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STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT

MASTER PAPERS

Study the social context initiating brand activism and explore the significant components of an effective brand activism as well as its pitfalls.

By Quang Nguyen and David

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Heads of master course Strategic Brand Management (BUSN21), part of master program International Marketing and Brand Management.
Lund School of Economics and Management

Study the social context initiating brand activism and explore the significant components of an effective brand activism as well as its pitfalls.

By: Quang Nguyen, David Farmakidis

Abstract

Purpose: Brands are entering a time where brand activism and political activism in which they state their beliefs affect consumer purchasing decisions instead of having, as opposed to traditional brand product marketing. Brands are more pressured to take a stand on any social issue and voice they're donating to matter. The purpose of this paper is to examine the social context initiating such activism and explore the significant components of an effective brand activism as well as its pitfalls.

Method: This paper adopts a qualitative research method that first focus on a literature revue of the current studies, which will be used to define the important concepts surrounding brand activism. Two case studies are analyzed through to collected consumer reactions, using those empirical data and insights to create to new contribution the existing literature.

Findings: This research found and analyze the shift in consumers behaviors towards a more value driven and social engagement with the brand. It demonstrate the repercussion of a misalignment between the messaging communicated by the brand and their actual practice.

Keywords: Brand Activism, political activism, cause-related marketing, woke-washing

Paper type: Research paper

I Introduction

History has witnessed various social conflicts in the past, such as the women's suffrage movement to demand the right to vote for women or the African-American civil rights movement to gain equality between the Black and the White. With the growth of technology, communication to the public spreads out rapidly. Hence, people no longer keep opinions for themselves but are more likely to judge various critical issues. Freedom of speech has never had this substantial impact on the current social-political landscape in history. People

no longer ignore or stay silent on any controversial topic like racism, sexism, or laborism. As Elie Wiesel has said, " We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented; the opposite of love is not hate; it is indifferent. Information on the internet is constantly exposed to individuals, which makes people more believe-driven. Individuals start to pay more attention to companies and brands in a society with their frame of thought and motives. Brands that have been in the market for a long time start to face resistance from the customers due to

their awareness of social and political issues. They also face fierce competition with brands whose purpose is not to provide the best product but also to make the world a better place. With these, brands have to react and adjust strategies to show their responsibility on the controversial issues in order to build brand loyalty and trust between brand and customers. When price and quality's similarity drives the market more competitive, many brands change their game toward the so-called social-political advertising strategy. The social-political advertising strategy is a strategy in which brands state their beliefs and opinions that matter the most to the customers, such as woman empowerment, racial discrimination, climate change, and many more social issues through advertising and donating to charities. However, brands have to be careful to speak out their opinions since it could backfire and negatively affect their image. Brands have to acknowledge that consumers are more sophisticated and sensitive than before. The tenet of advertising to sell products and make a profit is no longer applied to this case. Brands have to connect with consumers emotionally and intellectually to satisfy customers' needs and wants.

Literature review

Brand activism

Historically, various brands advertised their products or services through their performance characteristic. "Our car is eco-friendly." "Our car is the safest car in the market, or the fastest one or the most durable in the industry." Positioning was the critical factor of success in brand marketing. However, brands understand positioning is not sufficient in a highly competitive

industry. For example, the target customers are the millennials- one of the most significant demographic groups nowadays. Millennials have high expectations for brands since they live in an era in which the world faces with urgent problems like racism, climate change, global warming. For this reason, millennials tend to be more picky or hard to please. They would like to see various brands, especially their favorite brand, to show concern for the community they serve. Multiple companies practice brand activism to express brand engagement and awareness of the community.

Through literature, brand activism has been defined by two known classifications systems. The first one is based on the aspect in which the brand is either portrayed itself as progressive or regressive. Brand activism does not have to be progressive. It could be regressive as well. Progressive brand activism means the brand is taking a stand for a specific issue and looking for positive change. And regressive brand activism means the brand actively pursues issues that hurt the common good (Kotler & Sarkar, 2021). Neutral is the one in the middle. It is a mix of regressive and progressive. The way to figure out if a brand is progressive or regressive is the assessment of the public's opinion of that particular brand.

Patagonia is considered the most progressive brand, with the campaign called "The president, stole your lands", raise awareness about preserving public lands (Andrews, 2017). The campaign is launched against President Trump to cut some of the protected lands in the Bears and Ears and Grand Staircase- Escalante National Monuments in Utah. And Patagonia also showed its progressiveness by filing a lawsuit in the same activity sector. Patagonia's progressiveness can be seen to stand for what is right and go beyond profit-seeking. Patagonia wants to make an

impact and fight against President Trump on a serious issue.

On the other hand, according to Kotler and Sakers’s book “Brand Activism from Purpose to Action”, Big Tobacco was mentioned as regressive brand activism. Even the research shows that smoking is harmful, the brand still denied this fact for many years. They even promoted the benefit of smoking by several commercials.

The second classification of brand activism is explained by Sakar and Kotler. Sakar and Kotler (2021) stated that brand activism is “an attempt by firms to solve the global problems its future customers and employees care about.” Brand activism is expressed through the vision, values, goals, communication, and behavior of the businesses and brands towards the communities they serve.” Brand activism evolves from cause-related marketing, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and socially responsible business practice (Kotler & Sarkar, 2021). A list of six major areas for corporate social responsibility activities is mentioned in the book In Corporate Social Responsibility: Doing the Best for Your Company and Your Cause (2005) by Nancy Lee and Philip Kotler. The six major categories of CSR are social activism, political activism, workplace activism, environmental activism, and legal activism. (Figure 1)



Figure 1 :

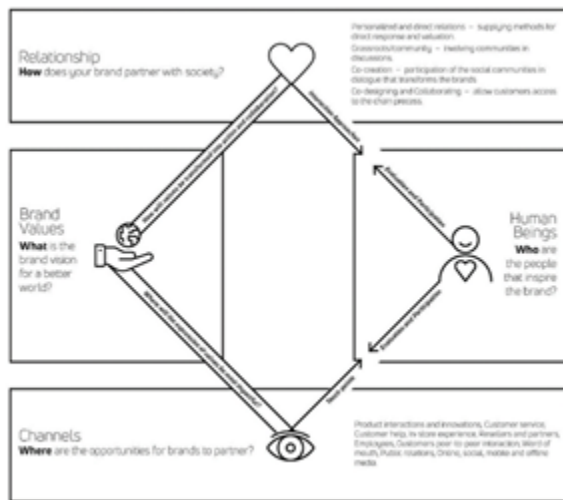
Social activism includes such as equality-gender, race, age, background, etc. It also includes societal and communities issues such as education, healthcare, etc.

One example is Airbnb with the campaign called “We accept” in response to President’s Trump decision about closing borders to refugees. The campaign position in social activism in terms of race and ethnic equality. Legal activism deals with the law and policy that affect the companies, such as tax, work environment, employment eligibility, etc. Business activism deals with governance and corporate issues, such as employee compensation, labor and union regulation, etc. For instance, Starbuck offers financial aid which supports workers who struggler during the Covid-19. This is an example of a brand that positions business activism through worker compensation through hard times. Economic activism includes minimum wage and tax policy, etc. One example is Gravity. Gravity provides a minimum payment of \$70,000 for their employee, to help close the inequality gap and make sure that their employees can live comfortably in the city (Gravity Payments, 2015). Political activism includes lobbying, voting, protesting, etc. One instance is Levi’s speak out loud their point of view in supporting their employees to vote in with the campaign called “ Rock the Vote. Live even gives employees paid time off to vote. And last one environmental activism deals with environmental concerns, such as global warming, climate change, resources reservation, etc. For example, Ben and Jerry initiates their activism on protecting the environment with the campaign called “Save our Swirled Climate tour”. They also work hard to reduce the greenhouse gasses emitted by the process of making their products and switch the renewable energy to run their factories partly. Brand activism played an indispensable role in customers’ inclination and purchase preference. Purchasing a product has become a way of expressing statements and exercising power. Consumers consider the items they are buying as an expansion of their view,

qualities, convictions, and ways of life, thinking of it as a type of political and social demonstration and a chance to have an effect.

Figure 2 explains the relationship among brand values, human beings, and channels. According to the figure, the brand takes on and addresses certain qualities. Society-based issues are translated into action and collaboration through personalized and direct relations, grassroots, co-creation, and co-designing. However, to touch and inspire customers, the brands have to consider the proper channels. The form of customer peer-to-peer interaction, word of mouth, public relations, or social media acts as opportunities for the brand to partner with customers. A brand that continuously follows this framework will successfully exchange values and beliefs crucial for both brand and customers.

Figure 2



Brand activism not only grabs the target audience's attention but also promotes the core value and belief of brand positioning. The right act of brand activism will help the brand create a significant impact on their profit, customer evaluation, customers

loyalty and bring brands and consumers closer through share common and beliefs. And when this emotional and bond connection is implemented, the price and quality of the product are not a big concern for brands to be more competitive in the market. However, in many cases where brands abuse brand activism that does not match with their core values, beliefs, ethics, or vision, it may be considered strategic advertising that separates core and loyal customers (Shivakanth et al., 2019). The campaign that raises brand image in customers' eyes can sometimes backfire. Brand should always consider comparing customers who have different political and social beliefs and who share the same opinion and ideas with the brand on any particular issue. Going with the majority will guarantee a successful campaign that would result in an increase in sales and profit and strengthen brand image and reputation.

Woke-washing

Consumers are now not only expecting brands to take a position in critical matter, but they expect them to do it well (Alexis A. Gray, 2019). However, some companies see brand activism as another marketing opportunity to exploit and attract more customers towards their brands. We then observe the phenomenon that is now called "woke-washing", woke meaning the fact of being aware and informed on social injustice issues. Similar to the concept of greenwashing, it is a term used when a company try to profit on social injustice context by incorporating certain social values into their advertising and marketing efforts (Katarina Fredrikson, 2020).

In order for a company to create an authentic brand activism, the campaign must be based on specific characteristics that must stay aligned with each other. Those are purpose,

values, messaging and practice (Katarina Fredrikson, 2020). Whenever practice or messaging are not in accordance with the rest of the factor, the campaign is therefore perceived as inauthentic (see figure 3).

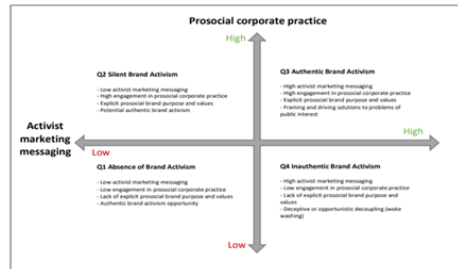


Figure 3

Woke washing is a dangerous new phenomenon that can make the consumers more suspicious towards brand activism and undermines the authentic efforts put by the other brands. Unilever's CEO Alan Jope (2019) stated *"It's polluting purpose. It's putting in peril the very thing which offers us the opportunity to help tackle many of the world's issues. What's more, it threatens to further destroy trust in our industry, when it's already in short supply."* He also claimed that Unilever will not maintain a long-term relationship with any brand without a clear purpose. Companies now understand that there is a price to pay for neutrality, but they also discover the price of woke washing the consumers.

Social brand engagement

Since the beginning of the 2000s, brands experts are claiming that in the marketing department, focusing on brand loyalty and brand awareness are not enough and companies should consider developing the emotion of the consumer and brand love (Robert V. Kozinets, 2014). The literature is defining customer brand engagement (CBE) as cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity of a consumer interactions with a brand in a specific motivational, brand related and contextual psychological state (Linda D. Hollebeek, 2011; Justina Malciute, 2013). It illustrate the new active role that consumers hold in the brand strategy. However, this concept alone does not take enough account of all the different interactions between the brand and the consumers.

The development of social media accentuates the social part of CBE and allow the participant to interact not only with the brand but also with each other. It is a social act that is driven by a sense of belonging in a community and correlated with the person's self-image (Dr Kofi Osei-Frimpong; Dr Graeme McLean, 2017). They defined the concept of social brand engagement as "The connection, creation and communication of the brand's story between the firm and consumers (both existing and prospects), using brand or brand-related language, images and meanings via the firm's social networking site".

Brand activism and social media engagement

According to a study conducted by the marketing consulting firm Edelman (2018), 64% of consumers are ready to buy or boycott a company regarding its stands on social or political issues. They now represent a majority of consumers worldwide in the different markets such as

the US with 59%, Japan with 60%, the UK with 57% and Germany with 57%. The results also show that a significant part of the people believe in the brands having more influence on societal changes as opposed to the government. It also highlights the importance for brand to take a position on specific societal matter, showcasing their brand identity and values, as it is now becoming a decisive aspect in the decision making of the consumer. Some companies are still hesitant on whether tackling a controversial issue or not, because of the difficulty to assess the impact on their ROI or the reactions of the consumers (Alexis A. Gray, 2019). But the risk of losing supporters of the brand by taking a stand seems inevitable as a majority of consumers expect brands to do so.

With more than one billion users overall, social media have the last decade tremendously change the marketing landscape and how companies interact with its customers. Social media are characterized by the interactivity it offers to its users. People can now create and share content related to the brand, increasingly influencing each other on the perception they have of it and can potentially create a significant impact on its image. Those behaviors enter the framework defined by Daniël G. Muntinga et al (2011) as the Consumer Online Brand Related Activities (COBRA's). Concerning the brand related social media use, the framework contains three different types of users (see figure). The first group is consuming, the second is contributing and the third one is creating brand related content.

Thus, companies desire that users convey a good image of the brand and also empower them to create its own positive content regarding it, which hold great value for the company. Therefore, they are using the social media such as Youtube, Facebook,

Instagram or Twitter as a mean of communication and marketing. Those platforms offer them a large reach and a great reactivity in terms of speed. The effect of brand activism can provide a significant impact on social media engagement, which is sought by companies.

Following Alexis A. Gray (2019) research and insights gathered after the empirical analysis of Twitter posts, a brand activism campaign can vary in its form, style and content. However, he states that they are general qualities that can be used in order to compare them and their potential impact: 1) Whenever a company includes media in its campaign on those platforms, they receive more customer engagement. It first allows them to take more space in the user's feed but adding an image or video convey faster more emotions which is essential for the user to create a bond with the brand. 2) Campaign should be more individual oriented rather than shaping a more general message for the society. Millennials are the first generation to be born with social media and also represent the major part of the consumers seeing brand activism as an added value. But different studies also showed that they are more narcissistic, more self-centered and can be driven by hedonistic values, implying that an effective campaign will focus on a message aimed towards individual rather than a more general message for the society. 3) Campaigns should adopt a non-gender-specific approach rather than focusing on a specific one. Our society has evolved and has become more open, diverse than before. Minorities will try to find brands that make them feel supported. People are therefore paying more attention to the message and values a brand communicates rather than using masculine and feminine qualities. 4) Brands creating campaigns with a long-term impact potential will attract more consumers engagement

than a short-term impact potential. This quality is specifically interesting regarding brand activism. It implies that consumers are sensitive to brands taking a stand on more deeply rooted issue. Long-term impact holds more value as consumers prefer structural changes instead of just resolving a problem.

Methodology

Literature review

First of all, this paper is based on a qualitative approach and revue of the current literature. The bases of what constitute brand activism and its different form. We then defined the recent phenomenon of “woke washing” that tries to capitalize on those social issues with the only purpose of financial gain. The study also examine the new social brand engagement behaviors and defined the online brand related interactions.

Case study

Secondly two different brand activism campaign where brands took a stand for a specific social issue were analyzed. The two brand activism related campaign mentioned in the paper are “Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything” advertising from Nike and the “Live for Now-Moment” advertising from Pepsi. In both cases, the advertising was contextualized with regards of its initial purpose. The reactions and different behaviors of consumers towards the brand provided significant empirical data which allowed to extract useful insights.

Case study and observations

Nike case study

Taking a statement on critical societal issues would be viewed as a considerable risk to take and a duty to be managed as cautiously

as possible from a company standpoint. Many brand activism campaign initiatives arise shortly after the emergence of an issue when the argument between parties is still raging. It's a delicate task that needs to be done with care, or the fallout might be catastrophic in the long run. Demonstration of this concept with real-life instances of brands that have launched brand activism efforts, as well as the differences between success (e.g., Nike) and failure (e.g., Pepsi), is presented below.

Nike is one of the most leading brands that ever launched a brand activism campaign. The study analyzes the primary case study of Nike using a qualitative descriptive method. Nike was chosen because of its history and leadership in taking a stand on socio-political topics in its advertisements. Nike's famous slogan “Just do it” has made Nike stand out among various brands. The slogan itself succeed in branding Nike by motivating people to fight through struggles and battles through difficulties. It utilizes emotionally and physically in consumers' minds on the idea of heroism. The slogan “Just do it” serves as a symphony for people to strike through when challenging their goals. Everything is possible with Nike.

In September 2018, Nike launched a 2 minutes Dream Crazy campaign with an American- African football athlete Colin Kaepernick as the face of the campaign. And it was also the 30th anniversary of Nike's slogan. The story behind this event is Colin Kaepernick and other NFL players kneeling during the national anthem to protest about police brutality that caused the death of an unarmed African American man. The United States is a country of freedom where the first

amendment mentioned the freedom of speech “The First Amendment provides several rights protections: to express ideas through speech and the press, to assemble or gather with a group to protest or for other reasons and to ask the government to fix problems. It also protects the right to religious beliefs and practices. It prevents the government from creating or favoring a religion”. However, this act of kneeling during the national anthem raise many controversial opinions judgments. Even the former president at that time, Donald Trump, claimed that Colin Kaepernick disrespected the flag and the country. In doing this campaign, Nike takes a stand on raging issues over racial discrimination, patriotism, and politics (Guardian sport and agencies, 2018). “Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything” becomes the most viral post on Twitter. Many Nike loyal customers start to post videos and photos of them burning their Nike apparel. The hashtag #Nikeboycott and #boycottNike gathered more than a billion impressions and were the third and fourth most popular hashtags in the conversation around Nike after #justdoit and #nike (Bassant, 2020). After the day of releasing the advertising, Nike’s share fell 3%. “Nike’s favorability dropped 34 points, from 76% favorable and 7% unfavorable to 60% favorable and 24% unfavorable, according to a poll of 8,000 Americans. Before the campaign launch, about half of respondents said they were "absolutely certain" or "very likely" to buy Nike products, but that figure has dropped to 39%. The steepest drop was among baby boomers, whose purchasing consideration

dipped from 38% absolute certainty to 28%”(Daniel, 2021). However, Nike made up for the lost ground a day after the 3% drop. Nike took a considerable risk, and it worked out for them. The success of Nike's Brand Activism campaign is mainly on the brand's consumer base, which is primarily made up of Millennials and Generation Z consumers under the age of 35 (Pengelly, 2018). According to Gibson(2018), Nike shares plunged up to 36%, adding nearly \$6 billion to the company’s market value.



Source: Apex Marketing Group Through 9:00am ET Sept. 4.

Pepsi case

While Nike is always on top of the chart in launching brand activism campaigns for the last few years, many brands have tried to do the same, and the result is quite contradictory. The most famous fail brand activism is Pepsi. They took a risk in expressing their opinions on a social issue but ended up ruining their image in the community. For example, Pepsi launched a campaign titled “Live for Now-Moment” on April 4th, 2017, to speak about the Black Lives Matter protest. The ad displayed the infamous supermodel Kendal Jenner walking through the protestors and hand a can of Pepsi to the police officer (Victor, 2021). The public’s reaction was outrage and angry. The advertising is wrong in any aspect.

First of all, the choice of the person embodying in the advertising. Pepsi chose a supermodel who has never distributed nor

showed any concern in any activist movement to represent the fight for racism and inequality regarding the “Black Lives Matter” issue. Second, in the first scene of the advertising, Kendall Jenner white person, takes her wig off and hands it to a black person. As many people acknowledge the long history that affects till today is the black is a slave to the White in the past. The White is dominant, and the black is submissive. And the next scene, the model is walking through the protesters to grab a can of Pepsi while everyone is cheering for her. Then she walks toward the police and hands him the can. He then opens the can and drinks it happily while a photographer is taking a picture of him. The advertising displays a naive view that a can of soda would resolve racism and police brutality problems. And it is even more wrong since the act of giving the can of Pepsi to the police seems like a reward for his wrongdoing. It makes people feel like Pepsi is encouraging police to show the White supremacists. The Pepsi response to the backfire was, “Pepsi was trying to project a global message of unity, peace, and understanding. Clearly, we missed the mark and apologized,” the company said in a statement on Wednesday. “We did not intend to make light of any serious issue. We are pulling the content and halting any further rollout” (Victor, 2021). Pepsi has decided to take off the advertising and apologize to the community. It took nine-month for Pepsi’s perception to fully recover from the advertising. Neutrality is not an option for any brand to compete in a competitive market for profit-seeking. The brand has to acknowledge things happening in society, listen and understand customers, and contribute their power to make the world a better place.

Analysis

Analysis of Nike case

This campaign has strengthened the infamous slogan “Just Do It” not only to the athletic excellence but also to address Nike’s voice on the social issues matter. Nike has made a calculated risk despite knowing that there will be many people who disagree with Nike’s stand on this social issue. Nike has considered very carefully based on the fact most of its consumers based are Millennials, and Gen Z. Aziz has mentioned that Gen Z makes up one-fourth of the US population, currently hold \$44 billion in spending power, and continually grow and will account for 40% of all consumers by 2020. Consumers’ buying decision affect profoundly on whether brand speaks their opinions in activism is undeniable (Aziz, 2018). The reason behind the success of the Dream Crazy campaign is Nike has done their research meticulously to target their consumer base, communicated and expressed point of view and position toward controversial issues in American society like racism, inequality, and police brutality against the African-American communities. And the most important this is they prove their resilience and courage with the slogan “Just do it” by facing and criticizing the opinion of the President of the United States of America and fight for the right (Green, 2018).

Throughout this analysis, millennials are the main target of any brand in the current market. Targeting millennials is a priority for activist brands. Millennials are known to be a value-driven generation. They do not only care about the quality and price of products but also concern brand ethical behavior, positioning on the social issues, or the impact of the product on environmental issues, social issues, and any other controversial issues that are happening in daily life. Generation Y (millennials) is the first generation that grows up and is surrounded by technology like social media, which benefits them from accessing news

and information through the power of the Internet. They are the generation that will speak for what is right and wrong according to their belief. Hence, brands should pay attention to this target group and carefully take a stand on specific social issues to grow their businesses. In many cases, brands take the wrong perspective on a social issue that costs them millions.

Despite the success of the different campaign created by Nike, the authenticity of the brand activism deployed by the company is still questioned. Looking at the activist campaigns involving Colin Kaepernick and Serena Williams with a general aim to empower women, the brand has been successful on the longer term and received overall a positive response. However, a New York times investigation has revealed in 2018 that 50 current and former female employees have described a culture of sexual harassment and gender disparities within the company, ending up in a class action lawsuit (Simon Chadwick, 2018). Consumer and experts also reacted to the Kaepernick campaign by mentioning Nike using sweatshop to create their products and also brought attention on the brand still remaining partnership with other teams that criticized the athlete behavior. As seen in the preceding literature, it illustrates a clear misalignment with the messaging perpetrated by the brand and its actual practice, undervaluing the first intent of the campaign.

A number of studies (Nadim Herbert 2020) also argue for the inauthentic aspect of the process driven by economic factors. Nadim Herbert (2020) analyzed that, even before the partnership between Nike and Kaepernick, the latter was criticized for his action as an individual, notably by the President Trump, rather than his position on a structural issue in our society. This highlights the fact that progressive actions

are mostly analyze through someone choice and acts. Therefore, Kaepernick, coupled with its identity and values, became a “proxy” of Nike’s products. This concept of “commodifying” identity in activism campaign is also illustrated in Nike’s partnership with Serena Williams and the “Dream crazier” message. Nike stated in a 2018 tweet “*If you’re a girl from Compton, don’t just become a tennis player. Dream of being the greatest athlete ever.*” In this case, the brand is using the identity of Williams as an athletic African American woman, to put her gender and color in front of the campaign. Herbert therefore explained that the campaign was more about selling an individual narrative by commodifying his identity rather than exposing a real structural social issue. He goes even further and states that Nike is using American nostalgia to generate emotions on the customer side. Kaepernick is portrayed as a hero coming from a difficult background who is fighting for a good cause, portraying the civil rights activists, part of the American history. As for Serena Williams, they used the principle of the American Dream conveying the message that with hard work, everything is possible.

Those inconstancies integrated in the company provide some insightful social brand engagement responses. Two different stances can be observed in such situation. Some consumers will decide to boycott the brand by a non-consumption act to express, as a traditional interest-based politics, the discordances towards the brand behavior (Hong C. 2018). As opposed to the “boycotters”, who will be “supporting specific products and businesses by performing selective buying”, defined as a more individual based behavior. Using social media to express denounce the woke washing marketing strategy of the brand, the consumer boycotting messages were met by the boycotters who were defending it

(Nadim Herbert, 2020). By putting the identities of those personalities at the core of their message, consumers are not only defending Nike, they also defend the values and justice associated with them and state their support in the cause.

What came through the analysis of this case, is first that millennials represent now a major part of the consumers worldwide and they will shape new economics in the years to come. This generation was raised surrounded by technology and social media, making them very responsive and socially engaged. The mindset of the average customer is shifting towards a more conscious consumption that is now value driven. They are less price sensitive, and they want to buy brands that represent their values and identity. A brand can therefore not overlook the activist aspect, or they will lose customers to competitors.

Secondly one effective brand activism campaign is not enough to convince consumers that the brand integrated the values that they communicate. Those values and identity must be incorporated into the very organizational structure of the company. Otherwise, the campaign will be labeled as inauthentic and as another woke washing technique only design to profit from those social issues. As shown in the Nike case and the Kaepernick advertising, the campaign was effective and received in the end overall a good response from public, following the qualities of a good social media communication described in the literature review. But the inconsistencies of the values that Nike portrayed in its communications as their own and the actual company culture and practices.

Analysis of Pepsi case

The Pepsi example showcases the risk of taking a stand on a social issue but not

taking it seriously. Pepsi digs itself a big hole by offending the base of customers and ruins its reputation and image. It took Pepsi a pretty long time to recover from the scandal and gain back community trust.

This advertising illustrates how a company can jump on a trending social issue by trying to communicate a progressive message towards the consumers that are “woke”, which will eventually push them to choose the brand instead of a substitute. However, the partnership with Kendall Jenner in this particular set-up, sent an opposite image and message that was initially meant by Pepsi. Kendall Jenner, as a celebrity brand, possess also her own identity and image as any brand have. As a well-known reality tv star and beauty model, her brand neither added nor brought any value to support the social issue tackle in the advertising. The goal was to promote equality and peace but it instead depicted an image of the “white savior”, “quietly reinforce overlapping racialised, gendered and heteronormative ideas”(Francesca Sobande, 2019).

Brand endorsement by celebrities has been a great tool used by the marketing department for decades. But brands that want to be involved in social issues need to seek personalities beyond the criteria of their personal brand. Jenner was never associated in the past with any activist activity. Therefore, she lacked relevancy to be in the add and even created the opposite expected effect. Celebrity brand are now not only valued on their fame, awareness, attractiveness and likeability, they need to uphold the values and embodied them in order for the campaign to be relevant.

Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of literature review and the case study presented on this paper shows connection between consumer perception and brand activism. Consumers are no

longer passive take in information that provided by commercial, they are more sensitive and active to speak their thoughts and opinion on social issue. Brands must show their ethical responsibility by participate in social cause, follow the concept of cause marketing and brand activism, to match with company's core values, mission, and vision. With the development of technology, interaction between consumers and brands has changed gradually. This give customers chance to participate and be a part of the content creation and act as brand activists.

This paper provides some insights for companies to take into account when launching itself in a brand activism campaign. Millennials are mostly value driven and tend to actively and financially support brands that share their values. Brand purpose, core value and image are now overtaking the traditional 4 Ps of the marketing mix. Millennials also tend to be very socially engaged by contributing and defending the brand. When a company state its position on critical social issues, the message and the practice must always be aligned. Otherwise, companies can face the risk the have put all its efforts in vain as the consumers feel as the brand just try to woke wash them and find their efforts inauthentic.

Therefore it also implies for personal brand to follow the trend and embody those value in their image and for companies to rightfully assess the relevance a personality.

Limitation and further research

Brand activism is a fairly new trend that offers a limited literature on the subject. The study of Brand Activism has limitations within literature review and case study. The lack of brand

activism concepts is challenging to deeply analyze the scope of brand activism. Another limitation is the lack of empirical data with quantitative approach.

For future research a focus on quantitative method, empirical data and more in depth of brand activism concept will be examined. Further research should be developed regarding the long-term commitment that activism implies. Finding quantitative data on whether companies have completely integrated these values into their organization and if not, how consumers react in terms of CBE and the impact on the brand image.

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