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The Effect of Brand Activism on Brand Loyalty and Willingness to Pay
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THE EFFECT OF BRAND ACTIVISM ON BRAND LOYALTY AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY

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Abstract

Brands are seeking to have an impact among young consumers, namely Generation Z and Millennials, as they become more important for the company's profitability and revenue. However, due to their growth in a digital and media stimulation society, consumers feel overwhelmed. Creating impact through values and controversial messages in a very polarized society becomes a very powerful tool if used correctly. Thus, the following empirical research aims to study the impact of Brand Activism in several marketing dimensions, namely Willingness to Pay a price and Brand Loyalty. Nevertheless, the perception of authenticity must be considered, as brands that invest in value- and purpose-driven messages could face backlash if perceived as profit-seeking. To achieve the research goal of this paper, a combination of an experimental research design plus an online survey was implemented. Within the scope of brands that support the LGBT+ community, Adidas is the brand chosen. In particular, its partnership video with Stonewall FC is the stimulus selected for the experiment. With a sample of 295 participants, the results show that Brand Activism Practices, as well as authenticity, affect consumers' loyalty. On the contrary, Willingness to Pay is not affected by this phenomenon. This study contributes to the scarce former literature by connecting Brand Activism Practices and Authenticity to Brand Loyalty. Managerially, it adds important insights concerning the consequences of this phenomenon on brands regarding Generation Z and Millennials.

Resumo

As marcas procuram impacto junto dos consumidores jovens, nomeadamente Millennials e Geração Z, visto que estes se tornam cada vez mais importantes para a rentabilidade e receitas das empresas. No entanto, devido ao crescimento numa sociedade de estimulação digital constante, os consumidores sentem-se submergidos em campanhas publicitárias. A criação de impacto através de valores e mensagens socialmente e politicamente controversas, numa sociedade polarizada torna-se uma estratégia eficaz se aplicada corretamente. Assim, o seguinte estudo empírico visa estudar o impacto do ativismo de marca em várias dimensões cruciais do marketing, nomeadamente a intenção de compra, a *willingness to pay* e a lealdade à marca. No entanto, a perceção de autenticidade deve ser considerada, visto que as marcas que investem em mensagens orientadas por valor e propósito podem enfrentar uma reação negativa se forem percebidas como inautênticas. Para atingir os objetivos de investigação, foi implementado um questionário online com manipulação experimental. No âmbito das marcas que apoiam a comunidade LGBT+, Adidas é a marca escolhida. Em particular, o seu vídeo de parceria com a Stonewall FC foi o estímulo selecionado para a experiência. Com uma amostra de 295 participantes, os resultados mostram que o Ativismo de Marca também afeta a lealdade dos consumidores. Em contraste, a *willingness to pay* a vontade de pagar não é afetada por este fenómeno. Teoricamente, este estudo contribui para a escassa literatura ao ligar Ativismo de Marca e a Autenticidade à lealdade à Marca. Relativamente aos contributos de gestão, acrescenta importantes conhecimentos relativos às consequências deste fenómeno sobre as marcas na Geração Z e Millennials.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Acronyms

ABA ....Authentic Brand Activism

BAA ....Brand Activism Authenticity

CrM .... Cause-related Marketing

CG .... Control Group

CBA .... Consumer Brand Agreement

CBI .... Consumer Brand Identification

CSR .... Corporate Social Responsibility

CBBE .... Customer-Based Brand Equity

EG .... Experimental Group

LGBT+ .... Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, others

WTP ....Willingness to Pay

List of Appendixes

1. Introduction

During the XXth century, many social movements arose worldwide, namely "Women's Rights", Indigenism, "Gay Rights" and more recently "Black Lives Matter" Movement. Social movements are a social process in which by engaging in a range of actions, collective actors articulate their interests, critiques, and proposed solutions to identified problems (della Porta & Diani, 2006). Among other causes of this growth, social media opened borders between countries and movements' core values and messages spread much easier (Cammaerts, 2015). Today, activism is more prominent in people's lives and while brands tried to stay neutral, this strategy might no longer be an option (Stein, 2018).

As governments' trust among consumers decreases, brands are expected to take larger roles in society (Edelman, 2019) by addressing social issues (Cone, 2017; Schmidt et al., 2021) and therefore not focusing only on profit maximization. Currently, consumers make their purchase decisions not only based on the product and price but also on what the brand stands for (Barton et al., 2018). Research has shown the increase of belief-driven consumers, who select, change, avoid or boycott a brand based on its stand on societal issues, rose from 51% in 2017 to 64% in 2019 (Edelman, 2019). Considering this, an increasing number of business entities such as brands are being bold and taking public stances on socio-political issues (Hoppner & Vadakkepatt, 2019). As the following statement exhibits, CEOs perceive the importance of the brand with the purpose in business management.

> *"We believe the evidence is clear and compelling that brands with purpose grow. Purpose creates relevance for a brand, it drives talkability, builds penetration and reduces price elasticity. In fact, we believe this so strongly that we are prepared to commit that in the future, every Unilever brand will be a brand with purpose."*
> *Unilever's CEO, Jope (2019)*

However, only 18,9% of managers think that taking a political stance is appropriate for their brand, even though the majority agree on its importance to retain and attract customers (Moorman, 2020a). This phenomenon is called Brand Activism, i.e., "business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental

reform or stasis with the desire to promote or impede improvements in society" (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018)[1].

Generation Z and Millennials, individuals born between 1981 and 2012, i.e. younger generations of consumers demand brands to listen to their causes and take a stance on controversial matters (Edelman, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2019; Title, 2020). As young consumers have a natural scepticism toward corporate ethics (Chatzopoulou & de Kiewiet, 2020) brand activism comes as an important corporate strategy to achieve this important target. However, there are risks connected to this corporate practice since consumers scrutinize brands for their intention (Barton et al., 2018). If consumers perceive it as inauthentic and profit-seeking driven, consumers' trust could be destroyed (Vredenburg et al., 2020). For instance, Nike was publicly criticised when it stepped up and defended the "Black Lives Movement" since it failed on having a congruent practice as the brand did not have any Black board members (Ritson, 2020). Thus, by understanding the consequences of this phenomenon, brands will select the causes that are most appropriate for them.

1.1. Research Objectives

Based on the preceding motivation this empirical research aims to understand the impact of brand activism on consumers' brand loyalty and willingness to pay. In fact, there is a lack of published research on this phenomenon and its implication for brands (Schmidt et al., 2021). From this perspective, this study will focus on the following research questions:

How do Brand Activism practices affect brand dimensions, such as Brand Loyalty and Willingness to Pay?

How does the perception of Brand Activism Authenticity impact Brand Loyalty?

In summary, by answering the previous research questions, it is concluded that, while Brand Loyalty is influenced by this phenomenon, according to the present study, Brand Activism does not influence Willingness to Pay. Additionally, the perception of authenticity by the consumer must be considered since it showed a direct positive effect between this variable and Brand Loyalty.

1.2. Structure

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Besides the present section, the study has the following structure. Firstly, the literature review (Chapter 2) discusses the main and related concepts of brand activism to contextualize the empirical research and proposes the research hypotheses. Chapter 3 presents the Research Methodology, namely the research design. Then, Chapter 4 presents the outcomes of data analysis and confronts them with previous literature. Chapter 5 summarizes the theoretical and managerial contributions as well the limitations of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1.　Introduction

Empirical research concerning Brand Activism has increased in recent years (e.g. Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Mirzaei et al., 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). However, there is still a lack of published research on this phenomenon and its implication for brands (Schmidt et al., 2021). Thus, the following chapter will draw the state of the art on this phenomenon and complementary concepts. Firstly, a conceptualization of Brand Activism and its differences from other corporate social initiatives introduces the discussion (section 2.2). Then, political and ethical consumerism (section 2.3) represent consumers' points of view. Next, brand activism impact (section 2.4) is explored on several brand dimensions, namely brand identification (sub-section 2.4.1), brand loyalty (sub-section 2.4.2) and willingness to pay (sub-section 2.4.3). After, the impact of activism authenticity on brand loyalty is presented (section 2.5). Further, a conceptual framework is proposed to integrate the research hypotheses (section 2.6). Finally, Generation Z and Millennials' response to corporate social initiatives is explored (section 2.7).

2.2.　Brand Activism and Corporate Social Initiatives

Brand activism broadly consists of "business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to promote or impede improvements in society"[2] and could be either progressive or regressive (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). Moreover, Craddock et al. (2018) include a public position on what they believe is "good" for society and, on occasion, adaptation of their operation in ways that support their chosen social causes. In this perspective, brands have a role in society (Holt, 2002) by being influential social actors that incorporate ideas and meanings important to society. This brand's role connects to the concept of Cultural Branding, which according to Holt (2004) describes strategies that approach modern and controversial subjects in societies by providing meaning and identity to such topics. Thus, as expected this concept relates to brand activism and could be considered one of the earliest stages. In the literature, this concept is very similar to Corporate Social Advocacy, which refers to a firm making a public

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statement, planned or not, or taking a public stance on a social-political issue, however, it requires a financial outcome (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

Sarkar and Kotler (2018) divided brand activism into six different areas: Social, Business, Political, Legal, Economic and Environmental (Figure 1). Additionally, the authors state that this concept comes as a development of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Cause-related Marketing (CrM) (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). While CSR and CrM are corporate and marketing-driven, respectively, Brand Activism is society-driven (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018).

Figure 1 - Brand Activism's scope (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018)

Even though CSR has been the focus of several studies, there is not a dominant definition in the literature (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). Although there is a consensus that CSR is concerned with societal obligations, the scope and the nature of the societal obligations are not consensual (Smith, 2003). Nevertheless, for this study, Kotler and Lee's view (2005, p. 3) will be presented, according to the authors, CSR is a "commitment to improve community wellbeing through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources". Moreover, Corporate Social Marketing, as a CSR initiative, has the purpose of persuading consumers to perform desired prosocial behaviour (Inoue & Kent, 2014).

Another similar concept is Cause-related Marketing (CrM), which is the "process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specific amount to a designated cause when customers engage in a

revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual's objectives" (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988, p. 60). To rephrase it, CrM supports a cause by donating a specific monetary value.

According to Vredenburg et al. (2020), four characteristics define the concept of brand activism. Firstly, on the contrary to the classical economic theory, brands should prioritize purpose before profit, in other words, a brand is not only driven by profit, but it is purpose and value driven. Hence, from an extreme perspective, this characteristic may be seen as the political mission of the brand.

Secondly, differently from Cause-Related Marketing and Corporate Social Marketing, Brand Activism states messages that are considered controversial, in the other words, messages on which society is yet to reach a consensus (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020) since different morals, values and interests provoke different opinion concerning a brand statement. Therefore, these statements are usually institutionally contested social issues, divisive and emotionally charged (Nalick et al., 2016). Nevertheless, despite being risky, brands are comfortable with the negativity that some consumers might have in other to engage in some political and social subjects (Smith & Korschun, 2018). Moreover, Brand Activism affects customers, as well as other stakeholders like partners and employees who do (not) align with the firm´s actions (Moorman, 2020b).

Thirdly, Brand Activism statements could be considered conservative or progressive (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Nevertheless, these statements are subjective and depend on consumer beliefs or ideologies (Moorman, 2020b).

Finally, according to Vredenburg et al. (2020) and Craddock et al. (2018), the last key characteristic of Brand Activism is that the firm not only contributes to society via a message but also in terms of brand practice. On the contrary to Corporate Social Marketing, a CSR initiative, which requires a message but does not demand internal practice, brand activism involves an alignment between the message and the practice, which uphold brand purpose and values.

In 2001, Keller develops the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, according to which a strong brand can be built in a sequence of contingent steps. First and foremost, the company should develop its brand identity. Then, create suitable brand meaning through "strong, favourable and unique brand associations" (Keller, 2001, p. 3). Thirdly, a brand should provoke responses in their customer concerning the brand identity and meaning. Finally, a brand should create an intense and active loyalty by converting the

responses in the previous stage (Keller, 2001). Moreover, the author defines brand meaning as the combination of two categories of brand associations, performance, and imagery (Keller, 2001). Brand Imagery concerns extrinsic characteristics of products and services incorporating brand efforts to meet customers' psychological and social needs, which could be enhanced by advertising (Keller, 2001). Thus, as Corporate Social Responsibility enhances the affective dimension of Brand Image (Martínez et al., 2014), Brand Activism practices could have the same outcome and consequently increase brand dimensions as loyalty.

In sum, Table 1 condenses the main concepts of this chapter:

Table 1 - Concepts Summary

Concepts	Definition
Cause-related Marketing (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988)	Process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specific amount to a designated cause when customers engage in a revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual's objectives.
Cultural Branding (Holt, 2004)	Strategies that approach modern and controversial subjects in societies by providing meaning and identity towards such topics.
Corporate Social Responsibility (Kotler & Lee, 2005)	Commitment to improve community wellbeing through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources.
Corporate Social Advocacy (Dodd, 2014)	Firms making public statement, planned or not, or taking a public stance on a social-political issue.
Brand Activism (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018)	Business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to promote or impede improvements in society.

2.3. Political and Ethical Consumerism

Voting or membership in a political party, as channels of political participation, have been decreasing over the last decade. On the contrary, unconventional methods of participation have attracted many citizens (Bossy, 2014). Among other channels, Teorell and Torcal (2007) classify political consumerism as a channel of political participation. In fact, due to technological developments that increased communication speed and the globalization process, this channel is the second most common form of political participation, only behind voting (Stolle et al., 2005; Van Deth, 2012; Ward & de Vreese, 2011). In this perspective, political consumerism must be defined.

Firstly, Micheletti and Stolle (2005) formally define political consumerism as the selection of products and sellers with the intention of changing politically or ethically market or institutional practices. Moreover, Bossy (2014) classifies political consumerism as a social movement, in which actors, individually or not, politicize the act of buying by criticizing and differentiating themselves from traditional consumerism. In a simpler manner, political consumerism is a critique of consumer society and traditional consumerism (Bossy, 2014; Humphery, 2010). These definitions have theoretical and practical implications. For instance, consumers being able to stop buying the product or choose another means that they have buying power (Holzer, 2006).

Moreover, political consumerism, according to Micheletti and Stolle (2005) could be divided into two categories: boycotting and "buycotting". Boycotting refers to the punishment act in which consumers stop buying a company's products and challenge companies to change their practices by addressing their reputation (Copeland, 2014). Buycotting concerns the behaviour in which consumers purchase specific products or brands to reward companies for their behaviour (Copeland, 2014). Even though this behaviour appears to be rare in society, it occurs daily in people's routines. De Zúñiga et al. (2013) give an example when consumers opt for fair-trade coffee, they are buycotting the company by rewarding it for its behaviour. This consumer behaviour is influenced by attitudes and values, such as justice and fairness that concern family and individual welfare, political and ethical valuation of business and government practices (Micheletti & Stolle, 2005). However, as consumers stop buying a product due to belonging to a particular ethnic, racial or religious group - for nationalistic reasons -, a negative version of political consumerism emerges (Micheletti & Stolle, 2005). Even though the focus of the empirical research concerns the

private sphere, political consumerism can also affect countries, as consumers stop buying foreign products to make a statement (Stolle et al., 2005).

Concerning younger generations such as Millennials and Generation Z, these cohorts are unconventionally approaching politics, since traditional politics does not attract them (Micheletti & Stolle, 2005; Ward & de Vreese, 2011). In this perspective, political consumerism magnetises young consumers since they are allowed to "modify" political activism (Micheletti & Stolle, 2005). Moreover, according to De Zúñiga et al. (2013), social media is associated with political consumerism, as people use social media for social reasons and due to consumption trends being spread through it.

As previously discussed, political consumerism, according to Micheletti and Stolle (2005) also contemplates the ethical dimension of consumption, and not only political fragment. Thus, it overlaps the definition of ethical consumerism in which this phenomenon portrays the purchasing behaviour that displays concern for the difficulties of the Third World, in situations of low salaries, and bad word conditions to manufacture low-cost goods for western consumers (Strong, 1996). Nevertheless, other authors, such as Zollo et al. (2018) approach this phenomenon globally, not only focusing on Third World countries. Comparable to political consumerism, ethical consumerism behaviours also incorporate boycotts and positive buying (buycotts) in which consumers choose or avoid a brand to make a statement (Harrison et al., 2005). Moreover, it is generally accepted, among researchers, that ethical consumerism derives from environmental movements as well as green consumerism (Freestone & McGoldrick, 2008). In fact, ethical consumerism incorporates green consumerism values plus the "people element" (Strong, 1996).

As consumers are changing towards more environmental and socially responsible products, and as companies perceive the importance of customer values to gain competitive advantage, brand managers are embracing ethical consumption as a marketing strategy to increase profits and enhance the brand image (Freestone & McGoldrick, 2008; Yeow et al., 2014; Zollo et al., 2018). However, other factors are pointed out to explain this phenomenon escalation, namely media interest in fair trade issues, diffusion of corporate responsibility practices and the rise of consumer awareness of the ethical behaviour impact on environmental issues and human welfare (Gillani & Kutaula, 2018; Strong, 1996). On the contrary, price-quality concerns towards ethical alternatives, lack of information or issue of bombardment, cynicism and scepticism slow this trend (Burke et al., 2014).

2.4. Brand Activism Impact

2.4.1 Consumer Brand Identification

Consumers use brands to articulate their identities or self-concept (Albert & Merunka, 2013). Thus, as brand managers perceive the importance of this phenomenon, marketing research aimed to understand how, when and why this occurs (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Based on social identity theory, which implies people determine their social identity by integrating themselves as members of social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), numerous authors have investigated how the concept of consumer identification correlates with companies (e.g. Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) and brands (e.g. He et al., 2012; Lam et al., 2010; Popp & Woratschek, 2017; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Hence, consumer-brand identification (CBI), according to Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012, p. 407), is defined as a "consumer's perceived state of oneness with a brand, is a valid and potent expression of our quest for identity-fulfilling meaning in the marketplace of brands". While Escalas and Bettman (2003) research implies that consumers use self-brand connections to transmit their identity to others and achieve a self-goal, Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) scope is tinner, by excluding these connections.

Brand-self similarity, brand social benefits, memorable brand experiences, brand warmth and brand distinctiveness are identified as brand identification drivers (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). While some research has focused on cognitive drivers, others state that affective drivers are more important (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Torres et al., 2017). Focusing on brand-self similarity, which concerns the overlap level between a consumer's perception of its personality traits and the brand could explain why people desire to maintain who they are (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) claim that if a consumer agrees with a brand stance, it will have a higher brand-self similarity. Thus, connecting with brand activism, brand-self similarity (or Consumer Brand Agreement), and consequently consumer-brand identification, allows consumers to identify if the values and evaluations on moral judgements of the brand are aligned with their own (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020).

Previously, other authors (e.g. He & Li, 2011) focused on CSR and its positive implications on consumer brand identification and brand loyalty. Nevertheless, empirical research exploring the positive correlation between brand activism practices, throughout consumer brand agreement, and Consumer Brand Identification is limited. Only Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) introduced this correlation between brand activism, Consumer Brand

Agreement (CBA) and consumer brand identification. Therefore, based on the previous literature, it is expected a positive correlation between these concepts, as consumers who agree or not with brand moral judgment will strongly or not identify with it. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Brand Activism Practices have a positive effect on Consumer Brand Agreement

H2: Consumer Brand Agreement has a positive effect on Consumer Brand Identification

Concerning the outcome of consumer-brand identification, marketing research identifies several behaviours for example brand advocacy, brand loyalty, brand attitude and willingness to pay (Augusto & Torres, 2018; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Additionally, this behaviour not only has an impact on the brand itself but also on the competitors, due to consumers creating hate towards them (Itani, 2020). In general, it is expected that brand identification could create favourable and positive attitudes towards a brand (Jung & Kim, 2015) and create a "love" relationship between the customer and the brand (Albert & Merunka, 2013).

2.4.2 Brand Loyalty

Brand Loyalty is a multi-dimensional concept (Ha, 1998) that has been studied in the marketing literature over the last five decades, as being one of the main objectives of brand managers (Albert & Merunka, 2013). However, due to different conceptualizations by several academics, it has been challenging to obtain a general and objective measurement of this concept (Ha, 1998). Firstly, this concept is defined by the simply biased choice behaviour towards a brand's products or services (Tucker, 1964). Moreover, Jacoby and Kyner (1973) argue that brand loyalty contains both attitudinal and behavioural constituents. Further, the authors stress that marketers should not only focus on the act of repeat purchase but also understand the attitudinal component of brand loyalty (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973). To clarify, while behavioural loyalty refers to the frequency of the purchase, attitudinal loyalty is characterized by being a psychological commitment towards a brand, without requiring a repeat purchase, but the intentions to purchase and to recommend to others (Jacoby, 1971; Jarvis & Wilcox, 1976; Nam et al., 2011). Furthermore, Dick and Basu (1994) suggested that customer loyalty was the combination of two concepts: relative attitude and repeat patronage. In their study, they identified four specific conditions related to loyalty: no loyalty, spurious

loyalty, latent loyalty, and loyalty. Additionally, Oliver (1999) contributed to this conceptualization by defining four stages of the loyalty process: cognitive, affective, conative, and lastly action loyalty. Considering the above, this empirical study will consider Brand Loyalty as the combination of attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, as Jacoby and Kyner (1973) proclaim. In general, several benefits are attributed to customer loyalty, namely lower price sensitivity, favourable word of mouth, lower cost to attract new customers and the improvement of the organization's profitability (Dick & Basu, 1994; Rowley, 2005).

Regarding the antecedents of Brand Loyalty, Dick and Basu (1994) identify several categories: cognitive, emotional, and conative antecedents. Self-Brand Identification, a CBI component, appears as an emotional antecedent of brand loyalty (Lam et al, 2010). According to Popp and Woratschek (2017), several theoretical deliberations support the positive effect of CBI on brand loyalty. For instance, consumers with a greater level of identification stick with the brand to avoid losing the emotional advantages they catch from it (Ahearne et al., 2005; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Popp & Woratschek, 2017). Some authors (e.g. Akbari et al., 2021) have studied the impact of CSR activities on loyalty and concluded that there is a direct relationship between these two variables. However, there is a lack of literature concerning the connection between Brand Activism and Brand Loyalty, with only Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) declaring that the effect of Brand Activism on consumer attitudes is asymmetric. Consequently, based on the previous research connecting Brand Activism, CBA, CBI and Brand Loyalty, the following hypothesis are proposed:

H3: Consumer brand identification has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty

H4: Brand Activism practices have a positive effect on Brand Loyalty

2.4.3 Willingness to Pay

On the contrary to other marketing variables, Willingness to Pay (WTP) allows practitioners to calculate, in a relatively simpler manner, the maximum amount that a customer would be willing to pay for a product or a service (Hanemann, 1991). In other words, it is a measure of value given by an individual that translates a consumption or an experience into monetary units (Homburg et al., 2005). According to Keh and Xie (2009), if a customer is WTP a premium, the price sensibility will be lower, and it is expected that the consumer stays longer in the relationship. In fact, WTP signals the brand's power and could be an indicator of the brand's success (Augusto & Torres, 2018).

As consumers can express their concerns via consumption, a price premium in this context refers to the monetary value that individuals are willing to pay to improve wellbeing (Aguilar & Vlosky, 2007). Various studies have focused on the relation between this concept and green consumerism, as they aim to understand how much consumers are willing to pay for eco-friendly products (e.g Yau, 2012). Other authors (e.g. Nassivera et al., 2017; Tully & Winer, 2014), explored the positive relationship between CSR and WTP. However, academia has not focused on the effect of Brand Activism Practices on WTP. According to Shetty et al. (2019), millennials do not hesitate to pay for such activist brands. Nonetheless, the methodology followed, and the focus group was very limited.

Consumer Brand Identification appears as a possible mediator of the impact of brand activism practices on willingness to pay a price premium. Several authors have explored this correlation between CBI and WTP a price premium. For instance, Albert and Merunka (2013) found a strong positive correlation between consumer-brand identification and brand love and consumers' willingness to pay a premium. Other studies have focused on the impact of online consumer-brand identification and willingness to pay a premium price (Wallace et al., 2022). According to Augusto and Torres (2018), there is a positive correlation between CBI and WTP a price premium. However, to the best of my knowledge, no empirical study has focused on the impact of brand activism practices on consumers' willingness to pay a price premium. Therefore, a research contribution could be achieved in this area. Based on the previous research the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Consumer Brand Identification have a positive effect on WTP

H6: Brand Activism practices have a positive effect on WTP

Additionally, WTP is considered one of the strongest outcomes of Brand Loyalty (Casidy & Wymer, 2016). Numerous authors (e.g. Palmatier et al., 2007) have explored this positive relationship. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H7: Brand Loyalty has a positive effect on WTP a Price Premium

2.5   Brand Activism Authenticity

As brands perceive brand activism benefits, many are approaching it for revenue objectives, and not value- and purpose-driven, and consequently might be perceived as inauthentic. Prior studies investigated this relationship (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Schmidt et al.,

2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020) to understand how the conscientiousness of authenticity or not affected the brand.

Vredenburg et al. (2020) to incorporate this concept of authenticity into the literature, classifies brand activism practices according to the level (high or low) of prosocial corporate practice and the level (high or low) of activist marketing messages, therefore identifying four categories: absence of brand activism, silent brand activism, authentic brand activism and inauthentic brand activism. Authentic Brand Activism (ABA) is the superior form of brand activism, as delivers the greatest brand equity outcomes, and reduces information costs and perceived risks associated with choosing a brand (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

In this perspective, ABA is defined as a strategy in which a brand clearly communicates an activist stance in a purpose and value-driven manner while engaging in prosocial corporate activity (Vredenburg et al., 2020). In other words, brand messages and business strategy must be aligned, if not it will undermine authenticity (Lyon et al., 2018). In fact, Schmidt et al. (2021) argue that the emotional connections created by brand activism only happen if it is seen as more than communication. However, the alignment condition between the practice and the message is necessary but not sufficient for authenticity (Schmidt et al., 2021). According to Vredenburg et al. (2020), four factors must be aligned, namely purpose, values, message, and practice, therefore, creating a holistic system.

On the contrary, brand activism is perceived as inauthentic if brands lack clear brand purpose and values, actively hide their absence of practices, or do not exhibit sufficient prosocial corporate practices. Consequently, inauthentic brand activism can destroy consumers' trust and create negative brand associations. In this context, brands are "woke washing", which is the misalignment of brand activism message with values, purpose, and practices (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Mirzaei et al. (2022) identify two examples: Gillette's and Nike's campaigns. In both cases, brands are accused of being opportunistic as they seek corporate gain by addressing societal causes, in general, for profit-seeking purposes.

As such, Mirzaei et al. (2022) developed the woke activism authenticity framework (WAAF) which highlights several dimensions - practice, inclusion, fit, motivation, self-context independence and sacrifice - that could influence the perception of authenticity and the possible relations between them. Moreover, the authors identify several managerial implications of the study. Firstly, a brand that has a history of activism might benefit from being perceived as authentic. This implication confirms Schmidt et al. (2021) perspective as they argue that brands that take a political stance should be committed over time, even if

creates polarization. Moreover, Mirzaei et al. (2022) suggest that some topics that remain inclusive and neutral to all target audiences will be perceived as more authentic, for instance, sexism or racism. On the contrary, inclusion stances will be more easily perceived as inauthentic. Finally, if consumers feel ignored or even betrayed, they will unlikely see the practice as authentic (Mirzaei et al., 2022). In general, brands, to protect consumers' view of authenticity, must consider what a reasonable consumer would interpret and how those claims could impact (Vredenburg et al., 2020). However, there is no relevant literature concerning the implication of the perception of inauthenticity in activism messages on several brand dimensions. Nevertheless, authenticity has been studied concerning corporate social responsibility and its positive impact on consumer brand responses, namely purchase intention and brand loyalty (e.g. Alhouti et al., 2016). Moreover, other authors (e.g. Carroll et al., 2022) state a positive relationship between brand authenticity and brand loyalty. Thus, it is expected a positive impact on Brand Activism Authenticity (BAA) on Brand Loyalty.

H8: Brand Activism Authenticity will positively impact Brand Loyalty

2.6   Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework (Figure 2) represents graphically the hypotheses and variables previously presented to guide further analysis.
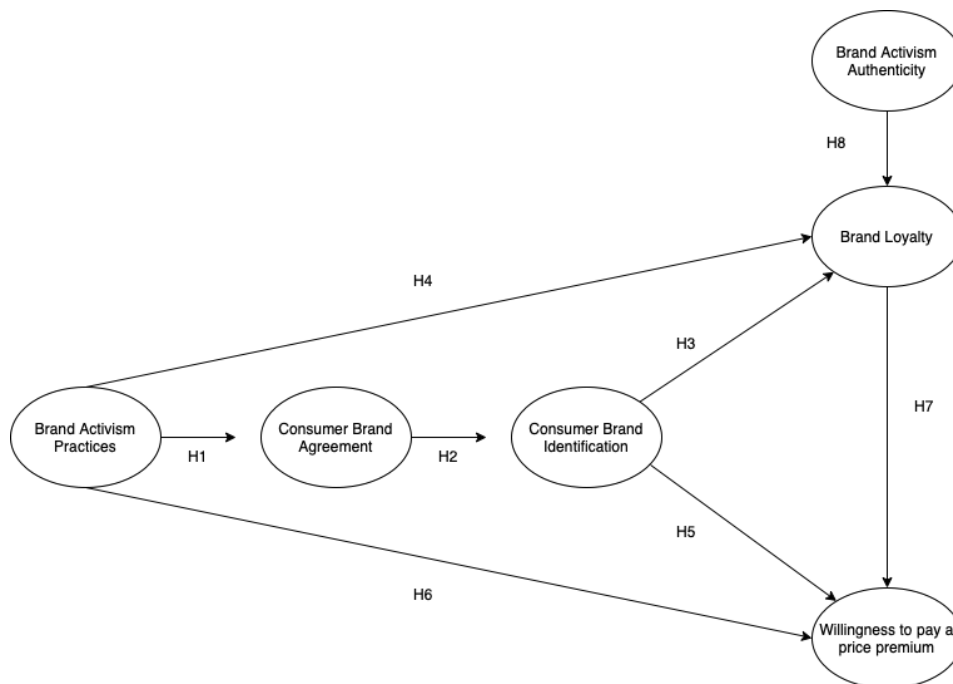
Figure 2 - Conceptual Framework, Source: own elaboration

Table 2 summarizes all the proposed research questions in the present empirical study.

Table 2 - Hypotheses Summary

Number	Hypotheses
H1	Brand Activism Practices have a positive effect on Consumer Brand Agreement
H2	Consumer Brand Agreement has a positive effect on Consumer Brand Identification
H3	Consumer brand identification has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty
H4	Brand Activism practices have a positive effect on Brand Loyalty
H5	Consumer Brand Identification have a positive effect on WTP a Price Premium
H6	Brand Activism practices have a positive effect on WTP a Price Premium
H7	Brand Loyalty has a positive effect on WTP a Price Premium
H8	Brand Activism Authenticity will positively impact Brand Loyalty

2.7   Generational Cohorts

As different generations have distinctive values, experiences, expectations, and lifestyles, which influence their consumer behaviour, brands should identify their characteristics to adapt their strategies and branding accordingly, for instance, their communication strategy, to which Brand Activism is related to (Williams & Page, 2011).

Millennials, Generation Y, or Digital Natives, the older generational cohort explored in this empirical study are individuals born between 1981 and 1996, thus today, they are between 26 and 41 years old (Pew Research Center, 2019; Scholz & Rennig, 2019). The

youngest, and mentioned differently across literature and society, Generation Z, Gen Z or IGeneration comprises individuals born between 1997 and 2012, being 10 to 25 years old now (Milotay, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2019). However, by being social constructions, like race and culture, generations are not completely defined and established. In fact, past research does not agree on where each generation begins and ends (Bolton et al., 2013). The differences among generational extremities are very minimal and gradual, triggered by cultural changes (Campbell et al., 2017). On the contrary, other authors state that there are numerous differences between generations, even adjacent ones. These disparities might imply different responses to the same message (Casalegno et al., 2022). For instance, they might react differently to Brand Activism messages.

Characterizing generations across Europe is considered unrealistic as values differ largely (Scholz & Rennig, 2019). However, due to social media and the internet at least Gen Z's individuals connect, therefore converging some of their beliefs (Scholz & Rennig, 2019). Research states that recent generations share more common values across countries (Egri & Ralston, 2004). Millennials are influenced by the traditional values transmitted by their parents, such as the importance of work, family and a sense of duty are characterized as having an individualistic essence (Casalegno et al., 2022). Loneliness, openness and fluidity are other traits that describe this generation (Chironi, 2019). Concerning, Gen Z, they are characterized as realist, persistent, self-aware, self-reliant and innovative and considered to be the first digital natives (Milotay, 2020).

2.7.1 Millennials

More open than previous generations, Millennials have more acceptance regarding social concerns, for instance, homosexuality, transsexuality, and defend intersectional feminism (Chironi, 2019; Roxas & Marte, 2022). This generational cohort favours direct action and social conflict to achieve its goals and contribute to the development of society (Chironi, 2019; Prakash & Tiwari, 2021).

As they have a conflicting attitude toward the state, they demand that businesses are socially responsible and ethical and consequently will have a positive attitude towards businesses that communicate their CSR practices (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Nevertheless, as this generation has a natural scepticism towards corporate ethics, they inspect the motives of the practice, to detect selfish reasons (Chatzopoulou & de Kiewiet, 2020).

Concerning brand activism, as mentioned some authors (e.g. Shetty et al., 2019) explored how this generational cohort would be affected by this phenomenon, however, as mentioned the methodology approach followed was very limited. Thus, this empirical investigation will bring important insights concerning the impact of this phenomenon on brand-related variables in this generation. Following the mentioned above, it is expected a positive attitude towards brand activism practices, especially concerning the subjects above addressed.

2.7.2 Generation Z

Gen Z fights for societal and environmental issues (Casalegno et al., 2022). As the most diverse in terms of origins, they praise diversity and punish discrimination, not only in terms of race but in other dimensions, for instance, political and religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, among others (Scholz & Rennig, 2019). For them, same-sex marriage is considered a norm and non-negotiable, and gender fluidity is embraced (Witt & Baird, 2018). Generation Z expects that "diversity" values are reflected in brands. Moreover, in this stage of life that this cohort is going through, self-exploration and identification concerns are high, therefore they understand what a brand or product purchase might say about them (Witt & Baird, 2018).

Several authors (e.g. Djafarova & Foots, 2022; Pelikánová & MacGregor, 2020) studied how this generation behaves concerning Corporate Social activities and Ethical practices. Firstly, according to Pelikánová and MacGregor (2020), Gen Z is extremely sensitive to the asymmetry of information and lack of information creating a lack of motivation to support social responsibility models. Nevertheless, according to the same author, this generation was willing to pay a premium price for brands that invested in corporate social responsibility activities for similar products (Pelikánová & MacGregor, 2020). Concerning ethical consumption, Djafarova and Foots (2022) state that this cohort has robust awareness and desire for environmental and ethical topics and the only force keeping them from buying is their financial situation.

Nevertheless, to the best of the author's knowledge, empirical research has not focused on the impact of Brand Activism practices on this generation. In general, it is expected a positive attitude of this generation toward Brand Activism on these topics.

Based on former literature and targeting Generation Z and Millennials, several hypotheses were drawn. The following chapter will describe the methodology applied.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The present chapter sets out the research methodology and measurements. To start, the research approach and the main paradigm in marketing literature introduce the main path of this empirical study (section 3.2). Then, within the research design chapter, section 3.3 describes the experience design (sub-section 3.3.1), which contemplates the experimental stimuli selection. Furthermore, section 3.3.2 clarifies the questionnaire development as well the measurements applied in it. Section 3.3.3 describes the sampling process in the present chapter. Finally, data analysis (section 3.4) briefly describes the statistical process that was followed.

3.2. Research Approach and Paradigm

Searching for causality and assuming a deterministic environment, marketing empirical research has been prioritizing quantitative over qualitative methods (Hanson & Grimmer, 2007; Hunt, 1994). While qualitative marketing research allows researchers to understand and interpret market phenomena without relying on numerical measurement, quantitative methods depend on numerical analysis and measurements to test theories (Zikmund & Babin, 2015). The numerical representation of issues and the definition of the world through statements represents the dominant paradigm in marketing literature, positivism, even though it is considered reductionistic as intents to reduce a behaviour, an idea into a small and discrete set of ideas to test (Creswell, 2009; Hunt, 1994). Nevertheless, the present study follows a softer version of positivism philosophy, post-positivism defends that the production of knowledge is based on probabilistic assumptions and therefore produces uncertain understandings, in other words, it will follow a quantitative research strategy (Hanson & Grimmer, 2007).

3.3. Research Design

To select the utmost appropriate research strategy several factors must be considered, namely the research question, objectives, resources, research nature, and access to potential participants (Saunders et al., 2012). Within the panoply of quantitative methodologies, numerous options could be deliberated, namely experiments, physiological measures, survey

research and panel and scanner data (Chrysochou, 2017). It must be noted that these strategies are not mutually exclusive and therefore could be implemented simultaneously (Saunders et al., 2012). Time and resource constraints, due to the nature of this empirical investigation, are factors that deeply restrict the options available. Even though the study's purpose is not to obtain a descriptive evaluation of the phenomena, it is beneficial to achieve a wide range of participants.

Thus, all variables reflected; the chosen quantitative research design is the combination of an online survey with experimental manipulation. While the survey strategy allows for a simple collection of data, the analysis of relationships between variables and the construction of models, the experimental strategy permits the comparison between two different groups – between-subjects design (Saunders et al., 2012). Therefore, by combining these two research strategies, causal relationships between variables are investigated in two groups: the experimental and the control group.

3.3.1 Experimental Design

With roots in natural science and with strong influence in social science research, experimental methodology aims to study relationships between dependent variables by manipulating the independent variable – brand activism practices in the present exploration (Saunders et al., 2012). Between Quasi, Within-subjects and Classical options, classical experiments would be the most appropriate option. In this technique, a sample of participants is randomly assigned to the experimental (EG) or the control group (CG), thus, none of the participants could belong to both groups (Saunders et al., 2012).

In the experimental group, a planned intervention was implemented, therefore it was created "different levels of the independent variable" (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 168), in this case, an activism video, which will be detailed further. On the contrary, the control group does not receive a stimulus. To operationalize this experiment, at the beginning of the survey, participants were asked to select between two options, "A" representing the CG and "B" representing the EG.

Additionally, by randomizing the assignment of the participants to a particular group, demographic variables, for instance, age, sex, and social status, among others, will have an equal likelihood of being distributed among both groups. Thus, this technique aims to eliminate the probability of another explanation not related to the manipulation of the independent variable and the exclusion of possible contaminating "variables" that might

affect the validity of the results (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Since there is a randomization of the participants, a pre-test measuring the dependent variables was not required as both groups were exposed to the same external influences (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Therefore, in this context, participants in the experimental group will only answer after receiving the stimulus, a post-test. Table 3 summarizes the experimental conditions for this study.

Table 3 - Experimental Conditions

Experimental Condition	Group Belonging	Stimulus Intervention
A	Control	No
B	Experimental	Yes

Experimental Stimuli

As previously mentioned, according to Sarkar and Kotler (2018), brand activism practices allude to numerous concerns – Social, Business, Political, Legal, Economic and Environmental. Within this wide range of themes, social and environmental issues are the priority fights for Generation Z and Millennials (Casalegno et al., 2022). The latest issue has been predominantly explored by several authors (e.g. Aguilar & Vlosky, 2007; Casalegno et al., 2022; Yau, 2012). In this regard, this empirical research will focus on Social Brand Activism, which according to Sarkar and Kotler (2018) concerns the search for equality in gender, LGBT+, race, and so forth. Among these, as mentioned, according to Mirzaei et al. (2022), racism and sexism stances are more likely to be perceived as authentic. On the contrary, inclusion stances, in which LGBT+ is comprised are more unlikely to be recognised as purpose-driven movements.

Within younger generations, namely Generation Z and Millennials, more individuals identify themselves as LGBT+, and between these generations, the youngest holds a higher percentage (Ipsos, 2021). Grasping this evolution, many brands started to embrace this public over the last few decades, without fully understanding, and therefore misrepresenting them. An example is the overuse of LGBT+ imagery during Pride month since consumers tend to have scepticism and perceive this stance as profit-seeking (Ciszek & Lim, 2021). The phenomenon is called "rainbow washing" – the usage of queer symbols, such as the rainbow, to promote products (Vasconcelos, 2022). Considering the previous statements, within Social

Brand Activism, LGBT+ brand stances will be the focus of this empirical study.

Apple, The Body Shop, Disney, Lego, and Netflix are just some of the many brands, across different industries, that have announced their support for this cause. In sports, in which homophobia is prevalent and more common than in general society, many sports brands, like Nike, Adidas and Converse are implementing practices and realising campaigns to support LGBT+ rights (Luxton, 2016). Moreover, the come-out news of some players has brought up the topic of queerness in the sports industry. Two recent examples are Jake Daniels, the UK's first active gay male professional footballer in 30 years, and Carl Nassib, the NFL's first active gay professional player to come out (Fernandes, 2022; Ferreira, 2021). These characteristics and recent debates make the sportswear industry appealing to explore.

Adidas was the selected brand for this empirical research. Several motives were behind this choice. Firstly, the German brand has a history of activism. In 2016, Adidas CFO, Robin Stalker announced the inclusion of a new clause to their contracts, stating that partnership agreements "will neither be terminated nor modified in case the athlete comes out to the public as a member of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community" (Stalker, 2016). Further, in 2020, the sportswear brand partnered with Stonewall FC, a football club that fights for societal change in terms of the football sport, aiming to be inclusive towards and safe members of the LGBT+ community, and others that feel discriminated against. In this partnership, the football club released a one-minute video, on December 9, 2020, on Twitter, in which they announce the collaboration with Adidas and "EA SPORTS FIFA" (see Appendix 1). More recently, in 2022, Adidas associated with a queer Australian artist Kris Andrew Small to create a pride collection (Adidas, 2022). Within the same year, the brand partnered with Jake Daniels, which, as mentioned, is the UK's first active gay male professional footballer. These are some of the historical examples of Adidas' support for this community. Thus, considering the brand awareness that Adidas preserves and the history of activism, it was the brand chosen. To represent Adidas' support towards the cause, the partnership video with Stonewall FC was selected since it clearly showed a brand activism practice promoted by a brand and since it was not widely shared, allowed to prevent some prior knowledge concerning the campaign (see Appendix 1).

3.3.2 Survey Design

As the most widely used data collection strategy within the survey research strategy, the questionnaire appears as a strong candidate to be implemented in this explanatory study.

In fact, due to its characteristics of being easily distributed without the requirement of huge amounts of capital, makes an adequate choice for the data collection method to achieve a wide range of individuals in a certain period – a cross-sectional survey strategy. Thus, a self-completed questionnaire with closed-ended questions was the choice for this investigation (see Appendix 2). The choice of closed-ended question occurred due to its advantage of data analysis and required minimal writing and effort for the participant.

To operationalize the survey strategy, the "Google Forms" platform was employed. In the beginning, potential participants could access the questionnaire in one of the two languages, Portuguese or English, in which the original measures were translated.

Overall, the questionnaire was divided into the following sections: introduction, stimulus, mediators and dependent variables measurement, consumer brand agreement and finally demographic variables. These sections were implemented to prevent fatigue from a lengthy questionnaire. Additionally, to prevent data breaks, all questions were mandatory, except a question concerning the net income of the participant. Throughout the questionnaire, it was not disclosed that an experimental investigation was in course, to prevent response bias due to awareness of the experiment.

In the beginning, a small introduction explained the scope and purpose of the study and they were encouraged to be as honest as possible – "This study is part of my master's thesis in Economics of Business and Strategy, aims to assess consumer responses to Brand Activism. There are no right or wrong answers, please answer as honestly as possible" (see Appendix 2). Even though social desirability bias is a concern, as may participants answer to please the researchers or feel that the answer would be more socially desirable within the questionnaire, a self-completed questionnaire is unlikely to have this bias (Dillman et al., 2014). Finally, after carefully reading the initial information, participants were required to choose one of the two options "A" or "B". As previously described, each option is connected to the control and experimental group, respectively.

The second phase depends on the previous selection. If the participants choose A, an Adidas generic advertisement with the quote "Our Attitude, Impossible is nothing" is exhibited (see Appendix 3). On the other hand, if they choose B, the same Adidas advertisement is portrayed, plus the stimulus, which as mentioned, is a one-minute video, in which a football team shows their new partners, one of them being Adidas (see Appendix 1). The same technique was also followed by Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020). For a better contextualization of the brand activism concept, a small definition was included for the

experimental group, based on Sarkar and Kotler (2018) definition. Moreover, to test the perceived activism authenticity, an additional matrix of questions was implemented for the experimental group. This variable was not included for the control group, since they did not watch the activist campaign.

Thirdly, in both groups, two matrices of rating questions were implemented, concerning the mediator (consumer brand identification) and dependent variables (brand loyalty and WTP a price premium), respectively. Further, the consumer brand agreement question was set in the penultimate section, to prevent participant bias. Finally, demographic variables namely gender, birth year, country of residence, nationality, completed education, occupation, and net income were employed with the purpose to characterize the sample in both groups, experimental and control. Finally, subjects receive an appreciation message for their participation (see Appendix 2).

To refine the questionnaire through inquiries' feedback before launching it, and to test its validity and reliability, a pre-test was implemented. This consisted of an interview in which the participants answered the questionnaire and immediately gave their comments on it. It was implemented during the first week of June, via zoom meetings, and involved nine participants. Several aspects were addressed in this pilot, namely clarity, language, possible answers, layout, and overall impression. The duration of the questionnaire was also questioned and varied from six to eight minutes, depending on the group (control or experimental) that they were randomly assigned. Due to its construction, the experimental group take more time to complete, since as previously mentioned included an activism campaign and an additional group of questions. Based on their feedback, several modifications were implemented, mainly concerning the language and phrasing of some questions. Nevertheless, in general, most inquiries stated the objectivity of the questionnaire. Thus, this pilot phase added to the overall reliability of the questionnaire.

Throughout an empirical investigation process, researchers are constantly confronted with ethical concerns. Thus, for the purpose of this investigation, several ethical issues were particularly addressed. Firstly, concerning the voluntary nature of the participation, none of the surveys was answered in person, which allowed the participants to not feel coerced or intimidated. Secondly, informed consent is the principle in which the researcher provides sufficient information for the participant to understand the implications of the participation and consequently to take an informed decision about it (Saunders et al., 2012). Thus, at the beginning of the survey, a general contextualization of the investigation was given and

consequential approval (see Appendix 2). In the same proposition was reinforced that the participant could withdraw at any time, and confidentiality of the participants was ensured. In fact, no individual answers and identifiable information are presented along with this study. Finally, contributors at the end of the survey were informed that they would be able to send an email concerning questions or doubts about the questionnaire.

Finally, to reach the purpose sample, social media posts and group messages were created through Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Additionally, to reach a broader number of possible participants, an email in partnership with the University of Porto, was sent to all members of the community. Concerning the time horizon, the questionnaire was distributed between June 7 to June 25 of 2022.

Measures

Most variables used were operationalised on a seven-point Likert scale multi-item, validated in former research. Nevertheless, some were adapted, combined, and translated from English to Portuguese. For additional information see Appendix 2.

Brand Loyalty. To measure "Brand Loyalty" it was adapted a scale previously employed by Ramaseshan and Stein (2014). This measure is constructed on an eight-item, seven-item scale. However, one of the questions was very similar to a WTP question, thus, to prevent redundancy, the question was removed. Therefore, instead of an eight-item conceptualization, it was operationalized on a seven-item. Example items include: "I will buy Adidas the next time I buy a product that Adidas offers" and "I would recommend Adidas to friends and family". Additionally, all items were divided into two categories (purchase and attitudinal brand loyalty). The first four questions concern purchase brand loyalty, thus the following three concern attitudinal loyalty. Other authors, for instance, Fernandes and Inverneiro (2020) and Liu et al. (2012) employed this measurement in their study.

Willingness to Pay. The initial measure was operationalized using four-item, in which three of them used a seven scale and the other was an eight-scale through several percentages. This measure was developed by Netemeyer et al. (2004). An adaptation concerning the name of the brand in the survey and the removal of the percentage question was made. Example items include: "I would be willing to pay a higher price for Adidas over other brands" and "I am willing to pay a lot more for Adidas than other brands of shoes and clothes". This measurement was previously applied by Anselmsson et al. (2014).

Brand Activism Authenticity. The measure has not been developed in the marketing literature. Nevertheless, perceived authenticity concerning corporate social responsibility practices was previously measured. Thus, by adapting a construct developed by Alhouti et al. (2016) is applied. The original measure was operationalized using an eight-item group of questions. For this study, only the brand name was modified. Example items include: "Adidas' activism message is genuine" and "Adidas is standing up for what it believes in".

Consumer Brand Agreement. This variable aims to evaluate the level of agreement concerning a controversial issue between brands and consumers through a premise. This concept was previously employed and developed by Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) and it was operationalized through one item. Since this study focuses on the support of Adidas towards the LGBT + community, the premise was the following: "LGBTIQ rights are human rights. Citizens like everyone else and yet LGBTI+ people face constant discrimination and intolerance every single day, simply as a result of who they love or who they are. At the same time, hate speech and homophobia are crimes sadly on the rise right across Europe" stated by Marc Angel MEP, S&D co-chair of the LGBTI-intergroup in the European Parliament.

Consumer Brand Identification. The level of "Consumer Brand Identification" was measured using the scale developed by Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) and previously employed by Popp and Woratschek (2017). Again, for this study, only the brand name was modified. Example items include: "I strongly identify with Adidas" and "Adidas is like a part of me".

Other measures. Apart from the previous variables, demographic measures were operationalized to characterise the sample and control possible biases that might appear. Thus, all participants were asked about their gender, birthday year, country of residency, nationality, completed education, occupation, and average monthly net income. While, in the country of residency and nationally, participants were able to write their answers; in gender, education and occupation, pre-defined answers were employed (see Appendix 2). To avoid, self-classification problems about belonging to a generation, respondents were asked their birthday year, consequently, a generation was matched.

3.3.3   Sampling

The study uses a convenience sample, i.e., it collects information from everyone available, and since it was shared online, everyone with the link was a potential participant.

It should be recalled that, due to sample characteristics, the conclusions from the present study cannot be generalized to the population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Also being prone to bias and influences that are not in the control of the researcher are other downfalls of this strategy (Saunders et al., 2012). However, due to the time and resources constraint and in concordance with Coppock and McClellan (2019), as the nature of this empirical investigation is not descriptive but explanatory, the sample does not need to represent the population, therefore is the most suitable strategy for this empirical investigation. Moreover, as one of the prior studies in Social Brand Activism, the findings could be a road map for future research.

Besides defining the sampling approach followed, the minimal number of participants required for the present investigation must be defined. As a generic rule, Stutely (2003) recommends a simple size of n=30 for each category. Therefore, in both experimental and control groups, the number is achieved (experimental: n=141; control: n=154).

To guarantee that the participants were within the generational cohorts, Millennials and Generation Z, their birth year was solicited in the questionnaire. Thus, participants born before 1981 were excluded, as well after 2012. Consequently, 15 out of the 314 participants, that answered the online questionnaire, were eliminated due to not belonging to the target generation. Additionally, 4 participants were also eliminated due to invalid answers. Thus, after performing this data cleaning, the overall number of valid contributors was 295.

Most participants were female (63%), male participants represented about 36% of the sample, and 1% preferred not to say. Further, concerning the Generation, about 78% belonged to Generation Z. Considering the "Nationality" and "Country of Residency", approximately 90% lived in Portugal or were Portuguese. The level of education, as expected, was high, as more than 90% have or frequent at least a bachelor's degree. Concerning the differences between the two groups, as expected due to randomization, both groups present similar characteristics. The final demographic profile of the sample is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 - Demographic characterization of the Sample

		Frequency			Percentage (%)		
		Experimental	Control	Total	Experimental	Control	Total
		141	154	295	47,80%	52,20%	100%
Gender	Female	89	98	187	63,12%	63,64%	63,39%

	Male	51	54	105	36,17%	35,06%	35,59%
	Other	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%
	Prefer not to Say	1	2	3	0,71%	1,30%	1,02%
Generation	Millennials	30	30	60	21,28%	19,48%	20,34%
	Generation Z	111	124	235	78,72%	80,52%	79,66%
Country of Residency	Portugal	128	142	270	90,78%	92,21%	91,53%
	Other	13	12	25	9,22%	7,79%	8,47%
Nationality	Portuguese	128	140	268	90,78%	90,91%	90,85%
	Other	13	14	27	9,22%	9,09%	9,15%
Completed or ongoing Education	High/middle school	7	10	17	4,96%	6,49%	5,76%
	Bachelor	54	59	113	38,30%	38,31%	38,31%
	Master	78	78	156	55,32%	50,65%	52,88%
	Doctorate	2	7	9	1,42%	4,55%	3,05%
Occupation	Student	110	120	230	78,01%	77,92%	77,96%
	Employed	27	33	60	19,15%	21,43%	20,34%
	Unemployed	3	1	4	2,13%	0,65%	1,36%
	Other	1	0	1	0,71%	0%	0,34%

3.4. Data Analysis

The data collected previously was imported to SPSS, which will be the statistical software for data analysis.

Formerly introduced, the conceptual model framework mainly draws a sequential mediation analysis between brand activism practices and the dependent variables (Brand Loyalty and WTP) through the two mediators (Consumer Brand Agreement and Consumer Brand Identification). Thus, to test **H1 – H6**, PROCESS Model 6 (Hayes, 2017) will be employed. Specifically, several linear OLS regressions will be computed to understand the type and magnitude of the relationship between variables. By default, Hayes' PROCESS provides several t-tests for each regression coefficient and through it, it is possible to interpret if the "model that includes that antecedent variable fits better than one that

excludes it" (Hayes, 2017, p. 63). To rephrase it, these t-tests will draw the significance of the relationship.

Further T-test considers the following null and alternative hypotheses:

$$\mathbf{H_0} : \beta = 0$$

$$\mathbf{H_A} : \beta \neq 0$$

Being β the individual coefficient of the variable. This empirical study considers significance levels of 95% (p-value = 0,05) as the threshold, meaning that the null hypothesis is rejected at a p-value higher than 0,05. Nevertheless, p-values closer to the threshold but below 0,1 (significance level of 90%) will be identified as marginally significant. Finally, **H7** and **H8** are tested through linear regression analysis and individual t-tests, as previously exemplified.

In summary, through a questionnaire with experimental manipulation targeting Generation Z and Millennials and a data analysis following Hayes Process Model, the results will be drawn in the subsequent chapter.

4. Results

4.1. Pre-analysis

4.1.1 Preparation of data

Before running descriptive statistical analysis and hypothesis testing, some data adjustment processes were implemented. Firstly, as the data excel file was imported to SPSS, the initial questions nomenclature was not the most suitable approach to select, identify, and combine variables. Thus, most of them were renamed according to the corresponding concept and the group that they belong to (experimental or control). Then, to group all multi-item concepts, a statistical mean was computed. A Cronbach alfa was calculated to provide information regarding the internal consistency of the multi-item combination, as detailed further. Finally, the remaining variables, i.e., group belonging, and control variables suffered data coding to increase the data analysis feasibility. Appendix 4 clarifies how each variable was converted.

4.1.2 Research Quality Criteria

To test the internal consistency of the scales, the Cronbach alfa was computed for each group, and then aggregated via a statistical average. The value varies between 0 and 1, and the closer is to 1, the higher will be the internal consistency (Saunders et al., 2012; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), if the alfa is above 0,8 the bundle has higher internal consistency. As Table 5 shows, all Cronbach alfas were above 0,8, which confirms the internal consistency.

Table 5 - Cronbach's alpha

Measures and Source	Items	Cronbach Alfa			Original Alfa
		EG	CG	Average	
Brand Activism Authenticity (Alhouti et al., 2016)	8	0,956	/	0,956	0,960
Consumer Brand Identification (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012)	5	0,929	0,932	0,931	0,940

Brand Loyalty (Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014)	7	0,908	0,910	0,909	0,878*
Willingness to Pay (Netemeyer et al., 2004)	3	0,903	0,868	0,886	0,873*
Consumer Brand Agreement (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020)	1	/	/	/	/

Note. (*) Due to the authors not providing a single Cronbach alfa value, a simple statistical mean from the original values was computed.

4.2. Descriptive statistical analysis

Before statistical inference and to describe the data obtained through the data collection method, a series of descriptive statistics will be computed, namely minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation. Additionally, to elucidate the distribution of scores in each variable, two descriptive indicators were added, that is skewness and kurtosis values. According to Pallant (2016), the skewness indicator provides information about the symmetry of the distribution and inversely, kurtosis provides evidence concerning the "peakedness" of the distribution. This descriptive statistical analysis only pretends to draw a general picture of the data, and not access information that might fully indicate the rejection or not of the previous hypotheses. Due to the experimental design followed, the descriptive analysis is divided into the control group (N=154) and then the experimental group (N=141). Statistical differences between groups will not be addressed in this section. Tables 6 and 7 summarize the data obtained.

Table 6 - Descriptive Statistics – Control Group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean Statistic	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
CBI	154	1	7	2,927	1,436	0,572	-0,316
BL	154	1	7	2,936	1,344	0,741	0,271
WTP	154	1	7	2,359	1,382	1,035	0,485
CBA	154	1	7	6,17	1,214	-1,705	2,788

Table 7 - Descriptive Statistics – Experimental Group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean Statistic	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
CBI	141	1	7	3,050	1,520	0,537	-0,540
BL	141	1	7	3,201	1,367	0,582	-0,052
WTP	141	1	7	2,537	1,549	1,063	0,433
CBA	141	1	7	6,14	1,387	-1,954	3,662
BAA	141	1	7	4,330	1,577	-0,336	-0,753

Firstly, CBI has a statistical mean of 2.93 (SD=1,44) on the CG. On the EG, the multivariable has a higher statistical mean of 3,05 (SD=1,52). Concerning the skewness value, both groups have a positive value (CG = 0,57; EG=0,54), which indicates that the distribution of the scores is clustered to the left at lower values – positively skewed. On the contrary, in both sets, the kurtosis value is negative (CG =-0,316; EG=-0,540). In other words, the distribution is flat (platykurtic) therefore, there are many cases in the extremes of the distribution.

Further, Brand Loyalty on the CG has a statistical mean of 2,94 (SD=1,34). Equally to the previous multivariable, in the EG, the statistical mean is higher than the CG, with a value of 3,21 (SD= 1,37). Concerning the skewness indicator, both groups have positive values (CG = 0,74; EG = 0,58), consequently, in both cases, they are the scores of the distribution are clustered on the left. Regarding the kurtosis value, while the CG has a positive value (0,27), the EG has a negative value (-0,05). Thus, in the first one, it is a peaked distribution, clustered to the centre, and in the EG, it is a flatter distribution.

Willingness to Pay in the CG has a statistical mean of 2,36 (SD = 1,38). Concerning the EG, again the statistical mean is higher than the CG, being 2,53 (SD= 1,55). Moreover, in both groups, the skewness value is positive (CG = 1,03; EG = 1,06). Thus, both are positively skewed distributions. On the contrary to Brand Loyalty, the WTP's kurtosis indicators have positive values in both groups (CG = 0,49; EG = 0,43), indicating that its distribution is leptokurtic.

In contrast to the previous variables, Consumer Brand Agreement has a higher statistical mean on the CG, being 6,17 (SD=1,21). On the EG, it is 6,14 (SD=1,39). Furthermore, in both segments, the skewness values are negative (CG = -1,71; EG = 1,95). In regard to the kurtosis indicator, the same behaviour occurs in the CG and EG, in both cases the values are positive (CG = 2,79; EG = 3,66), thus indicating that they present a

leptokurtic distribution.

Finally, as previously mentioned, in the EG, an additional variable was added - Brand Activism Authenticity. It has a statistical mean of 4,33 (S.D. = 1,57). The skewness value is negative, which indicates that the distribution of the scores is clustered to the right at higher values. On the contrary, the kurtosis value is negative (-0,75), indicating that the distribution is relatively flat.

In summary, in most cases, the statistical means of the variables are higher in the EG than in the CG. The exception is the Consumer Brand Agreement, in which the value in the CG is marginally higher than in the EG. Nevertheless, no additional inference could be derived from this information. As expected, none of the kurtosis or skewness values are 0, which would mean a normal distribution which is rare in the social sciences (Pallant, 2016). Nonetheless, with larger samples, as presented, the implication of statistically significant skewness will not make the distribution deviate enough from normality and therefore not make a substantial difference in the analysis. The same happens with the kurtosis value with larger samples (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

4.3. Test of Hypotheses

To answer **H1 – H6**, a series of linear- and multi-regressions were computed using Model 6 on PROCESS SPSS (Hayes, 2017). At this time, no covariate variables (gender, generational cohort, …) were included. Concerning **H7** and **H8**, their linear regressions were computed using "Regression – Linear" from SPSS. Table 8 presents a summary of the results. For the SPSS output, see Appendix 5 and 6.

Table 8 - Linear Regression

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path	β	df	t-stat	p-value	R^2
H1	Brand Activism → CBA	a_1	-0,0270	293	-0,1782	0,8587	/
H2	CBA → CBI	d_{21}	0,2072	292	3,1688	0,0017	/
H3	CBI → BL	b_2	0,7103	291	20,7790	<0,001	/
H4	Brand Activism → BL	c'	0,1878	291	1,8947	0,0591	/
H5	CBI → WTP	b_2	0,6775	291	15,7544	<0,001	/

H6	Brand Activism → WTP	c'	0,0949	291	0,7610	0,4473	/
H7	BL → WTP	/	0,887	293	24,928	<0,001	0,680
H8	BAA → BL	/	0,555	139	9,818	<0,001	0,409

Hypothesis 1 suggested that Brand Activism Practices would have a positive effect on Consumer Brand Agreement (trajectory – a_1, in Figure 3). In other words, if a consumer agrees with a brand stance, he will have a higher consumer brand agreement (or self-brand similarity). Interestingly, the variable presents the following results β = -0,027, t (293) = -0,17, p-value=0,859. The impact of the independent variable is negative, nonetheless, the effect is not significant, since p-value >0,05. Thus, contrary to what the literature presents, the effect of this phenomenon on the Consumer Brand Agreement is not significant. Therefore, **H1** is not supported.

There are, at least, two reasons that may explain why this phenomenon does not affect Consumer Brand Agreement. As previously mentioned (see section 2.6), both Generation Z and Millennials advocate for LGBT+ rights and expect businesses to support these issues. Therefore, they do not see it as a good action, but as an obligation. Thus, as consumers already defend the cause, the impact of this phenomenon on the subject will be negligible. In fact, according to the descriptive statistics chapter, the statistical mean of Consumer Brand Agreement in the Experimental Group has a lower value, when compared to the Control Group, indicating that brands might not influence people's opinions on this subject, this condition is much related to corporate social marketing (see section 2.1). Another possible explanation concerns the lack of emotional responses triggered by the stimulus. Actually, according to Schmidt et al. (2021), brand activism practices only create emotional responses if they are seen as more than communication, which might not happen. Even though during the pilot study, the stimulus choice was indicated by the volunteers as adequate, it might not generate sufficient emotional responses.

Hypothesis 2 predicted a positive relationship between Consumer Brand Agreement (Brand-Self Similarity) and Consumer Brand Identification. As previously debated, several authors (e.g. Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012) explored this relationship. In this case, the association (d_{21}) presents the following effects β = 0,207, t (292) = 3,169, p-value=0,0017. As the p-value is lower than 0,05, **H2** is supported.

Confronting these results with previous literature, this empirical study corroborates what previous authors claim.

Hypothesis 3 anticipated that Consumer Brand Identification positively influenced Brand Loyalty (trajectory – b_2, in Figure 3). Lam et al. (2010) and Popp and Woratschek (2017) supported this claim. Regarding this study, Consumer Brand Identification presents a coefficient (β) of 0,71 and it is statistically significant, with a p-value lower than 0,001. Thus, considering the above, **H3** is supported. Therefore, these results are in concordance with previous literature, which claims that when consumers perceive a state of oneness with a brand, they will reward it with their loyalty, e.g., in terms of advocacy and purchase intention.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that Brand Activism Practices (independent variable) had a positive effect on Brand Loyalty (dependent variable), in line with Hayes (2017), it represents the direct effect (c') in Figure 3. Results show that Brand Activism Practices has the following effect $\beta = 0,188$, t (291) = 1,895, p-value=0,059. The influence is positive, similar to the impact of other corporate social actions on loyalty (He & Li, 2011). Considering the statistical significance adopted (95%), the effect is not significant, however as the p-value is lower than 0,1, the effect is marginally significant. Therefore, **H4** is supported.

At least one reason could explain this marginally significant value. As previously mentioned, according to Vredenburg et al. (2020), Authentic Brand Activism is the superior form of Brand Activism since it delivers the greatest Brand Equity outcomes. Considering the descriptive statistics chapter, the statistical mean of Brand Activism Authenticity is 4,33 (S.D. = 1,57), indicating a value relatively closer to the centre of the Likert scale. To recall, this concept was measured by the following premises: "Adidas' activism message is genuine"; "Adidas is being true to itself with its activism messages", among others. Thus, this value might indicate that the participants did not feel strongly that the message and practice were authentic.

Even though the effect was only marginally significant, this result represents an important step to understanding how this practice influences brands. Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) claim that the effect of brand activism on attitudes towards the brand is asymmetric, i.e., it is neglectable if the consumer agrees with the cause, and negative if they do not agree. However, in the present case with a high level of support for the cause, the effect is positive.

Figure 3 summarizes the individual coefficients obtained in **H1** to **H4**.

$d_{21} = 0,207$

CBA → CBI

$a_1 = -0,027$

$b_2 = 0,710$

BA

$a_2 = 0,128$

$b_1 = 0,036$

BL

$c' = 0,188$

Figure 3 - Brand Loyalty - Statistical Diagram, based on Hayes
(2017)

Note: a_2 and b_1 represent additional coefficients computed on Model 6 on PROCESS

Hypothesis 5 anticipated a positive impact of Consumer Brand Identification on Willingness to Pay (statistical path – b_2, in Figure 4). This correlation has been explored by several authors (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Augusto & Torres, 2018; Wallace et al., 2022) in other contexts. In the present study, the linear regression shows the following results $\beta = 0,678$, t (291) = 15,7544 and a p-value<0,001. The effects corroborate previous literature, indicating that consumers who identify with the brand will reward the brand by being willing to pay a higher price. Thus, **H5** is supported.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that Brand Activism Practices had a positive impact on Willingness to Pay (direct effect – c', in Figure 4). Previous studies regarding CSR had explored this correlation (Nassivera et al., 2017; Tully & Winer, 2014) and claim that its relationship is positive. In other words, if a brand supports a cause, consumers would be willing to pay a higher price. Focusing on the present study, brand activism practices have the following effects on WTP: $\beta = 0,095$ t (291) = 0,867, p-value=0,387. The effect as expected is positive, however, it is not statistically significant, as the p-value is higher than 0,05. Consequently, **H6** is not supported.

Three reasons, at minimum, could explain this result. As mentioned in **H4**, one reason that might explain this non-significant value could be related to the perception of authenticity from the participants, and consequently not significantly rewarding the brand

for their support towards this cause.

Secondly, by analysing the demographic characteristics of the sample, it is perceived, that the majority of the participants belonging to Generation Z are university students. Consequently, it is expected that they are not financially independent and consequently might be more price sensitive.

The final possible cause concerns price sensibility. To the best of the author's knowledge, there is no recent empirical study concerning price sensitivity in the sportswear industry. Nevertheless, it is expected that depending on the industry, consumers will be more or less willing to pay a higher price. Consequently, the choice for this industry might influence the present results.

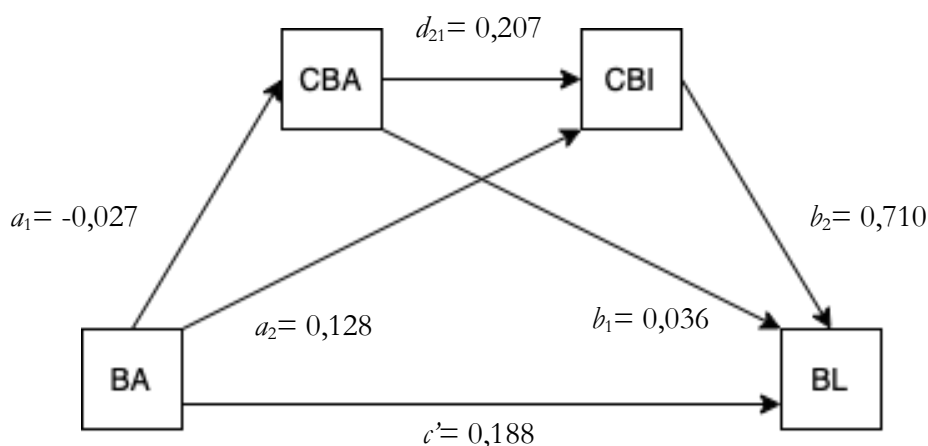Figure 4 summarizes the individual coefficients obtained in **H1**, **H2**, **H5** and **H6**
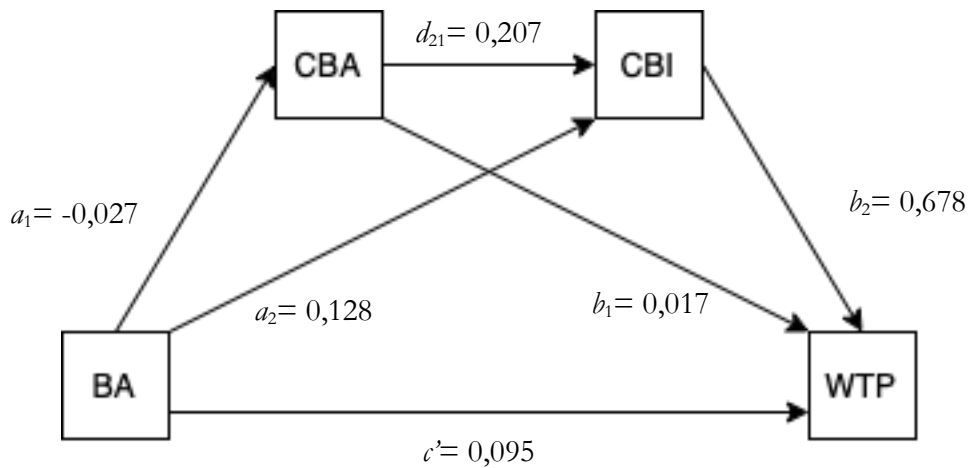
Figure 4 - Willingness to Pay - Statistical Diagram, based on Hayes (2017)

Note: a_2 and b_1 represent additional coefficients computed on Model 6 on PROCESS

Hypothesis 7 predicted that Brand Loyalty would positively affect consumers' Willingness to Pay. To test it, as mentioned, a linear regression was plotted. As table 8 shows the results are the following: $\beta = 0,887$ (*SE*= 0,036) and p-value <0,001. Concerning the goodness of fit, the R^2 has a value of 0,680, which is an acceptable value. As previous authors (e.g. Palmatier et al., 2007) claim, there is a positive relationship between these two concepts. Thus, **H7** is supported.

Hypothesis 8 anticipated that Brand Activism Authenticity would positively impact

Brand Loyalty. Other authors (e.g. Alhouti et al., 2016) explored the perception of authenticity and its positive impact on brand dimensions in another context, for instance, corporate social responsibility. In the present investigation, as mentioned, a linear regression was plotted. It should be noted that, since brand activism authenticity was only measured in the experimental group, the brand loyalty results only refer to the experimental group. The following results were obtained: $\beta = 0{,}555$ (*SE*= 0,057), p-value <0,001. Therefore, brand activism authenticity presents a significant effect on brand loyalty. In practice, when consumers feel the alignment between the cause and the brand motives, they will reward it in terms of advocacy and purchase intention. Concerning the goodness of fit, R^2 has a value of 0,409, which is not a high value, indicating that other variables influence brand loyalty in this context. Nevertheless, **H8** is supported.

Table 9 summarizes the overall results of the past hypothesis.

Table 9 - Overall results from the hypotheses' test

Hypothesis	Description	Result
H1	Brand Activism Practices have a positive effect on Consumer Brand Agreement	Not Verified
H2	Consumer Brand Agreement has a positive effect on Consumer Brand Identification	Verified
H3	Consumer brand identification has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty	Verified
H4	Brand Activism practices have a positive effect on Brand Loyalty	Marginally Verified
H5	Consumer Brand Identification have a positive effect on Consumers' Willingness to Pay	Verified
H6	Brand Activism practices have a positive effect on Consumers' Willingness to Pay	Not Verified
H7	Brand Loyalty has a positive effect on Consumers' Willingness to Pay	Verified
H8	Brand Activism Authenticity will positively impact Brand Loyalty	Verified

4.4. Other Analysis

Even though previous statistical analysis (chapter 4.3) led to confirmation or not of hypotheses, other results are noteworthy to mention.

4.4.1 Indirect Effects

The focus of the previous analysis was the direct effect between the variables presented in the model. However, the relationship between Brand Activism and the dependent variables must also consider the overall mediation effect, i.e., indirect effect. To claim full mediation Zhao et al. (2010) principle will be followed, which occurs when the indirect effect is significant and if the direct effect is non-significant.

Table 10 - Indirect Effects

Relationship	Indirect Effect	SE	CI	
BL sequential mediation	-0,004	0,238	-0,074	0,0387
WTP sequential mediation	-0,0026	0,016	-0,0369	0,0258

First, it was predicted that Consumer Brand Agreement and Consumer Brand Identification would sequentially mediate Brand Activism Practices on Brand Loyalty. To rephrase it, the relationship between Brand Activism Practices and Brand Loyalty is influenced by Consumer Brand Agreement and Consumer Brand Identification. This represents the indirect effect of the mediation. Through SPSS, the following results were obtained:

Indirect effect = -0,004, *SE*=0,238 CI [-0,074; 0,0387]

The confidence interval contains 0, indicating a higher p-value, above 0,05, thus it is possible to state that the indirect effect is not significant. Therefore, based on results obtained in **H4** and the indirect effect results, it is not possible to conclude that Consumer Brand Agreement and Consumer Brand Identification mediate the relationship between Brand Activism and Brand Loyalty. Even testing for other mediation paths, i.e., taking one of the mediators (Consumer Brand Agreement or Consumer Brand Identification) from the

model, the indirect was still not significant.

Second, it was anticipated that Consumer Brand Agreement and Consumer Brand Identification would sequentially mediate Brand Activism Practices on Willingness to Pay. In other words, for a brand to increase consumer Willingness to Pay through brand activism practices, the consumer would have to agree with the brand and identify with it. Representing the indirect effect of the mediation. As Table 10 shows, the results are the following:

$$Indirect\ effect = -0,0026,\ SE=0,016\ CI\ [-0,0369;\ 0,0258]$$

The confidence interval contains the value 0, thus, the indirect effect is not significant. Consequently, based on results on the results obtained in **H6** (direct effect not significant) and the current results, it is not possible to conclude, that Consumer Brand Agreement and Consumer Brand Identification mediate the relationship between Brand Activism and Willingness to Pay. Equally to the other dependent variable, the indirect was still not significant if one of the mediators was removed from the model.

4.4.2 Confounding Effects

Previous statistical analysis did not show sufficient statistical evidence to support the impact of Brand Activism Practices on consumers' willingness to pay, and it was conjectured. To understand if demographic variables are affecting results, Gender is added as a covariate. The premise behind Gender is that women are more prone to be involved in social causes (Hensley et al., 2019), which consequently, could be affecting the present results. Therefore, the demographic variable gender was also included. Tables 11 and 12 present a summary of these results.

Table 11 - WTP Regressions after incorporating Gender as a covariate

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path	β	df	t-stat	p-value
H1	Brand Activism → CBA	a_1	-0,0276	292	-0,1905	0,849
H2	CBA → CBI	d_{21}	0,2097	291	3,0523	0,0025
H5	CBI → WTP	b_2	0,6775	290	15,7273	<0,001
H6	Brand Activism → WTP	c'	0,0948	290	0,7594	0,4482

Table 12 - WTP Indirect Effect after incorporating Gender as a covariate

Relationship	Indirect Effect	SE	CI	
WTP sequential mediation	-0,0039	0,0216	-0,0510	0,0381

From Tables 11 and 12, it is clear that Gender, as a covariate, did not drastically influence the previous results. The validation or not of the hypotheses remained the same. Even though previous research stated that women are more prone to social causes, that behaviour was not reflected in these results.

The same principle was followed on Brand Loyalty since it was not possible to conclude full mediation. Therefore, Gender was also added to the model. However, as Tables 13 and 14 show, the results did not drastically change. The validation or not of the hypotheses remained the same.

Table 13 - BL Regressions after incorporating Gender as a covariate

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path	β	df	t-stat	p-value
H1	Brand Activism → CBA	a_1	-0,0276	292	-0,1905	0,8490
H2	CBA → CBI	d_{21}	0,2097	291	3,0523	0,0025
H3	CBI → BL	b_2	0,7104	290	20,7558	<0,001
H4	Brand Activism → BL	c'	0,1876	290	1,8900	0,0598

Table 14 - BL Indirect Effect after incorporating Gender as a covariate

Relationship	Indirect Effect	SE	CI	
BL sequential mediation	-0,0041	0,0223	-0,0540	0,0373

4.4.3 Alternative Conceptual Approach

Even though previous results showed full mediation in neither Brand Loyalty nor Willingness to Pay, an alternative approach will be tested. The strategy, similarly to Mukherjee

and Althuizen's (2020) study, consisted of taking Brand Activism Practices as a statistical variable and creating two simple mediation models for each group, experimental or control. The latest acts as a baseline for comparison. Focusing on Brand Loyalty, Figure 5 represents the new statistical diagram.
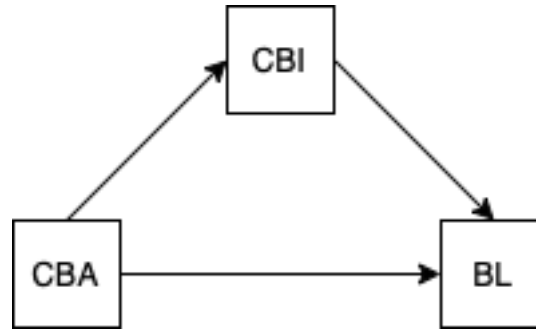
Figure 5 - New Statistical Diagram

Using Model 4 in PROCESS SPSS, in both groups, the direct effect of consumer brand agreement on brand loyalty was not significant, which follows Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) results. On the other hand, interestingly, the indirect effect on the experimental group was significant, while the control group was not. Therefore, it is possible to conclude a full mediation on the experimental group. Compared to Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) results, the present study attests to the moderating role of Consumer Brand Identification and it can establish the order of effects. Tables 15 and 16 summarize the results obtained.

Table 15 - BL - Direct Effect

Group	β	df	t-stat	p-value
Control	0,0614	151	1,0056	0,3162
Experimental	0,0084	138	0,1700	0,8652

Table 16 - BL - Indirect Effect

Group	Indirect Effect	SE	CI

Control	0,0688	0,0533	-0,0403	0,1784
Experimental	0,2197	0,0546	0,1049	0,3212

Concerning the second dependent variable, WTP in the control group both direct and indirect effects were not significant. Concerning the experimental group, similar to BL, the indirect effect was significant and the direct effect was not, therefore according to Zhao et al. (2010) rule, there is full mediation.

Table 17 - WTP - Direct Effect

Group	β	df	t-stat	p-value
Control	0,0854	152	1,1584	0,2485
Experimental	-0,0669	139	-1,0501	0,2955

Table 18 - WTP - Indirect Effects

Group	Indirect Effect	SE	CI	
Control	0,0579	0,0469	-0,0312	0,1523
Experimental	0,2351	0,0605	0,1050	0,3459

Finally, with the validation of the hypothesis and additional test results, several conclusions and contributions were drawn. The following chapter will summarise the contributions to academia and management, as well as the limitations faced through the study.

5. Conclusions

While being neutral might not be an option anymore (Stein, 2018), brands started to speak out and take action on controversial societal issues. Will consumers reward brands for being in the upfront battle of such causes? Or will they see it as a brand obligation? Vredenburg et al. (2020), Mirzaei et al. (2022), Schmidt et al. (2021), Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) are a few authors that explored this phenomenon, its implications for brands and how authenticity prevails as an important characteristic to define marketing strategies. Following their footsteps, this explanatory research aimed to answer the following research questions: *"How do Brand Activism practices affect brand dimensions, such as Brand Loyalty and Willingness to Pay a price premium?"* and *"Does the perception of Brand Activism Authenticity impact Brand Loyalty?".* By answering the previous research questions, the present empirical research brings out important findings for academia and practitioners.

5.1. Contributions to Theory

Concerning the theoretical contributions, the present empirical research adds several theoretical insights to the literature on this emerging phenomenon. First, it corroborates Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) and Escalas and Bettman (2003) theory, that the identification with a brand is influenced by consumer's perception that their personality is similar or congruent to a brand's personality, i.e., Consumer Brand Agreement (or brand-self similarity) is a driver of Consumer Brand Identification.

Second, it contributes to the current literature (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Augusto & Torres, 2018; Lam et al., 2010; Popp & Woratschek, 2017) by indicating that Consumer Brand Identification is an antecedent of Brand Loyalty and Willingness to Pay. In practice, if a consumer identifies with a brand, it will reward it, in terms of advocacy, purchase intention and willingness to pay. Gender was controlled in former relationships, however, did not influence either significance or direction, positive or negative. This result contributes to the gender marketing literature, indicating that this variable does not influence the impact of Brand Activism.

Thirdly, to the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first empirical study to associate Brand Activism and Brand Loyalty, indicating a positive relationship between these two concepts. Previous literature (e.g. Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020) focused on the impact of this phenomenon on broader concepts, namely attitudes toward brands. Even though it

was not possible to achieve a significant relationship between this practice and consumers' WTP, probably due to several factors, it is the first to address the possibility.

Fourth, for both Brand Loyalty and WTP, this research indicates that Consumer Brand Agreement and Consumer Brand Identification do not act as a relationship mechanism between Brand Activism practices and the dependent variables.

Fifth, even though the statistical and conceptual strategy followed was addressing consumer brand agreement and consumer brand identification as mediators, an alternative methodology was implemented. The alternative version confirmed the Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) hypothesis that CBI mediates the effect of CBA on brand dimensions. Hence, this empirical study contributes to the literature by arguing that CBI is a mediator between CBA and BL /WTP.

Finally, previous authors (e.g. Alhouti et al., 2016) explored the impact of authenticity on other corporate social initiatives, for instance, Corporate Social Responsibility. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, no research connects this topic to (social) brand activism and its impact on Brand Loyalty. Thus, this empirical study adds the conceptualization of this topic on the phenomenon and its positive impact on loyalty.

5.2. Contributions to Management

By demanding the alignment between brand management, operations and business strategy, this research brings out important insights for brand and strategy managers.

Firstly, this empirical study sets out one of the earliest discussions on the impact (social) brand activism on brand dimensions, especially in the Portuguese market on these two generations. Even though Brand Activism Practices are characterized by bringing controversial and divisive messages to the public (Nalick et al., 2016), in the present study, the support for the LGBT+ community was considerably high. Brand Managers could use these results to foresee how these generations will respond and embrace the cause. However, as expected, based on brand authenticity results, young consumers are septic concerning the brand support towards a cause. Therefore, brand and strategy managers should view this phenomenon from a holistic perspective, and not only as a communication one. Even though Brand Activism's purpose is to be socially driven and not profit-seeking, the present study reinforces the idea that Brand Activism could be a very powerful tool for managers. Loyalty, favourable word of mouth and general advocacy are a few benefits of this practice according to this research. This study sets out important insight for brands, to understand some of the

consequences of this tool.

Communicating the message should not be the only concern for brand managers since it was perceived that authenticity might have an important role in this phenomenon and impact consumer loyalty. Further, even though Consumer Brand Agreement is positively related to Consumer Brand Identification, and the latest to Brand Loyalty and WTP, there is no statistical evidence that supports their role in the Brand Activism impact. Nevertheless, it is recommended that brands investigate consumers' values to adapt their communication strategies accordingly. In fact, the support towards LGBT+ rights by the sample indicates possible progressive and pro-social values of these generations.

Finally, given the significance of CBI in predicting Brand Loyalty and WTP, it may be valuable for brand managers to deeply understand consumers' values and their own, and to adapt their communications to achieve the target consumer.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Although this empirical research brings out important insights for academia and practitioners concerning (social) brand activism, some limitations must be disclosed for future research, as well as possible research paths from now on.

First and foremost, the data collection strategy followed. Due to financial resources and time constraints, as mentioned, the study used a convenience sample (non-probability sampling) and consequently the results cannot be generalized to the overall Generation Z and Millennials population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Future empirical studies may focus on having a broader and more balanced sample to further test the implications of this phenomenon in different generations.

Second, the lack of information on brand activism campaigns targeting the LGBT+ community with business operation implications. Brand Activism, according to Craddock et al. (2018), demands adaptation of their operation in ways that support their chosen social causes. However, even though many brands openly support the cause, they do not show how their operations changed. Consequently, the scope of possibilities was limited. As it is expected that this phenomenon will continue to rise, future research will have more options to choose from.

Moreover, some authors (e.g. Kim et al., 2018) explored how self-concept influences the perception of an advertisement. Consequently, participants who identify themselves as members of the LGBT+ community could interpret differently the message. By being

randomly assigned to the experimental or control group, this variable should have the same impact in both groups. Still, this seems a relevant issue, which was not explored in this study. Future research in this particular social cause may consider sexual orientation and gender identity control variables, to explore the effect of these variables.

Finally, to access the availability to pay a premium price, participants were asked if they were available to pay more for a particular brand, in the present case Adidas. It is expected that personal income affects the price variable. However, for ethical reasons, the present data collection method did not mandatorily require the disclosure of personal income. Future studies may access consumer income from another point of view, for instance, personal expenses.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Experimental Stimulus

Weblink: https://twitter.com/stonewallfc/status/1336673714658799618

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire (Condition: Experimental Group)

Section 1

Impact of Brand Activism in Consumer Behaviour

Hello! My name is Pedro Castro, and I am a Master student at FEP – School of Economics and Management of University of Porto. This study is a part of my research for my Master Thesis in Economics of Business and Strategy, which will focus on Brand Activism.

This study is part of my master's thesis in Economics of Business and Strategy, aims to assess consumer responses to Brand Activism. There are no right or wrong answers, please answer as honestly as possible.

By completing this questionnaire, you are giving your consent to participate in this study, allowing the use of the data you voluntarily provide, trusting that they will only be used for this research and treated anonymously and confidentially. If you take the survey, you can always stop at any time.

If you have any doubt or problem, or if you are interested in accessing the study results, feel free to email me (up202000806@up.pt)

Thanks for you collaboration,
Pedro Castro

Please select one of the following letters
A
B

Section 2

Please consider the following Adidas' advertisement

Please watch the following Adidas' activist campaign, which will be the focus of this survey. To contextualise, brand activism practices, as the following one, refers to business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to promote or impede improvements in society.

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree)

1. Adidas' activism message is genuine
2. The activism message preserves what Adidas means to me
3. The activism message captures what makes Adidas unique to me
4. Adidas' activism message is in accordance with the company's values and beliefs
5. Adidas is being true to itself with its activism messages
6. Adidas is standing up for what it believes in
7. Adidas is a socially responsible company
8. Adidas is concerned about improving the well-being of society

Section 3

Please, when answering the following questions, consider the advertisement and video previously presented.

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree)

1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to Adidas
2. I strongly identify with Adidas
3. Adidas embodies what I believe in
4. Adidas is like a part of me
5. Adidas has a great deal of personal meaning for me

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree)

1. I will buy Adidas the next time I buy a product that Adidas offers
2. I intend to keep purchasing Adidas
3. I do not buy from other brands if Adidas is available
4. I usually purchase Adidas instead of other brands that offer similar products
5. I would be willing to pay a higher price for Adidas over other brands
6. I am dedicated to Adidas
7. I say positive things about Adidas to other people
8. I would recommend Adidas to friends and family
9. The price of Adidas would have to go up quite a bit before I would switch to another brand of shoes and clothes
10. I am willing to pay a lot more for Adidas than other brands of shoes and clothes

Section 4

"LGBTIQ rights are human rights. Citizens like everyone else and yet LGBTI+ people face constant discrimination and intolerance every single day, simply as a result of who they love or who they are. At the same time, hate speech and homophobia are crimes sadly on the rise right across Europe." Marc Angel MEP, S&D co-chair of the LGBTI-intergroup in the European Parliament

Indicate your level of agreement with the previous statement, from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree)

Section 5
Gender

     a)   Male

     b)   Female

     c)   Other

     d)   Prefer not to say

Birthday Year

     Answer:

Country of Residence

     Answer:

Nationality

     Answer:

Completed or ongoing Education

     a)   High/Middle school's degree

     b)   Bachelor's degree

     c)   Master's degree

     d)   Doctorate's degree

Occupation

     a)   High/middle school

     b)   University Student

     c)   Working Student

     d)   Unemployed

     e)   Employed

     f)   Other Option:

Your average monthly net income (€). You might prefer not to answer

     Answer:

Section 6

Thanks for your collaboration!

End of questionnaire. Again If you have any doubt or problem, or if you are interested in accessing the study results, feel free to email me (up202000806@up.pt)

Pedro Castro

Appendix 3 – General Advertisement

Appendix 4 – Variables Code

Concept	Questions	Control Group Code	Experimental Group Code
Consumer Brand Identification	I feel a strong sense of belonging to Adidas	CCBI1	ECBI1
	I strongly identify with Adidas	CCBI2	ECBI2
	Adidas embodies what I believe in	CCBI3	ECBI3
	Adidas is like a part of me	CCBI4	ECBI4
	Adidas has a great deal of personal meaning for me	CCBI5	ECBI5
	Compilation	CCBI0	ECBI0
Brand Loyalty	I will buy Adidas the next time I buy a product that Adidas offers	CBL1	EBL1
	I intend to keep purchasing Adidas	CBL2	EBL2
	I do not buy from other brands if Adidas is available	CBL3	EBL3
	I usually purchase Adidas instead of other brands that offer similar products	CBL4	EBL4
	I am dedicated to Adidas	CBL5	EBL5
	I say positive things about Adidas to other people	CBL6	EBL6
	I would recommend Adidas to friends and family	CBL7	EBL7
	Compilation	CBL0	EBL0
Willingness to Pay a price premium	I would be willing to pay a higher price for Adidas over other brands	CWTP1	EWTP1
	The price of Adidas would have to go up quite a bit before I would switch to another brand of shoes	CWTP2	EWTP2

	and clothes		
	I am willing to pay a lot more for Adidas than other brands of shoes and clothes	CWTP3	EWTP3
	Compilation	CWTP0	EWTP0
Consumer Brand Agreement	-	CCBA	ECBA
	Adidas' activism message is genuine	-	BAA1
	The activism message preserves what Adidas means to me	-	BAA2
	The activism message captures what makes Adidas unique to me	-	BAA3
	Adidas' activism message is in accordance with the -company's values and beliefs	-	BAA4
Brand Activism Authenticity	Adidas is being true to itself with its activism messages	-	BAA5
	Adidas is standing up for what it believes in	-	BAA6
	Adidas is a socially responsible company	-	BAA7
	Adidas is concerned about improving the well-being of society	-	BAA8
	Compilation	-	BAA0

Appendix 5 – Brand Loyalty, Model 6 PROCESS output

Matrix

```
Run MATRIX procedure:

**************** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.1 ****************

          Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D.        www.afhayes.com
     Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

**********************************************************************
Model : 6
    Y  : BL
    X  : Group
   M1  : CBA
   M2  : CBI

Sample
Size:  295


**********************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 CBA

Model Summary
          R        R-sq        MSE          F        df1        df2          p
      .0104       .0001     1.6886      .0317     1.0000   293.0000      .8587

Model
              coeff         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant     6.1688      .1047    58.9107      .0000     5.9627     6.3749
Group        -.0270      .1515     -.1782      .8587     -.3251      .2711

Standardized coefficients
          coeff
Group     -.0208


**********************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 CBI

Model Summary
          R        R-sq        MSE          F        df1        df2          p
      .1868       .0349     2.1147     5.2812     2.0000   292.0000      .0056

Model
              coeff         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant     1.6493      .4200     3.9272      .0001      .8228     2.4759
Group         .1280      .1695      .7549      .4509     -.2056      .4616
CBA           .2072      .0654     3.1688      .0017      .0785      .3358

Standardized coefficients
          coeff
Group      .0867
CBA        .1822
```

```
*****************************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 BL

Model Summary
          R         R-sq        MSE           F         df1         df2           p
      .7834        .6138       .7216     154.1601      3.0000     291.0000       .0000

Model
              coeff          se           t           p        LLCI        ULCI
constant      .6329        .2517      2.5143       .0125       .1375      1.1283
Group         .1878        .0991      1.8947       .0591      -.0073       .3829
CBA           .0363        .0388       .9340       .3511      -.0402       .1127
CBI           .7103        .0342     20.7790       .0000       .6430       .7776

Standardized coefficients
          coeff
Group     .1381
CBA       .0346
CBI       .7706

*************************** TOTAL EFFECT MODEL ***************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 BL

Model Summary
          R         R-sq        MSE           F         df1         df2           p
      .1007        .0101      1.8368      3.0027      1.0000     293.0000       .0842

Model
              coeff          se           t           p        LLCI        ULCI
constant     2.9360        .1092     26.8833       .0000      2.7211      3.1509
Group         .2737        .1580      1.7328       .0842      -.0372       .5846

Standardized coefficients
          coeff
Group     .2013

************** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y **************

Total effect of X on Y
      Effect          se           t           p        LLCI        ULCI        c_ps
       .2737        .1580      1.7328       .0842      -.0372       .5846       .2013

Direct effect of X on Y
      Effect          se           t           p        LLCI        ULCI       c'_ps
       .1878        .0991      1.8947       .0591      -.0073       .3829       .1381

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
          Effect      BootSE    BootLLCI    BootULCI
TOTAL      .0859       .1235      -.1585       .3248
Ind1      -.0010       .0075      -.0167       .0161
Ind2       .0909       .1203      -.1423       .3280
Ind3      -.0040       .0236      -.0564       .0376
```

67

```
Partially standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
          Effect      BootSE    BootLLCI    BootULCI
TOTAL      .0632       .0906     -.1160       .2354
Ind1      -.0007       .0056     -.0125       .0118
Ind2       .0668       .0883     -.1049       .2367
Ind3      -.0029       .0173     -.0411       .0279

Indirect effect key:
Ind1 Group       ->    CBA         ->    BL
Ind2 Group       ->    CBI         ->    BL
Ind3 Group       ->    CBA         ->    CBI       ->    BL

*********************** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS ************************

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
  95.0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:
  5000

NOTE: Standardized coefficients for dichotomous or multicategorical X are in
      partially standardized form.

------ END MATRIX -----
```

```
Run MATRIX procedure:

****************** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.1 ******************

          Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D.          www.afhayes.com
     Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3


***************************************************************************
Model  : 6
    Y  : WTP
    X  : Group
   M1  : CBA
   M2  : CBI


Sample
Size:  295


***************************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 CBA

Model Summary
          R        R-sq        MSE          F        df1        df2          p
      .0104       .0001     1.6886      .0317     1.0000   293.0000      .8587

Model
              coeff         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant     6.1688      .1047    58.9107      .0000     5.9627     6.3749
Group        -.0270      .1515     -.1782      .8587     -.3251      .2711

Standardized coefficients
          coeff
Group     -.0208

***************************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 CBI

Model Summary
          R        R-sq        MSE          F        df1        df2          p
      .1868       .0349     2.1147     5.2812     2.0000   292.0000      .0056

Model
              coeff         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant     1.6493      .4200     3.9272      .0001      .8228     2.4759
Group         .1280      .1695      .7549      .4509     -.2056      .4616
CBA           .2072      .0654     3.1688      .0017      .0785      .3358

Standardized coefficients
          coeff
Group      .0867
CBA        .1822
```

```
*************************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 WTP

Model Summary
          R         R-sq        MSE           F         df1         df2           p
      .6875        .4727     1.1418     86.9616      3.0000    291.0000       .0000

Model
              coeff          se           t           p        LLCI        ULCI
constant      .2745       .3166       .8670       .3867      -.3487       .8977
Group         .0949       .1247       .7610       .4473      -.1505       .3403
CBA           .0165       .0489       .3372       .7362      -.0797       .1126
CBI           .6775       .0430    15.7544       .0000       .5928       .7621

Standardized coefficients
          coeff
Group     .0648
CBA       .0146
CBI       .6826
*********************** TOTAL EFFECT MODEL ***************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 WTP

Model Summary
          R         R-sq        MSE           F         df1         df2           p
      .0606        .0037     2.1428      1.0803      1.0000    293.0000       .2995

Model
              coeff          se           t           p        LLCI        ULCI
constant     2.3593       .1180    20.0010       .0000      2.1272      2.5915
Group         .1773       .1706      1.0394       .2995      -.1585       .5131

Standardized coefficients
          coeff
Group     .1211
```

70

```
*************** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y **************

Total effect of X on Y
     Effect         se          t          p        LLCI       ULCI       c_ps
      .1773       .1706     1.0394      .2995      -.1585      .5131      .1211

Direct effect of X on Y
     Effect         se          t          p        LLCI       ULCI      c'_ps
      .0949       .1247      .7610      .4473      -.1505      .3403      .0648

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
            Effect      BootSE    BootLLCI    BootULCI
TOTAL        .0825       .1186     -.1425       .3220
Ind1        -.0004       .0067     -.0132       .0161
Ind2         .0867       .1164     -.1336       .3249
Ind3        -.0038       .0225     -.0540       .0374

Partially standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
            Effect      BootSE    BootLLCI    BootULCI
TOTAL        .0563       .0804     -.0992       .2184
Ind1        -.0003       .0046     -.0092       .0110
Ind2         .0592       .0789     -.0927       .2186
Ind3        -.0026       .0153     -.0370       .0252

Indirect effect key:
Ind1 Group        ->    CBA          ->    WTP
Ind2 Group        ->    CBI          ->    WTP
Ind3 Group        ->    CBA          ->    CBI         ->     WTP

*********************** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS ***********************

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
  95.0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:
  5000

NOTE: Standardized coefficients for dichotomous or multicategorical X are in
      partially standardized form.

------ END MATRIX -----
```