

Exploring Millennials' asymmetric brand attitudes held towards brands who practise brand activism

Abstract

This research paper takes an in-depth look into Millennials' attitudes towards brand activism and explores the extent of asymmetric within such attitudes. It then explores the factors that contribute to these attitudes, aiding the development of authentic brand activism.

Existing literature has outlined the cultural shift of brands engaging with socio-political issues, known commonly as brand activism, where many consumers are rejecting inauthentic activism due to their '*moral expectation*' of how a brand should behave towards such issues. However, in looking at society as a whole, academics appear to overlook one of the most concerning generations for brands: Millennials. The amalgamation of Millennials' willingness to voice opinions and their awareness of social issues has been overlooked in previous studies. This study looked at their opinions towards brand activism to understand what factors *catalyse* asymmetry in their attitudes, with the aim of assisting brands in mitigating any negative effects.

This study employed eight qualitative semi-structured interviews with participants aged 22-40, where the study found that their attitudes towards brand activism demonstrated a level of asymmetry. When exploring the contributing factors behind such asymmetry, respondents consistently demonstrated an *expectation* for brands to be involved with such issues, built off of their own personal '*moral expectation*'. Thus, if brands did *not* meet such expectations, respondents signified that they would avoid such brands. Further to this, respondents illustrated that they were *unlikely* to honour a brand for meeting such expectations, thus demonstrating the asymmetry.

Following the findings on contributing factors towards such attitudes and the recognition of the hazardous nature of engaging with brand activism, the study developed pillars of *best practice*, assisting in the understanding of the importance of managing activism effectively. It's here that the study suggests that marketing practitioners approach activist issues with *Caution and Thought, Authenticity and Action*.

Key words: Brand activism, socio-political issues, Millennials, moral expectation, authenticity, asymmetric attitudes, polarisation, societal pressure