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How Does Corporate Sociopolitical Activism (CSA) Affect Consumers' Intention to Buy or Boycott a Brand?

A Self-congruity and Moral Balancing Perspective

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Abstract

Corporate Sociopolitical Activism (CSA) has gained momentum as brands increasingly take public stances on polarizing sociopolitical issues. This dissertation investigated how aligned and misaligned CSA influences consumers' intentions to buy or boycott a brand, relying on self-congruity and moral balancing perspectives. The research examined the emotional and psychological processes that underlie these consumer reactions through three studies. The first study used a bibliometric analysis to map the intellectual structure of CSA research, identifying influential contributors, thematic trends, and future directions. The second study investigated how CSA alignment impacts purchase intentions through consumer-brand identification and self-enhancement, moderated by brand CSA motivations. The third study analyzes boycott intentions, focusing on the mediating role of self-conscious emotions, including pride and guilt, and the moderating effects of moral judgment and self-brand overlap. Our findings indicate the dual CSA role in shaping boycotting and buycotting intentions by highlighting the role of psychological and emotional involvement, the alignment with consumer values, and the motivation behind the CSA activities. This dissertation contributes to the knowledge of the risks and rewards of CSA and provides theoretical and managerial implications by combining bibliometric research with psychological and emotional perspectives.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In an era of increasing social and political consciousness, many companies have been participating in public discussions of sociopolitical issues such as LGBTQ+ rights, immigration policies, abortion rights, and gun control (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021). When the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, which protected abortion rights across the US, in 2022, several major brands, including Amazon, Microsoft, Starbucks, Levi's, Tesla, Apple, Disney, Patagonia, Lyft, and Netflix, made stances on abortion rights and took policies to support their employees' access to reproductive healthcare. This example of companies' participation in polarizing sociopolitical debates is termed Corporate Sociopolitical Activism (CSA), "a firm's public demonstration (statements and/or actions) of support for or opposition to one side of a partisan sociopolitical issue (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p1)". Unlike inclusive strategies like corporate social responsibility (CSR), which typically addresses more widely accepted social or environmental goals that are beneficial for both the firm and its shareholders, CSA often involves highly polarizing issues that cause various strong opinions from consumers (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020). This polarization separates the corporate sociopolitical activism into aligned CSA, where brands' stance is in line with consumers' values, and misaligned CSA, where the brand's position conflicts with consumers' sociopolitical beliefs. Thus, this contentious nature of CSA has the potential to satisfy and alienate certain segments of society simultaneously. When brands engage in CSA, they risk being boycotted and buycotted (Dodd & Supa, 2015). Specifically, boycotting is "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace." (Friedman, 1985, p.97). This purposive avoidance of a product or service can be either due to the harmful production process (harming the environment) or as a form of protest against its actions or policies (Basci, 2014; Klein et al., 2014). Conversely, buycotting (or purchasing) indicates the consumer behavior of "buying a certain product or service because the respondent likes the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it" (Baek, 2010, p.1071). While these definitions appear clear, the diversity of sociopolitical issues and variations in consumer attitudes make CSA outcomes unpredictable.

A more recent example is Bud Light's controversial campaign in early 2023 with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney to promote inclusivity and diversity, which received a polarized response from consumers. The LGBTQ+ community and the consumers who were

aligned with the brand's inclusive message support the campaign and express their approval with #StandWithBudLight hashtags on social media, increasing their purchase of the brand as a sign of their support. At the same time, the campaign faced boycotts from conservatives and consumers who were misaligned with Bud Light's values. Misaligned consumers show their opposition on social media with the #BoycottBudLight hashtag, call for a boycott of the brand, and share videos of themselves destroying Bud Light products or switching to competitor brands. These distinct reactions highlight how easily public opinion may split along ideological lines, showing the risks and benefits of CSA for brands.

With the enhancement in awareness and due to the increasing polarization of society and the sensitivity of sociopolitical issues, many companies are taking a stance on these issues, and corporate sociopolitical activism has gained significant momentum in recent years. The positive or negative impact of CSA on consumer behavior and the resulting mechanism of buycotting and boycotting is one of the focal issues of CSA. On one hand, CSA can drive social benefits and fulfill consumer expectations. On the other hand, brands must carefully consider their brand-related benefits, such as reputation and financial performance. Therefore, it is imperative to study how consumers respond to brand sociopolitical actions to understand the success or failure of these efforts.

While CSA has been studied across different disciplines, such as marketing, consumer behavior, political science, and business ethics, this thesis primarily draws from consumer behavior literature to understand how consumers respond to brands' sociopolitical stances.

Consumer behavior literature on CSA provides conflicting findings about its impact on consumer purchase intentions (buycotting). While some studies show positive effects when CSA aligns with consumer values (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Korschun et al., 2019), some other studies report no impact or even negative reactions among consumers who aligned with the CSA (Haupt et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2018). These conflicting findings and limited attention to the psychological mechanisms suggest that mediating psychological mechanisms may be at play. Studies within the consumer behavior literature also have identified several antecedents that can trigger boycotts, including consumers' political beliefs, polarized environment, and inconsistencies between a company's image and its CSA stance, specifically when firms take public controversial sociopolitical stances (Klostermann et al., 2022; Neureiter & Bhattacharya, 2021). Although the foundational findings on factors that motivate boycotts, there is still a significant gap in understanding the emotional drivers in shaping consumer responses to CSA. This gap regarding the role of emotions (specifically self-conscious emotions) in consumer responses to CSA was also highlighted by previous studies (Mukherjee

& Althuizen, 2020; Wannow et al., 2023). This dissertation focuses, therefore, on the aligned and misaligned corporate sociopolitical activism in investigating purchasing and boycotting intention through psychological and emotional mechanisms, drawing primarily from consumer behavior literature.

Due to the conceptual connection between boycotting and buycotting intentions, some scholars treated them as two sides of a coin, thus measuring them using one scale (Newman & Bartels, 2011). However, many studies have identified them as distinct intentions with differing orientations and motivations (Copeland, 2014; Kam & Deichert, 2017). Boycotting is avoidance-oriented, conflict-oriented, punishment-oriented, and collective political action. Conversely, buycotting is approach-oriented, coordination-oriented, reward-oriented, and more altruistic (Copeland, 2014; Elliot & Covington, 2001; Friedman, 1991; Kam & Deichert, 2017). There are also demographic and personality differences in these two intentions (Copeland, 2014; Neilson, 2010). Building on previous research that has examined boycotting and buycotting, this research investigates boycotting and buycotting as two separate intentions and addresses the following research questions in separate studies with focusing on psychological and emotional mediators:

RQ 1: How do aligned and misaligned CSA affect consumers' purchase intention?

RQ 2: How do aligned and misaligned CSA affect consumers' boycott intention?

This thesis answers these questions through three papers that specifically examine how aligned and misaligned corporate sociopolitical activism influences consumer responses in terms of purchase and boycott intention.

The first paper is bibliometric analysis and literature review of the CSA field. By mapping the structure of the field, bibliometric analysis identifies the influential contributors. This paper analyzed the 101 peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2024 from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. In this study, we used bibliometric techniques, including co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-occurrence analyses, utilizing tools such as RStudio (Bibliometrix package) and VOSviewer to uncover CSA research's intellectual and thematic foundations. According to the bibliometric results, studies such as Vredenburg et al. (2020) on brand authenticity, Bhagwat et al. (2020) on CSA's impact on firm value, and Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) on consumer attitudes were identified as key contributions to the field. Authors like Vredenburg and Bhagwat emerged as leading contributors to CSA scholarship. The *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, and *Journal of Consumer Psychology*

were also identified as key journals for CSA research. In terms of global trends, the United States leads in CSA research, followed by Germany and Italy. Having identified these CSA contributors, this paper has narrowed its focus to a core sample of influential papers. These are grouped thematically into three sets of papers: consumer-centric, corporate perspective, and strategic solutions. While the consumer-centric group reflects on how individuals view and respond to CSA, covering the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dynamics, the corporate perspective group discusses CSA as an organizational issue, considering financial consequences, stakeholder involvement, and threats to corporate reputation. The last group, the strategic solutions group, discusses effective CSA practices focusing on authenticity, effective messaging, and operational strategies.

The second paper addresses the first research question using the self-congruity theory. This paper examines the psychological mechanisms that drive purchase intention in aligned and misaligned CSA cases, including consumer-brand identification (CBI) and self-enhancement (SE). The moderation effect of a brand's CSA motivations is taken into consideration. Findings from two online surveys, one with the real brand Apple Inc. (with 303 participants) and a replication study with a fictitious brand TechNova (with 330 participants) in the context of abortion rights demonstrate that alignment between a brand's sociopolitical stance and consumer values significantly boosts purchase intention. Consumer alignment with the brand's CSA increased CBI when perceived as a commitment to public betterment rather than self-serving motives. CSA alignment helps consumers express their ideal selves, reinforcing their ideal self-concept and increasing purchase intention. In addition, consumers respond positively when they perceive the brand's CSA efforts as public-serving, increasing both CBI and SE. Motivations perceived as self-serving diminish the positive effects of aligned CSA, particularly for real brands like Apple.

The third paper addresses the second research question by exploring self-conscious emotions, including pride and guilt, as parallel mediators and moral judgment and self-brand overlap as moderators influencing consumers' intention to boycott regarding aligned and misaligned CSA. Findings from a cross-sectional online survey on the "Don't say gay" bill as the CSA context, with 399 participants, demonstrate that pride and guilt partially mediate the (mis)aligned CSA on boycott intention. Drawing on moral balance theory, pride in the aligned CSA reinforces consumers' intention to act prosocially (i.e., boycott). In contrast, diminished pride in misaligned CSA drives boycotts as a form of moral cleansing. Conversely, reduced guilt in aligned CSA cases leads to moral licensing and lowering boycott intentions, whereas

increased guilt with misaligned CSA does not have a moral balancing effect. Significant moderation effect of moral judgment in mis/aligned CSA and guilt, but not on pride, reveals that guilt is more sensitive to moral considerations.

The contribution of this dissertation covers three aspects. First, it makes an initial effort to present comprehensive maps of the CSA field through a bibliometric analysis, revealing key thematic clusters and gaps that future research can address. Second, it employs a self-congruity lens to clarify the psychological mechanisms by which alignment and misalignment between a brand's sociopolitical stance and consumer values translate into purchase intentions, highlighting the mediating roles of consumer-brand identification and self-enhancement. This dissertation also investigates the moderating role of brands' CSA motivation (public-serving vs. self-serving) in framing consumers' perceptions and behavior, showing that consumers prefer to identify with brands that engage in CSA for the public good. Third, by relying on a novel theoretical mechanism, moral balancing theory, this dissertation illuminates the emotional mechanism, specifically self-conscious emotions, that drives consumers to engage in boycotts. Moderation roles of moral judgment and self-brand overlap are also investigated. Taken together, by focusing on the psychological and emotional drivers, the current dissertation serves to understand better the influence of corporate sociopolitical activism on purchase and boycott intention.

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Chapter Two

Corporate Sociopolitical Activism: A Bibliometric Analysis and Future Directions

Abstract

The interest in Corporate Sociopolitical Activism (CSA), where brands publicly engage in partisan issues, has grown substantially in recent years. As an emerging research domain, understanding its knowledge structure and evolving collaboration networks is essential to guide future investigations and corporate decision-making. To fulfill this need, a bibliometric approach was applied using Scopus and the Web of Science (WoS) database to analyze 101 articles on CSA published between 2019 and 2024. Using analytical tools such as co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, and co-occurrence analyses. This study highlights the influential contributors and maps the foundational and thematic structure of CSA research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the field. Building on this bibliometric analysis, we narrowed our focus to a core set of papers categorized into three thematic groups: (1) consumer-centric studies focusing on emotional and behavioral responses to CSA, (2) corporate perspectives examining financial performance and reputational risks, (3) strategic solutions emphasizing authenticity, messaging strategies, and collaboration frameworks. Through network visualizations and thematic classifications of the core sample, this study reveals critical research gaps and proposes directions for further exploration. This work offers a structured framework for scholars and practitioners aiming to navigate and contribute to the evolving landscape of CSA.

Keywords: Corporate sociopolitical activism, Bibliometric analysis, Intellectual structure Co-citation analysis, Bibliographic coupling

1. Introduction

Over the last few years, brands frequently engage in sociopolitical issues that are sometimes highly controversial or partisan. Examples include taking a stand on polarizing topics such as abortion, immigration, or gun control, such as Google's action to delete location history data for abortion clinic visits (to support abortion rights), Delta Air Lines and United Airlines to cut their ties with National Rifle Association after school shooting tragedy in Parkland, FL (to support gun control), and Calvin Klein's Mother's Day campaign featuring a pregnant transgender man (to support the LGBTQ+ community).

These quietly new brand practices have been discussed under different terms in the literature, such as brand activism (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), corporate sociopolitical activism (Bhagwat et al., 2020), brand political activism (Moorman, 2020), corporate social advocacy (Dodd & Supa, 2015), corporate political advocacy (Hydock et al., 2021; Klostermann et al., 2021; Wettstein & Baur, 2016), and corporate activism (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020). All these different terms explain the same phenomenon in different words. For instance, Sarkar and Kotler (2018) define the phenomenon of brand activism as "the business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic and/or environmental reform with the desire to improve society" (p.468). Similarly, Moorman's (2020) definition is "public speech or actions focused on partisan issues made by or on behalf of a company using its corporate or individual brand name" (p. 388). In this study, we stick to the corporate sociopolitical activism (hereafter CSA) term and its definition by Bhagwat et al. (2020) as "a firm's public demonstration (statements and/or actions) of support for or opposition to one side of a partisan sociopolitical issue" (p.1).

The real-world examples presented earlier and the various definitions of the phenomenon highlight why many consumers think CSA is crossing a line and moving from appropriate socially responsible actions (i.e., CSR) to controversial activities to influence social policy (Weber et al., 2023). Due to the controversial nature of CSA and some brands' hesitation to engage in it, it could be an effort to differentiate themselves from competitors (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2021). Brands that aim to gain a competitive advantage should not underestimate enrolling in CSA (Livas, 2020). However, the dark side of this marketing strategy should be addressed (Pimentel et al., 2024; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). Stakeholders can negatively respond to these corporate sociopolitical actions to the point where they may boycott the brand (Johnson et al., 2022). It means CSA could be a source of risk and uncertainty for the brands (Bhagwat et al., 2020) and negatively impact brand images, reputation, and financial

damages in the case of inappropriate and inadequate analysis and implementation (Dodd & Supa, 2014; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Thus, due to the controversial nature of and the complexity of its outcomes and stakeholders' reactions to it CSA (Hydock et al., 2020), it is fundamental to understand better the phenomenon, its antecedences, outcomes, and influential factors. The growing number of research and evolving literature in this momentum area show the effort of researchers to understand the CSA better. Although this body of prior research is evolving, no study has yet, to the best of our knowledge, attempted to map its intellectual structure. Intellectual structure examines which authors, papers, or sources have significantly impacted the academic field and contributed to knowledge transmission (Khare & Jain, 2022). The need for a bibliometric analysis is also raised in the literature, highlighting the recognition of bibliometric analysis as a valuable approach to mapping the intellectual structure of the CSA field (Cammarota et al., 2023).

The present study aims to fill this gap in the literature on CSA through a bibliometric analysis, including co-citation, co-occurrence analysis, and bibliographic coupling, which helps identify CSA literature's influential and intellectual aspects. Building on this bibliometric analysis, the study classifies the core literature into three thematic groups: consumer-centric, corporate perspective, and strategy solutions. By analyzing these groups and their gaps, the present study proposes future directions for further studies in the CSA area. The overview of the study process is shown in Fig. 1.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. The next section discusses the research design, focusing on paper selection and the process used to conduct this bibliometric analysis. In section three, the findings of bibliometric analysis are discussed. Section four narrowed our focus from broad bibliometric analysis to a core sample. Section five discussed the future directions derived from our core literature. Finally, we conclude by discussing the contributions and limitations of our study.

-Insert Fig. 1 here-

2. Methodology

This paper uses bibliometric analysis including co-citation, co-occurrence analysis, and bibliographic coupling. By gathering and sorting out the literature on corporate sociopolitical activism, bibliometric analysis can help quantitatively explore the field's development status. Bibliometric analysis is an appropriate methodology to identify influential contributors, key

works, and thematic trends in a research field (Donthu et al., 2021). It enables the systematic mapping of a field's intellectual landscape by uncovering relationships among articles, authors, journals, and research themes to uncover the knowledge structure of the field.

2.1. Bibliometric analysis

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research method (Zupic & ˇCater, 2015) used to analyze and describe published papers by examining their external characteristics, such as publication patterns, citation counts, and authorship trends, to help researchers evaluate academic studies in a focal field (Marti et al., 2016). Bibliometric analysis examines secondary data from digital databases from a quantitative and objective perspective (Albort-Morant & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016). In this study, we conduct our analysis using bibliometric co-citation, co-occurrence, and bibliographic coupling analysis. A descriptive analysis is presented, including the trend of research publication, influential authors, and journal research. Subsequently, the intellectual structure of the field as the visual outcome of co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-occurrence analysis is presented.

We used RStudio and VOSviewer software to perform our analysis. The bibliometric analysis in RStudio was conducted using Biblioshiny as a Bibliometrix software written in R (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Bibliometrics is a well-known R tool that takes as input a Bibtex-formatted Scopus or Web of Science bibliography database or a plain text file (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). In this study, we imported our data into RStudio as bibliographic files retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science databases. Then, Biblioshiny was launched with the `library(bibliometrix)biblioshiny()` scripts to conduct the descriptive analysis (citation analysis). For better visualization, we then employed VOSviewer software (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010) as a tool that generates outputs in network form - the networks are the combinations of different clusters that facilitate researchers to discover the trending themes and sub-themes in a given area of research - (Van Eck & Waltman, 2019). VOSviewer is a user-friendly Java program that graphically displays bibliographic maps regarding the co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-occurrence analysis.

2.2. Data

To identify all potentially relevant studies, we conducted a keyword search in the widely recognized academic databases Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), known for their rigorous indexing standards (Materla et al., 2019). The keywords included "corporate* sociopolitical*

activism" OR "brand* activism" OR "activist* brand" OR "corporate* advocacy" OR "corporate*political* activism*" using truncation ('*') and the Boolean operator "OR" to cover all the fitting terms and broaden the search to include results with either of the terms. The keyword searching in the title, keywords, and abstracts yielded 316 papers, 185 from Scopus, and 131 from WoS (Fig.2). As most journals are indexed in both databases, we removed duplicate articles, resulting in a sample of 196 studies.

-Insert Fig. 2 here-

We followed six steps to determine and examine each article's eligibility. Figure 3 shows the procedure for selecting and identifying proper papers in our review (Hulland, 2020). Our first criterion was to review the document types and exclude items such as books, book chapters, conference proceedings, editorial notes, and other non-peer-reviewed publications from the database. The total number of papers was 155. As shown in Fig.2, a significant increase in publications occurred from 2019 to 2024, so in the second step, we excluded papers published before 2019 and limited our review to 2019 to 2024 publications. The number of articles that met this criterion was 132. In the third step, we consider only English publications; after excluding the Spanish, Turkish, and Portuguese articles, 127 articles proceed to the next step. In the fourth step, we limited the subject area to Business, Management, and Accounting for Scopus and Business and Management for WoS, resulting in a sample of 101 articles. This initial sample of 101 articles is a starting point for our broad bibliometric analysis. Based on this initial sample, we will identify the influential and intellectual structures in the field. Regarding these findings, in the subsequent steps, we will narrow down the sample size to focus on specific papers for a deeper literature review.

-Insert Fig. 3 here-

3. Results

This section offers the findings of descriptive statistics, visual maps, and analyses related to publications, authors, journals, institutions, and countries within the CSA research field. It also includes the visual results of co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-occurrence analyses.

3.1. Descriptive statistics

To understand business and management research on corporate sociopolitical activism, we identified and selected eligible articles published between 2019 and 2024. The sample in this study consisted of 101 publications by 270 authors from 189 institutions in 39 countries, which were published in 57 journals and referred to 7,865 cited references (see Table 1).

-Insert Table.1 here-

3.1.1. Analysis of Publications and Authors

This study uncovers the most cited publications, and the top 10 most cited papers are reported in Table. 2. These most cited papers have a focus on understanding the authenticity, consumer perceptions, strategic messaging, and impact of CSA on firm value. They create a consistent narrative about the problems and opportunities that companies face while engaged in sociopolitical activism.

Authenticity. The emphasis on authenticity emerges as a frequent theme among the top ten most cited papers. Vredenburg et al. (2020), the most cited paper accounting for 354 citations, provided a typology of brand activism and distinguished authentic activism from woke washing. Building on this foundation, Mirzaei et al. (2022) as the fifth most cited paper, identify six dimensions of authenticity, including social context independence, inclusion, sacrifice, practice, fit, and motivation, and proposed a conceptual framework to guide brands in their sociopolitical actions. Sibai et al. (2021), as the sixth-place holder took a broader social lens and introduced the concept of "free speech boundary work" and how activist brands authentically engage in public controversies and shape public norms. It highlighted the importance of moral competency, sensitivity, vision, and integration in redefining societal boundaries. These two current works complete each other by providing practical strategies for the authenticity of activist brands. Similarly, Schmidt et al. (2022) highlight authenticity's importance in sociopolitical actions, focusing on stakeholder trust and long-term impact.

Consumer perceptions and responses. Another primary focus of these papers is understanding how CSA affects customer perceptions and behaviors. Mukherjee and Althuizen's (2020) article, the third most cited article with 146 citations, investigated the CSA impact on consumer attitudes and behaviors, showing that taking a stand often negatively affects brand perception among opposing consumers and has minimal positive effects among supporters. The fourth most cited paper (Hydock et al., 2020), 117 citations, similarly focuses

on corporate political advocacy on consumer behavior by highlighting the role of political orientation and identity in consumer responses.

Strategic Messaging. The last two articles by Key et al. (2023) and Ahmad et al. (2022) in Table 2 highlighted the importance of storytelling and effective messaging. Key et al. (2023) highlight the role of storytelling in forging emotional connections with consumers, while Ahmad et al. (2022) discuss how messaging strategies can enhance authenticity and foster trust. Together, these works underscore the importance of strategic communication in navigating the complexities of CSA. Moreover, the eighth-ranked paper (Waymer & Logan, 2021) exclusively analyzed Nike's campaigns and discussed the strategic communications usage of the brand to challenge social norms.

Impacts on firm value. Finally, Bhagwat's et al. (2020) work with 202 citations, as the second most cited article explored the impact of CSA on firm value, finding that due to perceived risks and resource diversion, CSA negatively affects investor responses on average. Overall, the most prominent studies in CSA research are around authenticity, consumer perceptions, strategic message, and financial impact. They present a sophisticated understanding of how businesses can manage the complexities of sociopolitical activism in order to alter public standards, engage stakeholders, and have a real societal impact.

-Insert Tabel.2 here-

Table. 3 lists the institution, h-index, total citation (TC), number of publications (NP), and start year of publication of the top 10 influential authors in the CSA field ranked according to TC. Vredenburg and Kapitan from Auckland University of Technology lead the list with 383 and 375 total citations, respectively, demonstrating their significant contributions to the CSA field. Despite contributing only one paper each, Bhagwat and Mukherjee have achieved impressive citation impact. This clearly shows the increasing dominance of single, high-quality contributions in the CSA area, suggesting that influential work may not always result from prolific authorship but rather from the timeliness and relevance of a specific study. For instance, Bhagwat's and Mukherjee's work answered some of the key questions on CSA's effects on firm value and consumer perceptions at the time of publication and addressed those in the most pressing field. It is worth noting that recent authors like Mirzaei impactfully contributed to the field with a single paper, showing the openness of the CSA field to new voices.

-Insert Table.3 here-

3.1.2. Analysis on Journals

Table 4 lists the ten most influential journals in CSA, ranked by total publication (TP) and TC, to determine which journals frequently publish CSA-related papers and receive higher citations. Regarding productivity, journals like the *Journal of Brand Management* (TP=9) and the *Journal of Business Research* (TP=7) are the most productive sources in CSA-related research. The *Journal of Brand Management* introduce itself as a platform for exploring the strategic dimensions of branding such as sociopolitical activism. Due to its focus on applied research, brand ethics, and practical case studies, it is a proper venue for CSA studies. Similarly, the *Journal of Business Research* is an appropriate position for CSA research with its emphasis on consumer behavior and branding aligns closely with the sociopolitical dimensions of marketing explored in CSA studies. Journals such as the Journal of Public Policy and Marketing, with a high total citation score (TC=377) and a citations per publication ratio of 94.25, are influential despite having a relatively small number of publications. Similarly, with a TC of 202 and the highest TC/TP ratio of 202, the Journal of Marketing shows its concise but highly significant contributions. Table 5 shows the TP-based influential journal productions in the CSA area from 2019 to 2024. It shows a significant increase in publication activity and growing academic interest over these years. Figure 4. highlights the cumulative growth of publications across TP-based influential journals from 2019 to 2024. The figure shows the sharp increase in contributions from the Journal of Brand Management and Journal of Business Research, particularly in recent years.

These findings highlight that when journals like *the Journal of Brand Management* and *the Journal of Business Research* lead the CSA-related publications regarding productivity and citation impact, high-impact marketing outlets such as the *Journal of Marketing Research (JMR)* are absent. One explanation could be the scope of the journals, in which journals like JMR traditionally emphasize rigorous quantitative models or established consumer behavior frameworks that make them less interested in publishing on emerging sociopolitical topics without deep theoretical frameworks. In comparison, journals like *the Journal of Brand Management* and *Journal of Business Research* are more flexible in their scope. The other explanation could be the reviewer and editorial familiarity with the CSA due to its novelty and politically charged content. Another reason could be the tendency of scholars in journals with a history of publishing-related topics with an accelerating feedback loop.

-Insert Table. 4 here-

-Insert Table. 5 here-

-Insert Fig. 4 here-

3.1.3. Analysis on countries

We analyzed countries to understand which country is the most outstanding in the CSA research domain. Figure 5 shows the global distribution of countries in CSA publications. It is worth noting that these countries referred to the author's affiliated country at the time of publication. According to the map, the United States has the most contributors in the CSA area (40 publications). This is followed by Germany and Italy, with 12 and 6 publications, respectively. The United Kingdom occupied the fourth place with five publications. This dominance of Western countries can be attributed to the strong sociopolitical emphasis in these regions, where brands like Nike, Apple, and Starbucks face consumer demands to take clear stances on contentious issues. On the academic side, Western universities and research networks have established valuable relationships and resources to support the production and dissemination of CSA studies. At the same time, growing contributions from non-Western countries, such as Vietnam, demonstrate the growing global relevance of CSA. Although small in number, such work broadens the field by revealing how sociopolitical activism is perceived and practiced in environments where norms, values, and market structures differ significantly from those in the West. Given this imbalanced distribution, considerable opportunities exist to extend CSA research into understudied regions, including Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Each area has its own distinct sociopolitical issues (e.g., labor rights, environmental sustainability, gender equality) that might generate a completely new understanding of what drives CSA and how consumers react. Scholars can test established frameworks in diverse geographic scopes against the local sociopolitical values. This can enrich the theoretical frameworks of CSA and make the field more global.

-Insert Fig. 5 here-

3.2. Network visualization of CSA literature

In this section, we explore the intellectual structure of the CSA field. Network visualization techniques provide intellectual structure by analyzing which authors, documents, or sources have influenced the academic field. For visualization, we used VOSviewer (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010) to display and evaluate the citation networks of scientific publications. VOSviewer is a user-friendly Java program that displays bibliographic maps graphically. We mainly employed VOSviewer to conduct three types of analysis: co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-occurrence analyses.

3.2.1. Co-citation analysis

We used co-citation analysis, measuring the similarity of co-cited authors, co-cited documents, and co-cited sources to reveal the knowledge base and foundation of the CSA field's intellectual structure. The assumption behind co-citation analysis is that authors cite other works based on similarity, relevance, and relatedness (Donthu et al., 2021b). Table 6 lists the co-citation of the authors, references, and sources.

Co-citation analysis on cited authors. Based on a minimum citation threshold of 20 to a manageable and meaningful analysis, we narrowed the dataset from 8,962 to 49 authors with the highest relevance in co-citation relationships to understand the most co-cited authors in the CSA field. Using the full counting method, the authors were analyzed based on their Total Link Strength (TLS), which quantifies the total strength of the connections between each author and others in the network. Higher TLS values show that an author is important in the network, often cited with others, and plays a key role in influencing the field. For instance, Vredenburg J., with the highest citation count (79) and the greatest TLS (2022), has a key role in shaping the CSA field through direct academic recognition and strong connectivity with other authors. Spry A. and Hydock C. also show high influence, with the same TLS values (2011) and citations of 78 and 70, respectively. Guzman F., with the TLS of 1899 and citations of 60, is in fourth place. Fig. 6 shows the co-citation network. The node size reflects the frequency of the co-citation; the larger the node, the higher the number of co-citations. However, different colors indicate different clusters of these topics. Author-based co-citation analysis revealed three clusters. The authors of cluster 1 (red cluster) provided foundational work on authentic CSA and strategic consumer engagement. Key authors such as Vredenburg and Spry (Vredenburg et al., 2020) and Guzman focus on corporate authenticity and the strategic dimensions of sociopolitical engagement. Their research underlines that brands risk criticism of woke washing if they fail to demonstrate authentic commitment. Vredenburg et al. (2020) developed a typology to separate authentic activism from superficial campaigns, while Guzman emphasizes trust-building through transparent and values-driven messaging. The importance of authenticity here suggests that even as CSA grows, the field remains keenly aware that consumers can distinguish inauthentic motives. The strong co-citation ties indicate that authenticity research is foundational and a frequent benchmark for newer studies that guide brands navigating CSA. The second cluster (green cluster) is formed around the works of Hydock C. (Hydock et al., 2020), Korschun D. (Korschun et al., 2019), Mukherjee S. (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), and Bhagwat Y. (Bhagwat et al., 2020), focus on consumer behavior, market dynamics, and

and the balancing act between risks and rewards. Hydock et al. (2020), for instance, reveal how political orientation shapes consumer responses, showing the polarizing power of CSA. Bhagwat et al. (2020) link CSA to firm value, highlighting possible financial implications, while Mukherjee & Althuizen (2020) show that sociopolitical stances can alienate specific consumers, sometimes surpassing gains from supporters. This cluster focuses on the strategic importance of knowing one's consumer. Findings consistently suggest that brands can't simply take a stance; they must anticipate how different consumer segments (with varying identities, moral opinions, and political ideologies) will understand that stance, leading to reactions like boycotts, buycotts, or shifts in brand loyalty. This cluster helps brands effectively engage consumers by focusing on marketing strategies and behavioral insights. The authors in cluster 3 (blue cluster), like Sen S., Haidt J., and Jost J., look at the ethical challenges, decision-making frameworks, and psychological factors shaping consumer and brand behavior in the CSA context. For example, Sen & Bhattacharya address ethical issues that influence stakeholders' decision-making in CSA contexts. At the same time, Haidt and Jost frame the moral reinforcement of consumer and brand behavior by discussing psychological and ideological variables. As a result, this cluster emphasizes that CSA is a complicated phenomenon that is more than just a matter of strategic positioning. Brands must carefully navigate moral dilemmas and stakeholder conflicts to address the ethical difficulties of CSA and ensure successful CSA practice.

Observations across clusters show that although each cluster represents a distinct area, authenticity (Red), consumer dynamics (Green), and ethical frameworks (Blue), they also can be overlapped. For instance, authenticity (Red) often depends on ethical considerations (Blue), and consumer responses (Green) can be shaped by whether stakeholders consider a brand's CSA moral or immoral. Additionally, the clustering shown in Figure 6 indicates that CSA research is moving away from the fundamental concerns of authenticity (red) toward the more detailed analyses of consumer reactions (green) and ethical dilemmas (blue). This change demonstrates how the CSA field is evolving over time. Furthermore, cluster boundaries can be seen as opportunities for possible integration to enhance comprehension of the CSA topic, such as integrating ethical frameworks (blue) with consumer behavior insights (green).

-Insert Fig.6 here-

Co-citation analysis on cited references. To understand the structure of the cited references in the CSA field, based on a minimum number of citations threshold of 10, 13 out of 6239 cited

references meet the threshold, and two clusters were identified (Fig.7). Although these clusters are thematically divided, offer interconnected inputs bridging practical and theoretical CSA considerations. The references in cluster 1 (red cluster) focus on practical strategies for authentic and impactful CSA, highlighting practical frameworks and empirical findings to address skepticism and authenticity challenges in CSA. This cluster includes works by Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) on consumer skepticism and its effect on their behavior. Their findings suggest that moral coupling, tying sociopolitical actions directly to a brand's identity, often increases consumer backlash, showing the importance of strategically decoupling actions to decrease risks. Vredenburg et al. (2020) highlight the importance of authentic CSA by introducing the typology of authentic activism and the concept of woke washing. This work can be a guide and standard for authentic CSA. Hydock et al. (2020) explore decision-making regarding whether brands should take public stances and the risks involved in the CSA context. They mainly focus on the market shares and interplay between risks and opportunities, finding that smaller brands stand to gain more from CSA compared to larger ones, which face greater skeptics. This red cluster mainly highlights the importance of authenticity, skepticism, and strategic positioning to reach an effective CSA practice. Cluster 2 (green cluster) reflects the ethical, cultural, and narrative techniques of CSA. Sibai et al. (2020) propose narrative techniques to manage public controversies and set moral boundaries. Their work links storytelling to broader societal norms and shows how effective narratives shape public perceptions. Holt (2002) provided foundational insights into how sociocultural factors influence consumer-brand relationships in the context of activism. A crucial component of this research is the cultural dimensions of CSA behaviors. In this regard, Hoppner et al. (2019) discussed several moral dilemmas, suggesting a framework to tackle the challenges emerging from the multiple stakeholder expectations while balancing between business practices and ethical principles. This green cluster, showing the importance of combining cultural sensitivity and ethical principles, leads to the creation of CSA projects connected with social and stakeholder values.

Both clusters agree on the authenticity of CSA. While the green cluster elaborates on the ethical and cultural framework of authenticity, the red cluster views it from an operational perspective. In addition, both clusters are able to show that for trust to be generated with minimal backlash, the activities of CSA must be aligned with the values of the stakeholders, cultural norms, and consumer expectations. By linking theoretical foundations (green cluster) with strategic decision-making (red cluster), CSA research provides a holistic framework for brands to address ideological and practical challenges.

-Insert Fig.7 here-

Co-citation analysis on cited journals. By employing the threshold of 20 citations, we got 49 out of 2198 sources to meet the threshold to conduct the co-citation analysis of cited journals, and four clusters were identified (Fig.8). These distinct clusters are from foundational marketing venues to culturally and ethically oriented ones, presenting the multifaceted nature of CSA research. The *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research,* and *Journal of Consumer Psychology* are the key journals that form cluster 1 (red cluster). These journals have the highest citations and TLS, *Journal of Business Research* (285 citations, 10798 TLS), and the *Journal of Marketing* (266 citations, 8645 TLS), focusing on marketing and consumer psychology. High citation and link strength show the influence of these journals in the CSA context. This red cluster has a consumer-centric perspective, investigating how CSA shapes consumer attitudes and decision-making processes by focusing on moral or political triggers. This cluster also has a strategic orientation; journals in this cluster view CSA as both an opportunity and a risk. *Journal of Advertising, Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *European Journal of Marketing, International Journal of Advertising*, and *Psychology & Marketing* are formed Cluster 2 (green cluster). These journals mainly focus on the behavioral and psychological aspects of advertising and branding. Journals of this cluster examine the effectiveness of sociopolitical messaging and consider the behavioral mechanisms that mediate consumer-brand interactions in CSA contexts. Cluster 3 (blue cluster), with the *Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Public Policy & Marketing,* and *Journal of Brand Management* as the key journals of this cluster, focuses on ethical and managerial dimensions of corporate activism and examines the balance of ethical responsibility and strategic benefits in engaging the CSA practices. Finally, cluster 4 (yellow cluster) consists of the Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Consumer Culture, and Harvard Business Review. The Journal of Consumer Research, with 215 citations and 8023 TLS, is the third most co-cited journal and addresses consumer behavior, culture, and market tendencies issues. This cluster indicates that general cultural and social discourses play an important role in customers' reactions to CSA, and for this reason, firms have to align their actions with the prevailing cultural atmosphere.

According to cluster 1 (marketing strategy) and cluster 3 (ethics), engaging in CSA practices is a marketing strategy and an authentic moral alignment. Cluster 2 (advertising and branding) and cluster 4 (cultural and consumer trends) linkage show how effective sociopolitical messages can trigger consumer responses positively or negatively, depending on cultural

compatibility. Integrating all these clusters, including marketing fundamentals, advertising tactics, ethical, and cultural alignment, suggests a holistic CSA framework.

-Insert Fig. 8 here-

-Insert Table.6 here-

3.2.2. Bibliographic Coupling

Bibliographic coupling as a similarity measure is a helpful visualization technique for counting the share of common references in two documents (Khare & Jain, 2022). If two authors cite the same references in their works, they are considered bibliographically coupled (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Kessler, 1963). The extent of this coupling is quantified by the number of references they have in common. A higher degree of overlap indicates a stronger bibliographic coupling between the documents. The bibliographic coupling of authors and documents in the CSA field is presented in Table 7 and Figs. 9 and 10.

Bibliographic coupling among the authors reveals five clusters (Fig. 9). The key authors in cluster 1 (red cluster), including Haupt M., Wannow S., Guzman F., Tsougkou E., Ahmad F., and Hydock C. shared the alignment of marketing strategies with organizational and societal goals and consumer engagement strategies. The central positioning of this cluster is to highlight the strategic and foundational marketing research, reflecting its foundational role in the CSA research field. Cluster 2 (green cluster) is focused on consumer-centric innovation and marketing practices. Authors of this cluster are Spry A., Vredenburg J. (TLS:1485), Kapitan S., Kemper J.A., and Lee Z. This cluster positioning somewhat close to cluster 1, shows that it builds upon foundational marketing principles while pushing the boundaries into innovative consumer behavior. Highlighting innovation emphasizes how CSA research adapts to changing consumer needs with creative marketing. Authors of cluster 3 (blue cluster), including Cammarota A., Marino V., Resciniti R. (TLS: 2048), and Avallone F., emphasize an interdisciplinary approach and how societal and economic factors impact brand positioning and the creation of brand value in different contexts. This cluster shows that CSA research goes beyond marketing, drawing on sociology, economics, and public policy. As a technology-driven cluster, cluster 4 (yellow cluster) stands more independently from the core clusters (1 & 2), focusing on emerging topics that rely less on traditional marketing theories. This cluster's independent position shows how revolutionary technology may be in CSA. By moving beyond traditional marketing, this yellow cluster points to a future where digital innovation plays a key

role in shaping CSA. Authors of this cluster are Lou C., Huang X., and Zhou X. Cluster 5 (purple cluster), as the smaller cluster represented by Biraghi S. and Gambetti R.C., focuses on areas like behavioral and communication strategies. This cluster looks at how communication affects customers' reactions to CSA. Despite being smaller, this cluster's emphasis on communication strategies enhances the more general themes of customer behavior and involvement seen in other clusters.

-Insert Fig.9 here –

Bibliographic coupling among documents shows a four-cluster map in the CSA field (Fig. 10). Cluster 1 (red cluster), as the foundation, is structured around marketing strategies and consumer behavior analysis. The high TLS values of documents like Walter N. (2024, TLS:474) and Tsougkou E. (2024b, TLS: 463) provide that this cluster is a foundation for other clusters' theoretical and practical insights, focusing on marketing strategy and consumer behavior. This cluster's high link strength shows its documents' importance, offering that this cluster could be a foundation for newer research. Cluster 2 (green cluster), with key documents such as Cammarota A. (2024b, 2024a) and Tsougkou E. (2024a), shares a theme around innovation in marketing strategies and how brands can adapt to the markets that are rapidly changing. The connection between documents of Cluster 2 and the high-TLS documents in Cluster 1 indicates that foundational consumer behavior in Cluster 1 works as a basis for practical marketing innovations in Cluster 2. Cluster 3 (blue cluster) with key documents such as Chu S.C. (2023), Atanga B.A. (2023, 2022), and Schmidt H.J. (2022) highlight the psychological influences on consumer behavior. Lower TLS values and the small size of the nodes in the blue cluster suggest that this cluster focuses specifically on identification, moral judgments, and explanations for why consumers respond positively or negatively to CSA. This cluster enriches the general strategies in clusters 1 and 2 by concentrating on people's emotional triggers and cognitive biases. While Clusters 1 and 2 focus on brand strategies and innovations, Cluster 3 shows how consumers interpret these sociopolitical messages, linking strategy to psychological insights. Cluster 4 (yellow cluster) is focused on strategic decision-making in marketing based on alignment with leadership principles. This cluster consists of documents such as Wannow S. (2024), D'Arco M. (2024), and Haupt M. (2023), with high TLS 467, 439, and 412, respectively. The network offers a comprehensive picture of marketing in evolving times by demonstrating how fundamental research on consumer behavior enables more focused

studies and real-world applications. This cluster focuses on the CSA decision-making process of brands by integrating insights from other clusters.

We observe a clear progression in the bibliographic coupling analysis of CSA documents. The basic marketing and consumer insights (cluster 1) lead to innovative tactics (Cluster 2), which are shaped by psychological insights (Cluster 3) and finally integrated into managerial strategies (Cluster 4). This highlights how CSA research has grown from theory to practical.

Co-citation analysis and bibliographic coupling provide a better understanding of the field. Co-citation analysis highlights the foundational works that define the field and its state, whereas bibliographic coupling is used "to map a current research front" (Zupic & ˇCater, 2015, p. 434). Since articles with relatively long reference lists were given more weight in the bibliographic coupling method, combining the results of co-citation analysis and bibliographic coupling is necessary for a better understanding. Next, we use co-occurrence analysis to identify and group thematic clusters, highlighting the main topics and trends shaping the CSA field by focusing on frequently occurring keywords.

-Insert Fig.10 here-

-Insert Table.7 here-

3.2.3 Co-occurrence analysis on keywords

To further explore the topics and potential future topics, we conducted a co-occurrence analysis on keywords with VOSViewer (Fig. 11). By employing the threshold of a minimum of four occurrences of a keyword, 15 out of 372 keywords meet the threshold, and we identified four clusters. It is worth noting that we set a higher threshold to focus on the most frequently co-occurring and impactful keywords. The details of the co-occurrence of keyword analysis in the CSA field are presented in Table 8. Cluster 1 (red cluster) includes keywords like authenticity, woke washing, brand purpose, and activism. The occurrences of these keywords range between 5 and 6, with TLS values mainly in the range of 6 to 11. This cluster shows that brands must demonstrate a commitment to their causes. Strong links between authenticity and woke washing reflect that consumers expect authentic actions, but they are highly skeptical regarding the insincere attempts (i.e., "woke washing"). This cluster shows that authenticity is a must-have for credibility in CSA. Cluster 2 (green cluster) highlights brand activism as the most dominant theme (with 54 occurrences and a TLS of 43). As the central idea of this

analysis, brand activism highlights the significant change in how companies, instead of just engaging in social responsibilities, do activism as a part of their identity. The dominance of this cluster suggests that CSA is now a critical component of corporate strategy rather than a marginal phenomenon. Cluster 3 (blue cluster) contains keywords such as political ideology, brand attitude, corporate activism, and corporate sociopolitical activism, with slightly lower occurrence values ranging from 4 to 6 and TLS values ranging from 4 to 5. The moderate connectivity of this cluster shows an evolving but significant relationship between brands and political or social ideology. Cluster 4 (yellow cluster) focused on social media and corporate political advocacy, showing how public stances influence CSA. With 11 occurrences and a TLS 12, social media assists brands in reaching higher audiences and experiencing real-time activism. However, social media beyond the benefit has challenges like public stances being more exposed to scrutiny and the possibility of backlashing getting higher.

Observations through the clusters show that the interaction between authenticity and woke washing in the red cluster suggests a growing demand for transparency. In the blue cluster, the blurred borders between corporate advocacy and political ideology, meaning brands have increasingly been made political actors, and their positions on sociopolitical issues shape the nature of public discourses. Regarding the yellow cluster, social media is dual-edged in the CSA context. While it amplifies the CSA, it can increase the risk of backlash. In sum, these four clusters, green (brand activism core), red (authenticity and skepticism), blue (political direction), and yellow (social media), collectively illustrate a dynamic picture of the CSA phenomenon. It turns from a side effort to a key strategy and faces some challenges, such as consumer transparency expectations, ideological risks of politics, and challenges of social media.

-Insert Fig.11 here-

-Insert Table.8 here-

The analysis conducted with VOSviewer, including the co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-occurrence, offers a comprehensive view of the CSA research, how it is evolving, where it stands right now, and where it might be headed. Co-citation analysis uncovered core authors, foundational references, and journals that shaped the CSA research. Mapping all these clarifies that concepts such as authenticity, stakeholder alignment, and moral judgment are most influential and are a starting point for future scholars. Bibliographic coupling shows how the

CSA field evolves from foundational marketing and consumer insights to innovative marketing and psychological drivers. Recent studies explore technology, emotional responses, and organizational leadership. Connecting this with earlier works on authenticity and consumer expectations shows that this field is not isolated and receives ideas across ethics, psychology, behavioral, and strategic domains. Co-occurrence analysis of keywords reveals that brand activism is the center of corporate strategy and is more than a marginal concept. This analysis also shows that this field faces complexities such as woke washing, political polarization, and real-time and online scrutiny. Strong links between authenticity and skepticism suggest a potential room for developing frameworks to assess these constructs. The integration of these analyses contributes to a holistic lens of CSA as an interdisciplinary field with frameworks from ethics, marketing sociology, psychology, and policy. From an academic perspective, our analyses provide a clear overview of the past and present of CSA research, indicating which areas were well-developed and which areas need more attention. This helps future researchers detect these unexplored targets rather than re-tread established ground. In addition, recognizing the key authors and journals can speed up literature reviews for future researchers. From a managerial perspective, these findings show that CSA is more than taking a public stance on socio-political issues. It should be transparent and aligned with consumer expectations and required communication channels. Recognizing the literature cluster helps managers to benchmark their approaches against established knowledge.

4. Narrowing the Focus: From Broad Bibliometric Analysis to Core Sample

From our initial wide-ranging bibliometric analysis of 101 papers in the CSA domain, we identified 14 focal papers for a deeper review. The transition from a broad analysis of CSA papers to a targeted review provided us with an opportunity to more thoroughly examine important theoretical constructs, identify gaps in the literature, and explore future research possibilities. The selection of these 14 papers was based on thematic relevance and bibliometric indicators. We prioritized studies written by influential authors, showed a significant citation impact, and were ranked in journals based on our earlier co-citation and bibliographic coupling results, which allowed us to focus on the most influential research contributions. In addition, we included conceptually novel papers that addressed the underexplored CSA domains or proposed new frameworks. Finally, papers were selected based on how well they are relevant to our study, particularly with the psychological and emotional mechanisms in CSA. Notably,

some studies published in less prominent journals or with fewer citations were also considered because of their conceptual relevance to this topic and fresh perspectives on CSA literature.

Selected papers are listed in Table 9, along with title, author, year of publication, source, citation, and keywords.

-Insert Table. 9 here-

To categorize and gain an understanding of the 14 selected papers, we did a thematic analysis to group this core literature. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (Clarke & Braun, 2017) within qualitative data. We have then tried to visualize word clouds and network graphs to explore and classify papers considering abstracts, keywords, and directions for the future.

Fig.12, the word cloud output provides an overview of the selected papers by visualizing dominant keywords. It suggests these papers focus on brand engagement with activism, the sociopolitical implications of their stance, and consumers' reactions, including authenticity, equity, and the risks of being perceived as woke.

-Insert Fig.12 here-

In order to categorize the selected papers, we generated thematic maps (Fig. 13 & Fig. 14) using the *igraph* package in R. Fig. 13 shows the thematic groups, while Fig.14 highlights the connections between the keywords of these papers. This process revealed three thematic groups: Consumer-centric, corporate perspective, and strategic solutions. Additionally, we identified one paper (Hydock et al., 2020) that bridges consumer and corporate perspectives, categorized into the consumer and corporate perspective group. In the following sections, we discuss each thematic group in detail. Table. 10 listed the papers by groups.

-Insert Fig.13 here-

-Insert Fig.14 here-

-Insert Table 10 here-

4.1. Consumer-Centric Group

This group includes five papers examining how individuals perceive and respond to CSA. It focuses on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects, emphasizing the role of moral emotions, consumer-brand identification, and political ideology in shaping responses. These studies highlight how CSA influences consumer attitudes, WoM, purchase intention, consumer sentiment, and advocacy behavior. Table 11 provides an overview of the papers included in this group.

-Insert Table 11 here-

Moral emotions. Wannow et al. (2024), relying on cognitive appraisal theory (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Johnson & Stewart, 2005), emphasized the role of moral emotions —both other-praising and other-condemning— as mediators between CSA and consumer responses in brand attitude and advocacy behavior format. Due to the emotional complexity of CSA, Mukherjee, and Althuizen (2020), grounded in moral foundations theory (Graham et al., 2009), studied the moral reasoning processes of moral coupling and decoupling. Their findings attributed to moral reasoning revealed that moral coupling, which ties a brand's stance directly to its identity, tends to increase backlash, while moral decoupling helps reduce it by allowing it to distinguish the brand's actions from its core identity. Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) highlight the importance of emotional factors in shaping consumers' reactions to a brand's actions and, due to the limited exploration in this regard, point to further research to close this gap in this area. Similarly, Wannow et al. (2024) explicitly call for future research on moral emotions such as pride, shame, or guilt (self-conscious emotions) to explore their influence in the context of CSA.

Consumer-Brand Identification (CBI). Haupt et al. (2023), expanding on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), highlights the moderating role of consumer-brand identification in responding to CSA. Their findings on an experimental design reveal CBI as a buffer, meaning that strong CBI buffers the negative effects of disagreement with a brand's stance on sociopolitical issues. Through surveys and experiments, the findings of Wannow et al. (2024) show similar insights about the moderating role of CBI, showing that high CBI buffers negative emotional impacts and amplifies positive emotional responses in the CSA context. Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) find that consumer-brand identification (CBI) can partially mediate the negative effects of consumer disagreement on consumer attitudes. However, their study focuses only on the negative effects of consumer disagreement in the

CSA context, leaving an open question about how CBI might act and mediate in cases of positive reactions or consumer agreement. This highlights the need for further research to explore CBI's role in the situation mentioned.

Asymmetry in reactions. Some studies in this group (Haupt et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Wannow et al., 2024) observe the asymmetric nature of consumer reactions to CSA. For instance, Mukherjee& Althuizen (2020) findings through online experiments reveal that CSA has no significant impact on consumers who agree with the brand's position on the controversial issue and negatively impacts those who disagree (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Additionally, Haupt et al. (2023) highlighted that brand activism has no direct or interactive impact on the consumers' responses when they agree with the brand's stance, explicitly finding that agreement with a brand's stance does not significantly improve brand attitudes or word-of-mouth intentions. However, disagreement leads to a strong negative effect. Wannow et al. (2024) notice this asymmetry through emotional responses such that positive emotional shifts are less impactful than the negative emotions elicited by moral misalignment.

Brand-related responses to CSA. Studies in this group explored diverse consumer outcomes in CSA context, including issue advocacy (Wannow et al., 2023), WoM (Haupt et al., 2023), product usage (Schmidt et al, 2021), and brand attitude (Haupt et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2021; Wannow et al., 2024). Regarding brand attitude, which is among the most commonly examined factors, Schmidt et al. (2021), utilizing a mixed methods approach, including focus groups, surveys, and experiments, highlight the role of perceived authenticity in shaping attitudes. Haupt et al. (2023) and Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) show the asymmetric effect of CSA on brand attitudes, such that disagreement with the brand's stance leads to a decline in attitude. In contrast, agreement often leads to a neutral or modest increase in attitudes.

Regarding intentional outcomes such as purchase intention, Nam et al. (2023), using data scraped from Instagram and online experiments, reveal that speedy responses to sociopolitical events can play a critical role in shaping purchase intention, showing that while fast responses are perceived as a sign of commitment and authenticity and increase the purchase likelihood, delayed responses can lead to diminish the purchase intention. The identified asymmetric effects of CSA by Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) are also applied to consumer intentions such as purchase intention, highlighting a negative effect in the case of disagreement with a brand's stand and no effect in the case of agreement. Furthermore, regarding the other

intentional outcome, boycott intention, they note that moral coupling can increase the likelihood of backlash during a disagreement by connecting CSA's actions to its identity. Additionally, Wannow et al. (2024) anticipate that negative other-condemning emotions stemming from perceived negative brand actions could drive opposition-driven actions like boycotts. While they do not directly explore these effects, they point out that more research is necessary to understand how emotions—including self-conscious emotions—affect CSA boycott intentions.

In summary, the consumer-centric studies reviewed the consumer's perception and response to CSA on emotional, cognitive, and intentional outcomes, including brand-related actions like WoM, brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and advocacy, as well as negative reactions like backlash and negative WoM. The effect of CSA on consumer attitudes, intentions, and behavior is reported as asymmetric (Haupt et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), meaning that it is negative in the case of disagreement with a brand's stand and has no effect in the case of agreement. Additionally, the moderating role of consumer-brand identification emerges and is highlighted as buffering negative effects and amplifying positive emotional responses. The need for future research to investigate the mediating role of consumer-brand identification, specifically in the case of agreement, is also emphasized. Studies in this group also revealed the importance of emotions—both other-praising and other-condemning- in the CSA context and called for further research regarding the other kinds of emotions in this area. All these insights collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the complex consumer dynamics that brands face when engaging in sociopolitical activism.

4.2. Corporate Perspective Group

This group includes three papers exploring how CSA or CPA (*Corporate Political Advocacy)* impacts corporations, including financial performance, brand perception, and reputational risks, focusing on alignment, execution, and stakeholder engagement in reducing risks and maximizing benefits. Table 12 provides an overview of the papers included in this group.

Stakeholder values. Studies in this group emphasize meeting stakeholder values in shaping outcomes of sociopolitical actions. Bhagwat et al. (2020) rely on signaling and screening theories to explain investor responses to CSA and show that the firms whose sociopolitical stances are in line with the stakeholder's values experience a less negative impact on stock

returns. By emphasizing the value-match theory, Weber et al. (2023) revealed similar results and added that mismatched stakeholder and brand values raise intense backlash. Adding a more subtle point, Klostermann et al. (2022) emphasized that all stakeholders are not equal and firms should not treat them uniformly, showing that stakeholders emotionally invested in the brand react more negatively to CSA when it does not match their values. These findings indicated that although sociopolitical positions may attract new stakeholders, losing core and loyal ones threatens existing revenues, which is a corporate risk. Overall, these studies show that understanding and meeting the stakeholder values is not only a success factor but can also be a source of risk if neglected.

Execution and Collaboration efforts. Studies in this group show that carrying out sociopolitical actions, including effort, visibility, and collaboration, influence their outcomes. For instance, Bhagwat et al. (2020) find that some execution decisions, like announcement sources (CEO or another firm representative), can shape stakeholder reactions and worsen the negative investor reactions because they draw more attention and seem riskier. Klostermann et al. (2022) show that high-effort CSA actions from brands, such as expensive campaigns or large donations, can damage stakeholders' perceptions of the brand and lead to online protests. In terms of reducing the risks of CSA by collaborating with other brands, Klostermann et al. (2022) find that this strategy can distribute responsibility and make stakeholders less likely to blame a single brand for sociopolitical actions. Bhagwat et al. (2020) also point out that collaboration with others in CSA practices can decrease corporate risk as it is less visible and gets less attention. These studies suggest that brands can decrease risk by moderated effort, less visibility, and more collaboration in sociopolitical actions.

Financial vs. Reputational Risks. Studies in this group have different focuses regarding corporate outcomes, from financial to reputational outcomes. With event study methodology, Bhagwat et al. (2020) emphasize financial performance, showing that not considering investors' values can influence stock returns. On the other hand, Klostermann et al. (2022) used regression analysis of 106 CSA events, and Weber et al. (2023) used semantic analysis and experimental designs, examined the reputational dimension, focusing on social media sentiment and brand perception as key indicators of corporate success. These studies demonstrate that CSA practices can influence outcomes related to finances and reputation.

In sum, corporate-centric studies reviewed here provide a framework for understanding the CSA from a corporate perspective by combining the financial, reputational, and executive

dimensions. They also highlight the importance of stakeholders and their values and introduce potential risks and strategies to mitigate them with moderate effort, high collaboration, and less visibility.

-Insert Table.12 here-

4.3. Consumer & Corporate Perspective Group

According to the selected papers' thematic map, one out of 14 papers is categorized as a consumer and corporate-centric study. This study (Hydock et al., 2020) explores corporate political advocacy (CPA) 's dual-level impact on consumer choice depending on the brand's initial market share. At the consumer level, based on the negativity bias, the study finds that CPA polarizes the consumer responses and gets strong negative responses from consumers who disagree with brands' stance. At the market level, the study finds that the net effect of CPA depends on market share. At the same time, large-share brands lose more consumers than they gain from CPA. Small-share brands benefit from CPA by attracting supportive consumers without losing many consumers. This study, which has an experimental design, highlighted the role of authenticity as a moderating factor. While authentic CPA increases the loyalty of supportive consumers, the inauthentic CPA leads to strong backlashes with damaging consumers' trust. This research demonstrates that CPA can impact consumer response and market positioning.

4.4. Strategic Solutions

This group consists of five papers with strategic approaches to CSA, offering frameworks and solutions for effective sociopolitical activism. These studies, including Kapitan et al. (2022), Sibai et al. (2020), Vredenburg et al. (2020), Mirzaei et al. (2022), and Ahmad et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of authenticity and effective communication for brands adopting activist stances. Table 13 provides an overview of the papers included in this group.

Authenticity in CSA. The central theme of the papers in this group is exploring authenticity. As a qualitative study, Vredenburg et al. (2020) provide a theoretical framework for ensuring authenticity in CSA practices. According to their typology of brand activism, authentic brand activism is defined as aligning a brand's purpose, values, messaging, and corporate practices to handle sociopolitical issues in a coherent, purpose-driven manner. Sibai et al. (2020) explore

the concept of authenticity from the standpoint of controversial branding strategies, focusing on addressing controversial issues while staying within the boundaries of free speech to establish themselves as authentic activists. Sibai et al. (2020) also argue that following three strategies, including breaking traditional boundaries and changing norms, challenging powerful groups to redefine what is acceptable, and leading by example to set new standards of moral behavior, can foster authenticity in activist brands. Mirzaei et al. (2022) propose the Woke Activism Authenticity Framework (WAAF) and identify six dimensions: social context independency, inclusion, sacrifice, practice, fit, and motivation to achieve authentic woke activism. Vredenburg et al. (2020) and Mirzaei et al. (2022) first warn against woke washing and then focus on the authenticity dimensions. Ahmad et al. (2022) explore authenticity with effective messaging strategies (commitment type) for sociopolitical activist brands. Relying on exploratory and experimental methods, they find that among various types of commitments (financial, non-financial, and rhetorical), non-financial commitments, defined as the commitment to support other organizations who are fighting for the issue without any financial commitment" (Ahmad et al., 2022, p.610), are the most effective in fostering brand authenticity. These studies, in sum, stress the consequences of inauthentic activism, which leads to backlash, while authenticity encourages stronger connections and long-term brand equity.

Message framing. According to Sibai et al. (2020), how brands frame their sociopolitical messages is important when engaging in activism. Using a comparative case study and selecting 18 cases of brands attempting to achieve an activist positioning, this paper reveals that successful CSA depends on demonstrating moral competency across three dimensions: moral sensitivity (recognizing the moral content of situations), moral vision (having insight into the future of morality), and moral integration (ability to follow their moral beliefs in all situations). When brands show all three, stakeholders are more likely to view them as authentic activists. At the same time, they point out that it is about framing the message well and finding the right balance between controversy and authenticity. Brands must clearly communicate their goals while ensuring their actions align with their words. Doing this helps build trust with the audience and can lower the chances of backlash. Ahmad et al. (2022) explored this idea further by focusing on how messages influence people's emotions and perceptions. Ahmad et al. (2022) examine the effect of hope-framed and frustration-framed messages with commitment types (financial, non-financial, rhetorical) perceived brand authenticity and brand love. Their findings show hope-framed messages work best with financial and non-financial commitments

and increase perceived brand authenticity and love. On the other hand, frustration-framed messages are effective when brands make rhetorical commitments. Together, these studies emphasize the importance of crafting effective sociopolitical messages that align with a brand's commitment level and stakeholder expectations.

Operational strategies. Kapitan et al. (2023) introduce the concept of B2B brand activism as the actions and strategies employed by B2B firms to address sociopolitical issues through their supply chains. This activism goes beyond traditional consumer-centric brand activism, including operational and relational changes with business partners. Examples of these operational changes could be terminating supplier contracts due to ethical and sociopolitical concerns or changing sources to be aligned with social and political values. Relying on institutional and stakeholder theories, they identify key accelerators of this activism, like consumer and regulatory pressures and advancements in data tracking, alongside barriers like misaligned values and financial constraints. Using a qualitative phenomenology method and conducting 15 semi-structured interviews with marketing managers in New Zealand's B2B sector, they find that activism needs to be strategic and purpose-driven instead of reactive, and B2B activism acts as a tool to create a conscientious brand purpose and gain legitimacy.

-Insert Table.13 here-

4.5. Visualizing the Outcomes: A Thematic Overview

This section visualizes the key outcomes from our three thematic groups: consumer-centric, corporate perspective, and strategic solutions. This visualization helps comprehend the focus areas of these groups and the different insights they bring to the CSA field. Fig. 15 presents the distribution of outcomes for the selected papers.

-Insert Fig. 15 here-

From Fig. 15, it is observed that the outcomes of the consumer-centric group are mainly emotional and behavioral, in line with its attention to individual-level responses. The Corporate Perspective group's distribution focuses on opportunities and practical applications, with minimum attention paid to risks and strategic insight. This strategic solutions group mainly focuses on strategic insights, opportunities, practical applications, and some small attention to risks and behavioral/emotional outcomes. It also constitutes one of the most varied theme

covers. Thus, the distribution reflects the emphases of each thematic group and mirrors the complexities of CSA research.

In all, we have critically discussed the various research areas under the CSA research field and narrowed it down to a set of highly cited papers written by influential scholars and published in journals on high-ABS ranked. We also reviewed some papers that were not part of our initial selection criteria because of their relevance and contribution to the topic. This final selected sample includes various theories, methods, and themes, which we categorized into consumer-centric, corporate-focused, and strategic solutions groups. We use key themes to highlight the complexities of CSA and its implications for both consumers and corporations. The following section synthesizes the future directions suggested by these papers, outlining a potential avenue for further research and contribution to this evolving field.

5. Future directions

This study points to future avenues emerging from our close examination of the field of corporate sociopolitical activism. This section outlines a structured research agenda to address existing gaps by synthesizing insights from consumer-centric, corporate perspectives, and strategic solutions studies, integrating them with prior literature. The following themes investigated in the selected papers emerged as avenues for future investigation, each accompanied by key research questions. Table. 14 contains these themes with references and future research questions.

Emotional Mechanisms in Consumer Responses. Our thematic analysis of consumer-centric studies revealed that, regardless of the importance of emotional mechanisms, they are not fully explored. Although the impact of emotions like anger on brand attitude and advocacy behavior was explored, the role of self-conscious emotions in shaping these reactions is still unexplored (Haupt et al., 2023; Rim et al., 2022). Such self-evaluated emotions may have a stronger impact on consumer responses. Including self-conscious emotions in CSA models and studies can better explain why some consumers continue their brand relationships despite the brand's controversial sociopolitical activism while others drop them. Acknowledging self-conscious emotions can strongly impact the brands' strategic planning and help mitigate backlash risks. To remove the risk of oversimplifying consumer emotional processes, future research must study these emotional processes to provide a broader understanding of consumer reactions in a political context.

Another issue is that emotional reactions to CSA may intensify or weaken over time, based on consumer engagement with a brand's CSA messaging or observing inconsistency between the words and actions of a brand. Therefore, these emotions are unlikely to stay constant. To our knowledge, the emotional evolution in the CSA context has not been explored. Practically, tracking and adjusting to the temporal evolution of emotional responses could help brands to inform sustained CSA strategies, such as altering messaging tactics. Given these gaps, future research should investigate:

How do self-conscious emotions like pride and guilt mediate consumer reactions to CSA? (Wannow et al., 2023)

How do moral emotions (e.g., anger, contempt, gratitude) shape consumer responses to CSA? (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020)

How do emotional responses vary based on agreement or disagreement with a brand's sociopolitical stance? (Haupt et al., 2023)

How do emotional reactions to CSA evolve over time?

Psychological and Cognitive Mechanisms. Aside from emotional reactions, consumers interact with CSA campaigns of brands through psychological mechanisms such as brand identification and moral decoupling. These mechanisms remain underexplored in the CSA context despite their relevance. Examining these mechanisms could help better understand and anticipate the consumer's cognitive and psychological responses to either aligned or misaligned brand activism. These investigations could help brands plan strategies that reinforce positive identification. Future research could investigate:

How do psychological mechanisms like moral decoupling and rationalization mediate the effects of CSA on consumer attitudes? (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020)

How does consumer-brand identification influence consumer reactions to CSA? (Haupt et al., 2023)

How does brand attachment shape consumer loyalty during disagreements with a brand's sociopolitical stance? (Wannow et al., 2023)

Operationalizing and Measuring Authenticity. We observed a gap in operationalizing authenticity in dynamic and culturally diverse contexts, as the frameworks proposed by prior studies (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Vredenburg et al.,2020) are often static and not adaptable to different CSA climates and cultural norms. Although Hydock et al. (2020) touch on time-related aspects, they do not look at how different groups of people see authenticity throughout

a long-term CSA campaign. Future studies should conceptualize authenticity as a dynamic concept influenced by changing cultural values, stakeholder expectations, and social norms. With a dynamic model, the explanatory power of CSA theories will be increased. Moreover, brands must manage authenticity perceptions over time and in various sociopolitical contexts. A CSA messaging can seem authentic or inauthentic in different cultural and political contexts. Thus, understanding and developing robust metrics for authenticity could be helpful for brands to evaluate the creditability of their activism effort. Future research should investigate:

How do moral vision and integration help facilitate authentic brand activism across various sociopolitical contexts? (Sibai et al., 2020)

How could the dimensions of woke activism authenticity-in be quantified while embracing a dynamic framework that allows for cultural adaptability and change over time rather than static measures?

How and over what timeframe do various stakeholder constituencies assess the authenticity of CSA, and under what conditions do its manifestations remain authentic during sustained campaigns of CSA? (Hydock et al., 2020)

How do perceptions of authenticity change among various stakeholder groups across time, and what forces lead to these changes in long CSA campaigns?

Motivations and Strategic Approaches to CSA. Brands' motivations to engage in activism can range from strategic considerations like competitive advantage, stakeholder expectations, and following the market to public serving goals to protect the community and improve social justice and ethical standards. Despite the importance of these drivers in the CSA context, they have not been sufficiently explored. Recognizing the brand's motivations in CSA practices can help better understand the CSA phenomena. Future studies should differentiate between the CSA motivations of brands and explain how each kind of motivation influences consumer behavior. According to this, future studies should address:

What are the drivers of CSA by brands-strategic positioning or bandwagon behavior? (Klostermann et al., 2022)

How can companies strategically use CSA to minimize negative consequences and maximize positive ones? (Bhagwat et al., 2020)

What is the overlap between CSR/CSA and conventional marketing activities? (Weber et al., 2023)

Brand Characteristics and Industry-Specific Effects. CSA responses vary across brands and industries, although little is known about the impact of brand-specific characteristics on results. Drivers such as market share, industry category and size, and brand type (product vs. corporate) can influence consumer responses. Including these drivers as moderators in CSA models can explain boundary conditions that may determine when activism efforts are successful or unsuccessful. Without accounting for these specific characteristics, results will be overgeneralized with low predictive power. Practically, if brands are aware of these boundary conditions that affect consumer responses, then they may modify their CSA methods into a tailored method according to their conditions. Therefore, the future studies should explore this:

How do product and corporate brands differ in their outcomes from engaging in sociopolitical activism? (Schmidt et al., 2021)

What differences in CSA effectiveness do industry and product category make? (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020)

How do brand size and market share moderate consumer responses to CSA? (Wannow et al., 2023; Hydock et al.,2020)

Cultural and Demographic Variations. Our bibliometric analysis revealed a Western-centric bias in CSA research, and few studies have examined the cultural and demographic differences in the efficiency of CSA. Since current research does not clarify how local politics and cultural norms impact perceptions of CSA, it is difficult for corporations to develop global campaigns that respect regional variation. Incorporating cultural and demographic elements can reveal essential facts regarding political and moral norms, society and stakeholder expectations, and interpretations of activism efforts. Addressing the following questions can help brands create culturally sensitive activism strategies attractive to a broader range of groups.

How do cultural differences impact stakeholder perceptions of CSA and authenticity? (Ahmad et al., 2022; Mirzaei et al., 2022)

How do localized sociopolitical values of consumers and cultural context shape consumer perceptions of CSA authenticity?

How do different demographic segments respond to financial, non-financial, and rhetorical CSA commitments? (Ahmad et al., 2022)

What are the cultural drivers of controversial CSA's success or backlash? (Sibai et al., 2020; Hydock et al., 2020)

What are the differences in the emotional and behavioral consumer responses from the collectivist vs. individualist societies to the CSA?

Communication and Message Framing. Our thematic analysis highlighted the need to redefine the communication strategies that better balance commercial objectives against sociopolitical authenticity. Furthermore, little is known about platform-specific norms and how they affect the CSA messaging. For example, a suitable message on Instagram would not be appropriate on X or TikTok due to the diverse cultures, norms, and audiences of social media platforms. Understanding and following these norms helps brands optimize their CSA messaging to improve engagement. Poorly framed messages can lead to backlash and ruin the brand's credibility. Key future research questions in this matter include:

How do hope-framed and frustration-framed messages affect brand authenticity and consumer attachment? (Ahmad et al., 2022)

How can brands tailor CSA messages to meet platform-specific norms and audience expectations?

How can brands balance commercial objectives with authentic activism messaging? (Vredenburg et al., 2020)

Long-Term Impacts and Risks. The risks and rewards of CSA often develop over a long-term period, but most of the existing research examines short-term consumer responses. Integrating a longitudinal view in CSA studies can explain how brand and consumer responses evolve over time. This perspective helps to develop robust and predictive CSA theories and sustain credibility. Future research questions regarding this issue include:

What are the longitudinal impacts of CSA on brand equity, consumer behavior, and social norms? (Ahmad et al., 2022; Sibai et al., 2020)

How might longitudinal studies examine internal and external measures of success for CSA campaigns? (Vredenburg et al., 2020)

To what extent does long-term activism messaging impact the market-positioning and consumer-trusting ability? (Sibai et al., 2020; Wannow et al.,2023)

How does long-term CSA impact brand loyalty and market positioning over the long term? (Hydock et al., 2020)

This study identifies critical gaps in the CSA literature and suggests an avenue that includes emotional and psychological mechanisms, authenticity perception, communicating and

messaging perspectives, etc. Future studies can build stronger models of CSA by addressing these gaps. By exploring these gaps, managers and practitioners can also provide actionable insights on navigating the evolving sociopolitical environment.

-Insert Table. 14 here-

6. Conclusion

Corporate sociopolitical activism has gained traction in recent years, and brands have started showing interest in taking a stance. Thus, it is critical to understand the phenomenon, its research field, and the dominant themes of the field better. To do so, we identified the intellectual structure of the CSA area through bibliometric analysis, visual mapping, and keyword-based thematic grouping. This need has been recognized in the CSA literature (Cammarota et al., 2023), which underlines the value of a bibliometric approach for systematically mapping the intellectual landscape of emerging fields like CSA. This study initially analyzed 101 papers published in the Scopus and WoS database from 2019 to 2024 to identify key contributors (i.e., important publications, authors, journals, and countries) and illustrate the network of the CSA research field by conducting co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, and co-occurrence analysis. We complemented these intellectual structures of the CSA field by narrowing our focus to a core set of papers and thematically categorized them into consumer-centric, corporate perspectives, and strategy solutions groups. We underlined key themes among this core set of papers that have helped navigate the CSA field. For instance, these key themes include authenticity, emotional and psychological mechanisms, stakeholder values, brand-related responses, etc. Lastly, this study indicated the future research directions emerging from its core literature review to develop the CSA field further.

The novelty of this work lies in its methodology. With its methodological bibliometric and thematic mapping approach, it is, to the best of our knowledge, the first study to systematically uncover the intellectual landscape of CSA. This paper is a fundamental resource for researchers and practitioners seeking to understand or engage with CSA. For scholars, it provides a way out of existing gaps, such as the need for longitudinal evaluations of CSA effects, cross-cultural insights, and enhanced metrics of authenticity. For practitioners, our findings emphasize the necessity of aligning sociopolitical viewpoints with stakeholder values and using effective communications to reduce risks and backlash.

This study also presents some limitations. First, our bibliometric analysis relied on the papers published on the Scopus and WoS databases. Even though they are the most significant sources for scientific citation (Harzing & Alakangas, 2016), considering other databases such as Google Scholar would be useful. Second, we restricted our search to specific keywords in one of the three areas of search, which are "Title, Abstract, Keywords." It is possible to miss an article that does not mention the specific keywords in all search areas. The use of broader research queries in future studies would possibly extend the understanding of the phenomenon. Third, our analysis only included articles published in English. Analysis of other document types, such as books or conference proceedings in non-English languages, might bring fresh insights to the discussions.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Fig 1.
Study process flow

Research design
- Research question: (To identify the influential and intellectual aspects of CSA literature and outline the future research directions)
- Bibliometric techniques (citation and co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling and co-occurrence)

Data search
- Databases (Scopus and WoS)
- Keywords ("corporate* sociopolitical* activism" OR "brand* activism" OR "activist* brand" OR "corporate* advocacy" OR "corporate*political* activism*")

Analysis
- Softwares (Biblioshiny in R and VOSviewer)
- Techniques (citation and co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling and co-occurrence)

Visualization
- Intellectual structure (co-citation network, bibliographic coupling network)

Results
- Citation analysis (most cited authors, sources, documents)
- Co-citation/bibliographic coupling (network of authors, sources, documents)

Conclusion
- Identified the influential and intellectual structures of CSA field
- Revealed key themes and questions of core papers for future research

Fig. 2
Number of Publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science Database (1984-2024)
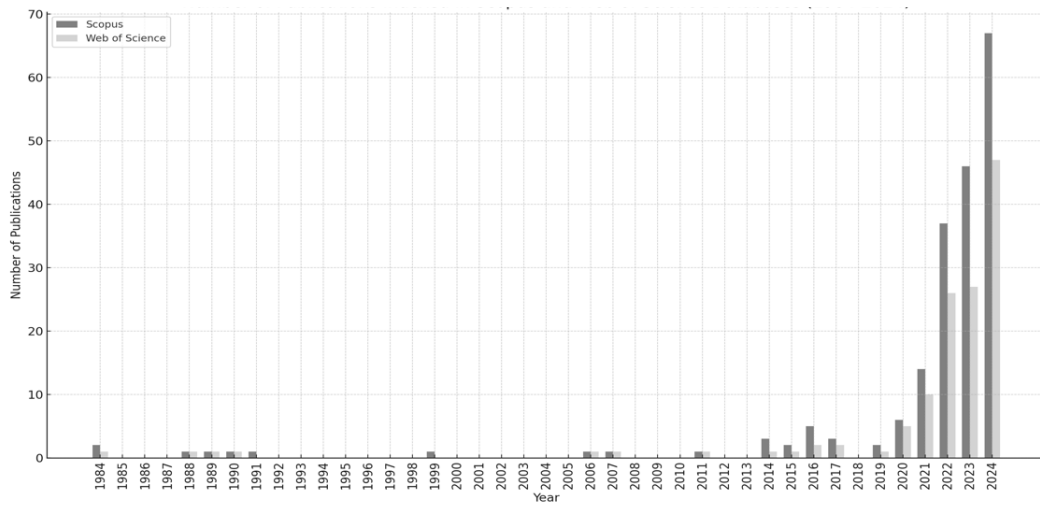
Fig 3
Paper selection process

| Combination of keywords in previous studies (316 papers) | Exclusion of overlaping works by checking the DOI number (196 papers) | Exclusion of non-peer-reviewed works based on document type (151 papers) | Exclusion of papers published before 2019 (132 papers) | Exclusion of non-English works (127 papers) | Limitation based on subject area (101 papers) |
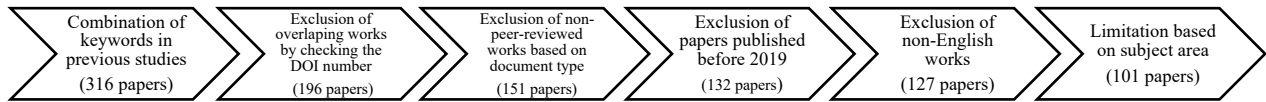
Table.1.
Descriptive statistics of the database

Metric	Quantity
Number of Authors	270
Number of Publications	101
Number of Journals	57
Number of Institutions	189
Number of Countries	39
Number of Cited References	7,865

Table.2.

Top 10 most cited publications

Rank	Title	Journal	Year	Citation
1	Brands taking a stand: authentic brand activism or woke washing?	Journal of Public Policy and Marketing	2020	354
2	Corporate sociopolitical activism and firm value	Journal of Marketing	2020	202
3	Brand activism: does courting controversy help or hurt a brand?	International Journal of Research in Marketing	2020	146
4	Should your brand pick a side? how market share determines the impact of corporate political advocacy	Journal of Marketing Research	2020	117
5	Woke brand activism authenticity or the lack of it	Journal of Business Research	2022	103
6	Authenticating brand activism: negotiating the boundaries of free speech to make a change	Psychology and Marketing	2021	67
7	Sociopolitical activist brands	Journal of Product and Brand Management	2022	60
8	Corporate social advocacy as engagement: Nike's social justice communication	Public Relations Review	2021	54
9	Brand activism change agents: strategic storytelling for impact and authenticity	Journal of Strategic Marketing	2023	30
10	Effective messaging strategies to increase brand love for sociopolitical activist brands	Journal of Business Research	2022	29

Table. 3.

Top 10 most influential authors ranked according to TC

Rank	Author	h-index	TC	NP	Affiliation	PY-start
1	Vredenburg J.	3	383	3	Auckland University of Technology	2020
2	Kapitan S.	2	375	2	Auckland University of Technology	2020
3	Bhagwat Y.	1	202	1	Texas Christian University	2020
4	Hydock C.	3	167	3	Tulane University	2020
5	Mukherjee S.	1	146	1	Audencia Business School	2020
6	Guzmán F.	3	103	3	University of North Texas	2022
7	Mirzaei A.	1	103	1	Macquarie University	2022
8	Sibai O.	1	67	1	University of London	2021
9	Schmidt HJ.	1	60	1	Hochschule Koblenz	2022
10	Waymer D.	1	54	1	The University of Alabama	2021

TC. *Total Citation*, NP. *Number of Publication*, PY. *Publication Year*

Table.4.

Top 10 most influential journals ranked according to TC and TP

Rank	Journal	TP	TC	TC/TP	IF(2023)	Journals	TP	TC	TC/TP	IF(2023)
1	J Brand Manag	9	50	5.55	4	J Public Policy Mark	4	377	94.25	5.1
2	J Bus Res	7	150	21.42	10.5	J Mark	1	202	202	15.9
3	J Prod Brand Manag	6	121	20.16	3	J Bus Res	7	150	21.43	10.5
4	J Public Policy Mark	4	377	94.25	5	Int J Res Mark	1	146	146	6.62

5	Public Relations Rev	4	60	15	3.5	J Prod Brand Manag	6	121	20.17	3
6	J Brand Strategy	4	9	2.25	N/A	J Mark Res	1	117	117	6
7	Psychol Mark	3	79	26.33	2.5	Psychol Mark	3	79	26.33	2.5
8	J Strateg Mark	3	41	13.66	2	Public Relat Rev	4	60	15	3.5
9	Int J Advert	3	21	7	2.5	J Brand Manag	9	50	5.56	4
10	J Advert	3	11	3.66	3	J Strateg Mark	3	41	13.67	2

TP. Total Publication, TC. Total Citation, IF. Impact Factor, N/A. Not Available

Table 5.
Journals production over 2019- 2024

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Journal of Brand Management	0	0	0	0	1	8
Journal of Business Research	0	0	0	2	0	5
Journal of Product and Brand Management	0	0	0	3	2	1
Journal of Brand Strategy	0	0	0	1	1	2
Journal of Public Policy and Marketing	0	1	0	0	1	2
Public Relations Review	0	0	1	0	2	1
International Journal of Advertising	0	0	1	0	1	1
Journal of Advertising	0	0	0	0	0	3
Journal of Strategic Marketing	0	0	0	0	2	1
Psychology and Marketing	0	0	2	0	0	1

Fig.4.
Source's production over time
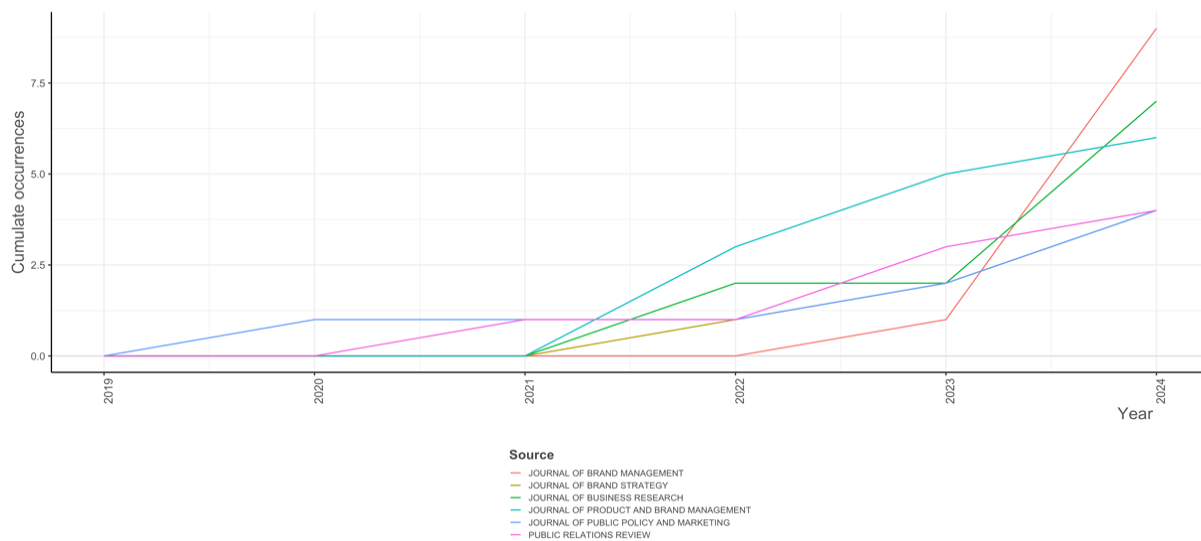
Fig.5.
World Map of Publications by Country

Powered by Bing
© Australian Bureau of Statistics, GeoNames, Microsoft, Navinfo, Open Places, OpenStreetMap, TomTom, Zenrin
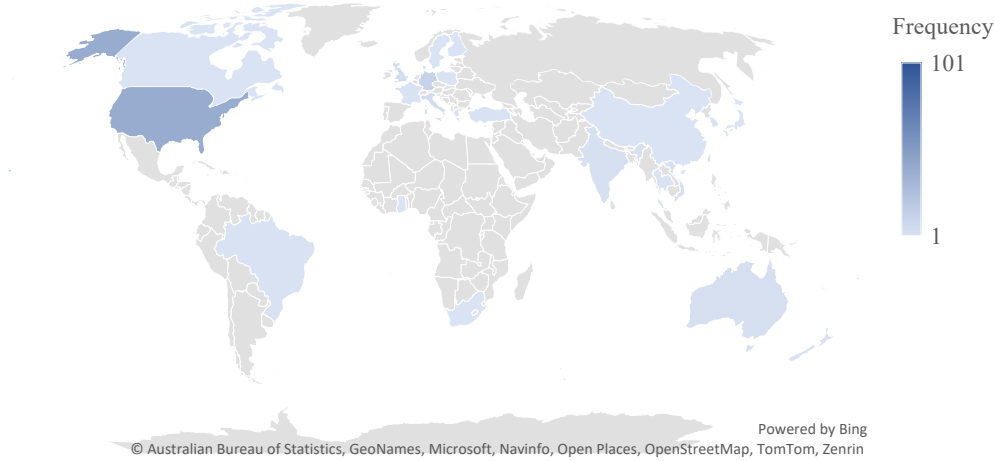
Table. 6.
Co-citation of authors, documents, and sources.

Co-citation authors				Co-citation references				Co-citation sources			
CL	**Authors**	**CI**	**TLS**	**CL**	**Cited references**	**CI**	**TLS**	**CL**	**Source**	**CI**	**TLS**
1	Vredenburg J.	79	2022	1	Mukherjee S., 2020, Int J Res Mark	46	179	1	J Bus Res	285	10798
	Spry A.	78	2011		Vredenburg J, 2020, J Public Policy Mark	37	151		J Marketing	66	8645
	Guzman F.	60	1899		Bhagwat Y. 2020 J Marketing	32	139		J Marketing Res	124	4651
	Kapitan S.	72	1820		Hydock C. 2020, J Mark Res	28	110		J Consum Psychol	98	3997
	Kemper J.A.	65	1697		Sarkar C. 2020, Idea Bite Press	19	79		J Acad Marketing Sci	88	3721
2	Hydock. C.	70	2011		Ahmad F. 2022, J Bus Res	15	62	2	J Advertising	140	4743
	Korschun D.	46	1530		Hoppner J.J, 2019, J Bus Res	11	59		J Product Brand Mang	108	4365
	Warren N.L.	50	1379		Nalick M. 2016, Acad Manage Perspect	12	41		Eur J Marketing	82	3400
	Althuizen N.	52	1315	2	Moorman C. 2020, J Public Policy Mark	35	140		Inter J Advertising	83	3261
	Mukherjee S.	53	1312		Mirzaei A. 2022, J Bus Res	25	112		Psychology & Marketing	83	3173
3	Bagozzi R.P.	35	1190		Sibai O. 2020, Pyschology & Marketing	17	77	3	J Bus Ethics	178	5622
	Sen S.	40	978		Vredenburg J., 2018, Conversation Media Group Ltd	13	41		J Public Policy Mark	155	5286
	Bhattacharya C.B.	41	936		Holt D.B. 2002, J Consum Res	10	40		J of Brand Management	106	4426
	Grappi S.	21	700						Acad Management Rev	58	2015
	Romani S.	21	700						J Marketing Management	45	1734
								4	J Consum Res	215	8023
									Harvard BusRev	38	1476
									J Consum Cul	33	1153

Key authors, references and sources for each cluster are listed here.

Fig.6.
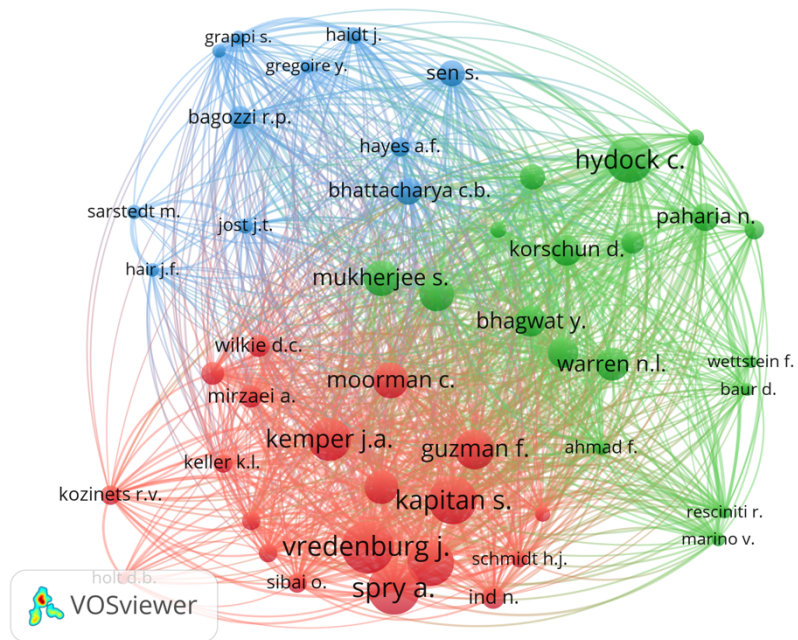*Co-citation network of authors*
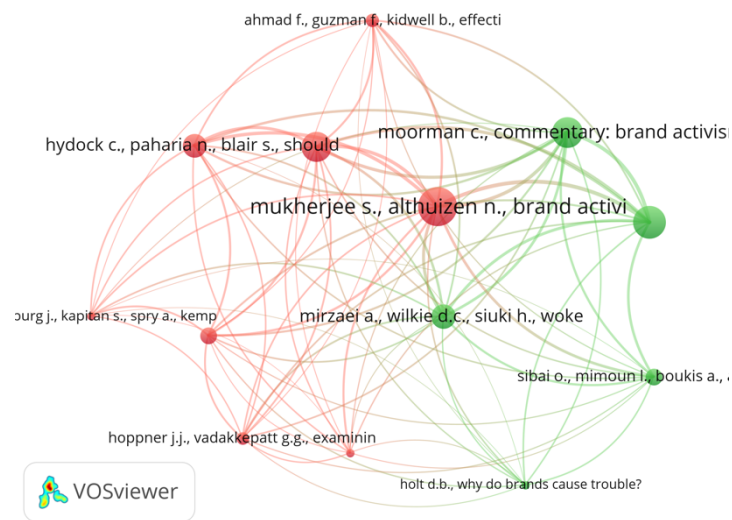

Fig.7.
Co-citation network of references

Fig.8.
Co-citation network of sources
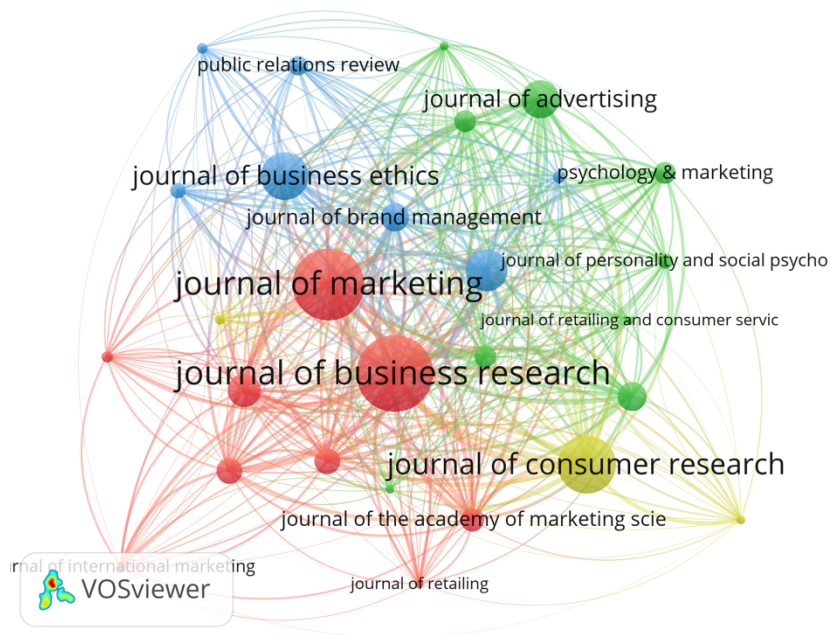

Fig.9.
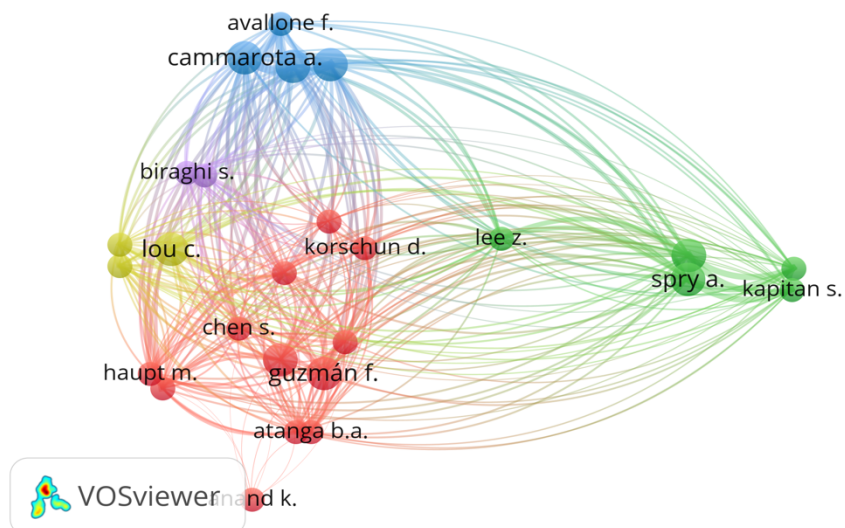*Bibliographic coupling among authors*

Fig.10.

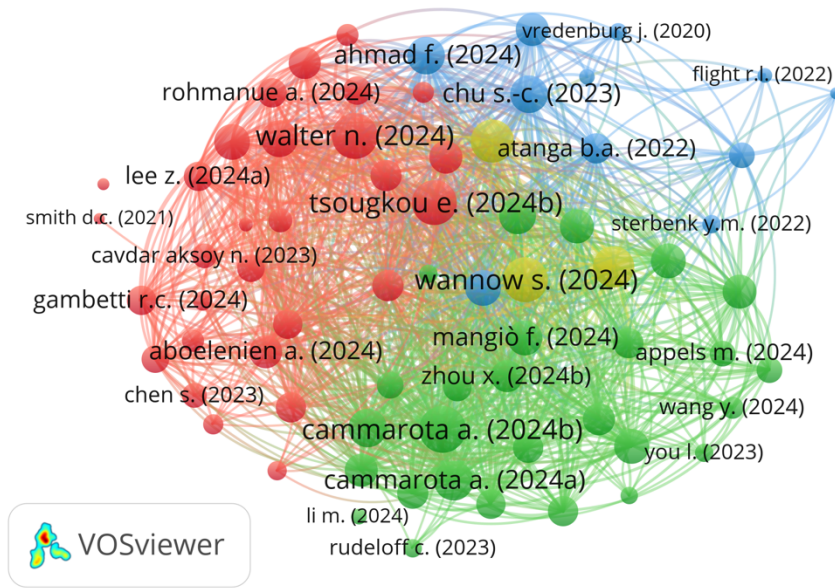*Bibliographic coupling among documents*

Table.7

Bibliographic coupling among authors and documents

Bibliographic coupling Among Authors				Bibliographic coupling Among Papers		
CL	Author	DOC	TLS	CL	Paper	TLS
1	Haupt m.	2	1072	1	Walter N. (2024)	474
	Wannow s.	2	1072		Tsougkou E. (2024b)*	463
	Guzmán F.	3	1042		Ahmad F. (2024)	371
	Tsougkou E.	2	833		Lou C. (2024)	349
	Ahmad F.	2	800		Gambetti R.C. (2023)	339
	Hydock C.	3	703	2	Cammarota A. (2024b)*	482
2	Spry A.	3	1483		Cammarota A. (2024a)*	390
	Vredenburg J.	3	1483		Tsougkou E. (2024a)*	374
	Kapitan S.	2	914		Lee Z. (2024b)	356
	Kemper J.A.	2	914		Mangiò F. (2024)	326
	Lee Z.	2	832	3	Chu S.-C. (2023)	369
3	Cammarota A.	3	2048		Atanga B.A. (2023)	346
	Marino V.	3	2048		Schmidt H.J. (2022)	305
	Resciniti R.	3	2048		Atanga B.A. (2022)	273
	Avallone F.	2	1419		Pasirayi S. (2023)	225
4	Lou C.	3	1126	4	Wannow S. (2024)	467
	Huang X.	2	796		D'arco M. (2024)	439
	Zhou X.	2	796		Haupt M. (2023)	412
5	Biraghi S.	2	728			
	Gambetti R.C.	2	728			

Key authors and documents for each cluster are listed here.

*Tsougkou, E., Sykora, M., Elayan, S., Ifie, K., & Oliveira, J. S. (2024). Peace brand activism: global brand responses to the war in Ukraine. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 07439156241289079.

*Tsougkou, E., Karampela, M., & Balabanis, G. (2024). Drivers and mechanisms of consumer attitudes toward global brand activists: a mediated approach. *International Marketing Review*.

*Cammarota, A., Avallone, F., Marino, V., & Resciniti, R. (2024). Taking a stand or standing aside? How to conceptualize the emerging phenomenon of university activism. *The International Journal of Management Education*, *22*(3), 101014.

*Cammarota, A., Avallone, F., Marino, V., & Resciniti, R. (2024). Can authenticity be built? Looking for factors that influence authentic brand activism. *SINERGIE*, *42*(1), 21-42.
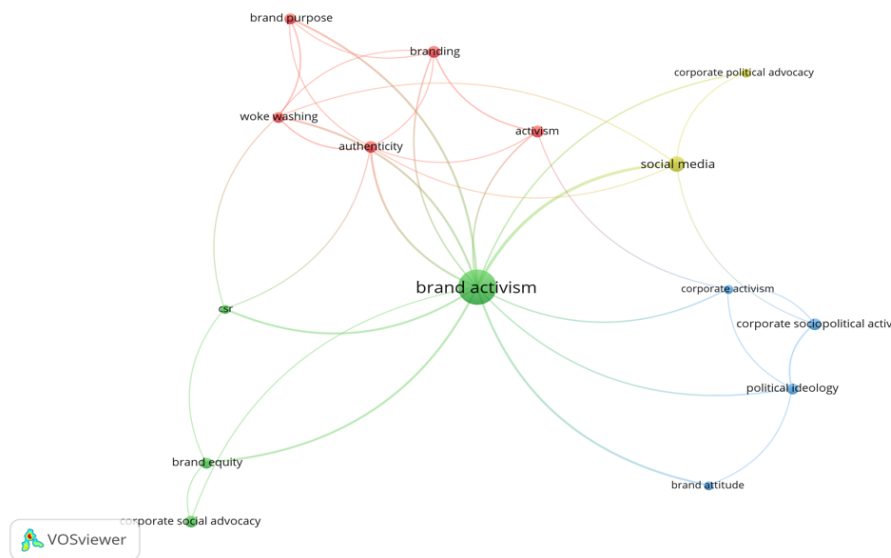
Fig.11.
Co-occurrence of keywords

Table.8
Co-occurrence keyword in four cluster

CL	Keyword	Occurrences	TLS
1	Authenticity	6	11
	Woke Washing	5	11
	Brand Purpose	5	8
	Branding	6	7
	Activism	6	6
2	Brand Activism	54	43
	CSR	7	7
	Brand Equity	6	6
	Corporate Social Advocacy	6	2
3	Political Ideology	5	5
	Brand Attitude	4	5
	Corporate Activism	5	5
	Corporate Sociopolitical Activism	6	4
4	Social Media	11	12
	Corporate Political Advocacy	4	3

Table. 9
Core Sample of Papers

| Title	Author (Year)	Citation	Journal	Keyword
Brands Taking a Stand: Authentic Brand Activism or Woke Washing?	Vredenburg et al., (2020)	362	J Public Policy Mark	Authentic Brand Activism; Authenticity; Brand Purpose; Branding; Political Advocacy; Prosocial Consumption; Purpose Driven Organizations; Woke Washing
Corporate Sociopolitical Activism and Firm Value	Bhagwat et al., (2020)	208	J Marketing	Corporate Sociopolitical Activism; Event Study; Political Activism; Political Ideology; Screening Theory; Signaling Theory; Sociopolitical; Stock Market Reaction
Brand activism: Does courting controversy help or hurt a brand?	Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020)	151	Int J Res Mark	Brand activism; Consumer-brand identification; Controversial issues; Morality
Should Your Brand Pick a Side? How Market Share Determines the Impact of Corporate Political Advocacy	Hydock et al., (2020)	121	J Mark Res	Brand Activism; Choice Share; Corporate Political Advocacy; Identity-Based Consumption; Market Share; Negativity Bias; Political Orientation
Woke brand activism authenticity or the lack of it	Mirzaei et al ., (2022)	103	J Bus Res	Woke, Brand activism, Authenticity, Social movement, Consumer backlash, Brand strategy
Authenticating brand activism: Negotiating the boundaries of free speech to make a change	Sibai et al., (2021)	67	Psychology & Marketing	Brand Activism; Brand Morality; Controversial Branding; Economies Of Worth; Free Speech Boundary Work; Moral Competency
Sociopolitical activist brands	Schmidt et al., (2022)	63	J Product Brand Mang	Activism; Authenticity; Brands, Experiment, Focus groups; Interviews, Politics, Positioning, Sociopolitical activism
Effective messaging strategies to increase brand love for sociopolitical activist brands	Ahmad et al., (2022)	29	J Bus Res	Brand activism, Brand love, Brand equity, brand authenticity
The effect of corporate political advocacy on brand perception: an event study analysis	Klostermann et al., (2022)	29	J Product Brand Mang	Brand image; Corporate political advocacy; Online protest; Political orientation; Social media
Differential Response to Corporate Political Advocacy and Corporate Social Responsibility: Implications for Political Polarization and Radicalization	Weber et al., (2023)	25	J Public Policy Mark	Brand Activism; Corporate Political Advocacy; Corporate Social Responsibility; Political Orientation; Radicalization
Strategic B2B brand activism: Building conscientious purpose for social impact	Kapitan et al., (2022)	21	Industrial Marketing Management	B2B brand activism; B2B brands; Brand activism; Brand purpose; Conscientious brand; Social problems
Is brand activism an emotional affair? The role of moral emotions in consumer responses to brand activism	Wannow, et al., (2024)	14	J Brand Management	Brand activism; Brand attitude; Consumer-brand identification; Issue advocacy; Moral emotions
Who is more responsive to brand activism? The role of consumer-brand identification and political ideology in consumer responses to activist brand messages	Haupt et al., (2023)	14	J Product Brand Mang	Brand activism; Brand attitude; Consumer–brand identification; Perceived marginalization; Political ideology
Speedy activists: How firm response time to sociopolitical events influences consumer behavior	Nam et al., (2023)	9	J Consum Psychol	Brand Activism; Branding; Communications; Sociopolitical Issues; Text Analysis

Fig.12
Word cloud from thematic analysis of CSA

Fig.13
Thematic map of selected papers
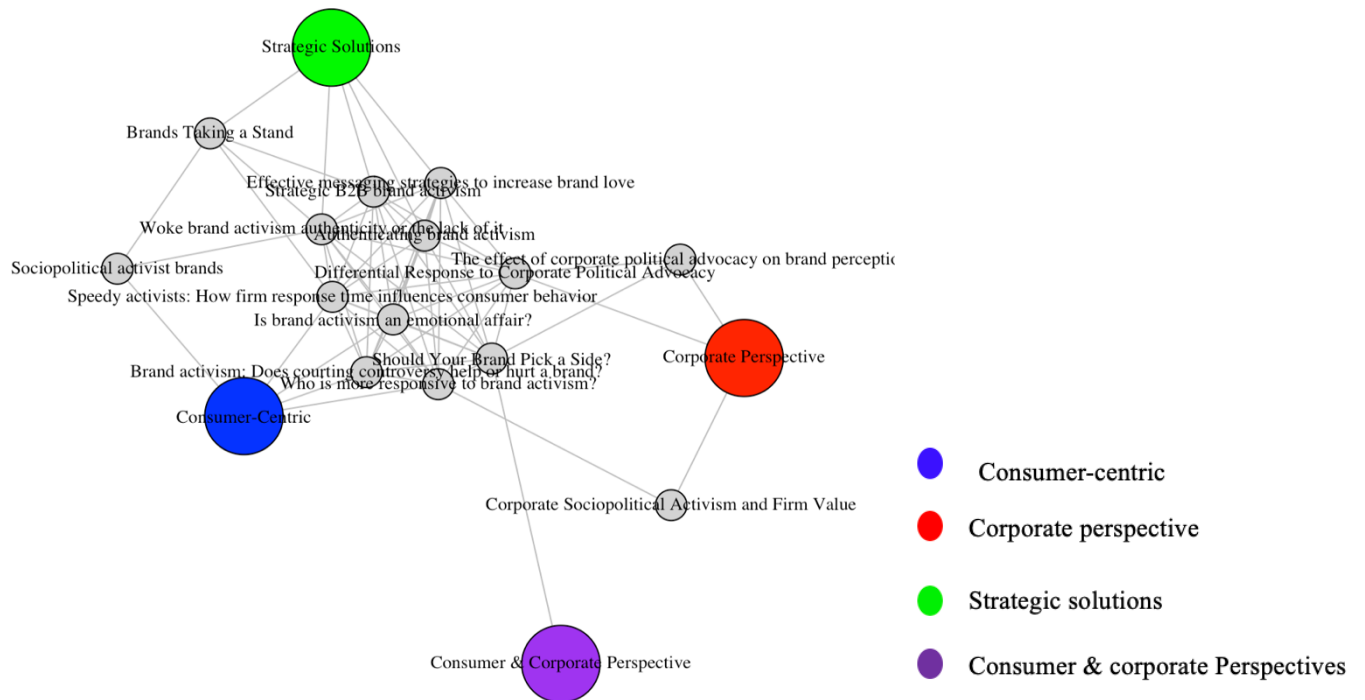
Fig.14
Thematic map of selected papers and Keyword connections

Tabel.10.
List of papers in each thematic group

Group	Group purpose	NP	Author (Year)	Papers
Consumer-Centric	Focuses on consumer reactions (emotional and intentional) to brand's CSA	5	Wannow, et al., (2024)	Is brand activism an emotional affair? The role of moral emotions in consumer responses to brand activism
			Haupt et al., (2023)	Who is more responsive to brand activism? The role of consumer-brand identification and political ideology in consumer responses to activist brand messages
			Nam et al., (2023)	Speedy activists: How firm response time to sociopolitical events influences consumer behavior
			Schmidt et al., (2022)	Sociopolitical activist brands
			Mukherjee & Althuizen (2020)	Brand activism: Does courting controversy help or hurt a brand?
Corporate Perspective	Focus on CSA impact on organizational performance, reputation, and stakeholders	3	Weber et al., (2023)	Differential Response to Corporate Political Advocacy and Corporate Social Responsibility: Implications for Political Polarization and Radicalization
			Klostermann et al., (2022)	The effect of corporate political advocacy on brand perception: an event study analysis

			Bhagwat et al., (2020)	Corporate Sociopolitical Activism and Firm Value
Strategic Solutions	Provides frameworks and strategies for brands engaging in CSA	5	Kapitan et al., (2022)	Strategic B2B brand activism: Building conscientious purpose for social impact
			Sibai et al., (2021)	Differential Response to Corporate Political Advocacy and Corporate Social Responsibility: Implications for Political Polarization and Radicalization
			Vredenburg et al., (2020)	Brands Taking a Stand: Authentic Brand Activism or Woke Washing?
			Mirzaei et al., (2022)	Woke brand activism authenticity or the lack of it
			Ahmad et al., (2022)	Effective messaging strategies to increase brand love for sociopolitical activist brands
Consumer & corporate perspectiv	Focus on individual and market level impacts simultaneously	1	Hydock et al., (2020)	Should Your Brand Pick a Side? How Market Share Determines the Impact of Corporate Political Advocacy

NP. Number of papers

Table 11.
Details of papers in consumer-centric group

Study	Theory	Methods	Key Findings	DV
Mukherjee & Althuizen (2020)	Moral Foundations Theory	Online experiments	Asymmetric effects of brand activism; moral decoupling reduces backlash; apologies exacerbate negative reactions	Consumer attitudes, intentions, and behavior
Nam et al. (2023)		Online experiments and data scrapping from Instagram	Fast responses enhance authenticity and purchase intention	Perceived authenticity, Willingness to purchase
Haupt et al. (2023)	Social Identity Theory	Survey and experiments	CBI buffers negative impacts; political ideology shapes reactions; conservatives show stability	Brand attitudes, WoM
Wannow et al. (2023)	Cognitive Appraisal Theory	Survey and experiments	Moral emotions mediate responses; moral alignment drives positive advocacy	Brand attitudes, Issue advocacy
Schmidt et al. (2021)	Self-identity Theory	Mixed methods: focus groups, surveys, and experiments	Demographic differences (e.g., gender) shape responses; long-term alignment is vital	Product usage

Table 12.
Details of papers in corporate perspective group

| Study	Theory	Methods	Key Findings	DV
Bhagwat et al., (2020)	Signaling theory/ Screening theory	Event study methodology/ Survey	CSA generally elicits negative investor reactions CEO-led or high-visibility CSA increases risks.	Abnormal stock returns

| Klostermann et al., (2022) | | Regression analysis of 106 CPA events | CPA has a negative effect on corporate outcomes, particularly from existing customers. High-effort CPA amplifies negative outcomes; collaborative CPA mitigates them. | Reputational risks by CPA, focusing on its negative impact on brand perception |
| Weber et al., (2023) | Value-match theory | Semantic analysis/ Experimental design | CPA elicits stronger negative and polarized reactions | Brand perception and social media sentiment |

CPA. Corporate Political Advocacy

Table 13.
Details of papers in strategy solutions group

Study	Theory	Methods	Key Findings	DV
Kapitan et al. (2023)	Institutional Theory, Stakeholder Theory	Qualitative Phenomenology: 15 semi-structured interviews	B2B Brand Activism enhances differentiation and legitimacy but depends on stakeholder alignment and value congruence	Stakeholder Trust, Supply Chain Legitimacy
Sibai et al. (2020)		Comparative Case Study: 18 brands	Successful activism requires moral competency (sensitivity, vision, integration)	Stakeholder Perception, Moral Competency, Consumer Trust
Vredenburg et al. (2020)		Qualitative: Case studies, reports	Authentic activism requires alignment between brand purpose and actions. Proposed typology: authentic, silent, inauthentic (woke-washing), and absent activism	Perceived Authenticity, Brand Equity
Mirzaei et al. (2022)	Costly Signaling Theory, Self-identity Theory	Content Analysis	Introduced Woke Activism Authenticity Framework (WAAF)	Perceived Authenticity, Consumer Trust
Ahmad et al. (2022)		Exploratory and experimental studies	Hope-framed messages and non-financial commitments most effectively enhance authenticity and brand love	Perceived Authenticity, Brand Love

Fig. 15.

Distribution of outcomes across thematic groups
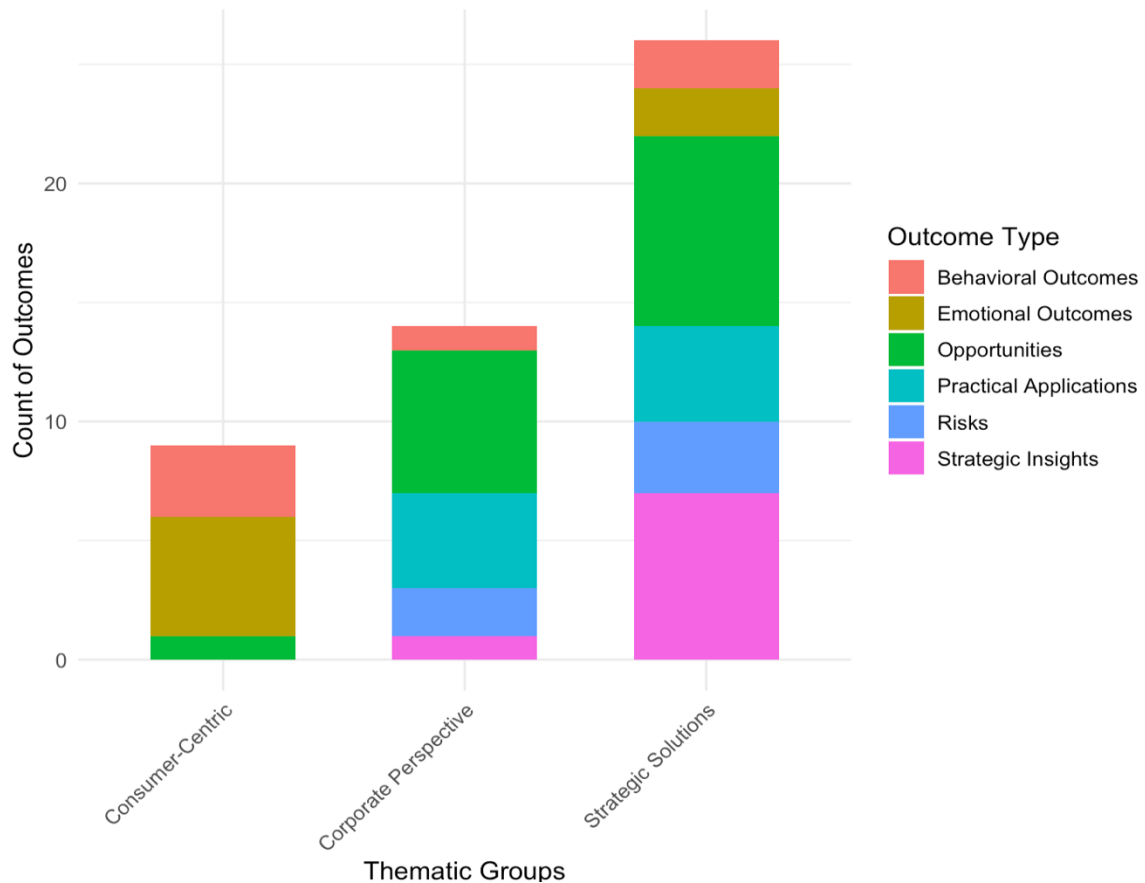
Behavioral Outcomes: Findings or discussions about actions, decisions, or consumer behaviors (e.g., WoM, purchasing or advocacy behavior, etc.).
Emotional Outcomes: Insights into how consumers feel in response to CSA
Opportunities: Benefits and advantages identified for brands or stakeholders
Practical Applications: Specific actionable strategies or frameworks suggested.
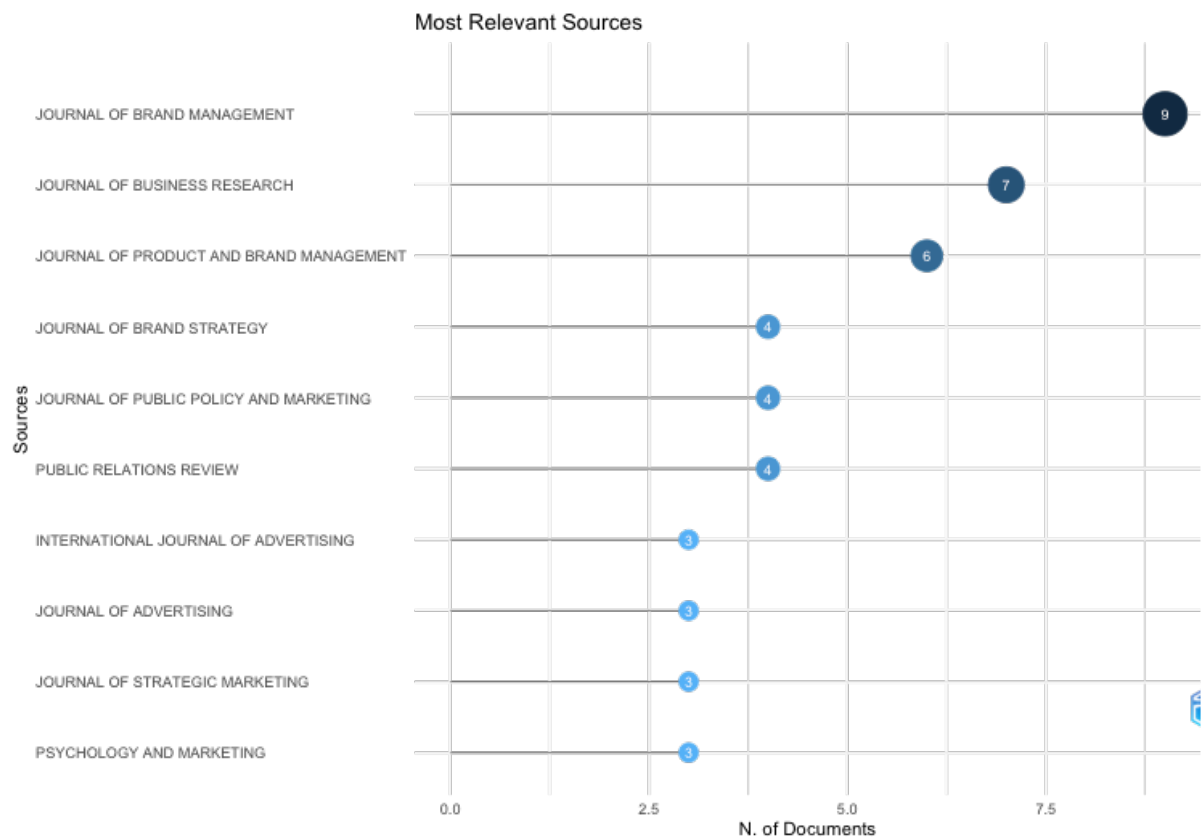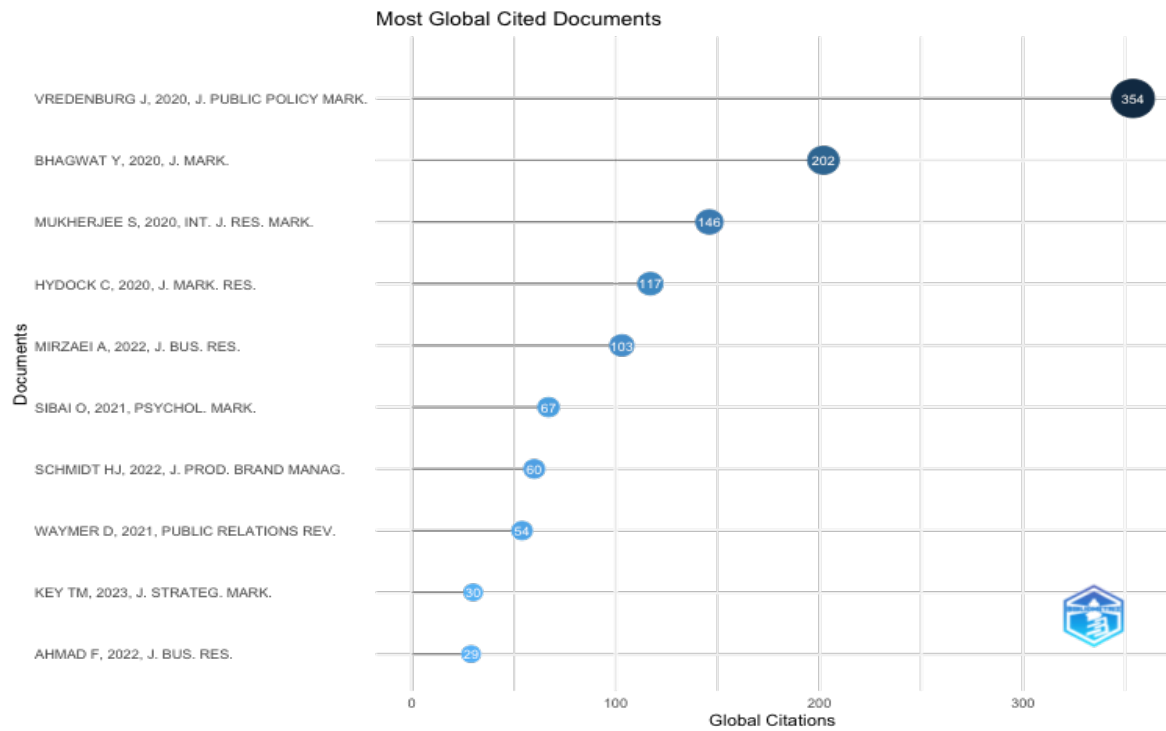**Risks**: Potential challenges or drawbacks highlighted
Strategic Insights: Long-term recommendations or theoretical contributions
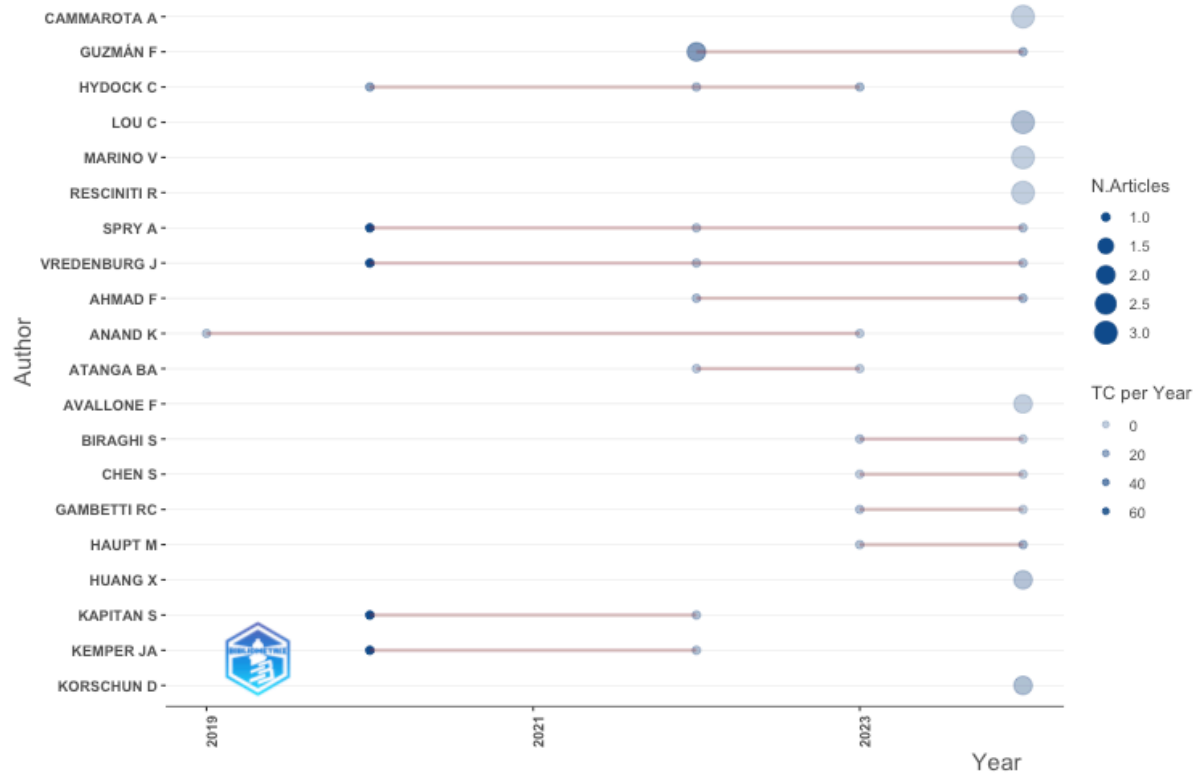
Table 14.

Future research directions to study CSA

Theme	Future research Questions
Emotional Mechanisms in Consumer Responses	How do self-conscious emotions like pride and guilt mediate consumer reactions to CSA? (Wannow et al., 2023)
	How do moral emotions (e.g., anger, contempt, gratitude) shape consumer responses to CSA? (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020)
	How do emotional responses vary based on agreement or disagreement with a brand's sociopolitical stance? (Haupt et al., 2023)
	How do emotional reactions to CSA evolve over time?
	What is the moderation role of emotions like anger, hope, or frustration in CSA outcomes?
Psychological and Cognitive Mechanisms	How do psychological mechanisms like moral decoupling and rationalization mediate the effects of CSA on consumer attitudes? (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020)
	How does consumer-brand identification influence consumer reactions to CSA? (Haupt et al., 2023)
	How does brand attachment shape consumer loyalty during disagreements with a brand's sociopolitical stance? (Wannow et al., 2023)

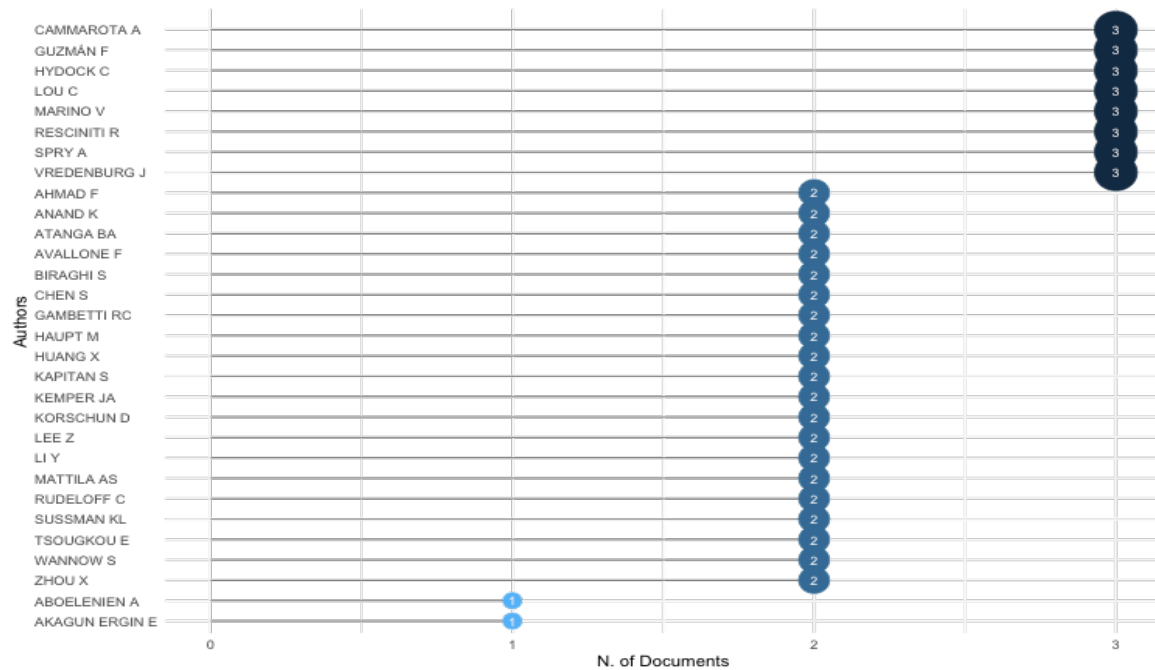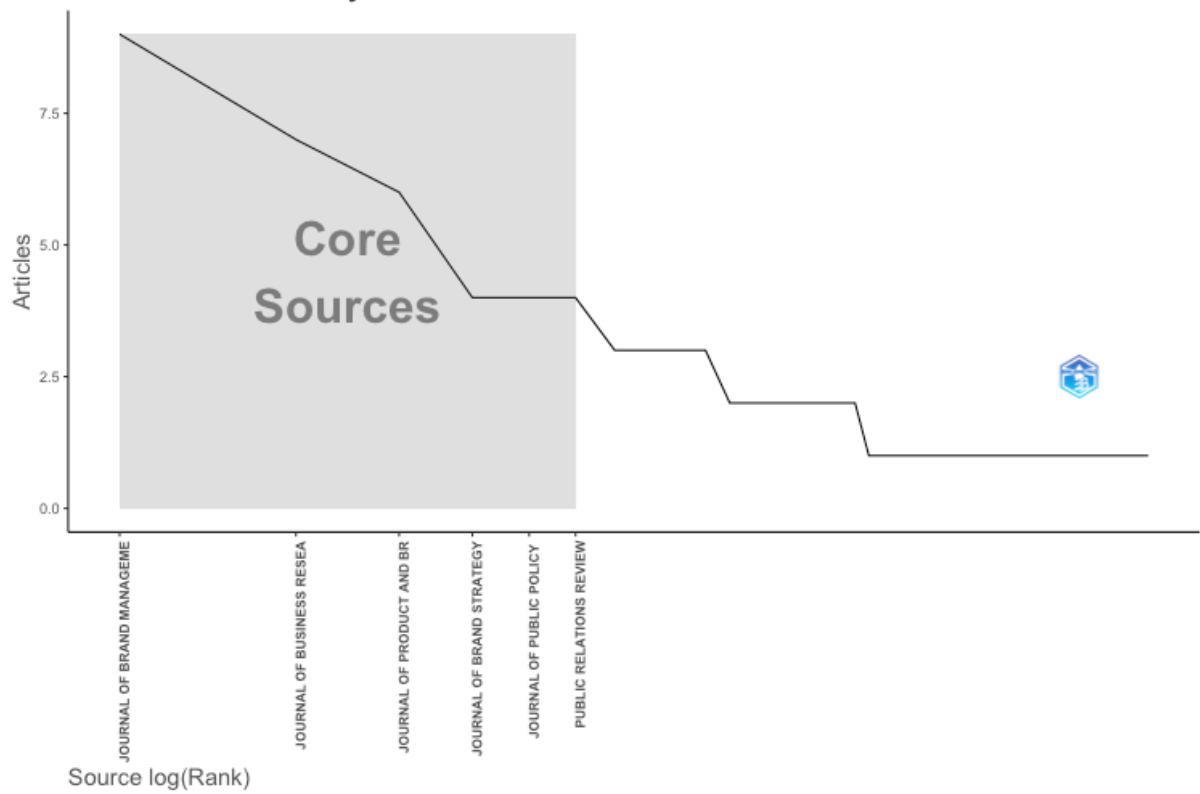|	
Brand Characteristics and Industry-Specific Effects	How do product and corporate brands differ in their outcomes from engaging in sociopolitical activism? (Schmidt et al., 2021)
	What differences in CSA effectiveness do industry and product category make? (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020)
	How do brand size and market share moderate consumer responses to CSA? (Wannow et al., 2023; Hydock et al.,2020)
Motivations and Strategic Approaches to CSA	What are the drivers of CSA by brands-strategic positioning or bandwagon behavior? (Klostermann et al., 2022)
	How can companies strategically use CSA to minimize negative consequences and maximize positive ones? (Bhagwat et al., 2020)
	What is the overlap between CSR/CSA and conventional marketing activities? (Weber et al., 2023)
Operationalizing and Measuring Authenticity	How can the dimensions of woke activism authenticity-e.g., social context independency, inclusion, sacrifice-be measured quantitatively? (Mirzaei et al., 2022)
	How could the dimensions of woke activism authenticity-in be quantified while embracing a dynamic framework that allows for cultural adaptability and change over time rather than static measures?
	At what level does an optimum balance of congruence and incongruence exist in CSA that achieves authenticity? (Vredenburg et al., 2020)
	How do moral vision and integration help facilitate authentic brand activism across various sociopolitical contexts? (Sibai et al., 2020)
	How and over what timeframe do various stakeholder constituencies assess the authenticity of CSA, and under what conditions do its manifestations remain authentic during sustained campaigns of CSA? (Hydock et al., 2020)
	How do perceptions of authenticity change among various stakeholder groups across time, and what forces lead to these changes in long CSA campaigns?
Cultural and Demographic Variations	How do cultural differences impact stakeholder perceptions of CSA and authenticity? (Ahmad et al., 2022; Mirzaei et al., 2022)
	How do localized sociopolitical values of consumers and cultural context shape consumer perceptions of CSA authenticity?
	How do different demographic segments respond to financial, non-financial, and rhetorical CSA commitments? (Ahmad et al., 2022)
	What are the cultural drivers of controversial CSA's success or backlash? (Sibai et al., 2020; Hydock et al., 2020)
	How do sociopolitical contexts shape consumer reactions to CSA in various global markets? (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020)
	What are the differences in the emotional and behavioral consumer responses from the collectivist vs. individualist societies to the CSA?
Long-Term Impacts and Risks	What are the longitudinal impacts of CSA on brand equity, consumer behavior, and social norms? (Ahmad et al., 2022; Sibai et al., 2020)
	How might longitudinal studies examine internal and external measures of success for CSA campaigns? (Vredenburg et al., 2020)
	To what extent does long-term activism messaging impact the market-positioning and consumer-trusting ability? (Sibai et al., 2020; Wannow et al.,2023)
	How does long-term CSA impact brand loyalty and market positioning over the long term? (Hydock et al., 2020)
Stakeholder and Industry-Specific Effects	How might stakeholder cooperation help improve the effectiveness of CSA? (Kapitan et al., 2023)
	How do CSA strategies differ in their effectiveness across industries? (Ahmad et al., 2022)
	How does CSA influence internal stakeholders, such as employees, and external stakeholders, such as customers? (Sibai et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2021)
Communication and Message Framing	How do hope-framed and frustration-framed messages affect brand authenticity and consumer attachment? (Ahmad et al., 2022)
	How can brands tailor CSA messages to meet platform-specific norms and audience expectations?
	How can brands balance commercial objectives with authentic activism messaging? (Vredenburg et al., 2020)
	What are the communication strategies that can mitigate backlash during sociopolitical controversies? (Sibai et al., 2020; Klostermann et al., 2022)

Appendix

Most Global Cited Documents

Documents	Global Citations
VREDENBURG J, 2020, J. PUBLIC POLICY MARK.	354
BHAGWAT Y, 2020, J. MARK.	202
MUKHERJEE S, 2020, INT. J. RES. MARK.	146
HYDOCK C, 2020, J. MARK. RES.	117
MIRZAEI A, 2022, J. BUS. RES.	103
SIBAI O, 2021, PSYCHOL. MARK.	67
SCHMIDT HJ, 2022, J. PROD. BRAND MANAG.	60
WAYMER D, 2021, PUBLIC RELATIONS REV.	54
KEY TM, 2023, J. STRATEG. MARK.	30
AHMAD F, 2022, J. BUS. RES.	29

Most Relevant Sources

| Sources	N. of Documents
JOURNAL OF BRAND MANAGEMENT	9
JOURNAL OF BUSINESS RESEARCH	7
JOURNAL OF PRODUCT AND BRAND MANAGEMENT	6
JOURNAL OF BRAND STRATEGY	4
JOURNAL OF PUBLIC POLICY AND MARKETING	4
PUBLIC RELATIONS REVIEW	4
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING	3
JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING	3
JOURNAL OF STRATEGIC MARKETING	3
PSYCHOLOGY AND MARKETING	3

Authors' Production over Time
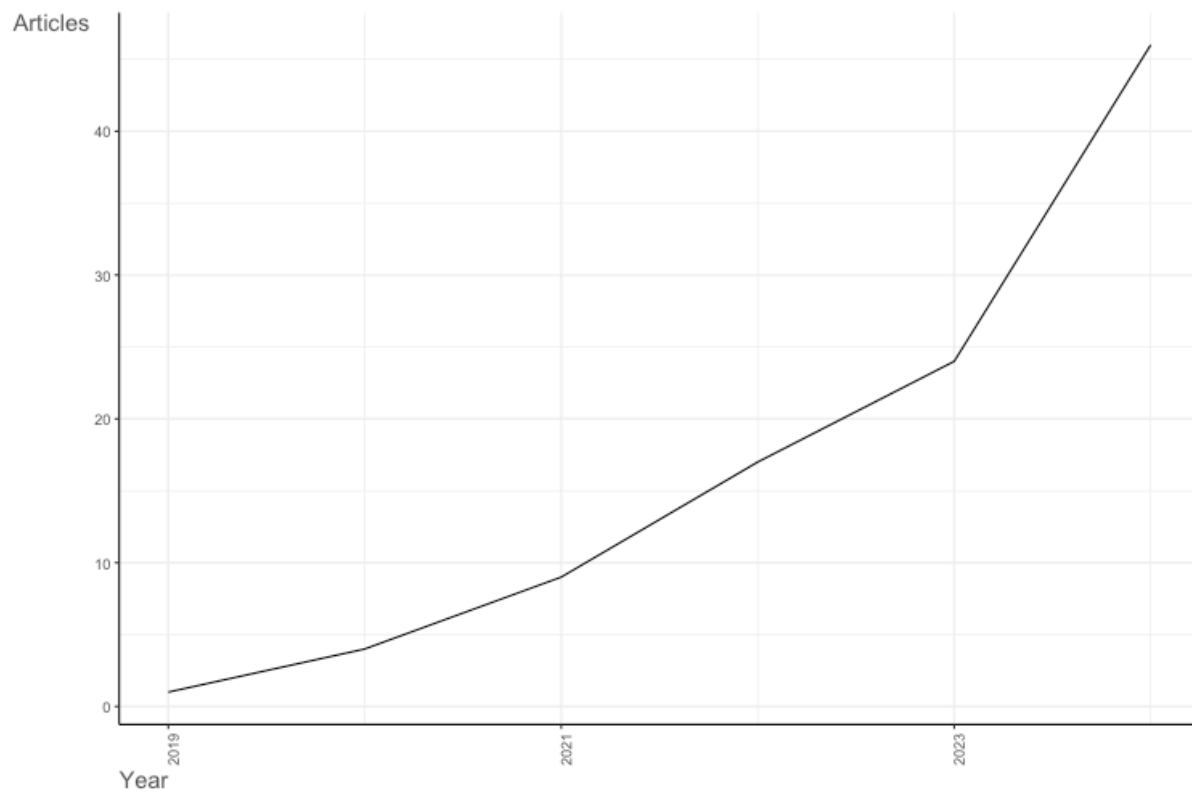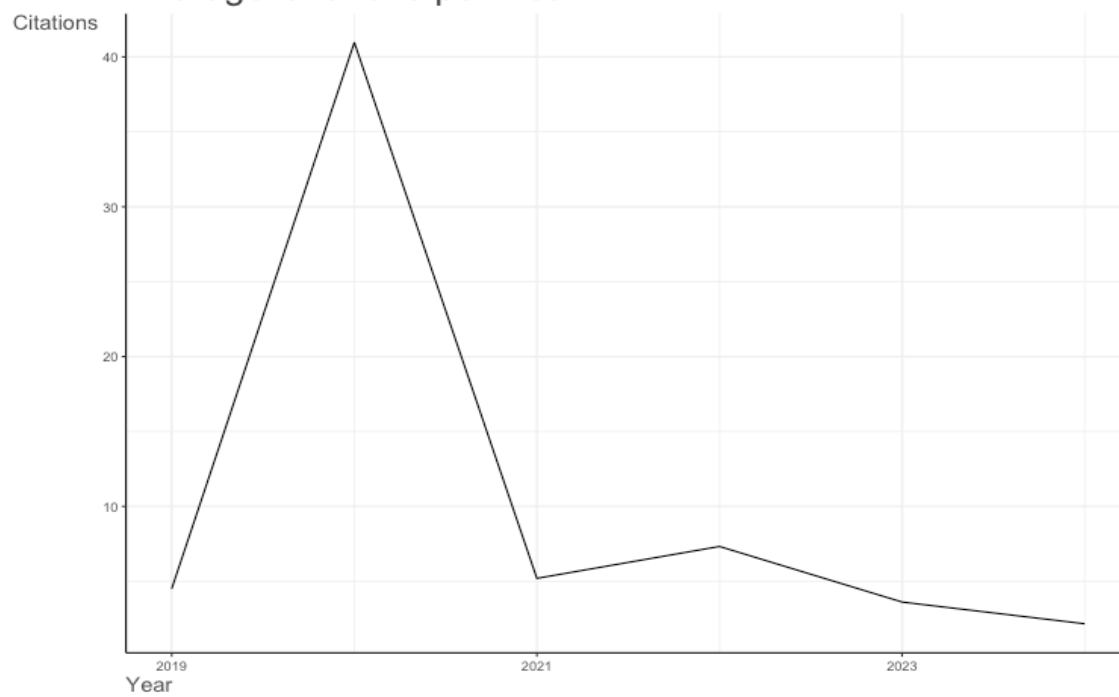

Most Relevant Authors

Core Sources by Bradford's Law
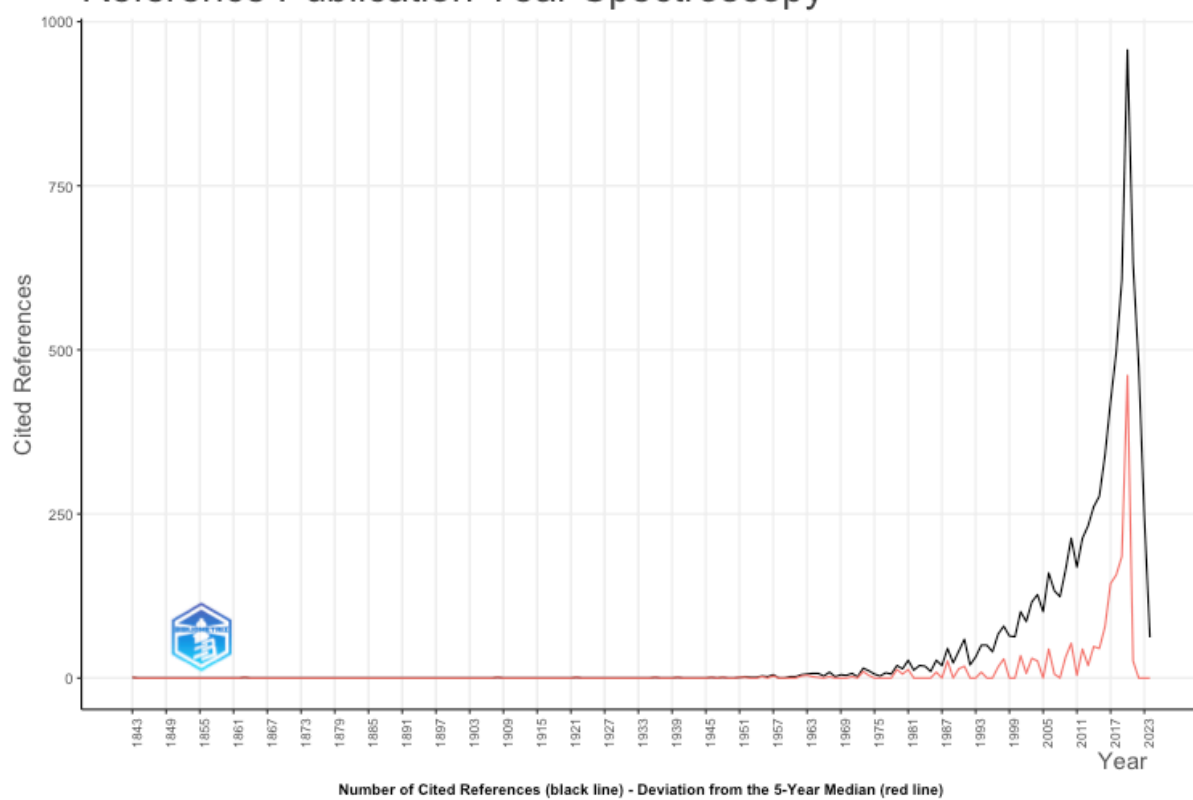

Sources' Production over Time
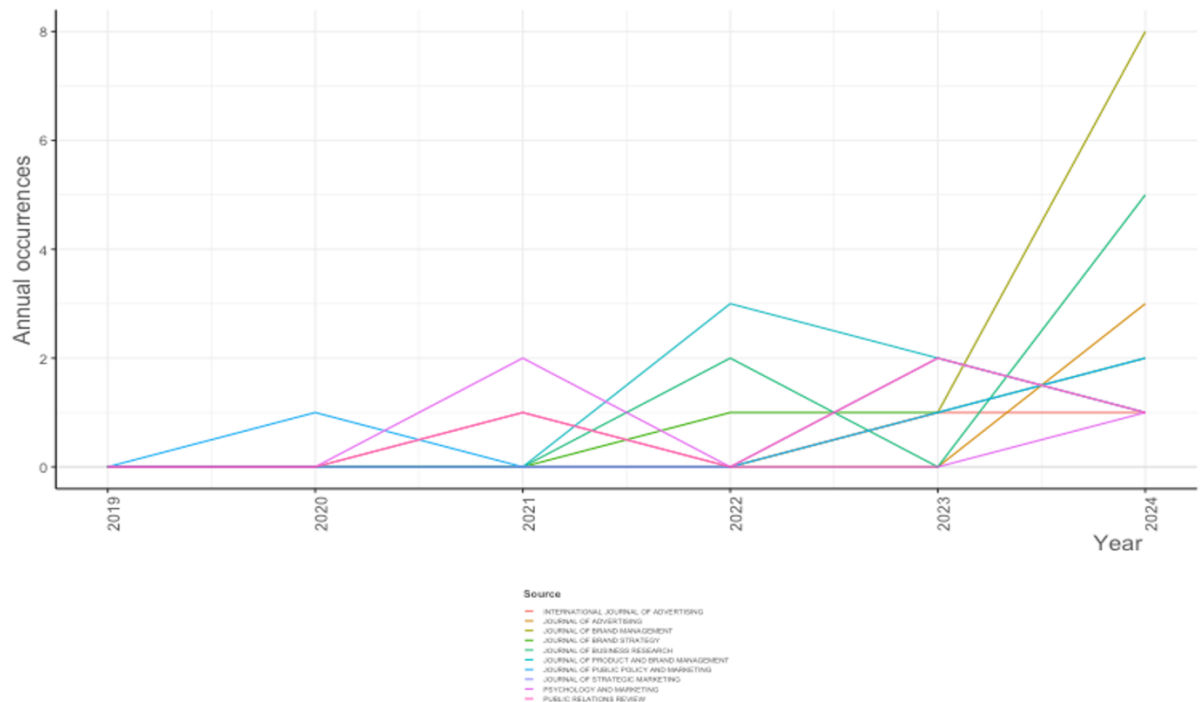
Annual Scientific Production

Average Citations per Year

Reference Publication Year Spectroscopy

Number of Cited References (black line) - Deviation from the 5-Year Median (red line)

Chapter Three

How Does Corporate Sociopolitical Activism (CSA) Affect Consumers' Purchase Intention? A Self-congruity Perspective

Abstract

A growing number of brands are publicly addressing controversial sociopolitical issues, recognizing that silence may be perceived as negligence or implicit support. This paper applies self-congruity theory to investigate the effect of mis/aligned Corporate Sociopolitical Activism (CSA) on purchase intention, considering the moderating role of a brand's CSA motivations (public-serving vs. self-serving). Based on this theoretical lens, the psychological mechanism suggests that consumer-brand identification (CBI) and self-enhancement (SE) can increase purchase intention. Findings from two online surveys involving real and fictitious brands in the context of abortion rights demonstrate that alignment between a brand's sociopolitical stance and consumer values significantly boosts purchase intention. Consumer alignment with the brand's CSA increased CBI when perceived as a commitment to public betterment rather than self-serving motives. By implying a new theoretical lens, introducing self-enhancement as a novel mediator, and exploring the CSA motivations impact, this study sheds light on the CSA literature gaps regarding the aligned and misaligned CSA effect on purchase intention from a psychological perspective and offers insights for better understanding this phenomenon.

Keywords: Corporate sociopolitical activism, consumer-brand identification, self-enhancement, purchase intention

1. Introduction

An increasing number of brands publicly speak up and actively participate in the discourse surrounding controversial and critical sociopolitical issues such as gun control, immigration policies, LGBTQ+ rights, and abortion rights (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021; Kotler & Lee, 2005; Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). As an illustration, consider Calvin Klein's "Mother's Day" campaign featuring a pregnant transgender man (to support the LGBTQ+ community), Gillette's campaign on "Toxic Masculinity" (encouraged by the #MeToo movement), and Starbucks's campaign on "Race Together" (intended to elevate racial understanding).

This corporate participation in polarizing sociopolitical debates is defined as Corporate Sociopolitical Activism (CSA): "a firm's public demonstration (statements and/or actions) of support for or opposition to one side of a partisan sociopolitical issue" (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p.1). The controversial nature of these sociopolitical topics is why brands, until recently, have been reluctant to address them for fear of losing part of their customers. Initially, brands' sociopolitical positions were spontaneous and perceived as unconventional (Ketron et al., 2022). Over time, consumer expectations evolved, and brands realized that silence might be perceived as negligence or condoning unjust sociopolitical dynamics. This is supported by findings from Porter Novelli (2021), which reveal that 59% of Americans believe corporate silence is no longer acceptable.

Consequently, the inherently contentious nature of CSA often sparks controversy and brings divisive public responses from consumers (Ciszek & Logan, 2018). Therefore, exploring how CSA influences consumer behavior and purchase intentions is imperative. This exploration underscores the necessity for brands to consider the associated brand-related benefits and costs alongside evaluating the societal advantages.

Literature about consumers' responses to CSA is still evolving and provides opposite results: On the one hand, scholars suggest a positive impact of CSA on consumers' response, claiming CSA increases consumers' purchase intention, particularly when consumers agree with the brands' stance (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Korschun et al., 2019), on the other hand, other research revealed that CSA has no significant impact on consumers who agree, while it negatively affects those who disagree with a brand's stand (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2018). Moreover, Haupt et al. (2023) have also identified that when consumers agree with a brand's stance, brand activism has no direct or interactive effects on responses.

Given these contradictory findings, this work aims to shed light on this unclear picture by relying on the self-congruity theory to investigate the psychological mechanism influencing

consumers' decisions to reward and support (buy) a brand engaged in CSA. This is achieved through the innovative integration of consumer-brand identification, self-enhancement, and CSA motivation, which promote our understanding of the CSA phenomenon.

Through two cross-sectional surveys exploring both a real and a fictitious brand, the present research makes meaningful contributions to the literature on CSA. First, this study employs a self-congruity lens to explore how the congruence between consumer perceptions of CSA brands and their actual and ideal self-concept provides a psychological framework and sheds new light on CSA's impacts on purchase intention. This psychological mechanism reveals that achieving congruency in the case of consumer alignment with a brand's CSA stance can reinforce consumer-brand identification (CBI) and self-enhancement (SE) and a boosted tendency to purchase. Introducing self-enhancement as a new mediator in CSA literature is the second contribution of this study, which demonstrates that alignment with CSA initiatives provides an opportunity for consumers to express their ideal selves and causes elevated purchase intention. Finally, the present study investigates the moderating role of brands' CSA motivation (public-serving vs. self-serving) in framing consumers' perceptions and behavior, showing that consumers prefer to identify with brands that engage in CSA for the public good.

2. Corporate Sociopolitical Activism

Scholars have defined CSA with overlapping meanings conveyed through varying terminology (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020; Kotler & Sarkar, 2017; Moorman, 2020). For instance, it has been conceptualized as a purpose- and values-driven strategy (Vredenburg et al., 2020), a strategic branding move (Schmidt et al., 2021), an integral aspect of transformative branding (Spry et al., 2021), and an evolution of CSR (Kotler et al., 2021). In light of previous definitions, CSA can be broadly construed as "a firm's public demonstration (statements and/or actions) of support for or opposition to one side of a partisan sociopolitical issue" (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 1).

Scholars have widely studied the impacts of CSA on brand-related outcomes, consumer behavior, and purchase intention (see Table 1 for an overview of previous studies). Regarding the CSA impact on brand, Lee et al. (2023) found a direct and positive effect of non-profit brand activism on brand bravery. This study further elaborates that the negative impact of such activism on brand equity is reduced in the presence of both brand bravery and brand hypocrisy. Through a scenario-based experiment, Wannow et al. (2023) highlight that consumer alignment with a brand's stance positively influences brand attitude. Additionally, Hydock et al. (2020)

clarify the individual-level effects of engaging in corporate political advocacy, which can increase the likelihood of brand choice when consumers agree with brands' stances but decrease when they disagree.

Regarding more direct consumer behavior, Schmidt et al. (2021) show that consumers prefer to use products from politically conscious brands rather than non-politically conscious brands. Moreover, Zhou and Dong (2022) highlight that the consistency between a company's stance and actions in corporate social advocacy is essential, and it can decrease negative consumer responses such as negative word-of-mouth and boycott intentions. Furthermore, Garg and Saluja (2022) show that brand activism positively influences consumer attitudes and willingness to pay based on their political ideology. Their findings reveal that liberal consumers are more willing to pay when a brand engages in activism than when it remains silent on issues.

Despite these findings on the brand- and consumer-related effects of CSA, we take a closer look at how CSA explicitly influences purchase intention. Accordingly, we seek to answer the question: *How do aligned and misaligned CSA affect consumers' purchase intention?*

- Insert Table 1 here –

3. Self-congruity Theory

In this study, we rely on self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1982), which refers to the match between a brand image and an individual's self-concept (or self-image) (Sirgy & Su, 2000), where the self-concept is the entirety of the individual's beliefs and feelings about themselves encompassing both subjective and objective aspects (Malhotra, 1988). According to the self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1982), consumers will likely prefer products/brands that are perceived as having an image similar to the self-concept of the individual (Graeff, 1997; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Landon, 1974). This cognitive matching between value-expressive attributes of a product or brand and consumer self-concept (Sirgy et al., 1991) enables individuals to strengthen their self-concept by purchasing or associating with brands that reflect aspects of themselves (Belk, 1988). Therefore, consumers increasingly use their purchasing power to endorse brands that reflect their values while avoiding those that do not align with their beliefs (Amed et al., 2019).

According to self-congruity theory, people's self-concept has two components: actual self-concept and ideal self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). The actual self-concept refers to how a person perceives themselves, whereas the ideal self-concept refers to how they would like to perceive

themselves (Sirgy, 1982). People are motivated to close the gap between who they are now (their current self) and who they want to be (their ideal self). Brands contribute significantly to this by offering products or services that help consumers to feel closer to their ideal selves.

Notably, a brand's stand on a controversial sociopolitical issue mirrors the values of the brand (Vredenburg et al., 2020), and it can provide consumers an opportunity to assess the congruence between the self and brand values. Based on Iyengar and Westwood (2014), people correlate their political beliefs with their identities, and consumers should identify with politically aligned brands. Brand political attitudes reinforce political identities, amplifying their influence on consumer decisions and prompting individuals to openly manifest their political allegiance through their purchasing behavior (Weber et al., 2021). When consumers feel that a brand's CSA views align with their own sociopolitical values (aligned CSA), this creates a feeling of self-congruity, which not only strengthens their connection to the brand through the actual self-concept but also satisfies consumers' ideal self-concept by allowing them to express their self-concepts and values through their brand affiliation.

Grounded in this theoretical framework, the present study proposes that CSA alignment affects consumers' purchase intention through two psychological mechanisms, including consumer-brand identification and self-enhancement. Furthermore, the motivations behind the brands' activism efforts (public-serving or self-serving) may moderate these relationships by weakening or amplifying the consumers' sense of self-congruity. In the next section, we develop hypotheses based on this theoretical lens.

4. Hypothesis Development

4.1. From aligned/misaligned CSA to purchase intention

Some prior studies have investigated consumer responses to CSA deeper, particularly focusing on purchase intention. For example, Korschun et al. (2019) conducted a field study and two experiments to examine the impact of a company's political stand on unplanned purchase and purchase intention. The field study reveals that consumer response to a company's political stand changed depending on the company's intended image. Remarkably, their experiment findings showed that the relationship between a company's political stand and purchase intention is mediated through the perceptions of corporate hypocrisy, with consumers' different political stand interpretations regarding the company's self-described image. Their findings suggest that consumers prefer consistency between a company's intended image and political stances, subsequently affecting purchase intention. Dodd and Supa (2015) also examine how corporate social advocacy impacts consumer purchase intention in the context of

same-sex marriage. Their findings state that when consumers' and organizations' beliefs are similar, organizations' CSA efforts positively influence purchase intention. For instance, when consumers have an anti-stance on same-sex marriage consistent with the organization's stance, purchasing intention is notably high. On the other hand, Mukherjee and Althuizen (2018), by investigating the impact of brand activism on consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions, show that when consumers disagree with the brand's stance, behavioral intentions significantly decrease. Meanwhile, for the supportive consumers, brand activism has no significant effect on behavioral intentions. Additionally, Haupt et al. (2023) highlighted that brand activism has no direct or interactive impact on the consumers' responses when they agree with the brand's stance.

Summarizing the previous findings on the effect of CSA on purchase intention shows some of these studies present the positive influence of CSA on purchase intention, mainly when consumers agree with the brands' stance (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Korschun et al., 2019). However, other studies uncover contrasting findings, stating that CSA has no significant impact on consumers who agree with the brand's position on the controversial issue and negatively impacts those who disagree (Haupt et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2018). These inconsistency in findings encourage further investigations into how CSA impact purchase intentions in different alignment contexts.

To do so, we first seek to understand how CSA exerts a direct influence on purchase intention in our study context. Given that alignment between a brand's sociopolitical stance and consumer values often leads to positive responses (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Korschun et al., 2019), we expect that when consumers perceive high alignment, they will be more likely to purchase, whereas misalignment could decrease purchase intentions. Based on these considerations, we hypothesized:

H1: Aligned (misaligned) CSA will increase (decrease) purchase intention.

After establishing the direct effect of CSA on purchase intention, we further investigate indirect pathways, introducing psychological mechanisms based on self-congruity theory to explain how the congruence between consumers' actual and ideal self-concepts with their perceptions of brands' CSA actions can impact their purchase intention, particularly in cases where consumers feel aligned or misaligned with CSA. This approach sheds light on the results observed in the literature from this psychological standpoint and provides a thorough

explanation of how CSA affects consumer purchase intention through consumer-brand identification and self-enhancement.

4.2 From aligned/misaligned CSA to Consumer-brand identification and Purchase Intention

Building on the self-congruity theory outlined above, we propose that when consumers perceive identity overlaps and strong connections between themselves and the brand (aligned CSA), they will likely experience a sense of psychological connection to the brand. This value alignment strengthens Consumer-Brand Identification (CBI), which defines a consumer's psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing belonging to a brand (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). According to Kim et al. (2001, p. 196), CBI reflects the extent to which a brand expresses and enhances consumers' identity, and it refers to the degree of overlap between an individual's self-concept and the image s/he holds for a brand (Carlson et al., 2008). Conversely, if consumers and brands have different sociopolitical values, indicating low congruency (misaligned CSA), it would cause lower consumer-brand identification and marketing outcomes such as purchase intention.

Previous research on CBI has demonstrated it to be a strong predictor of consumer behaviors such as repurchase intention and word-of-mouth (WOM) (Donavan et al., 2006; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008). Recognizing the significance of CBI in shaping consumer behavior, prior research has explored its mediating and moderating role within the CSA context (Haupt et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2018; Wannow et al., 2023). The former was analyzed regarding the negative effect of consumer-brand disagreement on consumer attitude, intention, and behavior, with CBI found to mediate this adverse effect (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2018). The latter, the moderating role of CBI, underscores that robust CBI could mitigate the adverse impact of consumer-brand disagreement on brand attitude change and word-of-mouth (Haupt et al., 2023; Wannow et al., 2023). In this paper, we extend these findings and investigate whether CBI mediates the relationship between the mis/aligned CSA and purchase intention. Based on these considerations, we hypothesized:

H2: Aligned (misaligned) CSA positively (negatively) influences consumer-brand identification.

H3: Consumer-brand identification positively affects purchase intention.

H4: Consumer-brand identification mediates the relationship between aligned (misaligned) CSA and purchase intention.

4.3 From aligned/misaligned CSA to Self-enhancement and Purchase Intention

Self-congruity theory posits that individuals are motivated to express aspects of their self-concept, not only to maintain self-consistency but also to project an idealized version of themselves (Sirgy, 1982). The literature addressing the ideal self commonly refers to self-enhancement, namely: "the degree to which a person values goals and ideals that are directly linked with self" (Schultz & Zelezny, 1999, p. 263). Self-enhancement, therefore, holds that people associate themselves with entities that match their identity to create and maintain a positive self-image (Wojnicki & Godes, 2008). Aguirre-Rodriguez et al. (2012) conceptualized self-enhancement as the motivation to seek brands congruent with the ideal self-concept, thus allowing one to aspire to achieve an ideal sense of self. This process occurs because the need for self-enhancement is gratified when an individual pursues favorable self-knowledge or experiences that improve and further a self-concept (Berger, 2014; Wien & Olsen, 2014). Consumers reinforce a sense of self by using possessions and consuming favorable products and brands (Belk, 1988; Kleine et al., 1995; McCracken, 1986). Therefore, consumers who desire self-enhancement tend to purchase, use, and publicly display products/services that enhance their self-concepts by transferring symbolic meanings to themselves and to their significant others (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). The fundamental assumption is that the greater the incongruence between the actual and ideal self-concept, the more likely consumers will buy brands whose images align with their aspired self-concept.

In the context of CSA, when a brand publicly expresses its stance on a sociopolitical issue, consumers who align with that stance may interpret the brand as an extension of their ideal self, assisting the consumer to express their ideal self to others and reinforcing their self-image internally. This alignment confirms that consumers become better people in their own eyes and the eyes of others. Consequently, when consumers perceive the brand's CSA to align with their values, purchase intention is increased by enhanced self-enhancement motive. Contrarily, if the brand's CSA does not align with the consumer's values, it will fail to boost the consumer's ideal self. In fact, it can threaten the consumer's perceived identity, decrease self-enhancement, and negatively influence purchase intentions.

Formally stated:

H5: Aligned (misaligned) CSA positively (negatively) influences self-enhancement.

H6: Self-enhancement positively affects purchase intention.

H7: Self-enhancement mediates the relationship between aligned (misaligned) CSA and purchase intention.

4.4. The role of CSA motivation as a moderator

Customers are keen to be informed about the good efforts of the companies they engage with, although they often question the underlying motivations behind these actions (Du et al., 2010; Karaosmanoglu et al., 2016). They can be enthusiasts and proactive or skeptical and prudent about why and how brands do social initiatives (Klein & Dawar, 2004). Some consumers are skeptical about brands' claims of social engagement, often referring to them as 'trust washing' or 'woke washing' (Ahmad et al., 2024; WARC, 2021). Hence, suspicion of brand motives may elicit "multiple, plausible rival hypotheses about the motives or genuineness" of the corporation's behaviors in the public's minds (Fein, 1996, p. 165), thereby influencing brand evaluation and subsequent consumer intentions.

More than half of the customers polled in a recent study by WARC (2021) questioned if companies were involved in social issues, suggesting that brands are primarily motivated by their desire to make money (Mirzaei, 2022). In this sense, motivations for engaging in CSA have been dichotomized into self-serving (firm-serving) and public-serving motivations (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). The term "firm-serving motives" describes behavior that is primarily beneficial to the firm and focused on meeting its needs, such as increasing sales and profits. On the other hand, public-serving motivations involve actions that help people outside the company, such as its customers and society. These actions are driven by a genuine desire to contribute positively to the community or address societal issues sincerely. Accordingly, the ultimate goal of firm-serving motivations is to advance the brand's welfare, while public-serving CSA aims to fulfill the company's responsibilities towards society by enhancing overall societal welfare. Generally, consumers perceive firm-serving initiatives negatively, viewing them as opportunistic and selfish, while they regard public-serving motives positively, seeing them as altruistic actions aimed at improving societal welfare (Rim et al., 2016; Samu & Wymer, 2014; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Previous studies suggest that customers respond differently to strategic firm-serving motives than to public-serving activities (Ellen et al., 2006; Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

Building on the self-congruity theory, we propose that brand motivations can significantly moderate the psychological processes underlying consumer responses to CSA. This theory suggests that individuals look for psychological consistency between their self-concept and the symbolic meaning associated with brands (Sirgy, 1982). Customers' opinions about a cause may affect how they react to a specific corporate position in the context of CSA. In particular,

consumers' perception of a brand's CSA initiatives as public-serving can strengthen the sense of self-congruity and reinforce the value alignment experience. Thus, key psychologically driven processes such as consumer-brand identification and self-enhancement will be enhanced. Conversely, if consumers find the brands' activism self-serving, the perception of opportunism can damage the authenticity of the congruence. Consequently, this weakens the psychological connection process, leading to lower consumer-brand identification and self-enhancement levels.

In sum, brand CSA motivation can act as a filter; when CSA motivations align with a consumer's sense of self, it helps them meet their motivational goals, fostering self-brand identification (Chaplin & Roedder John, 2005; Escalas, 2004) and reinforcing a positive self-concept. Based on these considerations, we predict positive-negative modalities of moderation:

H8: Public-serving motivations will strengthen the relationship between the aligned CSA, consumer-brand identification (H8a), and self-enhancement (H8b).

H9: Self-serving motivation will weaken the relationship between aligned CSA and consumer-brand identification (H9a) and self-enhancement (H9b).

Fig.1 presents the theoretical framework of this study.

- Insert Figure 1 here –

5. Methodology

5.1. Overview of the studies

Two studies were conducted to test the proposed hypotheses. Study 1 examines the conceptual model using the real Apple Inc. brand, chosen based on a pre-test with 98 participants (69% female). Study 2 replicates the effect of mis/aligned CSA on consumer purchase intention for a fictitious brand, TechNova. The research context was abortion rights for both studies, as suggested by a pre-test (N=73, 51% female) (see Appendix for pretests, Table B.1 & Table B.2). Data collection for this study was conducted through an online questionnaire composed of closed-ended questions/statements paired with a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. The constructs in our study were measured using pre-developed scales taken from the marketing literature. The list of items

for each construct, including appropriate dimensions and sources, can be found in the Appendix (A.2, Figure A.2, Table A.1).

5.2. Study 1

A total of three hundred and three participants were recruited through Prolific (49.5% Male, M_{age}=39.5) and were exposed to a fictitious pro-life post (previous tweet) attributed to the Apple brand (Sample stimuli can be found in the Appendix, Figure A.1). We excluded those who considered the Apple post entirely unrealistic. The data analysis was conducted on a subset of one hundred fifty-three participants (52% Female, M_{age}=39.5). Notably, performing the analysis before the exclusion of approximately half of the dataset yielded consistent results; the subsequent exclusion was undertaken transparently and in the interest of upholding the integrity of the analysis. Participants were asked to state their level of alignment with Apple's stance on abortion rights (From 1= Strongly misaligned to 7=Strongly aligned). Based on their answers, we labelled the misaligned and aligned CSA (independent variable). Ratings of 1 to 3 were labelled as misaligned (valued as 0), 5 to 7 were aligned (valued as 1), and a rating of 4 was neutral (valued as 0.5). Next, participants were asked to indicate their identification with the brand (a single item adapted from Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Lam et al., 2013; $\alpha = 0.90$), their self-enhancement (7-point Likert scale, eight items adapted from Schultz & Zelezny,1998; $\alpha = 0.95$), CSA motivation type (7-point Likert scale, seven items adapted from Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; $\alpha_{PublicMotive}$=0.90, $\alpha_{SelfMotive}$= 0.92; see Appendix Table A.5, Table A.6, Table A.7, and Table A.8 for factor analysis outputs of these constructs), and purchase intention (7-point Likert scale, three items adapted from Putrevu & Lord, 1994; $\alpha = 0.90$). Finally, they responded to demographic questions, thanked them, and debriefed. All scale items (A.2, Figure A.2, Table A.1) and demographic data (Table A.2) are presented in the Appendix.

5.2.1. Results

The composite reliabilities (CR) of the substantive constructs - self-enhancement, public and self-served motivations, and purchase intention- exceeded 0.70, indicating reliability. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) surpassed 0.50, establishing convergent validity (Hair et al., 2009). The lowest CR was 0.84 (Public-serving motivations), and the minimum AVE was 0.65 (Public-serving motivations). The square roots of the AVEs for the constructs were higher than their inter-construct correlations, indicating discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Moreover, Cronbach's alpha of all scales ranged from 0.90 (CBI &

PI) to 0.95 (SE) and presented satisfactory reliability. Therefore, the measurement model meets all relevant psychometric properties (see Table 2).

- Insert Table 2 here –

Employing a cross-sectional self-reported survey for data collection necessitates examining Common Method Variance (CMV) to detect potential biases in the outcomes (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2012). We followed the procedural and statistical remedies to mitigate the threat of CMV. While designing the questionnaire, we randomized the presentation order of items to minimize the order effects. We took measures to ensure that statements did not imply any preferred response to enhance questionnaire neutrality. Additionally, we improved the clarity of scale items, aiming to reduce respondent confusion. The research instrument was kept as concise as possible to mitigate survey fatigue. Additionally, we ensured the separation of the measurement of predictor and outcome variables. Finally, respondent anonymity was maintained using Prolific Academic's ID system. Subsequently, this study used Harman's one-factor method as a statistical strategy to assess common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). According to this approach, CMV exists if a single factor emerges or one "general" factor explains more than 50% of the covariation among variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Our analysis revealed that a single unrotated factor explained 36.39% of the total variance (see Appendix, Table A.3), which fell below the 50% threshold suggested by Harman's method. Consequently, these findings prove that CMV was not a significant concern in this study.

A mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS 4.2 macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2017, Model 4; bootstrapped with 5000 draws) to investigate the impact of consumer-brand identification and self-enhancement on respondents' alignment with CSA issues with the purchase intention. Based on our findings, aligned CSA can positively influence the purchase intention (effect 0.86, CI95 [0.20, 1.52]), supporting H1. Furthermore, the results indicate the significant effect of aligned CSA on CBI (effect 3.37, CI95 [2.80, 3.93]), supporting H2, as well as a significant effect of CBI on purchase intention (effect 0.38, CI95 [0.22, 0.55]), supporting H3. The results also revealed that aligned CSA has a statistically significant impact on self-enhancement (effect 1.90, CI95 [1.44, 2.36]), supporting H5. Following, self-enhancement impacts purchase intention (effect 0.36, CI95 [0.15, 0.56]), supporting H6. Furthermore, the results show that CBI (effect 1.30, CI95 [0.75, 1.94]) and self-enhancement (effect 0.68, CI95 [0.21, 1.12]) partially mediate the CSA and purchase intention relationship,

supporting H4 and H7, respectively (see Table 3). Finally, we ran a path analysis (see Appendix, Figure A.3) using STATA/SE 18, the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method, to ensure the robustness of our findings. This analysis validated the consistency of our results concerning the hypotheses (see Table 3, coefficient column).

- Insert Table 3 here -

To examine the moderation role of CSA motivation on the mis/aligned CSA-Consumer-brand identification and mis/aligned CSA-Self-enhancement relationships, a moderation analysis using PROCESS SPSS 4.2 macro (Hayes, 2017, Model 2; bootstrapped with 5000 draws) was conducted. The results showed that public-serving motivation has a significant moderation effect on the CSA and CBI relationship (β = 0.52, CI95 [0.13, 0.91]) but nonsignificant for the CSA and self-enhancement relationship (β = 0.29, CI95[-0.04, 0.64]). Concerning the moderation effect of self-serving motivation, it has no significant impact on the CSA and CBI relationship (β = -0.21, CI95[-0.54, 0.11]), nor the relationship between CSA and self-enhancement (β = 0.13, CI95[-0.15, 0.42]) (see Table 4.)

- Insert Table 4 here -

5.3. Study 2

The main objective of this study is to validate the outcomes observed in Study 1 further by conducting a replication using a fictitious brand, TechNova, to mitigate any potential biases derived from a well-known brand. Three hundred and thirty Prolific participants (55.8% Male, Mage=39.5, see Appendix Table A.4) were presented with a fictitious pro-life post from the fictitious brand of TechNova (see Appendix, Figure A.4). 87.3 % of respondents found the stimulus realistic. They were requested to express the extent of their alignment with the brands' position on abortion rights. The subsequent steps and measurements were dealt with in detail in study 1.

5.3.1. Results

We evaluated the reliability and validity of the measurement model through composite reliability values exceeding 0.70 and average variance extracted surpassing 0.50 (Hair et al., 2009) for the substantive constructs—self-enhancement, public and self-served motivations, and purchase intention. In Study 2, the lowest CR belongs to Public-serving motivations at

0.86, and the minimum AVE was 0.69. Discriminant validity was confirmed mainly when the square roots of the AVEs exceeded inter-construct correlations for all constructs except public motivation, whose inter-construct correlation is slightly (0.08) higher than the square roots of the AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Despite this minor overlap, the results demonstrate strong psychometric properties for our measurement model. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha for all scales exceeded 0.70, exhibiting satisfactory reliability.

- Insert Table 5 here -

A mediation analysis using the PROCESS SPSS 4.2 macro (Hayes, 2017, Model 4; bootstrapped with 5000 draws) was conducted to examine the CBI and SE effects in the aligned CSA and purchase intention relationship. Our findings indicate the positive direct effect of aligned CSA on purchase intention (effect 1.31, CI_{95}[0.92, 1.71]), supporting H1. There is also evidence that CBI (effect 1.16, CI_{95}[0.77, 1.57]) and SE (effect 0.61, CI_{95}[0.42, 0.83]) partially mediate the CSA and purchase intention relationship, supporting H4 and H7, respectively. Our results also reveal the effect of aligned CSA on CBI (effect 4.13, CI95 [3.83, 4.44]), supporting H2, and of CBI on purchase intention (effect 0.28, CI95 [0.19, 0.36]), supporting H3. The findings also show the statistically significant effect of aligned CSA on self-enhancement (effect 1.62, CI95 [1.32, 1.93]), supporting H5 and also the effect of self-enhancement on purchase intention (effect 0.37, CI95 [0.29, 0.46]), supporting H6 (see Table 6.) Finally, we ran a path analysis (see Appendix, Figure A.5) using STATA/SE 18, the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method, to ensure the robustness of our findings. This analysis confirmed the consistency of our results with the previous study (see Table 6, column Coefficient).

- Insert Table 6 here -

CSA motivation as moderator: Considering the moderator, the results revealed that public-serving motivations moderated both the aligned CSA and CBI (0.64, CI_{95}[0.36, 0.92]), as well as the aligned CSA and SE (0.49, CI_{95}[0.21, 0.77]) relationship. There is a significant moderation of self-serving CSA motivation type in the aligned CSA and SE relationship (0.29, CI_{95}[0.07, 0.52]), but nonsignificant for the CSA and CBI relationship (-0.17, CI_{95}[-0.39, 0.04]) (see Table 7.)

- Insert Table 7 here –

6. Discussion

An increasing number of brands are embracing CSA to meet the growing expectations of consumers who seek brands to take a side in sociopolitical issues. However, there is still a lack of clarity regarding how consumers respond to such initiatives. Researchers attempting to comprehend CSA phenomena have produced varying results, particularly on the impact of CSA on purchase intention. Hence, in this study, we investigated the effects of mis/aligned CSA on consumers' purchase intention from the self-congruity perspective. We rely on this theoretical framework to understand how consumers respond to mis/aligned corporate sociopolitical activism. To achieve this, we integrated the concepts of consumer-brand identification and self-enhancement and examined the moderating role of CSA motivation type to explore their effects, as well as interaction effects, on consumers' purchase intention toward the brands engaging in CSA.

Through two online surveys investigating a real, well-known brand and a fictional counterpart, this study finds that consumers show significantly high purchase intention toward a brand whose sociopolitical stance aligns with their values (supporting H1). This outcome reinforces previous research that claims CSA increases consumers' purchase intention when they agree with the brand's stance (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Korschun et al., 2019). Moreover, such alignment conveys a specific enhancement in consumer identification with the brand (supporting H2), which this elevation contributes to an increased purchase intention (supporting H3), reinforcing previous research that demonstrated the positive effect of CBI on consumer behavior (Crespo et al., 2023; Escalas, 2004; Kolbl et al., 2019). Importantly, our study confirms that this relationship remains meaningful and significant in the context of corporate sociopolitical activism, highlighting the relevance of CBI within this specific framework. Considering CBI in an activism context, Mukherjee and Althuizen (2018) revealed that CBI partially mediated the negative effect of consumer-brand disagreement on brand attitude. Our findings add that CBI not only mediated the negative impact of consumer-brand disagreement on brand attitude but also partially mediated the positive effect of consumer-brand CSA alignment on purchase intention (supporting H4). Moreover, consumers' alignment with brand sociopolitical activism further strengthens consumer self-enhancement (supporting H5), subsequently boosting purchase intention (supporting H6). Additionally, self-enhancement significantly and partially mediates the positive effect of aligned CSA on purchase intention (supporting H7). These findings show that introducing self-enhancement as a new mediator in the CSA context successfully leads to a significant relationship between

CSA and consumer purchase intention. Thus far, the findings confirmed hypotheses (H1 to H7) across both the real (Apple Inc.) and fictitious (TechNova) brands.

However, when we began to investigate the brands' motivation to engage in CSA, differences in our findings became apparent. Regardless of whether the target brand was real or fictitious, both studies highlighted that consumers' alignment with the brand's CSA increased consumer-brand identification only when they felt that the brand's engagement in CSA was due to the public-serving motives (supporting H8a), not self-serving driven (rejecting H9a). This result highlights how being consistent and committed with their values is essential in corporate sociopolitical activism, fostering stronger consumer-brand identification in the case of public motivations. Regarding self-enhancement, we found distinct outcomes when considering the real brand (study 1) compared to the fictitious brand (study 2). For the fictitious brand, simply taking an aligned stance on sociopolitical issues led to an increase in self-enhancement, regardless of the brand's motivation (public or self-serving) for the stance (supporting H8b & H9b for study2). Conversely, for the real brand, the brands' motivation had no significant impact on self-enhancement (rejecting H8b & H9b for study1).

6.1. Contribution

This present research offers several contributions. First, by applying self-congruity theory, we provide a new lens for understanding why some studies find boosted purchase intentions following CSA, whereas others see minimal or zero effects. In doing so, we resolve part of the uncertainty surrounding CSA's impact by demonstrating that the cognitive match between consumers' perceived brand image and their actual or ideal self-concept plays a critical role. When consumers feel their own values align with the brand's sociopolitical stance, they see the brand as a natural extension of who they are and aspire to be—ultimately increasing their intention to purchase.

This paper's second contribution is introducing self-enhancement as a new construct and mediator in the corporate sociopolitical activism literature. Prior work has mainly focused on perceived authenticity or other constructs to explain CSA outcomes, but our findings highlight a distinct mechanism: consumers' desire to become "better versions" of themselves. We empirically reveal that aligned CSA allows consumers to express or achieve an ideal identity, thereby increasing the self-enhancement that drives purchasing. This perspective offers a more subtle understanding of why even controversial stances can be advantageous as long as they connect with the consumer's ideal self-image.

This paper's third contribution is exploring the moderating role of brands' CSA motivation (public-serving vs. self-serving), which, according to our findings, has a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and behavior toward the CSA brand. Our findings show that consumers prefer to identify with brands doing CSA for the public good. This insight extends the CSA discourse by illustrating how brand motivations either strengthen or diminish the positive effects of aligned CSA on consumer identification and self-enhancement. All these contributions enrich the existing CSA literature regarding the CSA phenomena and its impact on consumer perceptions and purchase intention toward the CSA brand. Therefore, it provides valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners.

Our study provides insights for brand managers and marketers, presenting how a brand might benefit or harm from taking a sociopolitical stand. Our results show that a brand's public stand for a controversial issue is not enough per se. First, a brand's sociopolitical stands should be aligned with the values of current consumers, as this alignment is essential to strengthen consumer-brand identification and significantly elevate purchase intention. Managers can achieve this by conducting market research through surveys, focus groups, and social media analysis to know their consumers better and collect their insights on the sociopolitical issues that matter most to them. In other words, brands need to believe in the issue and know their target consumers if they seek positive reactions to their CSA effort, as the consumers can quickly detect that these actions are only strategic and can lead to opposite responses. Managers must also carefully speak up about their controversial beliefs and communicate their motivations transparently. They should ensure that their CSA efforts aim to benefit the public to avoid a decrease in consumers' tendency to purchase. Our findings show that companies' sociopolitical actions must be perceived as a real commitment to the public to elicit consumer identification. In contrast, when consumers feel that brands are doing CSA with self-served motives, they respond undesirably when the brand is well-known. Additionally, managers can provide opportunities for consumers to get involved in their CSA practices, which helps them to express their ideal selves and make them feel better about themselves, leading to higher self-enhancement and purchase intention. Managers can achieve this by creating interactive online or offline campaigns, events, and volunteering activities to allow them to participate actively in their CSA efforts. Finally, according to our findings, managers can build a positive consumer perception of new and less-known brands by highlighting their public-serving motivations for doing CSA efforts. We hope these insights guide managers' CSA practices and cause positive purchasing responses.

6.2. Limitations and future research

Our study has some limitations that suggest new avenues for future research. First, we selected our samples exclusively from the United States. The reason for this selection firstly was the historical context of abortion rights laws and the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade in June 2022. Secondly, the polarized nature of American society has a proper context for conducting such research. Future studies can redo this study in different countries with different levels of polarization or perform it as cross-national comparisons. While all the sociopolitical issues are theoretically similar, and we chose abortion rights through a pre-test, exploring only one controversial issue could be the second limitation of this study. As consumers may feel and evaluate each issue differently, future studies can explore other sociopolitical issues (LGBTQ+ rights, gun control, etc.) as well. Third, we focused on the technology brand as our target brand, which may restrict the applicability of our findings to other industries. Consumers may have different expectations of CSA based on the industry. Future studies can examine how CSA affects consumers' purchase intentions across various sectors (i.e., fashion, food, and health) and brand types (small local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and luxury brands). Fourth, our research focuses on how customers identify with a brand and its political positions. The aspect of CBI that was most relevant to CSA and that we focused on was the cognitive dimension. Future studies can examine the other dimensions of CBI, including affective and evaluative, to check how these aspects can offer new understandings regarding the CSA. Lastly, this study captured consumer reactions at a single point in time, which does not apply to the long-term effect of CSA. Consumers' opinions can change over time. For example, they can initially support the CSA efforts of a brand and then change their minds and become skeptical toward it due to the brand's subsequent actions. Longitudinal designs can help future studies investigate how consumers' responses to CSA change or evolve over time. In this study, we exclusively concentrate on the positive effects of CSA on consumer responses. As a future research avenue, we will investigate the negative side of the CSA coin, specifically in terms of boycotting intention, to understand how and in which framework consumers decided to punish a brand engaged in CSA and provide a complete picture of CSA impacts.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1.

Overview of prior research on Corporate Sociopolitical Activism (CSA)

Study	Theoretical framework	IV(s)	Mediator(s)	Moderator(s)	DV(s)	Main findings
Dodd & Supa (2015)	Theory of planned behavior	Corporate social advocacy			Purchase intention	Corporate social advocacy significantly predicts potential consumer purchase intention. Purchase intentions peak when there is alignment between individual beliefs and the organization's, regardless of the individual's stance on the issue.
Korschun et al. (2019)		Political stand (abstain, stand for, stand against) Perceived agency	Corporate hypocrisy	Intended image of the company	Unplanned purchase Purchase intention	Consumer response to a company's political stand varied by intended image. Unplanned purchases were higher in the values-driven image versus market-driven when a political stand was taken. Corporate hypocrisy mediated the link between political stance and purchase intention, influenced by the company's self-described image.
Hydock et al., (2020)	Negativity bias	CPA: (low-authenticity CPA vs. high-authenticity CPA)	Identification with brand *(different measurement from CBI)*	Authenticity Market share	st1a: Incentivized shirt choice st1b: Rental car choice st2: Shoe choice st3: Shoe choice st4: Shoe choice st5: Click-through rate	Corporate Political Advocacy is likely to have a negative impact on brand choice overall because it is more likely to repel existing customers who oppose the brand's position than it is to attract new customers who support it.
Mukherjee & Althuizen (2020)	Moral foundations theory	st1: Brand activism st2: Brand activism st3: Brand's stand st4: Public backlash and a retraction of an apology	CBI	Source of the brand's stand	st1: Customer attitudes st2: Attitudes and behavioral intentions st3: Moral reasoning st4: Brand stand	Attitudes toward the brand decreased among consumers who disagreed with the brand's stand. The more distant the relationship between the brand and the source of the stand, the weaker the negative effect of brand activism (morally decoupling the brand from the stand.)
Klostermann et al. (2021)		Corporate political advocacy	Online protest	CPA behavior	Brand perception	Corporate Political Advocacy (CPA) negatively impacted consumers' brand perceptions, with a stronger effect observed among customers than non-customers.
Schmidt et al., (2021)	Self-identity theory	Taking a political stance			Product use	consumers are more likely to use products from brands they see as politically conscious compared to non-politically conscious brands
Garg & Saluja (2022)		Brand activism	Happiness, sadness, pride, gratitude, and anger	Political ideology	Brand attitude Willingness to pay	Brand activism positively influenced brand attitude and WTP, with liberal consumers exhibiting higher WTP when a brand engaged in activism than when it remained silent on issues.
Rim et al., (2022)	Balance theory	Balance vs. imbalance CSA statement		Control mutuality Ideological identity strength	Consumer-company identification	A greater degree of consumer-company identification and company attitude changes when people experience an imbalanced rather than a balanced state.

Haupt et al. (2023)	Social identity theory	Brand activism condition	Perceived marginalization by the brand	CBI Political ideology	Attitude toward the company Consumer responses: -Brand attitude -WoM	Strong CBI and conservative ideology buffer the adverse effects of consumer-brand disagreement on brand attitude and word-of-mouth intentions. When consumers agree with a brand's stance, brand activism has no direct or interactive effects on responses.
Lee et al. (2023)	Signaling theory	Non-profit brand activism	Brand bravery	Concern for justice	Brand hypocrisy Brand equity	The adverse impact of non-profit brand activism on brand equity disappears when brand bravery and brand hypocrisy are present.
Wannow et al. (2023)	Cognitive appraisal theory	Brand activism	Moral emotions	CBI	Brand attitude Issue advocacy	Strong identification with the brand mitigates the effect of activist messages on brand attitude by dampening the activation of moral emotions, regardless of agreement or disagreement.
This study	Self-congruity theory	(mis)aligned CSA	CBI* Self-enhancement	CSA motivation type: (Public-serving motivation vs. Self-serving motivation)	Purchase intention	Consumers show significantly high purchase intention toward a brand whose sociopolitical stance aligns with their values from a self-congruity perspective. Aligned CSA can reinforce consumer-brand identification and self-enhancement, leading to heightened purchase behavior. Regarding the CSA motivations, consumers prefer to identify with brands committed to the public good.

CPA: Corporate Political Advocacy, CBI: Consumer-brand Identification, WTP: Willingness to Pay, CSA: Corporate Sociopolitical Activism, WoM: Word of Mouth

*Our findings extend Mukherjee & Althuizen (2020) by showing that CBI not only mediated the negative effect of consumer-brand disagreement on brand attitude but also partially mediated the positive effect of consumer-brand CSA alignment on purchase intention.

Table 2.

Descriptive statistics, reliability, discriminant validity

Constructs	Mean	S. D	CR	AVE	CA	PI	SlfMotiv	PbcMotiv	SE
Purchase Intention (PI)	3.67	2.14	0.99	0.97	0.90	**0.98**[a]			
Self-motivation CSA (SlfMotiv)	4.37	1.59	0.88	0.72	0.92	-0.49**	**0.85**		
Public-motivation CSA (PbcMotiv)	4.18	1.50	0.84	0.65	0.90	0.62**	-0.40**	**0.80**	
Self-enhancement (SE)	3.44	1.59	0.97	0.81	0.95	0.67**	-0.31**	0.59**	**0.90**

S.D Std. Deviation*, CR* Composite reliability*, CA* Cronbach alpha

[a] square root of average variance extracted (AVE) (bold diagonal)

Significant of correlations: **$p < 0.01$

Table 3.

Direct and indirect effects: The PROCESS Macro model N.4 & ML coefficient STATA

Direct relationship	Effect	*Coefficient	LLCI	UCLI	Hypothesis
CSA ⟶ PI	0.86	*0.66*	0.20	1.52	H1 supported
CSA ⟶ CBI	3.37	*3.10*	2.80	3.93	H2 supported
CBI ⟶ PI	0.38	*0.41*	0.22	0.55	H3 supported
CSA ⟶ SE	1.90	*1.80*	1.44	2.36	H5 supported
SE ⟶ PI	0.36	*0.36*	0.15	0.56	H6 supported
Indirect effects					
CSA ⟶ CBI ⟶ PI	1.30	*1.4*	0.75	1.94	H4 supported
CSA ⟶ SE ⟶ PI	0.68	*2.4*	0.21	1.12	H7 supported

*This column reports the coefficient of relationship from STATA/se 18

N=153

LLCI: lower level of confidence interval, UCLI: upper level of confidence interval of 95%

Bootstrapped with 5000 draws

Table 4.

Moderation effects: The PROCESS Macro model N.2

Moderated relationship / Moderator	Public-serving motivation	Self-serving motivation	Hypothesis
CSA ⟶ CBI	0.52 [0.13, 0.91]	- 0.21[-0.54, 0.11]	H8a supported H9a rejected
CSA ⟶ SE	0.29 [-0.04, 0.64]	0.13 [-0.15, 0.42]	H8b rejected H9b rejected

N = 153, the lower and upper level of the confidence interval in bracket

Confidence Interval: 95%

Bootstrapped with 5000 draws

Table 5.

Descriptive statistics, reliability, discriminant validity

Constructs	Mean	S. D	CR	AVE	CA	PI	Slf Motiv	Pbc Motiv	SE
Purchase Intention (PI)	2.84	1.81	0.99	0.97	0.98	**0.95[a]**			
Self-motivation CSA (SlfMotiv)	4.18	1.41	0.89	0.74	0.83	-0.41**	**0.55**		
Public-motivation CSA (PbcMotiv)	3.87	1.41	0.86	0.69	0.77	0.66**	-0.51**	**0.47**	
Self-enhancement (SE)	3.13	1.47	0.97	0.82	0.97	0.67**	-0.21**	0.55**	**0.67**

S.D Std. Deviation, CR Composite reliability, CA Cronbach alpha

[a] square root of average variance extracted (AVE) (bold diagonal)

*Significant of correlations: **p < 0.01*

Table 6.

Direct and indirect effects: The PROCESS Macro model N.4 & ML coefficient STATA

| Direct relationship	Effect	*Coefficient	LLCI	UCLI	Hypothesis
CSA ⟶ PI	1.31	*1.30*	0.92	1.71	H1 supported
CSA ⟶ CBI	4.13	*4.13*	3.83	4.44	H2 supported
CBI ⟶ PI	0.28	*0.28*	0.19	0.36	H3 supported
CSA ⟶ SE	1.62	*1.62*	1.32	1.93	H5 supported
SE ⟶ PI	0.37	*0.37*	0.29	0.46	H6 supported
Indirect effects					
CSA ⟶ CBI ⟶ PI	1.16	*1.40*	0.77	1.57	H4 supported
CSA ⟶ SE ⟶ PI	0.61	*2.60*	0.42	0.83	H7 supported

*This column reports the coefficient of relationship from STATA/se 18

N=330

LLCI: lower level of confidence interval, UCLI: upper level of confidence interval of 95%

Bootstrapped with 5000 draws

Table 7.

Moderation effects: The PROCESS Macro model N.2

Moderated relationship \ Moderator	Public-serving motivation	Self-serving motivation	Hypothesis
CSA ⟶ CBI	0.64 [0.36, 0.92]	- 0.17 [-0.39, 0.04]	H8a supported H9a rejected
CSA ⟶ SE	0.49 [0.21, 0.77]	0.29 [0.07, 0.52]	H8b supported H9b supported

N = 330, the lower and upper level of the confidence interval in the bracket

Confidence Interval: 95%

Bootstrapped with 5000 draws

Figure 1.

Conceptual model
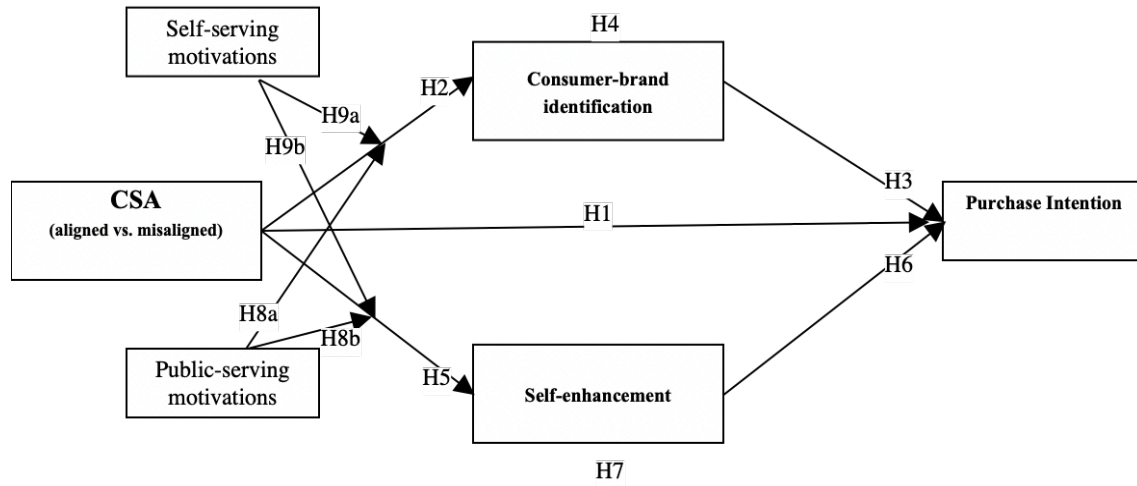
Appendix

Figure A.1.

CSA Stimuli (real brand)

Apple posted a tweet on their official X (former Twitter) account with 9.2 million followers. Please take a moment to read the tweet carefully and provide your responses to the upcoming questions.

A.2.

Mis/alignment CSA Measures
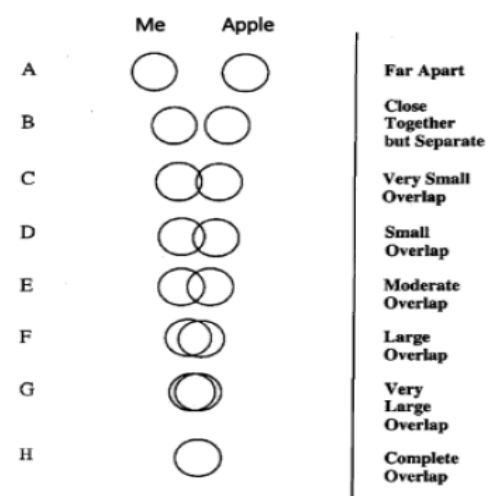
What do you think after reading Apple's tweet? Does Apple's stand on abortion align with your values? (1= Strongly misaligned - 7=Strongly aligned)

Figure A.2.

Consumer-brand identification (CBI) scale

(Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Lam et al., 2013; Cronbach Alpha = 0.903) After viewing the Apple tweet, how do you identify yourself with Apple? Please indicate which case (A, B, C,

D, E, F, G, or H) best describes the level of overlap between YOUR identity and Apple's identity.

Table A.1.

Constructs and measurements

Variables and scale items

Self-enhancement (Cronbach Alpha=0.95); (Schultz & Zelezny,1998)

Achievement: Using this brand makes me feel like:

  Successful

  Capable

  Ambitious

  Influential

Power: Using this brand makes me feel like:

  Social Power

  Authority

  Wealth

  Preserving my public image

CSA Motivation type (Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013)

Public-serving motivations (Cronbach Alpha=0.90)

  Apple has an ethical responsibility to help society.

  Apple sincerely cares about the targeted community.

  Apple is trying to give back something to society.

Self-serving motivations (Cronbach Alpha=0.92)

  Apple is taking advantage of social causes such as abortion.

  Apple is mainly interested in exploiting the abortion issue for its own good
  rather than supporting the targeted community.

  Apple is trying to benefit from the increased awareness of social problems.

Purchase Intention (Cronbach Alpha=0.90); (Putrevu & Lord, 1994)

  I will likely buy Apple products in the future.

  I will purchase Apple the next time I need such a product.

  I will definitely try Apple in the future.

Table A.2.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents (study1, N=153)

Demographic factors	Items	Counts	Percentage
Gender	Female	80	52.3
	Male	71	46.4
	Other	1	0.7
	Prefer not to say	1	0.7
	Total	153	100
Age	18-24	10	6.5
	25-34	51	33.3
	35-44	32	20.9
	45-54	32	20.9
	55-64	18	11.8
	65 or older	10	6.5
	Total	153	100

Table A.3.

Total variance explained in one factor Harman method

	Total Variance Explained					
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	14.19	36.39	36.39	14.19	**36.39**	36.39
2	3.48	8.93	45.33			
3	2.86	7.34	52.67			
4	2.19	5.63	58.31			
5	1.70	4.38	62.69			
6	1.49	3.83	66.52			
7	1.42	3.64	70.17			
8	1.10	2.84	73.01			
9	1.00	2.57	75.59			
10	0.94	2.42	78.01			
11	0.90	2.32	80.33			
12	0.84	2.16	82.50			
13	0.78	2.00	84.50			
14	0.73	1.89	86.40			
15	0.60	1.54	87.94			
16	0.53	1.38	89.32			
17	0.49	1.27	90.60			
18	0.46	1.19	91.80			

19	0.41	1.05	92.85
20	0.38	0.98	93.84
21	0.33	0.85	94.70
22	0.31	0.81	95.52
23	0.27	0.69	96.21
24	0.24	0.62	96.84
25	0.22	0.57	97.42
26	0.17	0.45	97.87
27	0.16	0.41	98.28
28	0.14	0.37	98.65
29	0.12	0.31	98.97
30	0.11	0.30	99.27
31	0.08	0.22	99.49
32	0.07	0.20	99.69
33	0.06	0.15	99.85
34	0.03	0.09	99.95
35	0.01	0.05	100.00

Figure A.3.

SEM path analysis (study 1)
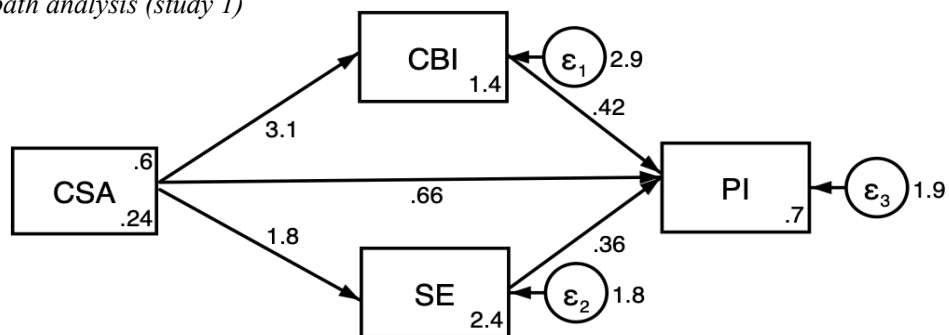
Study 2: replication of study 1 with a fictitious brand, TechNova

Figure A.4.

CSA Stimuli (fictitious brand- TechNova)

 TechNova, a multinational technology company, posted a tweet on their official X (former Twitter) account with 4.2 million followers. Please take a moment to read the tweet carefully and provide your responses to the upcoming questions.

Table A.4.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents (study2, N=330)

Demographic factors	Items	Counts	Percentage
Gender	Female	142	43.0
	Male	184	55.80
	Other	4	1.20
	Total	330	100
Age	18-24	25	7.60
	25-34	86	26.10
	35-44	78	23.60
	45-54	64	19.40
	55-64	46	13.90
	65 or older	31	9.40
	Total	330	100

Figure A.5.

SEM path analysis (study 2)
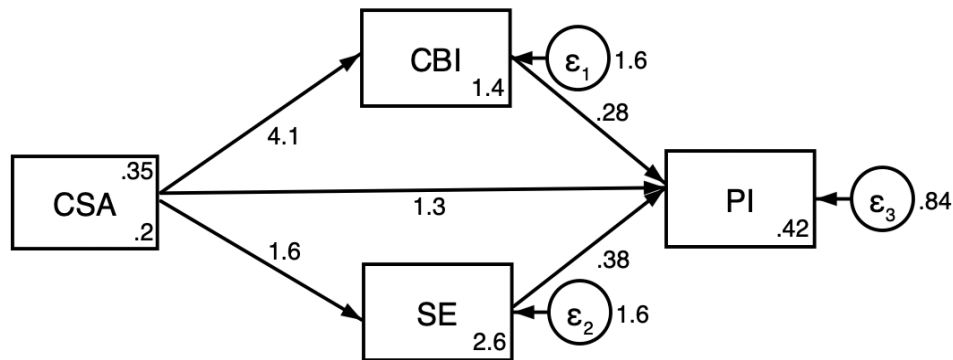
Factor Analysis Output for CSA Motivation Types (Study1)

Table A.5.
Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.917	48.620	48.620	2.91	48.620	48.62	2.25	37.630	37.6
2	1.360	22.664	71.284	1.36	22.664	71.28	2.01	33.654	71.2
3	.746	12.440	83.723						
4	.468	7.797	91.521						
5	.277	4.621	96.141						
6	.232	3.859	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table A.6.
Rotated Component Matrix

	Component	
	1	2
CSAMotiv_SelfMotiv1	.844	
CSAMotiv_SelfMotiv2	.806	
CSAMotiv_SelfMotiv3	.806	
CSAMotiv_PublicMotiv3		.860
CSAMotiv_PublicMotiv1		.771

	.699

CSAMotiv_PublicMotiv2 .699

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
Rotation converged in 3 iterations

Factor Analysis Output for CSA Motivation Types (Study2)

Table A.7.
Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.274	54.567	54.567	3.274	54.567	54.567	2.281	38.023	38.023
2	1.141	19.023	73.590	1.141	19.023	73.590	2.134	35.566	73.590
3	.682	11.372	84.962						
4	.364	6.072	91.034						
5	.288	4.808	95.842						
6	.249	4.158	100.0						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table A.8.
Rotated Component Matrix

	Component	
	1	2
CSAMotiv_SelfMotiv3	.877	
CSAMotiv_SelfMotiv1	.830	
CSAMotiv_SelfMotiv2	.773	
CSAMotiv_PublicMotiv3		.833
CSAMotiv_PublicMotiv1		.788
CSAMotiv_PublicMotiv2		.753

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Pretests

Table B1

Controversiality pretest

Event description
How much do you agree with the following actions of brands on socio-political issues? (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree)

1- A brand has announced that it will support anti-abortion legislation. Their stated motto is: "Pro-Life: without compromise, without exception, without apology."

2- A company has announced that they will not only support LGBTQ employees but also fully embrace them and any life decisions they choose to make while working there.

3- A technology company is allowing its employees to apply for relocation "without justification" for out-of-state abortion procedures.

4- A company's YES TO ALL collection stands with the belief that whatever your gender, sexual orientation, or identity, everyone should feel free to be who they are.

5- One of the largest retailers stopped selling handguns and military-style weapons after horrific mass shootings in August 2019.

6- A famous food company announced its opposing positions against transgender rights; "The company would never feature gay families in its advertisements because in a typical family the woman has a fundamental role. If gays didn't like it, they could eat something else. "

7- An automobile manufacture company stated: "Respect for all people is a core value of us, and we are proud of the rich diversity of our company. Thus, we do not support the immigration ban or any other that goes against our values as a company."

8- A brand added a tag to its product saying "Proudly Made in America by Immigrants."

9- An employment-oriented online service boost and expand the company's Welcome Talent program for refugees.

10- A brand announced: "As a company, we believe that all immigrants have to be asked to leave our country irrespective of how long they have been living here."

11- A brand announced its opposition to the abortion right by stating, "Abortion stops a beating heart!"

12- A jeans maker company said any employee who opts into their health-care plans would be eligible for reimbursement of travel costs for abortions, including part-time workers.

13- A company participates in Pride parades every year, walking the parade route with a banner showing off its rainbow logo.

14- After a school shooting, a multinational retail company continues a partnership with the groups lobbying for the gun trade.

15- In the wake of the actions to restrict immigration, a brand spoke up on the value immigrants, and refugees bring to its communities and recruited workers from refugee resettlement centers.

16- Fast-food restaurant chains donate millions of dollars to organizations that consider anti-gay organizations.

17- The ice cream maker company plans to cut ties with vendors who have worked with the firearms industry after mass shootings in some US cities.

18- A chips brand changed its packaging color to rainbow-color to celebrate LGBT pride.

19- A transportation company announced on June 24 that it would cover the cost of travel for employees who cannot access family planning services such as abortion.

20- A company offers training and bail for people who peacefully protest for reproductive justice and abortion rights.

21- A transportation company offers pro-gun groups' members discounts from 18 percent to 26 percent on domestic and international shipping.

Table B2

Brand selection pretest

Personal beliefs
What do you think about the issues below … (from 1= strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree)
I believe having an abortion is morally acceptable and should be legal.
I believe gun sales, purchases, or possession laws should be stricter.
I believe LGBT people's sexual acts or gender expressions are against what the God intended.

Brand knowledge
How well do you know these brands? … (from 1= Non at all to 5= A great deal)
Nike
Gap
Adidas
Apple
Amazon
Google
Patagonia
Paypal
Xeel
Facebook
Twitter
Uber
Starbucks
MacDonalds
King Burger
PepsiCo
Coca-Cola
MasterCard

Brand actions
In the following you will find a list of actions by some famous brands. How much do you agree with these actions? ((from 1= strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree)
Amazon covers up to $4,000 in employees' travel expenses to do the abortion process in another state.
Patagonia offers training and bail for people who peacefully protest for abortion rights.
PayPal does not allow using its service or logo to sell guns.
Facebook limits posts on Facebook and Instagram discussing the sale of guns to users over 18.
GAP launched a campaign to end gun violence with a $5 million donation.
Apple participates in Pride parades yearly, with a banner showing off its rainbow logo.
Nike says: "We are here to support our employees' decision on abortion."
Amazon came out for LGBT+ with an "Ask Alexa" campaign. Users can now ask Alexa questions about LGBT+ issues to educate them.

H&M believes in everybody's right to love who they want. They hope people can use H&M's Pride collection to celebrate their belief in equal love.

Over the years, Coca-Cola continued to update its culture and put its money behind the legislation, working in multiple states to fight against anti-LGBTQ legislation.

Reality check

How realistic you think these brands do these actions for the sociopolitical issues? … (from 1=Far below average to 7=Far above average)

Chapter Four

How Does Corporate Sociopolitical Activism (CSA) Affect Consumers' Intention to Boycott a Brand? A Moral Balancing Perspective

Abstract

As brands increasingly engage in corporate sociopolitical activism (CSA), a more comprehensive understanding of its effects is needed. This study contributes to the evolving research by exploring self-conscious emotions, including pride and guilt, as parallel mediators and moral judgment and self-brand overlap as moderators influencing consumers' intention to boycott regarding aligned and misaligned CSA. A cross-sectional online survey on the "Don't say gay" bill demonstrates that pride and guilt partially mediate the (mis)aligned CSA on boycott intention. Pride in the aligned CSA reinforces consumers' intention to act prosocially (i.e., boycott), while diminished pride in misaligned CSA drives boycott as a form of moral cleansing. Conversely, diminished guilt in aligned CSA cases leads to moral licensing and lowering boycott intentions, whereas increased guilt with misaligned CSA does not have a moral balancing effect. Significant moderation effect of moral judgment in mis/aligned CSA and guilt, but not on pride, reveals that guilt is more sensitive to moral considerations. Overall, these findings emphasize the dynamic and contextual functions of pride and guilt in the setting of CSA, drawing on moral balance theory and bridging a gap in the CSA literature on self-conscious emotions.

Keywords: Corporate sociopolitical activism, self-conscious emotions, boycott intention, moral judgment, self-brand overlap

1. Introduction

Consumers increasingly expect brands to be open and transparent about their values. According to the latest Bentley-Gallup Business in Society Report (2023), 53% of younger Americans believe companies should speak up about current events. Moreover, 88% of Americans also believe that companies can create real change and have the power to impact people's lives positively. To meet these expectations, brands are increasingly following this positive social change and speaking out publicly on sociopolitical issues, including free speech (Nike, Colin Kaepernick Campaign, 2018; Ben & Jerry's, Democracy is in Your Hands campaign, 2021), racial issues (Ben & Jerry's, Support for the Black Lives Matter Movement, 2020), gun laws (Dick's Sporting Goods, Stopped Selling Assault Rifles, 2018; TOMS Shoes, End Gun Violence Campaign, 2021), LGBTQ+ issues (Starbucks, Support for Same-Sex Marriage, 2012; Target, Pride Merchandise Display, 2023), immigration policy (Chobani, Support for Refugees, 2017; Google, Support for Refugees and Immigrants, 2022), and abortion (Levi Strauss & Co., Reproductive Rights and Access to Abortion, 2022; Disney, Travel Benefits for Abortion Access, 2022). This corporate involvement in polarizing sociopolitical debates is defined as Corporate Sociopolitical Activism (CSA): "a firm's public demonstration (statements and/or actions) of support for or opposition to one side of a partisan sociopolitical issue" (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p.1).

Due to its controversial nature, corporate sociopolitical activism works as a "two-edged sword"; it means taking these public positions while satisfying one part of society can simultaneously lose the other part. Previous research has investigated these mixed impacts of CSA on consumer responses (Hydock et al., 2020) and identified that CSA is a risky strategy that may lead to adverse reactions (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). This means that when brands participate in CSA as a value-driven strategy (Vredenburg et al., 2020), they risk being boycotted by dissatisfied customers (Dodd, 2015). Boycott, as the most known form of political consumerism (Neilson, 2010), is the deliberate refusal to buy a product or service, whether its production process (like environmental damage) or disagreeing with its social, political, or ethical values (Basci, 2014; Carr et al., 2012).

Literature on boycotts as a consumer response to CSA highlights several factors that can trigger boycotts, including consumers' political beliefs (Klostermann et al., 2022), a polarized environment (Neureiter & Bhattacharya, 2021), inconsistencies between a company's image and its CSA stance (Hong & Li, 2020), and misalignment between consumer and brand values (Alharbi et al., 2022). While prior research has provided a foundational understanding of several factors that may lead to boycotts, there is still a significant gap in understanding the

emotional drivers in shaping consumer responses to CSA. This gap regarding the role of emotions (specifically self-conscious emotions) in consumer responses to CSA was also highlighted by previous studies (Wannow et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Regarding the significant role of emotions in CSA, consider this real example of a high school shooting in Parkland, Florida, in 2018. Many people felt angry and sad due to this tragic incident, and they decided to boycott the companies (such as Amazon, FedEx, and Apple) that did not stop their partnership with the National Rifle Association (NRA) (Garfield, 2018). Building on this understanding, given that CSA is an emotionally charged issue (Nalick et al., 2016) that often arouses strong emotions, a boycott allows consumers to express these feelings (Hoffman & Muller, 2009), and given the established influence of emotions on consumer behavior (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Bruno et al., 2022), it is crucial to explore how emotions drive CSA-related boycotts. Therefore, this study seeks to provide insights into emotional responses triggered by corporate sociopolitical activism to address the mentioned research gap as its main research objective. We, precisely, aim to explore the consumers' self-conscious emotions, like pride and guilt, as predictors of boycott intention. We innovatively rely on the moral balancing theory to understand these emotions' mediator roles in the CSA context (Nisan & Horenczyk, 1990). In contrast to human's desire for cognitive consistency in their feelings and behavior (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1946), this theory suggests that acting in one direction (morally or immorally) liberates actors to do the opposite behavior later (Mullen & Monin, 2016). By applying this theory in the context of corporate sociopolitical activism for the first time, we aim to understand how being aligned with the sociopolitical positions of a brand can trigger self-conscious emotions and influence boycott intention as a later prosocial behavior of consumers.

Through a cross-sectional online survey exploring an LGBTQ+ issue, specifically the "Don't say gay" bill, as the research context with a real brand, the present study makes meaningful contributions. First, pride and guilt as self-conscious emotions are introduced as mediators of the effect of (mis)aligned CSA on boycott intention to fill the recalled literature gap. Second, it employs a novel theoretical mechanism, moral balancing theory, to examine how alignment with the CSA practices of a brand through emotions can liberate consumers to be less moral (or immoral) in their subsequent prosocial behavior. The findings of this theoretical application can contribute to both CSA and moral balancing literature. Finally, it is investigated whether moral judgment and self-brand overlap moderate the effects of CSA and self-conscious emotions.

2. Corporate Sociopolitical Activism

Corporate Sociopolitical Activism (CSA) is defined as "a firm's public demonstration (statements and/or actions) of support for or opposition to one side of a partisan sociopolitical issue" (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 1). Over the years, it has been conceptualized as a values-driven strategy (Vredenburg et al., 2020), a strategic branding move (Schmidt et al., 2021), and an evolution of CSR (Sarkar & Kotler, 2020). As CSA is speaking up on controversial issues, it is non-neutral and can elicit different consumer reactions based on how consumers perceive the brand's CSA position related to their values.

We can refer to the two significant Nike campaigns as a real-world CSA example. The first campaign with the statement, "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything," featured Colin Kaepernick, a National Football League (NFL) player, who decided to kneel rather than stand at NFL games during the playing of the US national anthem in protest of racial inequality and police brutality in the United States. Nike's support of Kaepernick sparked different interpretations and reactions (Milfeld & Flint, 2020). Some people loved the ad and were happy that Nike decided to back Kaepernick, and on the other side, some upset consumers even burned their Nike products in protest. The second campaign of Nike, the "For Once, Don't Do It" Campaign, was in June 2020 and focused on George Floyd's death and support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Nike released a video with a bold message saying: "For once, don't do it. Don't pretend there's not a problem in America. Don't turn your back on racism" in protesting the racial injustice and systematic racism. The responses toward this campaign launched by Nike were also quite mixed. Whereas some consumers appreciate that Nike used its platform to talk about equality and justice, some have felt Nike has become too political and divisive and backlash against the brand.

This example illustrates that a brand's position on sociopolitical issues can cause polarized reactions from consumers. They can evaluate brands' CSA values with their own and experience a feeling of connection and support in the case of alignment, while those who find the brands' actions misaligned with their own feel upset and disconnected. Based on this, CSA could be categorized as aligned or misaligned CSA. Aligned CSA occurs when the brand's stance on the sociopolitical issue is aligned with the customer's sociopolitical views. Conversely, when customers find the brand's stance on the sociopolitical issue contrary to their sociopolitical views, it is called misaligned CSA. This alignment or misalignment with the brand's sociopolitical values can trigger strong emotions in consumers. In highlighting this crucial role of emotions in consumer responses to CSA, Wannow et al. (2023) emphasized the impact of moral emotions like anger and gratitude on consumer brand attitudes in the CSA

context. Their findings show that consumers experience anger when they perceive a brand's CSA actions as misaligned with their moral standards and have feelings such as gratitude in the case of alignment.

While prior studies (Hydock et al., 2020; Zhou & Dong, 2022) have examined the behavioral outcomes of alignment and misalignment like boycotting and other negative acts, including negative WOM, the emotional mechanism underlying these consumer responses, particularly self-conscious emotions such as pride and guilt, has not yet been sufficiently addressed. This study addresses this gap by investigating how self-conscious emotions mediate the relationship between aligned and misaligned CSA and boycott intentions as consumer responses. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the question: *How do aligned and misaligned CSA affect consumers' boycott intention?*

3. Moral Balancing Theory

To better understand consumers' responses to CSA through emotional mechanisms, this study relies on moral balancing theory (Nisan & Horenczyk, 1990), which suggests that people balance their moral and immoral behavior in the context of their behavioral history and the potential to determine what is acceptable in the future. Based on this moral balancing, people engage in mental accounting to keep track of their good or bad actions and their influence on their self-perceptions. Ploner and Regner (2013) provide empirical evidence for moral balancing, where people weigh their behavior to maintain a positive self-image. Thus, people regulate their im(moral) actions by monitoring their moral balance, which leads to an increased probability of subsequently engaging in the behavior of the opposite moral value (Merritt et al., 2010), manifesting as either moral licensing or moral cleansing.

Moral licensing refers to effects in which individuals who have initially been involved in a morally positive behavior are more likely to engage in morally negative behavior subsequently (Kouchaki, 2011; Monin & Miller, 2001; Mullen & Monin, 2016), which causes a decrease in subsequent moral behavior (e.g., prosocial behavior; Young et al., 2012). Moral licensing suggests that individuals earn moral credits for their morally positive behavior, which these credits can be spent to justify immoral behaviors without threatening their positive self-image (Ferguson et al., 2024; Merritt et al., 2010). For example, people, after engaging in socially desirable behavior, expressed more prejudiced attitudes (Effron et al., 2009; Monin & Miller, 2001), preferred hedonic over utilitarian goods (Khan & Dhar, 2006), cheated in their purchase

behavior (Mazar & Zhong, 2010), increased their energy consumption (Tiefenbeck et al., 2013), and expressed lower prosocial intentions (Jordan et al., 2011).

Moral cleansing, converse to moral licensing, states that individuals who have initially been involved in negative moral behavior are more likely to participate in morally positive behavior afterward, leading to an increase in subsequent moral behavior to "cleanse" themselves (Blanken et al., 2014; Zhong et al., 2009). The moral cleansing effect can increase the likelihood of volunteering behavior (Young et al., 2012), prosocial intentions (Jordan et al., 2011), and less cheating (Cornelissen et al., 2013; Jordan et al., 2011). For example, Carlsmith and Gross (1969) found this moral cleansing effect among the participants who thought they had hurt someone by delivering electric shocks. They were likelier to volunteer to help an environmental cause than those who did not have the same thoughts. A similar behavioral pattern was observed in people who were more interested in donating to a homeless shelter after remembering past dangerous sexual behavior (Stone et al., 1997). Moral cleansing, recalling negative traits, can increase prosocial behavior like donations and moral actions to restore their self-image (Blanken et al., 2014; Ferguson et al., 2024).

These moral balancing dynamics have been observed across different domains, including volunteering (Kristofferson et al., 2014), pro-environmental behavior (Geng et al., 2016), and self-indulgent choice (Khan & Dhar, 2006).

Prior studies focused on the critical importance of self-image in moral balancing, where linking personal (im)moral behavior to subsequent behavior (Ferguson et al., 2024; Merritt et al., 2010; Nisan & Horenczyk, 1990; Ploner & Regner, 2013). However, Kouchaki (2011) extended the concept by revealing that moral balancing can also be triggered by the behaviors of others with whom one identifies and shapes their future behavior. When people witnessed their group members' nonprejudiced behavior, they were more likely to express prejudiced attitudes later (Kouchaki, 2011). Building on this idea, Newman and Brucks (2018) showed that moral licensing and cleansing work when the "other" is a brand to which individuals feel psychologically connected, depending on whether the brand's actions align with their values. Their findings, in line with Kouchaki's (2011) study, show that moral balancing can be influenced internally by personal actions and self-image and even externally by monitoring others' actions, including brands.

Applying moral balancing theory to corporate sociopolitical activism, we argue that when consumers feel that a brand's CSA actions align with their values, they might experience a form of moral licensing, which can reduce the consumers' perceived need to engage in further prosocial acts, such as boycotting. In contrast, if consumers feel a misalignment with the

brand's CSA stance, it may lead to moral cleansing and increased subsequent prosocial behavior to restore the moral balance, resulting in a higher intention to boycott the brand.

4. Hypotheses Development

4.1 From aligned/misaligned CSA to boycott intention

Before examining the emotional mechanisms, we first explore the direct relationship between aligned (misaligned) CSA and consumer's boycott intention.

CSA is inherently controversial, as it often speaks up about divisive sociopolitical issues that polarize public opinion and can attract and alienate consumers at the same time (Dodd, 2015; Dodd & Supa, 2014; Fox, 2017). Consumers judge the CSA positions of brands based on their own sociopolitical values, experiencing alignment or misalignment with CSA. Hydock et al. (2020) found that consumers prefer brands whose CSA positions align with their own. However, they also reveal that larger brands are more likely to lose an existing misaligned consumer than to gain new aligned consumers. These misaligned consumers not only leave the brand but also express their disapproval through actions such as negative WOM and boycotting (Zhou & Dong, 2022).

Boycotting is "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace" (Friedman, 1985, p.97). Boycotts are also social dilemmas, balancing the individual benefit of consumption against the shared benefit of a collective refrain from buying (Fernandes, 2020; Klein & John, 2004; Sen et al., 2001). Boycott is identified as anti-consumption because boycotters intentionally and voluntarily cease their consumption behavior in product services of a brand, company, or even a country for societal rather than personal reasons (Hoffman, 2011; Lee et al., 2009). According to prior research, boycotts are deliberate, targeted (Friedman, 1985; Garrett, 1987), and collective actions (Stolle et al., 2005) exploit market-based power (Friedman, 1985) to communicate and exert pressure on the organizations (Garrett, 1987; Stolle et al., 2005) to make a difference. Many scholars consider boycotting as key to unionization (Wolman, 1916), conscious consumption (Carr et al., 2012), ethical consumption (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001), a form of anti-consumption behavior (Makarem & Jae, 2016), political anti-brand action (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022), proactive response (Hahn & Albert, 2017), and a tool for consumer empowerment (Makarem & Jae, 2016). According to Klein et al. (2004) and Sen et al. (2001), boycotting can be seen as prosocial behavior, which is a voluntary behavior performed by an influential segment of society intended to benefit others (Penner et al., 2005), such as helping, comforting, sharing, and cooperation (Eisenberg

et al., 2007; Batson, 1998). According to Shaw et al. (2006), a boycott can be guided by consumers' motivation and prosocial drivers that express an obligation to society aiming to protect the common good (e.g., human rights, natural environment, etc.) By refusing to buy certain brands, consumers reduce the negative business impacts and contribute to a positive change in society. Thus, in this research, boycotting the brand doing CSA is envisioned in terms of prosocial behavior from consumers' perspective.

Numerous boycotts throughout history illustrate the real-world impact of boycotts and present them as a powerful tool that can drive significant sociopolitical change. For instance, prominent examples of boycotting, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 or the British goods boycott by Mahatma Gandhi (Friedman, 1999), show that boycotts utilized the marketplace to make a political change on broader sociopolitical goals such as civil rights. Modern cases include boycotting the food company Nestlé for its breast milk substitutes in underdeveloped countries, boycotting Nike for the exploitative working situation at the Taiwanese supplier, and more recent cases, namely boycott campaigns against Gillette (sexual harassment), Starbucks (working condition), McDonald's, Cadbury (political reasons), Adidas, and Hermès (animal rights), highlight how contemporary consumers continue to use boycotts as a protest tool (Yuksel et al., 2020).

Regarding some previous studies (Friedman, 1999; Kelin et al., 2002, 2004; Yuksel, 2013), boycotters' goals could be categorized into instrumental vs. non-instrumental. Instrumental goals are achieving specific and practical objectives, such as changing the behavior or policies of the target company. Non-instrumentally motivated boycotters aim to express their dissatisfaction and disapproval with the target's actions without expecting specific outcomes (Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Friedman, 1999). Although there is a fine line between instrumental and non-instrumental types, boycotting in the context of corporate sociopolitical activism can be classified as a hybrid of these two boycott types. For instance, Chick-fil-A faced a massive backlash after its CEO's same-sex marriage opposition in his public comments (Tomhave & Vopat, 2018). Alongside the activists who boycotted the brand to pressure the company to change its policy and pause its donation to the anti-gay organizations (instrumental), individuals who stand in solidarity with the LGBT community and voiced their disapproval participated in the boycotting (non-instrumental). In the following years, Chick-fil-A announced a revision of its charitable giving from controversial organizations to focusing on education, homelessness, and hunger. This example, therefore, shows that when a large number of people are involved in boycotting, this hybrid form of protest will effectively send a signal to the target brand to reduce the probability of future irresponsible behavior. The above dual

motivations also highlight the flexibility of boycotting as both consumer empowerment and political expression.

The consumer behavior literature identifies various antecedents and motivations for consumer boycotts. Consumers' intention to participate in boycotting can stem from the perceived egregious behavior of the company (Klein et al., 2004), ethical concerns (Bhatia et al., 2023), consumers' animosity (Kim et al., 2022), higher subjective well-being (Tuan et al., 2023), social pressure and media influence (Pandey et al., 2021). Negative emotions, such as outrage, can heighten boycott participation (Lindenmeier et al., 2012). Similarly, Hoffman and Muller (2009) believe that boycotts are an instrument for consumers to express their emotions.

While these antecedents provide a broad understanding of consumer boycotting behavior, they may be significant in the CSA context. To do so, scholars have examined the behavior of boycotts in the context of corporate sociopolitical activism. For instance, Klostermann et al. (2022) reveal that the intensity of online protest (operationalized as a number of tweets with stated boycott intention related to the brand) has a significant negative effect on corporate political advocacy (CPA) on consumer brand perception. Neureiter and Bhattacharya (2021) find that consumer activism is often displayed as partisan boycotts in politically polarized environments, and these boycotts can cause companies to experience sales fluctuations. Moreover, Hong and Li (2020) explore the effects of three cognitive constructs of consumer-company congruence, company-cause fit, and consumer-cause fit and issue involvement on boycott intention in the context of same-sex marriage as a controversial CSA issue. According to their results, consumer-company congruence and company-cause fit significantly and negatively affected boycott intention. Similarly, Alharbi et al. (2022) highlight the critical role of consumer-brand congruence and brand attitude in shaping boycott recommendations when brands take a public stand on sociopolitical issues. In summary, in the CSA context, consumers' political beliefs (Klostermann et al., 2022), polarized environment (Neureiter & Bhattacharya, 2021), and inconsistency between company image and CSA stance (Hong & Li, 2020) can spark boycotts as a form of consumer protest in brand misconduct. Following the logic between these findings, this study anticipates the following hypothesis:

H1: Aligned (misaligned) CSA can decrease (increase) the boycott intention.

4.2. From aligned/misaligned CSA to boycott intention through self-conscious emotions

Corporate sociopolitical activism, contrary to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), is divisive, politically sensitive, and emotionally charged, which causes strong emotions (Nalick

et al., 2016; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Such CSA stand can evoke positive and negative emotions when individuals evaluate the alignment and misalignment of brand position with their own values and beliefs. For example, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement ignites both positive and negative emotions (i.e., hope and anger) during the protests (Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022). Regarding the high sensitivity and emotionally charged BLM issue, Pepsi's infamous ad featuring Kendall Jenner, which was perceived as tone-deaf and trivialized the BLM movement, led to intense backlash and emotional hurt for those deeply involved in this racial justice (Mwencha & Njuguna, 2023). This example suggests that consumer responses to CSA may go beyond cognitive judgments into emotional dimensions that can lead to boycott intention. Indeed, prior research indicates that participation in boycotting could be an "emotional expression of a consumers' attitudes" (Farah & Newman, 2010, p.349), and emotions have been introduced as strong predictors of consumer engagement in boycotting (Hoffman & Muller, 2009). Furthermore, emotions can mediate between a brand's unethical behavior and consumer boycotting (Lindenmeier et al., 2012; Hoffmann & Muller, 2009).

In light of these findings, learning more about how emotional antecedents influence consumers' responses to CSA activities is necessary. In particular, while prior studies (Wannow et al., 2023) have examined the role of moral emotions such as other-condemning emotions and other-praising emotions in consumer reactions to CSA, the role of self-conscious emotions in consumer reaction to CSA has not been explored yet. These emotions arise from evaluating one's own behavior or that of closely affiliated others, such as brands. Recognizing the importance of emotions in the CSA context, this study applies the moral balancing theory (Section 3) to understand how consumers' emotions, triggered by aligned or misaligned CSA, drive the process of moral balancing and influence their subsequent boycott intention.

As moral balancing describes a structural process by which moral credits and debts are transferred, the emotional self-appraisal process determines whether and how these moral credits or debts are translated into subsequent behavior. Thus, emotions involving self-awareness and self-evaluation are crucial in the connection between CSA alignment, moral balancing, and boycott intentions. Emotions offer a lens through which individuals evaluate moral dilemmas and justify subsequent actions (Zhang & Du, 2023). In particular, understanding emotions can explain why people, through the evaluation process, either feel justified in acting immorally (moral licensing) or feel they need to correct their behavior (moral cleansing) (Newman & Brucks, 2018). Thus, moral balancing requires a self-evaluation procedure (individuals assess their moral behavior and decide their subsequent moral

behavior), which may evoke emotions associated with self-evaluation, such as self-conscious emotions.

Self-conscious emotions are aroused when people evaluate their behavior regarding personal (i.e., "Who do I wish to be?") or social standards (i.e., "What do others expect me to do?") (Tracy & Robins, 2004). The primary characteristic of self-conscious emotions is the involvement in self-evaluation processes and self-awareness (Baldwin & Baccus, 2004; Beer & Keltner, 2004; Leary, 2007; Parrott, 2004; Tangney & Fischer, 1995; Tracy & Robins, 2007). Accordingly, they experience self-conscious emotions due to the self-evaluation of whether they have lived up to or failed to live up to their personal and social standards. This process will generally cause a behavioral response that differs based on the specific self-conscious emotion aroused (Tangney et al., 2007). Contrary to basic emotions (i.e., sadness, joy), self-conscious emotions are activated through self-evaluative processes. For instance, winning a lottery or an athletic event leads to happiness. Lottery likely would not involve any self-evaluation process, whereas the latter evokes a self-evaluative process that creates a self-conscious emotion such as pride (Tracy & Robins, 2004). Self-conscious emotions, including pride and guilt, are linked to the individual self-evaluation process.

Pride emerges in response to internal attributions linked to the self that trigger positive self-representations in an emotion-eliciting event. It is considered one of the most typically mentioned positively valenced self-conscious emotions (Tracy & Robins, 2004, 2007). Pride is tied to moral behaviors surpassing internalized norms and standards (Tangney et al., 2007). Individuals feel proud when they are credited for their success and abilities or when they witness the achievements of those they identify with (Lazarus, 1991; Nabi, 2002). Feelings of pride encourage individual behavior to continue achieving their goals and the associated feelings of pride (Peter & Honea, 2012). Pride, thus, can give people moral "credits," decreasing their subsequent intention to engage in prosocial behaviors like boycotting, consistent with the moral licensing effect.

Guilt, another self-conscious emotion, arises in a self-evaluation process (Tangney et al., 2007) when individuals break their own moral, ethical, or religious standards, making them want to correct their wrongdoing (Nabi, 2002). Guilt happens when people find their behavior morally wrong or harmful to others (Tangney et al., 2007). People can also feel guilt when other group members whom they identify act immorally (Li et al., 2020). Unlike other emotions, such as shame, guilt is linked to external events and specific actions (Tangney et al., 2007), which people often react to by readjusting their behaviors and avoiding repeating

(Antonetti & Maklan, 2014). Thus, guilt leads to remorse and a more proactive or adaptive response to the situation and, regardless of its negative nature, can have a positive effect by motivating people to engage in prosocial and positive behavior (Ghorbani et al., 2013; Tangney et al., 2007; Zhang & Du, 2023). Guilt encourages people to correct their wrongdoings, motivating them to do prosocial compensatory behaviors (i.e., volunteering or donating) as a form of moral cleansing (Zhang & Du, 2023; Koch-Bayram & Biemann, 2024). Thus, guilt as a psychological mechanism is the key driver in how individuals regulate their moral behaviors (Lee et al., 2023). In the context of CSA, we argue that when a brand to which consumers feel attached takes a questionable socio-political stance, they may feel guilty and, in order to restore their moral equilibrium, their intention to engage in prosocial acts such as boycotting will increase.

Overall, moral balancing as a self-evaluation process can arouse self-conscious emotions associated with self-evaluation. This study proposes that CSA, as an emotion-eliciting event, can trigger pride and guilt in consumers (Gino & Galinsky, 2012; Kouchaki, 2011). Specifically, as elicited by aligned CSA, a feeling of pride may qualify these consumers to reduce their boycott intention as prosocial behavior, according to moral licensing. Therefore, they participate less in the collective action of boycotting to balance their moral behavior. In contrast, feelings of guilt evoked by misaligned CSA may encourage the consumers to enhance their intention of boycott regarding moral cleansing. Thus, they participate in boycotting to help others and balance their moral behavior. We therefore hypothesize:

H2: Pride mediates the relationship between mis/aligned CSA and boycott intention.
H3: Guilt mediates the relationship between mis/aligned CSA and boycott intention.

Although this study mainly focuses on the direct effect of aligned and misaligned CSA on consumer boycott intentions and the mediating role of self-conscious emotions, namely pride and guilt, it is also important to consider how additional factors may shape these relationships. We can better understand when and why consumers respond with specific emotions by introducing relevant moderators. In this regard, two key moderators, including self-brand overlap and moral judgment, are proposed to refine the explanatory power of our framework.

4.3 The role of Self-brand Overlaps as a moderator

Brands are symbolic entities that help consumers express their self-identity (Aaker,1999). Consumers tend to choose brands that are close to their self-image (Escalas & Bettman, 2003),

often resulting in a psychological connection between the self and the brand. Trump and Brucks (2012) refer to this connection as self-brand overlap, the degree of integration between an individual's identity and the brand's identity. Prior research shows that such overlap influences how consumers perceive and respond to the brand's action. For instance, Lichtenstein et al. (2004) show that consumer identification with the brand can impact their behavior, and Newman and Brucks (2018) point out that socially responsible actions of brands are more appealing and meaningful for those consumers who feel more connected to the brand. As a result, consumers see themselves as part of the brand, which can influence how they act in the future. In light of these findings, we referred to self-brand overlap, where individuals with a stronger connection to a brand may view the brand's sociopolitical actions as an extension of themselves.

From a moral balancing perspective, this psychological intimacy means that consumers may interpret the brand's behavior as reflective of their own values. When this overlap is high, CSA actions become more self-relevant, boosting self-evaluative emotional responses such as pride or guilt (Newman & Brucks, 2018; Kouchaki, 2011). Thus, in the context of CSA, when a brand's actions align with consumers' values, we predict that people with more connection to the brand (higher self-brand overlap) will strengthen positive emotional responses such as pride. Conversely, if a brand's CSA actions are misaligned with consumers' sociopolitical values, a higher self-brand overlap could increase negative emotions like guilt. Therefore, this study explores how overlapping between a person and a brand can affect the relationship between CSA and emotions. It is thus hypothesized that:

H4: Self-brand overlap will moderate the relationship between mis/aligned CSA, pride (H4a), and guilt (H4b).

4.4 The role of Moral Judgment as a moderator

Moral judgment relates to an individual's assessment of whether certain behaviors are ethically right or wrong (Kohlberg, 1969). Moral judgment is a critical aspect of ethical decision-making and influences how people perceive a moral dilemma (Tan, 2002). Previous research has identified that moral judgments could be automatically activated when one perceives a particular behavior as immoral (Haidt, 2001), and immoral brand practices affect consumer brand assessments (Kang et al., 2016; Romani et al., 2013). Individuals react differently to misconduct behavior (Lee & Kwak, 2016) based on their moral judgment. In the

context of CSA on controversial topics, consumers face a moral dilemma and view such actions through the lens of moral standards.

From a moral balancing perspective, moral judgment is a key internal standard that informs how individuals track and evaluate the morality of actions—both their own and those of others linked to their identity. Consumers with heightened moral judgment are more likely to interpret CSA alignment or misalignment through this evaluative lens, leading to stronger self-conscious emotional responses. If consumers find the brand's activism misaligned with their values, they may experience guilt and try to engage in corrective actions. Conversely, aligning with moral norms may bring about a greater sense of pride.

According to moral reasoning (Galotti, 1989; Kohlberg, 1969) and the link between moral principles and emotional reactions (Dahl & Killen, 2018; Lazarus, 1991), a misaligned CSA that violates consumers' moral principles can generate negative emotions such as guilt. Conversely, when CSA aligns with these moral principles, consumers are more likely to feel emotions such as pride. Thus, moral judgment influences how consumers categorize the brand's actions as moral or immoral and how these judgments translate into emotional responses. We thus hypothesize:

H5: Moral judgment will moderate the relationship between mis/aligned CSA, pride (H5a), and guilt (H5b).

Fig.1 presents the theoretical framework of this study.

-Insert Fig.1 here-

5. Methodology

Research context. To test our proposed hypotheses, LGBTQ+ rights, specifically the "Don't Say Gay" bill, served as a controversial sociopolitical research context. The Don't Say Gay bill (formally titled Florida's HB 1557 or Parental Rights in Education Bill) limits the teaching of sexual orientation and gender identity to Florida's elementary school students. The bill is controversial because supporters believe it gives more control to the parents and protects students from inappropriate topics in the classroom. At the same time, opponents worry that it could negatively affect LGBTQ+ students by making them feel invisible. We chose Disney, a

major mass media and entertainment company, as a target brand due to its public response to the bill on its X (formerly Twitter) account.

Data collection for this study was conducted through an online questionnaire composed of closed-ended questions/statements paired with a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. The constructs in our study were measured using pre-developed scales taken from the marketing literature. A detailed list of the items for each construct is provided in the Appendix, Table A.1., Figure A.1, and A.4.

Participants. A total of 401 participants were recruited from Prolific. After removing the ones who failed the attention check, the final sample consisted of 399 participants, 55.6% females, with an average age of 39.5 years (SD = 1.34).

Procedure. First, the Inclusion of Others in the Self scale (IOS; Aron et al., 1992) was measured. Participants were asked to select between a set of seven overlapping circles labeled "self" and "other" (with "other" here referring to Disney). A greater overlap between the circles shows a stronger self-brand overlap between participants and Disney. Next, participants were exposed to a real X post from Disney regarding the "Don't Say Gay" bill (sample stimuli can be found in the Appendix, Figure A.2.).

Participants were asked to state their personal position on the Don't say gay bill and their level of alignment with Disney's post on the mentioned bill (From 1= Strongly misaligned to 7 = Strongly aligned). Based on their answers, we labeled the misaligned and aligned CSA (independent variable). Next, participants were asked to state their moral judgment about Disney's action (7-point Likert scale, four items including two items on cognitive judgment and two on moral reasoning adapted from Tan, 2002; α = 0.92), their pride feeling (7-point Likert scale, seven items measure of authentic pride adapted from Tracy & Robins, 2007; α = 0.96), their guilt feeling (7-point Likert scale, three items adapted from Allard & White, 2015; Tangney et al., 1996; α = 0.94), and boycott intention (7-point Likert scale, seven items composed of a three items subscale of make a difference and a four items subscale of self-enhancement adapted from Klein et al., 2004; α = 0.94). Finally, they responded to demographic questions, thanked them, and debriefed. Demographic data are presented in the Appendix, Table A.2.

5.1 Results

The composite reliabilities (CR) of the substantive constructs – moral judgment, pride, guilt, and boycott intention- exceeded 0.70, indicating reliability. Additionally, the average variance

extracted (AVE) surpassed 0.50, establishing convergent validity (Hair et al., 2009). The lowest CR was 0.90 (moral judgment), and the minimum AVE was 0.61 (boycott intention). The square roots of the AVEs for the constructs, moral judgment, pride, and guilt, were higher than their inter-construct correlations, indicating discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). However, the square root of the AVEs for boycott intention (0.37) was slightly lower than its correlation with moral judgment (0.54). Despite this observation, the measurement model remains robust, as the discriminant validity of boycott intention was confirmed to the other constructs in the model. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha of all scales ranged from 0.92 (moral judgment) to 0.96 (pride) and presented satisfactory reliability (see Table 1)

-Insert Table.1 here-

Using a cross-sectional, self-reported survey to gather data requires assessing Common Method Variance (CMV) to identify any possible biases in the results (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2012). Both procedural and statistical techniques were employed to address the risk of CMV. When designing the questionnaire, the order of items was randomized to avoid order effects, and care was taken to ensure that none of the statements suggested any preferred answers, maintaining the neutrality of the survey. We also improved the clarity of the scale items to ensure clarity among respondents. The survey was kept short to minimize fatigue.

Additionally, we ensured the separation of the measurement of predictor and outcome variables to maintain their independence. Finally, respondent anonymity was maintained using Prolific Academic's ID system. To evaluate potential common method variance (CMV), we applied Harman's one-factor test, following the guidelines provided by Podsakoff et al. (2003). According to Harman's one-factor method, CMV could be present if the first component explains more than 50% of the variance. Since, in our analysis, the first unrotated factor explained 30.41% of the total variance well below the 50% threshold, common method variance was not a significant issue in this study (Appendix, Table A.3.).

A mediation analysis was conducted through the PROCESS 4.2 macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2017, Model 4; bootstrapped with 5000 draws) to investigate the impact of pride and guilt emotions on respondents' mis/alignment with CSA practices with the boycott intention. The results show a negative significant effect of aligned CSA on boycott intention (effect -2.26, CI95 [-3.28, -1.25]), as well as a positive significant effect of misaligned CSA on boycott intention (effect 2.94, CI95 [1.91, 3.96]), supporting H1. Furthermore, the findings show that

pride partially mediates the misaligned CSA and boycott intention relationship (effect -0.16, CI95 [-0.38, -0.02]), indicating the moral cleansing effect. Additionally, the results revealed that guilt partially mediates the aligned CSA and boycott intention (effect 0.25, CI95 [0.03, 0.62]), indicating a moral licensing effect. While the mediation effect of pride in the context of aligned CSA and boycott intention is statistically significant (effect = 0.10, CI95 [0.00, 0.27]), it does not reflect a moral licensing effect. According to the results, guilt, although it has a statistically significant mediating effect on the misaligned CSA and boycott intention (effect -0.11, CI95 [-0.34, -0.00]), does not reflect the moral cleansing effect (see Table 2).

-Insert Table.2 here-

To examine the moderation role of self-brand overlap and moral judgment on the mis/aligned CSA – self-conscious emotions, including pride and guilt, relationship, a moderation analysis using PROCESS SPSS 4.2 macro (Hayes, 2017, Model 2; bootstrapped with 5000 draws) was conducted. The results show that moral judgment has a significant moderation on the aligned CSA and guilt relationship ($\beta = 0.44$, CI95 [0.26, 0.63]), as well as a negative significant effect on misaligned CSA and guilt relationship ($\beta = -0.51$, CI95 [-0.69, -0.33]), supporting H5b, but nonsignificant for the aligned CSA and pride relationship ($\beta = -0.09$, CI95[-0.33, 0.13]) and misaligned CSA and pride (($\beta = 0.14$, CI95 [-0.08, 0.36]), rejecting H5a. Concerning the moderation impact of self-brand overlap, it has no significant impact on the aligned CSA and pride ($\beta = 0.07$, CI95[-0.10, 0.25]), nor the relationship between CSA and guilt ($\beta = -0.13$, CI95[-0.27, 0.00]), rejecting H4a and H4b, respectively (see Table.3).

-Insert Table. 3 here-

6. Discussion

This study explored the impact of CSA on consumers' prosocial behavior, particularly boycott intention, by focusing on the emotional mechanisms. As individuals assess the brand's stands with their values to know if this is aligned or misaligned with their stands on the issue, this evaluation can trigger self-conscious emotions, which reflect how people view themselves regarding the brand's actions. Therefore, building on moral balancing theory, we introduce a model that explores parallel self-conscious emotional mediators, pride and guilt, incorporating the intention to boycott and the moderating role of self-brand overlap and moral judgment.

Through an online survey investigating a real sociopolitical issue and a real brand action to it, this study finds that aligned CSA can decrease the consumers' intention to boycott. In contrast, when consumers find CSA misaligned with their values, their intention to boycott the brand increases (supporting H1). These findings differ from a previous study (Hong & Li, 2020), which found that consumer-cause fit -the perceived fit between a consumer and a company's activities- was not a significant predictor of boycott intention. After their unfulfilled expectations regarding consumer-cause fit's impact on boycott intention, they explained that the influence of consumer-cause fit might have been overridden by consumer-company congruence and company-cause fit, as two other constructs of consumer cognition. Our findings extended their work by conforming to the direct impact of mis/alignment CSA on boycott intention.

According to our findings, pride can significantly and partially mediate both aligned CSA-boycott intention and misaligned CSA-boycott intention relationships. However, only the misaligned CSA-boycott intention relationship can present the moral cleansing effect. These findings reveal interesting dynamics in pride functions in aligned vs. misaligned contexts. In the aligned context, the significant mediation of pride suggests that when consumers perceive the brands' stance to be consistent with their values, their sense of pride increases ($\beta = 0.34$, CI95 [0.07, 0.60]) and encourages them to be involved in boycott intention as a prosocial action. Thus, in the aligned context, pride acts as a positive reinforcer and motivates them to uphold their moral standard and act according to their values.

In contrast, in the misaligned context, when consumers feel a misalignment between their values and brands sociopolitical values, their pride emotion decreases ($\beta = -0.47$, CI95 [-0.75, -0.19]), they are more likely to engage in boycotting behavior. Thus, in a misaligned context, the diminished pride creates a sense of moral discomfort and encourages them to increase their prosocial behavior to balance their moral standards, leading to moral cleansing. These differences highlight the significant role of pride depending on whether the brand's stance aligns or misaligns with consumers' values.

Our findings regarding guilt also show that this self-conscious emotion can significantly and partially mediate the CSA and boycott intention relationship in both aligned and misaligned CSA contexts. In an aligned CSA context, guilt has a positive indirect effect on boycott intention. This means that aligned CSA reduces the guilt emotion ($\beta = -0.57$, CI95 [-0.78, -0.35]), which this reduction in guilt leads to a lower intention to boycott. The diminished guilt gives a sense of moral ease or license to be less moral, and they feel licensed to avoid boycotting as prosocial behavior. Their alignment with the brands' sociopolitical position helps

them to feel morally justified, decreasing the need to take corrective action. This pattern shows the moral licensing effect in the mediating role of guilt in the aligned CSA-boycott intention relationship. In the misaligned context, guilt also significantly and negatively mediates the relationship between misaligned CSA and boycott intention. Perceiving a misalignment between a brand and consumers' values increases the feeling of guilt ($\beta = 0.28$, CI95 [0.04, 0.52]), this heightened guilt reduces the intention of boycotting regarding the negative mediating effect of guilt. In contrast to the aligned context, guilt does not create a moral balancing effect, and it simply highlights a significant mediation effect, indicating that, in the misaligned context, guilt influences consumers' intention to boycott without providing moral relief or license. This distinction highlights how guilt's role changes based on alignment, serving as a psychological "license" but simply adding to the internal conflict in misalignment.

Our findings on how pride and guilt act in aligned and misaligned contexts differ from our initial expectations. We initially predicted that pride in an aligned context would lead to moral licensing, reducing people's intention to participate in boycotts as a form of prosocial action. Instead, the results indicate that pride in alignment acts as moral reinforcement, increasing consumers' desire to act in line with their values, which, in this case, means supporting boycotts. In misaligned contexts, decreasing pride drives people toward boycotts to balance their sense of moral integrity, showing a moral cleansing effect. Our findings also reveal a shift from our initial predictions regarding guilt. Initially, guilt was predicted to play a central role in driving boycotting intention in the misaligned context as part of a moral cleansing response. However, results suggesting a more subtle picture show that reducing guilt leads to a moral licensing effect, allowing consumers to feel morally justified and reducing their intention to engage in corrective actions like boycotting in an aligned context.

In contrast, the heightened guilt does not reflect a moral cleansing response as expected in a misaligned context. Instead, it may contribute to an inner moral conflict rather than directly leading to an intention to boycott. These findings suggest that pride and guilt have more dynamic, context-dependent roles than we first expected. Pride serves not only as a way to confirm one's moral values but also as a driver for balancing those values when one feels unbalanced. At the same time, guilt's effect varies from simply lowering the need for corrective action in alignment to heightening inner conflict in misalignment. The gap between our initial predictions and final findings may stem from assuming a one-dimensional role for each emotion. We focused on pride only in aligned contexts and guilt in misaligned contexts, which might have led us to overlook how both emotions can have important but different impacts in each context. Rather than pride solely enabling moral licensing in alignment and guilt driving

moral cleansing in misalignment, our results indicate that both pride and guilt work in each context but in distinctive ways (see Figure. 2).

-Insert Fig. 2 here-

Regarding the moderators, self-brand overlap did not significantly moderate the relationship between mis/aligned CSA and pride (H4a) nor between mis/aligned CSA and guilt (H4b). This lack of support contrasts with Newman and Brucks (2018), which shows that CSR actions of a brand potentially shape pride and guilt in consumers who have higher self-brand overlap, indicating that self-brand overlap may not necessarily intensify pride or guilt in reaction to CSA efforts. This suggests that self-brand overlap may not carry enough weight to alter emotional responses in this specific context of CSA due to the different and polarizing nature of CSA from CSR. In the CSA context, broader societal implications and ethical considerations could overshadow personal overlap with the brand.

Moral judgment as the other moderator significantly moderates the aligned CSA and guilt ($\beta = 0.44$) as well as the misaligned CSA and guilt ($\beta = -0.51$) relationship (H5a). These results show that moral judgment is crucial in shaping guilt emotions in both aligned and misaligned CSA. In an aligned CSA context, the positive moderation impact of moral judgment on guilt suggests that individuals with a stronger moral judgment experience a greater decrease in guilt. In a misaligned CSA context, the negative moderation effect of moral judgment on guilt indicates that individuals with higher moral judgment experience heightened guilt. The misalignment between their values and the brands' values likely intensifies feelings of guilt. These outcomes align with previous studies on moral judgment (Haidt, 2001; Haidt, 2003; Steenhaut & Van Kenhove, 2006), which suggest that moral judgment can trigger strong emotions, especially since individuals feel a behavior violates their moral standards. Thus, moral judgment intensifies guilt when there is a misalignment (due to perceived moral violation) and reduces guilt in alignment (as a form of moral affirmation), highlighting that guilt is sensitive to moral evaluations.

However, the results show that moral judgment does not significantly moderate the mis/aligned CSA and pride relationship (H5a), suggesting that moral judgment does not influence pride as strongly as guilt. This nonsignificant interaction could mean that pride as an emotion is less sensitive to moral judgment. These outputs show how guilt and pride could reflect differently on moral judgment. While guilt is a response to moral failures and is more sensitive to moral judgment, pride could arise from alignment with brands' actions and be less

sensitive to moral judgment. Thus, while moral judgment can moderate guilt based on the perceived alignment, pride remains stable and is not significantly influenced by moral judgment.

7. Contributions

Theoretical contributions. This study makes several contributions to the field of corporate sociopolitical activism. First, it explores the self-conscious emotions (specifically pride and guilt) as mediators in consumer responses to CSA. Unlike the basic emotions such as anger, which arises as immediate reactions to external stimuli (Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022; Wannow et al., 2023), self-conscious emotions emerge from internal evaluations comparing their personal sociopolitical positions with brands' CSA stances and find their values aligned or misaligned with the brands' values. Prior studies have mostly emphasized on the cognitive evaluations including value congruence or cognitive assessment between brand and consumer (Hong & Li, 2020; Alharbi et al., 2022), this study extends the focus from external evaluations to internal moral self-evaluation, due to the important role of self-conscious emotions in the CSA context and responding the gap identified by previous studies (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Wannow et al., 2023).

To further explain the role of self-conscious emotions, this study made its second contribution, introducing moral balancing theory as a novel theoretical lens to interpret CSA-related consumer behavior. Although some previous studies have applied the theory in the consumer context to understand how consumers regulate their behavior through moral licensing and moral cleansing (Kouchaki, 2011; Merritt et al., 2010), its application to the CSA remains unexplored. This novel integration of theory in the CSA context extends earlier works such as Newman & Brucks (2018), showing that not only brands' socially responsible (CSR) actions can trigger moral self-regulation in the form of licensing or cleansing but also socio-politically controversial brand actions can act as moral triggers.

This study's third contribution examines how new and individual-level moderators, including moral judgment and self-brand overlap, shape consumers' emotional responses to CSA. While previous studies have explored consumers' general reactions to CSA, they have rarely investigated who is more likely to experience more emotional reactions or when such reactions are most likely to occur (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2018; Zhou & Dong, 2022). By introducing moral judgment as a moderator, this study reveals that consumers who care more about right and wrong experience heightened guilt in misaligned CSA and reduced guilt in

aligned CSA. This extends prior works on moral emotions and judgments (e.g., Haidt, 2001; Steenhaut & Van Kenhove, 2006) to demonstrate personal moral standards moderate emotional reactions within the specific CSA context. In contrast, our findings revealed that self-brand overlap did not significantly moderate the emotional responses in a politically charged CSA context, contrary to the less controversial CSR context (e.g., Newman & Brucks, 2018), where identification with the brand has been shown to strengthen emotional responses. These results suggest that moral concerns can outweigh identity-based ties in the socio-politically different context of CSA.

Finally, this research made a methodological contribution by taking a real-world CSA example: Disney's stance on the "Don't Say Gay" bill, unlike the many prior studies that rely on hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2018). Using a large-scale survey with this actual case provides more generalizable outcomes than artificial scenarios. This approach makes our findings more applicable for both academic researchers and practitioners seeking to understand consumer reactions to CSA.

Managerial contributions. The findings of this study provide marketers and managers with practical insights into the brand sociopolitical activism and consumer responses. Our findings show pride acts as a moral reinforcement rather than moral licensing among the aligned consumers. It means pride increases the consumer's intention to engage in prosocial behavior (boycotting intention in our study), and they are motivated to express their values through further actions. Marketers and managers can use this motivation to encourage consumer engagement by channeling this feeling of pride into other prosocial behaviors rather than boycotting. For example, instead of framing the alignment and pride as the final achievements (i.e., "Thank you for your support"), brands can take it as a reason for continuing prosocial behavior (i.e., "Your support inspires change, let's keep making a change together"). They can provide opportunities for consumers to reinforce their prosocial behavior, such as participating in campaigns, supporting petitions, and joining advocacy or community events rather than passive celebrations. Thus, brands can turn pride into long-term and continuous engagement and other prosocial behaviors rather than one temporary moment.

Regarding the misaligned consumers with reduced pride, which acts as a moral cleansing and leads to heightened boycott intention to clean their internal moral imbalance, brands can take strategies to reduce this moral discomfort and offer alternative ways to voice their misalignment and dissatisfaction. For instance, brands can offer Q&A sessions, surveys, and open feedback channels to hear misaligned consumers' voices and release their discomfort without turning to boycott. Regarding the misaligned consumers who feel more guilty, creating

an internal conflict, managers may acknowledge and validate this discomfort in their CSA messaging and prevent it from turning into an action such as boycotting. For example, "We understand that not everyone may agree with our stance, and we respect other perspectives. We aim to act in line with our values while we believe in open dialogue." Managers can also reduce moral judgment's intensifying effect on guilt by using a narrative tone and humanizing the brands' CSA stance. This way, consumers do not feel that the brand takes a sudden and divisive stance. For example, "We listened to real stories of affected people, and then we took this stance. We always use our voice to support those who need it".

In addition, our findings show that self-conscious emotions such as pride and guilt are dynamic and can change based on consumers' ongoing evaluations of brands' CSA practices. As a result, brands need to monitor these shifts in real time using tools such as sentiment analysis and social listening. Finally, due to the significant role of emotions in consumer responses to the sociopolitical actions of brands, managers can train employees to recognize and respond to emotional feedback empathically and respectfully without defensiveness to reduce the negative potential emotional behaviors.

8. Limitations and Future Studies

This study has some limitations and provides some directions for future research. First, this study examined how Disney's sociopolitical stance on the "Don't Say Gay" bill affected consumers' self-conscious emotions (including pride and guilt) and intentions to boycott the brand. Future research may expand our proposed model to test other controversial topics, such as abortion rights, racial justice, and immigration, which might lead to distinct emotional reactions. Investigating other companies and sectors like tech, food, and fashion may also bring different responses to the CSA, and shed more light on the generalizability of our findings across brands and issues. Second, our research approach measures self-conscious emotions and boycott intention at a single moment in time rather than monitoring changes over an extended period. These emotions could change due to shifts in public conversations or developments in brands' stances. Therefore, longitudinal research methods could be used in future studies to understand better how boycott intentions and emotional responses change over time. Third, this study assessed mediators and output variables with self-report methodologies. These findings could be complemented with behavioral data and experimental methods to better understand consumers' reactions to CSA. Fourth, our proposed model works well in explaining consumer responses to CSA, although self-brand overlap did not moderate the relationship between mis/aligned CSA and emotions. This does not mean that this factor is less important.

Instead, it could be because of the polarizing nature of CSA that might outweigh the personal connection to the brand. Future research could investigate other contexts—for example, less controversial topics or less recognizable brands where self-brand overlap may be important for consumer emotions. Fifth, our research shows that moral judgment works differently depending on the consumer's emotions. It can play a crucial role when a person feels guilty but does not have the same impact as pride. This finding raises questions about the role of other moral constructs, such as moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002), in influencing pride and guilt. Such relationships can be explored in future research to see how they relate to pride and guilt in the context of CSA. Finally, future research can replicate this study with cross-cultural samples and other demographic groups, including participants from countries other than the US. Global attitudes to moral standards and sociopolitical values could be different and may reveal the cross-cultural dynamics of self-conscious emotions, moral judgment, and self-brand overlap. These avenues for future research can help us better understand how consumers react to CSA and clarify the confounding roles of self-conscious emotions, self-brand overlap, and moral judgment in shaping boycott intentions.

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Table.1

Descriptive statistics, reliability, discriminant validity

Constructs	Mean	S. D	CR	AVE	CA	MJ	Pride	Guilt	BI
Moral judgment (MJ)	3.19	1.93	0.90	0.75	0.92	**0.57[a]**			
Pride	3.96	1.34	0.97	0.83	0.96	-0.10**	**0.69**		
Guilt	1.93	1.11	0.95	0.87	0.94	0.23**	0.02**	**0.77**	
Boycott intention (BI)	2.84	1.29	0.90	0.61	0.94	0.54**	-0.06**	0.15**	**0.28**

S.D Std. Deviation, *CR* Composite reliability, *CA* Cronbach alpha

[a] square root of average variance extracted (AVE) (bold diagonal)

Significant of correlations: **$p < 0.01$

Table.2

Direct and indirect effects: The PROCESS Macro model N.4 & ML coefficient STATA

Direct relationship	Effect	LLCI	UCLI	Hypothesis
Aligned CSA ⟶ BI	-2.26	-3.28	-1.25	H1 supported
Misaligned CSA ⟶ BI	2.94	1.91	3.96	
Indirect effects				
AlignedCSA ➜ Pride ➜ BI	0.10	0.00	0.27	Statistically significant
MisalignedCSA ➜ Pride ➜ BI	-0.16	-0.38	-0.02	H2 supported Moral cleansing effect
AlignedCSA ➜ Guilt ➜ BI	0.25	0.04	0.62	H3 supported Moral licensing effect
MisalignedCSA ➜ Guilt ➜ BI	-0.11	-0.33	-0.00	Statistically significant

N=399

BI: Boycott Intention, LLCI: lower level of the confidence interval, UCLI: upper level of the confidence interval of 95%, Bootstrapped with 5000 draws

Table. 3
Moderation effects: The PROCESS Macro model N.2

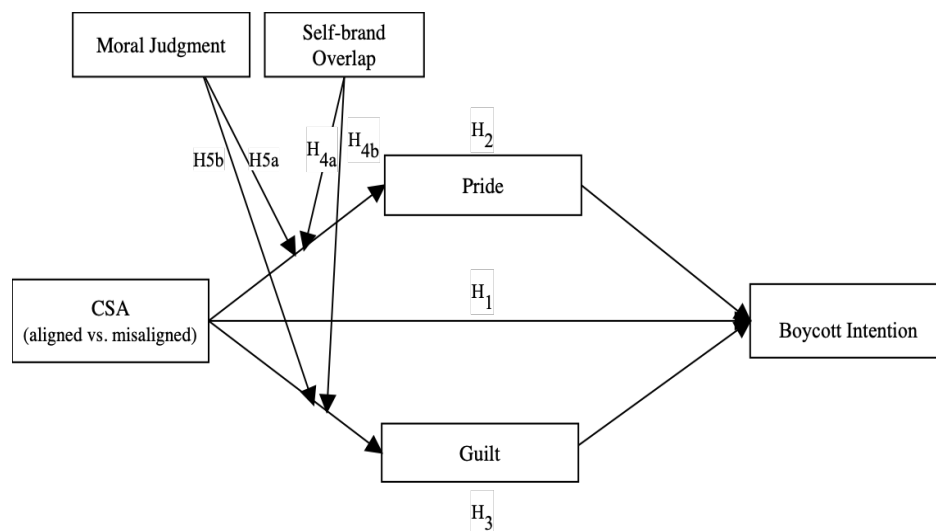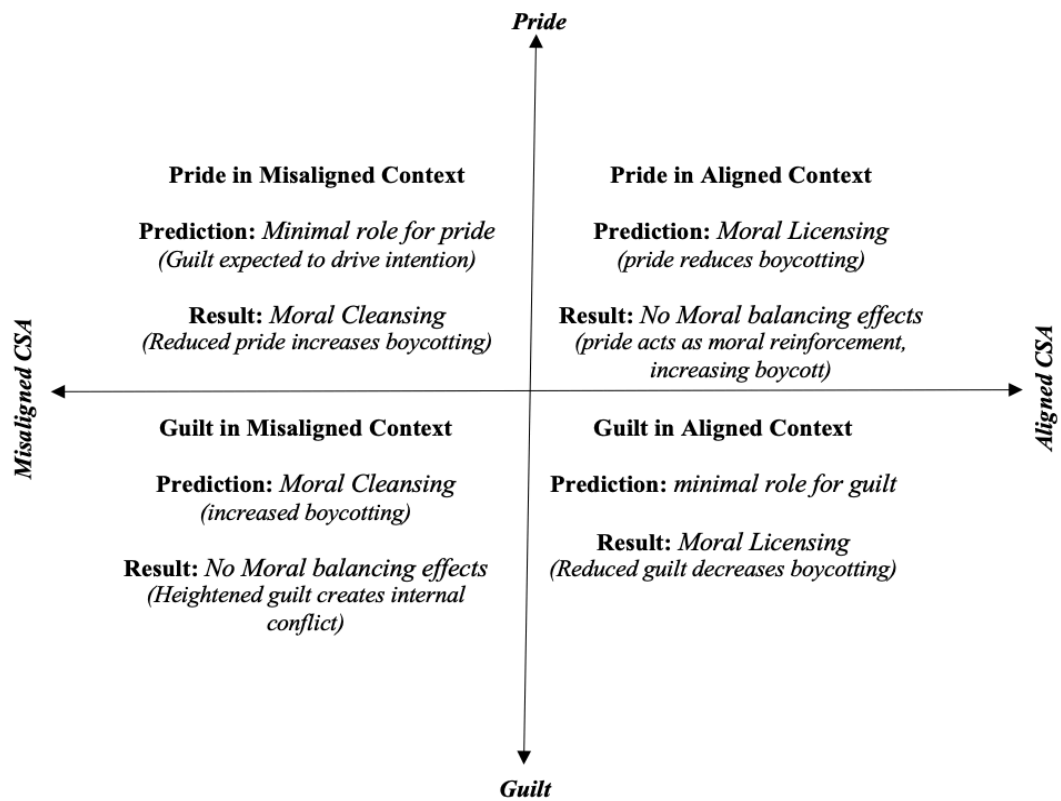| Moderated relationship	Self-brand overlap	Moral judgment	Hypothesis
AlignedCSA → Pride	0.09 [-0.04, 0.22]	- 0.09 [-0.33, 0.13]	H4a rejected
MisalignedCSA → Pride	-0.04 [-0.23, 0.15]	0.14 [-0.08, 0.36]	H5a rejected
AlignedCSA → Guilt	-0.13 [-0.27, 0.00]	0.44 [0.26, 0.63]	H4b rejected
MisalignedCSA → Guilt	0.04 [-0.11, 0.20]	-0.51 [-0.69, -0.33]	H5b supported

N = 399, the lower and upper level of the confidence interval in bracket

Confidence Interval: 95%

Bootstrapped with 5000 draws

Fig 1.
Conceptual model

Fig 2.
Effects of pride and guilt in aligned vs. misaligned CSA context

Pride

Pride in Misaligned Context

Prediction: *Minimal role for pride*
(Guilt expected to drive intention)

Result: *Moral Cleansing*
(Reduced pride increases boycotting)

Pride in Aligned Context

Prediction: *Moral Licensing*
(pride reduces boycotting)

Result: *No Moral balancing effects*
(pride acts as moral reinforcement, increasing boycott)

Misaligned CSA

Aligned CSA

Guilt in Misaligned Context

Prediction: *Moral Cleansing*
(increased boycotting)

Result: *No Moral balancing effects*
(Heightened guilt creates internal conflict)

Guilt in Aligned Context

Prediction: *minimal role for guilt*

Result: *Moral Licensing*
*(Reduced guilt decreases boycotting)*

Guilt

Figure A.1.
Self-brand overlap scale (IOS; Aron et al., 1992)

First, we asked Prolific participants about their relationship with the brand (Disney) by Inclusion of Other in the Self scale (IOS; Aron et al., 1992):

> Using the image below, which picture best describes your relationship with **Disney**?
> The "other" circle stands for (Disney)
>
> People hold different types of relationships with companies and brands. Some people have close relationships with certain brands and may think, "I consider brand X to be "me" (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others). This type of relationship would be indicated by the letter 'G' in the picture below. Others hold no relationship or even a negative relationship with a brand. This type of relationship would be indicated by the letter 'A' in the picture below."
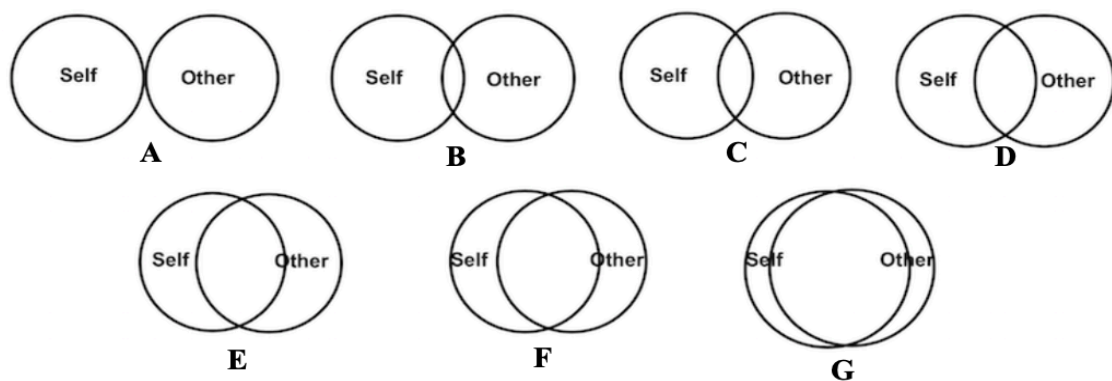
Then, an introduction to the "Don't Say Gay" bill and an X post from Disney reacting to the bill was provided:

> State legislators in Florida passed the so-called "Don't Say Gay" bill (formally titled House Bill 1557, or the Parental Rights in Education bill) that limits the teaching of sexual orientation and gender identity to Florida primary school students. The bill faced controversy, with supporters arguing about parental rights and protecting children from inappropriate classroom topics and opponents expressing concerns about the potential negative impact on LGBTQ+ students by making them feel invisible, as well as broader implications for education and freedom of speech.
>
> Disney, a major entertainment company in Florida, initially faced backlash for not publicly opposing the legislation. Critics argued that Disney, as a major employer and influencer, should use its platform to support LGBTQ+ rights.

In response to the criticism, Disney later issued a statement expressing opposition to the bill, stating that:

Figure A.2.

CSA Stimuli (real X post from real brand, Disney)

The company ultimately signed a Human Rights Organization statement opposing similar efforts nationwide and **donating $5 million** to groups working to ensure LGBTQ+ protections.

A.3
Personal position

What is your personal position on the "Don't Say Gay" bill? (Banning the teaching of sexual orientation and gender identity in primary schools) (0 = Support, 1 = Oppose)

A.4
Mis/alignment CSA measure

What do you think after reading Disney's post? Does Disney's stand on LGBTQ+ rights align with your values? (a 7-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly misaligned to 7 = strongly aligned).

Table A.1.

Constructs and measurements

Variables and scale items

Moral judgment (Cronbach Alpha=0.92); (Tan, 2002)

Cognitive Judgment

In my opinion, Disney's stand on the Don't say gay bill was wrong.

In my opinion, it is morally wrong to take this stand on the Don't say gay issue.

Moral reasoning

Brands should always consider the moral implications before taking a stand on sociopolitical issues.

There are moral reasons against Disney's action.

Pride (Cronbach Alpha=0.96); (Tracy & Robins, 2007)

After reading Disney's post:

I feel accomplished

I feel like I am achieving

I feel confident

I feel fulfilled

I feel like I have self-worth

I feel productive

I feel successful

Guilt (Cronbach Alpha=0.94) (Allard & White, 2015; Tangney et al., 1996)

After reading Disney's post:

I feel guilty

I feel repentant

I feel blameworthy

Boycott Intention (Cronbach Alpha=0.94); (Klein et al., 2004)

Make a difference: After Disney's action regarding the Don't say gay,

I would feel better about myself if I boycotted Disney.

My friends/my family encouraged me to boycott Disney.

I would feel guilty if I used Disney products.

I would feel uncomfortable if other people who are boycotting saw me consuming Disney products.

Self-enhancement:

By boycotting, I can help change Disney's decision.

Everyone should take part in the boycott because every contribution, no matter how small, is important.

Boycotts are an effective means to make a brand change its actions.

Table A.2.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents (N=399)

Demographic factors	Items	Counts	Percentage
Gender	Female	222	55.6
	Male	161	40.4
	Non binary/third gender	14	3.5
	Prefer not to say	2	0.5
	Total	399	100
Age	18-24	46	11.5
	25-34	136	34.1
	35-44	104	26.1
	45-54	53	13.3
	55-64	38	9.5
	65 or older	22	5.5
	Total	399	100

Table A.3.

Total variance explained in one factor Harman method

	Total Variance Explained								
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.692	30.419	30.419	6.692	**30.419**	30.419	5.887	26.760	26.760
2	5.471	24.870	55.289	5.471	24.870	55.289	3.946	17.935	44.695
3	2.549	11.584	66.873	2.549	11.584	66.873	3.792	17.238	61.933
4	1.661	7.550	74.423	1.661	7.550	74.423	2.748	12.491	74.423
5	.989	4.493	78.917						
6	.841	3.822	82.739						
7	.542	2.464	85.203						
8	.444	2.019	87.222						
9	.396	1.798	89.020						

10	.352	1.601	90.622
11	.296	1.346	91.968
12	.283	1.288	93.256
13	.215	.978	94.234
14	.211	.957	95.191
15	.182	.829	96.020
16	.171	.778	96.798
17	.150	.680	97.478
18	.137	.621	98.099
19	.132	.600	98.699
20	.104	.474	99.174
21	.094	.427	99.600
22	.088	.400	100.000

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This thesis investigates the phenomenon of corporate sociopolitical activism (CSA) and explores how consumers respond to this phenomenon. Consisting of three papers, this thesis progresses from a literature review to empirical investigations of consumer reactions under CSA. By examining diverse angles—bibliometric analysis, self-congruity theory, and moral balancing theory—this dissertation comprehensively explains CSA's effects on purchase and boycott intentions.

Corporate sociopolitical activism, as a response to sociopolitical issues, has become a timely and important phenomenon of study (Clemensen, 2017). With increasing numbers of companies engaging in the public debate, consumers may react either positively or negatively in terms of purchase and boycott intention (Dodd & Supa, 2015). Then the question becomes: What is the impact of CSA on consumers' responses in terms of purchase and boycott intention, and what makes individual consumers respond differently to CSA? To answer this question, the thesis integrated psychological and emotional antecedents and examined the impact of brands' motivations, moral judgment, and self-brand overlap.

In this thesis, we used three papers to answer this question. The first paper, a bibliometric study of CSA research, visualizes the most influential publications, authors, themes, and conceptual links. It shows how CSA is gradually becoming a marketing and consumer research focus. Through the bibliometric analysis, several key themes are revealed that define the structure of CSA research. The consumer-centric theme represents a cluster of studies focusing on how CSA influences consumer attitudes, trust, and brand choice (Haupt et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Wannow et al.,2023). The corporate perspective focuses on the potential reputational and financial risks or benefits of taking a public stance on sociopolitical issues (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Hydock et al., 2020; Weber et al., 2023). Finally, the strategic solutions cluster looks into practical approaches to communicating CSA efforts effectively, highlighting the importance of monitoring authenticity (Ahmad et al., 2022; Mirzaei et al., 2022; Vredenburg et al., 2020). This bibliometric study not only clarifies how CSA research is still unfolding but also reveals the necessity of understanding psychological and emotional mechanisms to explain how consumers arrive at decisions to purchase or boycott.

In order to fulfill this psychological mechanism call, the second paper employs self-congruity theory to uncover the mechanisms behind aligned and misaligned CSA stances and consumers' final purchase intentions. By seeking a match between a brand's values and consumers' self-concept, actual and ideal, this study proposes two key psychological drivers, including consumer-brand identification (CBI) and Self-enhancement. Consumers who perceive the brand's actions as aligned with their values are more likely to "reward" the brand by purchasing it. Where brand and consumer values are misaligned, CBI decreases.

Beyond the identification, consumers use brands as a means to express their ideal self-concept. When the brand's CSA practices align with the values of consumers, the brand becomes a symbolic resource for self-enhancement, which motivates stronger purchase intention. As a result, the alignment of the brand's values with the values of the consumers not only promotes feelings of belonging to something valuable but also contributes to the consumer's self-concept and, consequently, purchase intention. However, our findings showed that the extent of such identification and self-enhancement depends on why consumers believe the brand is engaging in CSA in the first place. When the brand's motives are perceived to be self-serving, the positive outcomes of alignment are diminished, while perceiving the brand's actions as public-serving amplifies the psychological drivers.

The third paper, drawing on moral balancing theory, addresses the other side of the CSA coin-boycotting. By addressing the emotional mechanism call of literature review, this study examines how consumers' self-conscious emotions, namely pride and guilt, shape their subsequent decision to boycott. Intriguingly, the third paper's findings revealed that pride and guilt display context-dependent roles. Pride in alignment can either sustain or reinforce moral intentions, whereas diminished pride in misalignment can fuel moral cleansing through boycotts. Guilt, meanwhile, exerts a licensing effect when alignment lowers guilt. Interestingly, guilt did not always translate simply into boycotts under misalignment; sometimes, it triggered internal conflict rather than an immediate move to punish the brand.

Moreover, moral judgment turned out to be important in shaping such guilt. Consumers whose values are misaligned with the brand's stance have an intensified sense of guilt because they see the brand's actions as a serious breach of morality. Conversely, when consumers' values align with the brand, their guilt is reduced, mainly when moral judgment is high. This could be because people believe the brand's actions are consistent with their own personal ideals. These findings indicate that moral judgments are quite important in how people emotionally respond to CSA. Meanwhile, in contrast to our initial assumptions, self-brand overlap did not significantly moderate the effects of aligned or misaligned CSA on pride or guilt. One possible

reason is that the controversial nature of CSA outweighed personal brand closeness as a driver of these emotions.

The second and third papers provide a holistic view of CSA's impact on consumer responses—purchase vs. boycott. The second paper underscores consumers' desire to maintain coherence with their self-concept (enhancing or affirming identity). The third explores how individuals integrate moral or immoral "credits" into collective action. As the data reveals, what matters is the brand's motivations, perceived moral standing, and alignment with an individual's values and identity. Noticeably, these findings represent two sides of the same phenomenon. They will most likely purchase from brands aligning with their values on polarizing issues when their actions appear to serve the public rather than self-serving. Conversely, misalignment can cause moral-based resistance, resulting in boycotts. However, this reaction is based on moral judgment and self-conscious emotions rather than self-brand overlap. In both cases, identity and morality are important in encouraging consumers to reinforce a valued sense of self through purchase or to seek moral "cleansing" through a boycott.

Collectively, the three papers answer the field's call for a bibliometrics analysis and more investigations into the psychological and emotional underpinnings of CSA. This thesis uses self-congruity and moral balancing theories to show that CSA is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by self-concept, self-conscious emotions, perceived motivations, and moral frameworks. Moreover, corporate sociopolitical activism is a powerful moral, emotional, and identity-charged force rather than just a way to sell products. It can motivate consumers to buy brands in order to show their best selves or lead them to stop supporting a brand as a way to balance their morals. Rather than an absolute or one-size-fits-all impact, CSA elicits various psychological and emotional responses that occur in different ways depending on which groups of consumers feel that the brand has aligned or misaligned with their identity.

From these three interconnected studies, this dissertation highlights how corporate sociopolitical activism can be both an opportunity and a hazard for brands. Taking a public stance engages with consumers' identities, moral values, and emotional foundations. Brands that align with particular values may inspire increased identification and self-enhancement among supportive consumers. Equally, they face the possibility of boycotts from those who feel the brand has crossed a moral line. By illuminating the pathways—consumer-brand identification, self-enhancement, pride, guilt—and the moderating effects of perceived motivation, moral judgment, and self-brand overlap, this work offers a richer understanding of

why CSA can lead to polarizing outcomes and also offers practical guidance for brands navigating the complex terrain of sociopolitical activism.

From a managerial perspective, our studies show that brands taking a public stand on controversial issues must understand the complicated moral and emotional issues involved. A key takeaway is that why the brand is speaking out, whether seen as "profit-driven" or "public-driven," can significantly influence how aligned consumers respond. Marketers should invest effort in clarifying public-serving motivations if they wish to deepen consumer-brand identification. Where consumers think that the brand is deceptive or acting just for profit, any goodwill earned from its alignment may be lost. CSA triggers self-conscious emotions like pride and guilt. Brands that handle these emotions carefully can lower the chances of boycotts and encourage positive support from consumers. For instance, offering platforms for dialogue (Q&As, community engagements) can help aligned consumers express their pride constructively, and misaligned consumers voice their concerns without resorting to a boycott. Staff training and guidelines help ensure that brand representatives handle polarizing conversations sensitively and in ways that minimize emotional escalation. Managers should also realize that pride will not always lead to complacency among supporters; it may lead them to further prosocial behavior, such as boycotting. Managers could positively use guilt by helping consumers resolve their moral dilemmas. However, these feelings could lead to confusion or even backlash if not appropriately handled. Some consumers will evaluate brand actions through a strong moral lens for divisive sociopolitical matters. If there is a risk of moral offense, managers might mitigate potential backlash by clearly communicating why the brand views its stance as ethically grounded (e.g., tying it to the brand's long-term values). Any brand that takes a stance on a divisive topic should anticipate that some segments will feel validated while others may be alienated. Balancing those reactions demands more than typical CSR communications; it requires continuous listening, empathic dialogue, and thoughtful transparency around why and how the brand is intervening in the social sphere. Thus, managers must forecast how different consumer segments might respond and develop communication strategies for supporters and detractors.

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