

\* Note: Footnoting numbering does not align to original PIP due to formatting as an extract.

## Log

*“Brand’s... position within our culture means they have the ability to steer global conversations and the power to sway opinion.”<sup>1</sup>*

The inspiration for this Personal Interest Project was prompted after reading an article on The Conversation about ‘woke washing’<sup>2</sup> - an inauthentic form of brand activism. Although I was aware of the various forms of activism such as protesting and internet activism, I was recently introduced to the term brand activism. This triggered immediate curiosity of the foreign concept and made me realise that I have unknowingly interacted with brand activism through Ben & Jerry’s marriage equality and racism campaigns which challenged social constructs. Further research on contemporary examples informed me that brand activism is becoming the norm in today’s globalised world which sparked interest in the way companies are actively “harnessing the brand’s power to inspire social and environmental problems and change.”<sup>3</sup> This led to my hypothesis that states, ‘*Globalisation has seen an increase in digital tech and awareness of geo political issues, thus brands have increased their power to influence socio-political change at a macro level.*’<sup>x</sup>

Extensive secondary research was conducted to gain a more profound understanding into the corporatisation of activism. The book *Brand Activism: From Purpose to Action*<sup>4</sup> by Sarkar and Kotler, detailed how progressive brands can use their macro-level platform to create a better society. Journal articles such as *Brand Activism in a Political World*<sup>5</sup> and *Corporate Socio-political Activism and Firm Value*<sup>6</sup> offered extensive examinations of the impact and growing trend of brand activism through the authors’ own primary research.

Primary research was conducted to enhance the validity of my secondary research. Firstly, a questionnaire<sup>7</sup> was distributed online and generated 101 responses. The quantitative data was valuable in reflecting meso-level perceptions towards brand activism, including the perspectives of people from different generations, however, this distribution method was limited in its capacity to reflect

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<sup>1</sup> Hayman, B. 2018, *Why Nike was right to feature Colin Kaepernick in its controversial new ad*, Reuters Events, accessed, 28 February 2021, <<https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/why-nike-was-right-feature-colin-kaepernick-its-controversial-new-ad>>

<sup>2</sup> Vredenburg, J. et al. 2018. *Woke washing: what happens when marketing communications don’t match corporate practice*, The Conversation, accessed 29 January 2021, <<https://theconversation.com/woke-washing-what-happens-when-marketing-communications-dont-match-corporate-practice-108035>>

<sup>3</sup> Eyada, B. 2020. ‘Brand Activism, the Relation and Impact on Consumer Perception: A case study on Nike Advertising’. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 12(4) pp.30.

<sup>4</sup> Kotler, P and Sarkar, C. 2018, *Brand Activism: From Purpose to Action*, idea bite press

<sup>5</sup> Moorman, C. 2020. ‘Commentary: Brand Activism in a Political World’. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 39(4)

<sup>6</sup> Bhagwat, Y. et al. 2020. ‘Corporate Socio-political Activism and Firm Value’. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(5)

<sup>7</sup> Questionnaire, See Appendix A

macro-scale insights. Moreover, there was a gender and age bias present as 81.2% of respondents were female and 61.4% of respondents belonged to Generation Z, hence the attitudes towards this topic may not have been an accurate representation.

Furthermore, two visual content analysis were conducted of examples of brand activism that utilised traditional mass media, including *Benetton's*, 'United Colours of Benetton' billboard advertisement<sup>8</sup> and *Nike's* 'Dream Crazy' TV advertisement<sup>9</sup> featuring Colin Kaepernick. This allowed for a deconstruction of the effectiveness and limitations of brand activism through traditional mediums. However, the content analysis may be subject to bias due to personal interpretations.

Finally, two qualitative interviews were conducted with Dr Jessica Vredenburg<sup>10</sup>, author of several academic journal articles on brand activism and Christian Sarkar<sup>11</sup>, co-author of *Brand Activism: From Purpose to Action*. Due to their expertise on brand activism, these interviews provided academic and authoritative perspectives that enhanced and allowed for the critical discernment of secondary research. However, the interviews were conducted over email which limited elaboration of ideas.

*"The way brands react to social injustices has been watched forever, but this year it was on full display."*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Content analysis, See Appendix B

<sup>9</sup> Content analysis, See Appendix C

<sup>10</sup> Interview, See Appendix D

<sup>11</sup> Interview, See Appendix E

<sup>12</sup> Elder, C. 2020, *How Effective is Brand Activism on Social Media?*, College of Communication, accessed 10 March 2021, <<https://www.bu.edu/prlab/2020/10/27/how-effective-is-brand-activism-on-social-media/>>