

Sarcastic or Assertive: How Should Activist Brands Respond to Consumers' Uncivil Comments on Social Media?

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Cite as:

Batista Juliana, Barros Lucia, Peixoto Fabricia, Botelho Delane (2021), Sarcastic or Assertive: How Should Activist Brands Respond to Consumers' Uncivil Comments on Social Media?. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 50th, (94775)

Paper from the 50th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, May 25-28, 2021



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Abstract

Brands are increasingly embracing social activism and often take a stand on controversial issues, prompting some consumers to react by making uncivil comments on social media. How should brands reply to such rudeness while maintaining their conviction and protecting their reputations? Currently, they use either a sarcastic or an assertive tone to reply to such comments; however, the effects of these types of responses on the brand's reputation are unexplored. Results from a series of five studies show that consumers evaluate brands that reply sarcastically less favorably than those with more assertive responses, due to their perceived aggressiveness. Specifically, when brands use an assertive tone, attitudes toward the brand improve substantially among consumers who are supportive of the brand's stance, whereas they remain negative among consumers who disagree with it. Interestingly, when comments are excessively uncivil, consumers who are stance supportive welcome sarcastic reply.

Keywords: *sarcasm; assertive; brand activism*

Track: Consumer Behaviour