

That's Unlike You: How Moral Expectation and Motivated Reasoning Drives Consumer Reaction to Brand Activism

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Abstract

The past few years have seen an increasing number of brands publicly voicing their opinion on controversial social or political issues. Accordingly, I seek to understand how consumers process information about such instances of brand activism and, subsequently, how it affects consumer's attitudes and behavior. In two experiments, I show that consumer's evaluation of an activist brand is determined by two simultaneous, but opposing, factors – moral expectation disconfirmation (which depends on consumer's personal moral beliefs) and motivated reasoning (which depends on consumer's prior attachment to the brand). The proposed theoretical model explains the varying degree of effects of brand activism on brand performance observed in real life market cases.