

# Brand Activism: Does Courting Controversy Help or Hurt a Brand?

**Sourjo Mukherjee**  
Audencia Business School  
**Niek Althuisen**  
Independent Researcher

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## **Abstract**

How do consumers react when brands or individuals associated with a brand take a public stand on a controversial socio-political issue? Results from a series of experiments indicate that, if consumers disagree with the stand, it leads to sharp decline in their attitude towards the brand, while there is no positive effect among consumers who are supportive of the brand's position. Only if brands face serious backlash due to their activism, there is a small increase in the attitude towards the brand among the supporters of the stand. However, if the brand subsequently withdraws from their position or apologizes, brand attitude decreases for both supporters and the opponents of the brand's position. The negative effect of consumer-brand disagreement is mitigated as the perceived distance between the source of the stand and the brand is increased allowing for "moral decoupling".

**Keywords:** *activism; controversy; morality*

**Track:** Social Responsibility & Ethics