Fashionable Activism

A study of corporate activism in fashion brands' marketing communications and the effects of congruence as moderated by brand type and political leanings

Andrea Jernberg
Vendela Angerlöv

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Abstract

Corporate activism (CA) has become a commonplace occurrence whereby brands express support for different social-political causes. Despite its increasing prominence, corporate activism has not been extensively researched. This quantitative study, therefore, investigates the area of CA within the fashion industry by measuring the congruence between brands and causes and its effects on consumers, more specifically attitudes towards tweets, brands, and causes, brand attractiveness, brand image, purchase intention, and cause support intention. Furthermore, we examine the moderating effects of brand type (luxury vs. mainstream) and political leanings (liberal vs. conservative). Using an experiment in an online survey, we collected responses from 725 U.S. based respondents and obtained results through the use of Independent t-Tests, Two-way ANOVAs, and planned contrasts using One-way ANOVAs. Our study demonstrates that a more congruent CA message leads to significantly higher evaluations in our measured variables, although these results differ based on brand type and respondent political orientation. We found that congruence is particularly important and leads to more positive evaluations for luxury fashion brands and liberal consumers, while it is less effective for mainstream brands and conservatives. These novel insights contribute to the unexplored domain of corporate activism and are valuable for marketing practitioners.

Key terms
Corporate activism, marketing, congruence, corporate social responsibility, cause related marketing, political leanings, luxury fashion, mainstream fashion.

Authors

Andrea Jernberg (50669)

Vendela Angerlöv (50652)

Supervisor

Jonas Colliander, Associate Professor, Department of Marketing and Strategy, Center for Retailing

Examiner

Claes-Robert Julander, Professor Emeritus, Department of Marketing and Strategy; Senior Advisor, Center for Retailing

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

The climate in the United States has become more politically charged, and it has become commonplace to see brands engaging in corporate activism in their marketing communications. A wide range of well-known, large brands have taken part in social media campaigns addressing important social and political issues, and most U.S. consumers today believe it is important for companies to take a stand on these issues (Deloitte, 2019). However, practicing corporate activism entails risk since poor brand performance can lead to adverse effects and a weak brand position from which it can take up to six months to recover from (Ataman et al., 2010). For instance, the recent controversies surrounding Spotify and Joe Rogan, and Disney and the HB 1557 "Don't Say Gay" bill highlight the dangers for companies that choose to remain neutral or implicitly support controversial views.

In early 2022, concerns were raised by the public over a pattern of problematic speech in Joe Rogan's Spotify podcast in which he perpetuated Covid misinformation and denigrated members of the LGBTQ+ and Black communities. Spotify's lukewarm response to those concerns was ill-received, and several artists like Neil Young and Joni Mitchell protested the platform by removing their music or canceling contracts (Rosman et al., 2022). Shortly after, the hashtag #DeleteSpotify began to trend as users called for a boycott of the company. According to CEO, Daniel Ek, the backlash did not result in any drop in subscriber numbers (Ugwu, 2022). However, there is no doubt that Spotify suffered reputational damage in the eyes of some of its users.

Disney was also involved in a controversy in early 2022 when media outlets reported that a large portion of Disney's lobbying funds directly benefited Republican politicians supporting the divisive HB 1557 bill. This bill sought to ban discussions of sexual orientation or gender identity in schools in a major blow to the LGBTQ+ community. As a result, Disney faced intense criticism from employees and customers which was further heightened when the CEO, Bob Chapek, refused to speak about the matter publicly. Eventually, Chapek reversed course, expressed support for the LGBTQ+ community, and condemned the bill. However, those in support of the LGBTQ+ community felt the actions were too little, too late, and because of Disney's vocal opposition to the bill, the governor of Florida began to consider revoking special privileges that Disney had enjoyed since the 60s. (Frankel, 2022; Lodewick, 2022)

While some companies like Disney and Spotify may try to refrain from taking a hardline stance, others proudly participate in corporate activism. Perhaps one of the most infamous examples of this is Nike's collaboration with the football player, Colin Kaepernick, in support of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement in 2018. Kaepernick rose to notoriety in 2016 when he chose not to stand for the national anthem in a silent protest against the treatment of Black Americans. His actions led to an increased awareness of the BLM movement, but conservatives found his protests disrespectful, and he was eventually ousted from the NFL. However, Nike embraced Kaepernick and launched an advertising campaign that would later win the award for Outstanding Commercial at the Creative Arts Emmys (Vera, 2019). In this advertisement Kaepernick says, "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything". Nike's public stance resonated with young consumers, and in the week following its release, Nike saw an increase in stock prices and followers on social media (Goldman, 2018). However, the advertisement was condemned by many conservatives on social media who expressed their displeasure with hashtags such as #BurnYourNikes and #NikeBoycott alongside pictures of their own destroyed Nike merchandise (Abad-Santos, 2018). This example highlights that even when a corporate activism campaign can be considered successful, it is not without risk, and it is nearly impossible to please everyone.

Corporate activism is a challenging practice to navigate, and many of the most discussed social-political causes today are divisive. Because of the risk associated with corporate activism, it is likely that companies are not participating for purely altruistic reasons. Furthermore, the effects of practicing corporate activism are obscure, and in a study, Maks-Salomon (2021) highlights the need for further research to investigate if certain types of companies, and certain types of activism, can lead to different effects. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to examine what types of positive effects relating to the brand and cause can be obtained by utilizing corporate activism in marketing communications. In this study, we have taken inspiration from past examples of companies that have faced controversy and ask, "What can be done to increase the likelihood of success when using corporate activism in marketing communications, what types of positive outcomes can be achieved, and for which customers and brands are these results likely to hold true?". By answering these questions, this study aims to fill the research gap on corporate activism and provide valuable guidance to marketing practitioners seeking to navigate this challenging practice.

The research in this thesis focuses specifically on fashion brands and the U.S. market by examining differences in effects between congruent and incongruent causes, luxury and mainstream brands, and liberal and conservative respondents. The paper proceeds as follows: The following section reviews literature relevant to our studies where we discuss in detail the fundamental theories of corporate activism and congruence, effects we predict will result from congruence, and the moderating variables of brand type and political leaning, upon which we base our hypotheses. We conclude this section with a conceptual model which illustrates the two proposed hierarchies of effects following congruent corporate activism messages. Next, a pre-study is presented and discussed. Following this, the main study research method is explained, and the results of the hypothesis testing are presented. Finally, we discuss the implications and conclusions of our findings, including limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Corporate activism

In recent years, corporate activism has become a recurring phenomenon as younger generations expect corporations to demonstrate their values (Purtill, 2021). Eilert and Nappier Cherup (2020, p. 461) define *corporate activism* (hereafter referred to as CA) as a "company's willingness to take a stand on social, political, economic, and environmental issues to create societal change by influencing the attitudes and behaviors of actors in its institutional environment". Although a novel scholarly area, the topic of social marketing on issues such as family planning was already brought up in 1971 by Kotler and Zaltman, emphasizing the need for planned social change. A related but distinct practice is *cause-related marketing* (CrM), which is a marketing activity whereby the firm pledges to donate a specified amount to a selected cause when customers make a purchase (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988).

Unlike *corporate social responsibility* (CSR), defined as a company's response to its societal obligations (Brown & Dacin, 1997), corporate activism is a recent practice and differs from CSR because it centers around issues that face barriers in their solutions. CA is, therefore, more goal-focused toward solving challenges and altering the social order and status quo (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020). CSR is generally positively regarded, as it aligns with companies' stakeholder values (Wagner et al., 2009) and results in favorable customer awareness and attitude and positive corporate credibility and reputation (Hur et al., 2014). Corporate activism, however, represents more risk and controversy. Indeed, CA risks having a backlash effect on

the company's internal and external environment (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020) since it involves strong, public stances which are not aligned with the values of the company's institutional ecosystem (Bhagwat et al., 2020).

Corporate activism (CA) encompasses both political and social issue activities (Maks-Solomon, 2020; Maks-Solomon & Drewry, 2021). Some authors even refer to corporate political activities (CPA), defined as "corporate attempts to shape government policy in ways favorable to the firm" (Hillman et al., 2004, p. 838), to highlight the distinctiveness between companies' social and political activities. Furthermore, in political theory, CSR is often referred to as "political CSR" since CSR emphasizes firms' engagement in governmental roles and responsibilities and often involves interaction with constitutional decision-makers which ultimately represents CPA (den Hond et al., 2014). CSR has been studied extensively, yet CPA and corporate activism on social matters remain somewhat unexplored. We aim to fill this knowledge gap since firms' success in the political arena is equally critical as achievement in the marketplace (Hillman & Hitt, 1999). Taking stands on social issues positions firms in the midst of controversial and argumentative debates, and thereby represents risks and unknown grounds. By further studying this area, valuable knowledge can be gained, which can help organizations to navigate the social and political aspects of corporate activism.

To further clarify the novel research topic of CA and lay the foundation of this thesis, the distinction between hard and soft activism is presented. Hard activism signals strong support for a social issue (e.g., Supreme Court briefs and congressional lobbying disclosures), while soft activism relates to tweets, press releases, CEO interviews, and speeches (Maks-Solomon & Drewry, 2021). This thesis will focus on soft corporate activism, specifically corporate tweets, to investigate its effects on fashion brands. Because of the limited previous research on CA, we draw on prior studies conducted in the CSR and CrM fields. Thereby, we hope to contribute to the novel research area of CA.

Minimal research has been conducted regarding CA risks and implications for practitioners. However, in an unpublished manuscript, Maks-Solomon (2020) finds no proof that the average investor's perception of overall firm economic capability is impacted by social activism since there is no significant difference in stock market returns. Accordingly, there is no short-term value gain nor stock market penalization or incentive for companies to engage in corporate activism. In his second analysis of the event study of stock prices, Maks-Solomon (2020)

further proves that although corporations generally have no stock market incentive to participate in social activism, companies that *perceive* that they do are more willing to resume their social politicking. The contradicting literature available on CA and the lack of extensive research by scholars in the relevant areas collectively represent a knowledge gap. Therefore, this thesis aims to provide valuable research by decomposing the effects of corporate activism efforts of fashion brands.

2.2 Congruence

In 1987, Park and Zaltman coined the marketing principle of *consistency*, defined as "the state achieved when each component or decision in a mix reflects the intended whole" (p. 304). This term also comprises a temporal element as consistency in marketing strategies over time is key to attaining an enduring brand identity and position (Swait & Erdem, 2002). A related term is *congruence,* defined by Keller (1993) as "the extent to which a brand association shares content and meaning with another brand association". Congruence relating to social causes has been defined by other marketing scholars as brand and social cause complementarity (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998), compatibility (Samu & Wymer, 2009), alignment between the brand and cause proclamations (Miller, 2002), and logical associations between cause and company (Haley, 1996). To further strengthen this thesis's foundation, the term *fit* elaborates on the concept of congruence. Fit is described as a "match between two or more factors" (Yoo & Lee, 2018). Kuo and Rice (2015) explain fit as an assessment of the relationship between two factors which is operationalized as the theoretical congruence between those. The related attributes between the factors entail a transferability of knowledge and assets. In this thesis, congruence refers to the perceived congruence between a fashion company and the cause they support in corporate activism efforts.

There are several theories and studies explaining the antecedents of congruence. In the CrM field, the importance of fit between cause and company is highly acclaimed. The CrM scholars refer to *schema* theory, which explains humans' mental organization of knowledge, to justify the importance of congruence since it is determined by individuals' existing schema from previous life experiences (Goldsmith & Yimin, 2014). The level of schema congruence governs consumers' response to new information; actions consistent with expectations are less likely to lead to cause elaborations, while inconsistent actions are likely to lead to judgment and resistance (Goldsmith & Yimin, 2014).

Another related theory from the CSR literature is proposed by Yoo and Lee (2018). They found that congruence between CSR engagements and the company is critical since it shows a stronger association between the two and simplifies the transferring of positive facets of the activities to the company. The degree of CSR fit controls the number of thoughts and elaboration on the relationship between the firm and its CSR activities. Congruence thereby affects the recall of brand associations and how easily new information can be linked to the brand node in memory (Keller, 1993). Thus, more congruent information leads to less elaboration, which generates positive thinking and ultimately has a positive effect on consumer attitude (Yoo & Lee, 2018).

The activism and movement surrounding the topic of LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) (Allison, 1998) have become commonplace, and Maks-Solomon (2020) found consistent evidence in his study that firm CA on LGBTQ issues is frequently covered by the press. Historically, gay rights have been linked to businesses, and today CEOs are more commonly taking stands on the matter in public speeches, letters, and tweets (Maks-Solomon & Drewry, 2021). Combining the covered theory on congruence with the social causes studied in this thesis, we expect CA on LGBTQ+ to be perceived as a more congruent cause.

2.2.1 Effects of Congruence: Brand

Considering the vast research conducted on this topic, several studies have found evidence of the effects resulting from congruence. Swait and Erdem (2002) proved that consistency in advertising has a positive effect on consumer utility and choice. Keller (1993) argues that consistent information and congruent brand associations are more easily learnt and recalled than unrelated information. These are just some of the general effects of congruence, and in the following sections we will cover more specific effects that can result from congruence following two proposed hierarchies of effects.

Tweet attitude

In a study conducted by Ilicic et al. (2015), evidence was found that the fit between a spokesperson and a product positively impacts advertisement attitude. Other authors have proven that there is a positive effect of thematic congruency in concurrent exposure. For instance, concurrency between a website and its banners leads to more positive evaluations of the banner (Janssens et al., 2012). Furthermore, Dahlen (2005) found evidence that congruent creative media choice enhances ad evaluation, while an incongruent choice does not. Previous

marketing research has studied the effects of ads and found that a direct effect of such efforts is *advertisement attitude,* defined as "consumers' favorable or unfavorable responses to a particular advertisement based on various advertisement factors; it is the emotional change after viewing the advertisement" (Lee et al., 2017, p. 1014). Since the definition of an advertisement is "a notice or announcement in a *public medium* promoting a product, service, or event" (Lexico, n.d.), we apply the advertisement attitude theory to our study, and we expect that a more congruent cause will lead to more positive attitudes towards a tweet (advertisement).

Brand attitude

Scholars in the marketing research area emphasize the influence and positive effect of advertising attitude on the process of developing brand attitude (Brown & Stayman, 1992). We, therefore, include *brand attitude,* defined as customers' positive or negative attitude toward a brand (Mitchell & Olson, 1981) in our conceptual model. More specifically, brand attitude represents the individual recognition and emotional aspect of a brand engaging in advertising (Lee et al., 2017). Through their structural equation modeling on mobile advertisements, Lee et al. (2017) proved that advertising attitude has a significant positive impact on brand attitude. Furthermore, congruence has also been proven to have a positive effect on consumer attitudes towards the brand (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Yoo & Lee, 2018).

Brand image

In an empirical study, Faircloth et al. (2001) prove that brand attitude has a significant, positive direct effect on brand image. Keller (1993, p. 3) defines *brand image* as the "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in the consumer memory", including associations regarding the brand's attributes, benefits, and in fact, attitude. Brand attitude is often confused with brand image; however, it is simply one of the several associations used in the creation of brand image (Faircloth et al., 2001). Brand associations are described as "beliefs, feelings, and attitudes based on an individual's memory of a specific organization or brand" by Bigné-Alcañiz et al. (2010, p. 130). They argue that corporate ability associations (a company's ability and know-how as a creator and marketer of goods) and CSR associations are part of a company's brand image. Since these associations represent prestige and altruistic values, brand image can improve brand attractiveness.

Brand attractiveness

Companies' engagement in CSR and CrM activities characterizes them with altruistic values and a brand image that ultimately is perceived as attractive for the customers since it is viewed as a central and enduring act for society's benefit. Such actions thereby satisfy customers' basic personal definition needs, which positively impacts the *brand attractiveness* for the consumer. This theory was proven by Bigné-Alcañiz et al. (2010, p. 132) who define brand attractiveness as "the subjective assessment, positive or negative, of its [the brand's] identity", assessed in relation to how it benefits the consumer to fulfill their personal definition needs.

In another study conducted within the CrM field, Goldsmith and Yimin (2014) prove a significant positive relation between when a customer perceives the brand image as in line with their own self-image (i.e., brand-consumer image congruence) and purchase intention. However, we are not able to identify any research conducted proving that there is a direct, positive link between brand attractiveness and purchase intention. Nevertheless, in line with the self-extension theory, purchasing products is a way for the consumer to express her or his own self, which is essential for personal definition (Belk, 1988). We, therefore, propose that brand attractiveness, being a means to fulfill customer definition needs and align identity with the company's, has a positive impact on purchase intention.

Purchase intention

Throughout the marketing literature, several direct effects have been proven to impact *purchase intention,* defined as the consumers' processes of planning to purchase a product/service after seeing an advertisement in an advertising media (Kamins & Marks, 1987). Purchase intention is also used as a dependent variable for assessing efficiency by measuring the match between consumer and advertisement, the impact of the advertising, and repurchase likelihood (Lee et al., 2017). As confirmed by Bigné-Alcañiz et al. (2010), brand attractiveness, by means of consumer-company identification, positively impacts purchase intention as possessions reflect our identities (Belk, 1988). Furthermore, in the referenced study by Lee et al. (2017), a hierarchy of effects is evidenced, demonstrating that advertisement attitude has a positive effect on brand attitude, which ultimately has a positive impact on purchase intention. The authors argue that advertising and brand attitudes are the cause and effect factors prompting purchase intention. Other than the features leading to purchase intention brought up so far, scholars have proven that congruence increases both attitudes and purchase intention as it increases the degree to which customers think positively about the brand (Connors et al., 2017; Goldsmith

& Yimin, 2014). Furthermore, the fit between a firm and its CSR actions is critical for CSR success, and there is a positive relationship between CSR fit and customer evaluations and purchase intentions (e.g., Yoo & Lee, 2018; Goldsmith & Yimin, 2014).

The theories and research studies presented together build a steady conceptual framework for this thesis. Based on the above theory linking the variables studied, a hierarchy of effects is proposed to identify the impact of brand/cause congruence on fashion companies:

> *Hypothesis 1a: A tweet expressing support for a cause congruent with the brand will result in a higher tweet attitude, brand attitude, brand image, brand attractiveness, and purchase intention (following a hierarchy of effects) than a tweet expressing support for a cause incongruent with the brand.*

2.2.2 Effects of Congruence: Cause

A central topic of this thesis is the concept of corporate activism (CA) which, as mentioned previously, is limited in terms of hitherto conducted research. Therefore, we use literature from the fields of CrM and CSR as a theoretical bridge in this thesis.

CrM (cause-related marketing) and CSR engagement are currently becoming more commonplace. Many corporations use these practices as part of their sales argument to create a virtuous brand image. CrM is thus a "pro-social consumer influence strategy", including promoting social causes and environmental concerns (Osterhus, 1997, p. 16) in which three parties mediate, namely the consumer, the brand, and the social cause, usually a Non-Profit Organization (NPO) (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2010). The CrM literature proposes numerous benefits to the company following CrM, such as greater brand image, brand awareness, brand attitudes, purchase intention, and customer satisfaction (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2010). Moreover, CSR associations have been heavily researched and proven to influence consumers' evaluation of the company, products, and responses to new products (Brown & Dacin, 1997).

The theory of congruence applies profoundly to CrM since the fit between company and cause has been proven to have several effects. Higher congruence leads to higher associations of pro-social (selfless) motives to the company, which ultimately leads to more positive customer responses (Galan-Ladero et al., 2013). Numerous scholars have proven that perceived brand-cause congruence positively affects product choice, brand attitudes, purchase intention, brand attractiveness, and credibility (Goldsmith & Yimin, 2014). For the purpose of this thesis's

conceptual framework, the following section will cover the hierarchy of effects on the cause following a congruent tweet message.

Tweet attitude

As elaborated upon above, more congruent marketing messages lead to a more positive advertisement attitude (Ilicic et al., 2015). In a CrM related study, Basil and Herr (2003) prove that a positive fit between company and cause positively affects charity/cause attitude. They also find evidence that pre-existing company attitudes and organizational fit are key determinants of how CrM campaigns change customers' cause attitude. The literature available on this topic is limited, therefore, we combine these theories by assuming that the positive fit between cause and company leads to increased tweet (advertisement) attitude, and that the fit directly affects cause attitude. However, previous studies have proven that companies' motives behind CrM messages moderate the advertisement attitude, with intrinsic motives (versus extrinsic) resulting in more favorable attitudes towards the communication (Kim et al., 2012; Samu & Wymer, 2014). Samu and Wymer (2014) further prove that message type in the form of information, focusing on providing knowledge about the cause, rather than messages encouraging consumption, leads to a more positive attitude towards the cause.

Attitude towards the cause

Although the literature is limited regarding cause attitude, Samu and Wymer (2014) have proven that more variables other than message type impact cause attitude. For instance, consumer responses to CrM are determined by the advertisements' attribution of partner motives (philanthropic or egoistic), salience of the brand or cause, the type of message (information or consumption), and the brand-cause fit. In a cause-marketing paper studying the sponsorship of social causes, Zdravkovic et al. (2010) find that brand-cause fit has a significant positive effect on the attitude towards the sponsorship. Although there is a significant knowledge gap in this area, we expect a positive tweet attitude will result in a positive cause attitude.

Cause support intention

CrM is often viewed as an affiliation of corporate philanthropy and sales promotion. Cause-related objectives such as creating awareness and support of the cause are emphasized alongside the goal of increased sales. It has become a trend to "do better by doing good" as companies realize that social engagement is a long-term investment and a key to gaining a

competitive advantage (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Samu and Wymer (2014) found evidence that cause informational messages result in a more positive attitude towards the cause, commitment to contribute to the cause, and intent to volunteer for the cause. Further evidence supports this since corporate engagement in social causes leads to consumers' support of the cause when consumers identify with the company's objectives (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2010).

The concepts proposed together form a conceptual framework for the effects on the social causes studied. The parallel hierarchy of effects, beginning with a brand/cause congruent tweet and ending with cause support intention, has yet to be proven in academia. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis to examine the impact of congruent CA on fashion brands:

> *Hypothesis 1b: A tweet expressing support for a cause congruent with the brand will result in a higher tweet attitude, cause attitude, and cause support intention (following a hierarchy of effects) than a tweet expressing support for a cause incongruent with the brand.*

2.3 Moderating variables

The practice of CrM has undoubtedly become a proliferated marketing strategy for brands to gain a competitive advantage. However, limited research has been conducted regarding the moderating variables affecting the relationship between CrM on consumer attitudes. Since the CA area of research is further limited, yet the focus of this thesis, we will apply the related CrM literature in order to fill the knowledge gap for CA.

Scholars have proven that sociodemographic features influence CrM attitude, personal values perform as mediators, and individuals' receptiveness to interpersonal influence controls the weight given to personal values, which ultimately affects CrM attitude (Galan Ladero et al., 2015). In another study, Kropp et al. (1999) found significant evidence that genders do not impact CrM attitude, however, there was directional support suggesting that females generally have a more positive attitude toward CrM than males. Barnes (1992) further verifies that household income and age significantly impact CrM attitude, with higher income and younger customers being more favorable towards corporate social engagement.

Despite its common practice, CrM scholars have yet to examine the impact resulting from factors beyond the traditional sociographics, and the research into the CA is even more limited.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this knowledge gap on moderating effects to aid marketers in creating targeted and impactful CA campaigns. Specifically, our thesis focuses on comprehending the effects of brand type and respondent political leanings on the studied variables.

2.3.1 Luxury and Mainstream Brands

This study focuses on CA activities in fashion brands, an industry that is described as involving "products for which the design, aesthetics, and style hold primary importance for the consumer" (Fuchs et al., 2013, p. 77). Previously, the fashion industry has been granted leeway in cases of tactlessness when communicating social or political causes or lack of CSR engagement since the industry was perceived as less serious (Carrigan et al., 2013). This approach, however, is no longer applicable considering the present corporate climate where CSR is of utmost importance for companies to achieve long-term success (Carrigan et al., 2013). The risks of overlooking social responsibility issues are numerous, and CSR has gone from being a theoretical concept to epitomizing a requirement for corporate practice (Maon et al., 2009).

A clear distinction defines the fashion market, namely the division between luxury and mainstream brands. Several terms exist demonstrating their opposite meanings, such as prestige and non-prestige, high-end and mass-market, and luxury and mainstream fashion (Carrigan et al., 2013; Park et al., 2020; Fuchs et al., 2013). In an extensive study, Dubois et al. (2001) identified luxury fashion's key characteristics: excellent quality, very high price, scarcity, strong aesthetic appeal, anchoring in the past, and superfluousness. Other scholars describe luxury fashion as having symbolic and aesthetic value, heritage, and superiority, while mainstream fashion involves low costs, worldwide operations, attainability, and masses of consumers (Carrigan et al., 2013; Park et al., 2020).

Another dimension differentiating luxury and mainstream fashion is their degree of *customer involvement,* defined as the perceived risk of choosing a particular brand (Rossiter et al., 2018) or how important a product decision is to a customer (Ouwersloot & Duncan, 2008). Involvement is dichotomous to the customer, meaning that their decision to invest time and effort in searching for brand-product information, or the choice not to, are mutually exclusive. Customers' purchase decisions diverge depending on the degree of involvement which can be identified by measuring decision importance, level of consideration required, and perceived

risk of selecting the wrong brand (Rossiter et al., 1991). In a parallel manner, Ouwersloot and Duncan (2008) identify risk (financial, performance, physical, psychological, and social risk) and relevance, defined as "the extent to which a product is pertinent and connects with a customer's personal interests" (p. 105), as the key factors determining involvement. The contrasting levels of involvement are referred to as low- and high-involvement. The latter represents more expensive products that are infrequently purchased and merit higher investments in terms of pre-purchase effort and consideration (Ouwersloot & Duncan, 2008). Therefore, luxury goods are identified as high-involvement, and a study conducted by Lin (2013) found that consumers often invest more effort in comparing brands and features of these products and their marketing communication.

Considering the higher degree of involvement dedicated to luxury goods, customers become more discerning in luxury-related decisions. Goldsmith and Yimin (2014) proved in their study that both brand-cause and brand-customer image congruence and identification both positively influence purchase intention, however, the latter is posited to have a greater effect for high-involvement products. The authors support this argument by proclaiming that consumers are more likely to identify strongly with high-involvement products. Furthermore, an aligning theory argues that luxury brands possess other facets of involvement, namely interest and pleasure (Dubois et al., 2001). O'Cass (2000) further argues that luxury clothing involvement entails more relevance to the self.

Based on these theories, a second hypothesis is reached, assuming that the effects caused by high involvement and discernment with luxury goods lead to differing outcomes.

> *Hypothesis 2: The effects of a tweet supporting a congruent/incongruent cause will be moderated by brand type.*

2.3.2 Political Leanings
Considering the developments with increased environmental and political awareness, fashion brands experience increased jeopardy of reputational damage as a larger part of their brand value originates from empathy and trust. Customers are also becoming more sensitive in their consumption, and they have greater consideration for others and the environment (Carrigan et al., 2013). However, the research into the social and political aspects of corporate activism in

marketing is limited, therefore, we hope to fill this academic gap by examining political leanings as a moderating factor of customer behaviors.

Marketing scholars argue that political ideology has the power to impact consumer attitudes and behaviors as it is affiliated with a person's political and moral identity (Kaikati et al., 2017). Political ideologies represent the set of beliefs and values that forms an individual's opinion and validates his or her political standpoint (Northey et al., 2020). The political spectrum has been divided between two opposing ends since the 1800s; left and right. Although abstract, researchers still apply this continuum as an acceptable tool for predicting people's behavior (Kidwell et al., 2013). Since the left-right distinction represents a non-connecting spectrum, several differences can be seen regarding their opposing characteristics.

Traditionally, the key dissimilarities were related to sociodemographic factors. However, recent scholars have portrayed liberals as working-class and high social welfare spenders, while conservatives are defined as middle-class and low social welfare spenders (Ketron et al., 2022). In this study, Ketron et al. (2022) found that liberals tend to be more open to new experiences and integrative complexity, while conservatives are more dogmatic, structured, and in need of order. Furthermore, they argue that liberals emphasize the moral foundations of compassion and fairness as they believe in individual rights and welfare. Liberals pursue social justice, which stands for the impartial treatment of all individuals as a way to maximize everyone's happiness and independence. Conservatives, however, have a strong in-group loyalty, and they place less importance on inequality and social change.

The impact of political ideology on consumer attitudes and behaviors is particularly influential when brand marketing advertises LGBTQ imagery. This was proven to be significant by Northey et al. (2020), who argue that since politically conservative consumers are less open than liberals to untraditional sexual behaviors, they react negatively to LGBTQ ads. Conservatives reportedly evaluate the brand and product more negatively, experience feelings of disgust, and have a more negative attitude towards the advertisement compared to liberals when the ad portrays LBGTQ imagery. The authors reason that their significant findings are explained by the clear political distinction. Conservatives, compared to liberals, value conformity to group norms, group identification, and are more old-fashioned (Northey et al., 2020).

Another related concept, political consumerism, is brought up by Newman and Bartels (2011), which is defined as the intended use of products in consumer choice to communicate policy preferences and attain political objectives. The scholars describe political consumerism as a sort of "lifestyle politics" that allows citizens to recognize the political implications of everyday personal recreational choices and attempt to impact political change. This represents a shift from the institutionalized political participation toward a political engagement that is more individual, informal, and applied in a daily manner (Newman & Bartels, 2011). Political participation is heightened by education, a sense of national duty, and group membership, while political consumerism is positively related to youth and governmental distrust. Developments in society, such as globalization and decreased trust in governments, have resulted in an increased practice of lifestyle politics, and it is argued that this phenomenon will become the new custom of practicing "politics by other means" (Newman & Bartels, 2011, p. 806). Based on the theory presented above, we would expect to see marked differences between consumers on different sides of the political spectrum, and thus propose our final hypothesis;

> *Hypothesis 3: The effects of a tweet supporting a congruent/incongruent cause will be moderated by respondent political leanings.*

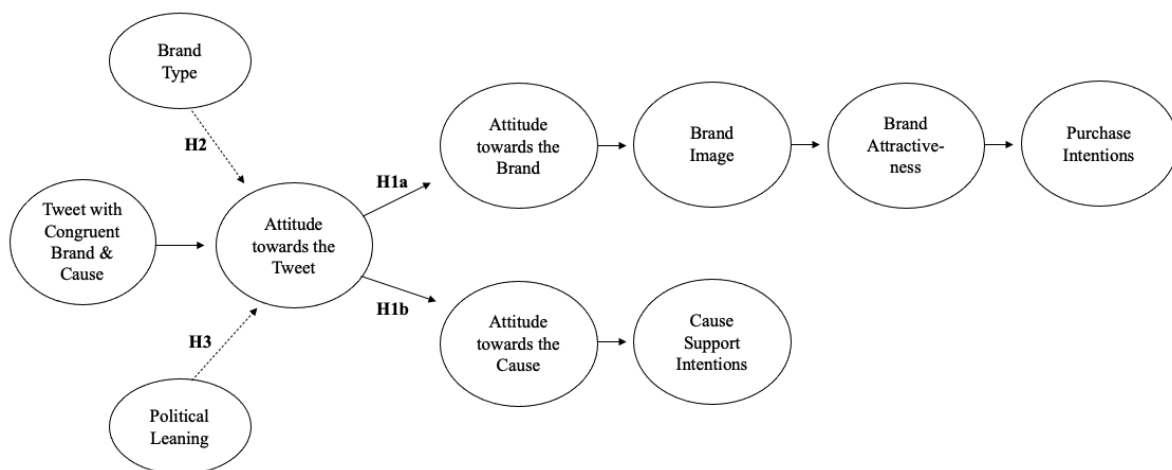Figure 1 illustrates our hypotheses in a conceptual model based on the literature we have presented.

Figure 1

3. RESEARCH STUDIES

3.1 Pre-Study

The aim of the pre-study was to obtain an understanding of which causes are perceived as more or less congruent to different fashion brands. The following sections outline the methodology used in this study and the results obtained.

Methodology

The pre-study was conducted in order to gauge respondents' perceptions of congruence between fashion brands and different social causes. H&M, Gap, and Zara were chosen as representatives of mainstream fashion brands, and Chanel, Hermès, and Louis Vuitton were chosen as examples of luxury fashion brands. All brands were selected due to their high degree of salience, large amount of sales, and a customer base consisting of both men and women (Smith, 2022a; Smith, 2022b; Statista, n.d.; Mehta et al., 2021). In addition, six causes were selected based on recognizability, proliferation in media, and strong opinions about the movements (Google Trends, 2022a, b, c, d, e, f). These causes included LGBTQ+ Acceptance, Women's Rights, Black Lives Matter, Voting Access, Covid Vaccine Awareness, and Animal Rights. Once these brands and causes were selected, preliminary interviews were conducted with four U.S. based respondents to confirm the awareness of the brands and causes within the target audience.

Following the interviews, a short survey was created on Qualtrics to gauge the perceived congruence of the aforementioned brands and causes. Participants were shown an image that included the fashion brands' logos and were told that the brands were considering promoting causes in the external communications. They were then asked to rate the perceived congruence of each brand and cause using congruence measures adopted from Xu and Pratt (2018). The two questions were on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 equaling "Not compatible" and 7 equaling "Compatible" in one question, and 1 equaling "Bad fit" and 7 equaling "Good fit" in the other. In addition, several demographic questions were included at the end of the survey to measure respondents' age and gender. Finally, two control questions were included in the survey. The first question ensured that only U.S. resident or citizen respondents were included in the analysis. The second question acted as an attention check and asked, "What was this survey about?" with the answer choices being; fashion brands and social causes, online shopping, or grocery shopping. The survey was distributed to U.S. based contacts from the authors' personal networks during the second week of February in 2022.

After eliminating respondents that failed control questions, 32 valid responses remained in the pre-study sample. The age range of respondents was 19 – 64 years, with an average age of 37 years. 75% of the sample were women, and 25% were men. After ensuring acceptable Cronbach's Alphas above 0.7 in reliability checks, indexes were created by grouping responses based on brand type and cause. Due to the small sample size, basic mean comparisons were performed without consideration for significance.

Results

Results from the study indicated that respondents find the Covid Vaccine Awareness cause to be the least congruent cause for both luxury (M = 3.27) and mainstream brands (M = 3.26). Women's Rights was found to be the most congruent cause for luxury brands (M = 5.01), and LGBTQ+ was found to be the most congruent cause for mainstream brands (M = 5.07). The second highest mean rating for congruence in luxury brands was LGBTQ+ (M = 4.22), and for mainstream brands was Women's rights (M = 4.50). Tables 1 and 2 provide summaries of the groups, Cronbach's Alphas, and mean ratings for congruence.

Luxury Brands (Hermès, Louis Vuitton, Chanel)

Brand and Cause	Cronbach's Alpha	Index name	Congruence Mean Rating
Luxury LGBTQ+	.917	Luxury_LGBTQ+	4.22
Luxury BLM	.852	Luxury_BLM	3.59
Luxury Women's Rights	.757	Luxury_Womens	5.01
Luxury Voting Rights	.877	Luxury_Voting	3.74
Luxury Covid Vaccine	.957	Luxury_Covid	3.27
Luxury Animal Rights	.844	Luxury_Animal	3.45

Table 1

Mainstream Brands (H&M, Gap, ZARA)

Brand and Cause	Cronbach's Alpha	Index name	Congruence Mean Rating
Mainstream LGBTQ+	.826	Mainstream_LGBTQ+	5.07
Mainstream BLM	.849	Mainstream _BLM	4.31
Mainstream Women's Rights	.872	Mainstream _Womens	4.50
Mainstream Voting Rights	.866	Mainstream _Voting	3.79
Mainstream Covid Vaccine	.808	Mainstream _Covid	3.26
Mainstream Animal Rights	.757	Mainstream _Animal	3.80

Table 2

3.2 Main Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to understand the positive hierarchies of effects that occur when fashion brands engage in corporate activism. In particular, the study was conducted via an online survey during the second week of March 2022, and it examined congruence between brands and causes, attitudes (towards tweets, brands, and causes), brand image, brand attractiveness, purchase intention, and cause support intention. In addition, the study examined brand type and political leanings as potential moderators of the effects. This study utilized a 2 (perceived congruence: congruent, incongruent) x 2 (brand type: luxury, mainstream) x 2 (political ideology: liberal, conservative) design. The following section details the methodology used in the main study.

4. METHODOLOGY

Participants

800 hundred U.S. based participants were recruited using Amazon MTurk and were paid $1.00 to complete the survey. Respondents that incorrectly answered control questions were removed from the sample. Specifically, respondents who answered they did not reside in the U.S. and those that failed to identify the survey topic as "A fashion brand and a cause" and the picture as "A tweet" were excluded. Obvious cases of straight-line answers were also removed. Finally, respondents who answered the survey in under four minutes were excluded to ensure data quality. The final dataset with valid responses included 725 respondents.

The age range of the sample was 20 - 73 years, with a mean age of 35.0, and females accounted for 45.7% of the sample (N = 331). Respondents with liberal political leanings made up 25.8%

of the sample (N = 187), conservative leanings 65.8% (N = 477), and mid-point respondents accounted for 8.4% (N = 61). As this thesis aims, in part, to examine effects resulting from the political orientation of respondents, the data was weighted to give a more accurate representation of the political leanings of the U.S. population. Weighting data is a commonly utilized, although imperfect, tool used to improve data quality by reducing biases (Bethlehem & Stoop, 2007; Loosveldt & Sonck, 2008). The weight was applied so that the data split was 50% liberal (N = 363) and 50% conservative (N = 363), and while this is not an exact reflection of the 2020 U.S. presidential election (51.3% voting Democrat, 46.8% voting Republican), the weighted data more accurately represents the population than the unweighted data (Lindsay, 2020). After weighting, the age range of the sample remained at 20 – 73 years, the mean age increased minimally to 35.1, and females accounted for 47.4% of the sample
(N = 344).

The Treatments
Using results from the pre-study, the focal brands and causes were reduced in number to four brands (luxury: Louis Vuitton, Chanel; mainstream: H&M, Gap) and two causes (LGBTQ+, Covid Vaccine Awareness). The brands were chosen based on accessibility and broad age appeal. The Covid Vaccine Awareness cause, hereafter referred to as Covid, was chosen because it was rated as least congruent for both luxury and mainstream brands. The LGBTQ+ cause was selected as it was rated the most congruent for mainstream brands and the second most congruent for luxury brands.

Eight fictitious tweets were created for the treatments in the experiment using a tweet generator (Tweetgen). The tweets combined the brands and causes in the following ways: Louis Vuitton and LGBTQ+, Louis Vuitton and Covid, Chanel and LGBTQ+, Chanel and Covid, H&M and LGBTQ+, H&M and Covid, Gap and LGBTQ+, and Gap and Covid. The tweets featured the brand name, brand tag, a verified checkmark (indicating that the tweet comes from a verified corporate account), and an identical number of likes, shares, and comments. Different text and graphics were included for the two causes to simulate a more realistic scenario, and these texts were adapted from previous company tweet examples (Ardouin-Fumat, 2021; Smalley, 2020).

The LGBTQ+ tweet featured the text, "No matter who you are, or who you love, join us this #PrideMonth and beyond as we at [company name] stand with and celebrate LGBTQ+ customers, employees, and communities around the world". The graphic accompanying the

text featured the phrases, "Love Openly. Love Equally. Love Proudly." in rainbow colors. These tweets listed the date June 3rd, 2021 as this falls within Pride month. The Covid tweet featured the text, "I'm going to get the Covid-19 booster – it will keep me safe, keep my family safe, and keep other people safe. Let's do this together. - @companyname CEO To learn more, visit CDC.gov". The graphic accompanying the text featured the text, "Why you need a COVID-19 Booster Shot", and listed reasons for receiving a booster shot and when the boosters are recommended. These tweets listed the date as March 3rd, 2022. The treatments were randomly allocated to survey respondents, and they were asked to carefully examine the tweets before answering the questions that followed. The participants exposed to the treatments are as follows: Louis Vuitton LGBTQ+ (N = 85), Louis Vuitton Covid (N = 75), Chanel LGBTQ+ (N = 86), Chanel Covid (N = 97), H&M LGBTQ+ (N = 97), H&M Covid (N = 93), Gap LGBTQ+ (N = 103), and Gap Covid (N = 90). At the conclusion of the survey, participants were advised that the tweets were fictional and that the views expressed did not necessarily reflect those of the brands. See Appendix A for images of the tweets used in the experiment.

Measures

Following random exposure to one of the eight treatments, respondents received identical survey questions (Appendix B). All measures used in the survey were adopted from previous peer-reviewed research and were on a 7-point Likert scale except for the measure of political orientation, which was on an 11-point scale. These measures are elaborated on below.

Measures for perceived congruence of the brand and the cause were obtained from previous studies conducted by Xu and Pratt (2018) and Kirmani and Shiv (1998). Respondents were asked to rate the perceived congruence of the brand and cause using the following four adjective pairs: not compatible - compatible, bad fit - good fit, inappropriate - appropriate, and bad match - good match. After performing a reliability analysis on these items, an acceptable Cronbach's Alpha of .861 was obtained, and an index was created.

To capture attitudes, respondents were asked to provide an overall evaluation of the brand, tweet, and cause. Measures for attitude were adopted from Berg et al. (2015) and included the four adjective pairs: do not like it – like it, negative impression – positive impression, unpleasant – pleasant, and very bad – very good. The measures were indexed after obtaining Cronbach's Alphas of .867 for tweet attitudes, .832 for brand attitudes, and .871 for cause attitudes.

Brand image was measured by asking respondents to rate the brand on a scale of lowest to highest grade using the following items: being well known and prestigious, offering high-quality products to their customers, and having great expertise in their area of business. These measures were adopted from Ismail and Spinelli (2012), Esch et al. (2006), and Bigné-Alcañiz et al. (2010), respectively. After running a reliability analysis and obtaining a Cronbach's Alpha of .747, an index was created.

Brand attractiveness was measured using statements from research conducted by Elbedweihy et al. (2016) and Bigné-Alcañiz et al. (2010). These statements included "I like what the brand represents", "I think the brand is an attractive brand", and "I like what the brand symbolizes". Participants rated their level of agreement on a scale of strongly disagree – strongly agree. A Cronbach's Alpha of .812 was obtained during the reliability test, and the measures were indexed.

Purchase intention was measured using items from Lee et al. (2017). Respondents were asked to rate their purchase intention using three adjective pairs: not likely – likely, not probable – probable, not possible – possible. The Cronbach's Alpha for these variables was .811, and an index was created.

Measures for cause support intention were inspired by Chang's (2011) research into cause-related marketing, and respondents were asked to rate how much they agree with the following statements using the adjective pair strongly disagree – strongly agree: I intend to support this cause in the future, I intend to volunteer for this cause in the future, and I intend to donate to the cause in the future. The items above were adopted from Samu and Wymer (2009) and Wisner et al. (2004), respectively. After obtaining a Cronbach's Alpha of .750, an index was created.

Political Orientation was measured using the 11-point scale suggested by Kroh (2007). Kroh's research indicates that a larger scale gives respondents a greater feeling of choice, and thereafter leads to a more accurate measurement. The item was scaled from 1 = Extremely liberal to 11 = Extremely conservative. This variable was recoded into a new variable in which respondents answering 1 – 5 were labeled liberal, and those answering 7 – 11 were labeled conservatives. Respondents answering at the midpoint, 6, were eliminated from the analyses

during the weighting process, as described above, since these respondents cannot be classified as either left- or right-leaning.

The end of the survey included demographic questions about gender and age, and several control questions were included to ensure respondent attentiveness. For example, respondents were asked in which U.S. state they resided in, what the survey was about, and what the picture was at the beginning of the survey. Table 3 presents a summary of the measures used in the survey.

Measures

Construct	Measurement Items	Sources	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Congruence	Not compatible – Compatible Bad fit – Good fit Bad match – Good match Inappropriate – Appropriate	Xu & Pratt, 2018 Kirmani & Shiv, 1998	.861
Tweet Attitude	Do not like it – Like it Negative impression – Positive Impression Unpleasant – Pleasant Very bad – Very good	Berg et al., 2015	.867
Brand Attitude	Do not like it – Like it Negative impression – Positive Impression Unpleasant – Pleasant Very bad – Very good	Berg et al., 2015	.832
Brand Image	[Brand] is well known and prestigious [Brand] offers high-quality products [Brand] has great expertise	Ismail & Spinelli, 2012 Esch et al., 2006 Bigné-Alcañis et al., 2010	.747
Brand Attractiveness	I like what the brand represents I think the brand is an attractive brand I like what the brand symbolizes	Elbedweihy et al., 2016 Bigné-Alcañis et al., 2010	.812
Purchase Intentions	Not likely – Likely Not probable – Probable Not Possible – Possible	Lee et al., 2017	.811

Cause Attitude	Do not like it – Like it Negative impression – Positive Impression Unpleasant – Pleasant Very bad – Very good	Berg et al., 2015	.871
Cause Support Intentions	I intend to support this cause in the future I intend to volunteer for this cause in the future	Samu & Wymer, 2009	.750
	I intend to donate to this cause in the future	Wisner et al., 2005	
Political Orientation	Extremely liberal – Extremely conservative	Kroh, 2007	n/a

Table 3

Grouping variables

A new grouping variable with four factors was created by collapsing treatments with shared brand and cause types together. Group 1 comprised the luxury brands with LGBTQ+ cause treatments (N = 171). Group 2 contained the luxury brands with Covid cause treatments (N = 172). Group 3 was composed of the mainstream brands with LGBTQ+ cause treatments (N = 200), and finally, Group 4 contained the mainstream brands with Covid cause treatments (N = 182). We sometimes refer to this variable as the brand type and cause grouping variable for simplification purposes.

A final grouping variable was created by separating responses based on the cause the respondents were exposed to. Group 1 consisted of all LGBTQ+ exposures, and Group 2 consisted of all Covid exposures.

Significance Level

Although many scientific studies adhere to the established threshold of 0.05 for significance, this is in fact an arbitrary number (Alifieris, 2020). While raising the p-value carries an increased risk of a Type 1 error, we argue that the benefits of taking a slightly higher risk would outdo the potential minor economic cost that an error may incur. We have thus chosen to set a significance level of 0.10 for our statistical analyses.

5. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

5.1 Congruence

In the following section, the analyses and results are presented for Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 1b. To examine if one cause was perceived as more congruent and the effects that arise from congruence, an Independent Samples t-Test was performed. Indexes for brand & cause congruence, tweet attitude, brand attitude, brand image, brand attractiveness, and purchase intentions were used as inputs for the t-Test. Respondents that were exposed to the LGBTQ+ treatments (N = 371) were compared with those exposed to the Covid treatments (N = 355).

Results from the t-Test indicate that the LGBTQ+ cause is perceived as significantly more congruent than the Covid cause ($M_{LGBTQ+ Cause}$= 5.50, $M_{Covid\ Cause}$= 5.16, p <.001), confirming the results of our pre-study. A One-way ANOVA was performed which compared the 4 groups comprised of luxury brands and the LGBTQ+ cause (N = 171), luxury brands and the Covid cause (N = 172), mainstream brands and the LGBTQ+ cause (N = 200), and mainstream brands and the Covid cause (N = 182). Results from this ANOVA showed significant differences in perceived congruence between luxury LGBTQ+ and luxury Covid ($M_{Luxury\ LGBTQ+}$= 5.59, $M_{Luxury\ Covid}$ = 5.18, p = .001) and between mainstream LGBTQ+ and mainstream Covid ($M_{Mainstream\ LGBTQ+}$= 5.42, $M_{Mainstream\ Covid}$= 5.13, p = .026). These results indicate that the LGBTQ+ cause is perceived as more congruent for both luxury and mainstream brands.

To examine Hypothesis 1a and the brand effects resulting from congruence, additional results from the independent t-Test were inspected. The results show significantly higher positive responses to the more congruent (LGBTQ+) treatment in terms of tweet attitude ($M_{Congruent\ Cause}$= 5.56, $M_{Incongruent\ Cause}$= 5.39, p = .011), brand attitude ($M_{Congruent\ Cause}$= 5.45, $M_{Incongruent\ Cause}$= 5.22, p <.001), brand image ($M_{Congruent\ Cause}$= 5.34, $M_{Incongruent\ Cause}$= 5.13, p = .002), brand attractiveness ($M_{Congruent\ Cause}$= 5.43, $M_{Incongruent\ Cause}$= 5.20, p = .001), and purchase intention ($M_{Congruent\ Cause}$= 5.44, $M_{Incongruent\ Cause}$= 5.24, p = .004). We, therefore, find empirical support for Hypothesis 1a. See Table 4 for a summary of t-Test results relating to the brand effects.

Hierarchy of Effects: Brand

Index	Significance Level	Congruent (LGBTQ+) Treatment Mean	Incongruent (Covid) Treatment Mean
Perceived Congruence	<.001*	5.50	5.16
Tweet Attitude	.011*	5.56	5.39
Brand Attitude	<.001*	5.45	5.22
Brand Image	.002*	5.34	5.13
Brand Attractiveness	.001*	5.43	5.20
Purchase Intentions	.004*	5.44	5.24

Table 4
* Significant at the p = .10 level

An alternate series of effects relating to the cause were also measured to test Hypothesis 1b. Indexes for tweet attitude, cause attitude, and cause support intention were used as inputs for the independent t-Test, and again, respondents that were exposed to the LGBTQ+ treatments were compared against those exposed to the Covid treatments. Results from this t-Test indicate that those exposed to the more congruent (LGBTQ+) treatment have significantly higher positive responses in terms of tweet attitude ($M_{Congruent\ Cause}$= 5.56, $M_{Incongruent\ Cause}$= 5.39, p = .011), cause attitude ($M_{Congruent\ Cause}$= 5.47, $M_{Incongruent\ Cause}$= 5.29, p = .010), and cause support intention ($M_{Congruent\ Cause}$= 5.25, $M_{Incongruent\ Cause}$= 5.16, p = .007). Therefore, we find empirical support for Hypothesis 1b. See Table 5 for a summary of t-Test results relating to the cause effects.

Hierarchy of Effects: Cause

Index	Significance Level	Congruent (LGBTQ+) Treatment Mean	Incongruent (Covid) Treatment Mean
Tweet Attitude	.011*	5.56	5.39
Cause Attitude	.010*	5.47	5.29
Cause Support Intentions	.007*	5.25	5.16

Table 5
* Significant at the p = .10 level

5.2 Moderation: Brand type – Luxury vs. Mainstream

Having established that the LGBTQ+ cause is perceived as more congruent than the Covid cause and leads to more positive effects, we examined the possible moderation effect of the brand type (luxury vs. mainstream brands) and tested Hypothesis 2 by performing a series of Two-way ANOVAS followed by planned contrasts in one-way ANOVAS.

The dependent variables used as inputs for the Two-way ANOVAS were the previously mentioned indexes for tweet attitude, brand attitude, brand image, brand attractiveness, cause attitude, and cause support intention. The fixed factor variables used in the model were cause type: congruent (LGBTQ+) (N = 371) and incongruent (Covid) (N = 355) and brand type: luxury (N = 343) and mainstream (N = 382). After running the Two-way ANOVAS, significant interaction effects were observed for tweet attitude (p = .067), brand attitude (p = .034), purchase intention (p = .099), and cause attitude (p = .002). Non-significant interaction effects were observed for brand image (p = .493), brand attractiveness (p = .663), and cause support intention (p = .326). See Table 6 for a summary of interaction effects from the Two-way ANOVAS.

Interaction Effects: Brand Type

Index	Interaction Effect (Cause type * brand type)
Tweet Attitude	.067*
Brand Attitude	.034*
Brand Image	.493
Brand Attractiveness	.663
Purchase Intentions	.099*
Cause Attitude	.002*
Cause Support Intentions	.362

Table 6
* Significant at the p = .10 level

The same indexes were used as inputs for the dependent variables in One-way ANOVAS, and the 4 groups in the brand type & cause variable were compared. The descriptive results from the ANOVA showed a general pattern in which our examined variables had higher mean scores for the luxury brands and congruent (LGBTQ+) cause than in other groups. However, for the

purpose of this study, we performed planned contrasts between Group 1 (luxury, congruent cause) and Group 2 (luxury, incongruent cause) and between Group 3 (mainstream, congruent cause) and Group 4 (mainstream, incongruent cause) to further examine patterns relating to moderation effects.

For all variables examined, the luxury brands and congruent (LGBTQ+) cause group had significantly higher mean rankings than the luxury brands and incongruent (Covid) cause group as follows: tweet attitude ($M_{Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.62$, $M_{Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.32$, p = .034), brand attitude ($M_{Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.60$, $M_{Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.21$, p = .003), brand image ($M_{Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.51$, $M_{Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.24$, p = .067), brand attractiveness ($M_{Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.55$, $M_{Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.28$, p = .098), purchase intention ($M_{Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.57$, $M_{Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.23$, p = .021), cause attitude ($M_{Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.57$, $M_{Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.13$, p = .002), and cause support intentions ($M_{Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.53$, $M_{Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.25$, p = .098).

When comparing the mainstream brands, the group with the congruent (LGBTQ+) cause had higher mean rankings than the group with the incongruent (Covid) cause for all variables except cause attitude, however, there was no statistical significance in any of these differences. The results were as follows: tweet attitude ($M_{Mainstream\ Congruent} = 5.50$, $M_{Mainstream\ Incongruent} = 5.46$, p = .982), brand attitude ($M_{Mainstream\ Congruent} = 5.32$, $M_{Mainstream\ Incongruent} = 5.23$, p = .871), brand image ($M_{Mainstream\ Congruent} = 5.19$, $M_{Mainstream\ Incongruent} = 5.02$, p = .404), brand attractiveness ($M_{Mainstream\ Congruent} = 5.33$, $M_{Mainstream\ Incongruent} = 5.13$, p = .282), purchase intention ($M_{Mainstream\ Congruent} = 5.32$, $M_{Mainstream\ Incongruent} = 5.25$, p = .917), cause attitude ($M_{Mainstream\ Congruent} = 5.38$, $M_{Mainstream\ Incongruent} = 5.43$, p = .980), and cause support intentions ($M_{Mainstream\ Congruent} = 5.19$, $M_{Mainstream\ Incongruent} = 5.08$, p = .740). Summaries of the results from the planned contrasts are presented below in Table 7.

One-way ANOVAs: Luxury Brands   **One-way ANOVAs: Mainstream Brands**

Index	Significance Level	Luxury Congruent Group Mean	Luxury Incongruent Group Mean	Significance Level	Mainstream Congruent Group Mean	Mainstream Incongruent Group Mean
Tweet Attitude	.034*	5.62	5.32	.982	5.50	5.46
Brand Attitude	.003*	5.60	5.21	.871	5.32	5.23
Brand Image	.067*	5.51	5.24	.404	5.19	5.02
Brand Attractiveness	.098*	5.55	5.28	.282	5.33	5.13
Purchase Intentions	.021*	5.57	5.23	.917	5.32	5.25
Cause Attitude	.002*	5.57	5.13	.980	5.38	5.43
Cause Support Intentions	.098*	5.53	5.25	.740	5.19	5.08

Table 7
* Significant at the p = .10 level

Based on the results of our Two- and One-way ANOVAs, we find partial empirical support for Hypothesis 2. We found significant interaction effects between brand type and cause type for tweet attitude, brand attitude, purchase intention, and cause attitudes, and in these variables, there were significantly higher mean rankings for luxury brands with the congruent cause than for luxury brands with the incongruent cause, while no such significant differences existed for the mainstream brands groups.

5.3 Moderation: Political Leanings – Liberal vs. Conservative

We next chose to examine the potential moderation effect of the political leanings (liberal vs. conservative) of respondents and test Hypothesis 3 by conducting a series of Two- and One-way ANOVAs.

The indexes for tweet attitude, brand attitude, brand image, brand attractiveness, purchase intention, cause attitude and cause support intention were used again as the dependent variables in the Two-way ANOVAs. The fixed factor variables used in the model were cause type: congruent (LGBTQ+) (N= 371) and incongruent (Covid) (N = 355) and brand type: luxury (N = 343) and mainstream (N = 382). For this analysis, a split file was applied using the political leanings variable to better understand differences in interaction effects that might exist between liberal (N = 363) and conservative (N = 363) respondents.

The results for the liberal respondents show significant interaction effects for tweet attitude (p = .062), brand attitude (p = .016), purchase intention (p = .011), and cause support (p < .001). Non-significant interaction effects were observed for brand image (p = .227), brand attractiveness (p = .506), and cause support intention (p = .115).

For the conservative respondents, the results showed no significant interaction effects for any of the examined variables: tweet attitude (p = .905), brand attitude (p = .778), brand image (p = .670), brand attractiveness (p = .803), purchase intention (p = .604), cause attitude (p = .852), and cause support intention (p = .883). See Tables 8 and 9 for summaries of the interaction effects from Two-way ANOVAs for the liberal and conservative respondents.

Interaction Effects: Liberals

Index	Interaction Effect (Cause type * brand type)
Tweet Attitude	.062*
Brand Attitude	.016*
Brand Image	.227
Brand Attractiveness	.506
Purchase Intentions	.011*
Cause Attitude	<.001*
Cause Support Intentions	.115

Table 8
* Significant at the p = .10 level

Interaction Effects: Conservatives

Index	Interaction Effect (Cause type * brand type)
Tweet Attitude	.905
Brand Attitude	.778
Brand Image	.670
Brand Attractiveness	.803
Purchase Intentions	.604
Cause Attitude	.852
Cause Support Intentions	.883

Table 9
* Significant at the p = .10 level

After completion of the Two-way ANOVAs, the same indexes were used as inputs for the dependent variables in One-way ANOVAs. The groups in the brand type & cause grouping variable were compared, and a split file using the political leanings variable was applied to compare results from liberals and conservatives. The descriptive results from the ANOVAs show, on a general level, higher mean rankings for liberals than for conservatives in all variables except cause support intention, where the mean ranking was the same for those exposed to mainstream brands with the covid cause. However, in this analysis, we chose to perform planned contrasts between liberals and conservatives in Group 1 (luxury, congruent) and Group 2 (luxury, incongruent) and between Group 3 (mainstream, congruent) and Group 4 (mainstream, incongruent) to identify patterns that might exist.

Amongst liberal respondents, the luxury brand and congruent (LGBTQ+) cause elicited significantly higher mean rankings in all variables when contrasted with the luxury brand and incongruent (Covid) cause. The results for these liberal groups were as follows: tweet attitude ($M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.96$, $M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.50$, p = .022), brand attitude ($M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Congruent} = 6.06$, $M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.42$, p < .001), brand image ($M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.83$, $M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.33$, p = .013), brand attractiveness ($M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.89$, $M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.39$, p = .023), purchase intention ($M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.96$, $M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.35$, p = .002), cause attitude ($M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Congruent} = 6.05$, = 5.32, p < .001), and cause support intention ($M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Congruent} = 5.86$, $M_{Liberal\ Luxury\ Incongruent} = 5.30$, p = .009).

When contrasting the mainstream brand and congruent (LGBTQ+) cause group against the mainstream brand and incongruent (Covid) cause group, mean rankings were higher for all variables for the group with the congruent cause with the exception of cause attitude. However, significance was only found for the brand attractiveness variable. The results for these liberal groups were as follows: tweet attitude ($M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Congruent} = 5.75$, $M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Incongruent} = 5.65$, p = .903), brand attitude ($M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Congruent} = 5.53$, $M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Incongruent} = 5.35$, p = .621), brand image ($M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Congruent} = 5.33$, $M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Incongruent} = 5.07$, p = .287), brand attractiveness ($M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Congruent} = 5.53$, $M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Incongruent} = 5.17$, p = .098), purchase intention

($M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Congruent}$ = 5.45, $M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Incongruent}$ = 5.38, p = .965), cause attitude ($M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Congruent}$ = 5.69, $M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Incongruent}$ = 5.72, p = .999), and cause support intention ($M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Congruent}$ = 5.10, $M_{Liberal\ Mainstream\ Incongruent}$ = 5.08, p = .502). See Table 10 for a summary of the planned contrast results for liberal respondents.

One-way ANOVAs: Liberals

Index	Between Group 1 & 2 Significance	Luxury Congruent Group Mean 1	Luxury Incongruent Group Mean 2	Between Group 3 & 4 Significance	Mainstream Congruent Group Mean 3	Mainstream Incongruent Group Mean 4
Tweet Attitude	.022*	5.96	5.50	.903	5.75	5.65
Brand Attitude	<.001*	6.06	5.42	.621	5.53	5.35
Brand Image	.013*	5.83	5.33	.287	5.33	5.07
Brand Attractiveness	.023*	5.89	5.39	.098*	5.53	5.17
Purchase Intentions	.002*	5.96	5.35	.965	5.45	5.38
Cause Attitude	<.001*	6.05	5.32	.999	5.69	5.72
Cause Support Intentions	.009*	5.86	5.30	.502	5.30	5.08

Table 10
* Significant at the p = .10 level

When examining conservative respondents and contrasting the same groups, the differences were negligible, and significance was not found. Those that fell into the luxury brand and congruent (LGBTQ+) cause group had slightly higher mean rankings than those in the luxury brand and incongruent (Covid) cause group for all variables except cause support intention. The results for these groups were as follows: tweet attitude ($M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Congruent}$ = 5.30, $M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Incongruent}$ = 5.19, p = .865), brand attitude ($M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Congruent}$ = 5.16, $M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Incongruent}$ = 5.03, p = .853), brand image ($M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Congruent}$ = 5.20, $M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Incongruent}$ = 5.17, p = .997), brand attractiveness ($M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Congruent}$ = 5.22, $M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Incongruent}$ = 5.19, p = .996), purchase intention ($M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Congruent}$ = 5.19, $M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Incongruent}$ = 5.14, p = .986), cause attitude ($M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Congruent}$ = 5.12, $M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Incongruent}$ = 4.99,

p = .864), and cause support intention ($M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Congruent}$ = 5.21, $M_{Conservative\ Luxury\ Incongruent}$ = 5.22, p = 1.000).

Contrasting conservatives in the mainstream and congruent (LGBTQ+) cause group and in the mainstream and incongruent (Covid) cause group produced similar results. Those in the group with the more congruent cause had slightly higher mean rankings for all examined variables, however, these differences lacked any significance. The results for these groups were as follows: tweet attitude ($M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Congruent}$ = 5.28, $M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Incongruent}$ = 5.18, p = .925), brand attitude ($M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Congruent}$ = 5.12, $M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Incongruent}$ = 5.04, p = .966), brand image ($M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Congruent}$ = 5.06, $M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Incongruent}$ = 4.96, p = .908), brand attractiveness ($M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Congruent}$ = 5.16, $M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Incongruent}$ = 5.08, p = .962), purchase intention ($M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Congruent}$ = 5.20, $M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Incongruent}$ = 5.07, p = .865), cause attitude ($M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Congruent}$ = 5.11, $M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Incongruent}$ = 5.02, p = .946), and cause support intentions ($M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Congruent}$ = 5.10, $M_{Conservative\ Mainstream\ Incongruent}$ = 5.08, p = .999). See Table 11 for a summary of the planned contrast results for conservatives.

One-way ANOVAs: Conservatives

Index	Between Group 1 & 2 Significance	Luxury Congruent Group Mean 1	Luxury Incongruent Group Mean 2	Between Group 3 & 4 Significance	Mainstream Congruent Group Mean 3	Mainstream Incongruent Group Mean 4
Tweet Attitude	.865	5.30	5.19	.925	5.28	5.18
Brand Attitude	.853	5.16	5.03	.966	5.12	5.04
Brand Image	.997	5.20	5.17	.908	5.06	4.96
Brand Attractiveness	.996	5.22	5.19	.962	5.16	5.08
Purchase Intentions	.986	5.19	5.14	.803	5.20	5.07
Cause Attitude	.864	5.12	4.99	.946	5.11	5.02
Cause Support Intentions	1.000	5.21	5.22	.999	5.10	5.08

Table 11
* Significant at the p = .10 level

Based on the results of our Two- and One-way ANOVAs, we find partial empirical support for Hypothesis 3. There were significant interaction effects for liberal respondents between the brand type and cause type variables for tweet attitude, brand attitude, purchase intention, and cause attitude, while no significant interaction effects were found for conservative respondents. Strong significant differences were found between luxury groups for liberals, while no significant differences were found for any groups amongst conservative respondents.

A summary table of means is presented below in Table 12 to highlight the variables with significant interaction effects and differences between groups.

Summary Table of Means

		Luxury Brands			Mainstream Brands			Total
		All	Liberal	Conservative	All	Liberal	Conservative	
Congruent	*Tweet Attitude*	5.62	5.96	5.30	5.50	5.75	5.28	5.56
	Brand Attitude	5.60	6.06	5.16	5.32	5.53	5.12	5.45
	Purchase Intention	5.57	5.96	5.19	5.32	5.45	5.20	5.44
	Cause Attitude	5.57	6.05	5.12	5.38	5.69	5.11	5.47
		All	Liberal	Conservative	All	Liberal	Conservative	
Incongruent	*Tweet Attitude*	5.32	5.50	5.19	5.46	5.65	5.18	5.39
	Brand Attitude	5.21	5.42	5.03	5.23	5.35	5.04	5.22
	Purchase Intention	5.23	5.35	5.14	5.25	5.38	5.07	5.24
	Cause Attitude	5.13	5.32	4.99	5.43	5.72	5.02	5.29

Table 12

6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Corporate activism in the marketing communications of brands is becoming more common in the United States, and the climate is politically charged. This is a challenging area to navigate as certain social causes are divisive in nature, and they do not resonate with all consumers. The studies in this thesis have provided valuable results that clarify some positive effects that can

occur when a fashion brand chooses to participate in corporate activism through social media communications, and they have both theoretical and practical implications.

In the pre-study and main study, results indicated that the LGBTQ+ cause was seen as more congruent for fashion brands when compared with the other examined causes. Furthermore, the more congruent (LGBTQ+) cause led to more positive effects in two concurrent hierarchies, providing empirical support for H1a and H1b. In the first examined series of effects, we saw that the more congruent cause led to a more positive tweet attitude, followed by a more positive brand attitude, greater brand image and attractiveness, and finally, greater purchase intention (Hypothesis 1a). In the second series of effects, we saw that the more congruent cause led to a more positive tweet attitude, followed by a more positive attitude toward the cause and greater intention to support the cause (Hypothesis 1b). This means that by expressing support for a congruent cause, a fashion brand could not only gain a multitude of positive effects relating to their own brand, but they could also help engender societal change by increasing acceptance and support of the cause.

These results are unsurprising, as they are in line with the previous CrM and CSR marketing studies examined in our theoretical framework, but our results contribute to the specific body of knowledge relating to corporate activism. This distinction between CA, CrM, and CSR will prove valuable to academics seeking to study minute differences that might exist in these marketing practices. Furthermore, our findings provide valuable insights that contribute to the knowledge surrounding congruence in marketing theory. For fashion brands and marketing practitioners, the results can provide guidance when planning a potentially controversial marketing campaign or message. Fashion brands would benefit from performing market research to ensure that they are selecting and endorsing a cause that is congruent with their brand, and this would allow them to reap positive benefits relating to their brand equity and purchase intention, which could impact their customer loyalty and sales. Groups or leaders of congruent social-political causes would also find these results useful, and they could plan strategic collaborations with fashion brands to increase awareness and support for their causes.

In our study, we also sought to understand if there were moderating effects that might indicate certain conditions in which these results did and did not hold true, and we chose to examine brand type and political leanings as moderating factors.

When examining differences between luxury and mainstream fashion brands, we found that the LGBTQ+ cause was perceived as more congruent for both types of brands. However, an interesting and striking pattern emerged when comparing the luxury brands groups (luxury and congruent cause vs. luxury and incongruent cause) and the mainstream brand groups (mainstream and congruent cause vs. mainstream and incongruent cause). Within the luxury groups, there were significant interaction effects and significant differences for tweet attitude, brand attitude, purchase intention, and cause attitude, with the more congruent cause leading to higher evaluations. While significant interaction effects were not observed for brand image, brand attractiveness, and cause support intention, it is worth highlighting that these variables still showed significantly higher mean scores in the congruent cause group than in the incongruent cause group. Amongst the mainstream groups, significant differences were not found between the groups for any of the measured variables. We, therefore, found partial empirical support for Hypothesis 2.

These results indicate that the respondents exposed to the luxury brands are more discerning, and congruence plays a larger role in affecting positive responses and evaluations. For those exposed to the mainstream brands, congruence is less important, and responses are rather similar to both cause types. This means that luxury brands, in particular, would benefit from ensuring that a cause is congruent with their brand before expressing support in marketing communications, and in doing so, these brands would benefit from significantly higher tweet attitude, brand attitude, purchase intention, and cause attitude. In the past, the luxury fashion industry has been reluctant to adapt to the rapid development of social media since it challenges traditional business models (Arrigo, 2018). However, luxury brands must develop innovative strategies to remain relevant in today's dynamic market and understand what social media marketing can imply for their business. Our study provides guidance for one such strategy, namely corporate activism, as one way of achieving positive effects through social media.

These results are in line with existing literature that describes shoppers of luxury brands as more critical, discerning, and with higher levels of involvement (Goldsmith & Yimin, 2014). One would expect that those engaging with luxury brand advertising would take a more analytical approach due to a higher perceived financial risk which high involvement luxury products entail (Rossiter et al., 1991; Ouwersloot & Duncan, 2008). Because of this, they would exert more effort by paying greater attention to the tweet (advertisement), and they would also be more fastidious in their evaluations. Our research contributes to the body of literature

surrounding fashion brands and shopper behavior by further clarifying some differences that exist between luxury and mainstream brands and how consumers respond to marketing efforts of these brand types. This research also contributes novel findings to the limited body of research on corporate activism.

Finally, we also examined differences between self-identified liberal and conservative respondents and found partial empirical support for Hypothesis 3. For our liberals, significant interaction effects were seen for tweet attitude, brand attitude, purchase intention, and cause attitude, and in these same variables, the luxury congruent cause group had higher mean rankings than the luxury incongruent cause group. Although no significant interaction effects were seen for brand image, brand attractiveness, and cause support intention, the mean rankings for these variables were all significantly higher in the luxury congruent cause group. For liberals exposed to the mainstream brands, the only significant difference found was in brand attractiveness, and the mainstream congruent cause group had a higher mean ranking than the mainstream incongruent cause group. When examining the conservative respondents, no significant interaction effects or differences between groups were found for any of the measured variables.

These results are interesting, and they indicate that liberals are driving the differences and significance we found earlier, while conservatives have tepid and similar responses regardless of brand or cause type. On the one hand, the results are unsurprising - both of our examined causes (LGBTQ+ and Covid Vaccine Awareness) are rather divisive along political lines, with conservatives having a generally lower regard for both causes than liberals. Previous research indicates that liberals believe in social justice and equality (Ketron et al., 2022), and combined with pandemic-fatigue, it is logical that there would be more positive effects resulting from the congruent (LGBTQ+) cause. Furthermore, acceptance and support of LGBTQ+ issues is more ingrained in the values of these respondents than the relatively recent Covid considerations.

However, it was surprising to see that the mean rankings for conservatives were not lower. Previous research indicates that conservatives react negatively to LGBTQ+ ads and experience feelings of disgust (Northey et al., 2020), and conservatives are more likely to be against Covid measures (Connaughton, 2021). Based on this, we would have expected the results from exposure to these causes to lead to more negative responses.

These results are valuable to marketing practitioners and fashion brands, and they indicate that brands would benefit from understanding the political leanings of their customers. For luxury fashion brands, endorsing a cause that is not only congruent with their brand but also their customers' values would lead to more positive attitudes and purchase intentions. Although it is not possible to fully satisfy both political groups, it should be comforting for these brands to know that our examined causes did not lead to visceral, highly negative reactions for conservatives. While congruence of a cause is less important for mainstream fashion brands, it does play a small role with liberal customers. If these brands support a cause congruent with their brand, they could expect liberal customers to find their brand more attractive than if they supported an incongruent cause.

Combining the results from our studies paints a valuable picture for practitioners and academics. We provide a deeper understanding of some effects that can result from the use of corporate activism in marketing communications, and we find partial empirical support for the moderating effects of brand type and political leanings, furthering the knowledge within the field of corporate activism. Different causes can be perceived as more or less congruent, and luxury brands face greater scrutiny from liberal consumers when they engage in this type of marketing. Therefore, these luxury brands should carefully select a cause that is perceived as congruent before endorsing it, allowing them to obtain beneficial positive effects in terms of tweet (advertisement) attitude, brand attitude, purchase intention, and cause attitude.

6.1 Limitations and Future Research
Although this thesis found interesting results regarding the impacts of corporate activism within the fashion industry, it has some limitations and, therefore, presents some avenues for future research. This thesis only studied some social causes and brands and solely used Twitter as the medium for corporate communication. Therefore, the features of the treatments in the experiment confine the study's generalizability. Future research could expand on this study by examining these features further and thereby contribute to this limited academic area. Considering the restrictive choice of only studying the fashion industry, the results might not be applicable in other sectors, and further investigation is warranted. In addition, our research specifically focused on U.S. respondents and used political orientation as a moderating factor. Therefore, our results are not necessarily translatable to other global markets that may have differing political situations, and future studies could provide clarification or confirmation of our findings. Furthermore, the artificiality of the experimental setting could cause unnatural

behaviors when taking the survey that might not perfectly transmute to real life situations. Therefore, this must be considered carefully before applying our findings in practical settings.

Our thesis chose to study, and is thereby limited to, the positive effects of engaging in corporate activism and taking a stand in social causes, and future research could investigate the opposite feature, that is the negative consequences of corporate activism. By conducting such research, further valuable insights could be gained which can help companies in their communication strategy. For instance, greenwashing, whereby companies convey a false impression regarding their pro-environmental actions, has become common and results in negative effects such as loss of market share (Walker & Wan, 2012; River, 2021). This concept could be paralleled with corporate activism since inaccurately communicating social causes might have similar negative consequences. Furthermore, future research could also study the impact of abstaining from participation in social causes. Due to the heightened social-political climate, it is likely there are negative results occurring when brands choose to ignore certain social causes.

Finally, our capabilities are somewhat limited, and our analyses would have benefitted from the use of a more statistically sound methodology such as performing 3-way ANOVAs or utilizing Process in SPSS. Addressing the aforementioned limitations and future research avenues will grant a more complete evaluation of the impact of corporate activism - providing a broader scope of knowledge on this highly relevant topic.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A: Experiment Tweets

Louis Vuitton @LouisVuitton

No matter who you are, or who you love, join us this #PrideMonth and beyond as we at Louis Vuitton stand with and celebrate LGBTQ+ customers, employees, and communities around the world.

LOVE OPENLY. LOVE EQUALLY. LOVE PROUDLY.

1:16 PM · Jun 3, 2021

59 Retweets   **23** Quote Tweets   **784** Likes

Louis Vuitton @LouisVuitton

"I'm going to get the Covid-19 vaccine booster - it will keep me safe, keep my family safe, and keep other people safe. Let's do this together." - @LouisVuitton CEO Bernard Arnault

To learn more, visit CDC.gov.

Why You Need a COVID-19 Booster Shot

Vaccines are working very well to protect against severe illness, hospitalizations, and death, but effectiveness against infection decreases over time.

Boosters increase your protection from COVID-19, including variants.

The Omicron variant spreads more easily than the original virus.

GET A BOOSTER SHOT 5 MONTHS AFTER YOUR PFIZER-BIONTECH OR MODERNA SERIES, OR 2 MONTHS AFTER YOUR J&J SHOT.

cdc.gov/coronavirus

1:16 PM · Mar 3, 2022

59 Retweets   **23** Quote Tweets   **784** Likes

CHANEL @CHANEL

No matter who you are, or who you love, join us this #PrideMonth and beyond as we at CHANEL stand with and celebrate LGBTQ+ customers, employees, and communities around the world.

LOVE OPENLY. LOVE EQUALLY. LOVE PROUDLY.

1:16 PM · Jun 3, 2021

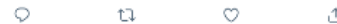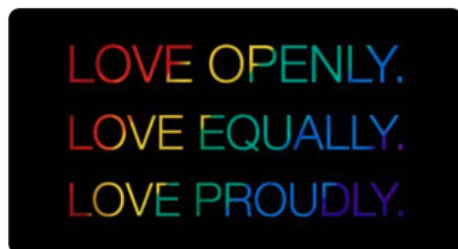**59** Retweets   **23** Quote Tweets   **784** Likes

CHANEL @CHANEL

"I'm going to get the Covid-19 vaccine booster - it will keep me safe, keep my family safe, and keep other people safe. Let's do this together." - @CHANEL CEO Leena Nair

To learn more, visit CDC.gov.

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cdc.gov/coronavirus

1:16 PM · Mar 3, 2022

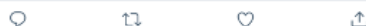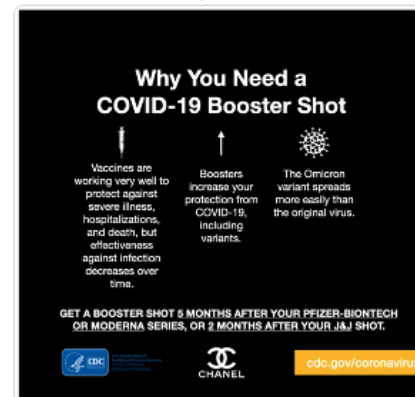**59** Retweets   **23** Quote Tweets   **784** Likes

Gap ✔
@Gap

No matter who you are, or who you love, join us this #PrideMonth and beyond as we at Gap stand with and celebrate LGBTQ+ customers, employees, and communities around the world.

LOVE OPENLY.
LOVE EQUALLY.
LOVE PROUDLY.

1:15 PM · Jun 3, 2021

59 Retweets   **23** Quote Tweets   **784** Likes

Gap ✔
@Gap

"I'm going to get the Covid-19 vaccine booster - it will keep me safe, keep my family safe, and keep other people safe. Let's do this together." - @Gap CEO Sonia Syngal

To learn more, visit CDC.gov.

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CDC   GAP   cdc.gov/coronavirus

1:16 PM · Mar 3, 2022

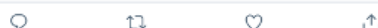**59** Retweets   **23** Quote Tweets   **784** Likes

H&M ✔
@hm

No matter who you are, or who you love, join us this #PrideMonth and beyond as we at H&M stand with and celebrate LGBTQ+ customers, employees, and communities around the world.
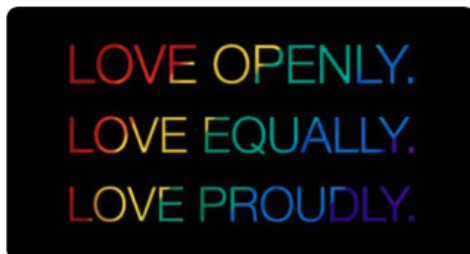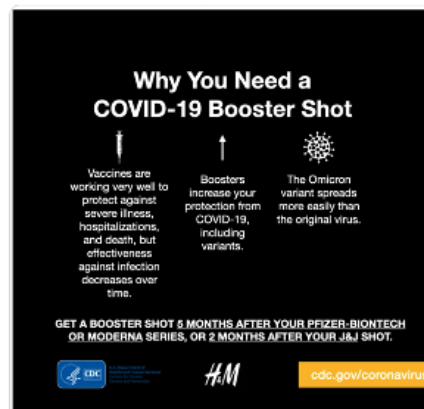
LOVE OPENLY.
LOVE EQUALLY.
LOVE PROUDLY.

1:15 PM · Jun 3, 2021

59 Retweets   **23** Quote Tweets   **784** Likes

H&M ✔
@hm

"I'm going to get the Covid-19 vaccine booster - it will keep me safe, keep my family safe, and keep other people safe. Let's do this together." - @hm CEO Helena Helmersson

To learn more, visit CDC.gov.

Why You Need a COVID-19 Booster Shot

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CDC   H&M   cdc.gov/coronavirus

1:16 PM · Mar 3, 2022

59 Retweets   **23** Quote Tweets   **784** Likes

Appendix B: Main Study Survey Questions

Disclaimer: We are two students from Stockholm School of Economics conducting research for our bachelor thesis. The survey is anonymous and follows GDPR guidelines and is for U.S. citizens or those residing in the U.S. No personal data will be collected, and the data will be deleted June 1st. This survey will take approximately 9 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, please feel free to email us at 50669@student.hhs.se!

Thank you,

Andi Jernberg & Vendela Angerlöv

By selecting "I consent" you acknowledge the above text and agree to continue.

- I consent

Survey Description: In the following survey, you will be provided with a tweet from a fashion brand that sells clothing and accessories, followed by some questions. Please examine the tweet carefully before moving on. In the questions, "brand" refers to the *company from the tweet*, and "cause" refers to the *issue being tweeted about*. **Please examine the tweet carefully and note the brand and cause.**

Please examine the following tweet carefully:

(One of eight different treatments is randomly presented)

Att_brand: What is your overall evaluation of the *brand*?

(1 = Very bad, 7 = Very Good)

(1 = Do not like it, 7 = Like it)

(1 = Negative Impression, 7 = Positive impression)

(1 = Unpleasant, 7 = Pleasant)

Att_cause: What is your overall evaluation of the *cause*?

(1 = Very bad, 7 = Very Good)

(1 = Do not like it, 7 = Like it)

(1 = Negative Impression, 7 = Positive impression)

(1 = Unpleasant, 7 = Pleasant)

brand_futpurch: After seeing this tweet, what is the chance you will buy from this brand?

(1 = Not likely, 7 = Likely)

(1 = Not probable, 7 = Probable)

(1 = Not possible, 7 = Possible)

Congruence: Please indicate your perceived congruence between the *brand* and the *cause* through the following measures.

The brand and the cause are:

(1 = Not compatible at all, 7 = Very compatible)

(1 = Bad fit, 7 = Good fit)

(1 = Inappropriate, 7 = Appropriate)

(1 = Bad match, 7 = Good match)

Att_tweet: What is your overall evaluation of the *tweet*?

(1 = Very bad, 7 = Very Good)

(1 = Do not like it, 7 = Like it)

(1 = Negative Impression, 7 = Positive impression)

(1 = Unpleasant, 7 = Pleasant)

brand_image: Please rate the *brand* in terms of:

- Being well known and prestigious
- Offering high quality products to their customers
- Having great expertise in their area of business

(1 = Lowest grade, 7 = Highest grade)

brand_attract: Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the *brand* after seeing this tweet.

- I like what the brand represents
- I think the brand is an attractive brand
- I like what the brand symbolizes

(1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

cause_int: After seeing this tweet, please rate how much or how little you agree with the following statements:

- I intend to support this cause in the future

- I intend to volunteer for this cause in the future

- I intend to donate to the cause in the future

(1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

Politics: Please indicate your political leaning on the following scale:

(1 = Extremely liberal, 11 = Extremely conservative

Age: What is your age?

(Fill in the blank)

Gender: What is your gender?

- Male

- Female

- Non-binary / third gender

What U.S. state do you reside in?

(All states were offered as alternatives, as well as "I do not reside in the United States")

control_1: What was this survey about?

- A fashion brand and a cause

- Online shopping

- Grocery shopping

control_2: What was the picture at the beginning of the survey?

- An advertisement

- A tweet

- A magazine clipping

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