responses to brand activism. This cause represents one of the most visible and polarizing societal causes in contemporary brand activism. In fact, in recent years, many corporate campaigns supporting LGBTQIA+ inclusion have generated both strong support and high-profile backlash (e.g. Target, Bud Light, Chick-fil-A and many more; Cammarota et al., 2026; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Zhao et al., 2024), making it a particularly relevant context for studying how consumers respond to brands engaging in brand activism. In addition, unlike environmental issues which can sometimes overlap with traditional CSR due to the relatively broad societal consensus around environmental protection (Hydock et al., 2020; Moumade et al., 2024), LGBTQIA+ activism more clearly reflects the defining characteristics of brand activism, by addressing socially contested and morally charged issues. Finally, recent policy debates and legislative developments concerning transgender rights in several countries have further increased the visibility of LGBTQIA+ issues in public discourse, reinforcing their relevance as a contemporary context for examining brand activism.

Following the approach of prior brand activism studies that selected universally accessible product categories, like the FMCG industry, to ensure participant engagement regardless of demographic background (e.g. Herzberg & Rudeloff, 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), this study contextualizes the scenario within the beer industry. Beer represents a recurrent consumption category with broad cross-demographic relevance, facilitating participant projection into the scenario. The beverage sector has already been validated as an appropriate experimental setting for brand activism research using fictitious brands, although prior studies have primarily focused on non-alcoholic beverages such as bottled water or soft drinks (Jungblut & Johnen, 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). This choice is also supported by several recent cases of brand activism in the beer industry that have generated highly contrasting consumer reactions, notably the Bud Light controversy following its partnership with a transgender influencer (Cammarota et al., 2026). These real-world examples reinforce the ecological credibility of the scenario used in this study.

4.3. Scenario

Participants were introduced to LUMEN, a fictitious beer brand presented as a popular independent brand. The scenario asked respondents to imagine that, while browsing

social media, they came across an Instagram post from LUMEN announcing its position on a societal issue. Specifically, the post presented a limited-edition Pride beer bottle honoring the LGBTQIA+ community, released during Pride Month. The post included an activist message expressing the support of the brand for inclusion and diversity, a commitment to donate 15% of the proceeds from the limited edition to ILGA World, an international organization supporting LGBTQIA+ rights, and the slogan *"Because everyone deserves to 'cheers' to being themselves."* Appendix 2 provides the full text of the scenario and the Instagram mockup.

Following prior research (e.g. Ahmad et al., 2024 ; Atanga et al., 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), the scenario included both a public statement and a concrete financial commitment to ensure that the activist stance would be perceived as substantive rather than opportunistic, thereby reducing the risk that respondents would consider the campaign as woke-washing.

4.4. Measurement scales

After reading the scenario and viewing the Instagram post, respondents were first asked to rate their attitude towards the brand presented. Brand attitude was measured using the five-item semantic differential scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004), a widely used scale to measure consumers' overall brand evaluations due to its high statistical reliability. Respondents evaluated LUMEN on seven-point scales anchored by five bipolar pairs: unappealing/appealing, bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, unfavorable/favorable, and unlikable/likable. To verify the effectiveness of the scenario, two checks were included in the survey. First, a realism check assessed whether respondents perceived the scenario as realistic and believable, measured through two items on a seven-point Likert scale. Participants evaluated the scenario as realistic ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.16$). Second, a manipulation check asked respondents to identify the societal cause addressed in the post, ensuring that the activist nature of the stimulus was correctly understood.

Cultural values were measured at the individual level using the CVSCALE developed by Yoo, Donthu and Lenartowicz (2011). As discussed in the literature review, this instrument avoids the ecological fallacy associated with country-level proxies by capturing cultural orientations directly at the individual level. Collectivism (six items), power distance (five items), masculinity (four items) and uncertainty avoidance (five items), were measured on seven-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Long-term orientation was measured separately using six items rated on a seven-point importance scale (1 = very unimportant, 7 = very important), consistent with the original CVSCALE instrument. In total, 26 items measured the five cultural dimensions.

One attention check item was included within the cultural values items to identify inattentive respondents.

Control variables were included to account for demographic, ideological and contextual factors that may influence consumer responses to brand activism. Political orientation was measured using a single-item left-right self-placement scale, a widely used instrument in cross-cultural and political research for decades (Kroh, 2007), adapted from cross-cultural surveys such as the European Social Survey (ESS) and the World Values Survey (WVS), that are among the most prominent cross-national data collections (100+ countries for the WVS ; Hofstede, 2011). In this study, it was adapted to a seven-point scale (1 = extreme left, 7 = extreme right) to maintain consistency with the other scales in the survey. Religiosity was measured using the intrapersonal subscale (Factor 1 ; six items) of the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10; Worthington et al., 2003). Although Worthington et al. (2003) originally used a five-point scale (“Not at all true of me” to “Totally true of me”), a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) was used in this study to ensure a balanced response format and again, to maintain consistency across the survey. Beer consumption was measured through a single-item frequency scale to control for product category familiarity. LGBTQIA+ proximity was assessed through a single item asking whether the respondent has close friends or family members who identify as LGBTQIA+ (0 = no, 1 = yes), drawing on the contact hypothesis (Herek & Glunt, 1993 cited by Schiappa et al. (2005)). Finally, demographic characteristics (age, gender (0 = male, 1 = female) and highest level of education completed) were controlled.

4.5. Data collection

Data were collected in April 2026 via an online survey in English, created using Google Forms (see Appendix 3). The survey was distributed on several social media platforms, including LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook, and other communities such as Survey Circle. Respondents were also encouraged to share the survey within their own networks. The minimum required sample size was determined using G*Power. An a priori power analysis for multiple linear regression based on the full model, with 12 predictors (five cultural dimensions and seven control variables: age, gender, education, political orientation, religiosity, beer consumption and LGBTQIA+ proximity), a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$; Cohen, 1988), a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and a statistical power of 0.95 (selected to maximize the probability of detecting a significant effect, exceeding the conventional minimum threshold of 0.80 recommended by Cohen (1988)), indicated a minimum required sample of 184 respondents (see Appendix 4). To account for incomplete responses or failed attention checks, approximately 220 responses were targeted.

5. Research Findings

All statistical analyses were conducted using the SPSS software, with a significance level of .05 applied to all tests. The findings are detailed below.

5.1. Sample description

A total of 233 responses were collected. Twenty-nine respondents were excluded: 9 for failing the manipulation check only (they did not correctly identify the LGBTQIA+ cause), 10 for failing the attention check only and 10 for failing both. The final sample consists of 204 respondents. After data cleaning, composite scores were computed for each multi-item construct by averaging the corresponding items. Dummy variables were created for gender (male = 0, female = 1) and LGBTQIA+ proximity (no = 0, yes = 1).

The sample is mostly female (67.6%) and quite young, with 62.7% of respondents aged 18-24 and 23.0% aged 25-34. The majority holds a bachelor's (46.1%) or master's degree (38.7%). Regarding beer consumption, 27.0% reported never consuming beer, while 21.1% consume beer one to three times a month. A large majority (84.3%) reported personally knowing someone who identifies as LGBTQIA+. The mean political orientation was 3.75 (SD = 1.21) on a scale from 1 (left) to 7 (right), suggesting a slightly left-leaning sample. Appendix 5 provides a detailed overview of the sample characteristics.

5.2. Measurement model validation

Before testing the hypotheses, the measurement model was assessed to ensure the validity, consistency and reliability of the constructs. A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted separately for each construct to verify their unidimensionality. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measures of sampling adequacy ranged from .733 to .916, all exceeding the recommended .60 threshold (Kaiser, 1974), and all Bartlett's tests of sphericity were significant ($p < .001$). For each construct, a single component with an eigenvalue greater than 1 was extracted, confirming the unidimensional structure of all scales.

Convergent validity is achieved when all standardized factor loadings exceed the recommended .50 threshold (Hair et al., 2010). All loadings exceeded the threshold, with one exception: one item of collectivism (item C02: "Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties") exhibited a low loading (.382) on the main component and a high cross-loading on a second component (.808). This item was therefore removed. After removal, the model improved and all remaining items loaded above .50 on their respective constructs.

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. A measure exceeding .70 indicates that internal reliability among items is achieved (Hair et al., 2010). All constructs exceeded the .70 threshold, with values ranging from .718 (power distance) to .951 (brand attitude), except for uncertainty avoidance ($\alpha = .679$), which remains within the acceptable range for exploratory research (Hair et al., 2010). Composite reliability (CR) was also computed for each construct, with a threshold of .70. All CR values exceeded this threshold, ranging from .808 (uncertainty avoidance) to .963 (brand attitude), further confirming internal reliability. Table 3 presents the full item loadings, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for each construct.

Table 3: Construct measures

Measures ^a	Factor loadings	Cronbach's α	CR
Brand attitude (Spears & Singh, 2004)		.951	.963
The brand presented in the post is... (unappealing/appealing)	.891		
The brand presented in the post is... (bad/good)	.859		
The brand presented in the post is... (unpleasant/pleasant)	.940		
The brand presented in the post is... (unfavorable/favorable)	.948		
The brand presented in the post is... (unlikable/likeable)	.940		
Collectivism (CVSCALE, Yoo et al., 2011)		.788	.855
Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group	.554		
(Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties)*	(.383)		
Group welfare is more important than individual rewards	.722		
Group success is more important than individual success	.864		
Individuals should only pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group	.803		
Group loyalty should be encouraged even if individual goals suffer	.714		
Power distance (CVSCALE)		.718	.820
People in higher positions should make most decisions without consulting people in lower positions	.764		
People in higher positions should not ask the opinions of people in lower positions too frequently	.780		
People in higher positions should avoid social interaction with people in lower positions	.695		
People in lower positions should not disagree with decisions by people in higher positions	.666		
People in higher positions should not delegate important tasks to people in lower positions	.537		
Masculinity (CVSCALE)		.720	.835
It is more important for men to have a professional career than it is for women	.736		
Men usually solve problems with logical analysis; women usually solve problems with intuition	.750		
Solving difficult problems usually requires an active, forcible approach, which is typical of men	.834		

There are some jobs that a man can always do better than a woman	.664		
Uncertainty avoidance (CVSCALE)		.679	.808
It is important to have instructions spelled out in detail so that I always know what I am expected to do	.574		
It is important to closely follow instructions and procedures	.592		
Rules and regulations are important because they inform me of what is expected of me	.811		
Standardized work procedures are helpful	.679		
Instructions for operations are important	.712		
Long-term orientation (CVSCALE)^b		.815	.871
Careful management of money (Thrift)	.778		
Going on resolutely in spite of opposition (Persistence)	.602		
Personal steadiness and stability	.784		
Long-term planning	.766		
Giving up today's fun for success in the future	.597		
Working hard for success in the future	.817		
Religiosity (RCI-10, Worthington et al., 2003)		.945	.957
I often read books and magazines about my faith	.860		
I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith	.879		
Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life	.922		
My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life	.837		
Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life	.912		
It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and reflection	.915		

Notes. ^a All items were measured using 7-point scales. ^b Measured by "How important is... for you?" * Item removed due to low loading on the main component (.383) and cross-loading on a second component (.808).

Finally, discriminant validity was assessed by examining the bivariate correlations among all constructs. All inter-construct correlations were well below the .80 threshold, with the highest being $r = .385$ (between masculinity and brand attitude), indicating that the constructs are empirically distinct. Additionally, following Fornell and Larcker (1981), the AVE of each construct was compared with the squared correlations between constructs. Discriminant validity exists when the AVE of each construct exceeds the squared correlation between any pair of constructs. For example, the highest squared correlation observed was $r^2 = .148$ (between masculinity and brand attitude), which remained well below the lowest AVE value of .461 (uncertainty avoidance). These results confirm the discriminant validity of all constructs. Appendix 6 presents the descriptive statistics, AVE values, correlations and squared correlations among all variables.

5.3. Hypotheses testing

Before running the regression analysis, the assumptions of multiple regression were verified. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.09 to 1.45, below the threshold of 5 indicating no multicollinearity concerns. The histogram and normal P-P

plot of standardized residuals indicated an approximately normal distribution. The scatterplot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values showed no systematic pattern, supporting the assumption of homoscedasticity. All the assumption checks are presented in Appendix 7.

A hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with brand attitude as the dependent variable and was structured in two models. In Model 1, the seven control variables (gender, age, education, political orientation, religiosity, beer consumption and LGBTQIA+ proximity) were included to account for their baseline contribution to brand attitude. In Model 2, the five cultural dimensions (collectivism, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation) were added to assess their incremental explanatory power beyond the control variables (ΔR^2). This hierarchical approach allows testing whether cultural values significantly increase the proportion of variance explained in brand attitude after controlling for demographic, ideological and contextual factors.

Model 1 (control variables only) was significant ($F(7, 189) = 4.931, p < .001$) and explained 15.4% of the variance in brand attitude ($R^2 = .154$). Within this model, age ($b = -0.203, p = .008$), political orientation ($b = -0.179, p = .010$), LGBTQIA+ proximity ($b = 0.510, p = .026$) and gender ($b = 0.388, p = .036$) were significant predictors.

The addition of the five cultural dimensions in Model 2 improved the model ($\Delta R^2 = .076, F \text{ change}(5, 184) = 3.643, p = .004$), with the full model explaining 23.1% of the variance in brand attitude ($R^2 = .231, F(12, 184) = 4.596, p < .001$). Among the cultural dimensions, only masculinity had a significant effect on brand attitude ($b = -0.304, p < .001$), with a standardized coefficient of $\beta = -0.306$. Collectivism ($b = 0.044, p = .568$), power distance ($b = -0.033, p = .749$), uncertainty avoidance ($b = 0.082, p = .429$), and long-term orientation ($b = 0.013, p = .874$) did not reach significance. Therefore, the results did not provide evidence of a significant influence for the four other cultural dimensions on brand attitude towards brand activism in this study. Importantly, non-significant results should not be interpreted as evidence of absence of an effect but rather indicate that this study did not detect a significant relationship under the conditions tested. The effect size for the incremental contribution of cultural dimensions in the full model was $f^2 = .099$, representing a small-to-medium effect (Cohen, 1988). As a robustness check, a supplementary regression was conducted using only the five cultural dimensions as predictors, without control variables. The results were consistent and the trends remain the same: masculinity remained the only significant predictor ($\beta = -.370, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.529, -.237]$), while the other four dimensions remained non-significant (all $p > .50$). This confirms the stability of the findings.

Regarding the control variables in Model 2, age remained a significant predictor ($b = -0.244$, $p = .002$), while political orientation became marginally significant ($b = -0.122$, $p = .077$). Gender and LGBTQIA+ proximity, which were significant in Model 1, lost their significance after the introduction of the cultural dimensions, suggesting potential shared variance with the cultural constructs. Table 4 presents the full results of the hierarchical regression.

Table 4: Hierarchical regression results (DV: Brand attitude).

	Model 1				
	b	SE(b)	β	t	95% CI
Independent variables					
Collectivism	—	—	—	—	—
Power distance	—	—	—	—	—
Masculinity	—	—	—	—	—
Uncertainty avoidance	—	—	—	—	—
Long-term orientation	—	—	—	—	—
Control variables					
Gender	0.388	0.183	0.156	2.115 *	[0.026, 0.749]
LGBTQIA+ proximity	0.510	0.227	0.153	2.249 *	[0.063, 0.957]
Age	-0.203	0.076	-0.207	-2.675 **	[-0.353, -0.053]
Education	0.231	0.129	0.141	1.795 n.s.	[-0.023, 0.485]
Beer consumption	-0.041	0.058	-0.053	-0.705 n.s.	[-0.156, 0.074]
Religiosity	-0.070	0.053	-0.095	-1.331 n.s.	[-0.174, 0.034]
Political orientation	-0.179	0.069	-0.186	-2.616 **	[-0.315, -0.044]
R ²	15.4%				
ΔR^2	15.4%				
F	4.931 ***				
ΔF	—				
	Model 2				
	b	SE(b)	β	t	95% CI
Independent variables					
Collectivism	0.044	0.078	0.041	0.572 n.s.	[-0.109, 0.198]
Power distance	-0.033	0.102	-0.024	-0.321 n.s.	[-0.234, 0.169]
Masculinity	-0.304	0.078	-0.306	-3.920 ***	[-0.458, -0.151]
Uncertainty avoidance	0.082	0.103	0.054	0.793 n.s.	[-0.122, 0.286]
Long-term orientation	0.013	0.079	0.011	0.159 n.s.	[-0.143, 0.168]
Control variables					
Gender	0.199	0.183	0.080	1.087 n.s.	[-0.162, 0.560]
LGBTQIA+ proximity	0.321	0.225	0.096	1.424 n.s.	[-0.124, 0.765]
Age	-0.244	0.076	-0.249	-3.220 **	[-0.394, -0.095]
Education	0.165	0.127	0.101	1.297 n.s.	[-0.086, 0.415]
Beer consumption	-0.045	0.058	-0.059	-0.782 n.s.	[-0.159, 0.069]
Religiosity	-0.018	0.055	-0.025	-0.330 n.s.	[-0.127, 0.090]
Political orientation	-0.122	0.069	-0.127	-1.781 n.s.	[-0.258, 0.013]
R ²	23.1%				
ΔR^2	7.6%				
F	4.596 ***				
ΔF	3.643 **				

Notes. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, n.s. = not significant. Model 1 includes control variables only. Model 2 adds the five cultural dimensions. f^2 for cultural dimensions = .099 (small-to-medium effect).

In conclusion, H3, which predicted a negative relationship between masculinity and brand attitude, was supported ($\beta = -0.306$, $p < .001$). H1 (collectivism), H2a and H2b (power distance), H4 (uncertainty avoidance), and H5 (long-term orientation) were not supported as no statistically significant effects were detected. Table 5 summarizes the results for each hypothesis.

6. General discussion

This study examined how cultural values, measured at the individual level influence consumers' attitudes towards brand activism. Drawing on five of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the study tested whether collectivism, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation predict brand attitude in response to a brand's public stance on a sociopolitical cause. The findings reveal that the addition of cultural dimensions significantly improved the model ($\Delta R^2 = .076$, $p = .004$), confirming that cultural values represent a meaningful lens through which consumers evaluate brand activism. However, only masculinity was found to significantly influence consumers' attitudes towards brand activism. While this finding deserves attention, the absence of effects for the other dimensions also provides important insights into the boundary conditions of culture's influence on brand activism responses. The study produced the following findings :

Table 5: Summary of hypotheses results

Hypothesis	Prediction	β	p	Result
H1	Collectivism → Brand attitude (–)	0.041	.568	Not supported
H2a	Power distance → Brand attitude (–)	-0.024	.749	Not supported
H2b	Power distance → Brand attitude (+)	-0.024	.749	Not supported
H3	Masculinity → Brand attitude (–)	-0.306	<.001	Supported
H4	Uncertainty avoidance → Brand attitude (–)	0.054	.429	Not supported
H5	Long-term orientation → Brand attitude (+)	0.011	.874	Not supported

6.1. The role of Masculinity

The most notable finding of this study is the significant negative effect of masculinity on brand attitude ($\beta = -0.306$, $p < .001$), making it the strongest predictor in the entire model. This result supports H3 and indicates that individuals who endorse masculine cultural values, characterized by a preference for competition, performance, assertiveness and

clearly defined gender roles (Hofstede et al., 2010), tend to evaluate brand activism less favorably.

This finding is consistent with prior cross-cultural consumer research suggesting that masculine values are associated with resistance to corporate initiatives that prioritize social welfare over economic performance. De Mooij and Hofstede (2011) noted that masculine cultures emphasize performance and achievement, whereas feminine cultures value caring for others and quality of life. Because brand activism often involves taking a stance on issues of social justice, inclusion, or environmental protection, these themes are traditionally viewed through the perspective of "feminine" cultural values, such as empathy, nurturance, and people-orientation (Hur & Kim, 2017). Consequently, there is a fundamental incongruence in values: individuals with a high masculinity score prioritize a firm's economic performance and material success rather than its social role.

This finding also resonates with the negativity bias documented in the brand activism literature (Jungblut & Johnen, 2022). As Hydock et al. (2020) and Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) demonstrate, ideological disagreement generates stronger negative reactions than ideological agreement generates positive ones. The present results suggest that masculinity may function as a cultural amplifier of this asymmetry: because masculine values are fundamentally incongruent with the communal and progressive orientation of brand activism, individuals scoring high on masculinity are likely to experience a particularly pronounced negative evaluative response, consistent with the pattern described by Hydock et al. (2020). In the framework of consumer-brand identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), the activist stance may trigger a process of "disidentification" (Lee et al., 2009; Wannow et al., 2024) among masculine consumers, who distance themselves from a brand that no longer reflects their self-concept. This identity-based rejection mechanism, discussed in the literature review, provides a compelling explanation for why masculinity emerged as the strongest predictor of brand attitude in this study.

Furthermore, brand activism by nature challenges established social norms and calls for progressive change (Vredenburg et al., 2020). This transformative nature conflicts with the preference for traditional social order, strict role divisions and the "tough" identity that characterizes masculine values (Hofstede et al., 2010). If the activism of the brand is perceived as "soft" or highly progressive, it can enter into direct conflict with the self-identity of masculine individuals, leading them to perceive brand activism as an unwelcome disruption of the status quo and a threat to their identity (Hur & Kim, 2017).

Moreover, the perceived authenticity of brand activism, identified as a central evaluative filter in the literature (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Vredenburg et al., 2020), may also be affected

by masculine cultural values. If masculine consumers perceive social causes as falling outside the legitimate scope of business activity, they may be more inclined to interpret the brand's engagement as opportunistic rather than genuinely values driven. Indeed, research shows that highly masculine individuals tend to be pessimistic about intrinsic corporate motives and are generally less supportive of altruistic initiatives (Hur & Kim, 2017). In other words, the very same activist campaign that feminine-oriented consumers perceive as authentic could be dismissed by masculine-oriented consumers as an “insincere marketing ploy”, precisely because it contradicts their expectations of what a brand should stand for. However, this thesis did not directly measure perceived authenticity as a mediating variable, which represents an avenue for future research.

While the present study used an LGBTQIA+ rights scenario for its experimental stimulus, the theoretical mechanism is likely to extend beyond this specific cause. Brand activism, by definition, involves taking a stance on divisive sociopolitical issues that challenge existing norms (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Masculine values which are rooted in the preservation of traditional hierarchies and conventional social orders, are therefore fundamentally incompatible with the transformative nature of brand activism. Whether the cause concerns gender equality, environmental justice or racial equity, the underlying tension between masculine values and norm-challenging activism is likely to persist.

6.2. Insights from non-significant cultural dimensions

Contrary to the developed hypotheses, collectivism (H1), power distance (H2a/H2b), uncertainty avoidance (H4) and long-term orientation (H5) were not found to significantly influence brand attitude in this study. These « non-findings », while unexpected, offer valuable contributions to the understanding of culture's role in consumer responses to brand activism, rather than suggesting these dimensions are irrelevant.

The non-significant effect of collectivism on brand attitude contradicts the assumption suggesting that collectivistic individuals, for whom maintaining group harmony is of primary importance (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011), may react negatively to brands that disrupt this harmony. One possible explanation is that collectivism operates differently in the context of brand activism than in traditional CSR contexts. While collectivists generally favor corporate initiatives that benefit their immediate in-group or local community (Karaosman et al., 2015), brand activism usually addresses global societal issues (such as LGBTQIA+ rights) that cross traditional in-group/out-group boundaries, potentially neutralizing the conformity pressures that collectivism usually exerts. Furthermore, research demonstrates that collectivists' responses to corporate social initiatives heavily depend on their attribution of the brand's motives (Hur & Kim, 2017).

If the experimental stimulus did not clearly signal an altruistic benefit for their specific community or if the motive was perceived ambiguous, the expected collectivistic reaction may have been muted. Additionally, while the hypothesis development drew on research characterizing boycotting as a conflict-oriented, collectivistic form of political consumerism (Jungblut & Johnen, 2022), the present study measured attitudinal responses rather than behavioral intentions. It is possible that collectivism's influence manifests more strongly at the behavioral level, through collective punitive actions such as boycotts, rather than at the attitudinal level captured by brand attitude.

The absence of a significant effect for power distance aligns with the mixed theoretical expectations reflected in the competing hypotheses (H2a and H2b). As discussed in the hypotheses development, two opposing mechanisms were anticipated. On the one hand, high power distance consumers may defer to corporate authority and demonstrate a lower willingness to punish companies for controversial behavior (Williams & Zinkin, 2008). On the other hand, these same consumers may resist brands that overstep their perceived commercial role and challenge the established social order (Garg & Saluja, 2022). The non-significant result suggests that these opposing forces may have neutralized each other within the sample. Furthermore, because the stimulus featured a fictitious brand with no established market presence or reputation, the respect mechanism described by Williams and Zinkin (2008) and Möller and Eisend (2010), which is based on the fact that consumers perceive the brand as a powerful and authoritative entity, may not have been triggered.

Uncertainty avoidance did not predict brand attitude either, which contradicts the expectation that individuals high in uncertainty avoidance would react negatively to the unpredictable consequences of brand activism (H4). It is possible that the experimental scenario, presenting a clearly articulated brand position with a concrete charitable action (donating 15% of proceeds to ILGA World), may have reduced the perceived ambiguity associated with the brand's stance. Recent research by Ahmad et al. (2024) demonstrates that highly concrete activist messages, those detailing specific actions and financial commitments, effectively mitigate "causal uncertainty" by providing clear information to consumers. Consequently, the concreteness of the donation in the scenario likely resolved the perceived ambiguity associated with the brand's stance, thereby weakening the effect of uncertainty avoidance.

Finally, the non-significant effect of long-term orientation suggests that the temporal framing of brand activism (as a short-term campaign or long-term commitment) may not be a primary driver of consumer attitudes. While we hypothesized that long-term oriented individuals would appreciate the societal investment implied by brand activism

(H5), the lack of significance suggests a different psychological mechanism. As Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) demonstrate, moral judgments regarding brand activism are driven by quick, automatic, and intuitive processes based on moral foundations. Therefore, consumers likely evaluate brand activism primarily through an immediate identity and values lens, outweighing any long-term or rational cost-benefit calculations.

More broadly, the non-significant results for four of the five cultural dimensions may also be attributable to the characteristics of the experimental stimulus. As discussed in the literature review, recent research distinguishes between heavy and light activism, with more intense and confrontational messaging generating stronger polarization and potential backlash (Cammarota et al., 2026). The LUMEN scenario adopted a moderate, educational tone and included a concrete financial commitment, which aligns more closely with light activism (Cammarota et al., 2026), and concrete messaging strategies (Ahmad et al., 2024). It is therefore possible that cultural dimensions such as uncertainty avoidance and collectivism would become significant predictors in response to heavier, more confrontational forms of activism that more strongly disrupt social harmony or introduce greater ambiguity into the marketplace.

These findings should be interpreted with caution given the use of a single scenario and because of the sample composition. Different causes, products or communication formats might influence these cultural dimensions differently.

6.3. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it provides a more holistic examination of the relationship between cultural values and brand activism by simultaneously testing five of Hofstede's dimensions. Prior research has typically examined cultural values in isolation or focused on a single dimension (e.g. collectivism/individualism). By including the five dimensions in a single model, it reveals that their respective effects vary considerably, with masculinity here emerging as the dominant cultural predictor. This finding complements the growing body of research demonstrating that the Hofstede framework's dimensions should be examined simultaneously, as they are free to vary and may interact and suppress each other's effects when analyzed individually (Möller & Eisend, 2010; Schumann et al., 2010).

Second, this study extends the brand activism literature by introducing cultural values as individual-level antecedents of consumer attitudes. While prior research has extensively examined the role of perceived authenticity (Mirzaei et al., 2022), brand-cause fit (Ahmad et al., 2024 ; Vredenburg et al., 2020), and political ideology (Garg & Saluja, 2022) in shaping consumer responses, the influence of broader cultural value orientations remains

mainly underexplored. This study demonstrates that cultural values still play an important role in shaping consumer responses to brand activism.

Third, by measuring cultural values at the individual level rather than relying on country-level indices, this study avoids the ecological fallacy inherent in much cross-cultural research (Yoo et al., 2011). This approach recognizes that individuals within the same country may hold vastly different cultural orientations, providing a more fine-grained understanding of cultural influences on consumer behavior.

6.4. Managerial implications

The findings of this study offer several practical insights for marketing managers considering brand activism strategies. The most actionable finding is that consumers with strong masculine values tend to evaluate brand activism less favorably. This suggests that brands operating in markets or segments characterized by traditionally masculine values should carefully assess the potential backlash before engaging in brand activism and may need to adapt their communication strategies accordingly.

For brands that do choose to engage in activism, the results suggest that understanding the cultural profile of their target audience is essential. Brands targeting segments with more feminine cultural orientations, emphasizing values such as caring, inclusiveness, and quality of life (Hofstede, 2011), are likely to encounter more favorable responses to their activism efforts. Conversely, brands primarily serving segments with masculine values may wish to frame their activism in terms of achievement, success, or competitive advantage rather than social justice. As demonstrated by prior research, masculine consumers are highly performance-oriented and respond much more favorably to corporate initiatives when they are framed around extrinsic motivations and business performance (Hur & Kim, 2017), as these frames resonate better with their audience's value system.

More broadly, the fact that the significant contribution of cultural dimensions goes beyond demographic controls ($\Delta R^2 = .076$, $p = .004$) underscores that cultural values represent a distinct factor that demographics alone cannot capture. Managers should therefore consider incorporating cultural profiling into their consumer insight frameworks when planning brand activism campaigns.

Finally, the significant role of age and political orientation as control variables reinforce the importance of audience segmentation. Younger consumers and those with left-leaning orientations responded more favorably to brand activism, consistent with prior research (e.g. Garg & Saluja, 2022). These factors should be considered alongside cultural values when designing activism strategies.

7. Limits and future research

Several limitations in this thesis present opportunities for ongoing research. First, this study relies exclusively on Hofstede's (2001) cultural framework, operationalized through the CVSCALE (Yoo et al., 2011). While this framework is among the most widely used in cross-cultural consumer research, alternative cultural models exist that may capture additional dimensions relevant to brand activism. For example, Schwartz's (1994) theory of basic human values includes dimensions such as self-transcendence and openness to change that could be pertinent. Similarly, Hall's (1976) distinction between high-context and low-context communication cultures could offer insights into how consumers interpret brand activism messages, as suggested by Cammarota et al. (2023). Moreover, this study did not include Hofstede's sixth dimension, indulgence versus restraint, which could play a role in consumers' openness to brands engaging in societal causes. Future research could integrate these complementary cultural frameworks to provide a richer understanding of culture's influence on brand activism responses.

Second, this study relies on a scenario-based experimental design using a fictitious brand. While this approach strengthens internal validity by eliminating confounds related to prior brand familiarity and pre-existing attitudes (Ahmad et al., 2024; Jungblut & Johnen, 2022), it lacks ecological validity. Respondents had no prior emotional attachment to the brand, which differs from real-world contexts where consumers often hold pre-existing beliefs, emotional attachments and attitudes towards the brands they encounter (Herzberg & Rudeloff, 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Future research could replicate and improve this study using real brands to examine whether the effects of cultural values on brand attitude hold when prior brand attitudes are already established.

Third, this study focuses exclusively on brand attitude as the dependent variable. While brand attitude is a well-established and widely used measure in marketing research (Spears & Singh, 2004), it captures only one aspect of consumer responses to brand activism. Future research could examine the effects of cultural values on a broader set of behavioral outcomes, such as boycott intention, purchase intention, or word-of-mouth behavior (Kim & He, 2025; Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022), which may reveal different patterns of cultural influence. For instance, consumers who hold favorable brand attitudes may still refrain from purchasing due to social pressure in their cultural environment.

Fourth, this study examines only the direct relationship between cultural values and brand attitude. However, several mediating mechanisms may underlie this relationship. For example, perceived authenticity has been widely recognized as a key driver of consumer responses to brand activism (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Vredenburg et al., 2020) and

cultural values may shape the extent to which consumers perceive a brand's activism as genuine. Similarly, variables such as perceived brand-cause fit (Ahmad et al., 2024), moral emotions or moral identity (Kim & He, 2025) could mediate the link between culture and attitude. Future research could explore these potential mediating pathways to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which cultural values shape consumer responses.

Fifth, while this study examines brand activism in general terms at the theoretical level, the empirical investigation relied on a single cause (LGBTQIA+ rights) and a single product category (beer). Although this choice was necessary for the experimental design, it limits the generalizability of the findings. Different types of causes, such as environmental activism, racial equity, or gender equality, possess varying degrees of controversy and novelty, which have been shown to elicit distinct consumer responses (Atanga et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2018). For instance, masculinity may be less relevant for environmental brand activism, where uncertainty avoidance or long-term orientation could play a more prominent role. Similarly, the category of the product may moderate the relationship between cultural values and brand attitude. The perceived fit between a beer brand and LGBTQIA+ rights may differ significantly from the fit between a fashion brand and gender equality. Since perceived brand-cause fit is an important element of brand authenticity and consumer attitudes (Ahmad et al., 2024), future research should therefore explore whether the type of cause and product category moderate the relationship between cultural values and brand attitude.

Finally, this study presented a single communication format (an Instagram post) with a fixed message framing. It is possible that alternative communication strategies, such as varying the level of brand sacrifice, the degree of emotional versus rational appeal or the platform used, could moderate the effect of cultural values on brand attitude. Future research could manipulate these communication elements to examine how brands can adapt their activism messaging to different cultural audiences.

8. Conclusion

The objective of the present thesis was to investigate the influence of cultural values on consumers' attitudes towards brand activism, addressing the overarching research question: how do cultural values influence consumers' attitudes towards brand activism? Drawing on Hofstede's (2001) cultural framework and measuring cultural values at the individual level, the study tested the effects of five cultural dimensions (collectivism, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation) on brand attitude in a scenario-based experimental design.

The findings demonstrate that cultural values do matter for how consumers evaluate brand activism, but not equally across all dimensions. The cultural dimensions collectively added significant explanatory power beyond demographic, ideological and contextual controls, confirming that culture represents a meaningful and distinct lens through which consumers assess brands' sociopolitical stances.

Among the five dimensions tested simultaneously as predictors of brand attitude, masculinity emerged as the only significant predictor in this study, indicating that consumers who endorse masculine values, emphasizing competition, assertiveness, and rigid gender roles, tend to evaluate brand activism less favorably. This result suggests that the core tension between brand activism and cultural values lies in the domain of gender-related norms and social role expectations : brand activism, which inherently challenges established social structures and advocates for change, conflicts most directly with the values that seek to preserve traditional hierarchies.

The absence of significant effects for collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation does not imply that these dimensions are irrelevant to brand activism. Rather, it suggests that their influence may be more context-dependent, potentially varying across causes, product categories, and communication strategies. These non-findings open important opportunities for future research, inviting scholars to explore the boundary conditions under which different cultural dimensions come into play.

From a managerial perspective, the key takeaway is clear : brands considering activism strategies should pay close attention to the cultural profile of their audience, particularly regarding masculinity-related values. Understanding whether a target market leans towards masculine or feminine cultural orientations can help brands anticipate potential audience responses or backlash and adapt their messaging accordingly.

In a world where consumers increasingly expect brands to take a stand and where brands continue to navigate the high-stakes terrain of sociopolitical engagement, this study

contributes to a growing body of research seeking to understand who responds favorably to brand activism initiatives and why. By demonstrating that deep-seated cultural values shape these responses, it underscores the importance of moving beyond demographic segmentation towards a culturally informed approach to brand activism strategy.

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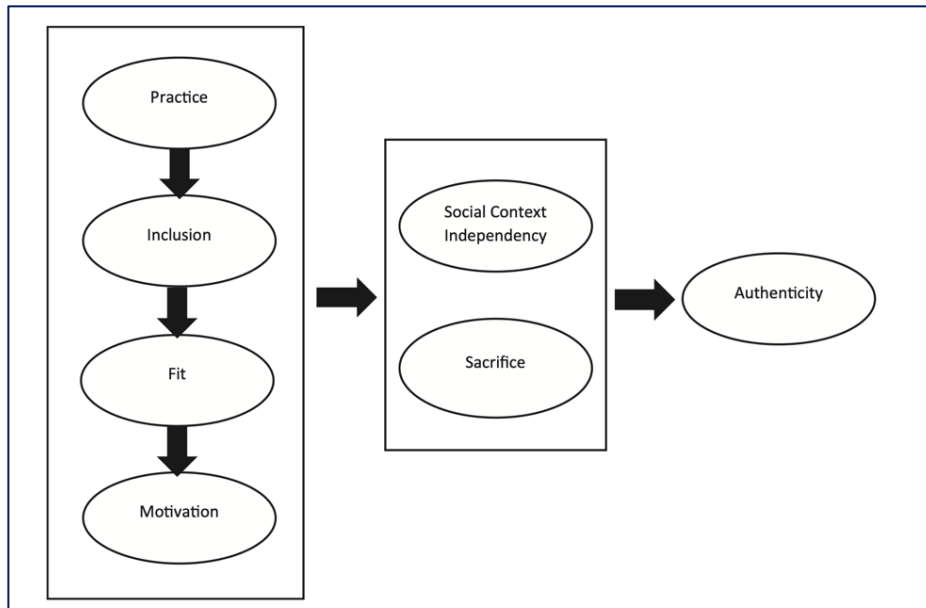
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10. Appendices

Appendix 1. Woke activism authenticity framework (WAAF). Retrieved from Mirzaei et al., 2022.



Appendix 2: Instagram mock up



Appendix 3: Content of the survey on Google Form

Start of Block: Intro and Consent

Q1: Hello! My name is Louise Le Bret, and I am currently in the second year of my Master's program. As part of my thesis, I am conducting a short survey to better understand consumer attitudes towards brand actions.

The questionnaire takes about 5 to 10 minutes, and your responses would be of great help in completing my project.

Please feel free to share this survey with others: the diversity of responses is always valuable for enriching the study. A big thank you for your participation and time!

Before taking part in this study, please read the consent form below and indicate if you understand the statements and freely consent to participate in the study.

There is no deception and the study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life). Participation is voluntary; you may refuse to participate or exit the survey at any time. Participation in the study is strictly anonymous; in no case will responses from individual participants be identified. Rather, all data will be pooled and published in aggregate form only. The data collected will only be used for research purposes.

Because I care about data quality and want to verify that you are a real person, I added several attention checks to the questionnaire. If you have further questions about this study, please contact:

louise.lebret@student.uclouvain.be

If you are 18 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and freely consent to participate in the study, answer "yes" below.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

End of Block: Intro and Consent

Start of Block: Scenario

Q2: Instructions

On the next page, you will be introduced to a brand and exposed to one of its advertisements on social media.

Please take a moment to read carefully and imagine yourself in the situation described.

When you are ready, click "Next" to continue.

Q3: Imagine that, while browsing social media, you come across a post from LUMEN, a popular independent beer brand. The brand recently **announced its position on a societal issue** and donated money in support of the cause. This Pride Month, LUMEN is celebrating diversity with

a limited-edition Pride beer bottle honoring the LGBTQIA+ community, whose rights are increasingly under threat.

The post read:

"We believe everyone deserves to feel welcome and celebrated for who they are! To fight for inclusion and equality, we proudly support the LGBTQIA+ community and stand for diversity. We are donating 15% of the proceeds from this limited edition to ILGA World, an international organization supporting LGBTQIA+ rights. Because the world is more vibrant when everyone can be themselves."

Please take a few seconds to imagine yourself in this situation before answering the questions.

[Instagram mockup - see Appendix 2]

End of Block: Scenario

Start of Block : Questions

Q4: Instructions

Based on the scenario you just read, please indicate your overall attitude toward the brand "Lumen".

Q4 : *The brand presented in the post is...*

Unappealing 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 Appealing

Q6 : *The brand presented in the post is...*

Bad 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 Good

Q7 : *The brand presented in the post is...*

Unpleasant 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 Pleasant

Q8 : *The brand presented in the post is...*

Unfavorable 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 Favorable

Q9 : *The brand presented in the post is...*

Unlikeable 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 Likeable

End of Block: Questions

Start of Block: About the scenario

Q10: Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements regarding the situation described.

Q11: The situation described was realistic.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q12: I had no difficulty picturing myself in the situation presented.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q13: According to the scenario you just read, what cause was the brand supporting?

- ☐ Environmental protection
- ☐ Gender equality
- ☐ Racial equality
- ☐ LGBTQIA+ rights
- ☐ Animal welfare

End of Block: About the scenario

Start of the Block : Your views in general

Q14: Regardless of the situation described previously, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements in general.

Q15: Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties.

- ☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q16: It is important to have instructions spelled out in detail so that I always know what I'm expected to do.

- ☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q17: It is more important for men to have a professional career than it is for women.

- ☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q18: People in higher positions should make most decisions without consulting people in lower positions.

- ☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q19: People in higher positions should not ask the opinions of people in lower positions too frequently.

- ☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q20: It is important to closely follow instructions and procedures.

- ☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q21: Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group (either at school or the work place).

- ☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q22 : Please continue indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, regardless of the situation described previously.

Q23: Please select "Neither agree nor disagree" to show you are paying attention to this question.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q24: People in lower positions should not disagree with decisions by people in higher positions.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q25: Men usually solve problems with logical analysis; women usually solve problems with intuition.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q26: People in higher positions should avoid social interaction with people in lower positions.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q27: Rules and regulations are important because they inform me of what is expected of me.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q28: Standardized work procedures are helpful.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q29: Group welfare is more important than individual rewards.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q30: Please indicate one last time the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, regardless of the situation described previously.

Q31: Instructions for operations are important.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q32: Group loyalty should be encouraged even if individual goals suffer.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q33: There are some jobs that a man can always do better than a woman.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q34: Individuals should only pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q35: Group success is more important than individual success.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q36: Solving difficult problems usually requires an active, forcible approach, which is typical of men.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q37: People in higher positions should not delegate important tasks to people in lower positions.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q38: Once again, please answer the following questions, regardless of the situation described previously.

Q39: How important are the following values for you?

Q40: Giving up today's fun for success in the future

1 = Very unimportant — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 = Very important

Q41: Working hard for success in the future

1 = Very unimportant — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 = Very important

Q42: Going on resolutely in spite of opposition (Persistence)

1 = Very unimportant — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 = Very important

Q43: Careful management of money (Thrift)

1 = Very unimportant — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 = Very important

Q44: Personal steadiness and stability

1 = Very unimportant — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 = Very important

Q45: Long-term planning

1 = Very unimportant — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 = Very important

End of the Block : Your views in general

Start of the Block : Your beliefs

Q46: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Q47: Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q48: I often read books and magazines about my faith.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q49: I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q50: It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and reflection.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q51: Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

Q52: My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life.

☐ Strongly disagree — ☐ Disagree — ☐ Somewhat disagree — ☐ Neither — ☐ Somewhat agree — ☐ Agree — ☐ Strongly agree

End of the Block : Your beliefs

Start of the Block : About yourself

Q53: Finally, I'd be interested to find out more about you!

Q54: What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q55: What is your age group?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18–24
- ☐ 25–34
- ☐ 35–44
- ☐ 45–54
- ☐ 55–64
- ☐ 65 and over

Q56: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ High school graduate / Secondary education
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctorate (PhD)

- Other

Q57: In politics, people sometimes talk about "left" and "right". Where would you place yourself on the following political scale?

Extreme left 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 Extreme right

Q58: How often do you consume beer?

- Never
- Less than once a month
- 1–3 times a month
- About once a week
- More than once a week
- Daily or almost daily

Q59: Do you personally know someone (e.g., a friend, family member, or colleague) who identifies as LGBTQIA+?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Q60: In which part of the world do you live?

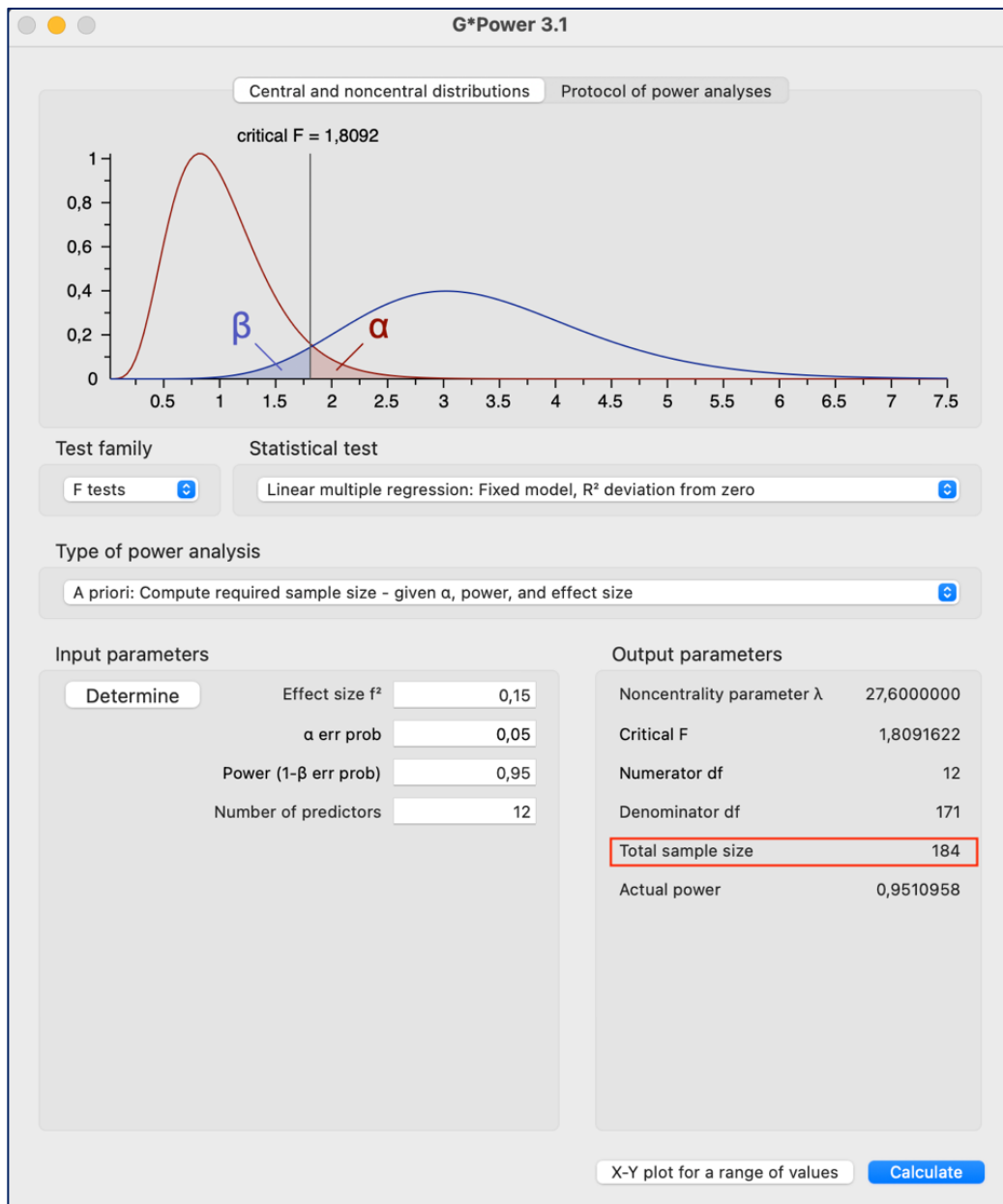
- Asia
- North America
- South America
- Africa
- Europe
- Oceania

End of the Block : About yourself

End of survey.

Your response has been recorded! Thank you very much for your participation.
SurveyCircle : use the following survey code on <https://www.surveycircle.com> and get free participants for your survey through SurveyCircle: BQJK-Q8YB-GZQY-27YF

Appendix 4: Calculated sample size on G*Power



Appendix 5: Sample characteristics (N=204)

Variable	Percent
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	67.6%
Male	32.4%
Other	0%
Prefer not say	0%
<i>Age</i>	
18-24	62.7%
25-34	23%
35-44	3.4%
45-54	3.9%
55-64	6.4%
>65	0.5%
<i>Continent of origin</i>	
Africa	0.5%
Asia	8.3%
Europe	83.8%
North America	4.9%
Oceania	1.5%
South America	1%
<i>Highest level of education completed</i>	
< High school	1%
High school graduate /	
Secondary education	11.3%
Bachelor degree	46.1%
Master degree	38.7%
Doctorate PhD	1%
Other	2%
<i>Beer consumption</i>	
Never	27%
Less than once a month	20.6%
1-3 times a month	21.1%
About once a week	10.8%
More than once a week	17.6%
Daily or almost daily	2.9%
<i>LGBTQIA+ proximity</i>	
Yes	84.3%
No	14.2%
Prefer not to say	1.5%
<i>Political orientation</i>	
Mean = 3.75, SD = 1.21	—
(1 = left, 7 = right)	

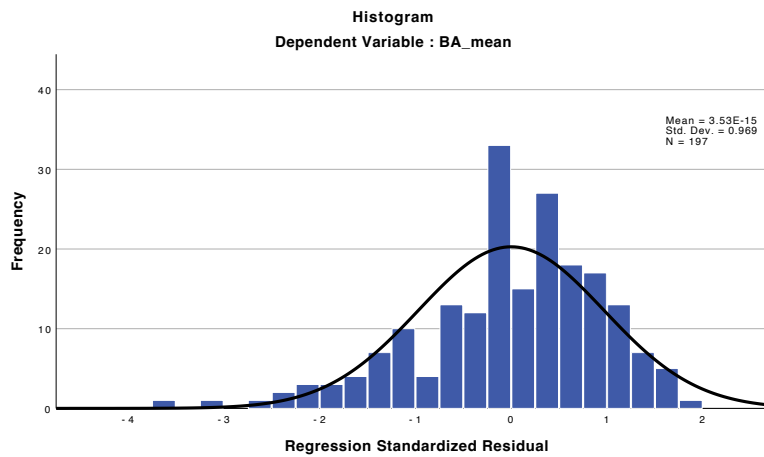
Appendix 6: Descriptive statistics, Reliability, Correlations and Squared correlations

	Mean	SD	α	Correlations and Squared Correlations												
				1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
1. Brand attitude	5.27	1.21	.951	.840	.008	.032	.152	.00	.00	.040	.036	.036	.022	.00	.00	.068
2. Collectivism	3.79	1.07	.788	-0.09	.546	.109	.010	.00	.006	.012	.012	.00	.032	.00	.022	.006
3. Power distance	2.10	0.86	.718	-0.18	0.33	.481	.137	.00	.010	.053	.008	.017	.00	.00	.00	.026
4. Masculinity	2.42	1.17	.720	-0.39	0.10	0.37	.560	.008	.006	.096	.040	.058	.008	.010	.00	.063
5. Uncertainty avoidance	5.15	0.78	.679	-0.02	-0.06	-0.06	0.09	.461	.044	.032	.006	.006	.00	.010	.008	.010
6. Long-term orientation	5.17	1.00	.815	-0.03	-0.08	-0.10	0.08	0.21	.532	.040	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.006
7. Religiosity	2.48	1.63	.945	-0.20	0.11	0.23	0.31	0.18	0.20	.789	.008	.010	.020	.00	.090	.012
8. Gender	0.68	0.47	—	0.19	-0.11	-0.09	-0.20	0.08	0.05	0.09	—	.00	.014	.068	.102	.040
9. LGBTQIA+ proximity	0.86	0.35	—	0.19	-0.06	-0.13	-0.24	0.08	-0.03	-0.10	0.07	—	.00	.00	.00	.010
10. Age	1.70	1.18	—	-0.15	0.18	0.03	-0.09	-0.02	-0.04	0.14	-0.12	0.04	—	.160	.032	.014
11. Education	3.28	0.72	—	-0.05	0.07	0.03	-0.10	-0.10	0.04	-0.04	-0.26	0.04	0.40	—	.012	.078
12. Beer consumption	2.80	1.53	—	-0.00	0.15	0.04	-0.01	-0.09	-0.05	-0.30	-0.32	0.05	-0.18	0.11	—	.008
13. Political orientation	3.75	1.21	—	-0.26	0.08	0.16	0.25	0.10	0.08	0.11	-0.20	-0.10	0.12	0.28	0.09	—

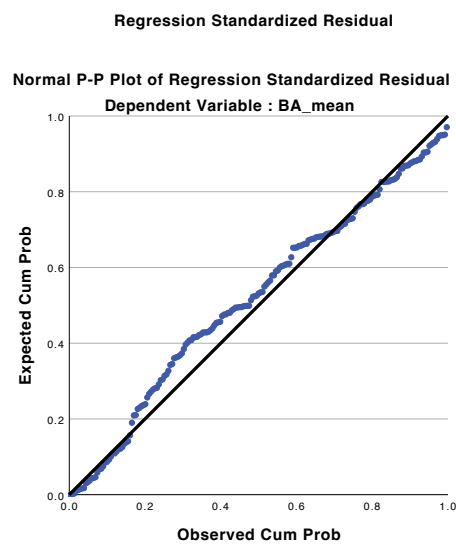
Notes. N = 204 (201 for LGBTQIA+ proximity). α = Cronbach's Alpha. Average variance extracted values (AVE) on the diagonal. Correlations below the diagonal. Squared correlations above the diagonal. Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. LGBTQIA+ proximity: 0 = no, 1 = yes. — = single-item measure. None of the squared correlations between multi-item constructs exceeds the lowest corresponding AVE, confirming discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Appendix 7: Regression assumptions checks

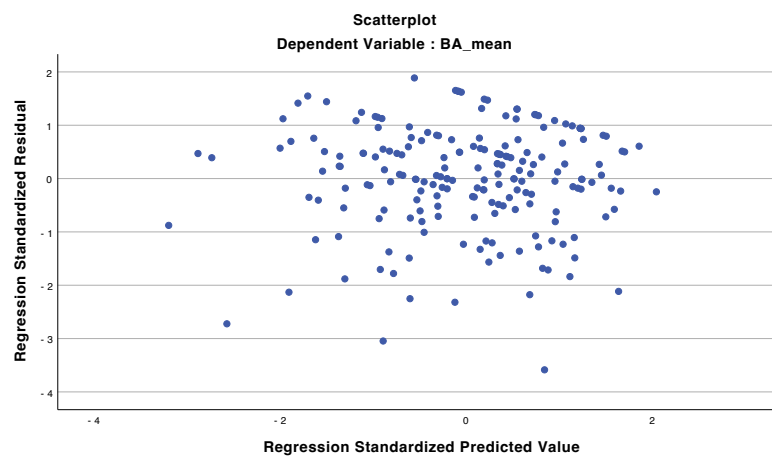
Appendix 7a : Histogram of standardized residuals



Appendix 7b : Normal P-P plot



Appendix 7c : Scatterplot of standardized residuals against predicted values



Abstract :

In recent years, brands have increasingly taken public stances on sociopolitical issues, a practice known as brand activism. While this strategy can strengthen consumer engagement and brand loyalty, it also carries significant risks, as consumers often react with strong support or intense backlash depending on their personal values and beliefs. Understanding what drives these contrasting responses has become a central question in both marketing research and practice. However, while the literature has examined various determinants of consumer responses to brand activism, including perceived authenticity, brand-cause fit, and political ideology, the role of cultural values remains largely underexplored. Most existing studies rely on Western-centric, single-country samples, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of how deeply rooted cultural orientations shape consumer evaluations of brand activism.

This thesis investigates how individual-level cultural values influence consumers' attitudes toward brand activism. Drawing on Hofstede's (2001) cultural framework and operationalizing cultural values at the individual level through the CVSCALE (Yoo et al., 2011), the study tests the effects of five cultural dimensions (collectivism, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation) on brand attitude. A scenario-based experimental design exposed respondents to a fictitious beer brand engaging in LGBTQIA+ activism. Hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the incremental explanatory power of cultural dimensions beyond demographic, ideological and contextual control variables.

The results confirm that cultural values collectively represent a significant predictor of brand attitude beyond control variables. However, among the five dimensions, only masculinity emerged as a significant predictor, indicating that individuals who endorse masculine values, characterized by competition, assertiveness and traditional gender roles, tend to evaluate brand activism less favorably. The other four dimensions did not reach statistical significance in this study, suggesting that their influence may be more context-dependent.

These findings highlight the central role of gender-related cultural norms in shaping consumer responses to brand activism. From a managerial perspective, the study underscores the importance of cultural profiling, particularly regarding masculine versus feminine value orientations, when designing activism strategies. More broadly, this research calls for moving beyond demographic segmentation toward a culturally informed approach to brand activism.

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