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## **Standing Up for Societal Change: The Phenomenon of Brand Activism**

A quantitative investigation on young consumers' attitude towards an environmental activist brand

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Master's thesis



# Abstract

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A quantitative investigation on young consumers' attitude towards an environmental activist brand

More and more brands nowadays speak up and address societal relevant issues in their communication, as the phenomenon of brand activism is trending. In order to add on previous studies and expand knowledge, this research aims to understand young consumers' responses towards environmental brand activism in advertisement and observes their brand attitude accordingly. Millennials and the Generation Z, as the most susceptible cohorts for brand activism, are examined in this study along with the research question: *To what extent do factors of environmental brand activism influence young consumers' brand attitude?* Environmental brand activism is chosen as the research subject, as environmental matters are of great importance among young consumers and expected to be addressed by brands. Based on previous studies in similar fields, the impact of brand-cause fit, authenticity and issue involvement are in the centre of this research. By means of the Elaboration Likelihood Model as a theoretical framework and a quantitative experimental investigation, relationships as well as differences in the experimental groups were analysed. The results showed that perceived authenticity and argument quality significantly prompt brand attitudes. Contrary to the ELM, a moderating effect of issue involvement was not detected, but the data demonstrated a direct influence of issue involvement on brand attitude. The experimental manipulation further provided empirical evidence of brand-cause fit affecting brand attitude. Generally, the outcomes of environmental brand activism in the high brand-cause fit condition were more favourable. Ultimately, in the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, high perceived argument quality, authenticity as well as a great congruence with the communicated issue have the potential to influence young consumers' brand attitude positively.

*Keyword:* environmental brand activism, brand attitude, elaboration likelihood model, brand-cause fit, authenticity, issue involvement, Millennials, Generation Z

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# 1. Introduction

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Fridays For Future, Me Too, Black Lives Matter – these are just some examples of activist movements that have gained a lot of attention in the past years. Activism is more prominent in our daily life than ever before both online and offline. Since 2018, the young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg has inspired and encouraged people around the world, especially the younger generations, to fight climate change. However, it is not only individuals or groups that stand up and advocate for social, political or environmental change. Today, more and more brands address different kinds of societal relevant issues in their communication.

I predict that we will see more brands take a stand on issues that impact their brand purpose and audiences. Research has shown that trust among government is down and more people are looking to their workplace and brands that emulate their personality and beliefs to drive change. For brands, it's an opportunity to demonstrate their cultural relevance – Meghan Craig, Empower (Forbes Communications Council, 2019).

In our ever-changing marketplace, now is the right time for brands to become activists, stand out of the crowd and drive change. The phenomenon of firms actively and publicly taking a stance on a societal relevant issue is called brand activism (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). One reason for this ongoing development is certainly the widespread lack of trust in the government and public sector. Contrary, consumers rely more than ever on brands. Research showed that consumers have even more trust in businesses than in government (Edelman, 2019). They believe that brands are able to contribute to societal change by implementing sustainable or ethical practices (van Gils & Horton, 2019). Trust in brands nowadays is based on ethics as well as competence, whereas ethical behaviour tends to outplay competence. Ethical brands are purpose-driven, honest, fair and have a vision (Edelman, 2020). Consumers today appreciate this and even demand from brands to act ethically and take a stand for an issue (Cone Communications, 2017). In order to make a purchase decision, buyers tend to assess common values with the brand and consider their principles even more than their products (Hoppner & Vadakkepatt, 2019).

Another reason for the rise of brand activism is the importance of younger consumers, implying Millennials and the Generation Z, and their demands towards brands. Millennials

and the Generation Z are ethical and belief-driven consumers that are committed to societal and environmental welfare issues more than any other generational cohort (Ahmad, 2019; Title, 2020). These value-driven consumers choose, switch, avoid and boycott a brand due to its position towards societal relevant causes (Edelman, 2020; Kam & Deichert, 2020). They look beyond the products and truly care about the mission and vision of a company. This development brings along new dynamics and challenges for brands in the current marketplace. In order to be recognised by these younger generations, brands cannot remain silent (Ahmad, 2019). Hence, brand activism offers a chance for firms to position themselves by doing something good for society, to show cultural relevance and to approach the increasingly important younger generations as target groups. Thereby, environmental matters such as sustainability and climate issues are preferably expected to be addressed as they are one of the biggest concerns of the younger consumers (Ahmad, 2019; YPulse, 2020).

Generally, it is not just a few brands that already integrate activist messages in their brand communication. A lot of well-established brands such as Nike, Ben & Jerry's and Patagonia support movements of societal relevance. As an environmental activist brand, Patagonia sued the former U.S. president Donald Trump in 2017, because he removed parts of the Bears Ears National Monument in Utah which is protected land (McCarthy, 2017). Evidently, brands are willing to stand up for societal relevant matters by actively taking position and striving for change. In order to address such issues and raise awareness, brands are required to convincingly imply activist messages in their brand communication. However, there is insufficient research on how Millennials and Generation Z actually perceive brand activism in advertisement and how it affects their attitude towards the advertised brand (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020).

## **1.1 Problem statement**

Most young consumers prefer brands that take a stand on an issue over those that remain silent (Admirand, 2020; Ahmad, 2019). However, if not done in the right way, brand activism can easily be perceived as 'woke washing' and lead to a backlash and boycott of a company (Kam & Deichert, 2020; Vredenburg et al. 2020). The term 'woke washing' depicts "brands [that] have unclear or indeterminate records of social cause practices' (Vredenburg et al. 2018) but yet are attempting 'to market themselves as being concerned with issues of inequality and social injustice' (Sobande, 2019, p. 18)" (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 445). In

2019, when Pepsi launched its campaign standing up against racism with Kendall Jenner as an ambassador, they faced a huge backlash since they were accused of missing the mark by trivialising racism. Although this campaign integrated a powerful activist message that created noise, Pepsi referred to the Black Lives Matter movement having neither a congruent brand purpose and values nor remarkable prosocial practices (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Due to this lacking fit resulting in missing authenticity, the campaign failed. Therefore, implementing a successful brand activism strategy is identified as a challenge for brands.

According to Edelman (2019), 56% of consumers state that too many companies nowadays use brand activism mainly as a strategy to grow profits. Especially the value-driven younger generations see through marketing strategies and hence are not reluctant to boycott, avoid and switch a brand due to their stand on societal issues (Kam & Deichert, 2020). Hence, it is of utmost importance for firms to know their target groups, their values, act accordingly and most important act authentically. Since brand activism is a fairly new concept emerging in research, there are several questions regarding its effectiveness that are relevant for academics as well as practitioners to face: When are activist messages perceived as authentic? What role does the fit between brand and issue play in brand activism? What influence does the consumers' involvement with a cause have? How does brand activism influence brand attitude?

Previous research in the related domains of corporate social responsibility (hereinafter referred to as CSR) and cause-related marketing (hereinafter referred to as CrM) identified brand-cause fit as well as consumers' issue involvement next to authenticity as influential factors that need to be considered when investigating attitude formation (e.g. Chéron et al., 2012; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004). But to what extent are these already researched predictors relevant in the context of brand activism?

## **1.2 Aim and research question**

This thesis contributes to previous research about the evolving phenomenon of brand activism. In particular, the main purpose is to examine the effect of environmental brand activism in advertisement on Millennials' and Generation Z's (hereinafter referred to as 'young consumers' or 'young generations') brand attitude. Since young consumers generally have high demands towards brands regarding environmental awareness and sustainability

(Choudhary, 2020), environmental brand activism is chosen as a case for this study. Considering the potential of environmental brand activism for brand communication, this study is set out to investigate and gain a deeper understanding of parameters and relations that enrich its outcomes when addressing younger generations. By scrutinising brand-cause fit, authenticity and issue involvement as driving factors of environmental brand activism, this thesis provides managerial implications for strategic communication practitioners. In order to accomplish the purpose of the study, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (hereinafter referred to as ELM) of persuasion by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) serves as a framework for testing and interpreting the research model. By means of a quantitative approach, this study provides not only an understanding of relationships between constructs but also compares differences through an experimental manipulation. Ultimately, the aforementioned considerations lead to the following research question:

*To what extent do factors of environmental brand activism influence young consumers' brand attitude?*

By answering the research question, this thesis contributes to previous studies in three ways. First, with the help of an experimental investigation, it observes the impact of high vs. low brand-cause fit on attitudes towards an activist brand. Second, it enhances and assesses the application of the ELM in the context of brand activism. And third, it enriches the research field of (young) consumers' brand attitudes. As a result, this thesis generates further insights and develops deeper knowledge for academics and practitioners about how environmental brand activism in advertisement is perceived by younger generations.

### **1.3 Relevance for strategic communication**

Strategic communication is described as „the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission“ (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 3). In practice, strategic communication supports organisations to reach their defined goals, in particular long-term goals (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018). Falkheimer and Heide (2018) defined three different traditional research domains within strategic communication: public relations, organisational communication and marketing communication. The developing phenomenon of brand activism that is in the focus of research in this study can be embedded in the area of marketing communication. Marketing communication is a continuously developing and dynamic field that needs to adapt constantly to its stakeholders and the environment (Falkheimer & Heide,

2018). Therefore, when applying a new strategy, such as the phenomenon of brand activism, it is necessary for strategic communicators to carefully listen to their stakeholders' demands in order to stay competitive in the prospective marketplace. Certainly, the concept of brand activism contributes to the development of marketing communication and presents a strategy not only to address companies' target groups but also to show cultural relevance.

Since brand activism is a fairly new approach, it is highly relevant for strategic communication research to scrutinise this concept and its impacts for brand communication in depth. Brand activism entails chances as well as risks for practitioners because it requires them to develop and implement new communication strategies (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Thus, it can challenge strategic communicators in several ways. First, it requires practitioners to carefully evaluate on how to connect the nature of the issue with their brand. Second, in order to be perceived as genuine, practitioners need to ensure that the activist messages are in accordance with their corporate actions (Vredenburg et al., 2020). And third, brands are recommended to take the needs of their target groups into account in order to implement a strong and successful activist strategy. From an academic strategic communications' perspective, it is therefore of utmost importance to provide empirical evidence about the effectiveness of brand activism by considering young consumers' perceptions about it. In this way, managerial recommendations can be expressed. Since this phenomenon is just on the rise, certainly more attention will be attributed to it in the near future. Based on this reasoning, research into brand activism is bound to be highly relevant for the field of strategic communication.



## 2. Literature Review

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This literature review presents the existing research on the constructs that are scrutinised in this thesis. First, an overview of the concept of consumers' brand attitudes is given. Second, the phenomenon of brand activism by Kotler and Sarkar (2017) which is in the focus of this study is introduced while reflecting on relevant historical contexts and first findings. Third, brand-cause fit and perceived authenticity as conditions of brand activism are reviewed. And fourth, former research about issue involvement as a moderating factor in attitude formation is highlighted. Ultimately, a synthesis is provided that consolidates the constructs and embeds this study in the scope of previous research.

### 2.1 Consumers' brand attitudes

Consumers' attitudes have been in the centre of attention in communication and marketing research for a long time, since attitudes are valuable to predict consumer behaviour (Mitchell & Olson, 1981). Investigations in attitudes not only play a crucial role for academics, but also practitioners are interested in consumers' affective reflections and responses in order to develop more successful communication strategies (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Mitchell & Olson, 1981). Considering the significance of advertising for a brand's equity, it is not surprising that previous research mainly focused on attitudes towards an advertisement and the advertised brand (Gardner, 1985). Brand attitude describes the formation of an individual's evaluation such as general liking or disliking towards a brand (Mitchell & Olson, 1981). In their research, Mitchell and Olson (1981) examined brand attitude on four semantic differential scales: good/bad, dislike very much/like very much, pleasant/unpleasant and poor quality/high quality. In order to measure attitudes towards a brand, several researchers applied different measurement scales, for instance with verbal statements or descriptive adjectives. However, there seems to be no generally recommended scale to operationalise brand attitude outcomes (Li & Ali, 2020).

For academics as well as practitioners it is of utmost interest to research how advertisements are processed by relevant target groups and how this influences brand attitude. Hence, researchers looked into different kinds of advertising appeals, their impacts on information processing and ultimately attitude formation (Petty et al., 1983; Rhee & Jung, 2019). Beyond,

attitudes can indicate to what extent consumers are loyal to a brand. Being favourable among all brands in a product class is one of the long-term goals brands aim for (Chaudhuri, 1996; Jacoby & Kyner 1973). Thus, when consumers have lasting positive brand attitudes and are overall satisfied, it may lead to brand loyalty and subsequently higher market share (Chaudhuri, 1996; Liu et al., 2012). Furthermore, since brand attitude commonly has a direct impact on purchase intention (see Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), it is still a significant and widely-observed parameter in consumer research. Adding on that, with the rise of brand activism in advertisements and increasingly important younger target groups, it is required to scrutinise their brand attitudes in order to make statements on how brand activism is perceived. Therefore, this study focuses on investigating brand attitudes of Millennials and Generation Z after the exposure to environmental brand activism in advertisement.

## **2.2 Brand activism and its origins**

As mentioned, brand activism offers firms a chance to demonstrate their cultural relevance. Referring to this, Holt (2004) developed the concept of cultural branding that explains how brands are driven by emotions and purpose in order to create noise. Cultural branding describes strategies that approach contemporary issues or paradoxes in societies by providing meaning and identity towards such causes. As cultural branding requires brands to address societal relevant matters (Holt, 2004), it can be seen as an early groundwork for the development of brand activism.

However, in their pioneering work, Kotler and Sarkar (2017) classified brand activism as an emerging field which naturally evolved from the concepts of CrM and CSR. CrM is “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” (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988, p. 60). Research found out that consumers prefer companies that support good causes by donating a certain amount to charities over those that do not. Although customers are aware of the revenues firms make with such collaborations, they generally perceive CrM as highly beneficial for the overall welfare of society (Farache et al., 2008). The marketing-driven CrM concept is integrated in the context of CSR which is generally known as the “perception of a company’s societal integrity” (Sheik & Beise-Zee, 2011, p. 28). Kotler and Lee (2005) disclosed CSR as a multidimensional domain: “Corporate

social responsibility is a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources” (p. 3). In order to persist in our ever-changing, dynamic environment and meet the demands of younger consumers, it is generally expected from companies to support a societal purpose and to act socially responsible beyond raising profits (Ahmad, 2019). Brands nowadays cannot remain silent. They are required to be flexible and proactive with their CSR strategies in order to approach the expectations of their target groups and remain competitive in the marketplace (Kotler & Lee, 2005).

Nevertheless, Kotler and Sarkar (2017) asserted that CSR strategies and marketing-driven cause promotions within CrM are not satisfactory to meet the high demands and desires of the younger generations towards a brand today. Due to decreasing trust in the public sector, consumers expect from brands to take a stand and advocate for issues relevant to society (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Consequently, in times of rising activism and crises, the concept of brand activism evolved inherently from the well-researched field of CSR. Whereas CrM and CSR are categorised as marketing-driven or corporate-driven concepts, the phenomenon of brand activism according to Kotler and Sarkar (2017) developed as a “value-driven agenda for companies that care about the future of society and the planet’s health”. Thus, with activist messaging, brands clearly position themselves in society (Champlin et al., 2019). Manfredi-Sánchez (2019) described brand activism as “a strategy that seeks to influence citizen-consumers by means of campaigns created and sustained by political values” (p. 343). While CSR initiatives are usually evaluated as positive by consumers, brand activist strategies do not necessarily appeal to everyone. Usually, activist brand messages address controversial, challenging or polarising socio-political issues whilst driving societal change. By actively standing up for an issue and implementing practices that fit the corporate values as well as the vision and mission of a company, activist brands aim for a greater purpose than merely increasing sales (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). Besides, brands can raise a lot of attention that leads to publicity (Eilert & Cherup, 2020). In order to gain a better understanding of brand activism, Kotler and Sarkar (2017) developed a framework with six subcategories of brand activism which is fundamental in the current research (see Figure 1). As mentioned, this thesis focuses on environmental brand activism meaning brands advocating on any kind of ecological matters that have an impact on our planet (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017).

**Figure 1: Development of the phenomenon brand activism**



*Note.* From Kotler and Sarkar (2017)

### 2.2.1 Consumer responses to brand activism

Several scholars stated that consumers generally prefer brands that take a stand over those that stay neutral or even silent (Bhagwat et al. 2020; Edelman, 2018; Jamoneau, 2019). Adding on that, activist brands have the potential to develop a strong relationship with their target groups assuming they share the same values (Bhagwat et al., 2020). On the one side, Millennials would be loyal and willing to pay a higher price, if a brand shares the same values and stands up for them. On the other side, they would change brands and generate enormous backlash, if their favourite brands would promote ambivalent issues (Champlin et al., 2019; Kam & Deichert, 2020). Accordingly, Jamoneau (2019) further stressed the importance of the fit between the communicated cause and the brand identity as well as between the target groups and the brand's position. In their study, Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) researched both brand activism with regards to hypothetical as well as known brands showing that consumers who do not share a brand's position on an issue consequently have negative attitudes towards the brand. Further, there is no significant change of attitudes for those consumers that support a brand's position. As a result, they noticed an asymmetric effect of brand activism on brand attitude formation as well as consumer behaviour (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Whereas in the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, Elkan (2018) discovered that U.S. Millennials have positive attitudes towards the activist advertisement, but not towards the brand when comparing to generic advertisement that is only focused on a product. Ultimately, it can be assumed that brand activism – if done in the right way – can influence attitude formation positively which may lead to brand loyalty in the long-term. As presented, former studies were mainly focused on younger consumers' perception on brand activism.

Previous research regarding environmental brand activism in advertisement is very limited, but indeed highly relevant to study. Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) suggested to further research parameters that influence the impact of brand activism on brand attitudes. Thus, this thesis follows up to previous studies by investigating young generations that are more prone to brand activism and by considering possible predictors of brand attitude that also have a crucial role in the origins of brand activism.

### **2.3 Brand-cause fit and perceived authenticity**

The term ‘brand-cause fit’ generally describes the similarity or congruence between a cause or social issue and the brand (Lafferty, 2007). However, the definition of the term is not very distinct in previous research and is perceived as multidimensional. On the one side, a brand could fit with a social cause if both address the same or compatible target groups. On the other side, a fit could also be perceived if a brand and a cause have the same values and achieve the same goals (Nan & Heo, 2007). The thesis at hand adds on the latter and the description of Du et al. (2010) who classified brand-cause fit as the “perceived congruence between a social issue and the company’s business” (p. 12).

Related to CrM and CSR, brand-cause fit and its impact on consumer response is widely researched (e.g. Aaker & Keller, 1990; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Rifon et al., 2004). Consumers often expect brands to only support a cause or social issue if it is in accordance with the companies’ values so that it can easily be associated with the brand (Du et al., 2010; Lafferty, 2007). Supporting this claim and by means of experimental manipulations, the majority of previous research found out that perceived high brand-cause fit favours brand attitudes (Becker-Olsen, 2006; Melero & Montaner, 2016). Nevertheless, there is no general consensus on the role of brand-cause fit. Some studies stressed that high brand-cause fit can lead to negative attitudes, since it seems that the brand could take advantage of the fit (Drumwright, 1996; Ellen et al., 2000). Lafferty (2007) manipulated brand-cause fit and highlighted that a perceived fit does not necessarily have a crucial role in regards to brand attitudes as well as purchase intentions. Adding on that, Nan and Heo (2007) underpinned that CrM messages generally are more favourable compared to generic advertisement, regardless of the brand-cause fit. However, with their experimental investigation, they found out that a high brand-cause fit elicits more positive attitudes towards the brand compared to a low brand-cause fit in a CrM message. Thus, it can be assumed that a higher fit enriches the

effectiveness of the message and therefore enhances persuasion. In contrast to this, a low brand-cause fit entails the risk of criticism or boycott from the consumer (Chéron et al., 2012). The lower the perceived fit, the more doubtful are the consumers towards the partnership. They perceive the cooperation rather as an act of self-interest and sales growth than a contribution to the welfare of society. Consequently, in the context of brand activism, it seems fruitful to also experimentally investigate and understand the role of brand-cause fit and its impact on consumer response.

Moreover, in order to prevent a boycott and ensure a positive outcome of brand activism, several researchers stressed the significance of authenticity (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017; Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). In their study, Alhouti et al. (2016) scrutinised the role of authenticity in regards to CSR initiatives. They connected CSR authenticity closely with the ideas of perceived brand-cause fit and identified fit as one of the determinants of CSR authenticity. Further, Pérez (2019) suggested that authenticity can be enhanced when there is a high brand-cause fit as well as detailed information on the social issue. CSR authenticity according to Alhouti et al. (2016) portrays “the perception of a company’s CSR actions as a genuine and true expression of the company’s beliefs and behaviour towards society that extend beyond legal requirements” (p. 1243). Their research results indicated that it is necessary for brands to consider authenticity as a vital predictor that influences consumers’ perceptions and attitudes. Adding on that, Vredenburg et al. (2020) pointed to the importance of authenticity for brand activism not only in regards to the brand’s success but also for societal change. They described authentic brand activism “as the alignment of a brand’s explicit purpose and values with its activist marketing messaging and prosocial corporate practice” (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 445). In order to be perceived as preferred in the marketplace, it is essential for brands to be authentic with their activist messaging and practices.

Hence, in order to establish authenticity, brands are required to communicate with their target groups to comprehend their demands and interpretations regarding activist messages (Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Particularly, it is recommended for brands to be specific with their wording whilst eluding claims that could be misinterpreted. Ultimately, taking authenticity into account when integrating brand activism in communication strategies, is of utmost importance to influence consumers’ brand attitudes positively (Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Apart from brand-cause fit, perceived authenticity is identified as a

crucial parameter in previous research that might influence the outcome of brand activism and is therefore relevant to scrutinise in this study. Vredenburg et al. (2020) also emphasised the need to further investigate the role of authenticity regarding brand activism and its impact by understanding attitude formation.

## **2.4 Issue involvement**

Within marketing and consumer research, involvement has been identified as one of the major moderating factors in a communication process (Antil, 1984; Krugman, 1965; Nowak & Salmon, 1987). Involvement, as an individual's state of mind, was first in the centre of attention in Krugman's (1965) research about television advertising. He explained involvement as a person's own interest and importance towards an advertisement whilst differentiating between states of high vs. low involvement. High involvement describes a high degree of attention and interest, while low involvement indicates low levels of relevance regarding a stimulus. Consequently, consumers' behaviour was different depending on the state of involvement (Krugman, 1965). Generally, research related involvement as personal relevance usually to either situations, messages or products (Bloch, 1982; Mitchell, 1979; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981).

In this thesis, the interest lies in involvement towards an issue or cause that is supported by a brand through activism. Nowak and Salmon (1987) described issue involvement of an individual "as the state or level of perceived importance and/or interest evoked by a stimulus (issue) within a specific situation" (p. 1). Similar to that, Grau and Folse (2007) outlined it as "the degree to which consumers find the cause personally relevant to them" (p. 20). Personal relevance of an issue could derive from previous experience with the specific cause or the self-identity and -concept of an individual. Accordingly, individuals who are highly involved with an issue are expected to engage and process an information more extensively since the message in an advertisement stimulated their attention and interest (Grau & Folse, 2007; Kim, 2014). Highly involved consumers analyse an advocacy in detail whilst reflecting on prior knowledge about the issue to evaluate the validity of the message. In contrast, individuals that are less involved with the cause consider other cues in regards to their information processing that are usually not related to the cause itself (Petty et al., 1983).

Indeed, previous researchers that observed issue involvement in the context of CrM identified it as a crucial moderator of attitude formation and change (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2010; Kim, 2014; Patel et al., 2016). Hajjat (2003) confirmed that high involvement with a social cause enhances an extensive processing of information, whereas low involvement leads to elaboration based on other cues. Similar results can be found in the study of Patel et al. (2016). They also observed the moderating influence of cause involvement on brand attitude and purchase intention in the context of CrM. Patel et al. (2016) further found out that people who are more involved with the communicated issue in cause-related marketing have more favourable brand attitudes than those who are less or not involved. Hence, advertisements including social causes that are personally relevant to individuals have the opportunity to allure consumers (Kim, 2014), assuming that the message and the fit between cause and brand are perceived as authentic. Especially when addressing Millennials and Generation Z that are the most environmentally involved and ethically driven cohorts (Ahmad, 2019; Title, 2020), brand activism might provide a high potential to be successful.

## **2.5 Synthesis**

Most of the recent studies concerning brand activism referred to the concept suggested by Kotler and Sarkar (2017) that is grounded in CrM and CSR research. Indeed, previous studies indicated that there is a potential of brand activism in advertisement to drive brand attitudes positively (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Champlin et al., 2019). Although there is little research yet on the impact of brand activism, the effects of CSR and CrM initiatives on brand attitude were considered as a groundwork for studying the field. Since brand-cause fit, perceived authenticity and issue involvement were acknowledged as important factors of successful CSR and CrM strategies, this study based its investigation on these findings. Adding on that, former research particularly expressed the need to further scrutinise possible parameters of brand activism in order to make statements about its outcomes and give managerial implications (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Especially perceptions of young consumers seem to be relevant to study, since they are most expectant and susceptible towards brands and their activist strategies. By experimentally investigating young consumers' attitudes towards an environmental activist brand whilst considering the ELM as a theoretical framework, this thesis contributes to previous studies and addresses a gap in the current literature. Ultimately, the ELM is challenged in a new arena and the evolving research of brand activism amplified.



## 3. Theoretical Framework and Development of Hypotheses

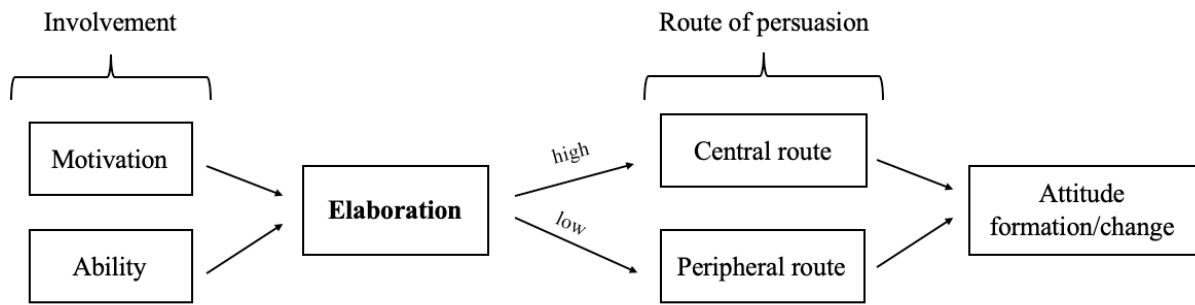
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In this chapter, the ELM is presented as the theoretical framework for this research. It serves as the foundation for the purpose of this study in order to predict brand attitudes in the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement. Based on the ELM, the hypotheses are developed and the research model is presented. First, the theory and its application are introduced in detail. Second, the ELM is brought into the research context whilst demonstrating the development of the hypotheses. Lastly, the research model is portrayed.

### 3.1 Elaboration Likelihood Model

Originally, the ELM of persuasion by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) emerged due to interest in persuasion and influence through communication within the field of social psychology. Further clarification was demanded in regards to attitude change and persuasion research, since there was little consensus on the role of different underlying factors such as the source, messages, arguments and individuals (Hovland et al., 1953; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Hence, the ELM of persuasion was developed in order to provide a frame that explains information processing and consequently attitude change after the exposure to persuasive communication. Indeed, conflicting previous research was considered and a suggestion to explain differences in communication-induced attitude formation was made (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). With the development of this dual process model, earlier single process models (e.g. Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) were challenged (Schumann, 2012). Since the ELM aims to enlighten the effectiveness of persuasive communication, it is widely used in mass media and advertising research. Accordingly, this model helps to understand attitude formation or change after the exposure to an advertisement (Moscato, 2018; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Until today it has been applied in diverse advertising and advocacy areas of research such as environmental issue and political advertising (Schumann, 2012). Therefore, the ELM is considered a well-suited framework for this thesis in order to understand the effect of environmental brand activism in advertisement on brand attitude. This theory is chosen because it outlines the persuasiveness of communication and its effect on consumers' attitudes as well as the explanation of why an advertisement leads to different outcomes across individuals (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006).

**Figure 2: Elaboration Likelihood Model**



*Note.* Own portrayal adapted from Petty and Cacioppo (1986)

Petty and Cacioppo (1986) defined the term ‘elaboration’ as “the extent to which a person carefully thinks about issue-relevant information” (p. 7). According to the ELM there are two paths of elaboration that lead to persuasion: the central and the peripheral route. The central route of persuasion is taken when a recipient carefully reflects on the persuasive message by using prior knowledge or experience in order to evaluate the provided information (Petty & Cacioppo 1986; Petty et al., 2009). Consumers that process information via the central route critically analyse the arguments in the persuasive message as well as consider their relevance before forming attitudes and judgements (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006). The central route of persuasion therefore requires high elaboration, meaning consumers need to have the motivation and ability to process the given information with extensive cognitive effort. When being highly involved, consumers take the actual merits of the message into account and form their opinions and attitudes accordingly (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Significant for persuasion under the central route therefore is that consumers consider the arguments of the message as qualitative and compelling. However, ensuring argument quality does not necessarily mean that the message is elaborated via the central route. Motivation and ability to process information are also dependent on individuals as well as situational factors. Further, although a persuasive communication is extensively elaborated, it does not imply that attitudes are formed rationally. Emotions, prior attitudes or knowledge can play an important role and influence the persuasiveness of communication as well (Petty et al., 2009). Nevertheless, there are some attributes that result from attitude formation or change through the central route. Since these attitudes are saved in a consumer’s cognitive structure, they are easy to retrieve, persistent over a long period of time as well as resilient to change (Petty et al., 2009).

In contrast, the peripheral route of persuasion is taken if message recipients do not have the ability and motivation to process the presented information with cognitive effort and consideration of merits (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty et al. 2009). Under the peripheral route, persuasion occurs through simpler means such as different features of communication like images, attraction of the source or source credibility. In any case, elaboration via the peripheral route is based on cues that do not refer to the persuasive message itself. Whilst a cognitive evaluation of the arguments and merits is missing, persuasion is induced by other cues that are equally able to influence attitude formation or change (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Contrary to the central route, persuasion caused through peripheral cues is cognitively less available and lasting as well as resilient to change (Petty et al., 2009). Nonetheless, peripheral cues can be influential even though for a shorter period of time. Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2006) summarised three main characteristics that distinguish the central and the peripheral route: First, the central route takes the comprehension of argument quality related to the message into account while the peripheral route focuses on cues. Second, whereas the central route is based on careful evaluation through cognitive efforts before making a judgement, the peripheral route requires less reasoning but rather positive or negative associations with cues in an advertisement. Third, compared to the peripheral route, attitude change or formation via the central route is more constant and lasting, because the arguments are scrutinised carefully and thoughtfully. Attitude formation via the central route is therefore commonly preferred from a brand's perspective since enduring attitudes can induce brand loyalty and predict behaviour (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Chaudhuri, 1996).

The vital aspects that determine elaboration likelihood and therefore which of the two routes is taken are motivation and ability to process the information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In order to reach a high level of elaboration and thus the central route of persuasion both characteristics need to be present. Otherwise, it is more likely that a stimulus is processed on low levels of elaboration and is therefore dependent on peripheral cues. Motivation and ability entailing involvement can be affected by several factors depending on the individual and the situation (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996). Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2006) emphasised that motivation and ability to elaborate, moderate the impact of argument quality and peripheral cues on attitude formation: The higher the elaboration likelihood, the more argument quality is salient, whereas the lower the elaboration likelihood, the more peripheral cues effect attitude formation. Previous research often referred to prior expertise and personal relevance when identifying elaboration motivation and ability (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Thus, it can be

stated that higher levels of prior knowledge and personal involvement regarding an argument or issue communicated increase elaboration likelihood.

Generally, the ELM underwent some criticism over the past 30 years. As mentioned, the ELM is a dual-process model that explains persuasion. Due to its descriptive nature and the duality of the theory, some researchers questioned its suitability for a modern communication context. The two routes underlying in the ELM might not do justice to the complex procedure of information processing which is rather perceived in a dynamic manner (Kitchen et al., 2014). Furthermore, Petty & Wegener (1999) explained elaboration as a continuum which allows shifts from the peripheral to the central route. Heesacker et al. (1983) for instance argued that peripheral cues such as source credibility can also prompt the central route of persuasion which further confirms the dynamic process of elaboration. Although a shift of routes is empirically problematic to consider, the ELM is still one of the most predominant theories applied by marketing researchers for investigating consumers' attitudinal change (Kitchen et al., 2014). This is also the rationale for why it was chosen as a theoretical framework for this thesis studying brand attitudes in the scope of environmental brand activism in advertisements. Moreover, by applying the ELM in a new research field, its robustness and suitability for a modern communication context is critically tested.

### **3.2 Development of the hypotheses and the research model**

In the next section, the components of the ELM are scrutinised in-depth and embedded in the context of this research. Hereinafter, the development of the hypotheses is pointed out. Thereby, the following variables are in the centre: brand attitude, perceived argument quality, perceived authenticity and issue involvement. Eventually, the research model that guides this study is presented. The variable 'brand-cause fit' constitutes the manipulation in this experimental investigation. Thus, the research model including all hypotheses is additionally tested and compared within the manipulated groups that are exposed to different levels of brand-cause fit.

#### The central route: Perceived argument quality

As stated in the previous chapter, when elaboration likelihood is high, information is processed via the central route of persuasion according to the ELM. In the centre of evaluation is hereby the argument quality of the presented information (Petty & Cacioppo,

1986). Heesacker et al. (1983) claimed that argument quality is the evidence for a thorough processing of the message presented and thus, also a confirmation for the central route of persuasion in the ELM. Consequently, argument quality is considered as one of the main variables that predict attitude change through the ELM (O’Keefe & Jackson 1995). Quality of arguments refers to the strength of arguments. Here, it needs to be distinguished between messages that contain weak or strong arguments. When argument quality is perceived as strong and the arguments as convincing, consumers form their opinions favourable. Whereas when argument quality is perceived as weak, careful thinking about the message leads to unfavourable thoughts and evaluation of the message. Hence, it can induce counter-effects (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Subsequently, perceived argument quality has an important impact on attitude formation. Several studies confirmed this statement by applying the ELM in different research fields (Bhattacharjee & Stanford, 2006; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Additionally, Lin et al. (2017) claimed that strong, objective arguments that are easy to understand have a greater effect than weak, subjective arguments that seem emotional.

For the purpose of this study, it can be assumed that perceived argument quality plays an important role in the context of environmental brand activism in advertisements. Berger et al. (1999) stated that the way of processing advertisements is closely related to the arguments of the message. Further, they scrutinised the function of argument quality in cause-related advertising finding out that argument quality induces attitude formation or change. As mentioned, brand activism easily can lead to backlash due to doubtful consumers and lacking consideration of fitting activist messages as well as actions (Edelman, 2019; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be assumed that consumers’ perception of argument quality also has a vital role in order to predict their brand attitudes. Consequently, the quality of arguments in accordance with the ELM is fundamental to investigate in the scope of environmental brand activism in advertisement which leads to the following hypothesis:

**H1:** *In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, higher levels of perceived argument quality significantly induce higher levels of brand attitude.*

#### The peripheral route: Perceived authenticity

It is not only the message and arguments themselves that can have an impact on the consumers’ processing of the given information. There are also peripheral cues meaning more

simple indicators that consumers refer to when evaluating a message. These cues are more likely to be considered when motivation and ability to elaborate on the content of the message are low (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Previous elaboration likelihood research primarily scrutinised source credibility as a main parameter that predicts attitude formation or change through the peripheral route of persuasion (Petty et al., 1981; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Ohanian (1990) stated that “‘Source credibility’ is a term commonly used to imply a communicator’s positive characteristics that affect the receiver’s acceptance of a message” (p. 41). Thus, when a source is perceived as trustworthy, attractive and an expert in its field, the sender is considered as credible and therefore persuasion is more likely to occur (Wu & Wang, 2011). However, apart from source credibility, there are other cues that induce the peripheral route of persuasion such as images, words or core values. When respondents have positive associations with cues, they effortlessly grab their attention which may lead to persuasion (Lilleker, 2014). Since peripheral cues can be anything that is not related to the message itself, Cialdini (1993) differentiated six categories that are mainly used in persuasive communication: reciprocation, consistency, social proof, liking, authority and scarcity. Subsequently, peripheral cues are complex and can take different directions that lead to persuasion. Irrespective of the argument quality in the message, source cues foster favourable attitude formation and are especially meaningful when elaboration is low (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty et al., 2009). Consequently, such cues that commonly evoke emotions are identified as significant predictors of brand attitudes (Petty et al., 1981). The influence of peripheral cues on attitude formation can be predominant, although lasting for a shorter period of time (Petty et al., 2009).

In the context of brand activism in advertisement and in accordance with the ELM, this study investigates perceived authenticity as a relevant source cue that may lead to persuasion. For the purpose of this research, perceived authenticity serves as an independent variable that is assumed to prompt the peripheral route of persuasion. Since a new parameter is treated as a source cue in this study, it not only enriches but also embeds the ELM in the research context. Referring to the concept of brand activism, perceived authenticity is one of the most important key variables (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Brand activism is identified as authentic when the brand’s messages, core values as well as corporate practices are aligned. Otherwise, brand activism can be apparent as inauthentic and further lead to counter-effects such as boycotting the brand. Thus, it is crucial that the brand which is integrating activist messages in its advertisement is perceived as authentic as well. Perceived authenticity in this study

refers to the consumers' evaluation of the presented brand as a source cue and its intentions behind the activist message. Alhouti et al. (2016) examined the role of authenticity in CSR research finding out that it has a great influence on consumers' perceptions. They stated that consumers will have positive attitudes towards brands that are authentic when engaging in CSR actions. Previous research about authenticity in the domain of CSR and the theoretically analysed concept of brand activism provided clear occasion to expect that this variable has a great significance for attitude formation in the context of brand activism as well. Regarding this research, when the brand and its advocacy seem to be authentic and an expert in environmental matters, it can be assumed that consumers have more positive brand attitudes. Ultimately, based on the ELM as well as previous literature concerning brand activism, the following hypothesis is developed:

**H2:** *In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, higher levels of perceived authenticity significantly induce higher levels of brand attitude.*

#### Level of elaboration: Issue involvement

In order to understand why some individuals have higher levels of elaboration compared to others, it is relevant to scrutinise moderators that effect the process of elaboration. In accordance with the ELM, motivation and ability to evaluate a stimulus are highlighted as significant predictors (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Early studies in persuasion and consumer research already emphasised the need to differentiate between various states of individuals' involvement and their impact on persuasion (e.g. Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Involvement, in accordance to the ELM, describes the degree to which a consumer is motivated and able to process given information (Kim, 2003). Motivation to elaborate is often related to the personal relevance of the message, whereas ability refers to an individuals' prior knowledge about the topic (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Assuming that both motivation and ability are present, consumers are said to be highly involved with the communicated issue. Individuals that have extensive knowledge or perceive the communicated cause as personally relevant to them, most likely have the motivation and ability to evaluate the presented information carefully whilst following the central route of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996). Hajjat (2003) further confirmed that highly involved consumers with an issue have sufficient ability and motivation to elaborate on relevant information and use their prior knowledge to form attitudes and judgements in regards to an advocacy. On the one side, when being highly involved, the influence of argument quality on attitudes is assumed to be more salient than the

effect of peripheral cues. On the other side, when motivation and ability to elaborate are lacking, meaning consumers are less involved, the impact of peripheral cues on the evaluation of the stimulus and attitude formation is greater. Thus, it can be stated that high involvement moderates the central route of persuasion within the ELM, while low involvement moderates the peripheral route of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Referring to the purpose of this study, issue involvement is assumed to interact with the independent constructs that influence brand attitude and thus has a moderating impact. Based on an individuals' involvement, environmental brand activism in advertisement is supposed to be processed differently. Previous studies that applied the ELM within CSR and CrM research underlined the influence of issue involvement on the process of attitude formation (e.g. Grau & Folse, 2007; Hajjat, 2003). Accordingly, Bögel (2015) found out that consumers elaborate CSR communication depending on their CSR involvement levels. Thus, it stands to reason that these findings can be applied to the domain of environmental brand activism as well. The more individuals are involved with the addressed environmental issue, the more salient is the influence of perceived argument quality on attitude formation (central route of persuasion). In contrast, the less individuals are involved with the communicated issue, the more pertinent is attitude formation through perceived authenticity as a peripheral cue (peripheral route of persuasion). Consequently, issue involvement is assumed to function as a significant moderator that influences the outcome of environmental brand activism in advertisements on attitude formation. Eventually, the aforementioned considerations lead to the following hypotheses:

**H3:** *In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, greater issue involvement significantly moderates the effect of perceived argument quality on brand attitude.*

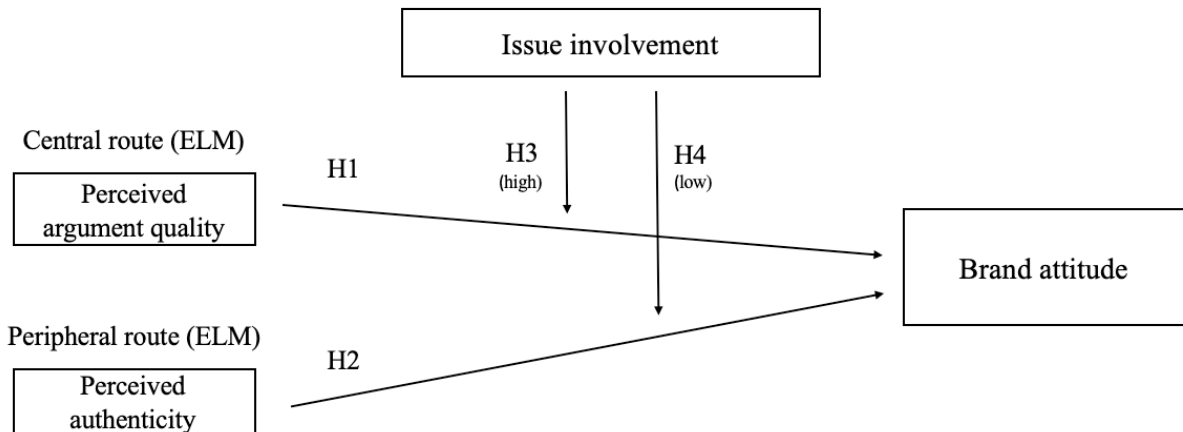
**H4:** *In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, less issue involvement significantly moderates the effect of perceived authenticity on brand attitude.*



### 3.3 Research model

Figure 3 visualises the developed research model that guides this study including all variables and hypotheses:

**Figure 3: Research model**



Based on this research model and the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, brand attitude is examined as the outcome variable. All hypotheses are based on the ELM framework entailing that consumers with greater issue involvement elaborate the presented activist advertisement through the central route of persuasion whilst evaluating on argument quality. In contrast, consumers that are less involved with the communicated issue take perceived authenticity as a peripheral cue into account in order to form their brand attitudes.

As mentioned, in addition to testing the research model, this study further compares the outcomes within the two experimental groups that were exposed to stimuli with different levels of brand-cause fit. Adding on previous research (e.g. Becker-Olsen, 2006; Melero & Montaner, 2016), it is anticipated that high brand-cause fit affects brand attitude positively and that the research model induces generally more favourable outcomes for consumers exposed to the high brand-cause fit condition compared to the low brand-cause fit treatment. Thereby, based on former studies, it is expected that brand-cause fit has an important influence on how environmental brand activism in advertisement is perceived.

## 4. Methodology and Measurements

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This chapter sets out the methodology and measurements in this study. To start with, the chosen research approach and paradigm that guided this thesis are outlined. This is followed by a thorough discussion of the sample selection and data collection process. Here, a demographic profile of the sample is presented. Afterwards, ethical considerations are emphasised. Furthermore, a comprehensive overview of the dual research design containing an experimental design as well as survey design is given. Lastly, the scales and measurements are described, whereas validity and reliability as well as the descriptive statistics are highlighted.

### 4.1 Research approach and paradigm

In order to conduct research in communication and get to know ‘something’, there are several approaches, so-called epistemological approaches. Epistemology refers to different methods of understanding and interpreting the world whilst quantitative and qualitative approaches are the most prominent ones (O’Reilly, 2012; Wrench, 2013). Whereas qualitative methods commonly are of subjective, interpretive and exploratory nature, quantitative research is identified as the scientific approach that objectively explains phenomena and generates comprehension by scrutinising facts based on statistical data and analysis (Muijs, 2011; Wrench, 2013). As stated before, this thesis aims to investigate, explain and predict young consumers’ attitudes towards environmental brand activism in advertisement by means of an experimental investigation. Therefore, starting from the ELM and its theoretical relationships, this study quantitatively approached empirical evidence about brand attitude along with an experiment. It followed a deductive direction of investigation in which theories and developed hypotheses build the groundwork for collecting data and explaining reality (Neuman, 2006; O’Reilly, 2009).

Muijs (2011) argued that within quantitative research there are different views and perspectives on how to generate knowledge. Traditionally, quantitative research has been explained “as being ‘realist’ or sometimes ‘positivist’” (Muijs, 2011, p. 3). A realist perspective claims that research is able to reveal the true reality, while a positivist view takes it a step further asserting that reality is explained only by laws and facts. In this way,

quantitative research tests theories that uncover the truth by only rejecting or accepting them. However, most quantitative research is not conducted in this extreme way and therefore criticised by proponents of the radical realist as well as positivist perspective. Subsequently, deriving from the criticism of positivism, the paradigm of post-positivism that emerged is the underlying perspective in this study (Fox, 2008; Muijs, 2011). Post-positivism as an approach to knowledge, admits that studies are not able to completely reveal the truth through research, even though there is a certain objective reality. Post-positivists state that theories are able to explain human behaviour, however there are uncertain situations as well as some instabilities for prediction (Allen et al., 2008). Thus, research should try to present and explain reality in the best way possible (Muijs, 2011). Given the research question in this thesis as well as the developed set of hypotheses, this study derived from a post-positivist perspective. By finding out to what extent factors of environmental brand activism influence young consumers' brand attitude, this study explains the objective reality regarding the phenomenon of brand activism in the best way possible.

## **4.2 Sample selection and data collection**

This thesis aims to gain and deepen knowledge about young consumers', in particular Millennials' and Generation Z's, response towards environmental brand activism in advertisements. Millennials, also called Generation Y, are born between 1981 and 1996, whilst everyone born after 1996 until 2010 belongs to the Generation Z (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Parker & Igielnik, 2020). These younger generations are the most ethically and environmentally concerned generational cohorts that expect more from brands than merely selling their products (Choudhary, 2020; Petro, 2020). Millennials and Generation Z care about social and environmental relevant issues such as climate change and generally prefer brands that take a stance in accordance with their brand purpose and values (Title, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Beyond, these young generations are the prospective driving force in the marketplace and therefore a relevant target group for marketing or branding. Ultimately, they were chosen as the pertinent population for this study.

The sampling approach in this study presents a nonprobability sampling strategy, because participants were not selected randomly (Van de Ven, 2007). In particular, this study implicated an online convenience sample. That means respondents were chosen based on their mere availability (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015): everyone that came across the distributed

survey link was able to take part. This sampling approach was implemented because it is the most efficient considering the limited time and expenses for this study. Efficiency is also the reason for why convenience samplings are increasingly applied in social sciences research (Coppock & McClellan, 2019). Nonetheless, since respondents were not selected randomly, the results cannot be generalised to the chosen population and the possibility for bias evoked by sampling error increased (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015; Wrench, 2013). A sampling error describes the discrepancy between the defined population and the cases represented in the sample which is a threat to stability and thus reliability. However, by reaching an extensive number of respondents, it is attempted to counteract the sampling error in this study (Wrench, 2013).

In order to ensure that the participants belonged to the generational cohorts Millennials or Generation Z, the birth year was queried in the survey. In sum, 374 respondents completed the online survey; however, 46 cases were excluded as they were not part of the defined population. Eventually, the sample consisted of 328 respondents. Out of the 328 valid cases in the sample, almost 3/4 of the respondents were female (74%), 1/4 were male (25%) and 1% non-confirming or preferred not to reveal their gender. The average age of all participants was 26 years ( $M = 26.20$ ,  $SD = 4.36$ ). All participants ( $N = 328$ ) were born between 1981 and 2007 and therefore presented the relevant generational cohorts of Millennials and Generation Z. Since 46% have finished a bachelor's degree and 30% a master's or doctorate degree, the level of education in the sample was fairly high. To sum up, a demographic profile of the sample is portrayed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographics of the sample**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	242	74
Male	83	25
Non-conforming/Prefer not to say	3	1
<b>Age</b>		
Under 20	23	7
20-24	80	24
25-29	167	51
30-34	40	12
35 or above	18	6
<b>Country of living</b>		
Germany	124	38
Sweden	98	30
Others	106	32
<b>Education</b>		
No formal education	3	1
High/middle school degree	74	23
Bachelor's degree	152	46
Master's degree	90	27
Doctorate degree	9	3
<b>Occupation</b>		
High/middle school student	23	7
University student	174	53
Working	121	37
Unemployed	10	3

*N* = 328

The data collection phase was from the 18<sup>th</sup> of March until the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2021. The online survey was distributed with a link on several social media platforms as well as to the own social network of the author who also belongs to the relevant research population.

### 4.3 Ethical considerations

Apart from the mere research purpose, it is of utmost importance to meet ethical standards when conducting research. Ethical standards imply a clear explanation of the research procedure including the purpose, information about the length and assurance of anonymity to the participants, which is called informed consent (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015). The

informed consent in this thesis was given at the beginning of the survey on the first page. It included a clear statement regarding the purpose of research and explained how confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. It was ensured that no individual responses are presented in the report. Further, it was pointed to the possibility of withdrawing from the survey at any time. On the last page of the survey, the researcher disclosed her contact details and encouraged the participants to get in touch in case of any questions. The anonymous handling of the data was guaranteed one more time. Throughout the study as well as the data analysis, neither identifiable information nor individual answers were presented.

On another note, all questions in the survey were required to be answered. In this way, it was ensured to avoid missing data and receive complete answers that are necessary for a thorough and valid data analysis. Choosing all questions to be mandatory implied the risk of participants withdrawing from the survey or of lacking quality in the answers (Décieux et al., 2015). However, this was taken into account. Ultimately, at all times throughout the study, the researcher intended to follow the principles of ethical behaviour.

#### **4.4 Research design**

The chosen research design in this study was twofold combining an online survey design with an experimental manipulation. While a survey research sets out to examine associations and relationships, an experimental design aims to explain differences of behaviour in groups (Allen et al., 2008). By means of the survey part in this thesis, the developed research model with all hypotheses based on the ELM and previous literature was tested. Additionally, the experimental manipulation within the survey scrutinised the impact of different levels of brand-cause fit on young consumers' attitude formation in the context of environmental brand activism. Ultimately, both designs were combined in order to observe the research model within the experimental groups and examine the effect of brand-cause fit on the survey results. With this dual research design, the thesis approached the following research question: *To what extent do factors of environmental brand activism influence young consumers' brand attitude?*

#### **4.4.1 Experimental design**

The experimental manipulation in this study intended to explain the impact of high vs. low brand-cause fit on the survey results. In this research, a single-factor, between-subjects experimental design with a manipulation on two levels is underlying. A single-factor design describes the variation of simply one factor (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015) which in this study is the level of brand-cause fit. Additionally, a between-subjects design implies that each participant is exposed to only one stimulus treatment so that differences can be drawn from comparing the experimental groups. Beyond, it indicates that variances between the groups and their results are caused by the manipulated treatment (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015). In this study, the manipulated stimuli were randomly assigned so that each respondent had the equal probability to be in one of the two treatment groups (Muijs, 2011; Wrench, 2013).

As mentioned in the literature review, the majority of previous CrM research found out by means of an experimental manipulation that high perceived brand-cause fit favours brand attitudes (e.g. Rifon et al., 2004). Consequently, these findings give reason to assume that high brand-cause fit also favours attitude formation in the scope of environmental brand activism in advertisement and further justifies the choice of an experiment. Based on these thoughts, the definition of brand-cause fit by Du et al. (2010), which is the “perceived congruence between a social issue and the company’s business” (p. 12), as well as the consideration of brand activism traits, the stimuli for this study were built. As previous research suggested (Nan & Heo, 2007), brand-cause fit in this study was manipulated by differing the brand statements that are attributed to environmentalist advertisements.

Consequently, each experimental group was introduced to the fictitious fashion brand ‘LOLIZA’ and the same environmentalist advertisement. It was decided for a fictitious brand to control potential experience-related confounding effects that might have an impact on the independent and dependent variables (Wrench, 2013). As mentioned, the manipulation in the treatments was merely the brand statement that disclosed the brand’s purpose and values. Whereas one statement indicated honest sustainable and environmentally friendly values, the other statement did not imply any environmental principles and hinted to a fast fashion brand. More than any other generational cohort, Millennials and Generation Z demand sustainability and environmental awareness from the fashion industry (Gazzola et al., 2020; Salfino, 2020). Thus, the rationale for choosing a fashion brand as an example emerged from the assumption

that most young consumers are familiar with the fashion industry and understand whether a fashion brand genuinely advocates for an environmental issue based on their values and beliefs. Since a lot of fashion brands nowadays implement sustainable collections and attempt to be environmentally friendly, it seemed like a realistic and thus suitable example for the purpose of this study.

The two stimuli created in the online tool 'Canva' included an introduction sentence with the brand's field of business, a brand statement about values and beliefs and an environmentalist advertisement comprising the slogan: 'The climate is changing, why aren't we? By 2030 fashion waste may increase to 148 million tonnes. Choose your clothes wisely!'. The creation of the advertisement with its catchphrase was inspired by existing advertisements of environmentalist brands such as 'Patagonia'. The visual elements as well as the fictitious brand name 'LOLIZA', logo and the illustration of the activist advertisement were held fairly neutral and consistent in both groups in order to control as many potential interference variables as possible. When designing the stimuli, it was ensured to minimise the differences between the conditions in order to maintain validity and limit response biases (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015). In this way, it can be assumed that it actually was the fit of the brand with the chosen issues of climate change and fashion waste that caused variance in the results. Whereas the stimulus indicating a sustainable fashion brand that is actively standing up for the climate crisis intended to generate high brand-cause fit, the (fast) fashion brand was shaped to be anticipated as a hypocritical brand that implements 'woke washing' (Vredenburg et al., 2020) by having a low brand-cause fit. In contrast to the low brand-cause fit treatment, the high brand-cause fit condition prompted the congruence between the social issue and the company's business. The two stimuli did not induce whether it is a print or digital advertisement, since this was not relevant for the purpose of this research. The stimuli can be found in Appendix 1.

#### **4.4.2 Survey design**

Implying the experimental manipulation, an online survey was conducted to investigate the research model. The underlying survey design can be classified as a cross-sectional survey that collects the data from one time period (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015). In particular, this online survey scrutinised the associations between the independent constructs and the dependent variable 'brand attitude'. Thereby, the hypotheses were tested and it is explained to



what extent the perception of argument quality and authenticity influence attitude formation after the exposure to environmental brand activism. Further, the role of issue involvement as a moderator was observed. In order to collect the relevant data for the analysis, an online survey using the tool SoSci Survey was conceptualised. The survey entailed different sections in order to thoroughly cover the constructs, test the hypotheses and answer the research question. As part of the questionnaire, the respondents were exposed to either the high brand-cause fit or the low brand-cause fit condition.

Before the survey started, an intro text informing about the aim and length of the survey as well as its voluntary nature was shown to the participants. Confidentiality as well as anonymity were ensured and therewith the participants encouraged to respond in an honest manner. However, the real purpose of the study, to investigate the phenomenon of brand activism, was concealed and thus biases prevented. The intro simply stated that the survey aims to deepen and explore knowledge about consumers' perceptions of advertisements. After acknowledging and clicking 'Next' the survey started. The first section queried demographic questions including gender, age, residence country, education and occupation. Subsequently, the moderating variable 'issue involvement' was measured. Hereinafter the participants were introduced and exposed to the manipulated stimulus, that was described in the previous chapter, as well as questions referring to it. Thereby, the independent variables 'perceived argument quality' and 'perceived authenticity' as well as the dependent variable 'brand attitude' were covered. Further, the manipulation of brand-cause fit and the perceived level of activism were checked. In order to ensure that the respondents remembered the experimental stimulus correctly, it was shown at the top of each page after it was first introduced. Throughout the survey, it was not revealed that it included an experimental investigation. In this way, response biases as a consequence of awareness of the experimental situation were avoided.

Another influencing factor important to consider in survey research is the so-called social desirability bias. This bias implies that participants do not answer in accordance to their actual opinion but rather to what they perceive is socially accepted (Fowler, 2009; Wrench, 2013). Especially in this survey, when asking about involvement with environmental issues, respondents might not have answered truthfully but tended to put themselves in a better light at the expense of the validity in this study. Although there are claims in previous research regarding a social desirability effect on environmental issue measures (Beckmann, 2005),

other researchers (e.g. Milfont, 2009) observed that it most likely only has a weak effect on the outcome.

Before the data collection phase started, a pre-test with six respondents was conducted. In this way, it was ensured that all questions as well as the stimuli were understood correctly and suitable for the purpose of the study. Minor phrasing and grammar changes were carried out before the survey went live.

## 4.5 Scales and measurements

All variables of interest in this study were operationalised on seven-point, multi-item Likert- or semantic differential scales, using mostly pre-validated instruments from former research. In the following, the measurement scales are described. Furthermore, validity and reliability of measurements are addressed and a summary of the scales including the Cronbach's alpha value for the built indices is presented in Table 2. Lastly, the descriptive statistics for all relevant variables are demonstrated. All scales including items can be also found in the survey in Appendix 2.

**Brand attitude:** The operationalisation of the dependent variable 'brand attitude' was grounded on the four item, seven-point semantic differential scale by Mitchell and Olsen (1981). Mitchell and Olsen's (1981) scale is well-established and widely used to assess brand attitudes (e.g. Chaudhuri 1996).

**Perceived argument quality:** The operationalisation of argument quality was based on the four-item, seven-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree by Bhattacharjee & Sanford (2006). They revised and validated their scale from Sussman and Siegal's (2003) research. Since Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2006) used the scale in another research context, the wording of the items for this study was adjusted.

**Perceived authenticity:** Perceived authenticity was operationalised using the CSR authenticity scale by Alhouiti et al. (2016) as a foundation. The original scale is an eight-item, seven-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree that has high reliability and validity. For the purpose of this study, two items of the initial scale were omitted, since they assume that the respondent is familiar with the brand. In addition, another item based on the definition of authentic brand activism by Vredenburg et al. (2020) was

added. Eventually, the scale used in this study consists of seven items. The wording ‘CSR initiative’ of the initial scale was changed to ‘climate change initiative’ in this study.

**Issue involvement:** The level of involvement with the relevant issues in this study, ‘Climate Change’ and ‘Fashion Waste’, was operationalised using Nowak and Salmons (1987) issue involvement scale. It is a ten-item scale with a five-point semantic differential that measures subjective feelings by opposing contrary adjectives (e.g. Important/Unimportant). In order to reflect even better on the respondent’s true evaluation, the scale was applied with a seven-point semantic differential in this thesis. Nowak and Salmon (1987) developed their scale with high internal as well as test-retest reliability from the Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) scale by Zaichkowsky (1985) that initially operationalised product involvement.

**Perceived brand-cause fit:** In order to be able to check the effect of the experimental manipulation, perceived brand-cause fit was measured using the four item, seven-point semantic differential scale by Alhouiti et al. (2006). They revised and developed their reliable and valid scale based on Becker-Olsen et al. (2006). Again, the phrasing was changed in order to serve the purpose of this study.

**Perceived level of activism:** This measurement was added in order to test how the respondents perceive the level of activism in advertisement. The level of perceived activism was asked with a one item, seven-point semantic differential scale that opposed the adjectives ‘high/low’.

As all variables in this study were measured with Likert- or semantic differential scales that have equal differences between each step, the variables can be categorised as interval variables also known as continuous variables (Wrench, 2013). Since most constructs in this study were operationalised with several items, the total scale score needed to be calculated and so-called indices for each variable built. Beforehand, it was necessary to reverse oppositely phrased items that were used to prevent response bias. Consequently, it was ensured that all items are worded in the same direction so that total scales could be formed (Pallant, 2020).

#### **4.5.1 Validity and reliability of measurements**

When conducting quantitative research, the two most significant traits of measurements that need to be maintained are reliability and validity. Reliability describes the stability and consistency of measurements, while validity depicts the level of accuracy meaning to what

extent the chosen variables or scales measure what they are supposed to measure (Wrench, 2013). An identified threat to reliability as well as validity could be a measurement error meaning an alteration between the respondents' given value for a variable in the survey and their actual value according to the definition of the variable (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015). In order to avoid measurement errors in this study, well-established, reliable and pre-validated scales by former research were used. Furthermore, a pre-test was conducted and the scales were tested on internal consistency in order to ensure reliable measurements. With a Cronbach's alpha value above .7, scales are commonly accepted (Pallant, 2020). Since all of the constructs in this study met this requirement, as shown in Table 2, they are considered as reliable. As most of the scales were pre-validated and used by previous research, they were expected to be internally consistent. Consequently, the scales were suitable to test the research model.

**Table 2: Overview of measurement scales and internal consistency**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Items (No.)</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>
Brand attitude	4	.90
Perceived argument quality	4	.87
Perceived authenticity	7	.93
Issue Involvement	20	.94
Perceived brand-cause fit	4	.93
Perceived level of activism	1	/

#### **4.5.2 Descriptive statistics of variables**

In the following, descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis on all summative built indices and relevant variables are presented. Whereas the skewness value reflects the symmetry of the distribution of scores, kurtosis indicates the 'peakedness' (Pallant, 2020). The dependent variable 'brand attitude' involves four items and has a mean of 18.88 ( $SD = 4.31$ ). The distribution of scores is negatively skewed (-.25) which implies that the scores are rather bundled at the right-hand side of the graph. Further, this variable has a positive kurtosis (.41) indicating that the values tend to be clustered in the centre and the distribution is peaked. The independent variable 'perceived argument quality' builds an index out of four items and has a mean of 18.92 ( $SD = 5.04$ ). The distribution is negatively skewed (-.94) with a positive kurtosis value (.46). As perceived argument quality,

the second independent variable ‘perceived authenticity’ is also negatively skewed (-.85) with a positive kurtosis (.84). Perceived authenticity was built out of seven items with an overall mean of 32.98 ( $SD = 7.47$ ). The moderating variable ‘issue involvement’ consists of 20 items that queried climate change involvement as well as fashion waste involvement with 10 items each. The mean of the computed variable is 110.21 ( $SD = 18.81$ ). Similar to the independent variables, issue involvement is skewed negatively (-.70) with a positive kurtosis value (.41). The control variable ‘perceived brand-cause fit’ forms an index out of four items and has a mean of 18.81 ( $SD = 4.91$ ). As for all other variables, the distribution is negatively skewed (-.60) and has a positive kurtosis value (.54). Lastly, the control variable ‘perceived level of activism’ that was queried with only one item showed a mean value of  $M = 4.58$  ( $SD = 1.58$ ) indicating that participants perceive rather high levels of activism in the ad. Moreover, outliers for all variables were checked by screening box plots. In order to control if the extreme values have a strong impact on the mean, the 5% trimmed mean was accessed that calculates a new mean without the top and bottom 5% of the cases. Since for all variables, the 5% trimmed mean was similar to the original mean, extreme cases were not problematic and remained in the data file (Pallant, 2020). The means, standard deviations and scale characteristics of all relevant variables are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the variables**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>5% Trimmed Mean</b>	<b>Scale range</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Range of scores</b>
Brand attitude	18.88	4.31	18.97	1-7	4	min. = 4; max. = 28
Perceived argument quality	18.92	5.04	19.24	1-7	4	min. = 4; max. = 28
Perceived authenticity	32.98	7.47	33.40	1-7	7	min. = 7; max. = 48
Issue involvement	110.21	18.81	111.10	1-7	20	min. = 39; max. = 140
Perceived brand-cause fit	18.81	4.91	19.00	1-7	4	min. = 4; max. = 28
Perceived level of activism	4.58	1.58	4.64	1-7	1	min. = 1; max. = 7

## 5. Quantitative Analysis and Results

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The following chapter presents the data analysis and empirical results using the software program IBM SPSS Statistics, in short SPSS. Thereby, the hypotheses and underlying research question, *to what extent do factors of environmental brand activism influence young consumers' brand attitude*, is approached. The first section of this chapter contains multiple analyses to test the hypotheses. Afterwards, the research model is further assessed within the experimental groups and differences are compared in order to make statements about the impact of brand-cause fit.

### 5.1 Hypotheses testing

This section sets out to examine the developed research model based on the ELM as a theoretical framework. By performing correlation analyses as well as multiple and moderated regression analyses the following four hypotheses were addressed:

**H1:** *In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, higher levels of perceived argument quality significantly induce higher levels of brand attitude.*

**H2:** *In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, higher levels of perceived authenticity significantly induce higher levels of brand attitude.*

**H3:** *In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, greater issue involvement significantly moderates the effect of perceived argument quality on brand attitude.*

**H4:** *In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, less issue involvement significantly moderates the effect of perceived authenticity on brand attitude.*

#### 5.1.1 Effect of argument quality and authenticity

In order to make statements about the relationship between two variables, a correlation analysis is a suitable approach, since it not only describes the direction of the association but also its strength (Pallant, 2020). Therefore, in this study, a correlation analysis was used to explore the association between each of the two independent variables 'perceived argument quality' and 'perceived authenticity' with the dependent variable 'brand attitude'. In order to ensure no violation of assumptions regarding normality and linearity, preliminary analyses such as scatterplots were performed. By means of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, the relationships were analysed. The results showed that there is a strong

positive correlation between perceived argument quality and brand attitude ( $r = .52$ ,  $N = 328$ ,  $p < .001$ ) meaning high levels of argument quality associate with high levels of brand attitude. Moreover, a strong positive relationship was also detected between perceived authenticity and brand attitude ( $r = .58$ ,  $N = 328$ ,  $p < .001$ ). According to Cohen (1988),  $r$  values from .5 and above indicate a strong positive relationship.

However, in order to take it a step further and test how much of the variance in the dependent variable ‘brand attitude’ is explained by the two independent constructs, a standard multiple regression analysis was performed. A multiple regression is an advanced analysis that is able to explore interrelationships between several independent and one dependent variable (Pallant, 2020), and thus served the underlying research model and purpose of this study. Before conducting the analysis, it needed to be ensured that the data meets certain conditions (Muijs, 2011). First of all, the dependent variable must be continuous, whereas the independent variables can be continuous or categorical. Since in this study all used scales were semantic differential or Likert-scales measured on a continuous level, the first assumption was encountered. Further, linearity between each independent variable and the dependent variable is required, which was controlled with the previous correlation analysis. Apart from that, the independent variables needed to be checked for multicollinearity. Both independent variables in this study had values below  $r = .7$  and therefore were not considered as highly correlated. Supporting this, collinearity statistics checking the VIF (‘Variance Inflation Factor’) and Tolerance value were analysed: VIF values above 10 and Tolerance less than 0.1 would be an indication for multicollinearity (Pallant, 2020). However, the VIF and Tolerance values of perceived argument quality as well as perceived authenticity met the requirements, thus there was no concern for multicollinearity. Additionally, the residuals were controlled for normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and independence by checking the normal probability plot and scatterplot for residuals (Pallant, 2020). Lastly, the data should be controlled for outliers. As previously mentioned, some outliers were detected, however it was decided to keep them in the data since they did not impact the mean very much. Thus, before performing the multiple regression, it was ensured that all the assumptions were complied with.

In order to explain how well the independent variables ‘perceived argument quality’ and ‘perceived authenticity’ predict the dependent variable ‘brand attitude’, a standard multiple regression analysis was conducted, as demonstrated in Table 4. The overall regression model

explains 39% of the variance in the dependent variable, and the result is significant ( $F(2, 325) = 104.51, p < .001$ ). The scatterplot and normal probability plot of the residuals showing that the assumptions are not infringed can be found in Appendix 3. In support of the hypotheses, the analysis showed that both independent constructs solely predict the dependent variable. Whereas perceived authenticity makes a stronger unique contribution to explain brand attitude ( $\beta = .43, t = 8.15, p < .001$ ), perceived argument quality has less of a unique contribution, yet significant ( $\beta = .27, t = 5.22, p < .001$ ).

**Table 4: Effect of argument quality and authenticity on brand attitude**

$R^2 = .39, F(2, 325) = 104.51, p < .001$	Standardised coefficients	$t$	Sig.
	Beta ( $\beta$ )		
Perceived argument quality	.27	5.22	.000*
Perceived authenticity	.43	8.15	.000*
$*p < .001$			$N = 328$

The presented results from the standard multiple regression analysis showed that the empirical data supports hypotheses 1 and 2. Ultimately, higher levels of perceived argument quality and authenticity induce a significantly more positive brand attitude.

### 5.1.2 Moderating effect of issue involvement

In accordance with the theoretical framework of the ELM, hypotheses 3 and 4 indicated that there is a moderation of issue involvement on the effect of perceived argument quality and perceived authenticity on brand attitude. Whereas hypothesis 3 stated that high issue involvement moderates the effect of perceived argument quality on brand attitude, hypothesis 4 claimed that low issue involvement moderates the effect of perceived authenticity on brand attitude. In order to test such an interaction between a moderating variable and the independent variable on the outcome, Hayes (2013) suggested to perform a moderated regression analysis. In contrast to other statistical procedures that examine moderation effects, a regression-based analysis allows to investigate the effect of an interaction between two continuous variables and therefore was the chosen technique in this study. Apart from the assumptions of a multiple regression analysis, some more requirements needed to be considered, before conducting the moderated regression analysis. First, the scores of both interacting predictors needed to be centred by subtracting the mean value from the scores of



each predictor in order to diminish a correlation between the product term and the values of each predictor (Warner, 2013). Second, product terms were built as new variables by multiplying the centred moderating variable ‘issue involvement’ with each of the independent variables ‘perceived argument quality’ and ‘perceived authenticity’. These product terms exemplified the interaction between the two predictors and thus the moderating effects. Eventually, moderated regression analyses were conducted in a similar manner than a multiple regression analysis. However, the product term as well as both the moderator and the independent variable themselves were included in the regression calculation (Warner, 2013). Thus, it was possible to analyse if the product term makes a significant unique contribution in explaining the dependent variable.

Moderated regression analyses were performed to assess whether issue involvement has an interacting impact on the perceived argument quality and perceived authenticity effect on brand attitude. The scatterplots and normal probability plot can be found in Appendix 3. As displayed in Table 5, the overall regression models are significant ( $R^2 = .28$ ,  $F(3, 324) = 42.34$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $R^2 = .36$ ,  $F(3, 324) = 61.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The moderation analyses showed that the independent variables ( $p < .001$ ) and further on also issue involvement ( $p < .05$ ) itself have a unique significant contribution to explain the dependent variable ‘brand attitude’. The latter result was rather surprising, as it was not predicted in this study. Pearson’s correlation coefficient confirmed a weak, positive significant relationship of issue involvement with brand attitude ( $r = .14$ ,  $N = 328$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, the interaction terms did not make a sole significant contribution with  $p$  values above .05 indicating no significance in the results.

**Table 5: Moderating effect of issue involvement on brand attitude**

	<b>Overall model</b>	<b>Independent variable</b>	<b>Moderator</b>	<b>Product Term</b>
<b>H3</b>				
Perceived argument quality x Issue involvement	$R^2 = .28$ $F = 42.34$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .51$ $t = 10.83$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .12$ $t = 2.41$ $p < .05$	$\beta = -.03$ $t = -.56$ $p > .05$
<b>H4</b>				
Perceived authenticity x Issue involvement	$R^2 = .36$ $F = 61.65$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .59$ $t = 13.11$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .15$ $t = 3.28$ $p < .05$	$\beta = -.01$ $t = -.20$ $p > .05$
$N = 328$				

Nevertheless, in order to precisely examine and test hypotheses 3 and 4 in this study, it was necessary to split the moderation variable ‘issue involvement’ in high vs. low issue involvement by performing a median split. Hereafter, the two groups of ‘greater issue involvement’ and ‘less issue involvement’ could be investigated individually and the hypotheses in accordance with the theoretical framework supported or rejected. The results of conducting moderated regression analyses separating high and low issue involvement demonstrated again that the overall regression models are significant ( $R^2$  between .40 and .25,  $F$  between 35.87 and 18.25 and  $p < .001$ ). The scatterplots and normal probability plot can be found in Appendix 3. Conversely, also after splitting the moderator in two groups, all four product terms do not make a significant unique contribution to explain the model with  $p > .05$ . These results refused the prediction that greater and less issue involvement have moderating impacts on the perceived argument quality and perceived authenticity effect on brand attitude. These findings were rather surprising considering the ELM as a theoretical framework.

Ultimately, in the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, greater issue involvement does not significantly moderate the effect of perceived argument quality on brand attitude. Further, less issue involvement does not significantly moderate the effect of perceived authenticity on brand attitude. Out of the four hypotheses building the research model in this study, hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported and hypotheses 3 and 4 rejected after analysing the data.

**Table 6: Hypotheses testing results**

<b>H1:</b> In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, higher levels of perceived argument quality significantly induce higher levels of brand attitude.	Supported
<b>H2:</b> In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, higher levels of perceived authenticity significantly induce higher levels of brand attitude.	Supported
<b>H3:</b> In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, greater issue involvement significantly moderates the effect of perceived argument quality on brand attitude.	Rejected
<b>H4:</b> In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, less issue involvement significantly moderates the effect of perceived authenticity on brand attitude.	Rejected

## 5.2 Experimental stimuli analysis

In addition to testing the research model on the whole sample ( $N = 328$ ), it was even more of interest to explore the differences in the treatment groups and consequently highlight the impact of brand-cause fit on the dependent variable ‘brand attitude’ as well as on the research

model. To begin with, some descriptive statistics and the results of the manipulation check are presented. Out of all  $N = 328$  respondents, 172 participants (52%) were exposed to the high brand-cause fit condition, whereas 156 participants (48%) saw the low brand-cause fit condition. Since perceived brand-cause fit was queried as a manipulation check in the study, bivariate analyses were performed in order to compare the means of the two groups in regards to their perception of the fit. Whereas respondents of the high brand-cause fit condition ( $n = 172$ ) have a mean value of 20.11 ( $SD = 4.10$ ), respondents of the low brand-cause fit condition ( $n = 156$ ) have an inferior mean ( $M = 17.37$ ,  $SD = 5.32$ ). Hence, participants in the high fit condition actually perceived a higher fit between the brand and the communicated cause, compared to the ones in the low fit condition. Nevertheless, the mean value of the low fit group with  $M = 17.37$  is also fairly high and above the middle value of 14 ( $min = 4$  and  $max = 28$ ) which indicates a rather good perceived fit between the brand and communicated issue.

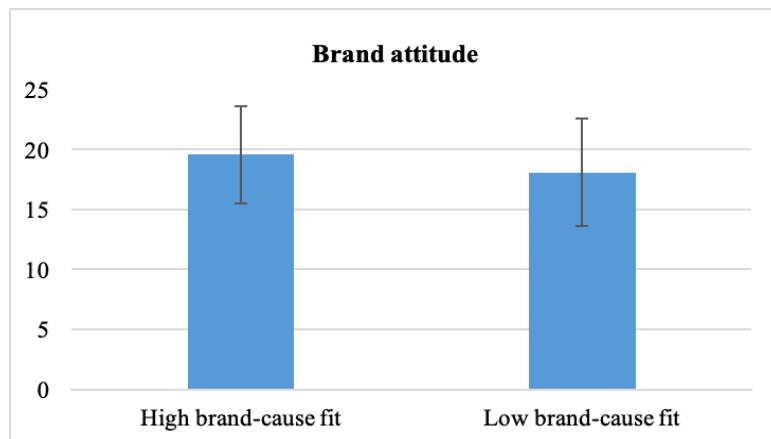
### **5.2.1 Comparison of brand attitude**

In order to compare the mean scores of brand attitude in the two experimental groups and test for significance, an independent-samples t-test is an appropriate analysis procedure (Pallant, 2020). Before performing a t-test, several general assumptions like continuous dependent variable, random sampling and independence of observations need to be met. All of these pre-conditions were assured of. Furthermore, normal distribution and homogeneity of variance are required. Although all observed variables in this study were marginally skewed, this does not cause major concerns since the sample size was reasonably large ( $N = 328$ ). Apart from that, Pallant (2020) claimed that in social sciences it is relatively common for dependent variables to not be normally distributed. However, since most procedures of analyses such as the independent-samples t-test are robust, minor violations of the requirements are of no concern. Homogeneity of variance implies that the population variances, meaning the distribution of scores around the mean, should be equal in two or more samples (Pallant, 2020). This assumption was ensured with Levene's Test for Equality of Variances as a part of the t-test. Thus, all requirements were controlled for.

To test the differences of brand attitude in the high vs. low brand-cause fit group, an independent-samples t-test was performed. Since the Levene's Test supported that there are equal variances between the two groups ( $p > .05$ ), the assumption of homogeneity of variance

was not violated. The findings showed that there is in fact a significant difference in brand attitude scores for the high brand-cause fit condition ( $M = 19.58$ ,  $SD = 4.06$ ) and the low brand-cause fit condition ( $M = 18.10$ ,  $SD = 4.46$ ;  $t(326) = 3.15$ ,  $p = .002$ , two-tailed). Thus, the respondents in the high fit group are significantly more positive towards the brand compared to the ones in the low fit condition, as illustrated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Comparison of brand attitude scores in the experimental groups**



*Note.* The error bars present the standard deviation values.

### 5.2.2 Testing the hypotheses within the experimental groups

In order to examine how the effects of both independent variables ‘perceived argument quality’ and ‘perceived authenticity’ on the dependent variable ‘brand attitude’ differ in the two experimental groups, standard multiple regression analyses were performed again, as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: Effect of argument quality and authenticity in the experimental groups**

	Standardised coefficients Beta ( $\beta$ )	<i>t</i>	Sig.	<i>n</i>
<b>High brand-cause fit</b>				
$R^2 = .44$ , $F(2, 169) = 66.11$ , $p < .001$				
Perceived argument quality	.32	4.65	.000*	172
Perceived authenticity	.43	6.30	.000*	172
<b>Low brand-cause fit</b>				
$R^2 = .33$ , $F(2, 153) = 37.47$ , $p < .001$				
Perceived argument quality	.24	3.05	.003	156
Perceived authenticity	.40	5.05	.000*	156

\* $p < .001$

The table shows that both models are significant ( $R^2 = .44$ ,  $F(2, 169) = 66.11$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $R^2 = .33$ ,  $F(2, 153) = 37.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas the model of the high brand-cause fit condition explains more of the variance in the dependent variable compared to the low brand-cause fit condition. In both experimental groups, the two independent variables make a significant unique contribution to predict the dependent variable ‘brand attitude’. Perceived authenticity in the high fit condition makes the strongest sole contribution in explaining the model with a beta coefficient of  $\beta = 0.43$  ( $t = 6.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, the beta coefficient of perceived authenticity in the low fit group is just marginally inferior with  $\beta = 0.40$  ( $t = 5.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Among both groups, the findings showed that perceived authenticity generally explains more variance in the dependent variable ‘brand attitude’ than perceived argument quality. Furthermore, in order to test and compare if there is a moderation effect of high or low issue involvement on the outcome when looking at the experimental groups separately, moderated regression analyses were again performed, see Table 8.

**Table 8: Moderating effect of issue involvement in the experimental groups**

	Overall model	Independent variable	Moderator	Product Term	<i>n</i>
<b>High brand-cause fit</b>					
<b>HIGH</b>					
Perceived argument quality x High issue involvement	$R^2 = .29$ $F = 11.37$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .41$ $t = 1.97$ $p > .05$	$\beta = -.05$ $t = -.50$ $p > .05$	$\beta = .14$ $t = .69$ $p > .05$	86
<b>LOW</b>					
Perceived argument quality x Low issue involvement	$R^2 = .37$ $F = 15.80$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .80$ $t = 5.94$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .02$ $t = .22$ $p > .05$	$\beta = .32$ $t = 2.38$ $p < .05$	86
<b>HIGH</b>					
Perceived authenticity x High issue involvement	$R^2 = .43$ $F = 20.52$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .71$ $t = 3.61$ $p < .01$	$\beta = .04$ $t = .43$ $p > .05$	$\beta = -.06$ $t = -.29$ $p > .05$	86
<b>LOW</b>					
Perceived authenticity x Low issue involvement	$R^2 = .34$ $F = 13.87$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .63$ $t = 4.99$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .07$ $t = .72$ $p > .05$	$\beta = .10$ $t = .82$ $p > .05$	86

	<b>Overall model</b>	<b>Independent variable</b>	<b>Moderator</b>	<b>Product Term</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
<b><i>Low brand-cause fit</i></b>					
<b>HIGH</b>					
Perceived argument quality x High issue involvement	$R^2 = .21$ $F = 6.50$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .58$ $t = 2.44$ $p < .05$	$\beta = .13$ $t = 1.29$ $p > .05$	$\beta = -.17$ $t = -.71$ $p > .05$	79
<b>LOW</b>					
Perceived argument x Low issue involvement	$R^2 = .37$ $F = 14.49$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .44$ $t = 3.19$ $p < .05$	$\beta = .34$ $t = 3.38$ $p < .05$	$\beta = -.03$ $t = -.22$ $p > .05$	77
<b>HIGH</b>					
Perceived authenticity x High issue involvement	$R^2 = .34$ $F = 12.67$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .48$ $t = 2.17$ $p < .05$	$\beta = .23$ $t = 2.32$ $p < .05$	$\beta = .10$ $t = .42$ $p > .05$	79
<b>LOW</b>					
Perceived authenticity x Low issue involvement	$R^2 = .37$ $F = 14.49$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .50$ $t = 4.02$ $p < .001$	$\beta = .32$ $t = 2.66$ $p < .05$	$\beta = .06$ $t = .37$ $p > .05$	77

As Table 8 presents, all eight models are significant ( $p < .001$ ) which is in accordance to the previous results. As in the aforementioned moderated regression analyses, most product terms that reflect the moderation effect of high or low issue involvement are not significant ( $p > .05$ ) and therefore do not make a unique contribution to explain brand attitude. Nonetheless, the results showed that one interaction term in the high brand-cause fit condition indeed demonstrates a significant result: Low issue involvement significantly moderates the argument quality effect on brand attitude with a beta coefficient of  $\beta = 0.32$  ( $t = 2.38, p < .05$ ). Therefore, in the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, less issue involvement moderates the effect of perceived argument quality on brand attitude in the high brand-cause fit condition. This finding, however, is conflicting with the ELM framework that suggests that greater involvement moderates the argument quality effect on the dependent variable. All the other findings from the moderated analyses refused again an interaction effect of high or low issue involvement when comparing the results of both experimental groups separately.

### 5.2.3 Impact of issue involvement in the experimental groups

Although the findings in this research mostly rejected that issue involvement has a moderating impact on the relations of the independent variables with the dependent variable, a direct effect of issue involvement on brand attitude was detected when analysing the whole sample. Therefore, it is further insightful to discover and compare how high vs. low issue involvement affect the dependent variable ‘brand attitude’ in the two experimental groups.

In order to test the differences in the high brand-cause fit condition, an independent-samples t-test was performed again to compare the brand attitude scores for high vs. low issue involvement. Since the Levene’s Test confirmed equal variances between the two groups ( $p > .05$ ), the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated. The findings of the t-test showed that there is no significant difference in brand attitude scores for high issue involvement ( $M = 20.15$ ,  $SD = 3.99$ ) and low issue involvement ( $M = 19.01$ ,  $SD = 4.08$ ;  $t(170) = -1.85$ ,  $p = .07$ , two-tailed) in the high brand-cause fit condition. Even though the results were not significant, the mean scores indicated that respondents who perceive themselves as more involved with climate change and fashion waste are more positive towards the brand LOLIZA in the high fit condition. A second independent t-test was conducted to compare the findings with the low brand-cause fit condition. The results for less and greater levels of issue involvement in the low fit condition confirmed again equal variances between the two groups. However, also in the low brand-cause fit condition there were no significant differences in brand attitude scores for low issue involvement ( $M = 18.30$ ,  $SD = 4.79$ ) and high issue involvement ( $M = 17.91$ ,  $SD = 4.13$ ;  $t(154) = .54$ ,  $p = .59$ , two-tailed). Considering the mean values, it can be concluded that participants who perceive themselves to be more involved with climate change and fashion waste are less positive towards the brand LOLIZA in the low fit condition, but the differences are not significant. The results of the independent-samples t-tests can be found in Table 9.

**Table 9: Brand attitude determined by issue involvement in the experimental groups**

	Issue involvement	
	High	Low
<b>High brand-cause fit</b>	$M = 20.15$ , $SD = 3.99$ , $n = 86$	$M = 19.01$ , $SD = 4.08$ , $n = 79$
<b>Low brand-cause fit</b>	$M = 17.91$ , $SD = 4.13$ , $n = 86$	$M = 18.30$ , $SD = 4.79$ , $n = 77$

Generally, the results of the experimental stimuli analysis showed that young consumers are significantly more positive towards the brand in the high brand-cause fit condition compared to the low brand-cause fit condition. While perceived authenticity makes the strongest unique contribution to explain brand attitude in the high fit condition, both independent constructs solely predict the dependent variable also within the two experimental groups. Although there was no moderation effect detected when looking at the whole sample, a moderation of low issue involvement on the argument quality effect on brand attitude can be confirmed for the high fit group. Further, there was no significant difference of high vs. low issue involvement on brand attitude scores when comparing the means of both experimental groups. However, the mean values showed that in the high brand-cause fit condition highly involved respondents have more positive brand attitudes than fewer involved respondents. In turn, in the low fit condition highly involved respondents tended to have less positive brand attitudes compared to those that are generally less involved with climate change and fashion waste. All results presented in this chapter are further discussed in the following section.



## 6. Discussion

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In order to answer the underlying research question, *to what extent do factors of environmental brand activism influence young consumers' brand attitude*, this study experimentally investigated young consumers' perceptions of environmental brand activism determined by different levels of brand-cause fit. Thereby, a developed set of hypotheses that forms the research model in this study was tested and further compared within the experimental groups. By means of the ELM as a theoretical framework, this thesis observed the formation of young consumers' brand attitude. In particular, light was shed on individuals' issue involvement and its influence on the effect of environmental brand activism. The findings of the experimental online survey were presented in the previous chapter showing that perceived argument quality and perceived authenticity have a strong, positive significant impact on brand attitude. Moreover, issue involvement has a positive significant influence on brand attitude, although there is no moderating effect of high and low issue involvement as predicted in the ELM. The comparison of the experimental groups showed significantly more positive brand attitudes in the high brand-cause fit group as well as overall more favourable outcomes compared to the low brand-cause fit group. The following chapters discuss the results in relation to previous literature and the theoretical framework.

### 6.1 Hypotheses discussion

Before discussing the tested hypotheses, it is of interest to have a closer look at some descriptive results. In order to ensure that respondents identify activism in the advertisement, their perception about it was controlled for. Overall, young consumers perceived the level of activism in the advertisement as rather high which demonstrated the suitability of the designed stimuli for this research. Furthermore, when taking their level of issue involvement into account, it was noticeable that young consumers are predominantly highly involved with the issues of climate change and fashion waste. This is in accordance with previous reports claiming that Millennials and Generation Z are committed to societal and environmental issues more than any other generational cohort (Ahmad, 2019; Title, 2020).

In accordance to the ELM, consumers that are highly involved take the actual merits of the message into account whilst relying on argument quality when forming their attitudes (Petty

& Cacioppo, 1986). In contrast, consumers that are less involved follow the peripheral route of elaboration and are rather influenced by source cues, in this study perceived authenticity. The peripheral route of elaboration, however, is multifaceted and therefore considered as more complex than the central route by several former studies. Previous research applying the ELM mainly investigated source credibility as a peripheral cue (Petty et al., 1981; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Some researchers argued that a highly credible source might favour the motivation and ability to evaluate on a message and therefore prompts the central route of persuasion (Heesacker et al., 1983). Generally, there is no consensus regarding the complexity and role of source cues among former researchers.

In order to embed the ELM in the research context of brand activism, perceived authenticity was treated as a source cue and is therefore in the focus, as it is one of the key factors of brand activism according to previous research (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Adding to former studies and the ELM, hypotheses 1 and 2 stated that higher levels of perceived argument quality as well as perceived authenticity significantly induce higher levels of brand attitude. In fact, the data analysis supported this prediction and confirmed hypotheses 1 and 2. Hereby, perceived authenticity makes the strongest unique contribution to explain brand attitude. This finding is in accordance with Alhouti et al. (2016) that emphasised the predominant role of authenticity in regards to CSR initiatives. They identified perceived authenticity as a pivotal predictor that impacts consumers' perceptions and attitude formation. Furthermore, the results in this study also confirmed Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) theoretical conception of brand activism with authenticity as the central variable. Following up on previous research, the findings showed that it is essential for brands to be authentic with their activist messaging and alignment to practices in order to be perceived as more favourable in the marketplace.

Perceived argument quality in contrast had a minor sole, but yet significant contribution to explain brand attitude. Nevertheless, this result tied up on the central route of the ELM as well as Berger et al. (1999) claiming that consumers generally take message arguments into account when processing advertisements and forming attitudes. Former research endorsed brands to be very specific with their wording of activist arguments in order to be persuasive and avoid misinterpretations (Vredenburg et al., 2020). This recommendation was followed when designing the stimuli for this study, which is also reflected in the significant effect of perceived argument quality. Adding on that, Lin et al. (2017) stressed that strong, objective arguments in advertisements have a bigger effect than emotional and subjective arguments.

However, since the claim in this study did not contain a scientific proof and due to the polarising nature of brand activism, the message might rather have evoked emotions than a careful elaboration of arguments. This might also explain the lesser contribution of perceived argument quality on brand attitude compared to the effect of perceived authenticity.

According to the ELM, it is the source cues that commonly elicit emotions and have an important impact on attitude formation in a shorter period of time (Petty et al, 1981; Petty et al, 2009). With a cross-sectional survey design, this thesis observed young consumers' attitudes from only one time, immediately after the exposure to the activist advertisement. Thus, the stronger effect of the source cue 'perceived authenticity' on brand attitude can be explained considering the short-term observation and the ELM as a framework. Ultimately, the results showed that in the scope of environmental brand activism in advertisements qualitative and compelling perceived arguments as well as high perceived authenticity enhance more positive brand attitudes. Since positive brand attitudes generally prompt brand loyalty, it is highly relevant for strategic communicators to consider factors that favour young consumers' responses towards new branding techniques such as brand activism.

By means of hypotheses 3 and 4, the interaction effect of issue involvement with the independent constructs was tested. Issue involvement as a moderator is extensively researched in the context of CSR and CrM, with the ELM as a framework (e.g. Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2010; Patel et al., 2016). Therewith, the findings of previous researchers are overall consistent stating that consumers elaborate CSR or CrM communication depending on their involvement with the addressed cause (Bögel, 2015). In order to examine the effect of issue involvement in the context of brand activism, moderated analyses were performed. The results of the analysis before splitting issue involvement in high and low involvement groups showed non-significant findings meaning no interaction between issue involvement and the independent constructs. However, the data demonstrated a positive relation and unique contribution of issue involvement as a predictor of brand attitude which was unexpected as most former studies scrutinised issue involvement only as a moderator (e.g. Hajjat, 2003). But, these findings add on Patel et al.'s (2016) results pointing out that consumers' brand attitudes are greater for those more involved with a cause compared to those less involved. Considering the chosen examples of climate change and fashion waste as well as young consumers' environmental concerns, it seems plausible that environmentally highly involved consumers generally have greater attitudes towards environmental activist brands. This is also consistent

with Ahmad (2019) stating that young, value-driven consumers expect from brands to support a societal purpose and to act responsible beyond raising profits. Nevertheless, this finding contradicted the ELM that approaches issue involvement merely as a moderating variable (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In order to challenge and possibly enhance the application of the ELM in the context of brand activism, it would be insightful to test the direct effect of issue involvement on brand attitudes in other sub-categories such as social or political brand activism.

However, as suggested by the theoretical framework and confirmed by previous literature, it is in fact different levels of issue involvement that moderate which route of elaboration is taken and thus how attitudes are formed (Petty et al., 1983). The ELM states that greater involved consumers consider their prior knowledge to elaborate a message based on its argument quality. Whereas less involved consumers form attitudes through the elaboration of peripheral cues, such as perceived authenticity in this study. Several researchers that observed issue involvement in the context of CrM and CSR confirmed that different levels of involvement with a social cause influence the process of attitude formation (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2010; Hajjat, 2003). Thus, hypotheses 3 and 4 indicating an interacting effect of high vs. low issue involvement with the independent constructs were addressed by splitting the variable 'issue involvement' in two groups. However, even after separating high vs. low issue involvement groups and testing the moderation effects, all interaction terms with the independent constructs were non-significant. Therefore, both hypotheses 3 and 4 were rejected: In the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, greater issue involvement does not significantly moderate the effect of perceived argument quality on brand attitude and less issue involvement does not significantly moderate the effect of perceived authenticity on brand attitude. To sum up, the findings demonstrated that young consumers' involvement with climate change and fashion waste indeed predicts attitudes towards the activist brand; but the level of issue involvement does not function as a moderator.

These outcomes were quite astonishing considering previous literature and the main features of the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The entire composition of the ELM is based on the moderator variable 'involvement' fragmented into motivation and ability that predict elaboration likelihood (see Chapter 3). Therefore, the results of this study certainly question the application of the ELM in the context of environmental brand activism and provide reason

to overthink the suitability of this dual-process model for modern advertisement strategies (see Kitchen et al, 2014). The ELM and especially its duality were previously criticised due to its descriptive nature and lacking definite demarcation of the central and peripheral routes (Heesacker et al., 1983; Kitchen et al. 2014). Rather than differentiating in high and low involvement, Petty and Wegener (1999) detected levels of elaboration rather as a continuum with high and low ends. Adding on that, Kitchen et al. (2014) suggested researchers to consider the dynamic nature of persuasion as well as processing shifts from the peripheral to the central route which, however, is empirically difficult to consider. In any case, this previously expressed criticism in accordance with the empirical results of this study expose the need to further elaborate and potentially amplify the ELM for modern communication contexts such as brand activism in advertisements.

## **6.2 Experimental stimuli discussion**

Besides testing the research model, this study experimentally explored the relevance of high vs. low brand-cause fit on brand attitudes in the scope of environmental brand activism, whilst adding on previous CSR and CrM research. As the manipulation check showed, the respondents in the high brand-cause fit group in fact perceived a higher fit between the communicated issue and the brand, compared to the ones in the low fit condition. However, the mean value of the low fit group was also above the middle score which implies a rather good perceived fit. This finding was not expected, since it was ensured, when designing the low fit stimulus, that brand values and beliefs were not related to the environmentalist advertisement, following the description of brand-cause fit by Du et al. (2010) and Nan & Heo (2007). Nonetheless, there is no general consensus in previous research regarding the definition of brand-cause fit; Nan and Heo (2007) identified brand-cause fit as a multidimensional phenomenon. Thus, it seems possible that respondents rather perceived a fit of the (fast) fashion brand with the cause, as the issues of climate change and fashion waste are overall related to the domain, irrespective of the brand's values and beliefs that intended to induce 'woke washing' practices (see Vredenburg et al, 2020). Nevertheless, the results of this study showed a substantial difference in the groups that were attributed to high or low brand-cause fit: Participants in the high brand-cause fit group had significantly more positive brand attitudes than participants in the low brand-cause fit group. This is consistent with the majority of former CrM studies expressing that a high perceived fit in fact favours brand attitudes (e.g. Becker-Olsen, 2006; Melero & Montaner, 2016). Yet, also the low fit group

presented predominantly positive brand attitudes which could derive from the choice of environmental issues for this study that are generally preferred to address among young consumers (Ahmad, 2019; Choudhary, 2020).

When testing and comparing the research model including the hypotheses in the two experimental groups, the results showed that perceived argument quality and authenticity make unique contributions to explain brand attitude in both groups separately. Additionally, perceived authenticity had the strongest impact on brand attitude, with a marginally greater value in the high-brand cause fit group. Compared to the low fit condition, both independent constructs in the high fit group predicted more variance in brand attitude. These findings indicated that a high brand-cause fit has a positive influence on the argument quality and authenticity effect on brand attitude. This suggestion is in accordance with former studies claiming that a higher fit enriches the effectiveness of a message and prompts persuasion (Nan & Heo, 2007). Pérez (2019) asserted that authenticity can be enhanced when there is a high fit between the communicated social issue and the brand which is also reflected in the results of this study. In contrast to Chéron et al. (2012), the findings of this study did not show any risks of boycott or negative brand attitudes in the low brand-cause fit group. But, as mentioned, the respondents in this study perceived rather a high fit of the issue and the brand even in the low brand-cause fit group which could explain the marginal difference in the results of the groups.

Beyond, the role of issue involvement as a moderator was illuminated again when comparing the two groups. In accordance to previous results, most interaction terms did not present significant results. Notwithstanding, one interaction term in the high brand-cause fit condition surprisingly showed a significant effect: Less issue involvement moderates the effect of perceived argument quality on brand attitude. Even though this result confirmed a moderating effect in the high fit group, it stands in contrast to the theoretical framework of the ELM. The ELM predicts that high involvement, implying motivation and ability to carefully think through a message, leads to the central route of persuasion evaluating on argument quality (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However, the significant finding in this study might be justified by the fact that the participants overall scored rather high on climate change and fashion waste involvement. Therefore, less involved consumers might have had the motivation and ability to elaborate since their involvement level was rather moderate than low. Furthermore, situational factors that influence elaboration likelihood (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) were disregarded in

this study which might have led to incorrect results. Another possible explanation refers back to the criticism of the theory's dual approach and point out to Petty & Wegener (1999) who emphasise elaboration as a continuum with potential shifts of the routes.

In order to address the role and differences of issue involvement in the two groups further, the mean values of brand attitude determined by high and low issue involvement were compared. Even though the results did not show significant differences, the mean scores indicated that environmentally higher involved respondents are more positive towards the brand in the high fit condition than less involved respondents. In contrast, in the low fit condition highly involved respondents tend to have less positive brand attitudes compared to those that are generally less involved with climate change and fashion waste. These findings assume that environmentally highly involved consumers are indeed more suspicious towards incongruent activist brands meaning they are rather able to detect hypocritical brands that implement 'woke washing' (see Vredenburg et al., 2020). This adds on Kam & Deichert (2020) saying that more value-driven younger generations rather see through marketing strategies. In turn, less environmentally involved consumers are an easier target for 'woke washing' practices, as they seem to consider brand-cause fit not as much to form brand attitudes.

Overall, the differences in the experimental groups provided empirical evidence of brand-cause fit playing a relevant role in environmental brand activism affecting brand attitudes. This relates to previous research that extensively scrutinised brand-cause fit in the field of CrM. Considering the theoretical framework when testing the research model in the groups separately, the outcome in the high brand-cause fit group was, as expected, more positive yet marginally. Ultimately, moderating effects of issue involvement in the two groups were mainly non-significant and challenge the ELM as well as former studies.

## 7. Conclusion and Implications

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Since increasingly more brands nowadays advocate for societal relevant issues, it is crucial for strategic communicators to understand consumers' responses to brand activism in advertisements and accordingly how brand attitudes are formed. Therewith, practitioners obtain fruitful insights on how different parameters contribute to a successful brand activism strategy. This study eventually gained knowledge and developed comprehension of young consumers' attitude towards an environmental activist brand along with the following research question:

*To what extent do factors of environmental brand activism influence young consumers' brand attitude?*

The findings and discussion of this study demonstrated that in fact some of the predicted factors can enrich the outcome of environmental brand activism and therefore improve young consumers' brand attitudes. In accordance with the ELM as a theoretical framework, perceived argument quality and especially perceived authenticity have a vital role to influence brand attitudes. Contrary to the theoretical framework, a moderating effect of issue involvement was not detected, but the data showed a direct impact of issue involvement on brand attitudes. Further, the experimental manipulation provided empirical evidence of brand-cause fit affecting brand attitude. Even though the findings regarding issue involvement were not significant when comparing the experimental groups, they indicated that highly involved consumers form their brand attitudes rather dependent on the brand-cause fit and therefore are more sceptical towards activist brands in terms of 'woke washing' practices. Finally, in the context of environmental brand activism in advertisement, high perceived argument quality, authenticity as well as a great congruence with the communicated issue have the potential to influence young consumers' brand attitude positively. Thereby, the underlying research question is addressed.

Given the abovementioned, this study contributes with new knowledge to the evolving field of brand activism in advertisements. By means of an experimental online survey, this thesis challenged and enhanced the application of the ELM in a new domain. Further, the potential of brand-cause fit on the outcome was emphasised and the research field of young consumers'



brand attitudes amplified. Finally, this research developed deeper knowledge about how environmental brand activism in advertisement is perceived by younger generations.

## **7.1 Implications for strategic communication**

This thesis enriched initial brand activism studies whilst bringing previous CSR and CrM research as well as the ELM into a new context. The overall outcome of this research confirms the potential of environmental brand activism in advertisements and its effect on brand attitudes. For strategic communication academics, this study provides reason to delve deeper into the phenomenon of brand activism that is just on the rise. Former studies concerning brand activism are very limited in number and therefore not yet sufficient to give overall effective managerial recommendations. In order to further develop the research field, it is necessary to critically scrutinise the developed concept of brand activism by Kotler and Sarkar (2017) and observe its implications for a brand's communication strategy.

By means of the ELM and former studies, this research showed that perceived argument quality and authenticity are central factors enhancing successful brand activism. However, as issue involvement did not function as a moderating influence in this research, the application of the ELM was questioned. The results of this study suggest academics to further elaborate and test the ELM in the context of brand activism. Possibly, other factors such as the consumers' agreement on the brand's position or the consumer-brand identification could be considered as moderators as well. Apart from that, it stands to reason to observe the dynamic phenomenon of brand activism through different theoretical lenses and explorative approaches in order to thoroughly amplify the field. Next to the significant effect of brand-cause fit on brand attitude, the experimental investigation further indicated an interrelation between issue involvement and brand-cause fit that influences the outcome. As this study is the first within the scope of brand activism that manipulated and scrutinised brand-cause fit, it is necessary to look at its impact and interacting effects more closely. Since a lot of brands already implement activist strategies nowadays, it is relevant for strategic communication academics to further theoretically embed the phenomenon of brand activism and expand its perspectives. As brand activism is a fairly new approach to address target groups whilst standing up for societal change, this phenomenon is prospectively enriching strategic communication as a research field.

For strategic communication practitioners, the results of this study entailing the potential of environmental brand activism on brand attitudes provide fruitful insights. In accordance with the findings of this study, it is thereby of utmost importance for managers to carefully listen to their stakeholders' demands and adapt accordingly. Since the majority of young consumers are involved and concerned about environmental issues such as climate change, they even demand from brands to address such causes in their communication which is reflected in the overall positive brand attitudes in this study. However, brands that advocate for environmental matters seem to be preferred among young consumers when showing a high congruence with the communicated issue. Especially highly involved consumers rather consider brand-cause fit in order to form their attitudes, as they tend to see through 'woke washing' practices compared to less involved consumers. Consequently, when communicating to young generations, brands face challenges, because these value-driven cohorts might choose, switch, avoid and boycott a brand due to its position towards societal relevant causes. Therefore, it is required from practitioners to constantly engage and to enter into an exchange with relevant target groups. Generally, it is recommended for brands to express their cultural relevance by carefully choosing an issue that is highly congruent with the brand. Even though this study did not confirm any risks of low brand-cause fit, different results might be obtained in other sub-categories of brand activism, such as social or political brand activism. In any case, as the results of this study showed, it is suggested for strategic communication practitioners to focus on brand-cause fit, a strong argumentation and an authentic presence aligning purpose, values, activist messaging and corporate practice when implementing brand activism.

## **7.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research**

There are some limitations of this study that need to be mentioned as they have an impact on the results and further express suggestions for future research. Generally, the findings of this study come along with unanswered questions and inspiration for prospective studies. To start with, this research used a convenience sampling that cannot be generalised to the population because participants were not chosen randomly. Particularly, women as well as participants from Germany and Sweden were overrepresented in the sample. In order to be able to actually infer from the results to the population, a random sampling is obligatory. Generally, it would also be interesting for prospective studies to compare perceptions not only among young consumers but also with older generations, since they are likewise exposed to brand activism.

Furthermore, this study merely scrutinised environmental brand activism as a subcategory of brand activism. Regarding this, future research is needed to observe and compare other categories such as social or political brand activism. Since advocating for environmental matters is preferred among young consumers, it would be interesting for prospective research to scrutinise examples in which brands speak up for even more critical or polarising issues. Another limitation of this thesis is the use of a fictional fashion brand as an example. A fictional brand was chosen to manipulate brand-cause fit and prevent confounding effects due to prior knowledge or opinions towards the brand. But at the same time, fictional brands lack realism which makes it more difficult for participants to answer the survey. Apart from that, the choice of a fashion brand might have biased the outcomes of this study and hence does not allow an inference to other sectors, since the involvement with the fashion industry was disregarded. As shown, the two stimuli designed for the investigation were not perceived as drastically incongruent. Therefore, when experimentally manipulating brand-cause fit, it is advised to create a clear difference in the stimuli by exaggerating the manipulation. Further, it is suggested for future research to conduct a pre-test in order to verify the suitability of the treatments beforehand. Moreover, different examples of brand activism both fictional as well as real cases should be assessed to gain a deeper understanding. It would also be insightful to observe differences in the outcomes of activist advertisements and generic advertisements in order to make statements about the benefits of brand activism for marketing communication strategies.

Overall, future research on the developing field of brand activism is demanded in order to reduce uncertainty amongst practitioners and to theoretically embed the phenomenon. This thesis used a quantitative approach to explain attitude formation based on the ELM and previous research in similar study fields. However, the results are limited to statistics and in-depth analyses are lacking. Hereby, mixed-method analyses or qualitative studies are necessary in order to explore the phenomenon and its characteristics in detail. Undoubtedly, it would be beneficial to conduct qualitative interviews with consumers in order to scrutinise the role of brand-cause fit, authenticity and issue involvement thoroughly. Moreover, it would be of interest to exploratory test the boundaries of brand activism and pursue questions such as: Which topics are preferably addressed? How and when should brands provide a platform for societal relevant discussions? To what extent do consumers support brand activism? In addition to studying consumers' perceptions, interviews with practitioners that already implement activist strategies are needed in order to receive fruitful visions from both

consumers' as well as organisations' viewpoints. Here it would be enlightening to receive first-hand insights on how organisation perceive the potential of brand activism and how they deal with the risks of consumers' boycott. Since some established brands such as Nike, Ben & Jerry's and Patagonia successfully implement brand activism in their communication strategies, it eventually would be insightful for future research to analyse their activist strategies as best practices in order to derive with recommendations from it.

As the research domain of brand activism just started to develop, there are many possibilities for future studies to contribute to the sphere. In any case, brand activism will have more meaning in the near future and is therefore highly relevant to further scrutinise within the field of strategic communication.

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# Appendices

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## Appendix 1: Experimental stimuli

### Stimulus 1: High brand-cause fit

#### Sustainable fashion brand: LOLIZA

LOLIZA is a new, ethical & sustainable fashion brand.  
LOLIZA's clothes are made out of 100% recycled material.

#### Brand values and beliefs:



"It is our purpose to save our home planet.  
We actively inspire with solutions to the climate crisis.  
We use the resources we have - our voice, our business and our  
community - to stand up together against climate change."

The brand LOLIZA launched a new advertisement:



## Stimulus 2: Low brand-cause fit

### Fashion brand: LOLIZA

LOLIZA is a new fashion brand.

#### Brand values and beliefs:



"It is our purpose to provide the best quality at a fair price.  
We actively inspire with the newest fashion trends.  
We use the resources we have - our voice, our business and our  
community - to make fashion available to everyone."

The brand LOLIZA launched a new advertisement:



## Appendix 2: Online survey



# LUND UNIVERSITY

0% completed

Dear participant,

this survey is a part of my master thesis in Strategic Communication (M.Sc.) at Lund University, Sweden. The aim of this study is to deepen and explore the knowledge about consumers' perceptions of advertisements. The survey is expected to take about 5 minutes.

Please read the questions carefully, answer individually and in accordance with your perceptions.

Your answers will only be used for the purpose of my study; the answers are anonymous and individual responses will not be presented in the report. You can cancel your participation at any time.

I really appreciate your contribution to my study.

Thank you a lot in advance,

Mona Schleier

Next

[Mona Schleier](#), Lund University – 2021

**Please select your gender.**

- Female
- Male
- Non-Conforming
- Prefer not to say

**What is your birth year?**

**What country do you live in?**

- Sweden
- Germany
- Other: Please specify

**What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?**

If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

- I have not finished any formal education.
- Lower secondary education (e.g. comparable to primary/middle school)
- Upper secondary education (e.g. comparable to high school)
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree

**Please state your occupation.**

- High/middle school student
- University student
- Working
- Unemployed



You will now be asked about your perceptions towards two environmental matters.

Please rate your overall feelings towards the issue 'Climate Change'.

Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unimportant
Of no concern	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Of concern
Irrelevant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Relevant
Very meaningful to me	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Means nothing to me
Trivial	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Fundamental
Matters to me	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Doesn't matter
Interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not interesting
Significant	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Insignificant
Vital	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Superfluous
Boring	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Exciting

Please rate your overall feelings towards the issue 'Fashion Waste'.

Fashion Waste refers to the waste the fashion industry produces.

Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unimportant
Of no concern	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Of concern
Irrelevant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Relevant
Very meaningful to me	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Means nothing to me
Trivial	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Fundamental
Matters to me	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Doesn't matter
Interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not interesting
Significant	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Insignificant
Vital	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Superfluous
Boring	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Exciting

Next

You will now be introduced to a new brand and exposed to an advertisement.  
Please read and look carefully.

In the following section, you will be asked to state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the quality, credibility, authenticity as well as your overall attitudes towards the advertisement and the brand.

You will see the questions underneath the advertisement.

Next

[Mona Schleier](#), Lund University – 2021

// *Experimental stimulus*

Please rate the level to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding the advertisement.

	strongly disagree	disagree	more likely disagree	neither agree nor disagree	more likely agree	agree	strongly agree
The information in the advertisement is informative.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information in the advertisement is helpful.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
The information in the advertisement is valuable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information in the advertisement is persuasive.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Please rate the level to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree	disagree	more likely disagree	neutral	more likely agree	agree	strongly agree
LOLIZA's climate change initiative is genuine.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
LOLIZA's climate change initiative is in accordance with the brand's values and beliefs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LOLIZA is being true to itself with its climate change initiative.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
LOLIZA is standing up for what it believes in.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LOLIZA is a socially responsible company.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
LOLIZA is concerned about improving the well-being of society.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LOLIZA's purpose, values, messages and practices are aligned.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Next

Please state your overall attitude towards the brand LOLIZA.

Good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Bad
Like very much	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Dislike very much
Pleasant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unpleasant
High quality	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Poor quality

Next

How would you rate the overall fit between the advertisement and the brand LOLIZA?

For example: how does it align with what the brand sells, who it sells to, the brand's identity, or the interests of its customers.

Low fit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strong fit
Dissimilar	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Similar
Inconsistent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Consistent
Not complementary	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Complementary

How would you rate the level of 'activism' in the advertisement?

For example: the level of taking a stand for societal change in the advertisement.

High	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Low
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Next

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**Thank you so much for your participation!**

Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding the purpose of research or the handling of data. Again, I can ensure that your answers are treated anonymously.

All the best,

Mona Schleier

e-mail: mo3725sc-s@student.lu.se

\*Correction: The introduced brand in the survey is fictitious and does not exist. For research purposes, it was described as a "new" brand.

\*For users of SurveyCircle ([www.surveycircle.com](http://www.surveycircle.com)): The survey code is: PFUX-NMYB-L9PY-A5DG.

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[Mona Schleier](#), Lund University – 2021

## Appendix 3: SPSS Outputs

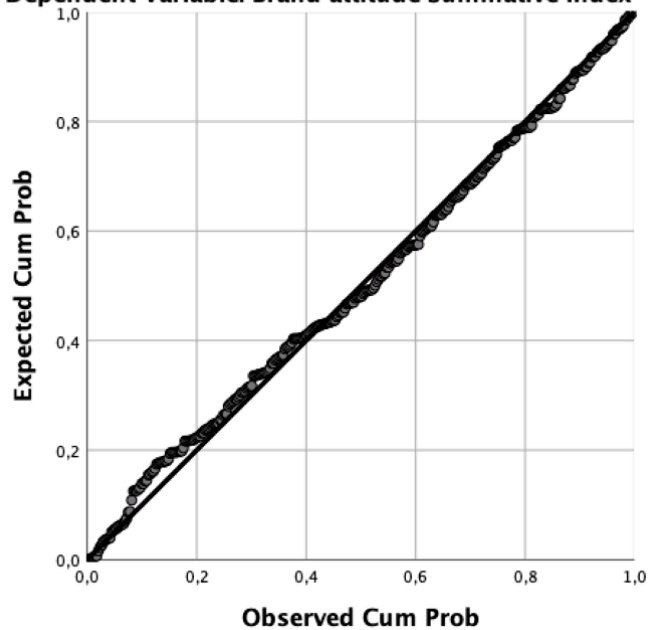
### P-Plot: Standard multiple regression

IV: Perceived argument quality and authenticity

DV: Brand attitude

#### Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

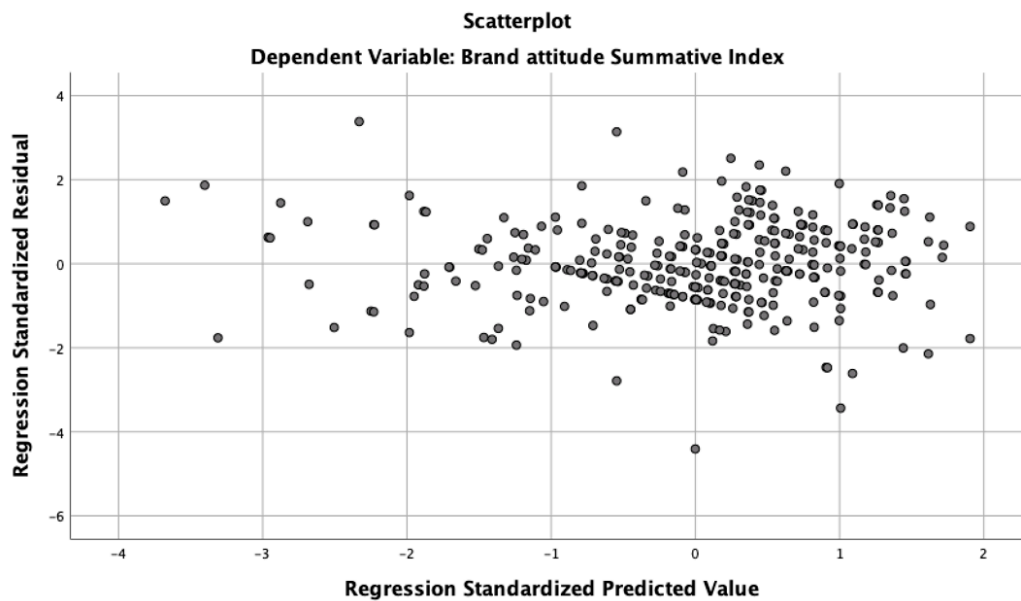
Dependent Variable: Brand attitude Summative Index



### Scatterplot: Standard multiple regression

IV: Perceived argument quality and authenticity

DV: Brand attitude



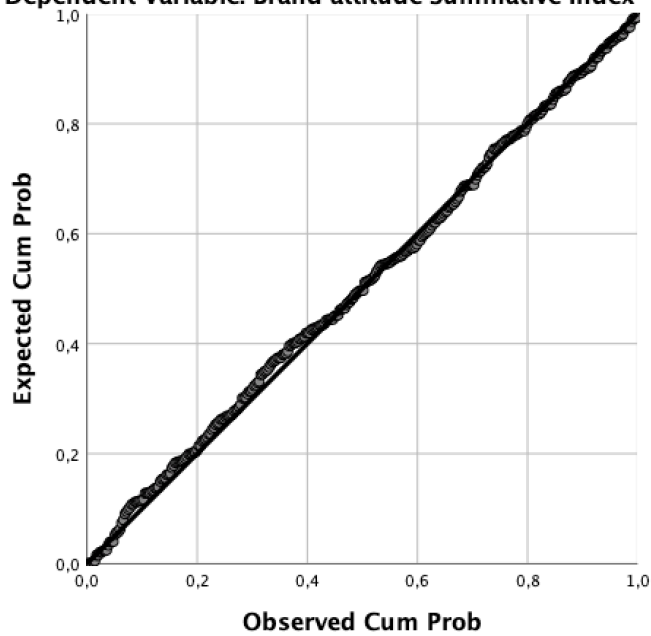
**P-Plot: Moderated regression ('argument quality' x 'issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived argument quality and issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude

**Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual**

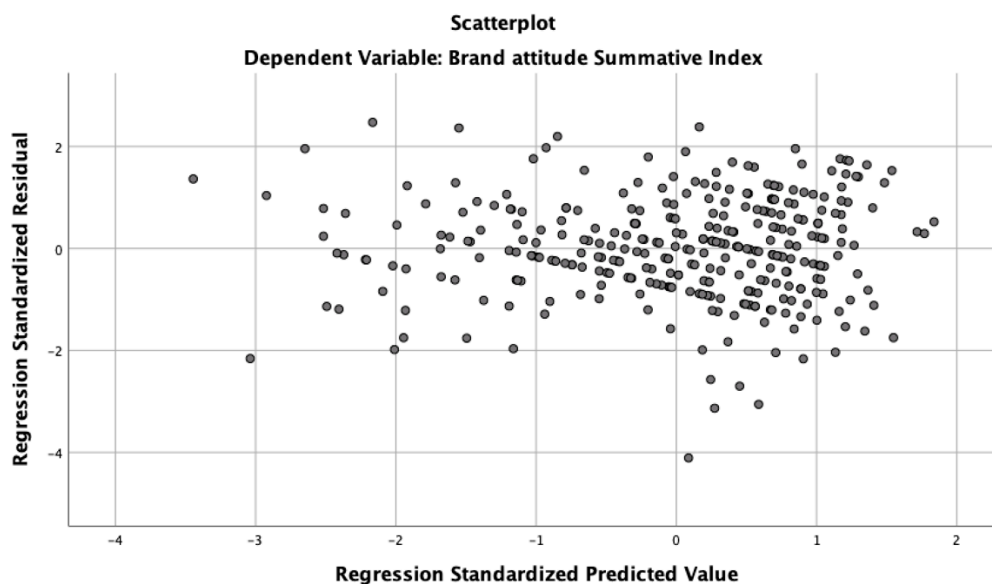
**Dependent Variable: Brand attitude Summative Index**



**Scatterplot: Moderated regression ('argument quality' x 'issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived argument quality and issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude



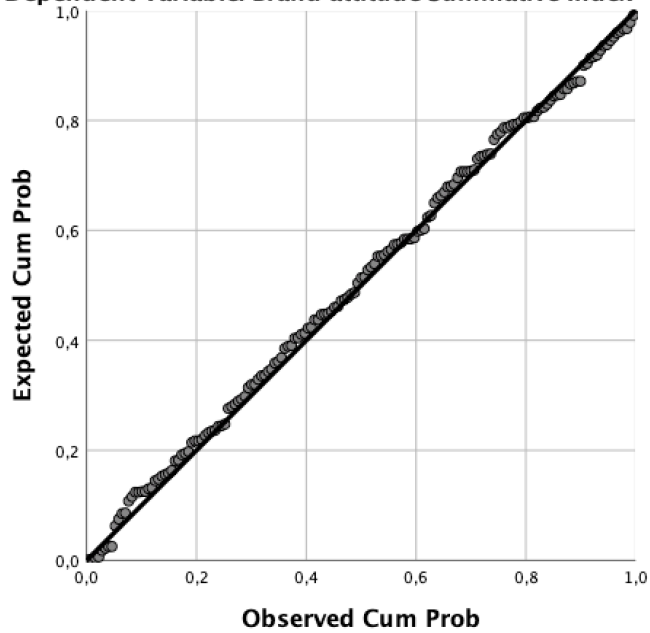
**P-Plot: Moderated regression ('argument quality' x 'high issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived argument quality and high issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude

**Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual**

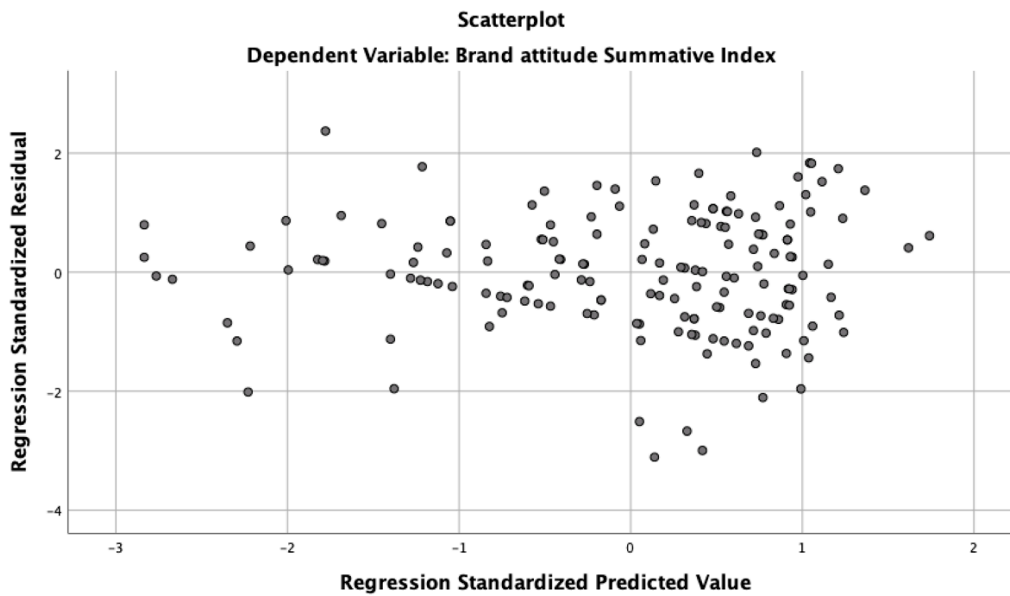
Dependent Variable: Brand attitude Summative Index



**Scatterplot: Moderated regression ('argument quality' x 'high issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived argument quality and high issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude



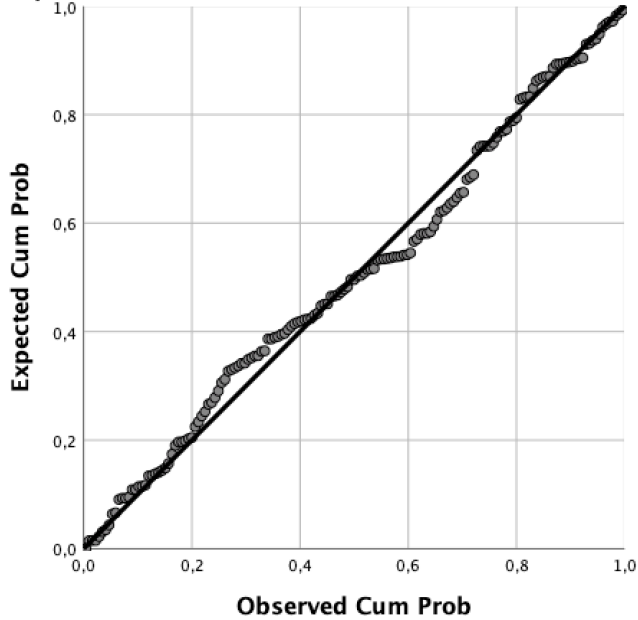
**P-Plot: Moderated regression ('argument quality' x 'low issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived argument quality and low issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude

**Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual**

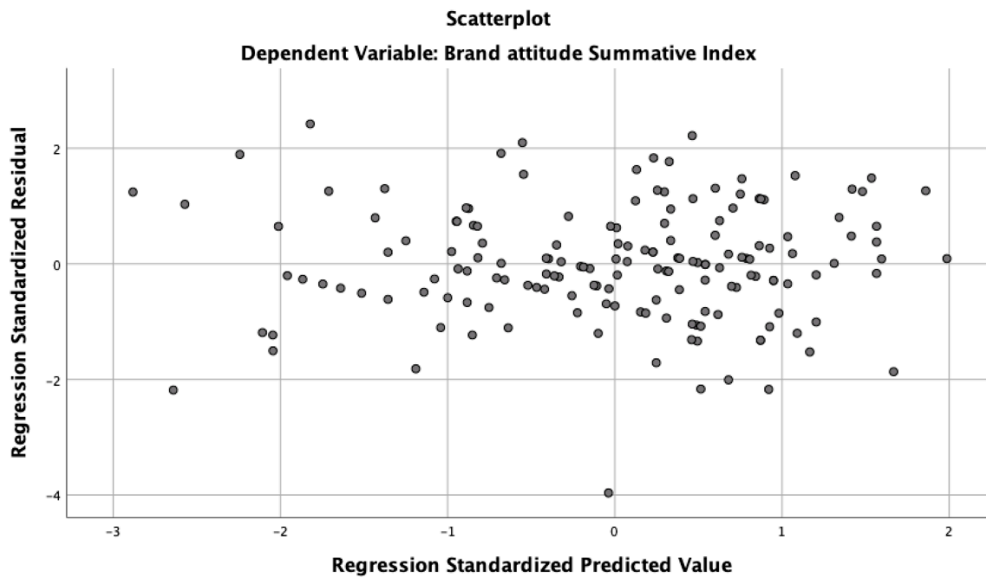
**Dependent Variable: Brand attitude Summative Index**



**Scatterplot: Moderated regression ('argument quality' x 'low issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived argument quality and low issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude



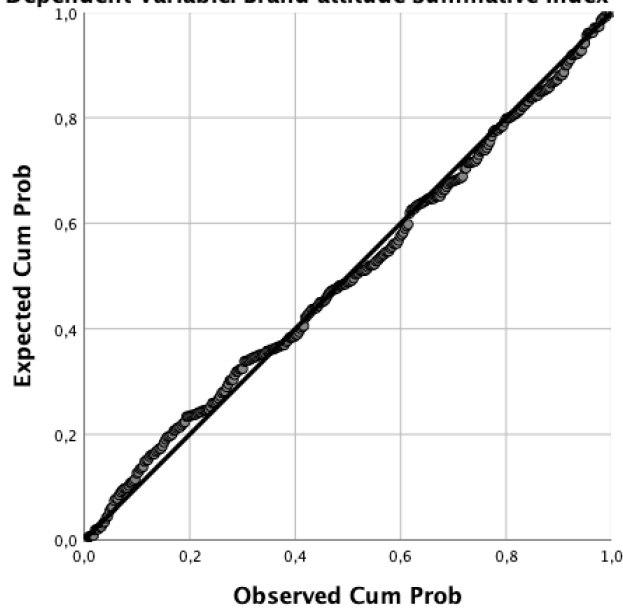
**P-Plot: Moderated regression ('authenticity' x 'issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived authenticity and issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude

**Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual**

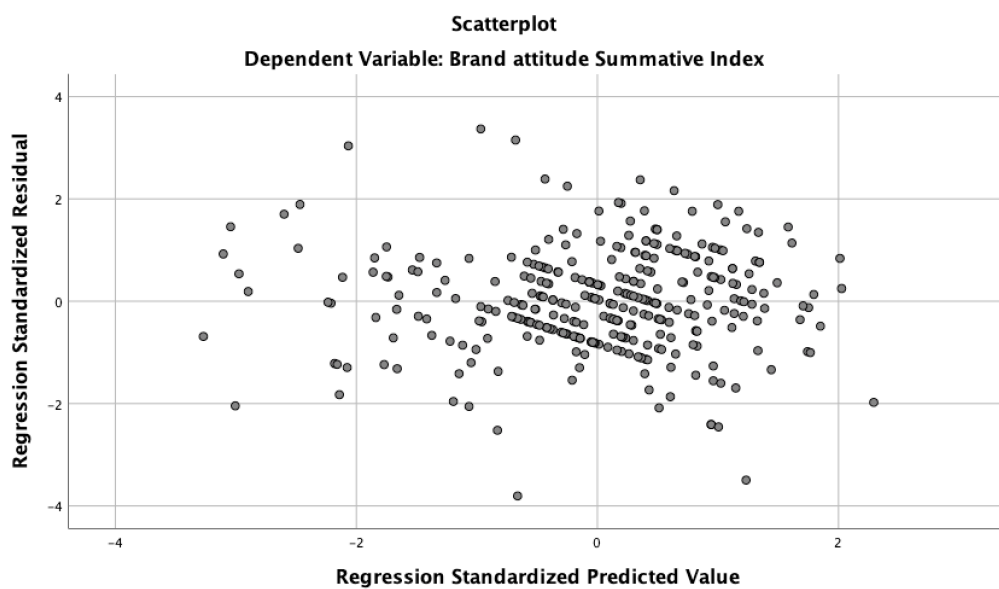
Dependent Variable: Brand attitude Summative Index



**Scatterplot: Moderated regression ('authenticity' x 'issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived authenticity and issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude





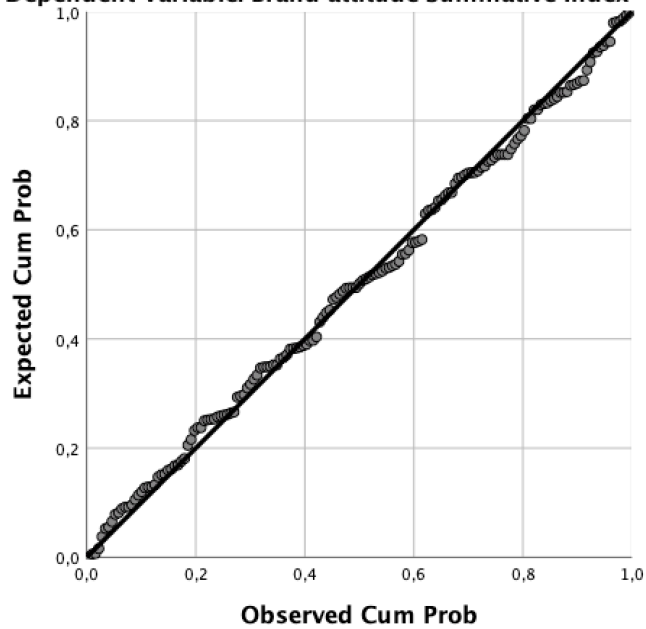
**P-Plot: Moderated regression ('authenticity' x 'high issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived authenticity and high issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude

**Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual**

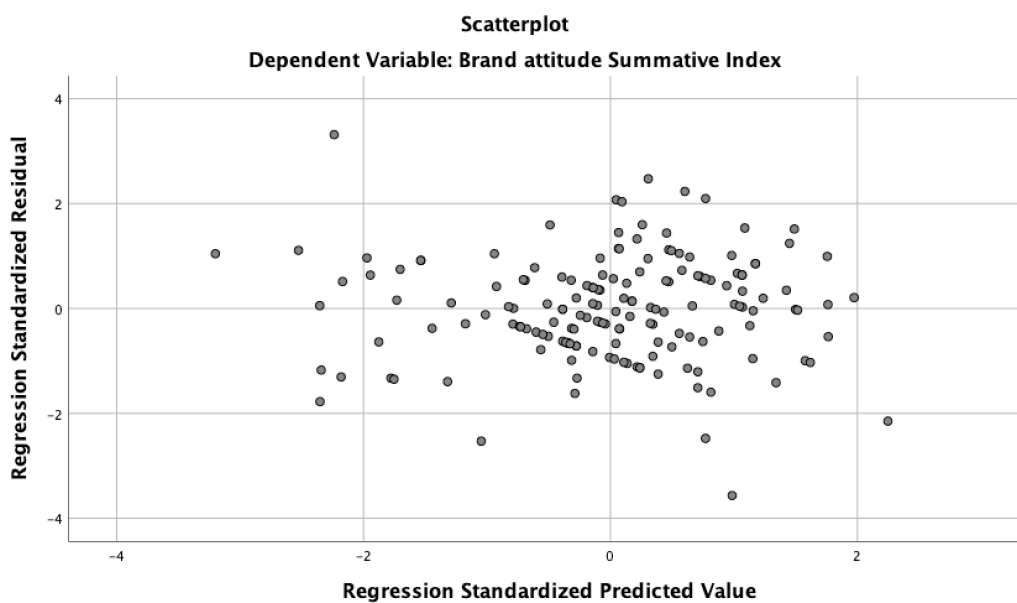
**Dependent Variable: Brand attitude Summative Index**



**Scatterplot: Moderated regression ('authenticity' x 'high issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived authenticity and issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude



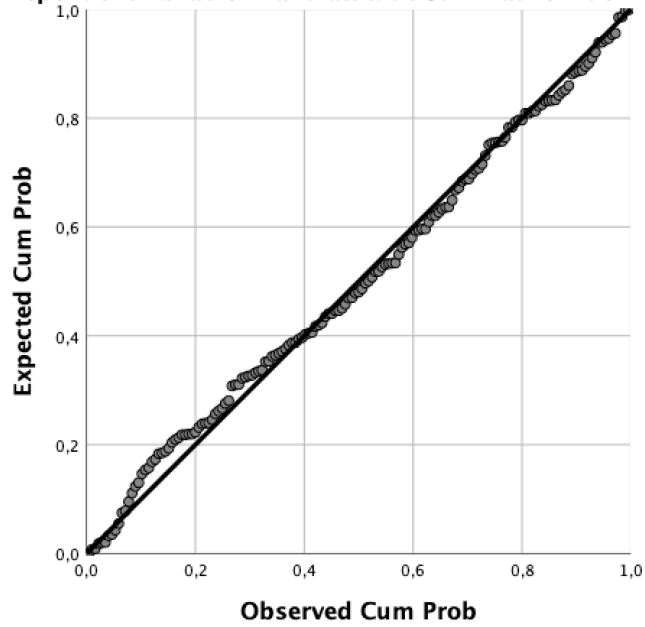
**P-Plot: Moderated regression ('authenticity' x 'low issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived authenticity and low issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude

**Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual**

**Dependent Variable: Brand attitude Summative Index**



**Scatterplot: Moderated regression ('authenticity' x 'low issue involvement')**

IV: Perceived authenticity and low issue involvement

DV: Brand attitude

