

# BRANDS TAKING A PUBLIC STAND: A KEYWORD ANALYSIS OF BRAND ACTIVISM

## MARKE KOJE ZAUZIMAJU JAVNI STAV: ANALIZA KLJUČNIH RIJEČI AKTIVIZMA MARKE

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Review

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this research is to explore which keywords are most relevant and valuable to a particular audience or industry. This study is aimed primarily at reviewing the short history of brand activism from the marketing literature and conduct keyword analysis related to the concept of brand activism.

**Design/Methodology/Approach** – Keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted to achieve the study's primary goal of establishing a conceptual review of the brand activism term and providing a map of brand activism literature for future authors. In conducting keyword co-occurrence analysis, the term "brand activism" was searched in the Scopus database and 30 related articles were found. The dataset of those articles was downloaded and analyzed using the VOSviewer program and map-based bibliographic data, resulting in the mapping of keyword co-occurrences of the dataset.

**Findings and implications** – Following the analysis, clusters were generally grouped under brand activism, protests and negative bias, activist advertising and sports, disapproval of brands, companies and orders, and brand. Clusters 1 and 6 include the keywords brand and brand activism. Brands that support or take a stand for social justice, social change, and freedom of speech

### Sažetak

**Svrha** – Svrha je rada istražiti koje su ključne riječi najrelevantnije i najvrjednije za određenu publiku ili industriju. Istraživanje uglavnom ima za cilj pružiti pregled kratke povijesti aktivizma marke iz marketinške literature i provesti analizu ključnih riječi povezanih s konceptom aktivizma marke.

**Metodološki pristup** – Odabrana je analiza supojavljanja ključnih riječi jer je primarni cilj ovoga članka uspostaviti konceptualni pregled pojma aktivizam marke i pružiti mapu područja o aktivizmu marke za buduće autore. Za provedbu analize supojavljanja ključnih riječi korištena je baza podataka Scopus. Pojam „Brand activism“ korišten je za pretraživanje baze podataka Scopus i pronađeno je 30 povezanih članaka. Skup podataka iz tih članaka preuzet je i analiziran putem programa VosViewer, korištenjem karte bibliografskih podataka, kao posljedice mapiranja ključnih riječi u skupu podataka.

**Rezultati i implikacije** – Nakon analize, klasteri su uglavnom grupirani kao aktivizam marki, prosvjedi i negativne predrasude, aktivističko oglašavanje i sport, neodobravanje marki, poduzeća i narudžbe i marke. Klasteri 1 i 6 uključuju ključne riječi marka i aktivizam marke. Marke koje podržavaju ili zauzimaju stav prema druš-

would gain credibility and improve their image with consumers.

**Limitations** – The literature regarding brand activism can be considered a limitation because the number of articles related to this topic is relatively low.

**Originality** – This research study clarifies the nature of brand activism, pointing out that brand activism can help companies develop holistic bonds with their customers while inspiring brand loyalty along with consumer advocacy.

**Keywords** – branding, activism, brand activism, keyword analysis, social marketing

tvenoj pravdi, društvenim promjenama i slobodi govora stekle bi kredibilitet i imidž kod potrošača.

**Ograničenja** – Ograničenjem se može smatrati literatura jer je broj članaka koji se odnose na temu aktivizma marke relativno mali.

**Doprinos** – Istraživanje pojašnjava prirodu aktivizma marke i ističe da on može pomoći poduzećima u razvoju holističke veze s kupcima i poticanju lojalnosti marki uz zagovor potrošača.

**Ključne riječi** – izgradnja marke, aktivizam, aktivizam marke, analiza ključnih riječi, društveni marketing

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1946, Peter Drucker stated that “A free-enterprise society would become impossible if we had to live under total depression or total war.” (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018, p. 14) This statement originated at a time when the world was at war. People were not free and faced the total depravity of war. Thus, they were not in the position to declare their freedom or pursue their rights. Even governments were not able to be sensitive about human rights or social rights.

Until the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world was frequently at war and terms such as human rights and social rights were not as popular as they are today. Some wars are still waged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but, instead of being fought with guns and weapons, trade wars have been more common in recent years. In particular, with the emergence of digitalization and a massive increase in social media usage, social, ecological, and animal-related justification statements have soared. People can easily see posts about these topics on social media and can be affected by other people’s position with regard to social issues and their opinions. Thus, social media and increased human interaction boost social awareness among their users (Wang, 2012).

With increased social media usage and social interaction, the terms social movements and activism have gained popularity (Cammaerts, 2015). Accordingly, this has become an attractive method for businesses to implement as a potentially beneficial way to gain customer trust.

According to Sarkar and Kotler (2020), recent years have seen a loss of trust in authorities among the population. A feeling of pessimism regarding the future is claimed to be increasing in people and it is believed that NGOs, governments, corporates, and media are all losing their credibility, leading to a trust crisis. According to the “Trust Barometer” by Edelman (2021), 56% of respondents all over the world believe that business leaders are purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false or

gross exaggerations. Thus, gaining customer trust can ensure a competitive advantage for businesses (Barney & Hansen, 1994; Warrington & Caldwell, 2000; Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2011) and activism has a growing importance as a tool of the marketing mix (Medina & Correia, 2012).

Activism is a relatively new term, introduced in the mid-70s, referring to the ability to act and make or change history. Whether it be through protests and demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, consumer boycotts, or non-violent civil disobedience, direct action is at the core of the processes of social change. There are also practices or forms of activism that are less driven by direct action and operate more within the dominant political and judicial system (Cammaerts, 2007). Marketing can be an excellent intermediate for applying activism in a judicial system, which leads us to brand activism.

In recent years, brand activism has become a popular concept, effectively influencing members of society. Brand activism offers companies and celebrities a new path and an excellent option to show that they are “doing good” for society and have moral values (Mukherjee & Althuisen, 2020). Thus, brand activism is a trending concept in the marketing literature with publications that are few and far between. Despite some studies, an analysis that would include a summary and the overall position in the existing literature currently represents a research gap. This gap in the marketing literature would be filled by a keyword analysis of both overviews of past publications and some real examples of brand activism that would serve as a reference for future authors. Thus, the aim of this research study it is to both fill the gap in this field and create a roadmap for future researchers by analyzing the extant research of brand activism in the academic literature.

## 2. CONCEPT OF BRANDING AND BRAND ACTIVISM

Marketing approaches have changed frequently throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sales-oriented,

product-oriented, and production-oriented approaches were standard marketing practices during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, as the intensity of competition led to a change in power balance, the marketing focus shifted from businesses to consumers. Terms like consumer satisfaction, consumer value, and consumer trust have increased in importance with the change of marketing orientation. With the emergence of modern marketing approaches, one term has gained particular importance when it comes to attracting consumers and achieving long-term sustainability, and that is branding. The function and art of branding are major contributors to the success of a product or service sold by the company that markets it (Philips, 2006).

Today, branding is a concept that has become increasingly important in the marketing toolbox, with marketing managers increasingly focusing on branding. Businesses use branding to make customers feel the strength of their products. Namely, in line with the existing competitive dynamics, branding is a powerful tool to be preferred by companies that provide reliability. As a result of this, almost every product, service, and even city and country are branded. As Kotler and Armstrong (2013) suggest, almost all products, including nuts, auto parts, tires, beer, fruit and vegetables, are branded and branding has become very strong.

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination of these that determines who makes or sells a product or service in order to successfully differentiate it (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). These variables are the factors that constitute the term of brand. Brands create marks and networks. These networks form associations in consumers' minds, consisting of assets, either verbal, visual, or auditory, and distinctive messages that can create an instant trigger or recognition (Kyriakidi, 2021).

Throughout recent years, branding literature has seen the emergence of a relatively new term that has found popularity in certain brand strategies, such as those implemented by Nike. This term is a combination of the brand and ac-

tivism terms. Activism is the practice of struggling for change and can be fueled by reactionary tendencies and aims, as well as progressive ones (Cammaerts, 2007). Moreover, branding is a name, symbol, design, or combination that identifies a particular organization's product with a substantial, differentiated advantage (Doyle, 1990). Although branding is a term that dates back a long time, brand activism is a relatively popular new term.

Activism refers to engagement in activities designed to foster or resist social change. Conventional wisdom argues that people participate in collective action and social movements because they have firmly held beliefs or are highly discontented about something. Oyler (2012) published a book entitled "Actions speak louder than words – Community Activism as Curriculum." Even the title of that book shows that it is critical for a person or company to take action as opposed to just supporting a movement with words.

Approaches related to management have been converted from "capital" and "labor" to "responsibilities of management" (Drucker, 1954). Drucker's words date back to many years ago, but still apply in today's world, and brand activism is the apex of management responsibility. Brand activism consists of business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to promote or impede improvements in society (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018).

### 3. HISTORY OF BRAND ACTIVISM

Consumers look at a brand's values to see if they align with their own before making purchase decisions. In fact, the majority of consumers make the decision to purchase from a brand that is doing environmental or social good. Social media hashtags like "income inequality", "black lives matter", "fascism 2.0", which are directly related to activism, have been widely used in recent years. Some brands and celebrities stand

together with the people who create those hashtags and support such activist movements. Regardless of whether or not those brands or celebrities genuinely support the movements, it is without a doubt that activism boosts the credibility and reputation of businesses and celebrities. The opposite is also true: activists' reputation is one of the critical determinants of a campaign (Johnson & Swem, 2019).

Companies such as Nike, Twitter, Netflix, and Citigroup have aligned themselves with the Black Lives Matter movement (Sarkar, 2020). Such movements move people deeply as these topics carry great significance for them. Nike's application of brand activism has been a critical milestone in the history of brand activism.

In 2016, Colin Kaepernick began kneeling during the national anthem before games to protest racial inequality in the United States. Since departing the San Francisco 49ers in 2017, he has been out of the National Football League (NFL), and he later resolved a complaint with the league in which he claimed team owners blackballed him because of his protests (Guardian, 2019). Nike, the most valuable sporting goods brand in the world (Interbrand, 2023), released an advertisement starring Colin Kaepernick in 2018 under the name Dream Crazy. The slogan included a picture of the NFL star, saying: "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything. Just do it." (Guardian, 2019) According to his claims, this slogan was directly related to Kaepernick's activist efforts, which he argued led to him being blackballed by the NFL. Thus, Nike showed that it stood together with Colin Kaepernick with aggressive and robust brand activism. Nike gained activist status by taking a stance with respect to Kaepernick. To the same extent, a debate was started over rights, patriotism, and the politicization of sports. In response, some conservative Americans decided to burn their Nikes or cut the Nike logos from their merchandise. Nevertheless, according to Scott Galloway, Nike received more than \$43 million worth of media exposure within just 24 hours from the start of the campaign and

within four days, Nike's online sales increased by 31% (Sarkar & Kotler, 2020). The result of this campaign clearly shows how Nike has benefited commercially from its position towards Kaepernick and its activism.

Another example of activism can be observed at the top level of motorsports, specifically in relation to Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA). The FIA and Formula 1 are also appropriate platforms for analyzing and interpreting activism in both its social and environmental form. According to Campbell (2015), Formula 1 has long been the most popular motorsport in the world, and it is controlled by the FIA.

Seven-time F1 World Champion Lewis Hamilton and four-time F1 World Champion Sebastian Vettel, statistically the two most successful drivers of the last 15 years, sharing 11 championship titles between them during that period, have been outspoken about brand activism. The "We Race As One" campaign focusing on racial injustice has been a form of social activism on the part of F1, led mainly by Lewis Hamilton. As the word "race" refers to both motorsport racing and racial issues, the phrase is an excellent way to show F1's activist stance. Hamilton, who is well known for his activism, has supported the anti-racist movement after the death of George Floyd. Additionally, Hamilton has been fighting to raise awareness regarding environmental issues (Francis, 2021). Vettel is another legendary driver who has been an activist on issues such as the environment, human rights, and gender equality (Hughes, 2021). Moreover, the FIA introduced Formula E, an all-electric car racing championship in 2014. Formula E has the mission of showing just what sustainable mobility is capable of, driving electric vehicles to the fore in the race for a better, cleaner future (Fiaformulae.com, 2021). Formula E resembles F1 in terms of car appearance but with a clear sustainability message (Næss & Tjønnedal, 2021). This changed the traditional anti-environmental image of motorsports and spearheaded new trends in global motorsport (Næss, 2020). Formula E has been gaining popularity year by year

as viewership rose to a cumulative audience of 316 million in 2021 (Wood, 2021). Evidenced mostly by sports-related issues, activism plays a vital role for companies. Brands that take a stand on socio-political issues show their moral foundations and create an image of “doing good” for society (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020).

#### 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on brand activism is interdisciplinary, drawing on fields such as marketing, sociology, psychology, and political science. It provides valuable insights into the role of brands and businesses in society and the potential for brand activism to drive positive change. It is noteworthy that an examination of the current literature found hardly any studies on brand activism dating back to before 2015. Some of the articles include brand activism, but most of them either do not deal with brand activism as their primary research subject or do not include it in their topics. As of 2023, the term brand activism became much more prominent.

Reviewing the literature in the area reveals that most studies use quantitative analysis and primarily address socio-political issues (Lee, Spry, Ekinci & Verdenburg, 2023; Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spy & Kemper, 2020; Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Moorman, 2020; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Garg & Saluja, 2022; Kuehn, 2017). However, some studies (Kozinets & Jenkins, 2022; Batista, Barros, Peixoto & Botelho, 2022; Shetty, Venkataramaiah & Anand, 2019; Nguyen, Lee, Truong, Truong & Wu, 2023; Lundemo Dahlin & Purgatory, 2021) analyze customer perceptions regarding brand activism. Several qualitative studies are also available in the field (Confetto, Palazzo, Ferri & Normando, 2023; Sibai, Mimoun & Boukis, 2021; Eyada, 2020; Backman & Lundgren, 2021; Key, Keel, Czaplowski & Olson, 2021; Haryono, 2022). However, quantitative research still predominates. There are very few in-depth studies on the theoretical framework and concept, in addition to all the studies that use qualitative and quantitative methods and explore

brand activism from various angles (Pimentel & Didonet, 2021; Miguel & Miranda, 2022).

A bibliometric analysis by Cammarota, Marino, and Resciniti (2022), given as a conference presentation, appears to be the sole comprehensive investigation into the concept of brand activism. The analysis draws attention to the fact that there is still a lack of brand activism literature and that the concept itself lacks development. Brand activism, according to the authors, differs from cause-related marketing (CRM) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) because it entails businesses openly expressing their opinions on disputed issues. The authors chose keywords such as “brand activism”, “corporate activism”, “corporate advocacy”, and “woke-washing” to conduct the bibliometric study. They carried out a search of the Scopus and Web of Science databases with no time limit and used inclusion criteria to identify pertinent articles and reviews. The final sample included 76 documents. The research yielded a comprehensive overview of the subject, stressing its historical development, the number of recent scientific publications, the most pertinent gaps in the literature, and lastly, offered recommendations for further investigation into the phenomena.

Even though the literature related to brand activism includes several articles, there is no major reference article pertaining to this concept. Such a reference article would deliver the key points of the concepts and literature for future authors. Almost all of the articles dealing with brand activism have aimed to find an answer to particular research questions related to activism and primarily included relations of precise keywords and concepts. As is evident, there is a significant gap in the body of knowledge with respect to keyword analysis. Therefore, it is crucial to include keyword analysis in the brand activism literature because it offers a systematic way to comprehend the core ideas, concentrate the literature study, improve conceptual clarity, identify research gaps, and enlighten on methodological issues. It would help researchers develop the area, add to the body of knowledge, and learn more about brand activism.

According to the search in Scopus, 30 articles include the term “brand activism” in their title, abstract, or keywords, and 23 of them are business-related. These 30 articles have a total of 260 citations with publication years ranging from 2015 to 2023, with only one publication in 2007 as an outlier year for the general years of publication. When the “brand activism” term is

narrowed down to article titles, only 11 publications are found. The results from such a widely used article research platform, Scopus, clearly show that there is a massive gap in the literature on brand activism. Twelve articles related to brand activism have been selected for the literature review, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Review of Brand Activism Literature

Author(s)	Year	Keywords	Article
Romani, Grappi, Zarantonello & Bagozzi	2015	Anti-brand, moral violations, feelings of hate, empathy	The revenge of the consumer! How brand moral violations lead to consumer anti-brand activism
Jacobson, Katalin Abdallah, Liasse & Lund	2018	Brand image, brand activism, femvertising, attitudes toward advertisements (Aad), attitudes toward brands	Femvertising and its effects on brand image
Shetty et al.	2019	Brand activism, millennials, brand management, brand equity, boycotting, buycotting	Brand activism and millennials: an empirical investigation into the perception of millennials towards brand activism
Eyada	2020	Advertising, brand activism, brand image, cause marketing, consumer perception, social cause, social leadership campaigns	Brand Activism, the Relation and Impact on Consumer Perception: A Case Study on Nike Advertising
Lee & Yoon	2020	Social network analysis, YouTube, User-generated content, Viral marketing campaign, Brand activism	When Brand Activism Advertising Campaign Goes Viral: An Analysis of Always #LikeAGirl Video Networks on YouTube
Vredenburg et al.	2020	Authentic brand activism, authenticity, woke washing, purpose driven organizations, brand purpose, branding, political advocacy, prosocial consumption	Brands Taking a Stand: Authentic Brand Activism or Woke Washing?
Moorman	2020	Political side of brand activism	Commentary: Brand Activism in a Political World
Mukherjee & Althuizen	2020	Brand activism, Controversial issues, Morality, Consumer brand identification	Brand activism: Does courting controversy help or hurt a brand?
Key et al.	2021	Brand activism, change agent, strategic brand storytelling, narrative construction, narratology	Brand activism change agents: strategic storytelling for impact and authenticity

Author(s)	Year	Keywords	Article
Sibai et al.	2021	Brand activism, brand morality, controversial branding, economies of worth, free speech boundary work, moral competency	Authenticating brand activism: Negotiating the boundaries of free speech to make a change
Kozinets & Jenkins	2022	Interview, popular culture, activism, consumer movements, fandom, brand culture, branding, race and intersectionality, micro-emancipation	Consumer movements, brand activism, and the participatory politics of media: A conversation
Mirzaei, Wilkie & Siuki	2022	Woke, brand activism, authenticity, social movement, consumer backlash, brand strategy	Woke brand activism authenticity or the lack of it
Kapitan, Kemper, Vredenburg & Spry	2022	B2B brand activism; B2B brands; Brand activism; Brand purpose; Conscientious brand; Social problems	Strategic B2B brand activism: Building conscientious purpose for social impact
Rivaroli, Spadoni & Bregoli	2022	Agri-food products; authentic brand activism; brand activism effectiveness; brand loyalty; brand trust; Libera Terra	What Grounds Our Loyalty towards "Authentic Brand Activism" of a Sustainable Food Brand?
Hartika, Pawito & Utari	2022	Brand activism; climate change; digital public sphere; environmental disaster	Brand activism on the digital public sphere: Campaign content analysis of #BringBackOurBottle on Instagram
Bhargava & Bedi	2022	Brand activism; Brand as promise; Marketing ethics; Promise; Theory of brands	Brand as Promise
Asenjo Mccabe & Del Pino-Romero	2023	Advertising, Brand Activism, Consumers, Social Change, Social Marketing	Brand Activism from The Academic, Professional and Consulting Perspective
Cavdar Aksoy, Yazici & Duzenci	2023	Brand activism; Employee emotions; Internal marketing; Online brand advocacy; Organizational identification; Organizational trust; Perceived organizational justice	Employees' online brand advocacy behaviors as a response to justice and emotion
Gambetti & Biraghi	2023	Brand activism; Cultural branding; Feminism; Postnormal times; Social media; Woke washing	Branded activism: Navigating the tension between culture and market in social media

Based on the review of the brand activism literature, the articles concerned may generally be divided into two main research categories. Some researchers tend to research or analyze the

political side of brand activism, whereas others tend to concentrate on the marketing side. As shown in Table 1, "brand activism" literature consists of articles from recent years, ending



with 2023. Some of these articles include freedom of speech and the moral as well as political values connected to brand activism (Romani et al., 2015; Moorman, 2000; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020; Sibai et al., 2021). Other articles are mainly related to the corporate side of brand activism, dealing with the marketing and advertising aspects (Jacobson et al., 2018; Shetty et al., 2019; Evada, 2020; Lee & Yoon, 2020; Key et al., 2021; Mirzaei et al., 2022).

## 5. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to explore which keywords are most relevant and valuable to a particular audience or industry. In recent years, methods of qualitative analysis have been prominent in addition to methods such as surveys and experiments (Akgün, 2020). Qualitative analysis methods such as bibliometric and scientometric techniques have become highly popular (Şenel & Demir, 2018). Among those qualitative analysis methods, keyword co-occurrence analysis has been chosen as the most appropriate method given that the primary goal of this paper is to establish a conceptual review of the brand activism term and provide a map of the brand activism literature for future authors. Analysis regarding, for example, co-authorship was not included because it does not cover the primary goal of this study.

Conducting a keyword analysis aids researchers in locating and comprehending the primary ideas connected to brand activism. This phase is essential for creating a strong framework for the literature review and making sure that all pertinent ideas are included. Additionally, the most pertinent papers, theories, and empirical data can be the focus of a review by selecting key phrases connected to brand activism. By giving a detailed summary of the field's current research, the literature review is ensured to be thorough and focused. By highlighting the various facets and dimensions of brand activism, keyword analysis aids in conceptual clarity. It enables scholars to spot terminological variances and various conceptual frameworks that can be

present in the literature. Researchers can clarify terminologies, spot gaps in knowledge, and gain a thorough comprehension of the topic by analyzing these variations. The identification of research gaps in the field of brand activism is also aided by keyword analysis. By examining the frequency and distribution of keywords, researchers can identify subjects that have not received much attention or have not been investigated in-depth. Such information helps to direct ongoing research projects and identify possible areas for new studies. It enables researchers to learn more about brand activism, contribute to the body of information, and advance the field. The need for such a study is undeniable for all of the reasons mentioned, as well as due to its contribution to closing the gap in the literature.

Keyword analysis is a crucial field of study in bibliometrics (Wang & Chai, 2018), and it has been a prominent analytical approach in recent years with the use of computers to analyze texts (Seale & Tonkins, 2012). The authors' perspective of many key phrases in their work is represented by keyword analysis, which may be used to discover emerging study ideas. Brand activism has long been an emerging study idea for the authors, as well as an emerging concept in marketing terms. Keyword and co-occurrence analysis reveal the most commonly utilized research subjects, keyword associations, and the mutual application of those keywords (Pesta, Fuerst & Kirkegaard, 2018). Keyword co-occurrence analysis is mainly conducted to show the current situation in the literature by using maps via algorithms.

To conduct keyword co-occurrence analysis, the Scopus database has been used. Citation analysis is crucial for evaluating the impact and influence of scholarly works. Scopus offers reliable and comprehensive citation data, enabling researchers to track citations, measure citation metrics (such as h-index and citation counts), and identify key papers and influential authors within a specific field (Bornmann & Marx, 2014).

Scopus has been chosen as the database because of the limited resources available. It

boasts one of the largest databases of scholarly literature, encompassing a wide range of disciplines, including natural sciences, social sciences, engineering, medicine, and more. With over 75 million records, including articles, conference papers, book chapters, and patents, Scopus provides researchers with access to a vast pool of information from reputable sources (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Scopus employs rigorous indexing standards and quality control measures, ensuring that only high-quality, peer-reviewed publications are included in its database. The indexing process involves subject experts and content specialists who evaluate the scholarly rigor, relevance, and credibility of the sources (Elsevier, n.d.). This robust indexing enhances the reliability and trustworthiness of the information retrieved from Scopus, facilitating rigorous and evidence-based research.

In addition, the VOSviewer application works best with the Scopus database. Thus, Scopus has been chosen as the sole database source.

For the purpose of this research, the term “brand activism” was searched in the Scopus database, finding 30 related articles. The dataset of those articles was downloaded and analyzed

using the VOSviewer program and map-based bibliographic data, resulting in the mapping of keyword co-occurrences of the dataset.

## 6. DISCUSSION OF KEYWORD ANALYSIS

A keyword co-occurrence map was obtained as output of the analysis, based on which information regarding the maps, clusters, and keywords is provided in Figure 1. In order to obtain accurate results in co-occurrence analysis, words that are irrelevant to the subject should be selected and excluded. For this reason, words such as “author, article, research, title, application, and theory”, which are used in many studies but are irrelevant to the subject, are manually excluded in the analysis. Thus, concepts with higher co-occurrence and link strength are divided into clusters and expressed using different colors. In this analysis, six different clusters were created and each cluster was shown in a different color, with related concepts grouped in the same color. Looking at the clusters, it can be seen that the most used concepts are written in large font, that is, they are created as large clusters.

FIGURE 1: Keyword Network Map



By clicking on the brand activism term on the map, the figure focuses on the terms co-occurring predominantly with brand activism. This map, including the same keywords, exact mapping, and the same clusters but aimed at presenting the terms most related to brand activism, is shown in Figure 2 below:

ly, how many links the item has with other items and how strong those relationships are collectively. Along similar lines, a link is a connection or a relation between two items. A map normally includes only one type of link. Each link has a strength, represented by a positive numerical value. The higher this value, the stronger

FIGURE 2: Keyword Network Map Focused on Brand Activism

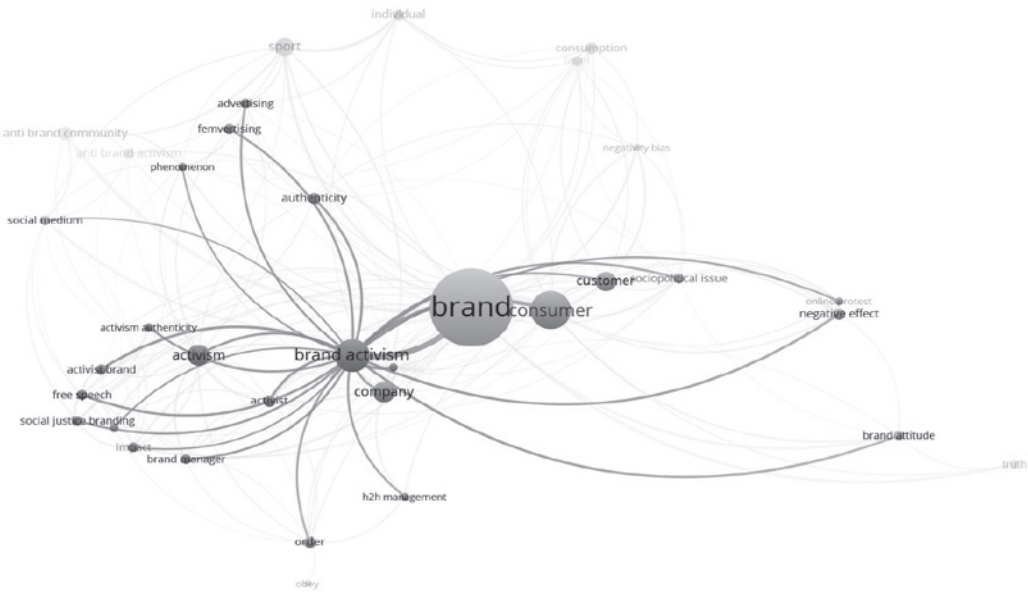


Table 2 below provides some key information about the keyword co-occurrence analysis. To interpret the values in the table, first of all, it is important to explain the terms appearing in it. The attributes concerning links and the total link strength for a particular object are the two standard weight attributes, which show, respective-

the link. Items may be grouped into clusters. A cluster is a set of items included in a map. Clusters are non-overlapping in VOSviewer. In other words, an item may belong to only one cluster. Clusters are labeled using cluster numbers (van Eck & Waltman, 2023).

TABLE 2: Keyword Analysis

Keyword	Cluster	Links	Total Strength	Occurrences
Brand Activism	1	25	200	20
Activist Brand	1	4	24	4
Free Speech	1	10	38	4
Social Justice Branding	1	7	36	4
Activism Authenticity	1	6	19	3
Brand Manager	1	9	41	4

Keyword	Cluster	Links	Total Strength	Occurrences
Activism	1	17	81	11
Social Change	1	8	34	3
Activist	1	13	55	5
Consumer	2	24	242	24
Customer	2	15	119	10
Negative Effect	2	7	60	5
Online Protest	2	6	33	3
Negativity Bias	2	7	48	3
Consumption	2	8	38	6
Sociopolitical Issue	2	14	50	4
Sport	3	10	108	10
Individual	3	7	56	5
Advertising	3	10	39	4
Femvertising	3	5	28	4
Authenticity	3	13	42	5
Phenomenon	3	13	41	3
Anti-Brand Community	4	6	119	7
Anti-Brand Activism	4	10	57	5
Social Medium	4	12	75	4
Company	5	15	79	11
H2H Management	5	4	24	3
Order	5	12	40	5
Obey	5	1	3	3
Brand	6	31	534	60
Brand Attitude	6	7	54	4
Truth	6	3	32	4
Social Justice Branding	1	7	36	4
Activism Authenticity	1	6	19	3
Brand Manager	1	9	41	4
Activism	1	17	81	11
Social Change	1	8	34	3
Activist	1	13	55	5
Consumer	2	24	242	24
Customer	2	15	119	10
Negative Effect	2	7	60	5
Online Protest	2	6	33	3
Negativity Bias	2	7	48	3
Consumption	2	8	38	6
Sociopolitical Issue	2	14	50	4
Sport	3	10	108	10
Individual	3	7	56	5
Advertising	3	10	39	4

Keyword	Cluster	Links	Total Strength	Occurrences
Femvertising	3	5	28	4
Authenticity	3	13	42	5
Phenomenon	3	13	41	3
Anti-Brand Community	4	6	119	7
Anti-Brand Activism	4	10	57	5
Social Medium	4	12	75	4
Company	5	15	79	11
H2H Management	5	4	24	3
Order	5	12	40	5
Obey	5	1	3	3
Brand	6	31	534	60
Brand Attitude	6	7	54	4
Truth	6	3	32	4

According to the co-occurrence relationship, 32 keywords have been grouped into six different clusters. Cluster 1 (red cluster) includes the following keywords: brand activism, activist brand, free speech, social justice branding, activism authenticity, brand manager, activism, social change, and activist. Links, total strength, and co-occurrences show that the most dominant keywords of this cluster are: brand activism, activism, activist, and free speech. This cluster contains the most keywords related to brand activism among all other clusters. Cluster 2 (green cluster) includes the following keywords: consumer, customer, negative effect, online protest, negativity bias, consumption, and sociopolitical issue. The most dominant keywords are consumer, customer, and sociopolitical issue. This cluster clearly shows consumer perceptions towards specific topics and the negative effects of these issues, resulting in protests and negative bias. Cluster 3 (blue cluster at the top) can be more clearly seen in Figure 2. This cluster includes the following keywords: sport, individual, advertising, femvertising, authenticity, and phenomenon. The cluster can be grouped under activist advertising and sports.

Cluster 4 (yellow cluster) includes the keywords anti-brand community, anti-brand activism, and social medium. This cluster can be categorized as referring to negative feelings towards a brand, or in short, disapproval of brands. Clus-

ter 5 (purple cluster) includes the keywords company, H2H management, order, and obey. As the keywords H2H management and obey have very few links, low total strength, and co-occurrences, they have been excluded. The company and order keywords have substantial numbers in the table, so this cluster can be classified as companies and orders. Cluster 6 (lighter blue) includes the keywords brand, brand attitude, and truth. This cluster mainly consists of brand-related keywords. As the word "brand" is part of "brand activism", it has very high links, total strength, and co-occurrences.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study was aimed at bridging a significant gap in the literature by conducting a keyword analysis of brand activism. The findings obtained underscore the growing consumer expectation for brands to actively engage in social issues, with the consequences of both refraining from taking a stand and choosing the wrong side being potentially damaging. Therefore, it is essential for brands to carefully consider their approach to brand activism.

One of the key benefits of implementing a brand activism plan lies in its capacity to foster a more productive work environment and

promote positive brand awareness. By aligning their values with social causes, brands can build trust with both employees and consumers while also enhancing their brand credibility. Additionally, a well-executed brand activism strategy can serve as a catalyst for launching new campaigns and ensuring ongoing relevance within the industry.

Consumers expect brands to participate in brand activism by standing up for the social issues they believe in. Because of this, choosing not to take a stand on important social issues can be incredibly damaging for brands, almost as damaging as choosing to show support for the wrong side. Ultimately, the benefits of creating a brand activism plan are vast. It can help encourage employees to be more productive while also promoting positive brand awareness.

Furthermore, such a plan can make it easier to build trust with both employees and consumers while also improving any potentially positive brand credibility. It can also serve as a great way to start a new campaign and ensure relevance within the industry. The purpose of this research was to shed light on the keywords associated with brand activism, thus filling a gap with respect to such technical analysis in the relevant literature.

According to results of the analysis performed, apart from the keywords brand, activism, and brand activism, some of the other keywords were consumer and customer, advertising, sport, anti-brand activism, company, order, and activist. Two of those keywords – sport and advertising – with their effect on brand activism were indicated in the “History of Brand Activism” section of this paper using examples from Nike’s Colin Kaepernick advertisement, which turned out to be a very successful campaign for Nike. Another example was provided in relation to Formula 1 and Formula E as the activist positions of drivers made them gain tremendous credibility and good reputation, with the additional introduction of Formula E being crucial in the area of environmental activism. Anti-brand activism is another keyword that stands out

since inaccurate campaigns and positions taken by companies might backlash dramatically on their brand image.

Clusters are mainly grouped as follows: brand activism as expected, protests and negative bias, activist advertising and sports, disapproval of brands, companies and orders, brand. Clusters 1 and 6 include the keywords brand and brand activism; however, keywords such as free speech, social justice branding, social change, and activism authenticity are vital. Brands that support or take a particular position towards social justice, social change, and freedom of speech would more likely gain credibility and improve their image held by consumers. The opposite can be seen in Cluster 2 and Cluster 4 as companies that discriminate people on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity, or religion might face protests, negative bias, and disapproval.

The section of the paper dealing with the “History of Brand Activism” provided some successful examples of activism enacted by sports brands and sports celebrities. In the keyword analysis section, keywords related to sport and advertising were found to exist in the same cluster of the brand activism map. The positive effects of supporting an athlete who has been blacklisted because of his activist position are evident in a very successful campaign for Nike. Furthermore, Formula 1 drivers taking a stand in relation to either social awareness or environmental activism was found to increase their fans’ awareness and the athletes’ credibility.

Free speech, social justice branding, and social change, which are the keywords found through keyword analysis, are also key points of brand activism. Freedom of speech and social justice are among the most important determinants of a country’s democracy and the activist movement of companies. Positions taken towards these would be important both for their credibility and for the community’s freedom. Social change is also essential for the welfare of the community. If there are any issues regarding the economy, democracy, freedom, or general welfare, a change might be needed and an activist

position taken by a brand in this respect may drive the necessary change.

On the other hand, negative applications by companies or celebrities, which are also mentioned in the discussion, such as racial, gender, ethnic, or religious discrimination may have devastating consequences for companies. Mobbing employees, negative positions or applications regarding specific people or animals, and supporting terror or violence may also result in the loss of brand reputation, credibility, trust, and loyalty for companies and even for celebrities. Social media hashtags indicated in the “History of Brand Activism” section of this paper show the power of social media when it comes to the negative side of activism. Social media hashtags and activist movements like “Black Lives Matter” have been extremely popular. Social media platforms have become powerful amplifiers of both the positive and the negative aspects of brand activism.

The Web of Science platform can be included in future research, and a comparison can be made to see more pertinent outcomes. By considering phrases such as “brand activism”, “corporate social responsibility”, “cause-related marketing”, “social change”, “public stand”, and similar terms, researchers may create a search query that successfully conveys the spirit of brand activism. On the other hand, the researchers were able to extract pertinent terms and ideas about brand activism from each article that was selected for the research. These keywords can be found in the abstract, introduction, methodology, and discussion parts of the paper. It is important to keep an eye out for words, ideas, or phrases that are frequently used and are essential to discussions of brand activism.

It would also be beneficial to evaluate how various brands engage in activism. This can entail analyzing effective brand advocacy initiatives and pinpointing the elements that made them so successful. Analyzing instances where brand activism failed or attracted criticism would also shed light on the potential dangers and difficulties connected to adopting a public stance.

Overall, brand activism can be a powerful tool for brands looking to build strong relationships with customers, differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace, and effect positive change in society. However, it is crucial for companies to approach brand activism with caution and integrity. Rushing into activism without a solid foundation that aligns brand messaging with core values may lead to misalignment and potential backlash. Therefore, defining key components and strategies for the successful implementation of brand activism is imperative for cultivating holistic bonds with customers, fostering brand loyalty, and inspiring consumer advocacy.

Finally, brand activism is important, but only if it is done right. Companies must not rush into it; on the contrary, they must create a solid foundation for their activist efforts to stand on. A brand needs to ensure there is a connection between the message it wants to create and the values it represents for its target consumers. This research clarifies the nature of brand activism and points out that brand activism can help companies develop holistic bonds with their customers, inspire brand loyalty along with consumer advocacy, and make a meaningful impact on societal issues. Thus, it is imperative to lay out the key components of this term.

Moreover, as the landscape of brand activism continues to evolve, it is important for scholars and practitioners to engage in ongoing research and analysis. Further exploration into the nuanced dynamics of brand activism, including the impact on consumer behavior, the role of social media, and the long-term sustainability of brand activism efforts, can contribute to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. Additionally, comparative studies across industries and cultural contexts can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of brand activism strategies. By advancing our knowledge in this area, we can refine best practices, develop ethical frameworks, and navigate the complex terrain of brand activism with greater precision and impact.

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