



Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales

ICADE

**The Impact of  
Corporate Socio-Political Communication  
on Customer-Based Brand Equity  
and Gender as a contributing Factor**

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## **Resumen**

En los últimos años, la manera de comunicar como empresa ha experimentado un cambio significativo, pasando de adoptar posturas neutrales a expresar claramente sus puntos de vista sobre cuestiones sociopolíticas controvertidas. Este fenómeno, conocido como Activismo de Marca, va más allá de la poco controvertida Responsabilidad Social Corporativa, y responde a las crecientes expectativas de los consumidores modernos. Sin embargo, el concepto presenta tanto oportunidades como riesgos, cuyas implicaciones aún se desconocen en gran medida debido al estado limitado de la investigación. Teniendo en cuenta la creciente polarización política de la sociedad actual, muchas empresas no están seguras de si el riesgo de esta forma de comunicación corporativa compensa los posibles efectos positivos.

Para contribuir al estado de la cuestión, se realiza un experimento cuantitativo en este trabajo con el propósito de analizar cómo una intensificación temática en la comunicación sociopolítica influye en la percepción del valor de la marca por los consumidores. Además, se investiga si el género es un determinante en el éxito del Activismo de Marca, ampliando el estado de investigación sobre posibles factores de éxito. Los resultados indican que el valor de la marca basado en el cliente es percibido de manera más favorable cuando las empresas se involucran en actividades activistas. Además, se identificaron diferencias de género específicas en la intensidad de este efecto. Las mujeres tienden a valorar más positivamente el Activismo de Marca, lo cual podría atribuirse a una mayor capacidad de empatía. Sin embargo, el Activismo de Marca también es necesario para mejorar significativamente la percepción de los consumidores masculinos. Limitar la comunicación corporativa sociopolítica a medidas de Responsabilidad Social Corporativa no basta, por tanto, para cosechar los beneficios de un mayor valor de marca.

Las conclusiones de este estudio revelan un posible nuevo factor predictivo del éxito en el contexto del Activismo de Marca y ofrecen nuevas perspectivas sobre la aceptación y el posible diseño de futuras campañas de Activismo de Marca.

### **Palabras clave:**

comunicación corporativa, Activismo de Marca, valor de marca basado en el cliente, diferencias de género

## **Abstract**

In recent years, the way companies communicate has undergone a significant shift, from adopting neutral positions to clearly taking a stance on controversial socio-political issues. This phenomenon, known as Brand Activism, goes beyond uncontroversial Corporate Social Responsibility, and responds to the growing expectations of modern consumers. However, the concept entails both opportunities and risks, the implications of which are still largely unknown due to the limited state of research. Given the increasing political polarisation of today's society, many companies are unsure whether the risk of this form of corporate communication outweighs the possible positive effects.

To contribute to the state of the art, a quantitative experiment is conducted in this paper, with the purpose of analysing how a thematic intensification in socio-political communication influences consumers' perception of brand equity. Furthermore, it is investigated whether gender is a determinant in the success of Brand Activism, extending the state of research on possible success factors. The results indicate that Customer-Based Brand Equity is perceived more favourably when companies engage in activist activities. In addition, gender-specific differences in the intensity of this effect were identified. Women tend to value Brand Activism more positively, which could be attributed to their greater capacity for empathy. However, Brand Activism is also necessary to significantly improve the perception of male consumers. Limiting corporate socio-political communication to Corporate Social Responsibility measures is therefore not enough to reap the benefits of greater brand equity.

The findings of this study reveal a possible new success predictor in the context of Brand Activism and offer new insights into the acceptance and possible design of future Brand Activism campaigns.

## **Keywords:**

corporate communication, Brand Activism, Customer-Based Brand Equity, gender differences

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BA.....	Brand Activism
CBBE.....	Customer-Based Brand Equity
CSR.....	Corporate Social Responsibility
IMC.....	Integrated Marketing Communication
PR.....	Public Relations

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*"Brands are facing a new competitive landscape in which self-definition, core values, and purpose will increasingly define their ability to reach customers that only allow what is meaningful in their lives to pass through their filter."*

- Simon Mainwaring (2011)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“Believe in something.  
Even if it means sacrificing everything.”*

This statement, published by the US sportswear brand Nike, received national attention in September 2018 as part of a brand campaign (Kelner, 2018). The collaboration with former football quarterback Colin Kaepernick as a brand ambassador, who had become the focus of public debate in the USA after kneeling during the national anthem in protest against racist police violence in 2016 (McKirdy, 2016) provoked highly controversial reactions – partly because President Trump described the behaviour as disrespectful towards the country and state authorities (Bostock, 2018).

The resulting controversy led to a 3% drop in Nike’s share price, equating to a loss of 4 billion US dollars (Isaza, 2023). Opponents of the campaign began burning clothing from the sporting goods manufacturer, using the hashtag #JustBurnIt, and sharing videos of it on social media (Bostock, 2018).

Despite the huge controversy, the share price rebounded by 5% within a week, reaching a new all-time high on the stock market (Isaza, 2023). The Net Promoter Score, which indicates the recommendation rate by consumers, also rose (Halzack, 2019). Furthermore, Nike recorded a 31% year-on-year increase in US online sales that year (Edison Trends, 2018) and a sharp rise in the company’s social media following (Isaza, 2023).

These developments suggest that the campaign either had a positive impact or at least no long-term negative impact on the company or its reputation. Nevertheless, it was considered one of the most controversial campaigns to date (Kelner, 2018) – and still is of great relevance.

The question arises as to why Nike decided to take such high-risk measures. In an interview published by Fast Company in 2019, co-founder Phil Knight asserted: „You can’t try and go down the middle of the road. You have to take a stand on something, which is ultimately I think why the Kaepernick ad worked“ (Snyder, 2019).

The Kaepernick campaign was not the only instance in which the company acted in accordance with this resolution.

In May 2020, Nike released a video entitled "For Once, Don't Do It". The play on words, which was applied to the normally encouraging slogan "Just do it", was followed by a sixty-second video, in which the brand clearly positioned itself against police violence and called on the population to become part of the "Black Lives Matter" movement (Nike, 2020). This was preceded by the violent killing of African American George Floyd by a police officer a week earlier (Hill et al., 2020).

This campaign also entailed benefits for Nike: 98% of 16-49 year-olds declared the advert as empowering and 60% praised the brand's willingness to engage in public debate (Ace Metrix, 2020).

By consistently espousing an activist brand message, Nike has succeeded in establishing itself as a tolerant and diverse company that raises its voice against injustice. This has been successfully incorporated into its marketing strategy by positioning the company according to its self-image and its young, diverse target group.

The sporting goods manufacturer is now considered one of the leaders of this movement (Kotler & Sakar, 2018), but it is important to note that it is by no means the only company to have become activist:

A growing number of brands have engaged in socio-political activism in recent years (Vredenburg, 2020; Bhagwat et al., 2020), as evidenced by the examples of Gillette (toxic masculinity), Patagonia (overconsumption on Black Friday), AirBnB (entry restrictions for certain countries in the USA), Levi's (reform of American gun laws) and Ben & Jerry's (same-sex marriage).

This phenomenon of taking a public stance on controversial socio-political issues is described as "Brand Activism".

The traditional role of corporations as politically independent entities seems to be outdated: In recent decades, the role of business has evolved significantly, with companies increasingly taking on functions and services that were once the domain of nation states (Heidbrink, 2016). They "go beyond legal requirements and fill the regulatory vacuum in global governance" (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011, p. 899) and are now seen as actors that bear social responsibility and can decisively change public life (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007; Scherer et al., 2009).

The reasons for this are numerous and complex. In a highly competitive and rapidly changing environment, branding has become increasingly important to sustain an objective comparative

advantage, ever since the 1990s (King, 1991). A well-known concept that has been established in this context since the 1980s, is brand equity (Barwise, 1993), which serves as the basis of this paper.

Conversely, the expectations of society have also contributed to the increased political position of companies (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Hydock et al., 2020), which is why this paper follows a customer-based approach: Businesses are increasingly expected to align their offerings with consumer expectations.

Yet, as the example of Nike demonstrates, the response to such initiatives is not always positive. Other companies, such as Starbucks and Heineken, have also been subject to criticism in relation to comparable campaigns (Shah, 2015; Chockshi, 2018). Brand Activism is thus regarded to as a high-risk strategy (Schmidt et al., 2022; Romani et al., 2015; Vredenburg et al., 2020). In the context of growing political polarisation (Gu & Wang, 2022), a contrary trend can be observed, with an increasing number of companies either limiting their activist activities or avoiding Brand Activism entirely (The Conference Board, 2024). The potential for success of an activist campaign appears to be increasingly difficult to predict.

The concept of Brand Activism is still considered rather unexplored (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Koch, 2020). Consequently, companies are confronted with a quandary: Should companies comply with the public expectations regarding Brand Activism, or return to their neutral stance to avoid exposing themselves to potential risks?

Both options have the potential to result in negative consequences: If a company refuses to take a public stance, it may be perceived as attempting to conceal its true intentions and attitudes (Korschun, 2021).

Given the limited state of research to date, there is a lack of quantifiable data that would allow for clear advantages of Brand Activism over other forms of corporate communication, and thus a clear recommendation for action, especially with regard to the already established Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which is considered to be less controversial (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020) and can already be proven to increase Customer-Based Brand Equity (Porter & Kramer, 2007; Lai et al., 2010; Hur et al., 2016).

Does Brand Activism strengthen this effect? If so, it is crucial to identify as many potential success factors as possible to achieve an optimal balance between requirements and potential risks.

To date, research on Brand Activism has focused on the age of consumers, with younger generations Z and Y in particular being the subject of research (Shetty et al., 2019; Sachdev et al., 2021; Kumar, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023). However, it is essential to identify other influencing factors predicting success of Brand Activism campaigns.

The objective of this study is to contribute to the state of the art by investigating whether an intensification of socio-political communication can lead to a significant improvement in brand equity from the consumer's perspective. In other words, the study aims to determine whether there are significant differences in terms of this effect between Brand Activism and Corporate Social Responsibility that would allow this new communication concept to be clearly recommended. Furthermore, the study will examine gender-related differences in the perception of Brand Activism to derive further recommendations for action. This is an area that has not yet been fully explored in this context, although it has been identified in Corporate Social Responsibility campaigns already (Hur et al., 2016; Calabrese et al., 2016).

In essence, this paper is concerned with the following research questions:

*RQ1: What impact does an intensification of corporate socio-political communication have on consumers' perception of brand equity?*

*RQ2: To what extent do gender differences exist in consumers' perception of brand equity regarding Brand Activism?*

To answer these research questions, this paper firstly defines brand equity, with a particular focus on Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model. It then describes the current development and change in the role of companies in society, differentiating between Brand Activism and the established concept of Corporate Social Responsibility and presenting gender as a possible influencing factor. Furthermore, an empirical quantitative experiment is conducted, with the aim of answering the research questions presented and thus gaining new insights and recommended actions for companies regarding Brand Activism.

## **2. BRAND EQUITY**

### **2.1. Definition and implications for companies**

Brand equity refers to the additional value that a brand adds to a product or service beyond its functional benefits (Aaker & Smith, 1992; Datta et al., 2017) and through brand associations (Chaudhuri, 1995) - thus describing "the marketing effects uniquely attributable to the brand" (Keller, 1993, p.1). In today's world, traditional market mechanisms such as price and quality are no longer the only criteria influencing public perception, but the brand itself can be seen as one of the company's most important assets (Keller & Lehman, 2006). Brand equity can be of great importance to companies as it leads to a competitive advantage through differentiation (Aaker & Smith 1992; Michell et al., 2001) and thus to a strengthening of the brand, which in turn can increase shareholder value (Pahud de Mortanges & van Riel, 2003; Madden et al., 2006). In addition, products with high brand equity can generally be priced higher and therefore have less elastic demand, as consumers are more likely to be loyal to the brand (Lassar et al., 1995).

Thus, high brand equity helps to pursue an expansion strategy (Keller, 1993) and is therefore considered a valuable long-term corporate asset (Wood, 2000), influencing the effectiveness of future branding efforts (Keller, 1993).

In a nutshell, brand equity can be described as the efficiency of marketing (Dahlén et al., 2010).

Although the term brand equity is not a scientifically recognised concept (Feldwick, 1996), academic literature distinguishes between two approaches:

On the one hand, there is a market-performance-oriented perspective, which examines the financial asset value of a brand. This includes monetary brand value, licensing or resale. This approach was particularly widespread at the beginning of brand equity research (Chieng & Lee, 2011).

Conversely, there is the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) approach, which influences consumer behaviour in all aspects of the evaluation and selection process and thus generates additional company value (Erdem et al., 1999; Buil et al., 2013). This paper refers to this approach, as it focuses on the consumer perspective and is widely established as a reference tool for brand success in this context (Tuominen, 1999).

## **2.2. Customer-Based Brand Equity**

### **2.2.1. Definition and differentiation**

The customer-based interpretation of brand equity (CBBE) was originally developed by Kevin Lane Keller and first presented in 1993. According to Lassar et al. (1995), CBBE is determined by consumer perceptions rather than objective measures. Keller (2001, p. 3) states: “[...] the power of a brand resides in the minds of customers”.

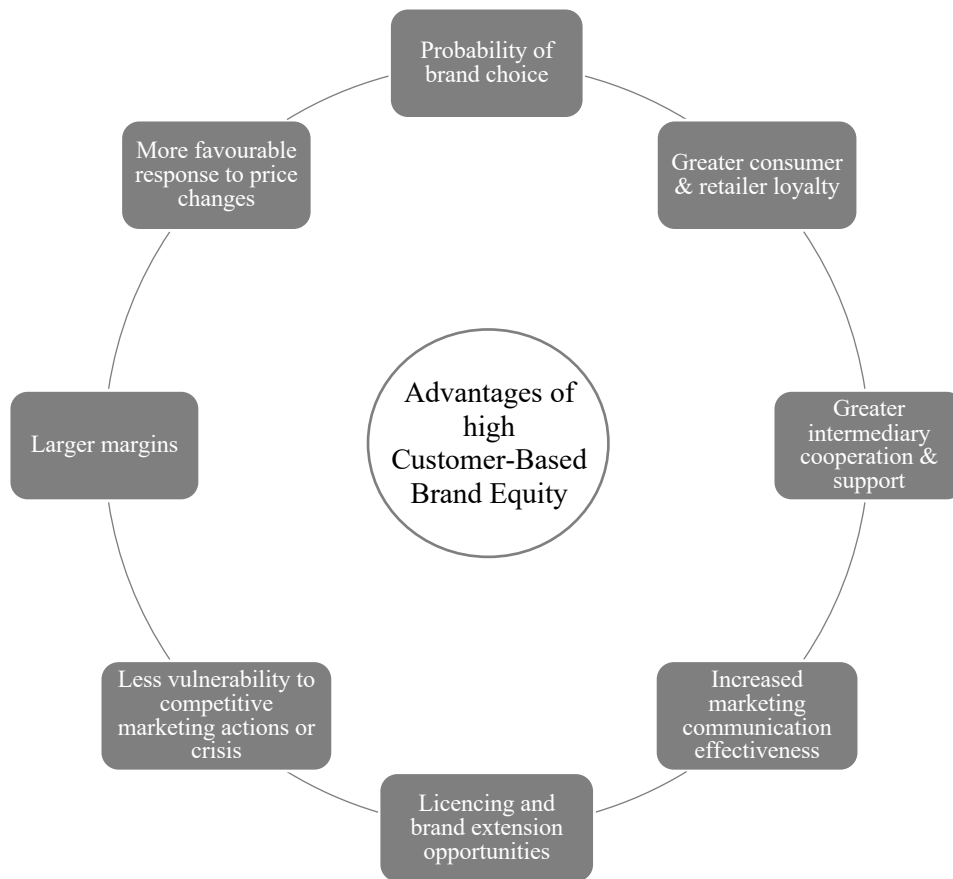
CBBE is the value added by the brand to the product as perceived by the consumer, measured as the difference between an individual's general brand preference and their brand preference based on objectively measured product attribute levels (Park & Srinivasan, 1994). The phenomenon thus describes the perceived benefits that consumers' associations and perceptions of a particular brand bring to a product and the difference this makes when responding to an element of the marketing mix in comparison to an objective consumer (Keller, 1993).

Through marketing and positioning, a company can differentiate itself from its competitors and positively influence public perception – this causes consumers to choose a company and its products and is also referred to as a unique selling proposition (Keller, 1993). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, positively associated brand evaluation is an intangible asset that influences consumer attitudes, preferences and ultimately purchase decisions (Jacoby et al., 1971). Therefore, this approach is of great importance to management and is considered a priority (Tuominen, 1999; Faircloth et al., 2001; Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016).

CBBE can have both positive and negative effects on the entire organisation and all its subsidiary brands (Keller & Aaker, 1992). Thus, a marketing strategy should be well thought out, long-term and clear to build sustainable CBBE.

Figure 1 shows the advantages of high CBBE (cf. Keller, 2001).





**Figure 1: The Advantages of high CBBE (cf. Keller, 2001)**

Despite the absence of a standardised definition of CBBE and the lack of an established instrument for measuring it (Schmitz-Axe et al., 2012), Keller’s CBBE Model is widely used in academic literature today, and thus serves as the foundation for the experiment presented in this paper.

### **2.2.2. Keller’s Customer-Based Brand Equity Model**

Keller’s CBBE Model is one of the most widely recognised and comprehensive models for Customer-Based Brand Equity is a pyramid scheme that can be divided into four main categories, which in turn build on each other, as seen in Figure 2 (cf. Keller, 2001).

The model’s versatility is its key advantage. It can be applied in any industry and to any brand, offering a valuable strategic basis for marketing decisions (Keller, 2001). Its duality is another notable feature, as the model considers both functional (product-related) criteria and abstract (non-product related) criteria (Keller, 1993), each representing one side of the

pyramid. Both paths can lead to increased CBBE, and neither should therefore be ignored (Keller, 2001).

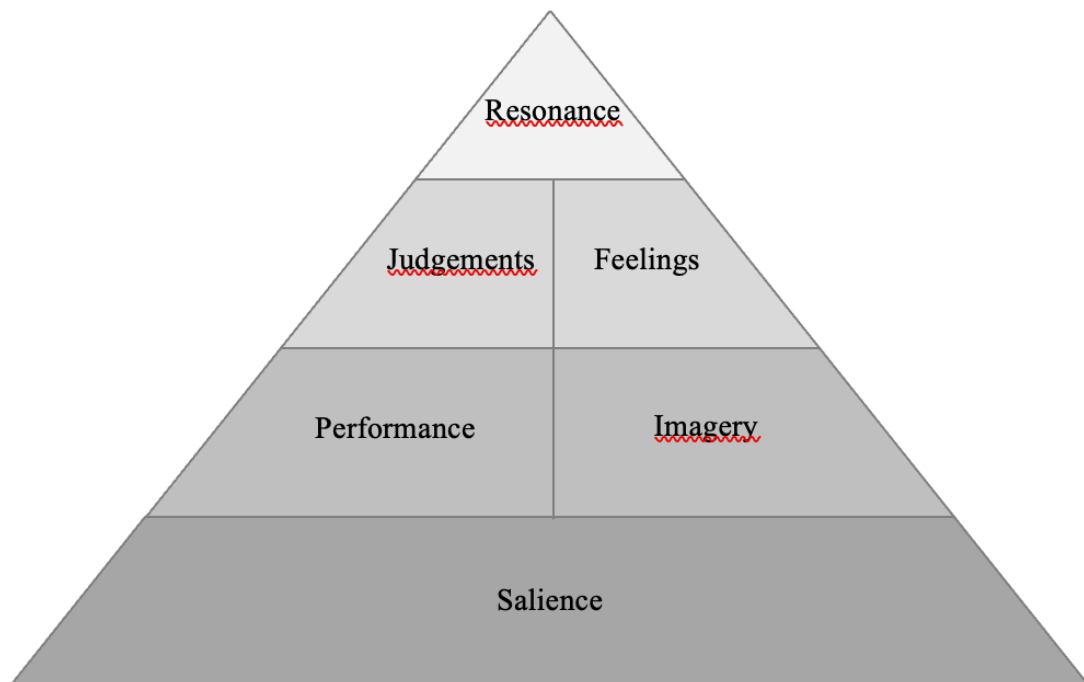


Figure 2: Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model (cf. Keller, 2001)

#### 2.2.2.1. Brand Salience

The foundation of Keller's CBBE Model is Brand Salience. In Keller's earlier work, this concept is also referred to as brand identity (Keller, 1993).

This phase is concerned with ensuring that consumers become aware of the brand. It is of great importance in providing a foundation for the subsequent stages, as without strong brand awareness, a deeper relationship with the brand cannot be established. Brand awareness is defined as the "consumer's ability to identify the brand under different conditions" (Rossiter and Percy 1987, p. 41, as cited in Keller, 1993). This encompasses both evoked recall when a brand is mentioned verbatim (brand recognition), and autonomous recall of a brand in a suitable context, for instance, when the product category is mentioned (brand recall). These dimensions are referred to as the depth and breadth of awareness (Keller, 1993).

Brand Salience serves as the foundation for all associations and, consequently, for the brand image. High CBBE increases the probability of a brand being included in a consumer's consideration set (Aaker, 1992; Keller, 2001; Romaniuk et al., 2004). Ultimately, high Brand Salience ensures greater integration into the consumer's memory (van der Lans et al., 2008),

which is particularly important in situations where consumers use mental cues to make decisions, using the knowledge they hold in memory for evaluation (Romaniuk et al., 2004). However, it is not only important that a consumer remembers a brand, but also how they remember it (Keller, 1993; Ansary & Hashim, 2018).

#### **2.2.2.2. Brand Meaning**

The second stage, Brand Meaning, is concerned with establishing Brand Meaning in the minds of consumers through the communication of brand experiences. The basis of this aspect is brand image, which Keller (1993, p. 3) defines as “perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory”. The success of a marketing program is therefore dependent on positive brand associations that are strong and unique enough to stand out. Zhang et al. (2015) characterises brand image as a driving force for a brand asset and thus the entire CBBE.

The stage is divided into two main categories: brand performance and brand imagery. Brand performance refers to the objective, functional aspects of the brand, including reliability, durability, efficiency, design and price. Brand imagery, on the other hand, addresses the psychological and social needs of consumers that are addressed by the brand, rather than what the brand objectively represents. This includes the personality and values of the brand; even an event may become a trademark if consumers have already formed associations or attitudes towards it (Keller, 1993).

Both main categories are essential for the creation of positive brand associations and the likelihood of customers recommending the brand to others and purchasing it again (Buil et al., 2013). Brand image is divided into three categories: attributes (characteristics of a product or service), benefits (personal value consumers attach to the product or service attributes) and attitudes (overall evaluations of a brand). The latter two are also referred to as abstract associations by Keller (1993) and, according to Chattopadhyay & Alba (1988), considered to be more enduring and easier to recall than attributes. This emphasises the importance of the emotional and subjective aspect for Brand Meaning. Consequently, the duality of the model is particularly evident in this stage.

Brands that are able to persuade consumers through both their performance and their symbolic attributes are more resilient to market changes and economic fluctuations (Christodoulides et al., 2015), particularly in dynamic, highly competitive, saturated markets (Aaker, 1997; Keller & Lehmann, 2006), where the only way to retain customers is to poach

them from competitors. By building an integrative Brand Meaning, brands remain in consumers' memories and differentiate themselves (Belch & Belch, 2018).

### **2.2.2.3. Brand Response**

In the third stage, Brand Response, the objective lies in eliciting positive consumer reactions to the brand. These reactions include both cognitive and emotional evaluations, encompassing brand judgments and brand feelings, as described by Keller as "head and heart" (Keller, 2001). Both are of significant importance for the final stage of the concept, as evidenced by Park et al. (2010).

Brand judgements comprise aspects such as quality, credibility, relevance and superiority of the brand. In this context, consistency is of particular importance, as these factors are only built up over time through personal experience (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). Brand feelings, on the other hand, represent the emotional connection that consumers have with the brand and can relate to characteristics such as sympathy, security, social acceptance and self-respect (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003).

A campaign that evokes positive emotional reactions effectively strengthens brand perception and loyalty. Consequently, it is important that brands develop communication strategies addressing both the cognitive and affective components (Ambler & Vakratsas, 1996). Fournier (1998) and Thomson et al. (2005) also emphasise the importance of emotional reactions to brand experiences for a sustainable brand relationship, touching on the importance of brand imagery discussed previously. Corporate socio-political communication could therefore become a symbolic, emotional differentiating factor for differentiation.

#### **2.2.2.4. Brand Resonance**

The fourth stage of the model is Brand Resonance or Brand Relationship, building the tip of the pyramid. This stage focuses on the final influence of the brand on the consumer, aiming is to create a deep, emotional connection that promotes active consumer loyalty and engagement.

Consequently, this final stage of the pyramid scheme represents the final step towards increased CBBE and is therefore considered the most valuable (Keller, 2001).

Brand Resonance is comprised of several components, including behavioural loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community, and active engagement (Keller, 2001).

Behavioural loyalty is evidenced by regular purchases, while sense of community refers to a feeling of belonging to a community of like-minded people who use the same brand. A strong sense of community can increase brand loyalty, as customers feel part of a larger group that shares common values and interests.

Attitudinal attachment represents a strong affective bond with the brand, leading to active engagement. Both parts manifest themselves in a deep psychological connection to the brand and the willingness of consumers to invest resources to support the brand, such as time and money (Keller, 2001; Shieh & Lai, 2017). Consumers perceive the brand as an integral part of their identity.

This is of great importance for companies, as Keller (2001, p. 17) states: “The strongest brands will be those to which consumers become so attached and passionate that they, in effect, become evangelists on their behalf”. Customers who are actively engaged can thus be considered brand ambassadors.

Since Brand associations can arise either from direct experience or indirectly, for example through word of mouth, this results in a chain reaction regarding influencing other consumers perception of a brand.

### **3. CORPORATE COMMUNICATION**

#### **3.1. Definition**

In academic literature, corporate communication is described as a multifunctional tool that not only addresses different groups of people but also includes different forms of communication. According to Goodman (2000, p. 1), corporate communication is defined as “the total of a corporation’s efforts to communicate effectively and profitably”. Consequently, all forms of communication, including marketing, public relations, and internal communication, such as those employed in human resources, are encompassed by this term (Varey, 1998).

#### **3.2. Corporate communication and brand equity**

Sergeant & Frenkel (2000) emphasise the communicative character of the instrument by focusing on customer needs and organisational values. Forman & Argenti (2005) and Balmer & Gray (2000) posit that companies communicate in order to implement strategies, influence reputation and corporate branding. Clutterbuck (2001) corroborates this assertion by stating that the achievement of a competitive advantage represents the primary motivation for communication measures across all processes and corporate activities.

The role of corporate communication can thus be seen as significant for the overall success of the company (Dolphin & Fan, 2000), as it leads to a competitive advantage (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Gronstedt, 2000; Forman & Argenti, 2005; Kotler et al., 2019).

This is why it is closely linked to the creation of brand equity and can be seen as a prerequisite for certain stages, especially for the non-product related aspects.

#### **3.3. Integrated Marketing Communication as a functional link to CBBE**

To be exact, the concept of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in particular is a critical component for CBBE (Keller, 2009; Madhavaram et al., 2005; Anantachart, 2006). According to Alsem et al. (2019), this form of corporate communication is at the core of every profitable company.

IMC combines advertising, public relations, sales promotion and direct marketing (Anantachart, 2006), emphasizing the relationship between public relations and marketing

(Hutton, 1996). It is a strategic approach to coordinating a company's communication tools. By integrating different communication channels, companies can create synergies that increase the impact of their marketing and PR measures, which in turn increases CBBE. Therefore, IMC is considered an important prerequisite for CBBE (Brunello, 2013).

The coordination of PR activities – such as press releases, events and media contacts – with marketing activities – such as advertising, promotions and social media campaigns – is essential for maximum impact (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). This indicates the importance of consistency in the creation of a strong and unified Brand Salience that enables consumers to clearly associate and recognise the brand (Keller, 2001). A consistent brand message avoids confusion among consumers (Kliatchko, 2005) and minimises the risk of only certain, possibly negative, attributes being recalled, manipulating consumers' memory (Chattopadhyay & Alba, 1988).

In the current business environment, however, maintaining a consistent brand image and communicating the unique advantages of a brand itself is no longer sufficient. As Schlegelmilch & Pollach (2005) observe, the role of ethics in public perception is of increasing importance. “[A] companies' ability to grow and to improve continuously is also determined by its social competences, ethical responsibility and environmental contributions” (Hardjono & van Marrewijk, 2001, p.1). These changing conditions have led to strategic communication of corporate values, ethical standards and social commitment becoming an integral part of Integrated Marketing Communication.

The functional link between CBBE and corporate socio-political communication thus exists in the concept of IMC.

Corporate socio-political communication is generally a non-market strategy (Mellahi et al., 2015; Frynas et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2021). Firms employ these strategies beyond traditional market activities, with the intention of influencing the social, political, and legal environment in which companies operate (Mellahi et al., 2015; Wrona et al., 2018). This is not achieved by relying on traditional market mechanisms such as supply and demand. Bach & Allen (2010) state: “Nonmarket strategy recognizes that businesses are social and political beings, not just economic agents”, which goes along with the currently changing economic environment. Companies interact not only with potential customers and stakeholders, but

also with a variety of other actors, which shapes the way companies interact with the public (Bach & Allen, 2010).

It can thus be argued that corporate socio-political communication can be categorised, at least in part, as a public relations tool (L'Etang, 1994; Dodd & Supa, 2015; Ho Lee, 2017). Nevertheless, non-market strategies also have an (indirect) economic impact and benefit the corporate strategy (Baron, 1995), for example by improving the company's reputation (Simpson & Kohers, 2002; Ellen et al., 2006; Porter & Kramer, 2007; Farooq et al., 2014; Coelho et al., 2023).

A commercially successful communication strategy can only fully unfold combining non-market and market strategies (Baron, 1995), for example by applying marketing measures that react to the behaviour of competitors and consumers and are therefore market-oriented (Jaworski et al., 2000). Thus, socio-political communication campaigns and profit-oriented purposes of the company cannot be completely separated, as evidenced by the case of cause-related marketing as part of CSR, for which a product campaign is combined with cooperation with an NGO (Liu & Ko 2011). Brand Activism can enhance the marketing strategy of companies to a certain extent as well (Kotler & Sakar, 2018; Pimentel et al., 2024).

This is why socio-political communication can be understood as part of Integrated Marketing Communications, as it combines PR and marketing.

In the field of CSR research, IMC has already been identified as an important success factor. For instance, if CSR communication in social media occurs as part of a product campaign, it is less successful than if the focus is additionally on real change and ethical issues and thus on public relations disciplines (Uzunoglu & Misci Kip, 2014).

In conclusion, the degree of corporate socio-political communication may be a strategic differentiator that increases the perceived CBBE, as it has established itself in recent years as a new component of IMC, which in turn is a prerequisite for CBBE.

There is evidence in academic literature that this is indeed the case, at least for CSR, in comparison to companies not implementing respective measures (Torres et al., 2012; Hsu et al., 2012; Hur et al., 2016). However, in the light of mounting public expectations and companies' concomitant responsibility in society, it is worth considering whether there are discernible differences in the impact of Brand Activism and CSR, with both being part of IMC: As socio-political messages become increasingly prevalent, Brand Activism could



even cause a stronger increase on CBBE, thereby warranting a clear recommendation for action on that matter.

This is of interest to companies in the politically uncertain times, as many of them have become reluctant to become activist despite rising social expectations and after years of public socio-political positioning being on the rise:

Since 2020, 60% of companies have become more selective in the social and political issues they address, and 12% have stopped addressing them altogether (The Conference Board, 2024).

Consequently, data on Brand Activism and its effects essentially needs to be as recent as possible.

The experiment presented in this paper allows for the evaluation of whether corporate socio-political communication continues to be a decisive factor in consumers' evaluation of a brand. Should this be the case, it also permits an assessment of whether the effects of Brand Activism campaigns are more positive in comparison to CSR campaigns, which are associated with less risk and thus widely established (Yoon et al., 2006; Vredenburg et al., 2020).

However, it is first necessary to introduce and differentiate the two concepts in question and analyse how Brand Activism has arisen.

### **3.4. Corporate socio-political communication**

#### **3.4.1. Corporate Social Responsibility**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to positions that are associated with the core of the company, that can be considered politically neutral or uncontroversial, that can be organised on a voluntary basis, that go beyond legal obligations and that can be flexible in their scope on the part of the company (Carroll, 1991; Deegan et al., 2002; Crane & Matten, 2007).

Coombs & Holladay (2012, p.5) define the concept as follows: „[Corporate Social Responsibility refers to] CSR is the voluntary actions that a corporation implements as it pursues its mission and fulfils its perceived obligations to stakeholders, including employees, communities, the environment, and society as a whole”.

The explicit aim of CSR is therefore to represent stakeholder interests and improve the company's relationship with its stakeholders. Consequently, these are topics that tend to meet with broad public acceptance and are therefore considered uncontroversial, such as family-friendly working hours, attempts to operate as sustainably as possible or equal opportunities programmes. CSR is internally focused and encompasses environmental, social or economic issues to which the company is committed regarding its own business activities. This is done to anchor its own values, promote CSR-compliant behaviour internally (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Maon et al., 2009) and thus indirectly bring about social change (Chernev & Blair, 2015; Fallah Shayan et al., 2022).

In view of the voluntary and internally oriented implementation, CSR measures are generally not communicated extensively to the public, as they do not arise from an external impulse but from internal conviction (Pava & Krausz, 1996; Korschun, 2021). However, there is evidence to suggest that companies that proactively publicise their CSR practices may benefit in terms of brand strength and customer loyalty. This, in turn, has a positive impact on CBBE, which in turn has a direct influence on long-term corporate success (Porter & Kramer, 2007).

Following the increased utilisation of CSR from the 1950s onwards (Latapí et al., 2021), its significance has grown, particularly in recent decades (Andersen & Johansen, 2021). This may be attributed to the low reputational risk (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). For example, in 2011, only 20% of companies on the S&P500 Index published a CSR report, whereas by 2019, this figure had risen to 90% (G&A Institute, 2020).

The concept is therefore regarded to as established, but also as little progressive (Daly & Cobb, 1991; Garriga & Melé, 2004; Matten & Moon, 2008):

In the current socio-political climate, companies are increasingly confronted with issues that lead to controversy and divergent public opinion. Considering the growing politicisation of society, it has become evident that CSR practices are no longer sufficient to meet the expectations of society regarding their socio-political responsibility (Spry et al., 2021).

This advent of a novel concept of corporate socio-political communication, namely Brand Activism, can be attributed to several factors that are discussed in the following.

### **3.5. Brand Activism**

#### **3.5.1. Thematic background**

A significant number of companies continue to refrain from deviating from their neutral positions (Kang & Kirmani, 2024). However, there has been a discernible shift in the role of business in socio-political policy over recent years (Scherer et al., 2009; Rommerskirchen, 2019). The reasons for this increasing politicization are presented below.

##### **3.5.1.1. Increasing globalisation**

The increasing interconnectivity of the global community also entails a redefinition of the boundaries of responsibility and influence within the complex interplay between politics, business and society. Until a few decades ago, the principle of clear separation of politics and business, with businesses subordinating and adapting, was largely applied – nowadays, globally active corporations can exert great political influence. This can no longer be reconciled with the previous passive role of business concerning emerging political conflicts (Korschun, 2021; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011).

Nikitin & Elliott (2000, p. 14) aptly define the process of globalisation as “an establishment of the global market free from sociopolitical control”. Companies, on the other hand, especially large, globally active corporations, can influence society across national boundaries, causing effective social change when political institutions reach the limits of their capabilities (Fyke et al., 2016). As Peterson & Pfitzer (2008) posit, companies are currently in a superior position to public institutions in terms of the potential for improving socio-political conditions. This is contingent upon the effective utilisation of their scope and influence. Dodd (2018, p. 227) describes companies in this context as „protector and promoter of the political agendas of the public on a large scale“.

This perspective is also held by consumers, as evidenced by a global survey conducted in 2018, which found that 53% of respondents believed that companies were more capable of addressing socio-political grievances than politicians (Edelman, 2018).

It is anticipated by the public that this influence will be employed in a constructive manner (Spry et al., 2021): Another survey indicates that 68% of consumers believe that companies possess the capacity and obligation to identify solutions to global issues (Havas Worldwide, 2023).

### 3.5.1.2. Digitalisation and social media

In the context of the increasingly global economy, the increasing digitalisation of processes plays a vital role as well.

On the one hand, the ease with which companies can publicise and disseminate socio-political campaigns nowadays also facilitates their ability to influence their public reputation and provide consumers with the information they desire (Dijkmans et al. 2015; Syed Alwi et al., 2020). This enhanced accessibility to information also enhances the transparency and traceability of companies' internal business operations (DiStaso & Bortree, 2012) and compels companies to adhere to elevated ethical, sustainability, and social responsibility standards, thereby fulfilling heightened public expectations in a more expedient manner.

Conversely, the advent of digitalisation has also transformed the manner and locations through which consumers obtain information. According to the Global Web Index (2019), 60% of internet users declare news consumption and information procurement as their primary motivation for using the internet. Furthermore, 80% of these individuals visit a news website, app, or comparable digital medium at least once a month. Notably, 44% of internet users use social media as their principal source of news, a figure that significantly outpaces company websites with 38% (Global Web Index, 2019).

However, social media presents both opportunities and risks for corporate communication. The speed at which information is disseminated can both strengthen and damage a company's reputation, depending on its actions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Etter, 2013). Digitalisation makes it more difficult for companies to maintain control over their communication (Argenti, 2006). In this context, the term "cancel culture" has become established in recent years and describes how individuals and groups who violate social norms or claim false facts are denounced, which often leads to sanctions (Clark, 2020). Due to the interactive nature of social media, negative feedback can quickly take on large proportions.

It is therefore of great importance to ensure that information is authentic. According to Loftus & Loftus (1980), information that is stored in memory only diminishes very slowly. Consequently, there is a risk of being confronted with a scandal even after a long period of time. One potential explanation for the pervasive adoption of CSR thus is that the issues addressed are perceived as less contentious, allowing companies to mitigate the risk of public discourse.

### 3.5.1.3. Changing societal values

The most significant factor driving the growth of Brand Activism is the growing expectations of society, which increasingly demands that companies adopt a stance on pivotal social and political issues and assume a degree of socio-political responsibility (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Hydock et al., 2020). The pressure to take a public position on contentious matters has intensified considerably (Vredenburg et al., 2020). To meet the demands of the modern consumer, companies must abandon their previously neutral and passive role (Korschun, 2021; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011).

A study conducted by Havas Worldwide (2023) revealed that 79% of respondents expect companies to be transparent about their stances. Additionally, 73% of respondents believe that companies should not only communicate socio-politically but take action in line with their messages and actively support society and the planet.

Other studies corroborate this data, indicating that 62% and 70% of consumers expect companies to adopt a public stance on socio-political issues (Accenture, 2018; SproutSocial, 2019).

A related term used in academic literature in this context is “Political Consumerism”. This phenomenon has been on the rise for several years, according to Micheletti et al. (2003), and explains the public demand for Brand Activism.

Political Consumerism describes how consumers are increasingly aware of a companies’ political practices, consume specifically according to their own values (Schmidt et al., 2022) and thus share their own opinions (Delacote & Montagné-Huck, 2012), participating politically in an indirect way (Gundlach, 2007). Brands transfer what they stand for to the consumer (McCracken, 1986), which explains the effect. Consumers therefore tend to choose the brand that represents their existing or desired personality (Belk et al., 1982).

According to Kotler & Sakar (2018), the current consumer era is value oriented. Companies are no longer solely economic, but also socio-cultural actors and must adhere to the norms expected by the public (Rommerskirchen, 2019).

A company that avoids taking a stance may ultimately be perceived as attempting to conceal its true attitudes, which could have detrimental consequences as well (Korschun, 2021). In the context of increasing political polarisation in society (Gu & Wang, 2022), this presents

companies with a challenge, as it has also become increasingly difficult to assess how consumers will react to campaigns and what their values and views are.

### **3.5.2. Definition and objectives**

The term of “Brand Activism” is used to describe a company’s engagement with controversial, current issues. Other terms used synonymously include “Corporate Socio-Political Activism” and “Corporate Social Advocacy”. This type of corporate engagement has been gaining popularity since the 1980s and 1990s (Korschun, 2021).

The meaning of Brand Activism is elucidated by the latter synonym, which is derived from the Latin word “advocare” and describes the summon assistance of companies on controversial socio-political issues, as defined by Wettstein & Baur (2016) and Dodd & Supa (2015).

The rationale behind the public communication of these positions is “voicing or showing explicit and public support for certain individuals, groups, or ideals and values with the aim of convincing and persuading others to do the same” (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 200).

The aspect of taking a public position on a socio-political issue that is considered controversial is a core element of Brand Activism. The objective is to proactively and directly change something in society (Korschun, 2021) by building up pressure on political actors where necessary (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Concurrently, the company endeavours to influence public opinion and behaviour regarding politics (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Korschun, 2021).

Brand Activism is regarded as an external approach to corporate communication, which aligns with the public desire for active participation in world affairs. An activist communication campaign is based on an external impulse that, from the company’s perspective, justifies the publication of a corresponding campaign or statement. Consequently, the controversy surrounding the topic in question is not initiated by the company, but rather a position is taken on an already relevant topic (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Wettstein & Baur, 2016). For this reason, these issues are explicitly “disconnected from the core business” of the company (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 200). This explains why Brand Activism primarily aims to address so-called activist groups, who do not necessarily have a functional link to the company.

The current topics within Brand Activism, for example, include LGBTQ+ rights, women's and equality rights (such as abortion rights), and country-specific topics such as gun law reform or police violence in the USA, as exemplified by the case of Nike.

Brand Activism is a nascent form of corporate communication that has only recently begun to attract the attention of scholars. It has not yet been subjected to the same level of rigorous analysis as other forms of corporate communication, such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), even though Brand Activism has been identified as a distinct phenomenon (Wettstein & Baur, 2016; Koch, 2020).

The following section will examine the ways in which Brand Activism differs from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

#### **3.5.2.1. Differentiation from CSR**

The question arises as to whether Brand Activism and CSR can be regarded as separate means of IMC, or whether Brand Activism is an "extreme form" of CSR. This is due to the similar subject areas. There is a lack of consensus among academics on this matter. In some cases, the two areas are grouped together, or Brand Activism is regarded to as an extension of CSR (Gaither et al., 2018; Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Kotler & Sakar, 2018). However, the fundamental concept underlying both concepts is distinct.

In its general understanding, CSR is based on topics that relate to the business core. These are also largely accepted by the public, but they are primarily geared towards compatibility with the views and standards of the organisation's own stakeholders. The aim is to improve the organisation's own stakeholder relationships (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004; Bhattacharya et al., 2009). Bruning & Ralston (2000, p. 427) state: "The relationship that exists between an organization and key public members influences key public members perceptions, attitudes, evaluations, and intended behaviors". This, in turn, leads to a more stable and facilitated business development: The consideration of stakeholder needs in corporate strategy can lead to better financial and social results (Freeman & McVea, 2001; Harrison et al., 2010).

CSR is therefore based on the idea of legitimacy as a result of stakeholder dialogues, as it places the interests of the groups associated with the company at the forefront. A company

that practices CSR acts according to standards defined by its stakeholders, for what stakeholders themselves perceive as socially acceptable or meeting their needs, legitimises the company's actions (Suchman, 1995; Matten & Moon, 2008; Fernando & Lawrence, 2014).

This is not the case with Brand Activism, which can also – or even primarily – act contrary to the interests of its own stakeholders to advocate an idealistic point of view (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). This can be defined as acting in a confrontational manner and overriding the legitimacy requirement.

Brand Activism is therefore based on a normative approach, which has a higher priority than the relationship with one's own stakeholders (Phillips, 2003). Due to the lack of connection between the business core and issues, stakeholders are not included in the decision-making process, but the company acts according to its own moral code. Referring to the stakeholders would contradict the sense of Brand Activism according to its own clear standpoints (Austin et al., 2019).

In this regard, the concept is contrary to the prevailing corporate principle of avoiding any form of resentment (Korschun et al., 2016). While Brand Activism may also have an indirect positive impact on stakeholders and shareholders, this is only the case if there is a correlation of interests in general (Bhagwat et al., 2020) and is of secondary importance to the company (Wettstein & Baur, 2016).

In essence, the definition of Brand Activism as an extension of CSR, which is sometimes found in academic literature, is not entirely accurate. Brand Activism does not encompass the same subject areas, nor does it target the same audience. While Brand Activism is typically directed towards the general public, there is no mandatory functional link (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). This contrasts with CSR, which is inherently linked to the public.

Furthermore, Brand Activism aims to effect long-lasting societal change by attempting to influence public opinion. This activist approach differs from CSR, which tends to be internal. Kotler & Sakar (2018) therefore assign Brand Activism a higher degree of advocacy and a higher degree of public relations compared to CSR. Consequently, Brand Activism is a more far-reaching concept than CSR, which is based on the socially responsible approach to business. As a result, Brand Activism is considered to be value-driven (Kotler & Sakar, 2018), whereas CSR is considered to be corporate-driven (Porter & Kramer, 2007).



Wettstein & Baur (2016) posit that an activist campaign is not merely the avoidance of complicity or the minimisation of harm with business activities, as is the case with CSR. Rather, Brand Activism should additionally emphasise the philanthropic activities of the company, and only can be referred to as Brand Activism (Wettstein & Baur, 2016; Vredenburg et al., 2016).

In short and when viewed through the lens of Carroll's CSR pyramid, illustrating the individual components of CSR (Carroll, 1991), Brand Activism can be described as an intensification of the "philanthropic" tip of the pyramid, but not as an extension of CSR per se.

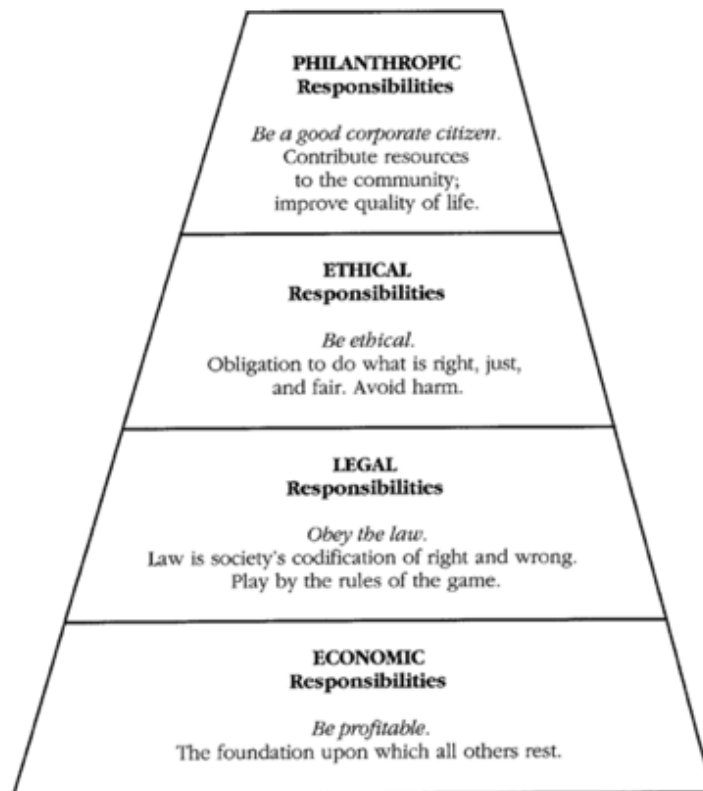


Figure 3: Carroll's Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility (1991)

The differences are summarised in the following table:

	<b>Corporate Social Responsibility</b>	<b>Brand Activism</b>
<b>Initiator</b>	Stakeholder expectations	Social expectations and current controversies
<b>Characterisation</b>	Primarily corporate driven	Value driven
<b>Topics</b>	Sustainability initiatives, social programmes, ethical business practices, charity work	Current socio-political issues (e.g. LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights, ...)
<b>Orientation</b>	Internal (responsive)	External (pro-active)
<b>Primary target group</b>	Stakeholder	The public, primarily „activist groups“
<b>Communication strategy</b>	Factual, primarily internal (e.g. CSR reports)	Direct and emotional, primarily via social media or public campaigns
<b>Target setting</b>	Long-term integration of corporate values into the corporate strategy	Social influence and long-term change
<b>Risks</b>	Perception as a pure PR strategy, Challenges of satisfying all stakeholders → generally entails little risk	Strong controversy and backlash „cancel culture“ Risk of loss of customers and reputation → especially if perceived as inauthentic

**Table 1: Difference overview between CSR and BA**

This differentiation allows to understand Brand Activism as a novel instrument of corporate political influence (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). It encompasses a specific aspect of corporate communication that no other concept fulfils to date.

However, the concept presents companies with a challenging decision: By taking a public stance on socio-politically controversial issues that are not directly related to the company's core business, it is generally perceived as entailing more risk (Bhagwat et al., 2020). Due to the sensitive nature of the topics and the potential for conflicts of interest with its own stakeholders, the company must carefully consider in advance which goals it is pursuing with such a campaign and to what extent these are worthwhile.

Yet, when applied correctly, Vredenburg et al. (2020, p. 446) confirm: “[Brand Activism creates] social change and marketing success“. The fundamental concept of Brand Activism has the potential to generate great positive economic outcomes if a corresponding campaign is successful.

This prompts the question of whether the associated risk can be mitigated by certain circumstances to successfully publicise Brand Activism campaigns, even in politically polarized times.

### **3.6. The Role of consumers in corporate socio-political communication**

#### **3.6.1. Principle of self-congruence**

The success of a communication strategy is contingent upon the response of consumers (Keller, 2001), which is why they are the focus of CBBE.

Research indicates that consumers are more likely to engage with a company and its brand message if they can identify with its values (Korschun, 2021). Conversely, there are negative consequences when consumers do not identify with the values of a company or its brand message. A product purchase reflects the consumer's personality and suggests information about their identity (Belk, 1988; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Brands that align with espoused values and opinions are favoured, while those that do not tend to be avoided (Reed et al., 2012). Sirgy (1982) suggests that the relationship between self-image and brand image has a positive effect on product evaluation.

This concept of identification is known as self-congruence and explains both the principle of Political Consumerism and why certain groups of people show greater acceptance of Brand Activism.

In the context of Brand Activism, it is possible to identify and engage with appropriate activist groups, who may subsequently become brand advocates. This is because consumers are more likely to represent and defend a brand with which they identify to the outside world than if they had only chosen it based on traditional factors, such as price or quality (Mirzaei et al., 2022). A study by Allen (2002) corroborates the assertion that the alignment of brand and personal values engenders increased brand loyalty, which is likely to result in a higher CBBE. Consequently, Brand Activism can be identified as a pivotal success factor for the most important stage of Keller's CBBE model – Brand Resonance –, provided that it is aligned with the appropriate target or activist group.

According to Keller (2001), independent consumers can also be influenced by others' high Brand Resonance, for example through word of mouth can create positive brand associations among consumers, resulting in a domino effect.

On the other hand, however, this can have negative consequences. For example, if the positioning of a brand and the actual activism undertaken by consumers differ, it can lead to what is known as "anti-Brand Activism" (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Romani et al., 2015). It

is therefore necessary to evaluate certain predictors that make the success of a Brand Activism campaign more likely regarding CBBE.

However, as Brand Activism is an insufficiently researched concept (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Koch, 2020), there are few established studies to date that examine these potential influencing factors regarding consumers. Previous research has primarily focused on the age of consumers. There is evidence that Brand Activism is widely accepted, particularly among Generation Z and millennials (Shetty et al., 2019; Sachdev et al., 2021; Kumar, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to identify further potential predictors of success to ascertain the efficacy of such a campaign with a company's own target group and to make more precise recommendations regarding its design.

To date, there has been a paucity of academic work on gender in this context. However, differences have already been identified in this respect for CSR (Calabrese et al., Hur et al., 2016).

This paper therefore investigates not only whether an intensification of corporate socio-political communication can significantly increase the perceived CBBE, but also whether there is a difference between men and women regarding this effect.

### **3.6.2. Gender as a potential success predictor**

Roberts (1993) posits that women exhibit greater concern for others and society as consumers in their behaviour and decision-making; Meyers-Levy & Loken (2015) characterise women as "other-oriented". They also demonstrate a stronger capacity for empathy, as evidenced by the findings of Hoffman (1978), Eisenberg & Lennon (1983) and Schieman & van Gundy (2000). This is related to both emotional and cognitive empathy (Mestre et al., 2009; Greenberg et al., 2022; Pang et al., 2023), the two most important and most classified aspects of empathy (Cox et al., 2012). Both refer to the ability of understanding other people and their behaviour, and thus to be able to empathise with viewpoints outside one's own if necessary.

Ambler and Vakratsas (1996) emphasise the consideration of cognitive and affective messages in the context of CBBE. Both could be better understood and evaluated by women due to gender differences.

As a result, it can be reasonably assumed that women exhibit greater acceptance of Brand Activism. On the one hand, they are more concerned about society and other people. On the other hand, the bias of self-congruence is lower in them due to their greater capacity for empathy, which enables them to empathise with opinions that do not correspond to their own. Roberts et al (1993) show that women consider their concern for others and for society when making decisions. Consequently, the risk of negative feedback could be lower for female consumers. Wei et al. (2019) found that men are more likely to forgive companies for performance-related wrongdoings, while women are more likely to forgive value-related wrongdoings.

The existing literature has identified differences between the sexes regarding the more extensively researched area of Corporate Social Responsibility. For instance, women have been found to have higher expectations regarding CSR measures from the corporate side (Calabrese et al., 2016) and to perceive them more positively (Hur et al., 2016). Hatch and Stephen (2015) state that they possess a higher internalised moral identity and believe that organisations should be more beneficial to society. This is also reflected in their consequence-based purchasing behaviour, which suggests that their demand for Brand Activism and Corporate Social Responsibility is likely higher and implies a greater application of Political Consumerism (Gundelach, 2021). If women perceive a campaign as relatable and important, they are more likely to respond positively to its message (Read et al., 2019).

#### 4. DERIVATION OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

For companies, the decision to take a controversial public stand is often a challenging one, particularly in politically uncertain times. Such a positioning can lead to controversy, which is difficult to assess in advance as society becomes increasingly polarised.

Conversely, it is evident that contemporary consumers have elevated expectations of companies. They are more politically engaged than ever, and their purchasing decisions reflect these circumstances.

It has been proven in academic literature that corporate socio-political communication can increase CBBE. However, as this approach is no longer seen as sufficient as the sole form of corporate responsibility, it is evident that consumers rate brand equity more positively with Brand Activism than with CSR.

Accordingly, the initial hypothesis to be evaluated in this study goes as follows:

*H1: The perceived CBBE increases significantly with the intensification of corporate socio-political communication and is therefore strongest with Brand Activism.*

The target group may provide initial indications of the likelihood of success of such corporate activism and should not be disregarded due to the increased risk of negative feedback. Based on the available research of CSR, it is reasonable to assume that gender could also act as such an indicator of success regarding Brand Activism.

A second hypothesis is therefore subjected to analysis:

*H2a: There is a significant gender difference in terms of how brand equity is perceived in the context of Brand Activism, with women perceiving it more positively than men.*

To establish gender as a novel, standalone success factor, it is imperative to ascertain its existence as a discrete variable, distinct from the established predictor of age.

The second hypothesis is therefore divided into two parts:

*H2b: The gender differences in the perception of CBBE in Brand Activism exist regardless of respondents' age.*

## **5. EXPERIMENT**

### **5.1. Research purpose**

The objective of the experiment presented in this paper is to ascertain whether the perceived CBBE increases in proportion to the intensity of socio-political communication. Furthermore, in the context of Brand Activism, the study aims to identify whether there are significant differences in this perception between the two genders.

### **5.2. Methodical approach**

To ensure the reliability of the statements made about the hypotheses in question, a quantitative research approach was selected. This approach allows for statistical evaluation, as it is characterised by a high degree of standardisation. Furthermore, it enables the surveying of large samples, which leads to comparatively accurate results, as the results are evidence-based (Echterhoff, 2023). Furthermore, quantitative research enables more straightforward comparisons with previous studies in the same research field, facilitating the identification of trends and correlations (Jung, 2019), which is of great importance for the reliability of possible recommendations for action in the context of this experiment. Additionally, it reduces the potential for researcher bias (Wilson, 2019).

The data was collected using a two-part quantitative questionnaire via Microsoft Office Forms, between 25 March 2024 and 16 April 2024. The questionnaire was available in German, English and Spanish.

It commenced with an introductory text and information on data protection, which was followed by the collection of demographic data: first age and gender, then questions on the highest level of education and political orientation.

The subsequent section, designated as Part One, comprises open-text inquiries pertaining to the respondents' personal interest in politics and their purchasing behaviour. This segment serves to inform future target-oriented behaviour by companies. It concludes with an instructional manipulation check designed to exclude invalid responses and to ensure the participants' attention prior to answering the subsequent main section.

The second section, designated as Part Two, comprises a case study. To assess the perceived CBBE, the participants are required to answer a five-point Likert scale (1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I rather disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I strongly agree) about a fictitious company. It is important to note that no real company was chosen to exclude any prior bias that could distort the results of the CBBE scale (Keller, 1993).

For the purposes of this case study, the participants were divided into three experimental groups using an independent stimulus (the day number of the birthday month) in order to enable a direct comparison of samples of approximately the same size between a company with no social-political commitment at all as a control group, a company that is only active in the area of CSR, and an activist company. The company itself remains unchanged regardless of the group to which it is assigned; only the type of commitment is altered in the respective introductory text.

As previously stated, there is no established scale or other measuring instrument for the concept of Customer-Based Brand Equity (Washburn & Plank, 2002). The nine items of the Likert scales were therefore designed freely based on Keller's CBBE model, with the intention that two items each form the first three stages of the CBBE model; three items were allocated to the most important phase of the model, the Brand Resonance (cf. Keller, 2001).

The subsequent evaluation and testing of the hypotheses were conducted using the Jamovi statistical programme.

### **5.3. Validity, reliability, objectivity**

To ensure the validity of quantitative research, the three scientific criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity must be observed.

#### **5.3.1. Validity**

Validity is considered the most important of all quality criteria, as it ensures the competence and meaningfulness of a measuring instrument. In short, it is used to check whether an experiment actually and sufficiently measures the intended concept and is therefore



important to improve the meaningfulness of the research results (O' Leary-Kelly et al., 1998; Levine et al., 2006).

To ensure this statistically, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis is carried out. If latent variables already exist, as in the case of the four dimensions of the CBBE Scale used here, this procedure can be used to test the hypothesis of whether the scale actually examines the underlying factors (Thompson et al., 2004).

Factor	Indicator	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Brand Salience	I could easily remember NoveLux if I saw or heard about it.	0.715	0.0776	9.21	< .001
	If NoveLux existed, I'm sure I would have heard of it.	0.441	0.0656	6.72	< .001
Brand Meaning	I believe that the products of NoveLux are of high quality.	0.723	0.0601	12.03	< .001
	I think NoveLux is authentic and its products are reliable.	0.760	0.0624	12.18	< .001
Brand Response	NoveLux fits well with my self-image.	0.624	0.0628	9.94	< .001
	NoveLux would be perceived positively in my social circles.	0.844	0.0788	10.71	< .001
Brand Resonance	I would prefer products from NoveLux to similar products without looking any further.	0.781	0.0779	10.02	< .001
	I would pay a price above the market average for a NoveLux product.	0.659	0.0745	8.85	< .001
	I would recommend NoveLux to my friends and family.	0.685	0.0730	9.37	< .001

**Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the CBBE Scale**

The results demonstrate a highly significant correlation ( $p < .001$ ) between all variables, indicating that they load effectively on their respective factors. The high Z values, which measure the distance between the estimate and the null hypothesis' value of 0 in standard deviations, provide further confirmation of this; the very low standard errors of  $SE < 0.1$  also support this conclusion. The indicators are well suited to measuring the underlying constructs (variables). Though one indicator exhibited a relatively low factor loading of 0.441, yet it remained statistically significant.

Factor Covariances		Estimate	SE	Z	p
Factor 1	Factor 1	1.000 <sup>a</sup>			
	Factor 2	0.813	0.0782	10.4	<.001
	Factor 3	0.888	0.0814	10.9	<.001
	Factor 4	0.951	0.0723	13.2	<.001
Factor 2	Factor 2	1.000 <sup>a</sup>			
	Factor 3	0.778	0.0609	12.8	<.001
	Factor 4	0.706	0.0654	10.8	<.001
Factor 3	Factor 3	1.000 <sup>a</sup>			
	Factor 4	0.977	0.0517	18.9	<.001
Factor 4	Factor 4	1.000 <sup>a</sup>			

<sup>a</sup> fixed parameter

**Table 3: Factor Covariances for the CBBE Scale**

The covariances, which indicate the strength of the correlation between two factors, are all highly significant and demonstrate a high degree of correlation. These findings provide support for the validity of the model, as the factors are not only internally consistent but also strongly linked to each other.

Test for Exact Fit			RMSEA 90% CI				
$\chi^2$	df	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Lower	Upper
29.4	17	0.031	0.977	0.962	0.0649	0.0196	0.103

**Table 4: Exact Fit Tests for the CBBE Scale**

Although the Chi-Square Test indicates a significant result ( $p = .031$ ), which indicates that the model does not fit ideally, the values of the Comparative Fit Index and the Tucker-Lewis Index demonstrate a very good fit showing values  $> 0.9$ .

The Root Mean Square Error of approximation also indicates a satisfactory fit, with a value of 0.0649. Values between 0.05 and 0.08 are considered to be within the acceptable range, while values above 1.0 are indicative of a poor fit (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). However, the confidence interval indicates a broad fluctuation, yet the model can be considered having an acceptable to good fit on average.

It can therefore be assumed that the CBBE scale is valid.

### 5.3.2. Reliability

The reliability criterion is employed to guarantee the internal consistency and stability of a measurement instrument (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). As the questionnaire utilises a self-created Likert scale, it is necessary to ascertain whether this instrument is capable of measuring the construct as a whole, which forms part of the research question. It is therefore not sufficient to validate only the individual factors.

The internal consistency of a test is enhanced by the average correlation between the individual items (Moosbrugger & Kelava, 2020). To ascertain this, the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient is calculated for the CBBE Scale.

This can take a value between 0 and 1. A value of 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable (Peterson et al., 1994).

Scale Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's $\alpha$	
CBBE Scale	0.882

**Table 5: Cronbach's Alpha for the CBBE Scale**

A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.882 was determined for the CBBE scale, indicating that the scale is within the optimal range.

Item Reliability Statistics	
	If item dropped
	Cronbach's $\alpha$
I could easily remember NoveLux if I saw or heard about it.	0.864
If NoveLux existed, I'm sure I would have heard of it.	0.880
I believe that the products of NoveLux are of high quality.	0.868
I think NoveLux is authentic and its products are reliable.	0.867
NoveLux fits well with my self-image.	0.866
NoveLux would be perceived positively in my social circles.	0.864
I would prefer products from NoveLux to similar products without looking any further.	0.867
I would pay a price above the market average for a NoveLux product.	0.872
I would recommend NoveLux to my friends and family.	0.869

**Table 6: Cronbach's Alpha for the CBBE Scale (if Item dropped)**

Even if individual items were removed, the resulting value would not fall below 0.864. It can therefore be assumed that the CBBE scale exhibits a good level of internal consistency.

### **5.3.3. Objectivity**

The quality criterion of objectivity emphasises the independence of the results from external influences. Furthermore, the results must be consistent when different individuals perform the same measurement (Kromrey, 2002). Objectivity is only approximated when there is objectivity in the implementation, evaluation, and interpretation (Bortz & Döring, 2006).

The former can be ensured using standardised procedures, which is the case with quantitative questionnaires due to the predefined answers.

Furthermore, the data collection in this paper is anonymous and independent to prevent distortions and bias in the evaluation.

In the subsequent analysis, statistical methods are employed to present the results in a uniform and objective manner. This provides the foundation for objective evaluation and interpretation.

Although objectivity is essential for the creation of a scientific paper, it can never be fully achieved (van Dongen & Sikorski, 2021). However, it is assumed to be sufficient for this experiment.

## **5.4. Participants**

To prevent bias, no demographic restrictions were imposed on the respondents. As of 16 April 2024, 180 individuals had participated in the survey.

Of these,  $n = 173$  were identified as valid using the instructional manipulation check, an analysis of possible contradictory answers and a box plot, which shows extreme values (outliers) in the results.

The precise descriptive data can be found in the following table.

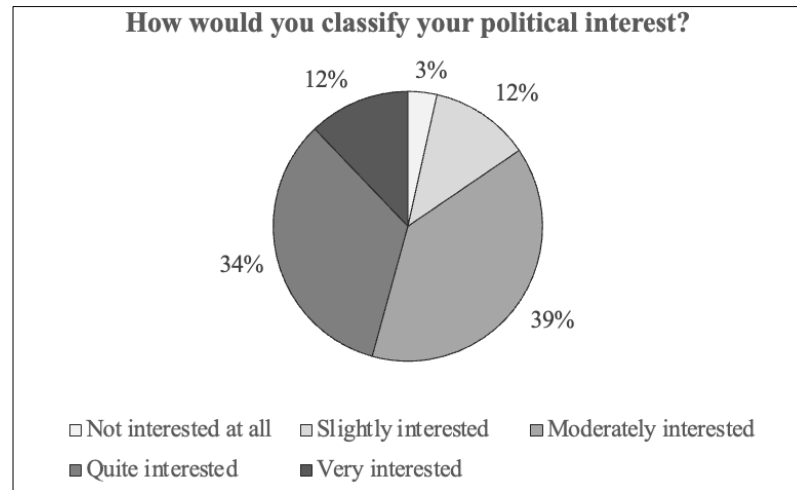
<b>Engagement Group</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
No socio-political Communication	53	30,6%	30,6%
CSR	55	31,8%	62,4%
BA	65	37,6%	100,0%
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
Male	73	42,2%	42,2%
Female	100	57,8%	100,0%
Non-binary	0	0%	100,0%
Prefer not to say	0	0%	100,0%
<b>Year of Birth</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
1946-1964	14	8,1%	8,1%
1965-1979	19	11,0%	19,1%
1980-1995	10	5,8%	24,9%
1996-2010	128	74,0%	98,8%
after 2010	2	1,2%	100,0%
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
Less than a high school degree	5	2,9%	2,9%
High school degree or equivalent	63	36,4%	39,3%
Apprenticeship	23	13,3%	52,6%
Bachelor's degree	72	41,6%	94,2%
Master's degree or higher	10	5,8%	100,0%
<b>Political Ideology</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
Far left	17	9,8%	9,8%
Centre-left	62	35,8%	45,7%
Centre	54	31,2%	76,9%
Centre-right	16	9,2%	86,4%
Far right	4	2,3%	88,4%
Prefer not to say	20	11,6%	100,0%

**Table 7: Demographic Sample Overview**

## 6. RESULTS

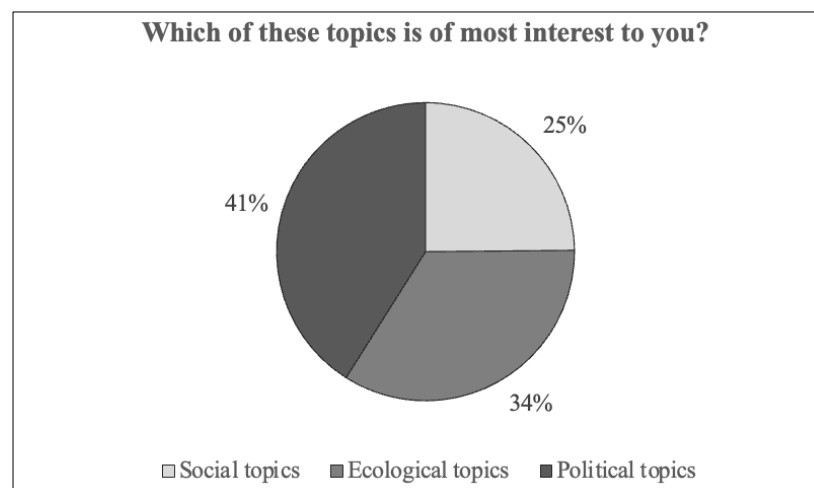
### 6.1. First part of the questionnaire

Firstly, the responses to the questions in Part 1 of the questionnaire are presented, which provide supplementary information about the participants.



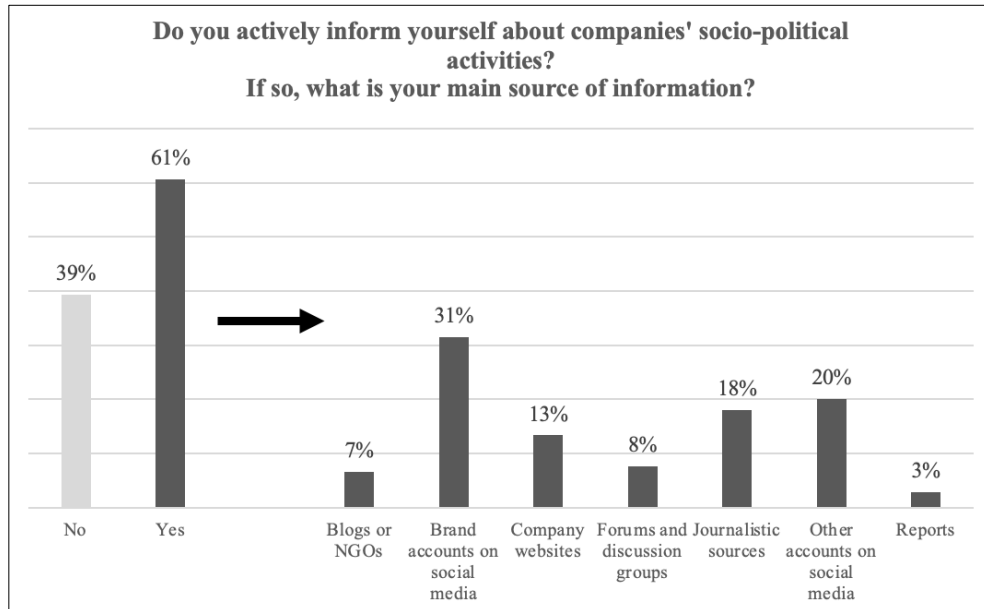
**Figure 4: Sample's Classification of Political Interest**

It is evident that a considerable proportion of participants (85%) exhibit at least a moderate level of interest in politics and current global affairs. As this is considered an important prerequisite for the acceptance of Brand Activism, as proposed by Zhang et al. (2015), it also supports Hypothesis 1.



**Figure 5: Samples' Political Interest by thematic Fields**

This interest is similarly distributed across all areas of the socio-political debate, which suggests that companies should also be interested in cross-cutting social debates. One prerequisite of Brand Activism is that the positioning does not necessarily have to be linked to the actual core business. This graph serves to confirm the necessity of this assertion.



**Figure 6: Sample's Degree of Information and main Information Sources**

As anticipated, a considerable proportion of participants demonstrate a proclivity for actively seeking information pertaining to the socio-political activities of companies. The significance of social media as previously discussed is also evident in this context. A total of 51% of respondents indicated that they use company' social media accounts or independent social media accounts for this purpose.

This information serves to corroborate the veracity of Hypothesis 1.

## **6.2. Results of Hypothesis 1**

### **6.2.1. Prerequisites for parametric statistical analysis**

Once the three quality criteria have been met, it must be further investigated whether the available data are suitable for parametric procedures or whether non-parametric procedures must be applied to avoid distorting the results.

To achieve this, several assumptions must be fulfilled. These include the use of an interval-scaled scale for metric data, normal distribution, the homogeneity of variance and the independence of observations (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012).

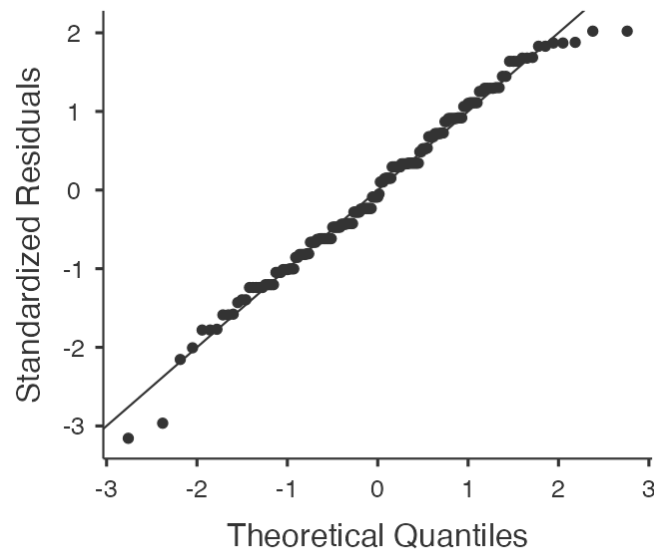
The initial step is to ascertain whether the data in question follows a normal distribution. As Likert scales consist of ordinal scaled values, the mean value of each item is first calculated by aggregating the individual values for each participant. This enables the formation of an interval-scaled scale, which is suitable for the subsequent procedures.

The Shapiro-Wilk Test is employed to ascertain the presence of a normal distribution, calculating the differences between the observed values and the expected values under normal distribution.

It is highly accurate and is particularly suitable for samples of up to 50, but it also provides reliable results for larger samples (Mohd Razali & Yap, 2011). The test determines whether the null hypothesis can be rejected, which states that a normal distribution exists. This is the case at values  $p \geq .05$ , which indicates that there is no significance and thus no strong deviation from the normal distribution.

Normality Tests			
		statistic	p
Aggregated Means Brand Equity Scale	Shapiro-Wilk	0.987	0.099

**Table 8: Shapiro Wilk Test for Hypothesis 1**



**Figure 7: Q-Q Plot for Hypothesis 1**



The result is an approximate normal distribution, and the null hypothesis ( $H_0: p \geq .05$ ) is not rejected. The result is not significant, thereby fulfilling the first condition for parametric test procedures. This is also evident from the Q-Q plot.

Homogeneity of Variances Tests					
		Statistic	df	df2	p
CBBE Scale	Levene's	2.41	2	170	0.093

**Table 9: Levene's Test for Hypothesis 1**

A further condition for parametric statistical tests is the homogeneity of variances. In the case of normally distributed data, the Levene Test is employed to calculate the homogeneity of variance. This test calculates the deviations of each value from the group mean and determines whether the variances of these deviations are significantly different.

The null hypothesis of the Levene Test postulates that the variances of the groups are homogeneous. In this instance, the null hypothesis ( $H_0: p \geq .05$ ) is also not rejected. The variances of the results of the CBBE scale are homogeneous. No significant differences were found between the groups were found.

The final criterion is that the data must be independent. This is ensured by ensuring that no respondent is privy to the results of other respondents, as this could influence their responses. Furthermore, the groups were formed by a random variable, in this case the day number of the birthday month. Each participant was allocated to a single group. It can therefore be assumed that the experimental groups are independent.

All the conditions for parametric tests are therefore met for this hypothesis.

### 6.2.2. Statistical analysis

Once the requisite criteria have been met, the subsequent analysis and evaluation of the results can be initiated. The following table presents the descriptive values for all three experimental groups  $\mu_1$ NoSocio-PoliticalCommunication (control group),  $\mu_2$ CorporateSocialResponsibility and  $\mu_3$ BrandActivism. The stimulus was found to have divided the participants into almost equally sized samples, thus demonstrating satisfactory efficacy.

Descriptives		
	Group	CBBE Scale
N	1	53
	2	55
	3	65
Mean	1	2.81
	2	3.25
	3	3.72
Median	1	3
	2	3
	3	4
Standard Deviation	1	0.604
	2	0.489
	3	0.639
Minimum	1	1
	2	2
	3	2
Maximum	1	4
	2	4
	3	5

**Table 10: Sample Descriptives by Experiment Group**

The following hypothesis is being subjected to empirical testing:

*H<sub>1</sub>: The perceived CBBE increases significantly with the intensification of corporate socio-political communication and is therefore strongest with Brand Activism.*

*H<sub>0</sub>: The perceived CBBE does not significantly increase with the intensification of corporate socio-political communication and is therefore not strongest with Brand Activism.*

A One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is employed to ascertain whether there are statistically significant differences between the mean values of the three independent experimental groups.

The aggregated mean CBBE values serve as the dependent variable, with the grouping variable being the groups that were divided up by the stimulus. Given that only one grouping variable is considered and that the homogeneity of the variances has been established, the appropriate statistical test is One-Way Fisher's ANOVA (Speed, 1992).

One-Way ANOVA (Fisher's)				
	F	df1	df2	p
CBBE Scale	35.7	2	170	<.001

**Table 11: One-Way ANOVA (Fisher's) for Hypothesis 1**

The results of Fisher's ANOVA demonstrate a clear significance between the medians of the individual groups ( $F = 35.7$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

In this case, the F-value represents the ratio of the variance between groups to the variance within groups. A high F-value, which is significantly greater than 1, indicates that the aggregated group means are significantly different for at least two of the groups (Wooditch et al., 2021). Group membership therefore exerts a considerable influence on the dependent variable.

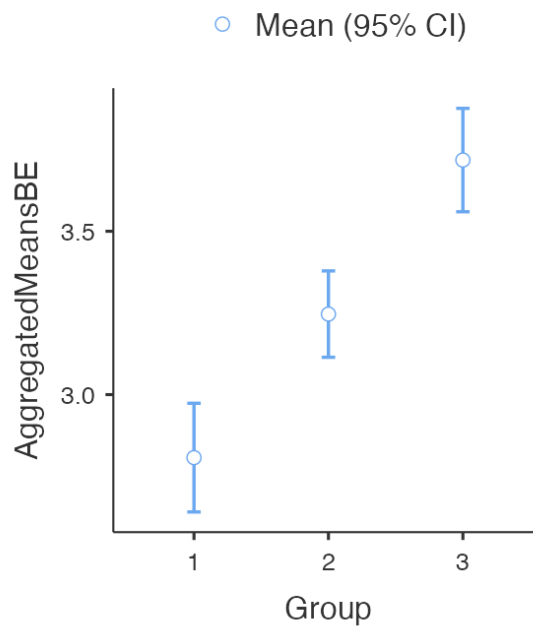
A p-value of  $p < .001$  indicates that the probability of the observed differences in the group means being due to chance is less than 0.1%. The F-value of 35.7 is statistically highly significant. The observed differences between the group means cannot be attributed to chance. It can therefore be concluded that corporate socio-political communication is a significant factor in the perception of CBBE, as this is the only differentiating factor between the experimental groups.

Nevertheless, to provide a definitive answer to the hypothesis, it is essential to ascertain which groups are in fact different. The ANOVA does not provide any information about this (Lynch, 2013). Consequently, the Tukey Post-Hoc Test is employed, which compares the aggregated mean CBBE values of all groups in pairs.

Tukey Post-Hoc Test – CBBE Scale				
		1	2	3
1	Mean difference	—	-0.439	-0.911
	p-value	—	<.001	<.001
2	Mean difference		—	-0.471
	p-value		—	<.001
3	Mean difference			—
	p-value			—

**Table 12: Tukey Post-Hoc Test for Hypothesis 1**

The results demonstrate a clear and significant relationship between all three groups. The aggregated mean in group 1 is 0.439 units lower than in group 2, and in group 2 it is 0.471 units lower than in group 3. This is also evident in the visual representation:



**Figure 8: Descriptive Plot for Hypothesis 1**

The null hypothesis can therefore be rejected: the perceived CBBE does indeed grow with the degree of intensification of corporate socio-political communication and is therefore strongest in Brand Activism, which can make the concept a decisive success factor.

### 6.3. Results of Hypothesis 2

#### 6.3.1. Prerequisites for parametric statistical analysis

The second hypothesis is concerned exclusively with the potential for gender-based differences in the perception of CBBE in the context of Brand Activism. As this analysis is limited to participants who were assigned  $\mu_{3\text{BrandActivism}}$ , a Shapiro-Wilk Test and a Levene Test are conducted once more for this specific group.

Tests of Normality		statistic	p
CBBE Scale	Shapiro-Wilk	0.990	0.889

Table 13: Shapiro-Wilk Test for Hypothesis 2

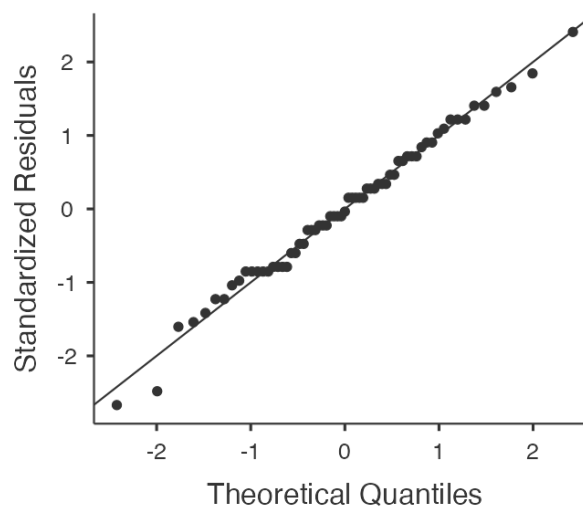


Figure 9: Q-Q Plot for Hypothesis 2

Homogeneity of Variances Tests					
		F	df	df2	p
CBBE Scale	Levene's	0.146	1	63	0.704

Table 14: Levene's Test for Hypothesis 2

The prerequisites for parametric tests have been met, and both tests have yielded significant results with a p-value greater than 0.05.

The parametric test procedures may therefore be continued.

### 6.3.2. Statistical analysis

The following table presents the descriptive statistics for the breakdown of participants by gender. The categorical variable was recoded as an ordinal variable for the analysis (1 = male, 2 = female).

Descriptives	Gender	
	1	2
N	1	31
	2	34
Mean	1	3.47
	2	3.95
Median	1	4
	2	4
Standard deviation	1	0.654
	2	0.537
Minimum	1	2
	2	3
Maximum	1	5
	2	5

**Table 15: Sample Descriptives by Gender**

The following hypothesis is being tested in part:

*H2a: There is a significant gender difference in terms of how brand equity is perceived in the context of Brand Activism, with women perceiving it more positively than men.*

*H0a: There is no significant gender difference in terms of how brand equity is perceived in the context of Brand Activism, with women not perceiving it more positively than men.*

To analyse whether women score higher on the CBBE scale in the context of Brand Activism, an Independent Samples T-Test was conducted, which compared the mean values of two independent groups (Lynch, 2013). The variable of gender is employed as the

grouping variable. The hypothesis to be tested is H2<sub>a</sub>, which states that the aggregated mean CBBE value for males is less than that for females:  $\mu_{\text{male}} < \mu_{\text{female}}$ .

**Independent Samples T-Test**

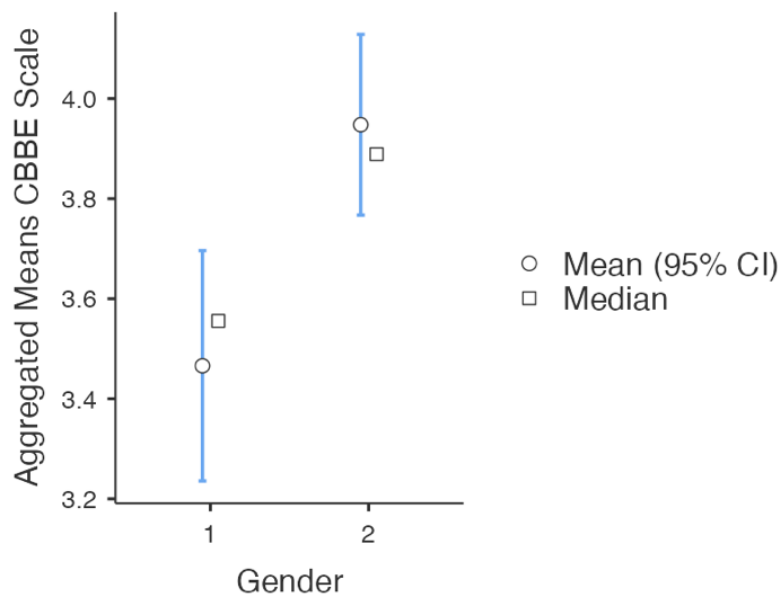
		<b>Statistic</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>CBBE Scale</b>	<b>Student's t</b>	-3.26	63.0	<.001

Note. H2<sub>a</sub>  $\mu_{\text{male}} < \mu_{\text{female}}$

**Table 16: Independent Samples T-Test for Hypothesis 2**

The t-value is negative at  $t = -3.26$ , indicating that the difference in the mean values relative to the variability is greater for the male participants than for the female participants.

The result is highly significant, with a p-value of less than 0.001. The probability of the observed difference being due to chance is less than 0.1%. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Furthermore, a visual inspection of the data reveals a pronounced disparity between the aggregated mean CBBE values.



**Figure 10: Descriptive Plot for Hypothesis 2**

To ensure that the results of Hypothesis 1 can be applied to Hypothesis 2 without distortion, the tests carried out for Hypothesis 1 are re-examined, this time grouped by gender. The results obtained for the male participants were as follows:

One-Way ANOVA (Fisher's)				
	F	df1	df2	p
CBBE Scale	6.14	2	70	0.003

**Table 17: One-Way ANOVA (Fisher's) for Hypothesis 1 by Gender (male)**

Tukey Post-Hoc Test – CBBE Scale				
		1	2	3
1	Mean difference	—	-0.319	-0.612
	p-value	—	0.235	0.002
2	Mean difference		—	-0.294
	p-value		—	0.240
3	Mean difference			—
	p-value			—

**Table 18: Tukey Post-Hoc Test for Hypothesis 1 by gender (male)**

There is no significant difference in the mean values for men, either within  $\mu_{3\text{BrandActivism}}$  or between the control group and  $\mu_{1\text{NoSocio-PoliticalCommunication}}$  or  $\mu_{2\text{CorporateSocialResponsibility}}$ . The only significant difference between the groups is between  $\mu_1$  and  $\mu_3$ , with a p-value of 0.002.

This indicates that men do not perceive CSR and Brand Activism to be significantly distinct, yet CSR alone is insufficient to elicit a significant impact on the CBBE score, as evidenced by the absence of a notable improvement in comparison to the control group.

For the female participants, the result is:

One-Way ANOVA (Fisher's)				
	F	df1	df2	p
CBBE Scale	41.6	2	97	<.001

**Table 19: One-Way ANOVA (Fisher's) for Hypothesis 1 by Gender (female)**



Tukey Post-Hoc Test – CBBE Scale				
		1	2	3
1	Mean difference	—	-0.515	-1.174
	p-value	—	<.001	<.001
2	Mean difference		—	-0.659
	p-value		—	<.001
3	Mean difference			—
	p-value			—

**Table 20: Tukey Post-Hoc Test for Hypothesis 1 by Gender (female)**

A strongly significant difference ( $p < .001$ ) is evident between all groups of women, indicating that they attach greater value to socio-political communication than men.

Nevertheless, Brand Activism appears to be a prerequisite for both groups to achieve a notable divergence in the perception of the CBBE.

The second sub-hypothesis is then subjected to empirical testing:

*H<sub>2b</sub>: The gender differences in the perception of CBBE in Brand Activism exist regardless respondents' age.*

*H<sub>0b</sub>: The gender differences in the perception of CBBE in Brand Activism do not exist regardless respondents' age.*

To ascertain whether these results are true independently of the effect of age that has already been established in the literature and can therefore serve as an independent indicator of success, it is necessary to analyse whether there is an interaction between these two variables. The interaction effect between age as a continuous covariate and gender as a categorical factor can be measured applying Linear Regression. The year of birth was recoded as an ordinal variable, with the following values: 1 = 1946-1964; 2 = 1965-1979; 3 = 1980-1995; 4 = 1996-2010; 5 = after 2010.

Model Fit Measures		
Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>
1	0.447	0.200

**Table 21: Model Fit Measures of Linear Regression for Hypothesis 2**

Model Coefficients – CBBE Scale				
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept <sup>a</sup>	3.7525	0.2637	14.233	< .001
Gender:				
1 – 2	-0.7723	0.3820	-2.022	0.048
YearofBirth	0.0638	0.0797	0.800	0.427
YearofBirth * Gender:				
YearofBirth * (1 – 2)	0.1073	0.1203	0.892	0.376

<sup>a</sup> Represents reference level

**Table 22: Linear Regression Model Coefficients for Hypothesis 2**

The results of the Linear Regression indicate a moderate correlation between the predicted and actual values of the metric dependent variable, in this case the aggregate mean values of the CBBE scale. The model explains approximately 20.1% of the variance in the mean values ( $R = .447$ ;  $R^2 = .200$ ). As is common in the social sciences, this value is comparatively low. However, it can be considered acceptable, given that human behaviour is dependent on numerous other factors (Ozili, 2023).

The results of the Linear Regression permit the following conclusions to be drawn, if female gender is taken as a reference:

Respondents' age has no significant influence on the mean score of the CBBE scale in Brand Activism in this experiment. The p-value of  $p = .427$  is not statistically significant and therefore cannot be used as a predictor, taking gender into account. The positive coefficient of 0.0638 for year of birth indicates that the mean value of the CBBE scale increases by 0.0638 units on average, the younger the generation is. However, this effect is not statistically significant when gender is taken into account.

However, when age is considered an independent variable, a slightly significant result of  $p = .048$  is obtained. As higher values represent younger individuals in this case, this indicates that younger individuals tend to have higher scale values, thereby confirming the hypotheses previously established in the literature. However, due to the high proportion of Generation Z participants in the sample, caution should be exercised in interpreting these values. Notwithstanding this finding, the effect is diminished when gender is considered.

**Model Coefficients – CBBE Scale**

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Intercept <sup>a</sup>	3.341	0.2026	16.49	<.001
YearofBirth	0.128	0.0634	2.02	0.048

<sup>a</sup> Represents reference level

**Table 23: Model Coefficients for Linear Regression (Year of Birth only)**

Moreover, the Linear Regression shows a negative coefficient of -0.7723. This indicates that the aggregated mean CBBE value on the CBBE scale for men is approximately 0.7723 units lower than that for women. This effect is statistically significant with a p-value of 0.048, which is statistically significant and thus confirms the assumption that gender is a possible success predictor.

**Model Coefficients – CBBE Scale**

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Intercept <sup>a</sup>	3.948	0.102	38.66	<.001
Gender:				
1 – 2	-0.482	0.148	-3.26	0.002

<sup>a</sup> Represents reference level

**Table 24: Model Coefficients for Linear Regression (Gender only)**

When gender, on the other hand, is considered as a single variable, it is highly significant, with a p-value of  $p = .002$ . This makes it an independent factor that is not dependent on the age of the respondents.

Finally, the interaction effect between the year of birth and gender is examined as part of the Linear Regression analysis. This results in a positive interaction coefficient of 0.1073 with

a p-value of  $p = .376$ . The interaction effect between the year of birth and gender indicates that the influence of the year of birth on the aggregated mean CBBE value varies depending on gender. However, this interaction effect is not significant. This indicates that the impact of age on the scale values for men and women is not significantly disparate.

In conclusion, gender has a significant influence on the perception of CBBE in Brand Activism, with men on average exhibiting lower values than women. When gender is considered, the year of birth exerts no significant influence. Furthermore, there is no significant interaction between gender and year of birth, indicating that the gender effect has the same impact on all age groups examined here.

It can be concluded that gender is a success predictor that should not be overlooked. The positive perception of Brand Activism is not solely attributable to younger generations. The gender effect is independent of age, thus opening new insights.

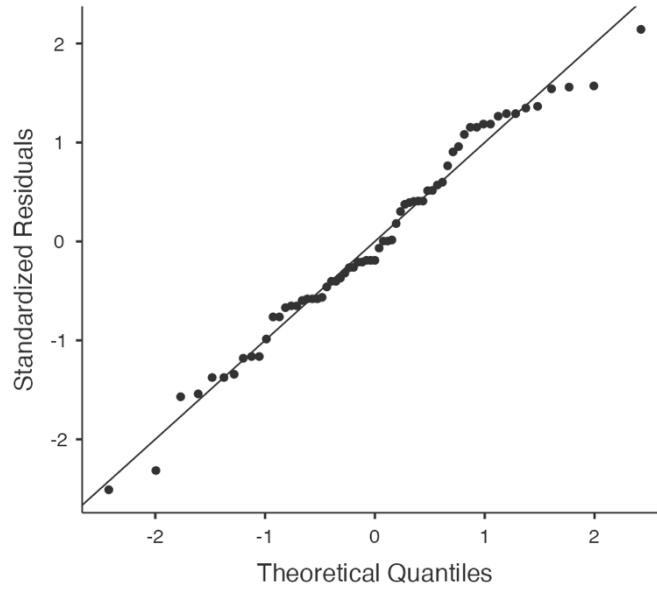
The results of this Linear Regression can be considered reliable in the sense of that they fulfil the classic requirements of Linear Regression (Kutner et al., 2005).

Normality Tests		
	Statistic	p
Shapiro-Wilk	0.981	0.416

**Table 25: Shapiro-Wilk Test for Linear Regression**

Heteroskedasticity Tests		
	Statistic	p
Breusch-Pagan	2.05	0.563

**Table 26: Heteroskedasticity Test for Linear Regression**



**Figure 11: Q-Q Plot for Linear Regression**

The residuals are normally distributed, and there is no evidence of heteroscedasticity, whereby the variance of the error terms is constant. All the values tested were found to be significantly greater than the required significance level of  $p = .05$ .

Durbin–Watson Test for Autocorrelation

Autocorrelation	DW Statistic	p
-0.0279	2.03	0.874

**Table 27: Durbin-Watson Test for Autocorrelation in Linear Regression**

The Durbin-Watson test also indicates a satisfactory result for the Linear Regression. The p-value of  $p = .874$  is not significant, as is evidenced by the autocorrelation coefficient of  $-0.0279$ , which is very close to 0, and the DW statistic value, which is very close to 2. Both indicate the presence of no significant autocorrelation in the residuals, thereby strengthening the reliability of the results (Gujarati & Porter, 2009).

Moreover, all collinearity values are below the critical limit of the variable inflation factor, which is equal to 10 (Kutner et al., 2005). There is no evidence of inappropriate multicollinearity.

Collinearity Statistics		
	VIF	Tolerance
Gender	6.91	0.145
YearofBirth	1.80	0.556
YearofBirth * Gender	7.31	0.137

**Table 28: Collinearity Statistics for Linear Regression**

## **7. DISCUSSION**

### **7.1. Interpretation and implications for businesses**

The outcomes of this experiment corroborate the previously formulated hypotheses and offer novel insights for companies.

#### **7.1.1. Results of Hypothesis 1**

In the current consumer era, corporate socio-political communication plays a pivotal role in the perception of CBBE, rendering it a highly valuable strategic tool for companies. Despite the inherently risky nature of Brand Activism, there is a significant overall improvement in CBBE the clearer the company's own socio-political positioning ( $p < .001$ ). This is consistent with the assumption that contemporary consumers have higher expectations and that companies must expand their socio-political commitment and avoid neutral positions to survive in the long term. It is evident that CSR alone is no longer sufficient to fully benefit from this effect.

Consequently, companies should be prepared to engage in activist activities, as consumers continue to attach considerable value to corporate participation in public debates. Over time, the associated risk can be reduced, as the CBBE exerts a direct influence on consumers' response to communication measures and their effectiveness (Keller, 2011). This is accompanied by a more positive and open perception of a company's communication measures, which can be an advantage, especially for controversial campaigns in the context of Brand Activism. Once a company has initiated its activist brand strategy and has established a reputation for genuine commitment to social change, as exemplified by Nike, the reputational risk is likely to diminish with each subsequent campaign.

It is important to note, however, that Brand Activism should not be reduced to communication campaigns. Rather, it is essential to recognise the significant role played by authenticity in this field. Havas Worldwide (2023) revealed that 73% of consumers believe that brands and companies should not only communicate in a socio-political manner, but also act in accordance with these messages and work for the benefit of society and the planet. To achieve the desired consistency of the brand message, which is an essential prerequisite

for CBBE (Keller, 1993), it is of paramount importance that communication and actions correspond with each other, being in alignment with the company's purpose, company values, and actual actions, as this is the optimal scenario for CBBE and genuine change to occur.

Taylor & Kent (2014) confirm the link between dialogue and engagement as a prerequisite for companies and public institutions to create social capital. In addition, Edwards (2016) posits that a fundamental interest on the part of the company is an indispensable prerequisite for social change. Consequently, this process must occur on both sides, rather than solely on the part of the consumer.

In this context, contradictions can have a detrimental impact on CBBE in the long term, particularly given that once lost, consumer trust is not easily regained (Loftus & Loftus, 1980). Public socio-political positioning can lead to controversy, which can even result in "anti-Brand Activism" on the part of consumers (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Romani et al., 2015) and can also deter shareholders and investors (Bhagwat et al., 2020). In this instance, the objective of Brand Activism campaigns would be thwarted, rather than achieved.

This is of particular interest because the public perception of companies, especially in the context of social media, can be erroneously perceived as susceptible to manipulation by the selective dissemination of specific brand associations or signals to consumers, thereby enhancing their impression of the brand (Faircloth et al., 2001). Nevertheless, such conduct is likely to have a detrimental effect on the company if it is not genuinely supported by the company. Authenticity, moreover, serves to mitigate the risk of acting against one's own stakeholders. This is because the communicated positions and the previous corporate values are likely to be congruent either way.

### **7.1.2. Results of Hypothesis 2**

The finding that the probability of success of a Brand Activism campaign is greater among female consumers implies new perspectives for companies, as does the fact that this can be observed across all age groups.

There is no significant interaction effect between age and gender. It is therefore evident that the age of consumers is not a sufficient indicator of the success of a campaign. The phenomenon of Brand Activism is complex, and the perception of it by consumers is



influenced by several factors. The introduction of gender as a new success indicator represents a significant contribution to the state of the art.

The results permit companies to make predictions about the success of advertising campaigns based on their own target group and their potential design.

There are notable differences in the ways in which women and men perceive advertising. Firstly, women tend to respond more positively to advertising than men (Wolin, 2003; Fisher et al., 2005). Additionally, they exhibit a greater capacity to absorb information and a more pronounced response to emotionally charged and visually detailed campaigns (Goodrich, 2014; Eisend et al., 2014), which are ideally designed to serve a social cause (Frischen et al., 2007).

Furthermore, they evaluate clear messages positively (Meyers-Levy, 1989), which is advantageous in terms of the call-to-action nature of Brand Activism. Nevertheless, a narrative design is of significant importance, as it can evoke an emotional response and motivating women to engage actively (Grau & Zotos, 2016).

Meyers-Levy (1989) also emphasises the necessity of providing information. It can be posited that women are more likely to act as active consumers if they feel well-informed and trust the brand, making authenticity crucial for the gender effect to work.

## **7.2. Summary and recommendations**

In conclusion, it can be stated that the hypotheses were confirmed in each case. It is recommended that companies adopt a proactive stance, regardless of the prevailing political climate, if this does not conflict with their own corporate values and their actions align with the messages conveyed in their communication campaigns.

Given that a significant proportion of consumers actively seek information about companies' socio-political activities, often utilising independent social media accounts that are not susceptible to influence, there is a high potential for negative promotion given their interactive character. Consequently, it is advisable to avoid negative feedback as much as possible to prevent the likelihood of becoming involved in a public scandal.

Regarding consumer preferences, it is recommended that communication campaigns are employed, in particular on social media and across all socio-political topics. As significant proportion of consumers actively seek information about companies' socio-political

activities, this represents the most straightforward and comprehensive means of reaching them. Since, according to Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014), social media users are more likely to engage in Political Consumerism, this is the most effective medium for publishing a corresponding campaign.

With regard to the design, it is important to consider the target group. Research indicates that younger people and women in particular are highly receptive to advertising that has a social impact (Eisend et al., 2014; Ting & De Run, 2015). Both groups share a preference for authenticity and information (Meyers-Levy, 1989; Ducoffe, 1995; Schouten et al., 2020).

### **7.3. Limitations of the study and future research lines**

Despite the unambiguous outcomes of the experiment, this study is not without limitations. Despite the utmost care taken in the execution of the experiment, it is not possible to prevent participants from answering untruthfully or misjudging themselves.

Regarding the questionnaire, it is possible that bias may have occurred, despite the fictitious case study, which may have distorted the results. Keller (1993, p. 11) states: „[...] identification with the product category itself can also result in inferences producing secondary associations”.

Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of the sample size, which precludes the generation of generalizable results. It is advisable to use a larger sample size to diversify the bias of personal congruence. Furthermore, if possible, sufficient consideration should also be given to people who do not identify with either of the two common genders.

Almost half of the participants have obtained an academic degree. In the case of Brand Activism, in particular, a certain level of political interest can be assumed as a prerequisite for the success of a campaign (Zhang et al., 2015). This tends to be higher in this social class in general (Aars & Christensen, 2018) and may have influenced the results of the study. Similarly, 146 of the 173 participants responded to the question regarding their own political stance indicating a position at least centrist-left or even further to the left. This is noteworthy in that the congruence of one's own political stance with that of the brand is considered essential (Hydock, 2020), as only then does the principle of self-congruence apply.

A significant proportion of consumers (45%) have indicated that they intend to cease purchasing products from brands that do not align with their personal values and perspectives (Havas Worldwide, 2023). To date, brands have largely positioned themselves on issues

associated with the left-wing political spectrum, such as LGBTQ+ rights. It would be of interest to ascertain the impact of such statements on a sample that is largely conservative or right-wing yet is confronted with statements from the political left.

Moreover, a considerable proportion of the participants, 80.92% in total, were born after 1980. Given that the existing literature indicates that younger generations are more likely to embrace Brand Activism, it is possible that the results presented here may be biased. However, it was demonstrated that age has no impact on gender differences in the evaluation of CBBE in Brand Activism in this experiment, which should be further validated.

One last further aspect that may be worthy of future research is that of cultural background. In the present study, the nationality of the participants was not asked. Yet, de Mooij and Hofstede (2010) demonstrate that advertising messages and strategies considering cultural values are more effective. Conversely, it is not a given that a campaign will be successful in every country. This also applies to ethical issues: Factors such as uncertainty avoidance or the degree of individualism within a cultural area can influence the probability of success (Armstrong, 1996).

Thus, it is essential to consider the cultural counterpart to self-congruence. Song et al. (2018) analyse that the cultural congruence between a product campaign and the market has a positive influence on the outcome of the campaign; Steenkamp (2001) and Soares et al. (2007) corroborate that national culture exerts an influence on the perception of marketing context and purchasing decisions.

In this regard, it is recommended that an identical experiment is conducted in a variety of cultural contexts, with the results then being compared.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The nascent concept of Brand Activism has yet to be sufficiently researched in the literature, rendering it an insufficient basis for companies to assess the potential risks associated with exposure. Nevertheless, companies are no longer able to evade the social responsibility that the public now expects of them. It is of great importance to contribute to an adequate data situation on the effects and success predictors of Brand Activism.

This paper therefore sought to ascertain whether the potential risks associated with Brand Activism outweigh the benefits from a consumer perspective, or whether companies should embrace this novel form of corporate communication, especially in comparison to CSR. The extent to which the gender of consumers can serve as a new indicator of success for corresponding campaigns was investigated similarly, as previous studies often focused on individual generations of consumers.

To this end, an experiment was conducted in which the participants were divided into three experimental groups, using the degree of corporate socio-political communication as a stimulus. The markedly disparate outcomes serve to demonstrate that the level of socio-political interaction constitutes a pivotal factor in the perception of CBBE and, as such, represents one of the most valuable contemporary corporate assets. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that Brand Activism can significantly enhance this perception in comparison to Corporate Social Responsibility alone.

The results of this experiment can be used by companies as a call to adhere to their own values and to begin perceiving themselves as an important socio-political actor being capable of igniting social change. The hitherto rather passive role of business in socio-political affairs is no longer appropriate in the contemporary context. Those companies that demonstrate a lack of commitment may face adverse consequences in terms of their reputation and economic performance. If Brand Activism is carefully considered and driven by appropriate motivations, which should not be solely financial, it can serve as a valuable instrument for long-term business success, as it increases CBBE, which in turn enables companies to differentiate themselves from their non-activist competitors, even in saturated markets.

Nevertheless, one question remains: How can the risk of failure in Brand Activism be minimised? This paper seeks to address this question by identifying the gender of consumers as a success predictor, in addition to the important role of age, which has already been identified in the literature. The findings indicate that women perceive Brand Activism significantly more positively than men.

Future studies in this area should examine further success predictors, including the influence of cultural backgrounds and political attitudes on the perception of CBBE in Brand Activism.

It can be postulated that Brand Activism will become a well-established concept in the long term, as consumers become increasingly politically engaged. For companies, therefore, an intensive examination of this concept will be of great importance to sustainably survive in the future and successfully establish their brands. It is of the utmost importance to conduct a meticulous assessment, planning and execution of activist campaigns on socio-political issues to optimise the likelihood of acceptance by the respective target group and to minimise the risk of failure.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Appendix 1: English Questionnaire**

Dear participant!

For my bachelor's thesis at the Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid, I'm conducting research on corporate socio-political communication and its effect on the evaluation of Customer-Based Brand Equity. Customer-Based Brand Equity is the value added by the brand to the product as perceived by the consumer, measured as the difference between an individual consumer's overall brand preference and their brand preference based on objectively measured product attribute levels (Park & Srinivasan, 1994). Your participation in this quick survey would help me a lot! Please take your time and read all the questions carefully. Of course, all data will be conducted anonymously, and the answers will only be used for this thesis. You don't have to indicate any personal data.

Thank you in advance and all the best,  
Sarah-Sophie Rieger

#### **1. What is your gender?**

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

#### **2. In what year were you born?**

- Before 1946
- 1946-1964
- 1965-1980
- 1980-1995
- 1996-2010
- After 2010

**3. What is your highest level of education?**

**(Please indicate the highest level of education you have already fully completed).**

- Less than a high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent
- Apprenticeship
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree or higher
- Other: (open text)

**4. How would you categorise your political views?**

- Far left
- Centre-left/progressive
- Centrist
- Centre-right/conservative
- Far right
- Prefer not to say

----- PAGE SWITCH -----

**PART 1**

**5. How would you classify your political interest?**

- Not interested at all
- Slightly interested
- Moderately interested
- Quite interested
- Very interested

**6. Which of these topics is of most interest to you? Please organise them; 1 being the most important.**

- Social topics (LGBTQ+ rights, Women's rights, ...)
- Political topics (Rise of right-wing parties, wars, ...)
- Ecological topics (Climate change, energy dependency, ...)

**7. Do you actively inform yourself about companies' socio-political activities?**

- Yes
- No

**(if yes)**

**8. What is your main source of information for this?**

- Blogs or NGOs
- Companies' websites
- Companies' social media accounts
- Other social media accounts
- Journalistic sources (newspapers, news websites, ...)
- Forums and discussion groups (Reddit, YouTube, ...)
- Reports (CSR reports, annual reports, financial reports, ...)
- Other: (open text)

----- **PAGE SWITCH** -----

**9. If you read this, please choose “3”.**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

----- PAGE SWITCH -----

**10. On which day of the month were you born? Example: If you were born on July 10<sup>th</sup>, choose “1-10”.**

- 1-10
- 11-21
- 22-31

----- PAGE SWITCH -----

## **PART 2**

**Consecutively, you will be presented a short case study. Please read the following text carefully.**

**Group 1 (No socio-political Communication – control group):**

NoveLux is a start-up founded in Munich in 2019 that is dedicated to the design and manufacture of furniture. The firm combines craftsmanship with modern technology to create furniture that is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also functional. With a special eye for design, NoveLux has redefined the furniture market. Their patented "SmartTables" and "FlexSofas" are unique in the industry, offering integrated charging stations, ambient light and customisable modules.



In terms of corporate politics, NoveLux prefers to prioritise other areas. The company wants to focus on its economic growth and does currently not consider applying extensive Corporate Social Responsibility measures or engaging publicly in controversial socio-political debates. The founders share the opinion that this should not be a company's priority as part of the economy.

What do you think of NoveLux? Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree to each of them.

### **Group 2 (Only Corporate Social Responsibility):**

NoveLux is a start-up founded in Munich in 2019 that is dedicated to the design and manufacture of furniture. The firm combines craftsmanship with modern technology to create furniture that is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also functional. With a special eye for design, NoveLux has redefined the furniture market. Their patented "SmartTables" and "FlexSofas" are unique in the industry, offering integrated charging stations, ambient light and customisable modules.

But NoveLux goes beyond impressive products. It promotes the well-being of its employees and is committed to sustainable practices by using recycled materials and renewable energy sources whenever possible. However, NoveLux refrains from taking public positions on more controversial issues and gives no comment about them when asked.

What do you think of NoveLux? Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree to each of them.

### **Group 3 (Brand Activism):**

NoveLux is a start-up founded in Munich in 2019 that is dedicated to the design and manufacture of furniture. The firm combines craftsmanship with modern technology to create furniture that is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also functional. With a special eye for design, NoveLux has redefined the furniture market. Their patented "SmartTables" and "FlexSofas" are unique in the industry, offering integrated charging stations, ambient light and customisable modules.

NoveLux is, moreover, widely recognised for its bold stance on various socio-political issues, such as climate change or LGBTQ+ rights.

In the past, this has often provoked polarising debates, for example when NoveLux donated money to NGOs such as Planned Parenthood, as a form of protest against the strict abortion policies in some parts of the United States.

The founders also frequently speak out in interviews and on social media, addressing the public and encouraging people to rethink their behaviour if necessary.

What do you think of NoveLux? Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree to each of them.

**11. Please indicate your agreement to the following statements:**

**(1 – I fully disagree, 2 – I rather disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – I rather agree, 5 – I fully agree)**

- I could easily remember NoveLux if I saw or heard about it.
- If NoveLux existed, I'm sure I would have heard of it.
- I believe that the products of NoveLux are of high quality.
- I think NoveLux is authentic and its products are reliable.
- NoveLux fits well with my self-image.
- NoveLux would be perceived positively in my social circles.
- I would prefer products from NoveLux to similar products without looking any further.
- I would pay a price above the market average for a NoveLux product.
- I would recommend NoveLux to my friends and family.

----- **PAGE SWITCH** -----

Thank you so much for taking your time and participating in this survey!

Your answers are of great help for my research.

Should any further questions arise, please do not hesitate to contact me via [202221061@alu.comillas.edu](mailto:202221061@alu.comillas.edu).

Sincerely,

Sarah-Sophie Rieger

## Appendix 2: Tables and graphs of statistical analysis

### Validity, Reliability, Objectivity

Factor	Indicator	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Brand Salience	I could easily remember NoveLux if I saw or heard about it.	0.715	0.0776	9.21	< .001
	If NoveLux existed, I'm sure I would have heard of it.	0.441	0.0656	6.72	< .001
Brand Meaning	I believe that the products of NoveLux are of high quality.	0.723	0.0601	12.03	< .001
	I think NoveLux is authentic and its products are reliable.	0.760	0.0624	12.18	< .001
Brand Response	NoveLux fits well with my self-image.	0.624	0.0628	9.94	< .001
	NoveLux would be perceived positively in my social circles.	0.844	0.0788	10.71	< .001
Brand Resonance	I would prefer products from NoveLux to similar products without looking any further.	0.781	0.0779	10.02	< .001
	I would pay a price above the market average for a NoveLux product.	0.659	0.0745	8.85	< .001
	I would recommend NoveLux to my friends and family.	0.685	0.0730	9.37	< .001

#### Factor Covariances

		Estimate	SE	Z	p
Factor 1	Factor 1	1.000 <sup>a</sup>			
	Factor 2	0.813	0.0782	10.4	< .001
	Factor 3	0.888	0.0814	10.9	< .001
	Factor 4	0.951	0.0723	13.2	< .001
Factor 2	Factor 2	1.000 <sup>a</sup>			
	Factor 3	0.778	0.0609	12.8	< .001
	Factor 4	0.706	0.0654	10.8	< .001
Factor 3	Factor 3	1.000 <sup>a</sup>			
	Factor 4	0.977	0.0517	18.9	< .001
Factor 4	Factor 4	1.000 <sup>a</sup>			

<sup>a</sup> fixed parameter

#### Test for Exact Fit

$\chi^2$	df	p
29.4	17	0.031

RMSEA 90% CI				
CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Lower	Upper
0.977	0.962	0.0649	0.0196	0.103

Scale Reliability Statistics

<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>	
CBBE Scale	0.882

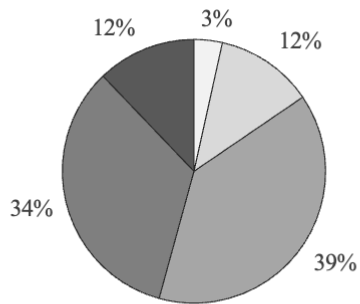
Item Reliability Statistics

	<b>If item dropped</b>
	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
I could easily remember NoveLux if I saw or heard about it.	0.864
If NoveLux existed, I'm sure I would have heard of it.	0.880
I believe that the products of NoveLux are of high quality.	0.868
I think NoveLux is authentic and its products are reliable.	0.867
NoveLux fits well with my self-image.	0.866
NoveLux would be perceived positively in my social circles.	0.864
I would prefer products from NoveLux to similar products without looking any further.	0.867
I would pay a price above the market average for a NoveLux product.	0.872
I would recommend NoveLux to my friends and family.	0.869

<b>Engagement Group</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
No socio-political Engagement	53	30,6%	30,6%
CSR	55	31,8%	62,4%
BA	65	37,6%	100,0%
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
Male	73	42,2%	42,2%
Female	100	57,8%	100,0%
Non-binary	0	0%	100,0%
Prefer not to say	0	0%	100,0%
<b>Year of Birth</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
1946-1964	14	8,1%	8,1%
1965-1979	19	11,0%	19,1%
1980-1995	10	5,8%	24,9%
1996-2010	128	74,0%	98,8%
after 2010	2	1,2%	100,0%
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
Less than a high school degree	5	2,9%	2,9%
High school degree or equivalent	63	36,4%	39,3%
Apprenticeship	23	13,3%	52,6%
Bachelor's degree	72	41,6%	94,2%
Master's degree or higher	10	5,8%	100,0%
<b>Political Ideology</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
Far left	17	9,8%	9,8%
Centre-left	62	35,8%	45,7%
Centre	54	31,2%	76,9%
Centre-right	16	9,2%	86,4%
Far right	4	2,3%	88,4%
Prefer not to say	20	11,6%	100,0%

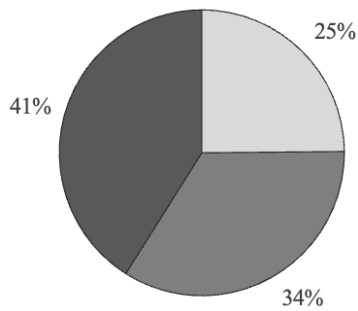
## Results

### How would you classify your political interest?



Not interested at all   
  Slightly interested   
  Moderately interested  
 Quite interested   
  Very interested

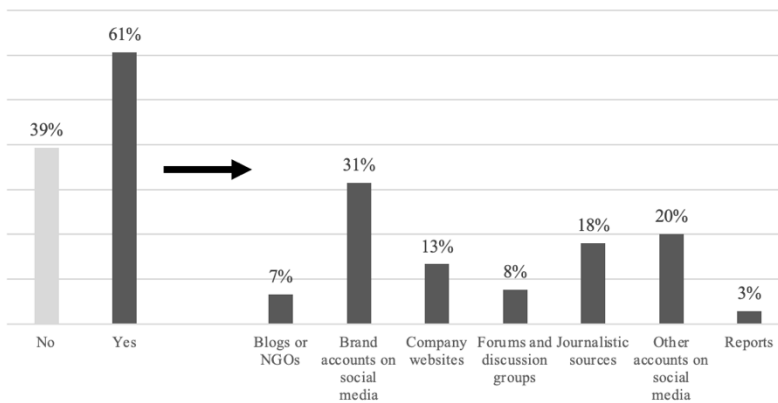
### Which of these topics is of most interest to you?



Social topics   
  Ecological topics   
  Political topics

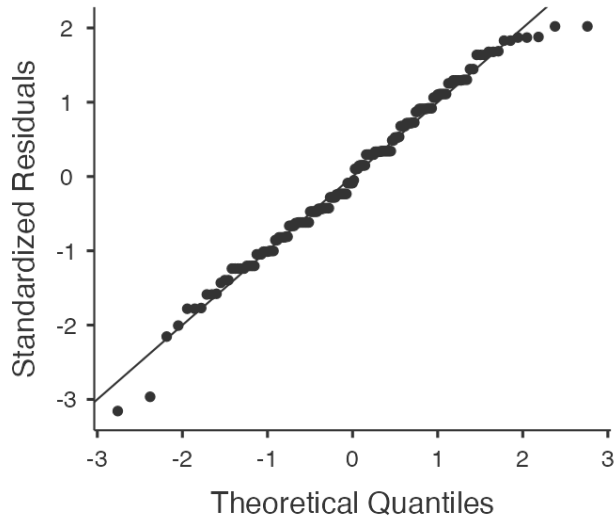
### Do you actively inform yourself about companies' socio-political activities?

If so, what is your main source of information?



Normality Tests

		statistic	p
Aggregated Means Brand Equity Scale	Shapiro-Wilk	0.987	0.099



Descriptives

	Group	CBBE Scale
N	1	53
	2	55
	3	65
Mean	1	2.81
	2	3.25
	3	3.72
Median	1	3
	2	3
	3	4
Standard Deviation	1	0.604
	2	0.489
	3	0.639
Minimum	1	1
	2	2
	3	2
Maximum	1	4
	2	4
	3	5

Homogeneity of Variances Tests

		Statistic	df	df2	p
CBBE Scale	Levene's	2.41	2	170	0.093

One-Way ANOVA (Fisher's)

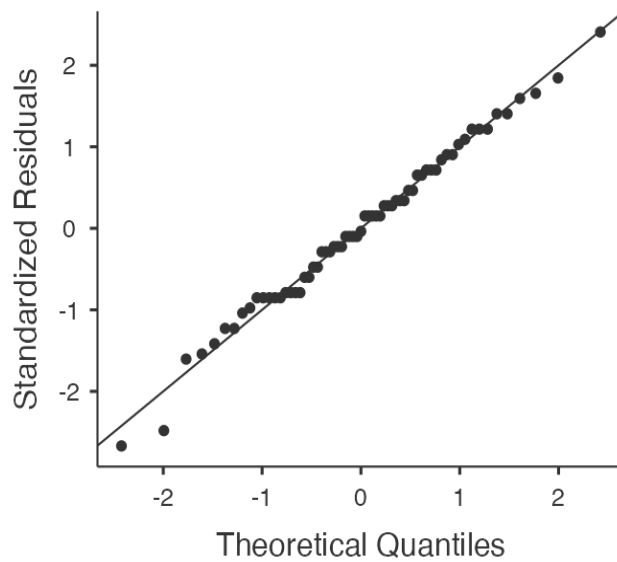
	<b>F</b>	<b>df1</b>	<b>df2</b>	<b>p</b>
CBBE Scale	35.7	2	170	<.001

Tukey Post-Hoc Test – CBBE Scale

		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1</b>	Mean difference	—	-0.439	-0.911
	p-value	—	<.001	<.001
<b>2</b>	Mean difference		—	-0.471
	p-value		—	<.001
<b>3</b>	Mean difference			—
	p-value			—

Tests of Normality

		<b>statistic</b>	<b>p</b>
CBBE Scale	Shapiro-Wilk	0.990	0.889



Homogeneity of Variances Tests

		<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>df2</b>	<b>p</b>
CBBE Scale	Levene's	0.146	1	63	0.704

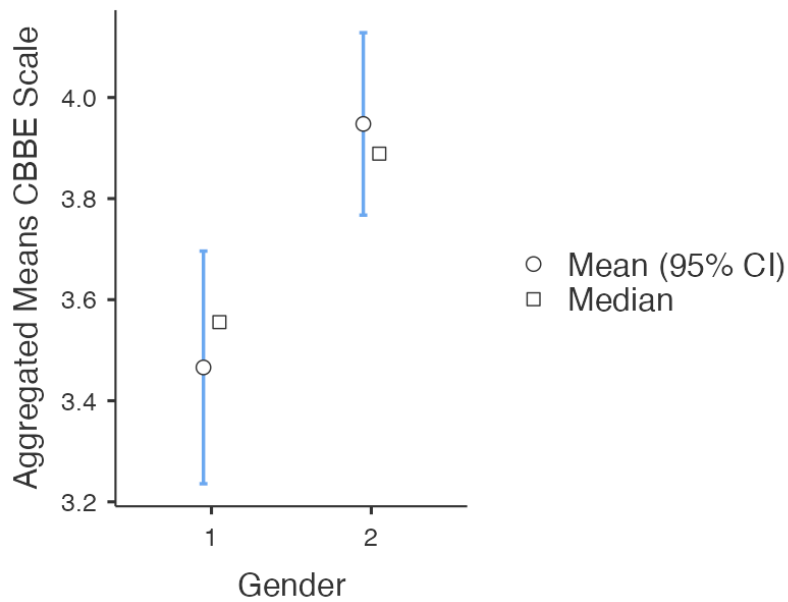
Descriptives

	Gender	CBBE Scale
N	1	31
	2	34
Mean	1	3.47
	2	3.95
Median	1	4
	2	4
Standard deviation	1	0.654
	2	0.537
Minimum	1	2
	2	3
Maximum	1	5
	2	5

Independent Samples T-Test

	Statistic	df	p
CBBE Scale Student's t	-3.26	63.0	< .001

Note. H<sub>2a</sub>  $\mu_{\text{male}} < \mu_{\text{female}}$





**Hypothesis 1 results for males:**

One-Way ANOVA (Fisher's)

	<b>F</b>	<b>df1</b>	<b>df2</b>	<b>p</b>
CBBE Scale	6.14	2	70	0.003

Tukey Post-Hoc Test – CBBE Scale

		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1</b>	Mean difference	—	-0.319	-0.612
	p-value	—	0.235	0.002
<b>2</b>	Mean difference		—	-0.294
	p-value		—	0.240
<b>3</b>	Mean difference			—
	p-value			—

**Hypothesis 1 results for females:**

One-Way ANOVA (Fisher's)

	<b>F</b>	<b>df1</b>	<b>df2</b>	<b>p</b>
CBBE Scale	41.6	2	97	<.001

Tukey Post-Hoc Test – CBBE Scale

		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1</b>	Mean difference	—	-0.515	-1.174
	p-value	—	<.001	<.001
<b>2</b>	Mean difference		—	-0.659
	p-value		—	<.001
<b>3</b>	Mean difference			—
	p-value			—

Model Fit Measures

<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>
1	0.447	0.200

Model Coefficients – CBBE Scale

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Intercept <sup>a</sup>	3.7525	0.2637	14.233	< .001
Gender:				
1 – 2	-0.7723	0.3820	-2.022	0.048
YearofBirth	0.0638	0.0797	0.800	0.427
YearofBirth * Gender:				
YearofBirth * (1 – 2)	0.1073	0.1203	0.892	0.376

<sup>a</sup> Represents reference level

Model Coefficients – CBBE Scale

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Intercept <sup>a</sup>	3.341	0.2026	16.49	< .001
YearofBirth	0.128	0.0634	2.02	0.048

<sup>a</sup> Represents reference level

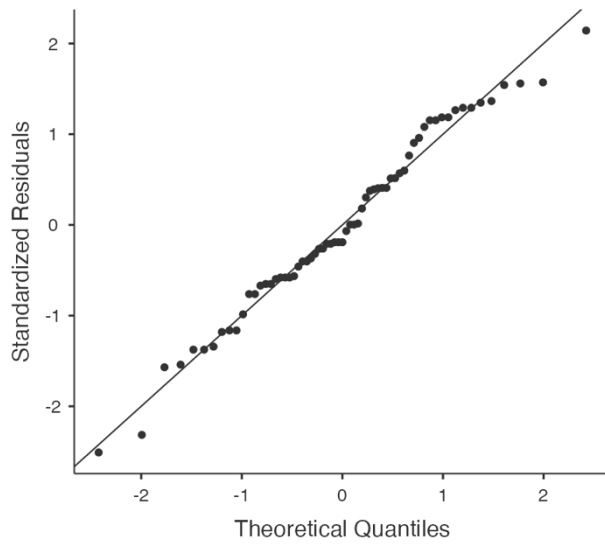
Model Coefficients – CBBE Scale

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Intercept <sup>a</sup>	3.948	0.102	38.66	< .001
Gender:				
1 – 2	-0.482	0.148	-3.26	0.002

<sup>a</sup> Represents reference level

Normality Test for Linear Regression

	<b>Statistic</b>	<b>p</b>
Shapiro-Wilk	0.981	0.416



### Heteroskedasticity Test for Linear Regression

	<b>Statistic</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Breusch-Pagan</b>	2.05	0.563

### Durbin-Watson Test for Autocorrelation

<b>Autocorrelation</b>	<b>DW Statistic</b>	<b>p</b>
-0.0279	2.03	0.874

### Collinearity Statistics

	<b>VIF</b>	<b>Tolerance</b>
Gender	6.91	0.145
YearofBirth	1.80	0.556
YearofBirth * Gender	7.31	0.137