Tone Deaf Marketing or Genuine Activism?

The impact of which consumer knowledge about brand activism and woke washing has on their purchase intention

by

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Abstract

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Thesis Purpose : The objective of this study was to research consumers awareness of woke washing and brand activism, if they were aware of the difference and how this affected their level of trust towards activist brands, which lead to the analysis of their purchase intention by using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as a mediating variable.

Methodology : The following research was conducted by using a deductive approach through quantitative studies. The data was collected through an online questionnaire using a non-probability sample approach. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling was then used to analyse the collected data.

Theoretical Perspective : The primary theory used for this research is the Theory of Planned Behaviour, while also using the theory of Trust by Mayer as a foundation for the variable of Trust.

Empirical Data : A web-based questionnaire was used to obtain 331 valid responses.

Findings : Knowledge about the difference between woke washing and brand activism was found to have a significance on the level of trust which a consumer has towards activist brands. Further, TPB dimensions of; Attitude, Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioural Control acted as mediators between trust and purchase intention. All 3 of these dimensions were found to have a significant effect on purchase intention, however, PBC had the lowest impact.

Practical Implications : This paper was able to successfully wield the theory of Theory of Planned Behaviour to understand consumers purchase intention when it comes to activist brands. In order for managers to successfully lead an activist brand and have a positive impact on communities, it is advisable to be aware of the slight differences between activism and woke washing, in order to steer clear from misunderstandings and displeased consumers.

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

This first chapter introduces the study background, followed by the problematisation, purpose and research objectives. Afterwards, the aimed contributions of the research will be presented and discussed. The final section of this chapter outlines the thesis structure for the reader.

1.1 Background

Back in the days, brands' only aim was to convince consumers that their product is the best, the cheapest, the finest quality, gives the whitest smile, is used by the top celebrities and makes them desirable in the eyes of potential partners. Today, consumers are more complex to satisfy, as their awareness of sociopolitical and environmental challenges has increased, correlating to a higher demand for transparency and companies to take responsibility for their actions. Consequently, some of these brands have established an identity that aligns with their actions of speaking up for social causes, aiming to make change in the world. These activist brands have taken part in social movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) and #metoo, promoting, inter alia, human rights and equality.

When authentic, this emerging marketing tactic brand activism can be successful in making social change, creating unique brand associations in consumers' minds and building brand equity (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry & Kemper, 2020). Consumers' support for brands driving for social justice has increased recently, and according to WPP/Group M's Mindshare media buying and planning agency, consumers expect brands to take a stance on issues meaningful to them (Berr, 2020). Organisations and individuals with solidarity and responses towards structural oppression, racism and other injustice have been indicated to be "woke", a term of African-American origin used as a "byword for social awareness" (Merriam-Webster, 2021). The popularity of these "woke" brands has raised the interest of marketers, recognising the profit opportunities within this emerging phenomenon.

Consequently, this has also led to marketers hijacking the power of these do-good actions and starting to exploit social issues to get monetary gain. The recently developed term woke washing refers to companies having inauthentic social activism marketing, whilst they have vague to no records of actions towards the said social causes (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry & Kemper, 2018). Sport brand Nike's marketing campaigns with female professional tennis player Serena Williams have been successful, for example by underlining double standards between women and men showing emotion, to raise discussion for gender equality (Carpenter, 2019). Simultaneously, the company has been criticized for female abuse happening in their elite professional training group Nike Oregon Project. In a statement from an athlete Mary Cain, she claimed to have missed her period for three years, broken multiple bones and had suicidal thoughts because of the disordered eating that occurred due to Nike's star coach Alberto Salazar's training methods (Chaves, 2019). A number of other athletes in

the Oregon Project have publicly spoken about Salazar's unhealthy culture, including female runners Amy Yoder Begley and Kara Goucher (Cain, 2019). Yet, the Oregon Project was only shut down after Salazar's doping offences in 2019.

As such woke washing actions have become increasingly common, consumers have inevitably become aware of the ongoing phenomenon. Thus, our study aims to examine whether some brands' woke washing practices have an effect on consumer trust in activist brands. Moreover, we want to investigate possible changes in consumer intention to purchase from companies that engage in brand activism.

Woke washing phenomenon is relatively new, hence the research on its effects on consumer trust in the marketing literature is limited. We believe that further study in this topic will be not only a relevant contribution to academic research but also beneficial for practitioners working with brand activism.

1.2 Problematization

The business environment has rapidly transformed in the past decade. Although important for the consumer, the quality and price of products are not necessarily the only aspect impacting the purchase decision. The more aware today's consumers are in relation to company transparency as well as their action on environmental and social challenges, the more companies need to address this demand of aligning their values with consumers. For a number of years, academic research has investigated the unethical practice of greenwashing, referring to misleading corporate communication about environmental performance of the firm (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). More recently, studies have looked into emerging concepts such as pinkwashing and purplewashing, of which the first considers the use of LGBTQIA+ related communication in marketing, and latter the use of female related communication such as femvertising. The more of an umbrella term for these "washing" practices concerning social justice is woke washing, which we have decided to adopt as the study focus on this paper.

As an emerging phenomenon, woke washing lacks academic research on its effects on consumer trust and purchase intention. We believe that this topic needs to be studied further to establish whether woke washing leads to reduced consumer trust on activist brands. Our study aim is thus to look into brands' woke washing practices and whether those have an effect on consumer trust on brand activism. More specifically, the study objective is to investigate whether knowledge of woke washing and brand activism impacts consumer trust. Additionally we aim to examine changes in consumer intention to purchase from companies that engage in brand activism.

1.3 Purpose and Research Objectives

According to scholars, the motives behind activist campaigning can be scrutinized and doubted by consumers (Alhouti, Johnson and Holloway, 2016; Vredenburg et al. 2020). For the sake of this study, such questioning is expected to increase with heightened awareness of inauthentic brand activism practices, namely, woke washing.

The purpose of this thesis is to create an original conceptual framework to study the relationships between knowledge and consumer trust, as well as consumer trust's impact on purchase intention. Using relevant theories on trust and purchase intention, the study aim is to establish an understanding and analysis of the extent to which a consumer's knowledge of woke washing affects their trust towards activist brands. Moreover, the second objective is to examine whether consumer trust towards activist brands affects purchase intention towards the activist brands.

1.4 Aimed Contributions

This paper builds on the fundamentals of brand activism literature, by taking on a perspective on the impact of woke washing knowledge to consumer trust and further to purchase intention. The thesis objectives include expanding the research from scholars such as Mukherjee & Althuizen (2020), who have previously examined consumer perceptions on authentic brand activism. Our aim is to contribute to past brand activism literature as well as researching and providing new knowledge on the phenomenon of woke washing, which has little to no research, therefore we wish to create a linkage between the two terms and provide readers and alike with relevant information.

Further, an original conceptual framework will be presented to model the impact of knowledge on trust and further to purchase intention via the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Examining whether consumer trust is affected by mediating variables, which in turn affects their purchase intention. Through this analysis we aim to contribute not only to brand activism literature, but also offer managerial contributions to assist brand managers in improving their understanding about brand activism as well as the perceived risks of woke washing.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

This paper is separated into 6 chapters, as seen in Figure 1. below.
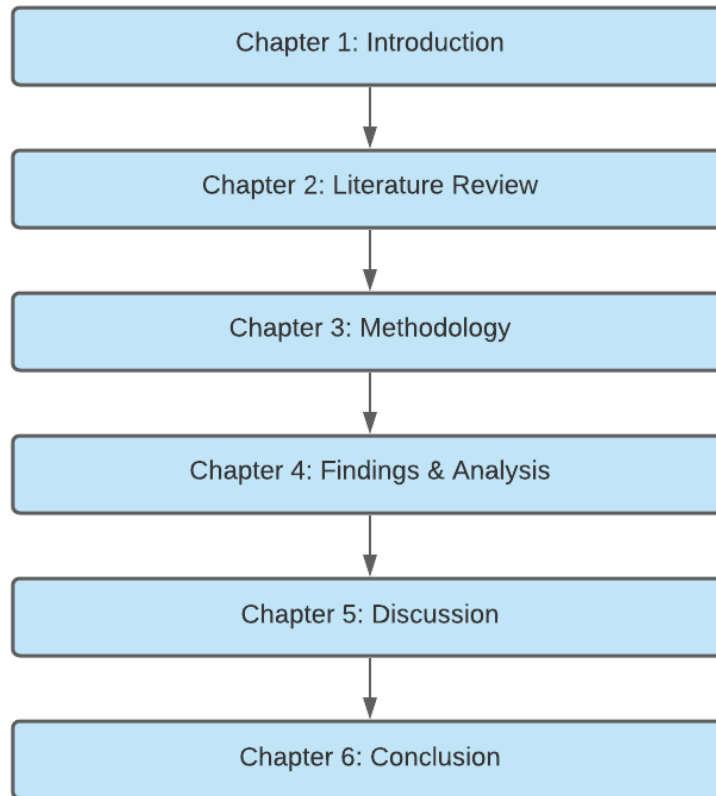
Figure 1. Thesis Outline

In the first chapter, the reader is presented with an introduction to the paper. Here, some important terms and phenomena which are relevant to the research topic are introduced and discussed. A background will then be set for the problematization, in turn leading to the aims, objectives and and purpose of the research topic of the thesis.

The second chapter will focus on the literature review, which will provide the reader with relevant information for the thesis topic. Previous academic studies and research will be analysed and critiqued. Two main literature streams will be presented; firstly brand activism which will also encompass woke washing, followed by the concepts of consumer trust and consumer knowledge. Furthermore, after the literature review, a theoretical and conceptual framework will be presented which will tie the elements of brand activism and trust. Additionally, the conceptual framework will lead to a set of testable hypotheses which will further direct the research of brand activism and woke washing.

Chapter 3 will focus on methodology explaining the research philosophy as well as defining the research design and research approach which will be used in order to test the outlined

hypotheses. Moreover, the validity and reliability of the study will be addressed and explained, leading to the analysis of a pre-test, allowing us to conduct our main research more successfully. Finally, the chapter is closed with more in-depth discussion of the chosen data analysis method.

Chapter 4 will consist of the findings and analysis from the main experiment. Here, we will analyse the data as well as explain the main findings of the study. Based on the results, each of the previously formulated hypotheses will either be rejected or accepted.

Lastly, chapters 5 and 6 will enclose both the discussion section and the conclusion. The discussion will combine both the obtained results and previous knowledge and existing literature. The conclusion will summarise the findings and present both theoretical and managerial implications of the study. Further, in the concluding chapter we will provide examples of limitations found during the study and a number of recommendations for future research in the field. Following these chapters an end to the thesis will be presented.

2. Literature Review

The aim of the literature review chapter is to underline academic research conducted thus far in the key topics of this study; brand activism, consumer trust and consumer knowledge. First of the two sections shed light on the emerging phenomena that is brand activism, with in-depth examination of the more recent concept of woke washing. The subsequent section discusses the notion of consumer trust, followed by a thorough presentation of the concept of consumer knowledge. Further, the theoretical framework used for this study will be introduced to the reader. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to underline the fundamentals on which this research will be built and to present the theoretical lens used

2.1 Brand Activism

The ever-changing social environment has recently increased the focus on various socioeconomic and environmental challenges around the globe. The accelerating flow of information on issues such as climate change and loss of biodiversity has impacted consumers' environmental awareness, thus affecting their consumption behaviour. 73% of the respondents in 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer agree that firms can take actions that both increase profits and improve conditions in communities where the firm operates. These types of brand activists go beyond product provision through attributing brand-related action with abstract moral concerns related to rightness, goodness, or virtuousness (Caruana cited in Koch, 2020).

Vredenburg et al. (2020, p. 446), define brand activism as " a purpose- and values-driven strategy in which a brand adopts a non neutral stance on institutionally contested socio political issues, to create social change and marketing success". Furthermore, according to Kotler and Sarkar, brand activism is an action where companies openly express their stance on a sociopolitical cause or issue (2017). They claim that brand activism can be divided into social, business, political, environmental, economic and legal activism, which all can be either regressive and progressive (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). Regressive brand activism refers to disobeying the common good, whilst progressive brand activism aims to benefit the common good. The state of research in relation to brand activism is intermediate. Brand activism research draws from several streams of literature, including inter alia, marketing, communication, management, and psychology, however it is mainly being studied as an emergent marketing strategy (Vredenburg et al. 2020).

These changing consumer demands have also created an opportunity for brands to take a stance on the issues, either to genuinely make a positive impact on the matter or to partake in rather unethical practices of greenwashing and pink washing. These two practices are used by companies solely to increase profits, not to contribute to actual change. Lately, such companies have been called out not only by consumers, but other companies as well. For

instance, Oatly is known for proactively positioning itself as an activist, pointing out the defects of the dairy industry and challenging other market players to better their sustainability practices (Koch, 2020).

In the CMO Survey 2020, Moorman conducted a study exploring marketing leaders' approaches to brand political activism, with 68% of the respondents concerned of activism's negative impacts on retaining new customers. The survey results uncovered six perspectives used by firms to guide their decisions to engage in activism (Moorman, 2020). What comes to the consumer side of the topic, Mukherjee and Althuizen investigated how consumers react to brand activism. Their study revealed that taking the "right" stand on a controversial matter had a modest positive impact on the brand, yet the "wrong" stand may affect the brand extremely negatively (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). According to the study, consumers disagreeing with the firm's stand were willing to waive the financial bonus offered if they were to share a positive news story of the brand on social media. Meanwhile, control groups provided with only neutral product-related information were willing to share the story. Yet, staying neutral is merely an option in the eyes of the consumer, hence it is important for companies to voice out their stand (Shetty, Vankataramaiah & Anand, 2019). If lucky, the brand will reap the benefits of a correctly chosen stand, leading to long-term competitive advantage (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill, 2006; Mandfredi-Sanchez, 2019; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Weinzimmer & Esken, 2016).

In their 2020 research, Vredenburg et al. formulated a typology for brand activism, consisting of companies that are yet to adopt prosocial corporate practices (absence of brand activism), companies that embrace prosocial corporate practices behind the scenes (silent brand activism), companies that engage in prosocial corporate practices and external communication that align with the brand values (authentic brand activism) as well as companies that engage in prosocial corporate practices and external communication that does not align with the brand values (inauthentic brand activism). Sobande (2019) also highlights these concerns of inauthentic activism, meaning brands cherry picking specific causes to support in order to gain profits. Brands exploiting environmental activism engage in a rather unethical practice of greenwashing, whilst pinkwashing refers to the use of LGBTQIA+ rights and purple washing to the use of womens' rights to gain profits. Umbrella term for taking advantage of social causes for marketing purposes is woke washing, which will be further discussed in the next section.

2.1.1 Woke washing

As discussed, brands today engage in activism, creating social change via communicating firm values that align with consumer's own. However, not all companies "walk the talk", meaning they practice inauthentic brand activism potentially misleading consumers through their activist messaging. Inauthentic brand activism can be witnessed in many global brand's marketing strategies, such as Pepsi's 2017 campaign with an activist message, including reality TV star Kendall Jenner ending a protest with a can of Pepsi. The advertisement was aired during the BLM movement, yet Pepsi had no values, history or a brand purpose related

to the social movement. The campaign backlashed, and the company was called out for woke washing online. Such inauthentic brand activism communication is common, and up to 56% of consumers think there are too many brands misusing societal issues as a marketing ploy to sell more products (Edelman, 2019). Woke washing is defined as "brands [that] have unclear or indeterminate records of social cause practices but yet are attempting to market themselves as being concerned with issues of inequality and social justice" (Vredenburg, Spry, Kemper & Kapitan, 2018).

As a fairly recent concept, woke washing is a nascent phenomenon that has not been examined thoroughly in academic literature. Yet, many scholars have looked into the use of cultural identity, and equality as strategies in marketing. Crockett's (2008) paper suggests a framework on how practitioners use the representation of blackness to market products. Building on this study, Sobande (2019) investigated how Black social justice activism ideas and intersectional understanding of feminism and equality are used in today's marketing strategies. The study conceptualises the branding of "woke" bravery, involving "brands invoking images and ideas that initially may appear allied with social justice sentiments" and highlights ways woke washing brands misuse recent socio-political issues to gain profits. Moreover, Mandfredi-Sanchez (2019) agrees with this idea, claiming that brand activism is used as a misleading marketing tool, taking advantage of consumers' goodwill.

Sarkar and Kotler (2018) underline the dangers of inauthentic brand activism, warning that activism practices not aligning with company values may damage the company reputation. Agreeing with Sarkar and Kotler, Vredenburg et al. (2020), highlight consumer trust in authenticity is fundamental for brand activism. They argue that woke washing companies may jeopardize the impact of authentic brand activism, meaning brand activism strategy may become less effective for social improvement, if consumers lack trust towards activism campaigns. Thus, it is important for further research to examine how woke washing knowledge affects consumer trust and further their intention to purchase from activist brands.

2.2 Trust

Trust is a key concept within the relationships between consumers, organisations as well as between individuals. The importance of trust is significant for consumers, as according to a 2019 study up to 81% of the respondents consider trust a deal breaker or a deciding factor in their purchase decision (Edelman, 2019). Nevertheless, trust is a crucial factor in marketing success (Sichtmann, 2007).

Consumer trust is a relatively mature phenomenon. Numerous interpretations of trust exist, however, from numerous research previously carried out, 3 factors were identified as the 'core' elements of trust (Bachmann, 2010; Barber, 1983; Cook, Cheshire, Gerbasi & Aven, 2009; Dietz, 2011; Grabner-Kraeuter & Kaluscha, 2008; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998).

1) In order for trust to develop there must be 2 actors, a trustee and a trustor.
2) There must be a sense of vulnerability present.
3) Trust is context sensitive.

Consumer trust can be defined as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 83). Consumers that trust a brand to produce and supply a consistent group of characteristics, quality and services, spend less time processing information, making decisions and have reduced purchase risk (Rajavi, Kushwaha & Steenkamp, 2019). Research has shown that in a vulnerable environment, the uncertainty of a situation is reduced if the consumer can rely on a trusted brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Scholars have found out that consumer trust leads to consumer loyalty, higher price tolerance and purchase intentions, more positive word of mouth and commitment in B2C relationships (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; 2002; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2001; Lau & Lee; 1999; Moorman, Zaltman & Deshpande, 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sichtmann, 2007; Singh, Iglesias & Batista-Foguet, 2012) as well as impact brand performance metrics, including price premium and market share (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Power, Whelan & Davies (2008) studied that even a brand with negative associations can be successful if consumers have developed a strong trust in it.

Traditionally, the idea of trust towards a brand encompassed aspects of credibility, integrity, reliability, confidence and benevolence. Further research discovered that such characteristics also apply to online trust. An experiment done by Gefen (2002) using students, found the specific beliefs when it came to online markets - integrity, ability and benevolence. These findings were further supported by multiple researchers; Lee & Turban (2001) and Belanger, Hiller and Smith (2002). Other theories have included reputation in their definition of online trust, as reputation often suggests competence and integrity (Doney & Cannon, 1997).

Previously a number of researchers found 3 areas to be important when it came to the research of online trust. Firstly, 'Green Trust', described by Chen and Chang (2013) as "a willingness to depend on a product, service or brand based on the belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence and ability about its environmental performance" (Chen & Chang, 2013, pg. 72). Secondly, 'Trust Recovery" is an important component to consumers' overall trust. Following a complaint, proper procedures have to take place. Failure to address consumers' complaints may result in future loss of trust (Pizzutti & Fernandes, 2010). Lastly, the role of ethics in commerce is described as; "a consumer's perception about the practice of the company in its handling of consumers in a confidential, fair, honest and sincere manner in the transaction process" (Cheng, Yang, Chen & Wu, 2010). This can also be applied to brand communication, what messages they send out and how they want them to be perceived. A brand involved in woke washing, may subject its consumers or certain communities to harm through their advocacy towards a marginalised phenomenon or group.

Trust has been identified as a mediating variable (Urban, Amyx & Lorenzon, 2009) which affects one's purchase intention. The idea of trust being a mediating construct between antecedents and behavioural intent, such as purchasing has been backed by multiple

researchers (Bart, 2005), showing that trust mediates perceived risk and intent to buy (Buttner & Goritz, 2008).

2.3 Consumer Knowledge

Knowledge is an important resource often reflected in a number of information-processing activities, such as reasoning, judgement, problem solving and the recognition of presented information (Mitchell & Dacin, 1996). Knowledge has been researched in various streams of literature, such as psychology, philosophy, education and business. In marketing studies, knowledge research is mostly conducted in the field of consumer behaviour (Bettman & Park, 1980; Mitchell & Dacin, 1996). The concept of consumer knowledge is often defined along the lines of individuals' understanding and prior knowledge of a product or a brand. As stated by Brucks (1986), the content of knowledge is the subject matter of information collected in one's memory. There are two kinds of knowledge; objective and subjective (Brucks, 1985; Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999). The first of these is concerned with what individuals think they know, whereas the latter is concerned with what actually is stored in their memory. Building on Bruck's statements, Dodd, Laverie, Wilcox and Duhan (2005) argue that the third type of knowledge used by consumers is usage experience, referring to the utilisation of different non-personal and personal information sources in the decision making process. According to Feick, Park and Mothersbaugh (1992), each type of knowledge is proved to have a different impact on consumer behaviour.

Whilst consumer product knowledge has been under examination frequently in past research (Brucks, 1985; Dodd et al. 2005; Rao & Monroe, 1988; Sujan, 1985), less scholarly attention has been paid to consumers' knowledge on external phenomena impacting their purchase intention. In this paper, the particular type of knowledge under focus is consumers' subjective knowledge of woke washing. By definition, subjective knowledge is "what individuals perceive they know, also indicated as perceived or self-rated knowledge" (Aertsens, Mondelaers, Verbeke, Buysse & Huylenbroeck, 2011, p. 1356). As reported by academics, subjective knowledge correlates with the purchase confidence of the consumer (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Jin & Han, 2014). Thus, a consumer's high perception of their knowledge about a brand leads to high purchase confidence. Vice versa, consumer's high purchase confidence often reflects their actual knowledge about the brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987).

According to Alba and Hutchinson (1987), familiarity and expertise are the two main concepts of consumer knowledge. Whilst familiarity concerns a number of consumers' past product-related experiences, expertise is developed gradually over a longer period of time. These expert consumers have acquired more knowledge about product performance from friends, advertising and media, and process information more in-depth when making decisions in comparison to novices (Mitchell & Dacin, 1996). Furthermore, as explained by

Mitchell and Dacin (1996), experts possess more interdomain knowledge, meaning that they are able to compare brands and product characteristics between product classes.

Research further indicates that consumer knowledge impacts decision making between product alternatives (Capraro, Broniarczyk & Srivastava, 2003). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) suggest that consumers evaluate alternatives based on their own knowledge about the product's characteristics. However, consumers often miss complete information about the alternatives when making decisions (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000). Thus, they must evaluate the product based on commonly known characteristics. According to prior studies, lack of product knowledge has been underlined as the main barriers towards the purchase of sustainable products (Hong & Sternthal, 2010). Furthermore, scholars have proved that although consumers generally have positive perceptions towards sustainable products, their knowledge towards the said products is inadequate (Ha-Brookshire & Norum, 2011).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 Consumer Trust

Consumer trust is subjective to many contexts, in this case how consumers interpret brand communications, more specifically how they view brand activism if they are able to distinguish between authentic activism and woke washing. Oftentimes, consumers act on information that is less than complete and far from perfect (Kim, Ferrin & Rao, 2008).

Previously it has been noted that the examination of trust, specifically it's study in organisations has been problematic and a topic that is repeatedly avoided or described as another. Formerly, trust has been examined as an antecedent of risk or in other words the same as risk. However, they have come to be treated as different concepts and according to Mayer (1995) trust has been defined as a behaviour one takes based on his or her beliefs about the characteristics of another person.

A model of dyadic trust developed by Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman (1995), in which the model is designed in such a way as to focus on trust in an organisational setting involving two specific parties: a trusting party (trustor) and a party being trusted (trustee) (Driscoll, 1978; Scott, 1980). The model encompases factors about both the trustor and the trustee. According to this model, there are 3 factors of trustworthiness proposed, which apply to the trustee; ability, benevolence and integrity. Ability refers to the group of skills, competencies and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Many theorists have discussed similar constructs and used either trust or synonyms of trust, such as competence (Butler, 1991; Butler & Cantrell, 1984: Kee & Knox, 1970; Rosen & Jerdee, 1977). Benevolence being the second characteristic is described as the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor, aside

from any profit gaining motives (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). However, intentions and motives have been considered as alternative characteristics for trust by several theorists (Cook & Wall, 1980; Deutsch, 1960; Giffin, 1967; Kee & Knox, 1970). Lastly, integrity refers to the trustor's perception that the trustee will adhere to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

An important point of the literature review is the trust factor in purchase intentions. Alongside this knowledge is a crucial variable, which allows for the level of trust to be determined. Trust may be considered as a relevant independent variable when it comes to purchase intention (Chong, Yang & Wong, 2003) specifically when consumer intention to purchase is affected by woke washing. This paper examines whether the concept of trust further influences one's intention to purchase. As previously mentioned, trust is something that has multiple explanations, several researchers have presented various attempts to define and conceptualize trust. Many of these approaches are influenced by Rotter (1967, p. 651), who defined trust as "an expectancy held by an individual (...) that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual (...) can be relied upon." In terms of woke washing, the level of trust amongst various consumers will be analysed in context of various brand activism and woke washing.

The model of trust by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), analysing the 'ability, benevolence and integrity' will be used to provide assistance in the understanding of consumer trust and their attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control of activist brands, to help justify and explain the final decisions in relation to purchase intention. Based on this theoretical perspective, the intention of consumers might be dependent on the level of trust that they possess towards an activist brand and their knowledge of woke washing, therefore leading to the first hypothesis;

H1; *Knowledge of woke washing has negative effects on trust for activist brands.*

2.4.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour

Fishbein and Ajzen formulated the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) in 1975, explaining the reasoning behind behavioural intention (Ajzen, 1991). Due to academic critique faced by the theory, Ajzen later extended it to what is known as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). This theory suggests that individuals' intention to engage in a specific behaviour can be predicted from attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control.

The first dimension of TPB is attitude, referring to consumers' attitude of specific behaviour and the outcome's impact on the individual themselves (Ajzen, 1991). The second dimension, subjective norm, includes the social pressure an individual perceives to have in regards to whether or not they should engage in a specific behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The third dimension

is perceived behavioural control, suggesting that individuals' behaviour is influenced by the perceived ability to perform a given behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

In this case, purchase intention is the behavioural intention to be examined. Purchase intention refers to the consumer's motivation to buy a specific product or a service. According to Lii and Lee (2012), consumers with a positive perception of a specific brand are more likely to have positive purchase intentions. Purchase intention is not the buying behaviour itself, yet it is the last step of the process before the actual purchase (Howard & Sheth, 2001). According to scholars such as Berkman and Gilson, consumers with an increased purchase intention are likely to purchase specific products, thus purchase intention can predict future behaviours (1978).

Giantari et al. (2013) found out that higher consumer trust on a company leads to more significant purchase intention. A number of other academic studies support this finding, suggesting that trust is a driver for purchase intention (Ajzen, 2011; Terengganga et al. 2013). Simultaneously, research has been conducted for example on sustainability aspects affecting food purchases, highlighting that sustainability information had little to no impact on consumer purchase intention (O'Rourke & Ringer, 2015).

Studies have looked at how consumer attitudes, values and knowledge of sustainability impact purchase intent (O'Rourke & Ringer, 2015). However, there has not been much examination of how consumers' intention to purchase towards a brand transforms according to issues such as woke washing.

Theory of Planned behaviour has been widely used as a theoretical lens to predict intentions and behaviour, consequently empirical evidence has supported the validity of the theory in this setting (Ajzen, 2011). Using the TPB, our research aim is to examine how woke washing knowledge impacts consumers' purchase intention.

Overall, Lin and Lu (2010) argue that there is a positive correlation between trust and purchase intention. Furthermore, according to Al-Swidi et al. (2014), attitude is a significant predictor of purchase intention. In case the consumer perceives the outcome of the purchase positively, they will have a significantly more positive attitude and be more likely to purchase the product or a service (Hayden, 2013). Research from Atkinson and Rosenthal suggests that trust has an impact on attitude (2014). A number of other studies support their findings, underlining the significant relationship between trust and attitude (Amaro & Duarte, 2016; Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014; Wu & Chen, 2005). Consequently, trust will indirectly have an impact on purchase intention. Hence, the following first hypothesis has been formulated in regards to the relationship between trust and purchase intention;

H2a; *There is an indirect relationship between trust and purchase intention for activist brands, via attitude towards activist brands.*

As discussed, subjective norms refer to the social pressures for an individual to engage in specific behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). A variety of scholars have studied the significance of the relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention (Ahn et al. 2012; Dean et al. 2008; Han & Stoel, 2015; Kang et al. 2013; Kim & Karpova, 2010). According to Han and Stoel, descriptive norms increase intention to purchase certain products, meaning that consumers tend to pay attention to socially typical behaviour (2015). Here, this would suggest that if the consumer perceives most people to avoid purchasing from woke washing companies, their own purchase intention would decrease. Furthermore, research has suggested that consumer trust has a significant impact on subjective norms (Lobb et al. 2007; Wu & Chen, 2005). Again, this proves that trust has an indirect effect on purchase intention. Hence, based on these findings our second hypothesis is;

H2b; *There is an indirect relationship between trust and purchase intention for activist brands, via subjective norms towards activist brands.*

There is a highly significant relationship between perceived behavioural control and purchase intention (Han & Stoel, 2015; Godin & Kok, 1996). Moreover, Wu and Chen's (2005) study findings indicate that there is a significant relationship between trust and the perceived behavioural control. Therefore, it can be expected that consumer trust towards brand activists further impacts purchase intention for the said brands. Our third formulated hypothesis is;

H2c; *There is a significant indirect relationship between trust and purchase intention for activist brands, via perceived behavioural control towards activist brands.*

3. Methodology

The methodology chapter presents the methodological approach which was employed in the establishment of the theoretical framework and subsequently the following hypotheses. The first section will establish the fundamentals in which this research is constructed, including research method and philosophical considerations associated with the study. Thus, the section's purpose is to outline and explain our chosen research method combined with our assumptions about what is reality in regards to this study. The following subsections underline the research design explaining the actions which were undertaken in order to carry out the study, and the approach to data analysis will be defined.

3.1 Research Philosophy and Method

It is important to clearly outline the underlying assumptions of the research in order to be able to apply the most accurate and appropriate methods to solve the research question. Following this, research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2009). At multiple stages of research, one is always making assumptions, whether they are aware of it or not (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Assumptions can be made about human knowledge (epistemological assumptions), realities encountered during research (ontological assumptions) and finally the extent to which your own values shape and influence your research process (axiological assumptions), understanding these assumptions will allow for better method developments and evaluation of findings for a study (Crotty, 1998).

This thesis aims to acquire knowledge with regards to woke washing and how consumers react to such activism. Following this, two assumptions can be made; ontological and epistemological. According to Crotty (2003) ontology refers to "the study of being", in other words, ontological assumptions respond to the questions such as 'what can be known' and 'what is the nature of this reality?'. From this perspective, our paper takes on an ontological position of realism . Furthermore, the ontological approach allows us to assume that every consumer answering our questionnaire has their own thoughts, interpretations and meanings, hence an in depth questionnaire is being used to understand and interpret these feelings, opinions and actions.

However, epistemology is a 'way of understanding and explaining what we know' (Crotty, 2003). In other words, the study of epistemology will cover questions such as 'how we know what we know', allowing us to develop suitable philosophical grounding to help identify

appropriate knowledge for the research question. In this case we use positivism epistemology, which assumes that only the facts and figures gained from our research method will be of legitimate knowledge.

As previously stated, your own beliefs and values can influence research, otherwise known as axiological assumptions. We have done our best to apply as much objectivity as possible following our study, steering away from our personal opinions (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018), so as to not bias our study.

Following the layout of our thesis which is theory-driven, we have taken on a deductive approach to our study. This method allows us to begin research on a foundation of already existing theories. which then allows for hypotheses to be made, followed by observations and a confirmation (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018). Based on the findings of the study, our hypotheses will either be confirmed or rejected, and then applied back to the theory.

In the quantitative approach, researchers classify and count features, and construct statistical models in an attempt to explain what is observed (Burns & Burns, 2008). There are also set paradigms which are used to view the world, a specific framework which helps shade the guidelines and principles of how the research should be complete (Burns & Burns, 2008). In the case of this thesis, the quantitative methods used reflect a positivist approach, which assumes that the environment and social reality which the study is set in, are all objective and external to the individual (Burns & Burns, 2008). By analysing woke washing we are using the positivist approach to ensure that proper methods and principles are used in order to obtain relevant data on the study of human behaviour in context with the research question.

3.2 Research Design

This thesis aims to uncover the effects which woke washing has on consumers' trust and hence their intention to buy, using a quantitative approach. A fine line exists between brand activism and woke washing, both concepts may be difficult to distinguish from each other, with subjective influences arising when trying to define both. Therefore, we believe that it is important to provide the reader with information so that they can differentiate between both concepts. Vredenburg et al. (2020, p. 446) gives a clear definition for brand activism along with Vredenburg, Spry, Kemper & Kapitan (2018) definition of woke washing.

To undergo this study, we have chosen to apply a cross-sectional approach.
A cross-sectional study is a type of retrospective design, referring to data gathering and categorising of respondents at one point in time (Adams, Khan, Raeside & White, 2007). In a cross-sectional study as this one, quantifiable data is analysed to establish variation between a set of cases, to find and examine relationships between a number of variables (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018).

3.3 Data Collection Method

As discussed in the previous section, the study design is cross-sectional, meaning that data is gathered only once. For research purposes, data is gathered either via primary or secondary research (Adams et al. 2007). In this case, as per the chosen research design, primary data will be extracted from respondents via self-completion online questionnaire. In the following subsections, the participant sampling method as well as the chosen surveying approach will be discussed in further detail.

3.3.1 Sampling of Participants

Due to the consumer-focused nature of our study, the target population consists of potential consumers within the age group of 18 and above. The sampling technique used is non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling refers to sampling techniques used to serve the specific objectives of a study (Adams et al. 2007). Here, sample is the one that is easily available for the research through online platforms, meaning the method used is convenience sampling (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018). Based on previous studies on consumer purchase intention, we have formulated the required sample size for this study (Ahn, Koo & Chang, 2011; Han & Stoel, 2015; Lohneiss & Hill, 2013; Lodorfos & Dennis, 2008; Terenggana et al. 2013). Hence, the sample size of this study is 343 responses for the self-completion questionnaire. Of these, 2 were omitted as they did not give permission for the use of their responses and 10 were omitted as their knowledge of woke washing and brand activism was not on the required level. The data analysed therefore was 331 respondents. The pre-test sample was more limited, 10 respondents.

As stated by Bell, Bryman and Harley (2018), good research practice is essentially associated with probability samples, suggesting that here the choice of non-probability sampling limits the quality of the study.

3.3.2 Questionnaire

Having outlined our model, we decided to use a web-based survey form for the collection of our data. This way each participant was redirected to our questionnaire by clicking a link, they then completed the survey and all of their answers were recorded and stored in a database for future analysis (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015). Drawing from the theory introduced previously, the questionnaire consists of a number of questions designed to fulfil the research objective. According to Bajpai (2018) designing a questionnaire is a systematic process,

consisting of three simple steps. The first of the three, pre-construction phase contains the relevant academic information, respondents' key characteristics as well as decision of the required surveying approach (Bajpai, 2018).

The second, construction phase, has six steps; choosing the question format, wording of the questions, sequencing, question response choice, layout and formulating the first draft of the question set. The types of questions required to answer this study research objectives include personal factual questions, questions about attitudes, questions about knowledge as well as questions about normative standards and values (Bell, Bryman & Harvey 2018). The questionnaire is structured into 3 sections, beginning with a set of general demographic questions. The chosen question format for this study was a set of structured, closed-ended questions. The benefit of this approach is low time and cost, higher response rate, reduction of interviewer bias and enhanced comparability of the answers (Bajpai, 2018; Bell, Bryman & Harvey 2018).

The questionnaire consists of two approaches. A number of the questions chosen are in a dichotomous format, meaning that the only response options are "yes", "no" and something along the lines of "do not know" (Bajpai, 2018). Such format will be adapted into the first section of the questions. Additionally, respondents are asked to answer several questions on a 1-5 Likert scale (Bell, Bryman & Harvey 2018). This is required in the second section of the questionnaire, consisting of two knowledge questions to establish an idea of the respondents knowledge of the topic. After this section, the respondent is provided with definitions and video examples to understand the concepts of brand activism and woke washing, followed by a question to confirm that the respondent understands the difference between the two key concepts. Following, the penultimate section consists of four sets of questions formulated based on the four study hypotheses. Five questions consider H1, followed by two or three more per each; H2a, H2b and H2c. Finally, the questionnaire will close after three purchase intention related questions.

The third and last step is the post-construction phase, consisting of pre-testing, reviewing the questionnaire based on the pre-test, revising the final draft as well as performing the actual questionnaire (Bajpai, 2018). Pre-testing or piloting, is a testing of the questionnaire to ensure it operates well and the questions are relevant (Bell, Bryman & Harvey 2018). Based on our pretest of 10 respondents, the questionnaire was revised with only slight adjustment to educational background question wording, after which it was distributed online for the final testing.

3.4 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is often the starting point to much quantitative research, such as surveys or questionnaires with set answers (Burns & Burns, 2008). Conceptual mapping can be drawn out to visualise the flow and links between different concepts, a network of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Jabareen, 2009), in this case the decision to purchase. Following this, we created a map consisting of the concepts; *knowledge, trust, attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and purchase intention*, as seen below in Figure 2.

The concept of *knowledge* in this study was used as an independent variable, which is a variable that can be manipulated (Burns & Burns, 2008). *Trust* acted as a mediating variable alongside the model of trust created by Mayer. Furthermore, dimensions of the Theory of Planned Behaviour; *Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral control* were used as intervening variables in order to inspect whether *knowledge* and *trust* had an effect on the dependent variable of *purchase intention*.

However, these components of our study are all expressed in abstract conceptual terms which means that they cannot be directly measured, therefore, at least one measurable variable needs to be introduced to each concept in order to be able to continue with the research (Burns & Burns, 2008). The process of turning concepts into measurable variables is known as operationalisation as is explained by Burns and Burns (2008).
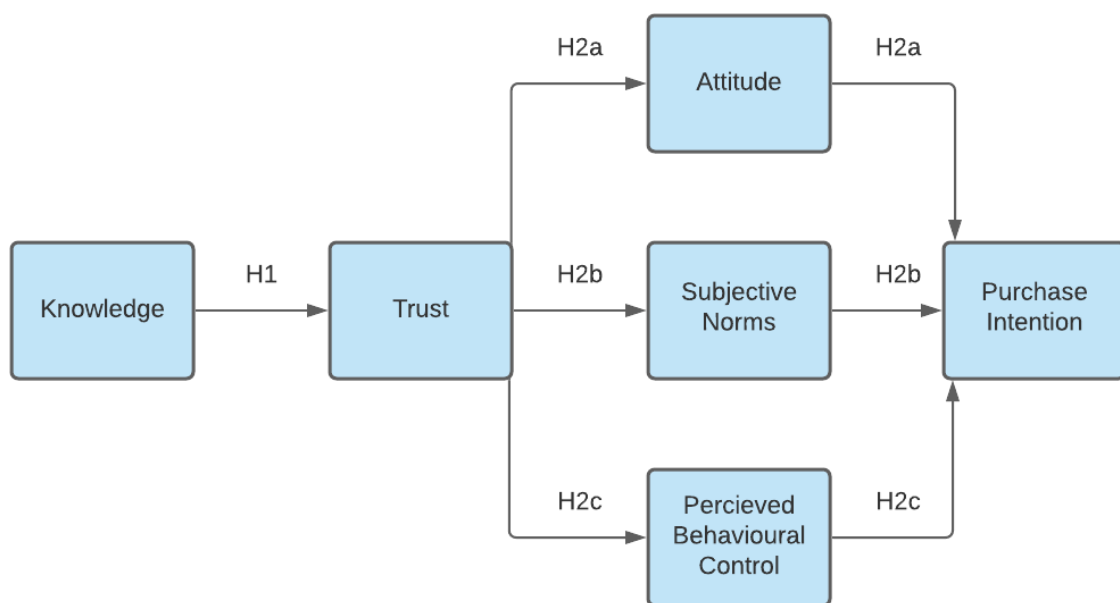

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

3.5 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Having based this study on the theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and the model of trust by (Mayer, 1995), it was important to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), as this model requires a strong foundation of either empirical or conceptual foundation to guide the evaluation of the factors, which in this case is the data which we have obtained from 331 respondents. CFA is one of the two factor analyses which can be performed, it's aim is to confirm theoretical predictions by testing whether responses are being influenced by certain constructs or not, this can be tested through a hypothesis (Burns & Burns, 2008). The CFA model is used when analysing the relationship between the observed measures or indicators and latent variables or factors. When choosing this type of analysis, it is standard for the researcher to have already specified a set number of factors and patterns of indicator-factor loadings, as well as any other factors needed to complete the research. Keeping this in mind, our study used the confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the chosen factors; Knowledge, Trust, Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control and Purchase Intention. CFA also verifies if the obtained factor model is robust enough and that it is not simply the consequence of one data set (Burns & Burns, 2008). Put simply, the CFA method acquires estimates for each factor loading and examines whether the chosen scales represent the latent variables and supports their robustness, for example, if the observed variables of "Trust" accurately support the measure of this latent variable. This method derives estimates for each of the factor loadings for both common and specific factors, and then gives an overall test statistic for how well the measurement model fits the data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

However, as Burns and Burns (2008) mention, CFA has been overtaken by the Structural Equation Model (SEM), which is a model that combines both factor analysis and multiple regression analysis, in order to analyse the relationship between measure variables and latent constructs. Therefore, we also applied the SEM model to our analysis. The software SmartPLS was used to conduct both the CFA and SEM calculations. Further, CFA was used to obtain factor loadings, which allows us to see how much each separate observed variable contributes to the latent variable which it represents.

3.6 Validity

To ensure the overall quality of the study, both validity and reliability of the variables is crucial to test (Burns & Burns, 2008). The first of the two, validity examines the integrity of the findings, consisting of internal, external and ecological validity (Bell, Bryman & Harvey, 2018). Whilst external validity investigates the extent to which the study results can be generalised to the overall population, the internal validity is concerned with the stability of

the experiment conditions (Burns & Burns, 2008). In regards to external validity, this study has its limitations considering the overall demographics of the sample. For instance, due to the online nature of the questionnaire, there were a high number of countries with low number of respondents. Furthermore, low overall respondent rate limits the possibility for the results to represent the entire population. To keep the internal validity of the study high, the pre-test was conducted to establish any changes required to the questionnaire. The final study had representation from a variety of educational backgrounds and countries, thus it is possible that the questions in English resulted in some difficulty of understanding for some of the respondents.

Ecological validity concerns the extent to which the study findings are applicable to people's everyday lives (Bell, Bryman & Harvey, 2018). As a result of the survey design of the research, the study findings are not completely representative of natural social settings. It can be argued that the respondents are unable to fully reflect on their behaviour in a real life purchasing situation, especially as the study neglects their personal relationships with specific brands.

Nonetheless, validity also refers to measurement validity, the scale's ability to measure a specific concept accurately, and can be established by a number of criteria, such as content validity and construct validity (Bell, Bryman & Harvey, 2018; Hair, Woldinbarger, Money, Page & Samouel, 2011).
First of the two, content validity (or face validity) is concerned with the scale's subjective ability to measure the correct factors (Hair et al. 2011). Oftentimes, content validity is based on judgement of subject experts, yet it is considered a limited measure of validity and therefore, frequently overlooked. Instead of consulting a number of experts to judge the scale, the study questions were strongly inspired by already existing scales from previous studies and approved by the research supervisor.

The second, construct validity assesses what is being measured, consisting of convergent validity and discriminant validity (Hair et al. 2011). The first of the two, convergent validity examines whether or not the construct is positively correlating with measures of the same construct. The convergent validity of the model was measured with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) in Smart-PLS. AVE must be greater than the acceptable threshold of 0.5 to signify validity (Wong, 2019). For this study, the only variable to score less than 0.5 was Trust, with 0.497.

On the other hand, discriminant validity establishes a difference between the content of two constructs, to ensure that there is no overlapping (Bell, Bryman & Harvey, 2018). For discriminant validity there are three ways to measure; the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, Cross Loadings and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Of the three, it is argued that HTMT is the most reliable method to detect discriminant validity (Henseler, Ringler & Sarstedt, 2015 cited in Wong, 2019). From Cross Loadings, the significance of indicator-variable relationships can be examined. Based on low factor loadings, the second question of PBC

was omitted (see Appendix A. for the questionnaire), as its significance for the latent variable PCB was 0.012 whilst its significance for knowledge was higher, 0.044.

3.7 Reliability

The reliability of a study is concerned with the consistency and accuracy of measures, further indicating repeatability (Burns & Burns, 2008). The investigation of reliability includes three key elements; stability, internal reliability as well as inter-rater reliability (Bell, Bryman & Harvey, 2018).

First of the three, stability, refers to a specific measure's low variation over time (Bell, Bryman & Harvey, 2018). Stabile measures lack fluctuation, thus replicating the study later in time has little to no change to the results. According to Bell, Bryman and Harvey (2018), the test-retest is the most obvious method to testing stability. The test-retest method suggests that there should be a high correlation between two tests administered on two different occasions. In this study, pre-test was conducted in advance to the final test, with similar results indicating stability. However, the two tests were undertaken in two very close points in time, consequently the stability of the study is not definite. Furthermore, the stability of the study may somewhat be weakened due to other factors influencing consumer intention to purchase from brand activists. Additionally, possible future increase in general woke washing knowledge may alter the results of the study replication.

Secondly, internal reliability is concerned with the reliability of multiple-indicator measurements (Bell, Bryman & Harvey, 2018). The internal reliability of this model was studied in Smart-PLS with Cronbach's Alpha, investigating the consistency of the scale in order to guarantee that the measured items determine the same construct (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The threshold for Cronbach's Alpha is 0,7 (Bell, Bryman & Harvey, 2018), with almost all study items scoring above. Only PCB for Cronbach's Alpha was 0.625, yet as it is close to the 0.7 limit, it did not signify any major issue for the study. Moreover, Cronbach's Alpha is the more traditional approach to internal consistency reliability, yet it provides a somewhat conservative and imprecise measurement in PLS-SEM (Hair et al. 2019; Wong, 2019). Consequently, a more modern approach to internal reliability is rho_A and Composite Reliability. For rho_A, value should be higher than 0.7 and less than 1 to confirm reliability (Wong, 2019). All the study measurements for rho_A were greater than 0.7, suggesting that the model is highly reliable. For Composite Reliability, the threshold for acceptable values is 0.7 and above, which all of the measures exceeded indicating excellent reliability.

Thirdly, inter-rater reliability refers to an occurrence where more than one rater engages in data analysis including subjective judgement (Bell, Bryman & Harvey, 2018). The main issue with quantitative questionnaires in regards to inter-rater reliability concerns open-ended

questions, which were not included in this study. Consequently, the researchers could not misinterpret participants' responses and this issue can be disregarded.

The fourth and last reliability factor considered is the length of assessment, as stated by Burns and Burns (2008). The reliability of a concept correlates with the number of indicators used to measure the said concept, indicating that a greater number of indicators equals higher reliability of the concept. Yet, it has been studied that significant increase in indicators only has a slight improvement to reliability (Burns & Burns, 2008). Thus, as adding more indicators would have also made the questionnaire significantly more time consuming, the chosen amount of indicators was 2-5 per variable. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, during the data analysis stage, one of the variables for PCB was omitted due to its low significance.

3.8 Data Analysis

Quantitative data can be analysed in two ways; by using descriptive statistics to understand the data and by testing hypotheses with statistical tests (Hair et al. 2011). As discussed in Theoretical Framework Chapter 2.3, this study is concerned with a set of four different hypotheses. The statistical technique used to investigate these hypotheses is PLS-SEM, introduced next.

3.8.1 PLS-SEM

The chosen approach to data analysis as well as to measuring validity and reliability of the model, is partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM is a soft modeling approach to structural equation modeling (SEM), oftentimes utilised in marketing and behavioural sciences research (Wong, 2019). The amount of published articles utilising PLS-SEM has been increasing considerably in the past years, and the simplicity of the method makes it appealing for researchers (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt and Ringle, 2019).

As an approach based on regression, PLS-SEM diminishes the endogenous construct's residual variances (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011). PLS-SEM is widely used in research due to, inter alia, its small sample size requirement, ability to handle large model complexity, effectiveness in moderation analysis, ability to work with less probabilistic hypotheses (Wong, 2013). Additionally, PLS-SEM allows the use of more than one independent and dependent variable and is a useful tool to test a theoretical framework from the perspective of prediction (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011; Ullman & Bentler, 2012), making it suitable for this study.

Despite being a widely used approach to data analysis, PLS-SEM is constrained by a number of disadvantages. Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt (2011) shed light on these disadvantages, stating

that there is no global measure of goodness of model fit and excessive focus on maximising partial model structures. Moreover, Wong (2013) underlined the possibility for biased results if the latent variable scores lack consistency and the model's inability to examine undirected correlation. Overall, these weaknesses are crucial to consider when using PLS-SEM, yet in spite of them it is a highly useful method for SEM.

The chosen PLS-SEM software used in the data analysis is SmartPLS 3, a user-friendly software package typically used to calculate PLS-SEM models (Hair et al. 2019). With SEM, direct, indirect and total effects can be examined (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow & King, 2006). For this study, the direct effect examined is the impact of knowledge to consumer trust. Yet, the main focus is on indirect effects, as the significance of TPB framework variables have already been established in previous research. Thus, in this study the mediating variables are attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (PBC). Further, the total effect examined is the relationship between knowledge and consumer trust impacting purchase intention, via the three mediating variables.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical obligations apply in all business research, hence why it must be addressed in this study. Throughout the process, caution was taken prior, during and after the data collection to ensure ethicality of the study and to avoid any distortion of the collected material. According to Hair et al. (2011), trust is in the core of business ethics, and lack of it leads to the requirement of ethical standards. In business research, the ethical implications of the process affect the participants rights of safety, freedom from harm, voluntary participation, privacy, confidentiality and the right to be informed (Burns & Burns, 2008). To avoid any type of harm to the participants, no identifying information was requested in the questionnaire. Anonymising the records is easier in quantitative research, as stated by Bell, Bryman and Harvey (2018). Further, conducting a pretest is considered to increase ethicality, as it ensures that questions can be understood and all crucial information is included in the questionnaire (Malhotra, Birks & Wills, 2010).

Lack of informed consent is another ethical issue that must be addressed. The assumption of informed consent is that the study participants are given an adequate amount of information about the study and their rights to withdraw at any time (Bell, Bryman & Harvey, 2018). Consequently, the research questionnaire included not only a paragraph of information about the study and its purpose, but additionally a question to ensure the prospective respondents consent to partake in the research, with all disallowing responses omitted. Furthermore, as it is fair to provide the estimate of the amount of time required to fulfil the research task (Hair et al. 2011), thus the approximate time frame was underlined in the study introduction. Furthermore, the questionnaire did not gather any sensitive or identifying information, such as names or email addresses.

4. Results

This chapter consists of analysis on the study results, starting with the descriptive statistics of the data, followed by the mean values and standard deviation. After, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis and PLS-SEM results are presented and analysed.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The sample deployed in this study demonstrates 343 responses collected via online questionnaire. After omitting the invalid responses, a total of 331 responses were used for data analysis. As demonstrated in Table 1., a majority, 85,5% of the respondents were women, 10,3% men, 2,4% other and 1,8% preferred not to disclose their gender. The respondents' largest age group was 25-34 (54,7%) followed by 18-24 (32,9%) and 35-44 (8,5%). What comes to the educational level of the respondents, 51,8% had completed bachelor level studies, 25,6% had completed master level or higher and 24,1% had completed high school or equivalent education. The rest of the participants reported to have completed a mandatory level of education.

In terms of residence, there were a total of 28 countries represented. The biggest country group with 154 respondents was the United States, followed by 49 respondents from Finland and 32 from Canada. From the overall countries represented, 56% of the respondents were from North America, 40% from Europe, 1,8% from Australia and Oceania, 1,2% from Asia, 0,6% from Central America and 0,3% from South America.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic characteristics	Number of Respondents	%
Gender		
Women	283	85,5
Men	34	10,3
Other	8	2,4
Prefer not to say.	6	1,8
Age		
18-24	109	32,9
25-34	181	54,7
35-44	28	8,5
45-54	10	3
55-64	2	0,6
65+	1	0,3
Education		
Mandatory	2	0,6
High school or equivalent	73	24,1
Bachelor level	171	51,7

Master level or higher		85	25,7
Residence			
Asia		4	1,2
	Russia	*2*	*0,6*
	South Korea	*1*	*0,3*
	Vietnam	*1*	*0,3*
Australia and Oceania		6	1,8
	Australia	*5*	*1,5*
	New Zealand	*1*	*0,3*
Central America		2	0,6
	Mexico	*2*	*0,6*
Europe		154	40
	Austria	*1*	*0,3*
	Croatia	*1*	*0,3*
	Czech Republic	*4*	*1,2*
	Denmark	*3*	*0,9*
	Estonia	*1*	*0,3*
	Finland	*49*	*14,8*
	Germany	*5*	*1,5*
	Hungary	*1*	*0,3*
	Ireland	*11*	*3,3*
	Italy	*1*	*0,3*
	Latvia	*2*	*0,6*
	Netherlands	*2*	*0,6*
	Norway	*2*	*0,6*
	Romania	*1*	*0,3*
	Slovenia	*1*	*0,3*
	Spain	*4*	*1,2*
	Sweden	*18*	*5,4*
	Switzerland	*1*	*0,3*
	United Kingdom	*25*	*7,6*
North America		186	56
	Canada	*32*	*9,7*
	The United States	*154*	*46,5*
South America		1	0,3
	Uruguay	*1*	*0,3*

The research data further showed that prior to taking the survey, 36,4% of the respondents were highly knowledgeable of woke washing and 37% with brand activism. On the other hand, 11,1% of them were not familiar with the concept of woke washing whilst only 2,4% were not aware of brand activism. Rest of the respondents fell somewhere between these extremities on the 5-point Likert scale used in the study (Figures 3 and 4).

I know what brand activism is.

331 vastausta
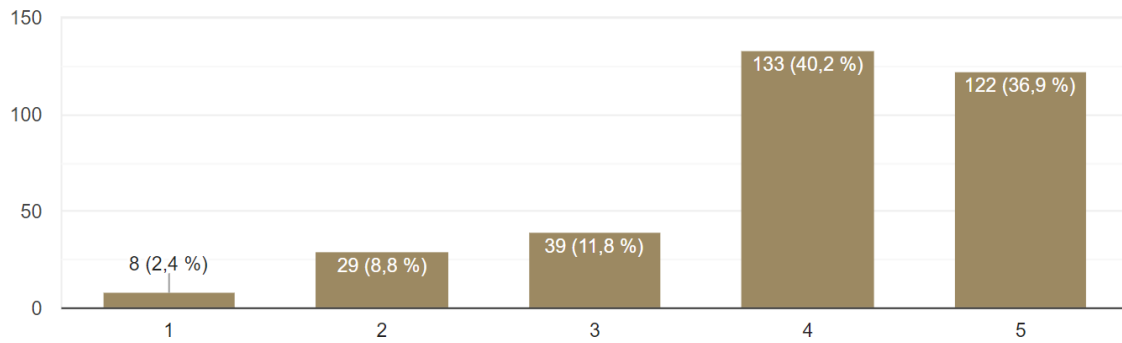
Figure 3. Respondents' knowledge of brand activism prior to the study

I know what woke washing is.

331 vastausta
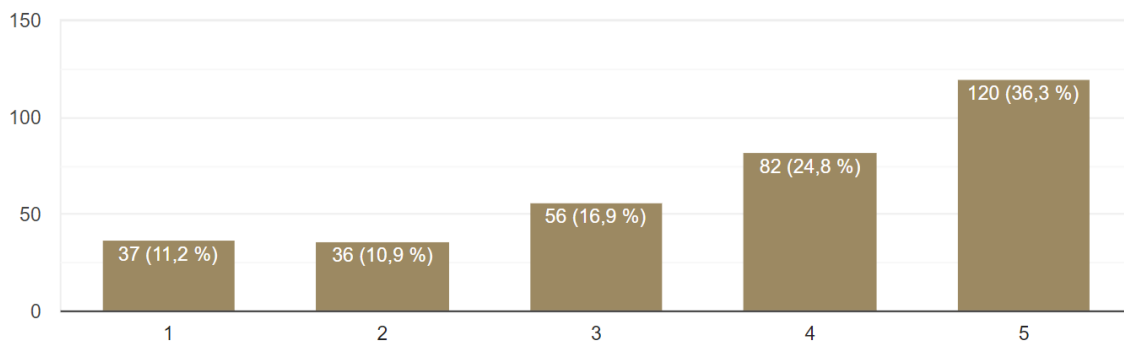
Figure 4. Respondents' knowledge of woke washing prior to the study

4.2 Mean values and Standard Deviation

Table 2. presents an overview of each variable's mean value alongside the standard deviation. The observed variables for each latent variable used to calculate the figures in this table are those with accepted values for Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and AVE. Variable PBC2 (see Appendix A. for the questionnaire) was not included due to an incredibly low factor loading of 0.012, whereas Awang (2014) states that every factor loading for every item should be above 0.6 for a more accurate representation of the research.

As previously mentioned, when answering the questionnaire respondents were given the chance to answer each question on a Likert scale of 1-5, 1 representing 'strongly disagree' and 5 representing 'strongly agree'. A value of 3 represents 'Neither agree nor disagree', indicating to the respondents indifference to the question or their hesitation in choosing an opinion. As seen from table (2) the variable of *Perceived Behavioural control* had the highest

mean value (3.385) signifying that the respondents agreed with most of the questions asked in order to quantify this variable. The variable with the lowest mean value was *Trust* (1.986) meaning that most of the respondents disagreed with the questions used to measure the variable of *Trust*. Further, the remaining mean values for the outstanding variables were all above 3, indicating to most respondents either not having an opinion or an answer, or slightly agreeing with the questions.

The standard deviation states the average amount of variability found in the data. Meaning, how far some data scores deviate or spread from the mean (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015). Analysing the standard deviation can tell us how similarly respondents answered to the given statements for each variable. Higher standard deviation values indicate more spread in the answers, whereas a smaller standard deviation value means that the respondents were more in unison regarding their answers. *Subjective Norms* was the variable with the highest standard deviation (3.225), implying that respondents had a high dispersity in their answers, in other words the answers to questions regarding this variable were more inconsistent and spread out. The variable with the lowest standard deviation was *Trust* (0.965), indicating that respondents had a high level of agreement in their answers.

Overall, the variable of *Trust* represented the respondents most accurately. With a low standard deviation of (0.965) and a mean of (1.986), the majority of respondents answered the same for the questions regarding the variable of *Trust*.

Table 2. Mean values and Standard Deviation

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Trust	1.986	0.965
Attitude	3.07	1.189
Subjective Norms	3.02	3.225
Perceived Behavioural Control	3.385	2.149
Purchase Intention	3.106	1.112

4.3 Confirmatory factor analysis

The confirmatory factor analysis as stated earlier, aims to confirm theoretical predictions through hypothesis testing (Burns & Burns, 2008). Table (3) shows results from the confirmatory factor analysis for our study, the data collected overall proved to be quite reliable and a good fit for our questionnaire model.

Both the validity and reliability were examined and analysed through Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability and AVE. A value higher than 0.90 indicates excellent reliability for Cronbach's Alpha, while a value of 0.80-0.89 is considered good and 0.70-0.79 is acceptable. The majority of our latent variables and their associated items of measure, all expressed values of over 0.70, except for perceived behavioural control which measured at 0.626 for Cronbach's Alpha. Values between 0.60-0.69 are considered as questionable but can still be utilised for research.

Composite reliability is much like Cronbach's Alpha, it measures the overall consistency in scale items (Netemeyer, 2003), in other words it measures the general reliability of items. According to Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2016) the minimum composite reliability value in the PLS-SEM analysis should exceed 0.70. Looking at all of the measured variables, each one is above 0.70, *Perceived Behavioural Control* had the lowest composite reliability at 0.755, while *Purchase Intention* had the highest value at 0.945. Overall the composite reliability for these variables was high, which is indicative of a high level of reliability.

AVE stands for average variance extracted, and it is the measure of the amount of variance that has been extracted from a construct. In other words, AVE can be explained along the lines of how well do the measured factors converge, and how well do they represent the concept that is being analysed. AVE can vary from 0 to 1, however, it is not recommended to study variables that have an average variance of lower than 0.50. The majority of the variables presented in table (3) are above 0.70, which is a good value for variance, despite this there are 2 variables which have lower AVE values. Variable *Perceived Behavioural Control* has a value of 0.625 for AVE, which is acceptable, however the latent variable *Trust* has a value of 0.497, below the recommended amount of 0.50. We decided to keep some of the measured variables for this construct because the value was extremely close to 0.50, and as we found from past research, it was acceptable to use AVE values above 0.40 but not recommended.

Throughout our analysis, we had discovered 1 factor with an inferior loading, meaning that we had to remove this factor from our study. This variable contributed to the measurement of perceived behavioural control (PBC2), however, it's factor loading was 0.012, which was exceedingly below the recommended and desired factor loading value of 0.70.

Table 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Construct	CFA loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Knowledge I know what brand activism is I know what woke washing is.	0.916 0.886	0.771	0.897	0.813
Trust I believe that woke washing is done for social change rather than monetary gain. (Mayer, 1995) I find these advertisements to be acceptable. (Mayer, 1995) Woke washing is an honest form of activism. (Chaudhuri, 2001) I trust that the claims and promises brands make are true. (Alam, 2010) I feel comfortable seeing woke washing advertisements.	0.644 0.691 0.718 0.760 0.707	0.779	0.831	0.497
Attitude For me, purchasing from activist brands is a good idea. (Wang, 2013) I believe that purchasing from activist brands contributes to making social change. (McLennan, 2014)	0.913 0.901	0.785	0.903	0.823
Subjective Norms My family and friends think it's a good idea if I purchase from activist brands. Supporting "activist brands" is the right thing to do. Purchasing from brand activists sets a good example.	0.676 0.925 0.931	0.811	0.887	0.727
Perceived Behavioural Control For me, purchasing from activist brands is easy. (Conner, 1999) I am confident that I have the resources and ability to purchase from activist brands. (Bansal, 2002)	0.998 0.513	0.625	0.755	0.629

Purchase Intention		0.913	0.945	0.852
I intend to purchase from activist brands. (Ajzen, 2006)	0.936			
I intend to purchase from activist brands in the near future. (Wang, 2013)	0.937			
I will encourage my friends and family to purchase from activist brands. (Wang, 2013)	0.895			

4.4 Analysis of reflective measurement models

Reflective models assume that causality flows throughout the constructs to the indicators, in other words it's an analysis to see how much of an effect do indicators have on a latent variable. As discussed earlier, the validity and reliability of our constructs and their indicators, was already measured through Composite reliability, Cronbach's Alpha and AVE. Complete results of reliability and validity can be seen in table (3).

Further, Fornell-Larcker Criterion was used to analyse the discriminant validity. Discriminant validity refers to the extent in which the construct is actually differing from one another empirically. It also measures the degree of differences between the overlapping constructs (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, 2016). There are two ways in which discriminant validity can be measured. Table (4) shows Fornell-Larcker Criterion, which illustrates the square roots of AVE in **bold.** Each value is higher than its correlated value (the value represented underneath). This therefore indicates a discriminant validity of all the constructs involved in the model.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Attitude	Knowledge	Perceived Behavioural Control	Purchase Intention	Subjective norms	Trust
Attitude	**0.907**					
Knowledge	-0.126	**0.902**				
Perceived Behavioural Control	0.207	0.033	**0.793**			
Purchase intention	0.732	0.032	0.287	**0.923**		

| Subjective norms | 0.795 | -0.104 | 0.267 | 0.700 | **0.852** | |
| Trust | 0.445 | -0.240 | 0.173 | 0.266 | 0.382 | **0.705** |

Another way of measuring discriminant validity is through HTMT, Heterotrait-monotrait, which is the ratio of correlation. Henseler (2015) suggests HTMT as a modern tool for analysing discriminant validity of constructs involved in measurement models. Table (5) shows the HTMT values for our model. As a rule of thumb, a HTMT value should not exceed 0.85, otherwise it indicates a potential problem of discriminant validity (Hair et al. 2017). As seen on the table, there are 2 values which exceed the recommended 0.85 value, in short this means that these 2 constructs are overlapping and potentially measuring the same thing.

Table 5. HTMT Values

	Attitude	Knowledge	Perceived Behaviour	Purchase Intention	Subjective Norms	Trust
Attitude						
Knowledge	0.162					
Perceived Behaviour	0.233	0.057				
Purchase Intention	**0.863**	0.038	0.261			
Subjective norms	**0.970**	0.121	0.283	0.782		
Trust	0.464	0.285	0.152	0.225	0.363	

The cross loading criterion states that subjective independence can help reduce the presence of multicollinearity amongst the latent variables denoting that the average variance extracted (AVE) of a latent variable should be higher than the squared correlations between the latent variable and all the other variables (Chin, 2010, Chin, 1998, Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Each of the indicators used to measure the model should have a higher loading in their own respective underlying latent construct. Table (6) illustrates the cross loadings of all the variables found in our model, excluding PBC2, as stated earlier the loading of this variable was significantly lower than the suggested value of 0.70. Each presented variable should be higher in value in its own latent construct, for example A1 and A2 are highest in *Attitude*

(0.913, 0.901). All of the variables in their respective latent constructs are highlighted in **bold.** Following this, we can see that all the represented variables have a higher loading on their respective constructs. Therefore, the findings from this table satisfy the cross loading criterion, providing satisfactory evidence for the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Table 6. Cross Loadings

	ATTITUDE	TRUST	PBC	PI	SN	K
A1	**0.913**	0.385	0.205	0.703	0.695	-0.091
A2	**0.901**	0.423	0.170	0.622	0.749	-0.139
T1	0.208	**0.644**	0.025	0.122	0.147	-0.195
T2	0.207	**0.691**	0.130	0.086	0.186	-0.146
T3	0.160	**0.718**	0.062	0.037	0.142	-0.139
T4	0.503	**0.760**	0.195	0.368	0.466	-0.207
T5	0.241	**0.707**	0.095	0.079	0.144	-0.121
PBC1	0.219	0.178	**0.998**	0.296	0.278	0.032
PBC3	-0.059	0.020	**0.513**	0.019	-0.016	0.034
PI1	0.700	0.274	0.290	**0.936**	0.646	0.024
PI2	0.655	0.245	0.276	**0.937**	0.629	0.052
PI3	0.669	0.218	0.228	**0.895**	0.662	0.012
SN1	0.453	0.203	0.249	0.359	**0.676**	-0.030
SN2	0.758	0.357	0.219	0.678	**0.925**	-0.117
SN3	0.763	0.380	0.239	0.682	**0.931**	-0.098
WW	-0.100	-0.200	0.044	0.025	-0.088	**0.886**
BA	-0.125	-0.231	0.018	0.032	-0.099	**0.916**

4.5 PLS-SEM Analysis

This section examines the results of the structural equation model, presenting the effect of woke washing knowledge to consumer trust, and further the indirect effect of consumer trust to purchase intention, through the three Theory of Planned Behaviour dimensions. The following subsections will delve into the path coefficients of the model, after which the direct and indirect effects of the model will be evaluated. Furthermore, the hypotheses formed in chapter 2.3 will be either accepted or rejected based on these values.

4.5.1 Path Coefficients

The strength of the relationships between variables can be measured with the PLS algorithm. These measures obtained are called path coefficients, demonstrating the relative statistical importance of the variables (Wong, 2013). As explained by Wong (2013), values over 0.1 are statistically significant. As demonstrated in Figure 5., all relationships within our conceptual framework are significant, which in turn indicates that all the four hypotheses are supported.

To begin with, knowledge has a strong negative effect on trust (B = -0.240), meaning that knowledge of woke washing decreases consumer trust towards activist brands. Further, trust is the strongest predictor of attitude (B = 0.445), followed by subjective norms (B = 0.382) and perceived behavioural control (B = 0.173). The model further suggests that attitude has the strongest effect on purchase intention (B = 0.479), followed by subjective norms (B = 0.289) and perceived behavioural control (B = 0.111).
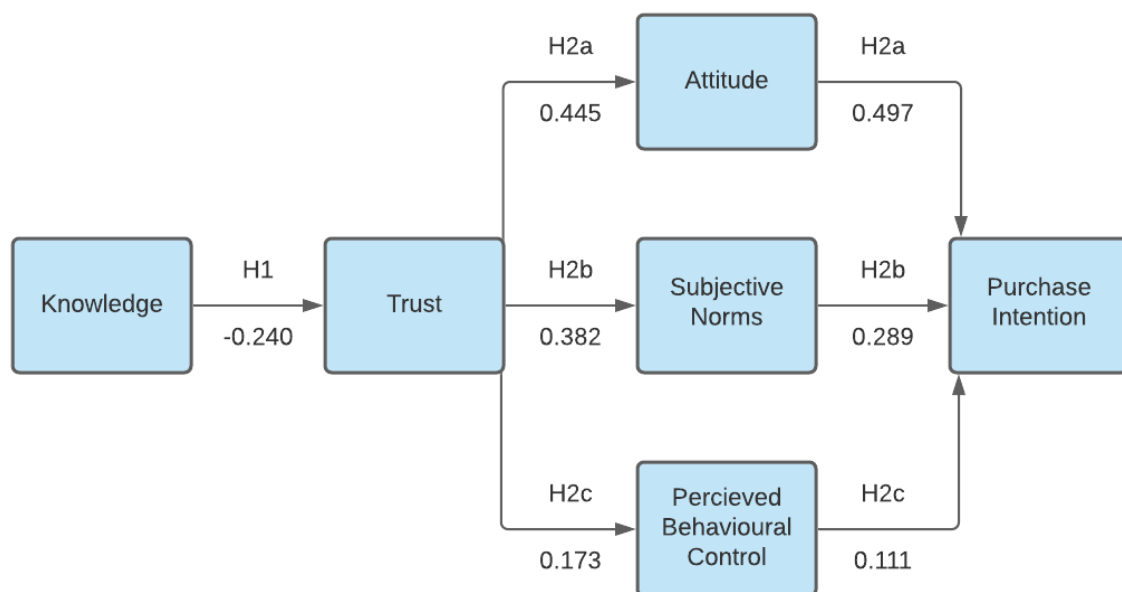

Figure 5. Path coefficients of the proposed model

4.5.2 Direct effects

The proposed model suggested that through attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, trust has a significant effect on purchase intention. According to Chin (1998), bootstrapping is used to determine statistical significance in PLS-SEM, as it is considered a nonparametric technique. As suggested by Hair et al. (2016), the bootstrapping was run with 5000 samples. Further, statistically insignificant confidence interval of an indicator weight includes a zero, meaning it must be removed (Hair et al. 2019). As mentioned previously, PBC2 indicator has been removed from the study, thus there were no further indicators to be omitted.

The proposed first hypothesis (H1) stated that knowledge of woke washing has negative effects on trust on activist brands. The results, as demonstrated in Table 7 below, indicate that there is a significant direct relationship between these two variables (t=4.072; p<0.001). Simply put, knowledge of woke washing has an effect on consumer trust towards activist brands.

Table 7. Direct Effects

	T-statistics	P-value	Accepted
Knowledge → Trust	4.072	<0.001	Yes.

4.5.3 Mediating effects

A mediating effect occurs, if a construct is impacted indirectly, through what is referred to as a mediating variable. Here, the main mediating variables are attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, through which trust affects purchase intention. As the three TPB factors' significance to purchase intention has been established in previous research, there is no need to consider those direct effects in this paper.

According to Hair et al. (2016), the total effect of a mediation can be calculated by indirect effect plus direct effect. In hypothesis H2a-c, it was proposed that there is a significant indirect relationship between trust and purchase intention, via attitude (H2a), subjective norms (H2b) and perceived behavioural control (H2c). Looking at the indirect effects one by one, it can be discovered that trust to purchase intention via attitude is significant (t= 6.021 p<0.001), meaning that H2a can be accepted. Furthermore, the indirect effect of trust to purchase intention is also mediated by subjective norms (t= 3.955 p<0.001) and perceived behavioural control (t= 2.106 p=0.035). Thus, H2b and H2c can also be accepted.

Table 8. Mediating Effects

	T-statistics	P-value	Accepted
Trust → Attitude → Purchase Intention	6.021	<0.001	Yes.
Trust → Subjective Norms → Purchase Intention	3.955	<0.001	Yes.
Trust → PBC → Purchase Intention	2.106	0.035	Yes.

As demonstrated in table 9 below, all of the four suggested hypotheses were accepted.

Table 9. Hypotheses accepted

Hypothesis	Accepted/ Rejected
H1; *Knowledge of woke washing has negative effects on trust for activist brands.*	Accepted
H2a; *There is an indirect relationship between trust and purchase intention for activist brands, via attitude towards activist brands.*	Accepted
H2b; *There is an indirect relationship between trust and purchase intention for activist brands, via subjective norms towards activist brands.*	Accepted
H2c; *There is an indirect relationship between trust and purchase intention for activist brands, via perceived behavioural control towards activist brands.*	Accepted

In addition to the hypotheses, further findings indicate that both attitude and subjective norms are mediating the relationship from knowledge to purchase intention. T-statistics for attitude is 3.608 and p-value is less than 0.001. For subjective norms, the t-statistics is 2.909 and p-value is 0.004. However, according to the statistical tests, perceived behavioural control does not mediate the relationship between knowledge and purchase intention via trust. With t-statistics of 1.896 and p-value of 0.058, the relationship is not significant.

Table 10. Total Effects

	T-statistics	P-value
Knowledge → Trust → Attitude → Purchase Intention	3.608	<0.001
Knowledge → Trust → SN → Purchase Intention	2.909	0.004
Knowledge → Trust → PCB → Purchase Intention	1.896	0.058

5. Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and discuss the results introduced in the previous chapter. The empirical findings are reflected on the initial research purpose introduced in chapter X, and then connected to the theory presented in the literature review. The overall objective of this section is to expand on previous results and present a clear connection between our findings and the aim of the thesis. Namely, our goal is to interpret the data collected and analyse whether it is valid to answer both research questions; does knowledge of woke washing and brand activism impact consumer trust and how does consumer intention to purchase alter through the TPB.

5.1 Main Relationships

The purpose of this study was to examine to what extent the knowledge of woke washing impacts consumer trust towards activist brands, and further investigate whether consumer intention to purchase from the activist brands is altered. Our expected outcome was that there is a significant effect from knowledge to trust, and significant indirect effects from trust to purchase intention, via TPB.

Firstly, the relationship between *Knowledge* and *Trust* was examined, followed by the relationship between trust and purchase intention through the mediating variables of the dimensions of TPB. Subsequent analysis of the dimensions of TPB shows that each mediating variable (*Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control*) had an effect on the relationship between variables. The most important finding of the study is that all of these relationships had a significant result, supporting our proposed hypotheses.

5.2 The Relationship between Knowledge and Trust

This section is dedicated to examining the findings discovered between the independent variables of *Knowledge* and *Trust*. After presenting every participant with the necessary knowledge to understand the difference between woke washing and brand activism, their initial level of trust was measured. The findings support the first research question, leading us to a discovery of significance between *Knowledge* and *Trust*. Findings for H1 indicate that knowledge of woke washing has a significant effect on trust for activist brands. As noted by Vredenburg et al. (2020), positive impact of brand activism is threatened by woke washing, if it leads to decreased consumer trust towards activism. Our study supports their findings, indicating that knowledge of woke washing impacts consumer trust for activist brands negatively. Therefore, woke washing creates a risk to brand advocacy. Consumer knowledge of inauthentic activism can diminish their trust towards genuine activism campaigns, which may have negative implications for the brand equity and increase unwanted, damaging brand associations (Vredenburg et al. 2020). Thus, albeit previous research claim that successful

brand activism leads to long-term competitive advantage (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill, 2006; Mandfredi-Sanchez, 2019; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Weinzimmer & Esken, 2016), it is possible that consumer awareness of woke washing negatively impacts activist companies in general.

Previous research found that consumer knowledge consisted of two components; familiarity and expertise (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). During our assessment of consumer knowledge about the difference between woke washing and brand activism, the majority were familiar with the concepts and had prior knowledge. However, the definition of expertise states that a person has expert skills in a specific field, whereas our questionnaire did not inquire about participants' skills in particular. Therefore, we are unable to say whether they have expertise or not in brand activism. Nevertheless, there are multiple ways of analysing consumer knowledge. Brucks (1985) viewed consumer knowledge from three perspectives: prior experience, objective and subjective knowledge where objective knowledge is what is actually known and subjective knowledge is "what individuals perceive they know, also indicated as perceived or self-rated knowledge" (Aertsens, Mondelaers, Verbeke, Buysse & Huylenbroeck, 2011, p. 1356). Although our survey did not delve into the understandings of how each participant knew the difference of both concepts, the results we received acted as justification for their knowledge being attained either from prior experience of stumbling upon woke washing and brand activism, or it was objective or subjective knowledge. Therefore, agreeing with Bruck's (1985) view of consumer knowledge.

Further, the concept of knowledge was linked with consumer trust. In this instance the model of trust (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995) was used as a baseline for developing the measurable variables which would then account for the overall concept and latent variable of trust. The model of trust consists of 3 dimensions, including; ability, benevolence, and integrity. These components of trustworthiness, along with a person's dispositional propensity to trust, theoretically predict the level of trust a trustor has in a trustee (Fricker, Ronald D. Jr., 2013). Although these components were strictly followed, the research still found that the measured variables used for trust did not fully represent the latent variable of trust, which indicated a rather low level of validity, despite this, if the values of the variables are above the recommended amount they are considered as acceptable. The AVE for trust was discovered to be below the standard minimum value. Nevertheless, since all the measurable variables and Cronbach's alpha along with the composite reliability were above the recommended amount, the variables for the measurement of trust were kept and not altered. This proves that the 3 components of trust illustrated by Mayer (1995) are valid.

5.3 The Relationship between Trust and Purchase Intention through TPB

There is a significant positive indirect relationship between *trust* and *purchase intention* via each of the mediating variables; attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. These findings not only support findings from Lin and Lu (2010), but also answer our research question, proving that as expected, changes in consumer trust will affect the purchase intentions of the consumer.

The findings detected that attitude has a mediating effect on the relationship between consumer trust for activist brands and purchase intention from activist brands. This indicates that lower trust towards activist brands increases negative attitude towards them, which further lowers the consumer's intention to purchase from activist brands. These results support the findings of past studies, suggesting that trust has a significant impact on attitude (Amaro & Duarte, 2016; Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014). Moreover, as Hayden (2013) claimed, higher trust towards a brand feeds the assumption that purchasing from the brand is beneficial and contributes to good, whereas lowered trust results in the opposite outcome. It seems like the consumers aware of woke washing no longer trust activist campaigns to promote social change.

Further, subjective norms were detected to mediate the relationship between consumer trust and purchase intention. Our hypothesis was based on previous studies, in particular Lobb et al. (2007) statement of subjective norms being affected by trust. As expected, the less trust consumers feel towards activist brands, the less subjective norms influence the consumers. This, consequently, leads to decreased purchase intention towards brand activist products and services. As claimed by Han and Stoel (2015), consumers tend to pay attention to socially typical behaviour and our study findings support this claim. Moreover, our results point out that consumers' purchase intention towards activist brands increase if their trust towards those brands are high. However, over half of the respondents reported neutral views about their family and friends' perceptions about activist brands, demonstrating lack of social support for purchasing from activist brands. Similar results could be noted for the respondents' own motivation towards encouraging their friends and family to purchase from activist brands.

The hypothesis H2c was built on the indication from Wu and Chen's (2005) findings about the correlation between consumer trust and perceived behavioural control. Consequently, as predicted, perceived behavioural control also mediates the relationship between trust and purchase intention. A consumer that has a low level of trust towards activist brands, will have a decreased confidence in their own ability to purchase from these brands. This might mean that the consumer believes not to have enough resources, such as money or time to analyse and the amount of information about available options may be limited. Furthermore, the recognisability of activist brands may be difficult and time-consuming, as woke washing brands may externally seem exactly alike. The perceived low level of convenience leads the consumers to choose the brand that seems satisfactory (i.e. not partaking in any activism) in an approach called satisficing (Bartol, 2011). Simply put, consumers may face the complexity

of not knowing which companies are genuine in their communications, and therefore avoid purchasing from activist brands in general.

Albeit our hypotheses can be accepted, the findings further reveal that knowledge has a significant indirect effect on purchase intention. The mediating variables in this relationship are trust, as well as attitude and subjective norms. However, it is noteworthy to mention that perceived behavioural control is not mediating the relationship between knowledge and purchase intention. This implies that although knowledge of woke washing decreases trust on activist brands and consequently leads to lower intention to purchase from the said firms, there is no proof that a person's perception of their ability to succeed in the task would have an impact in the process. This could be because consumers' ability to perform a task is more dependent on their other resources and opportunities available (i.e. time, money), than knowledge of woke washing. Consequently, whether the consumer is aware of woke washing or not, their perception of their ability to purchase from activist brands remains the same. Additionally, according to Ajzen (1991), perceived behavioural control may be unrealistic after change of available resources or after new elements have entered the situation. Simply put, after alteration in the respondents' knowledge of woke washing, the measure of perceived behavioural control may add little to accuracy of the prediction of purchase intention.

6. Conclusion

This last chapter will conclude with the main insights of this paper, beginning with the main theoretical contributions to the academic community, followed by the practical implications beneficial for marketers. Lastly, the study will be wrapped up with discussion about the study limitations and recommendations for future research.

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

The aim of this study was to analyse an unexplored sphere of marketing. Following the recent trend of activism in marketing, we decided to study the impact of firms that are solely taking part in social movements for the profits. The world of brand activism has been prevalent for a number of years, however, woke washing is a rather new idea which has little to no study about it. Throughout our analysis of woke washing and brand activism we utilised the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), using the dimensions of attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control as mediating variables between trust and purchase intention. We also used the theory of Trust (Mayer, 1995) as a foundation for the variables which were responsible for the measurement of the latent variable *trust*. However, throughout our preparations for the study, we were unable to discover a single theory which could be responsible for the whole analysis. This research makes three primary contributions to these streams of literature.

Firstly, while the theoretical constructs used in this study have been used in prior research, the constructs have not been combined previously to examine their relationships. Consequently, we integrated TPB with knowledge and trust research, to propose an original conceptual framework to examine knowledge's impact to purchase intention via trust. For each of the TPB variables, we consistently found that changes in trust positively impact purchase intention.

Secondly, unlike past research from Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020), which emphasized consumer perceptions of authentic brand activism, this study applies the impact of inauthentic brand activism to consumer views on authentic brand activism. We argued that knowledge of inauthentic brand activism, specifically woke washing, impacts consumer trust on activist brands. The results proved this to be true, with a negative correlation between the two constructs. Perhaps this may be attributable to our target respondents' lack of interest or time towards separating the wheat from the chaff.

Thirdly, previous studies suggest that brand activism strategies become less effective, if consumer trust towards activism campaigns decrease (Vredenburg et al. 2020). This study

confirms the claim, proving that knowledge of woke washing diminishes consumer trust towards activist brands.

Nevertheless, we contribute to brand activism literature by showing that consumer knowledge of woke washing has a significant negative impact on consumer trust, and in consequence risks to decrease consumers' purchase intention towards activist brands.

6.2 Practical Implications

In addition to the theoretical contributions presented above, this study further offers insights for brand managers and marketing practitioners that aim to implement activism in the brand communications. Brands may view activism as an opportunity to get closer to consumers by showing support for sociopolitical issues. This study contributes with a developed understanding of risks of woke washing to companies that are not yet engaging in it, and the ones that partake in authentic brand activism. As discussed in literature review, studies have revealed that the majority of marketing leaders' are concerned with activism's negative impacts on retaining new customers (Moorman, 2020), suggesting that there is need for further studies of the possible impacts of brand activism. Consequently, our study established an understanding of how inauthentic brand activism affects consumers' purchase intention. We consistently found that brand activism strategies come with a new risk that is skeptical consumers, whose understanding of woke washing reduces their trust towards activist campaigning. These findings guide managers to rethink whether to speak out on divisive socio political issues in the future, based on consumer knowledge about woke washing activities. As shown, the level of consumers' woke washing knowledge is relatively high, suggesting that a reasonably high amount of consumer trust and further purchase intention is affected by these practices.

Overall, when executed correctly, brand activism leads to long-term competitive advantage (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill, 2006; Mandfredi-Sanchez, 2019; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Weinzimmer & Esken, 2016). If companies decide to become involved in activism, it is advisable for managers to consider the risks of woke washing even when engaging in authentic brand activism. Therefore, our suggestion is that companies should build and embrace a long-term activism strategy aligned with their core values, and consistently take on action to contribute to social change. This way, the consumers are able to use their own judgement to decide whether or not to trust a specific activist brand, rather than depend on their existing knowledge of woke washing activities.

6.3 Limitations and Future Recommendations

Like all research, there are a number of limitations to this study. To begin with, this study is based on the assumption of Theory of Planned Behaviour, suggesting that in-depth contemplation and understanding predict the intended behaviour. Thus, it excludes the probability of irrational decision making and impulse buying. The study further does not rule

out respondents that are not interested in the sociopolitical environment. Additionally, possibility for socially desirable responses exist, meaning that the respondents may have overreported their views towards brand activism (i.e. thinking there is a "correct" answer). Furthermore, the theory itself is limited to 3 spheres of representation (Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural control), it could be argued that in order to obtain better results with less bias, the Extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (ETPB) could be used. The extended version consists of 7 variables, including the 3 original variables alongside; perceived usefulness, curiosity, behavioural intention and behaviour (Tommasetti, Singer, Troisi & Maione, 2018). There could be multiple factors influencing purchase intention, therefore by utilising a framework that has a broader scope it could be possible to obtain more accurate answers, giving the participants more options and variability when answering questions.

Although our study sample is not representative to generalise the results to the whole world population, it can be noted that the observed knowledge of both brand activism and woke washing is relatively high. However, this may be due to the fact that the majority of the respondents had completed education on bachelor level or higher, and most participants were of younger age. Additionally, the restrictions of time and cost create limitations for this study. The online questionnaires conducted were acquired with a non-probability sampling technique, which leaves space for sampling errors. Moreover, the study has been conducted only at one specific point in time, excluding any possibility for behavioural intention changes over time

Furthermore, this survey gathered data from 331 participants from anywhere in the world through online mediums. One would argue that such statistics are a great show of generalisability, however, by not by not having a specific representative sample, the data is scoped. For example, the distribution between genders was uneven, 85.5% of respondents were women, meaning that the data collected was skewed and that the data collected might not be the most accurate representation of the general public. Moreover, although a data collection of 331 respondents was a valid number, a higher response rate could have provided stronger significance levels. Overall, if specific samples were taken, from particular countries and fixed demographics, a more accurate and significant result could have been collected.

Lastly, as mentioned above, if there was a specific sample or representative sample, data could be more representative and significant. Instead throughout our study we utilised a convenience sampling method, which was the most accessible type of sampling for our thesis. Limitations of convenience sampling include; the inability to generalise the results to the general public, the possibility of under or over representation of data and potentially biased results. Therefore, for future research we could recommend using a non-probability sample method, which could result in higher validity, reliability and significance overall.

To conclude, this study has provided valuable information that can serve as the foundation of further research on inauthentic brand activism. As findings from Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) indicated, consumers are more likely to support a brand, which has moral foundations aligned with their own. As our study did not include this factor of consumer-brand agreement

within the study, a future suggestion is to examine whether it would alter the effect on consumer trust. Further, woke washing does not limit to companies, yet individuals can also engage in inauthentic activism. It could be thought-provoking to conduct a similar study in regards to activist communications of the firm leaders. This phenomenon, called CEO activism, is also an emergent point of interest for brand activism literature. Thus, there is still a demand for more studies considering the concept of CEO activism. Moreover, according to Sen, Bhattacharya and Korschun (2006), consumers find companies with strong CSR initiatives of interest in various ways. In addition to increased purchase intention, consumers tend to invest in as well as seek employment within these companies. For future studies, it could be of interest to further study consumer intentions to partake in these stakeholder behaviours in authentic activist companies as well as companies that engage in inauthentic brand activism.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Questionnaire

Brand Activism Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study!

We are Anastasia Kropinova and Alexandra Voinow, two masters students from Lund University School of Economics and Management. For our International Marketing and Brand Management thesis, we are examining brand activism and would appreciate your responses to the next few questions.

The questionnaire takes approximately 6 minutes to complete, all responses are anonymous and confidential. Please read the questions carefully before answering.

*Pakollinen

What is your gender? *

◯ Female

◯ Male

◯ Other

◯ Prefer not to say

Select your age category. *

- ◯ 18-24
- ◯ 25-34
- ◯ 35-44
- ◯ 45-54
- ◯ 55-64
- ◯ 65+

Which country do you live in? *

Oma vastauksesi

What is the highest level of education that you have completed? *

- ◯ Mandatory
- ◯ High School or equivalent
- ◯ Bachelor level
- ◯ Master level or higher

Do you consent to us using your responses for research purposes? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Seuraava

Personal Knowledge

I know what brand activism is. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I know what woke washing is. *

|	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Takaisin   Seuraava

Brand Activism Example

Brand activism refers to the efforts which a company makes in order to promote, impede and direct social movements, whether they are political, environmental, social or economic. Brand activism is about bringing 'justice' to an issue.
Below is an example of a successful brand activist campaign.

"Buy a Lady a Drink" 2015 campaign by Stella Artois
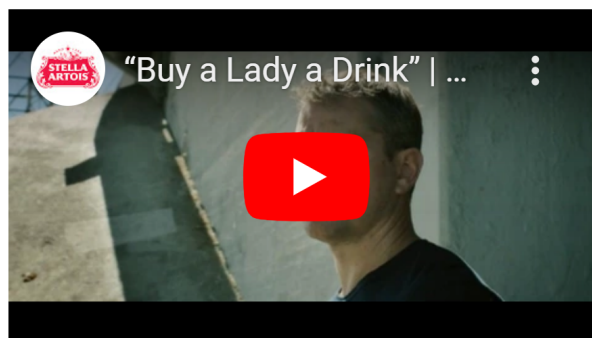
Description
In this campaign, Stella both raised awareness and resources for a country in need. The "Buy a Lady a Drink" brought attention to the global water crisis while also using the campaign as an initiative to bring fresh water to women and their families in developing countries. This is a great example of brand activism because it is not controversial, it brings awareness to a social issue as well as resonating and engaging with many demographics.

Takaisin   Seuraava

Stella Artois - "Buy a lady a drink" 2015
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jerKL6qCpk

#MeToo by Gillette - Woke Washing
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koPmuEyP3a0

Woke Washing Example

Woke washing refers to a company advocating for a marginalised cause, but simultaneously causing harm to vulnerable individuals or communities which are at risk. Furthermore, marketing for purposes that do not align with the company core values, can be considered woke washing. Oftentimes the real aim of these companies is to join a movement to increase profits.

'#MeToo' 2019 campaign by Gillette

Description

With the intention to support the #MeToo movement, Gillette released a campaign featuring young boys and men alongside the slogan "The Best a Man Can Get". However, the campaign faced intense backlash surrounding the portrayal of 'toxic masculinity' in the short film. Criticism of the campaign ranged from 'this is female propaganda' to 'Gillette does not want to be in the business of masculine men'. The more into the film you get, the further it steers from the #MeToo movement which advocates for females who survived sexual assault, rather the short film becomes focused on men and masculinity. Ultimately proving to be a great example of woke washing.

I now know the difference between brand activism and woke washing. *

○ Yes

○ No

Takaisin   Seuraava

66

Statements about Woke washing and Brand Activism

I believe that woke washing is done for social change rather than monetary gain. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I find woke washing advertisements to be acceptable. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Woke washing is an honest form of activism. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I trust that the claims and promises brand activists make are true. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I feel very comfortable seeing woke washing advertisements. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

For me, purchasing from activist brands is a good idea. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I believe that purchasing from activist brands contributes to making social change. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

My family and friends think it's good if I purchase from activist brands. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Supporting activist brands is "the right thing to do". *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Purchasing from brand activists sets a good example. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

For me, purchasing from activist brands is easy. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Whether I purchase from activist brands or not is completely up to me. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I am confident that I have the resources and ability to purchase from activist brands. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

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Purchase Intention

I intend to purchase from activist brands. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I intend to purchase from activist brands in the near future. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I will encourage my friends and family to purchase from activist brands. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

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