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Jumping on the bandwagon?
An explorative study on how female Gen Z consumers perceive global brands’ engagement in activism, and how their perception influences their brand loyalty

Muskaan Khurana and Masstewal Mekuriaw
Author
Muskaan Khurana and Masehel Mekuriaw

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Supervisor
Felix Terman

Examiner
Heléne Tjärnemo

Abstract
Brands’ engagement in activism is increasing as consumers expect more of brands, especially the younger generations. However, brands have different intentions behind their engagement in activism. The purpose of this thesis is to explore female Gen Z consumers’ perception of global brands’ engagement in activism, and how this perception influences their brand loyalty. Female Gen Z consumers’ mind is explored since previous research indicates that there are gender differences within perception and loyalty. A qualitative method in the form of four online focus groups were conducted to collect empirical data. Three findings were discovered, which contributed to understanding of the existing gap in research. Firstly, female Gen Z consumers positively perceived global brands’ engagement in activism. Secondly, they perceived and responded to brand activism based on the campaigns’ message, its connection to the brand and its offerings. Thirdly, female Gen Z consumers’ perception influenced their brand loyalty. The study contributes with an additional understanding of young female consumers’ perspective which can be useful for marketers when creating activist campaigns. Future research could study the perspective of male Gen Z consumers or Gen Z consumers to get additional understanding.

Keywords
Brand activism, Brand loyalty, Brand perception, Female, Generation Z, Gen Z consumer, Global brand
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Masstewal Mekuriaw
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1. Introduction

This chapter describes the background context of activism and the problematization of brands increasingly taking a stand in socio-political issues. Furthermore, the chapter also describes the purpose of examining female Gen Z consumers' perception on brand activism and its influence on their brand loyalty. Lastly, the outline of this study is presented.

1.1 Background

Activism takes place when people join forces to express their dissatisfaction in society by protesting and demonstrating (Warhurst, 2019). Citizens use activism as a way of addressing socio-political issues to create changes in society (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Activist movements can be traced way back in time, for instance to women's right to vote, which became legal in Sweden after years of protest and demonstration (Manns, n.d.). Today, activism takes place in several areas, such as climate, economics, gender equality and human rights. In recent years, major activist movements have taken place, for instance the climate strikes, #MeToo, LGBTQ+ rights, and Black Lives Matter (BLM) (Paul, 2019). One example, millions of people have participated in BLM protests to shed light on police brutality on people of colour. The movement started in the United States of America (US) but spread all over the world, even across the Atlantic Ocean to Sweden, where several protests took place across the country (Buchanan et al., 2020). Currently, in 2021 there have been protests against increased discrimination towards Asians, because of the origin of COVID-19 (Cabral, 2021).

Consumers frequently express their thoughts and feelings through activism by their purchases or boycotts (Lightfoot, 2019). Young consumers are especially engaged in consumer activism as they are described as a generation who are more aware, outspoken, and organized (Marris, 2019). On top of that, young female activists are particularly taking a stand and getting recognition for their efforts (Bennett, 2020). One example is Greta Thunberg, a Swedish 18-year-old female climate activist who has gotten worldwide attention because of her “school strike for the climate” (Woodward, 2020). There is no age limit nor entry barriers to get involved in activism, which makes the effort to participate minimal (Lightfoot, 2019). Because there are no entry barriers there has been an increase in activism engagement from young
females over the last couple of years. Another young female activist is Malala Yousafzai who fought for girls' right to education in Pakistan (Connley, 2018; The Nobel Prize, n.d.)

Today, social media is used as a platform to spread activism, as it allows information to spread quickly. There are billions of social media users globally. However, most of the users are in North America, Europe and Asia (Dollarhide, 2021). The growth of social media has resulted in a shift, where marketers have moved away from traditional marketing. Instead marketers are increasing their social media marketing to have closer interactions with their consumers (Hudson et al., 2015). Brands are focusing their marketing efforts to easily reach the digital generations where most users are young (Duffett, 2017; Hudson et al., 2015). Many young activists are using social media to spread awareness using hashtags on socio-political issues. One example was #MeToo, an online movement which females were in the front line of. The hashtag aimed to spread awareness about injustices related to harassment towards women, which quickly gained recognition all over the world (Gill & Rahman-Jones, 2020).

Consumers, but more recently brands, have a higher aspiration to be woke, a term coined from social media which means to be aware of social injustice and activism (Mirzaei, 2019). The concept of brands being woke is called brand activism. Brand activism is when brands take a stand in social and political issues such as gender rights, human injustices, and sustainability (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Consumers have high expectations of brands to take responsibility by addressing socio-political issues, since consumers themselves are engaged in activism (Auger & Devinney, 2007; Rosenblatt, 2020; Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Shetty et al., 2019). Thus, brands' engagement in activism have increased, and marketers are more willing to take a stand publically in comparison to the past few years (CMO Survey, 2021). Social media has an important role in brand activism as both consumers and brands post activist messages on social media platforms to spread awareness (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Rosenblatt, 2020).

An example of a brand who uses activism is Nike, an American athleisure brand. Nike took a stand by working with Colin Kaepernick, an American NFL-player, who in 2016 kneeled during the national anthem in support of BLM. Kaepernick’s decision to kneel led to controversy. Nike's choice to stand by Kaepernick led to two outcomes. Some consumers praised Nike’s decisions to support Kaepernick while others burned their shoes in outrage.
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(Bostock, 2018). Nike’s involvement in brand activism alludes to that it is a divided topic, where consumers have different reactions (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

1.2 Problematization

The dilemma of increased engagement in brand activism is that it can divide consumers and other stakeholders, such as investors, employees, and media's perception of brands (Bhagwal et al., 2020; Popoli, 2011). When brands engage in socio-political issues, their standpoint either aligns or collides with the consumers' own thoughts and feelings of the matter. Thus, the outcome of the engagement in activism is portrayed as hazardous (Bhagwal et al.; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Furthermore, brand activism can be strategically planned or sporadic, as brands might want to engage themselves in current and relevant issues (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). One example is how brands in 2021 are taking a stand against Asian discrimination by spreading knowledge and donating to the cause (Swant, 2021).

Brand activism can be used as a marketing strategy to attract consumers, increase consumers’ trust, and to differentiate the brands from competitors. This is a quite cynical view on brand activism (Edelman, 2020; Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Consumers have started to question the authenticity of brands’ statements. Depending on brands’ marketing and previous history of activism, their engagement can be categorized differently based on authenticity. Some brands might choose an authentic reason for brand activism where a connection to their brand identity can be found (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

On the contrary, some brands strategically use activism without previous engagement and lack a genuine connection to their identity. These are called woke washing brands and they solely engage in brand activism to increase their brand equity (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Many brands use brand activism as an attempt to attract and retain consumers (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). One example, the American brand Gillette which sells razors, released a campaign that addressed toxic masculinity. The campaign went viral and received much backlash because of the lack of congruence between the brand identity versus its socio-political cause. Gillette’s campaign could be seen as performative and jumping on the bandwagon (Maguire, 2020), which might influence consumers’ perception and brand loyalty negatively (Vredenburg et al., 2020).
Furthermore, brands are aware that the younger generation are involved in activism and expect more from brands regarding socio-political issues (Shetty et al., 2019; Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Hence, some brands see brand activism solely as a marketing strategy to attract young consumers, because they make up a profitable market (Duffett, 2017; Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). The young consumers of today's society are Generation Z (Gen Z), who are more likely to support and engage with brands that partake in socio-political issues. In addition, Gen Z is wary of woke washing as they are sceptical of campaigns that are performative (Maguire, 2020).

Gen Z is typically studied as a homogenous group (Duffett, 2017). However, researchers often explain that there are differences between men and women (e.g. Chéron et al., 2012; Hur et al., 2016; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010; Shetty et al., 2019). The reason for separating consumers based on gender is to get a better understanding of consumers’ behaviour (Hur et al., 2016). An example is that women usually act in a more prosocial manner and have bigger reactions towards societal issues in comparison to men (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010). Moreover, gender plays an important role as it could influence consumers’ purchasing habits (Kim, 2020). There is also a difference on how genders perceive brands and activism (e.g. Chéron et al., 2012; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010; Shetty et al., 2019).

There is currently a shift of responsibility from consumers to brands to address socio-political issues, which has created an urgent change in brands’ marketing strategies (Shetty et al., 2019). Even though many of today’s activist movements start off in the US, the young consumers and their active use of social media allow information to spread quickly on platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Hudson et al., 2015; Rosenblatt, 2020). Particularly, young females use social media frequently and have more attitudes that are favourable to companies' communication on social media (Duffett, 2017).

Social media has a great role in brand activism as it allows both consumers and brands to interact globally. The posting of activist messages on social media allows global brands to spread awareness and educate consumers on socio-political issues (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Rosenblatt, 2020). An example is Ben & Jerry's, an American ice cream brand, who frequently takes a stand in socio-political issues by posting activist messages on Instagram and Twitter (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Global brands are expected to act responsible and do good for society by taking a stand on societal issues. Global brands are perceived differently by consumers in comparison to local brands (Holt et al., 2004). However, global brands face issues
because they have consumers from different countries, who value different socio-political issues (Popoli, 2011). Hence, consumers’ origin influences how they perceive and respond to global brands (Holt et al., 2004).

There is a great extent of research on brand activism (e.g. Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Shetty et al., 2019). However, Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) and Hudson et al.’s (2015) suggestions for future research indicated that studies should examine the relation between young consumers, brand activism, brand perceptions, and how they relate to marketing tools (e.g. social media) and ethics (Hudson et al., 2015; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Rodrigues and Martins (2016) suggested that future research should create models on consumers' perceptions and behavioural dimensions, such as brand loyalty.

Previous research has mainly focused on the generation called Millennials (e.g. Duffett, 2017; Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Shetty et al., 2019), which is now according to Fromm and Read (2018) moving on to a younger generation, called Gen Z. Even though there is an unclear definition of the correct age span of the two generations, there are several factors that can differentiate them. Particularly, Gen Z are more aware of the topic of brand activism because of social media. Hence, they are more demanding of brands to be ethical (Duffett, 2017; Fromm & Read, 2018). Previous studies also indicated that perception can differ between the two genders (e.g. Borges et al., 2013; Hur et al., 2016; Kim, 2020; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010) even though marketing often views men and women similarly (Borges et al., 2013). Duffett (2017) suggested that homogeneous attributes within Gen Z in developed countries should be further studied. Thus, there are many possibilities to study the topic of brand activism in relation to female Gen Z consumers’ perception and loyalty and contribute to existing research.

The study is relevant because of the increase of globalization, digitalization and brand activism over the years (Holt et al., 2004; Popoli, 2011; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, there has been a shift in the role of responsibility of activism engagement, as it no longer solely lies on the consumer but has also been put on brands (Holt et al., 2004; Popoli, 2011). The study will create an increased understanding on how female Gen Z consumers perceive and act towards brand activism.
1.3 Research Purpose and Research Question

This study aims to explore how female Gen Z consumers perceive global brands’ different engagement in brand activism, and how this influences their brand loyalty. Hence, the research question is as follows;

_How do female Gen Z consumers perceive global brands’ engagement in brand activism, and how does this perception influence their brand loyalty?_

1.4 Research Outline

This explorative study consists of six chapters. The first chapter is an introductory to the research topic of brand activism, where background information is provided. Additionally, the problematization of brands engagement in activism along with the research purpose is stated to provide further insight on the topic. The second chapter contains a literature review, with theoretical outline concluding in a conceptual model. Methodology composes the third chapter where the empirical data is justified. The chapter starts with introducing the research philosophy, research approach and the strategy of the study. Moreover, the data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and limitations are explained. In the fourth chapter the empirical findings from the focus groups are showcased. Analysis and discussion makes up the fifth chapter, which addresses the findings in relation to the literature review. The last chapter summarizes the thesis and presents a conclusion. In addition, the theoretical contributions and practical implications of the study are explained. The chapter finishes in a critical review that addresses the limitations of the study as well as future research opportunities.
2. Literature review

This chapter consists of a literature review where the main concept of this explorative study is explained. The chapter presents a thorough explanation of global brands and brand activism. Additionally, the relation between brand perception and brand loyalty are clarified. The main concepts are then described in a context of Gen Z consumers. Lastly, a conceptual model summarizing the literature review is presented.

2.1 Global Brands

Brands allow consumers to differentiate companies’ products and services from their competitors (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Global brands are companies that operate in more than one country (Popoli, 2011). Global brands use similar names, symbols, and designs to help consumers worldwide to identify their offerings (Ghauri & Cateora, 2014). Digitalization works in favour of global brands as it allows communication to easily spread across country borders. Therefore, the media has a vital role in building brands’ images and brands' reputations. However, operating global brands can be complex because of the diversity in consumers, culture and values that differ from one country to another (Popoli, 2011).

Holt et al. (2004) explained that consumers view of global brands can be categorized into three characteristics. Firstly, global brands are associated with a certain quality signal, which indicates a better quality and allows the brands to be able to charge a higher price. Secondly, global myths are conceptualised around global brands and provide consumers with a similar identity and an ideal they can strive to achieve. Lastly, global brands are seen as powerful companies that can both help and do harm to others. Therefore, global brands are perceived to have additional social responsibility. Consequently, consumers expect more from global brands than from local brands to address social issues. If global brands are not living up to the consumers’ expectations, consumers will use their purchasing power against them for example by boycotting (Holt et al., 2004).
2.2 Brand Activism

There are various definitions of brand activism. In this study, brand activism is defined as brands taking a stand in socio-political issues. Brand activism is also considered a marketing strategy that brands use to influence consumers with certain values (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Vredenburg et al., 2020). The use of brand activism is often related to socio-political issues, where brands take a stand in support of social movements (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). The activism is usually driven by the brands' purpose and values (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Brand activism addresses issues in areas such as environment or economics typically within companies’ reach. However, brand activism can also lie outside companies' spectrum, such as gender rights, immigration and gun reform (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Brands can engage in activism by performing actions such as donating resources or putting out statements, which will bring attention to the issue (Shetty et al., 2019). The goal of brands' involvement in activism is to spread awareness, gain a good reputation, and appreciation from the consumer (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

According to Manfredi-Sánchez (2019), brand activism can be categorized into four characteristics. The first characteristic is that brand activism has *symbolic value and character* which is aimed at an audience who consider brands as having an impact on consumers’ status. Ismail (2017) would have considered this audience to be brand conscious since they choose well-known and expensive products and services, as it indicates status and reflects their self-identity. The second characteristic is that brand activism *redefines politics* by addressing controversial topics without belonging to a certain political party. The third characteristic is that the *recipient defines* brand activism. The recipient is the consumer who brands want to reach globally with their local campaigns. Finally, brand activism has its *foundation digitally*. With the use of the Internet, brands can easily reach global consumers by adapting to digital language (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Ismail (2017) also claimed that consumers nowadays use social media to find information about brands, because they consider it to be more trustworthy.

The reason for engagement in brand activism differs. Some brands use activism solely as an attempt to increase brand equity by following relevant socio-political issues to target consumers. On the contrary, some brands have a genuine concern for the issues and have roots in activism (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Vredenburg et al., 2020). An example is Patagonia, an American outdoor apparel brand (Vredenburg et al., 2020), which was created with the political
mission to make a change in society with their sustainable practices (Moorman, 2020). There is a possibility for brands to increase their profits and consumers’ loyalty by using brand activism. Consumers tend to support brands with activism that aligns with the brands’ identity and the consumers’ own values (Shetty et al., 2019). Shetty et al. (2019) also stated that men and women behave differently towards brand activism. For example, women usually support brands that do good for society (Silverstein & Sayre, 2009). Brand activism can lead to unfavourable outcomes such as boycotts if there is no congruence with the brand identity, socio-political cause and the consumers’ beliefs (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Consequently, brand activism can be risky, as it can lead to decreased profits and brand equity (Shetty et al., 2019).

2.2.1 Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) Typology of Brand Activism

Vredenburg et al. (2020), suggested a typology of brand activism. The typology has four quadrants. The quadrants are based on the authenticity of the brand activism, in relation to the brand's marketing messaging and previous engagement (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1**
Typology of Brand Activism

![Typology of Brand Activism](image.png)

*Note.* Retrieved from Vredenburg et al. (2020, p.449)

The first quadrant is *absence of brand activism* as the brands that have no expectations from consumers to engage in brand activism because they lack prosocial practices, brand identity and activism in their marketing (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Absent brands tend to operate in a setting where marketing is less guided by consumers’ expectations that the brands support activist
causes. However, because consumers expect more from brands, Vredenburg et al. (2020) predicted that absent brands need to get involved in brand activism by showing transparency. It is important to note, when brands have an absence of brand activism, it does not mean that they are not socially responsible (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

The second quadrant is silent brand activism which is usually exhibited by smaller brands who focus on working on long-term practices that align with their brand identity. Silent brands have already shown signs of authenticity. Therefore, silent brands can easily put out activist messages. The difference between the first and the second quadrant is that previous practices make it easier or harder for brands to engage in activism. Nonetheless, the brands that operate in the condition of absence or silence have an opportunity to get involved in brand activism (Vredenburg et al., 2020). An example of a global brand that Vredenburg et al. (2020) categorized as silent is Kraft Heinz, an American food and drink company, who has engaged in activism with little marketing as they focus mainly on practices.

The third quadrant is authentic brand activism as the brands are driven by their purpose and identity to change society. The authenticity of the activism enables brands to increase brand equity for themselves, as consumers view the brands as reliable. Consumers can minimise the apprehended risks linked to the brands and are, therefore, willing to choose them over competitors. By minimizing the risk, it allows consumers to create positive brand associations. The outcomes of authentic brand activism are also favourable long-term, as consumers are shown to be more accepting of other activist campaigns (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

An example of a global brand who displays authentic brand activism is Ben & Jerry’s, who has had roots in activism for several decades. Ben & Jerry’s has previously advocated for environmental issues and encourages sustainability (Vredenburg et al., 2020). In addition, the brand has recently gotten engaged in socio-political issues. One example is Ben & Jerry’s ice cream flavour “Pecan Resist” which showed their opinion in politics. Ben & Jerry’s overall alignment between previous engagement and marketing enables the brand to have products with premium pricing. Some authentic brands even have the sole purpose to educate the society, and do not have an economic interest with their brand activism. However, it is important to note that when these brands engage in polarizing topics, it may leave some consumers feeling alienated (Vredenburg et al., 2020).
The fourth quadrant is *inauthentic brand activism* where the brands strategically put out messages with activism without genuine connection to their brand identity. Inauthentic brands lack previous engagement in activism and use it to deceive their consumers. Vredenburg et al. (2020) explained that *woke washing* is a part of inauthentic brand activism. Woke washing is a hazardous marketing tactic from brands to meet the increased expectations from consumers that brands should address socio-political issues. Inauthentic brand activism has disadvantageous outcomes on brand equity, brand associations, and consumers’ trust, which hinders the brands from achieving a change in society. There are many examples of global brands who have used woke washing as an attempt to mislead consumers. One of those brands was Pepsi, an American soda brand, who in 2017 released a TV commercial with a celebrity, in support of BLM. The campaign was heavily criticized due to the brand’s previous lack of engagement and activist messaging. When inauthentic brand activism occurs, consumers may be sceptical of the authenticity of the brand as it seems as a marketing tactic to increase sales. Thus, the brand is perceived as untrustworthy (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

### 2.2.2 Brand Activism on Social Media

Brand activism can be expressed through different marketing tools, such as, TV, magazines, and radio (Ismail, 2017; Sasmita & Suki, 2015). However, marketers are changing their traditional marketing tools to communicate easier with their consumers (Hudson et al., 2015). The growth of social media is directing marketers to digital platforms and social media’s role in brand activism has increased. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube have all one thing in common; the ability to quickly interact with others (Duffett, 2017). As communication goes two ways, social media allow brands and consumers to interact (Hudson et al., 2015). Social media not only allow consumers to find information about certain products or services it also allow consumers to express their opinions (Ismail, 2017).

Brands can also use social media to share their opinions and thoughts through pictures and texts. Consequently, brand activism is commonly found on social media platforms. According to Manfredi-Sánchez (2019), there is a connection between brands and their social media. Social media allow brands to share videos and pictures by incorporating their brand identity such as the brand logo and name. For example, Nike used Twitter to share their campaign with Kaepernick or Ben & Jerry’s who used Instagram to show their new ice cream “Pecan Resist”. Social media has an important role in brand activism as brands can spread awareness on issues
continuously without spending huge amounts of resources. Social media allow brands’ campaigns to reach consumers globally. Most social media users follow to stay informed (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Hence, the role activist messages play on social media can influence brand perception. Brand perception further influence brand loyalty. Brand perception is based on the negative or positive brand associations related to the brands’ offerings that is conveyed through their marketing (Sasmita & Suki, 2015).

2.3 Brand Equity

To understand brand perception and brand loyalty, there is a need to understand their relation to brand equity, as some brands only focus on increasing equity (Vredenburg et al., 2020). According to Rodrigues and Martins (2016), brand equity is made of both perceptual and behavioural dimensions. The perceptual dimensions are consumers’ belief that a brand offers better quality and reflects their self-image. The perceptual dimensions reflect the mental value a consumer perceives the brand to generate. Behavioural dimensions, that have a positive correlation to brand equity, are brand loyalty and consumers’ will to pay a higher price. The behavioural dimensions are reactions based on their perceptions (Rodrigues & Martins, 2016).

2.3.1 Brand Perception

Perception is related to psychology and is defined as “the process whereby stimuli are received and interpreted by the individual and translated into a response” (Evans et al., 2013, p.38). Perception can be examined in relation to consumers' thoughts about a brand. In addition, brand perception can influence brand equity as perception includes positive and negative beliefs towards a brand (Rodrigues and Martins, 2016). According to Sasmita and Suki (2015), consumers that have a positive perception about a brand are more likely to purchase their offerings. Furthermore, perception influence how willing consumers are to pay a premium price and recommend the brand. According to Hur et al. (2016), gender has an influence on perception and consumer purchase behaviour. Women tend to react more towards marketing that is related to social issues and causes, because they are more steered by their emotions. Therefore, women are usually more prosocial than men (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010). Women process information differently from men, for instance they focus on gathering detailed information, when making decisions on product purchases (Kim, 2020). Women base their decision making on what others think, whereas men base their decision on decisions made by
others (Furaji et al., 2013). Both Borges et al. (2013) and Maurer Herter et al. (2014) claimed that the reason women are more involved in the process of their shopping is because they enjoy the experience more than men.

Furthermore, Vredenburg et al. (2020) claimed that marketing success is based on brand equity, which can be determined according to consumers’ positive responses based on their mental associations of a brand. Vredenburg et al. (2020) developed the framework of optimal incongruence (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2
Framework of optimal incongruence

![Framework of optimal incongruence](image)

Note. Retrieved from Vredenburg et al. (2020, p.453)

When brands engage in activism, consumers form perceptions of the brands based on their expectations and the brands’ previous involvement in prosocial causes. The expectations on brands to engage in activism are higher than before, which has resulted in brands putting out more activist messages. This can lead to different outcomes according to Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) framework on how compatible brands are with the activist cause. Vredenburg et al. (2020) claimed that optimally there should be some incongruence in the marketing and previous engagement to achieve more brand equity. Incongruence results in bigger reactions since consumers need to process the activism more, in relation to their expectations based on previous brand knowledge. Incompatibility causes either positive or negative responses to the controversial campaign (Vredenburg et al., 2020).
According to Vredenburg et al. (2020), there are three zones of responses, on how activism aligns with consumers’ values and social norms. When there is incongruence in moderation, brand equity will increase if consumers are delighted. Delight is based on how deviating the activist message is from social patterns in relation to the brands’ reputation. Consumers are delighted when the message is not too controversial or harmful to their self-identity. Furthermore, consumers will feel satisfaction if the message does not deviate too much from the cause, norms, brands’ identity or previous engagement. However, if consumers feel that the campaign threatens their identity it will cause outrage. Consumers’ perceptions and responses are related to the audience’s receptivity to brands addressing controversial issues that stray from social norms (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Absent and inauthentic brands portray incompatibility, which might lead to outrage or delight, because of low consumer expectations since the brands have low practices of activism. Silent and authentic brands have previous practices and can create consumer satisfaction, but less likely delight. Hence, many brands use activism with some incompatibility as a method to differentiate themselves from other competitors. Moreover, authentic brands can easily delve into new areas of activism such as Ben & Jerry’s have managed with politics. The relation between consumers’ perception of brands is a part of a consumers' purchase decision. Brands contribute to the way a consumer wants to be perceived (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Ismail (2017) claimed that brand loyalty can be improved by using marketing, such as social media, to build strong relationships between brands and its consumers. However, marketing is not as necessary because loyal consumers tend to spread a positive reputation about brands, also known as word of mouth (WoM) (Ismail, 2017).
WoM can result in brands cutting costs in areas such as marketing (Nawaz et al., 2020). In addition, loyalty such as positive WoM lowers the risk associated with brands and their products compared to its competitors (Harris & Khatami, 2017). Consequently, loyalty is both important for brands and consumers.

Loyalty can also bring out emotional attachment in a relationship with brands (Ismail, 2017). Therefore, it is important to note that loyalty is not only based around the fact that consumers purchase the same products or services. Loyalty is also based around consumers’ positive attitudes, also known as satisfaction. Satisfied consumers are more likely to spread positive WoM (Nawaz et al., 2020). Loyal consumers tend to spread positive WoM even if they experience lower levels of satisfaction, because they still identify with the brand and have a positive brand attitude. (Harris & Khatami, 2017). Consumers also actively follow brands online. Thus, brands can easily have a dialogue with their consumers, which can generate more brand loyalty. According to Nawaz et al. (2020), positive WoM can also be spread electronically on social media. Lee and Workman (2018) stated that loyal female consumers are especially valuable for brands since they tend to spread positive WoM electronically.

Researchers are not unanimous about genders' relation to loyalty. Loyalty depends on multiple factors, such as age and what entity the consumers are loyal to. One example is that some researchers claimed women tend to be more loyal toward individuals and that men show more support towards groups, such as companies (Melnyk & van Osselaer, 2012; Melnyk et al., 2009). Furthermore, Nawaz et al. (2020) claimed that young consumers tend to be less loyal because they have less fixed perceptions of brands. However, they are more likely to express their emotional attachment towards brands by referring to them as their “favourite” (Papista, 2012).

### 2.5 Generation Z Consumers

The younger generation of consumers have higher expectations of brands and are more involved in activism. Young consumers are not afraid to share their opinions and use their purchasing power thoughtfully. Social media has an important role in the communication of young consumers because of its ability to quickly reach many users globally (Duffett, 2017; Ismail, 2017). In addition, young consumers are more exposed to social media which have made them more critical towards brands who use social media platforms unethically. As brands tend to use
social media platforms to spread activism, the younger generation of consumers are more exposed to brand activism (Shetty et al., 2019).

There has been a shift as the former young generation of consumers, Millennials, born approximately 1979-1995, have entered adulthood. A younger generation is taking over namely Generation Z (Gen Z), born 1996-2010. Both generations want to create a change in the world, and both are familiar with digitalization (Fromm & Read, 2018). However, in comparison to the Millennials, Gen Z is more diverse and does not know a world without social media (Duffett, 2017; Fromm & Read, 2018). Thus, Gen Z is more able to filter out inauthentic marketing (Duffett, 2017). Therefore, brands need to realize that their marketing needs to change based on which generation they want to reach. Gen Z prefers social media marketing more than traditional marketing, because they are used to processing information quickly. Furthermore, Gen Z values authenticity and transparency from brands. Gen Z is less trusting of brands compared to other generations because they are aware that brands reflect their self-image. Gen Z consumers also have a lot of information available on hand; therefore, it is harder to get them to be loyal to a single brand (Fromm & Read, 2018).

According to Djafarova & Bowes (2021), female and male Gen Z consumers have distinctive reactions towards brands’ social media advertisements, because they use them for distinctive needs. Both genders use social media for gathering information. However, females are more frequent social media users and use it to stay updated on celebrities or on fashion. Whereas, males use it to receive information about sports or news. Female Gen Z consumers usually listen to friends, family, celebrities or other social media users’ recommendations on purchases, because they lack trust for brands who have motives that are ulterior. Therefore, marketers need to use separate methods to target the genders, since they use social media for dissimilar needs (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Deckman et al. (2020) also claimed that there is a difference between the genders’ opinions on political issues. Gen Z women are typically more involved in political issues than men. The genders have different political opinions and female Gen Z tend to be more liberal on political issues and hold pro-social values. The reason might be because women are empathic and tend to care for others more than men (Deckman et al., 2020).
2.6 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model is based on the literature review and portrays how this study aimed to explore female Gen Z consumers' perception and loyalty within brand activism (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3**
*The three cogwheels of female Gen Z consumers’ perception and loyalty towards global brands’ activism*

Since, female Gen Z consumers’ thoughts and feelings on brand activism are strived to be understood an up-close image of their mind-set is portrayed which includes three cogwheels. The first cogwheel of brand activism is based on Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) typology of brand activism, which is categorized into four quadrants; absence, silent, authentic, and inauthentic brand activism. The quadrants represent different brands based on their previous engagement in activism and the level of activist messages in their marketing (Vredenburg et al., 2020). The second cogwheel of brand perception represents how female Gen Z consumers perceive the different quadrants of brand activism. According to Vredenburg et al. 's (2020) framework of optimal incongruence engagements in activism can cause three different consumer responses; delight, satisfaction and outrage. The responses are based on the congruence between the activism consumers’ values and social norms (Vredenburg et al., 2020). The third cogwheel of brand loyalty represents the possible influence perceptions have on female Gen Z consumers’
behaviour. According to Rodrigues and Martins (2016) as well as Sasmita and Suki (2015), brand perception influences brand loyalty either positively or negatively.

The two arrows showcase the direction of the cogwheels as brand activism is explored in relation to brand perception which is then explored in relation to brand loyalty. The three cogwheels are linked with a dotted line to the thermometer, which has a question mark to display the lack of knowledge on perceptions based on brand activism. Next to the thermometer are the three consumer responses. The cogwheel of loyalty is connected to a shopping bag which represents female Gen Z consumers’ WoM and their will to purchase the brands’ offerings. The shopping bag also exhibits a question mark to display the lack of knowledge on the influence on brand loyalty. In total, the two question marks represent how female Gen Z consumers’ perception and loyalty will be explored in this study.
3. Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology for collecting empirical data to study female Gen Z consumers. Firstly, the theoretical methodology in terms of the philosophy and research approach are explained. Secondly, the empirical methodology, that includes the research strategy and design are discussed. Furthermore, the method for data collection and how the data will be analysed are presented. Lastly, the trustworthiness and limitations of the chosen qualitative method are explained.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is described as the authors’ approach to gather and analyse the collected data regarding a specific phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2019). According to Bryman and Bell (2019), there are different types of research philosophies, the main ones in business research are positivism, realism and interpretivism. Positivism uses natural scientific methods to study the social world. The philosophy focuses on creating hypotheses and requires objectivity. Positivism is mainly used in quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Realism also has its foundation in natural sciences. However, realism also states that there is another reality existing besides the studied social world, which it aims to explain (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Lastly, interpretivism interprets how individuals act and perceive their social world. Interpretivism is often associated with qualitative research and studies social interactions. Subjectivity is required in interpretivism to understand the behaviours of humans (Bryman & Bell, 2019). The research philosophy that was the most appropriate considering the research purpose was interpretivism. Interpretivism was selected because the study wanted to explore female Gen Z consumers’ brand perception and brand loyalty, where human interactions needed to be interpreted in relation to the object; brand activism.

3.2 Research Approach

A research approach explains how the theory is applied in relation to the researched object (Bryman & Bell, 2019). According to Bryman and Bell (2019), there are three different research approaches; deductive, inductive and an abductive approach. A deductive approach bases its data collection on hypotheses that are created using existing knowledge to develop a theory.
The approach is the most common foundation between the affiliation of theory and research. A deductive approach is normally used within quantitative research. In contrast to the deductive approach, an inductive approach formulates a new theory based on observed data. The approach draws generalizable conclusions. An inductive approach is mainly used in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Lastly, an abductive approach is a mix of the deductive and inductive approach. An abductive approach is more flexible as it works back and forth between theory and empirical data. An abductive approach provides researchers with the ability to contribute with new theory on a puzzling phenomenon. The approach provides the opportunity to use empirical data to supplement existing research (Bryman & Bell, 2019). There is a great extent of research on the topic of brand activism. However, there currently exists a gap regarding the studied subject. The study aimed to explore and contribute with understanding on how female Gen Z consumers perceived brand activism and how it influenced their loyalty. Therefore, an abductive approach was the most appropriate for the study. To bridge the gap in existing research, we simultaneously worked with the theories and the collected data to fulfil the purpose of this study.

3.3 Research Strategy and Research Design

A research strategy describes how to conduct research within the field of business. A research strategy can either be quantitative or qualitative (Bryman & Bell, 2019). The choice of research strategy was to conduct qualitative research, as the aim was to create an understanding of female Gen Z consumers’ perception of brand activism and its influence on their brand loyalty. Qualitative research often uses an abductive approach and interpretivism, as it aims to investigate and contribute with more knowledge through words and pictures (Bryman & Bell, 2019). The qualitative research strategy gave the study a chance to examine the human interaction between female Gen Z consumers. One of the advantages of qualitative study is understanding how people interpret the social word through their perspective (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Since the aim was to examine female Gen Z consumers’ perception we believed it was important to base the study on their thoughts which qualitative methods allowed. Another advantage of qualitative research strategy is that the methods provide flexibility. Flexibility was needed to fully understand the mind of female Gen Z consumers and to emphasize different aspects of their thoughts. A disadvantage of qualitative research strategy is that the methods can be difficult to reproduce since the researchers have a subjective view of the phenomena. Despite the disadvantage, we considered a qualitative research strategy to be an appropriate
choice as the study intended to explore and create understanding about female Gen Z thoughts in relation to brand activism.

Research design is the framework for a study on how to collect and analyse data. A multiple-case study was used as the study had a comparative design. According to Bryman and Bell (2019), a multiple-case study means that two or more cases, which are usually organizations or people, are studied and compared. A multiple-case study granted us the chance to compare female Gen Z consumers’ thoughts and feelings on different engagement in brand activism. In addition, an explorative design was appropriate for the study as it allowed us to use a flexible approach to research the gap in existing studies. Explorative designs generally ask research questions that begin with “how” or “what”. In addition, the questions are usually open and need to be explored and answered in a descriptive manner. Unstructured focus groups are a method that can be used to explore phenomena, because it provides flexibility. In an explorative research, flexibility is required, since it tends to be extensive and changeable (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.4 Data Collection

Data can be divided into primary and secondary data. The difference between the two is that secondary data is collected by others rather than the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2019). The primary data for this qualitative study was collected from focus groups and the secondary data was six video campaigns collected from two scientific articles.

3.4.1 Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted based on their ability to create discussions. We believed that discussions were the most effective method to gather data related to what an average female Gen Z consumer thought about brand activism. According to Bryman and Bell (2019), the use of focus groups is a qualitative strategy for collecting data. Focus groups are especially useful when researchers want to examine human interactions. In groups participants can exchange thoughts and elaborate their reflections together. The data from focus groups provides researchers an understanding of how the groups think and feel about a theme or topic (Bryman & Bell, 2019). We chose to conduct focus groups since we saw a possibility to create natural discussions. Furthermore, we believed the method to be the most appropriate to collect as much
data as possible on a broad topic, where consumers could have different opinions. The focus
group discussions required collaborative effort and engagement from the participants, it resulted
in detailed information, which we believe would not be possible with other methods. The focus
groups provided extensive data on a large group of female Gen Z consumers’ thoughts, which
helped us answer the research question in an effective manner. However, a disadvantage with
focus groups is that the participants might depend on other group members’ statements, which
can decrease the variation in answers (Denscombe, 2016). To prevent this disadvantage our
focus group guide was constructed in a manner that also provided the participants’ individual
opinions.

According to Bryman and Bell (2019), three to nine participants is a good number of members
in focus groups. The number of participants usually depends on the topic, where the aim is to
create manageable group discussions (Bryman & Bell, 2019). To create a balanced discussion,
we chose to conduct four focus groups, where each group had five participants. We chose to
have medium sized groups to create discussions where each participant was given the ability to
voice their opinion. Focus groups are led by a moderator whose role is to ask questions if
participants fall silent. In addition, the moderator attempts to keep the participants' discussion
within the chosen topic (Bryman & Bell, 2019). However, as the goal was to understand the
participants’ perspective of brand activism, we had a withdrawn role as moderators. Our main
role as moderator was to ask questions from the focus group guide to start discussions.
Additionally, we asked follow-up questions to avoid confusion, but for the most part, to
encourage deeper discussions. Lastly, we also made sure that all participants had the
opportunity to voice their opinion.

Focus groups tend to be conducted face to face. However, according to Bryman and Bell (2019),
online focus groups are also a possibility. An advantage of online focus groups is that
participants do not have to travel to a destination which increases the chance of participation.
In addition, it is usually easier for participants to speak freely because they are in a familiar
environment. However, a disadvantage with online focus groups are that participants
unconsciously interrupt each other, which can create difficulties for the researcher when
transcribing. Unstable Internet connection is also a disadvantage that can hinder the flow in the
discussions. Another disadvantage is that online discussion requires great engagement from the
participants because it is easier to get disturbed by distractions in the surrounding environment
(Bryman & Bell, 2019). Optimally, the focus groups would have been conducted face to face.
However, they were conducted on Zoom, an online platform that provides video communication (Zoom, n.d.). The reason for conducting online focus groups was because the Swedish public health authority recommended the public to avoid unnecessary gatherings to decrease COVID-19 cases (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021). Zoom was chosen because it was a free program that provided the ability to record both audio and video. To counteract the disadvantages of online focus groups, we asked the participants in advance to have their cameras on and to be seated in a non-disturbing environment where they would feel comfortable.

3.4.2 Participant Selection
According to Bryman and Bell (2019), the selection of participants in a focus group tends to be well thought out where the participants have some similarities, for instance, age, profession, or interests. The choice is often based on the possibility to gather several people at the same time (Bryman & Bell, 2019). To answer the research question only female Gen Z consumers were asked to participate in the focus groups. The reason for only studying one gender is because there is a difference on how they perceive brand activism (e.g. Chéron et al., 2012; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010; Shetty, 2019). The reason Gen Z consumers were chosen was because they are a generation who is both engaged and exposed to brand activism (Duffett, 2017). However, we chose to not include Gen Z consumers born in the years 2004 - 2010, since they are under the age of 18. The reason for excluding these Gen Z consumers is because the Swedish law, according to Chapter 7 §1 2nd paragraph, states that legal guardians have a duty to provide for their children up until the age of 18 (Föräldrabalken [FB], 1949). As we wanted to examine Gen Z consumers, not customers, it was easier to examine youngsters over the age of 18 since they are legally obliged to provide for themselves. The restriction in age span allowed us to identify that the consumer and customer were the same in a simple manner. The last criterion was that the participants had no prior in-depth knowledge on the topic of brand activism. This criterion was put in place to achieve a more accurate representation of what the average female Gen Z consumer thought. To ensure that the participants had no prior in-depth knowledge we asked the participants beforehand if they knew what brand activism was.

Our course of action to find relevant participants started amongst our acquaintances. Based on the set criterion we reached out to our acquaintances to ask if they were interested in participating. We reached out through our personal social media platforms, such as Facebook,
Instagram, and Snapchat, and asked if they would consider participating in our study. Consequently, we asked if they knew anything about the concept of brand activism or had heard about it before to ensure their previous knowledge matched our criteria. We asked the potential participants the following questions; “have you heard of brand activism before?” and “do you know anything in particular about brand activism?”. In most cases the people we reached out to asked what brand activism was before we could ask these questions, which made the selection easier.

The participants were asked to partake in the focus groups because they were easily obtained. A sample of this sort is called a *convenience sample* (Saunders et al., 2009). Because of the convenience in the sample we could create groups where one participant at least knew another group member. For example, some participants had previously been classmates. According to Bryman and Bell (2019), the advantage of familiarity can lead to the participants wanting to open up more, which often results in greater discussions. A convenience sampling is easily accessible in a rapid and low cost manner which is another advantage. However, a disadvantage of convenience sampling is that it could be biased because of the researchers’ selection of participants (Saunders et al., 2009). Another disadvantage could be that the participants are somewhat homogeneous which can decrease the variety in the answers (Bryman & Bell, 2019). However, we found a convenience sample to be useful considering the time limitations of this thesis.

In total, we had a sample of 20 participants located in Sweden. The selection of participants located in Sweden could be justified by Duffett (2017), who stated that there is a lack of research on brand activism based on Gen Z consumer context in developed countries. Therefore, our sample of participants allowed us to contribute to existing research on brand activism from the perspective of female Gen Z consumers located in a developed country. In table one, the participants’ initial, age, and what focus groups they belonged to is presented. Additionally, the date and the duration of each focus group discussion are also presented (Table 1).
**TABLE 1**

*List of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS GROUP</th>
<th>INITIALS</th>
<th>AGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>I.N</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 6, 2021</td>
<td>S.J</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1h 45 min</td>
<td>D.K</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H.B</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L.S</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>H.D</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 9, 2021</td>
<td>L.S</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1h 17 min</td>
<td>L.T</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D.A</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M.K</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>E.A</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 9, 2021</td>
<td>A.S</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 h 15 min</td>
<td>S.R</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S.L</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E.G</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>A.J</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 10, 2021</td>
<td>S.T</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1h 32 min</td>
<td>J.W</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P.K</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S.J</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3.4.3 Focus Group Guide**

In total, we conducted four focus groups that took place between May 6th and 10th, 2021. The focus groups lasted for about one to two hours. The focus groups were conducted in Swedish as it was the participants' native language. Swedish was selected to decrease the risk of the participants misinterpreting the questions. Furthermore, the discussions were recorded on Zoom with both audio and video. We had received consent in advance from the participants to record the discussions. By recording the data, we could be present in the moment and did not have to rely on our notes of the conversation.
The focus group guide (Appendix 1) was semi-structured, which meant that specific themes were developed to be discussed during the focus groups. A semi-structured focus group guide provides flexibility, as the moderator often asks questions that are not included in the guide (Bryman & Bell, 2019). A focus group guide was also developed in Swedish (Appendix 2). In total, there were thirteen open questions based on the main components of the conceptual model, which were brand activism, brand perception and brand loyalty. The open questions allowed the participants to discuss relatively freely, within the topic of brand activism. We had a variety of questions, for instance one of the questions required the participants to use the chat function and write directly to us. Whereas some questions required the groups to come to a mutual answer. All the questions had a specific purpose, which is stated in the focus group guide (Appendix 1) and were thought out to create an engaging discussion.

The selection of campaigns (Appendix 3) that were presented in the focus groups were collected from Lopez-Medel (2017) and Vredenburg et al. (2020). In total, six different video campaigns were presented. Five of the campaigns came from Vredenburg et al. (2020). Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) examples were used as they mentioned well-known global brands and because they were connected to the four quadrants of brand activism. However, we chose to include an additional example from Lopez-Medel (2017), which we believed was more appropriate for the selected participants. The reason for choosing another example than the one Vredenburg et al. (2020), suggested for one of the quadrants of brand activism, was because female Gen Z consumers living in Sweden not knowing the brand.

An example of a chosen campaign was “Dream Crazy” by Nike, which was released in 2016 (Figure 4). In the TV campaign Nike worked with Kaepernick to support the BLM movement. The campaign encouraged viewers to dream big, especially if you are an athlete. The campaign showcased different athletes and their stories to success. The video was narrated by Kaepernick himself, and at the end he encouraged the viewers to question themselves if they were willing to reach their dreams. Kaepernick said, “believe in something even if it means sacrificing everything” (Kaepernick, 2018, 0:31), which reflected Kaepernick’s own sacrifice of his career (The Guardian, 2018). Vredenburg et al. (2020), categorized this campaign as authentic brand activism, as the brand has shown previous engagement in other socio-political issues and has high levels of activist messaging in their marketing. To read about the remaining campaigns see the multiple case study (Appendix 3).
3.4.4 Focus Group Structure

We started the focus group discussion by welcoming all the participants. Additionally, the participants got the chance to introduce themselves. We then introduced the agenda and encouraged the participants to express themselves. In total, we showed six different video campaigns, which we divided into two rounds. We presented the following campaigns in the first round, “Daughter” from Audi, “Dream Crazy” from Nike and “The Best Man Can Be” from Gillette. The reason for grouping these three campaigns together was because their marketing campaigns presented a cause-related storyline. We did not disclose the campaigns’ relation to Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) typology, as we believed it could influence their discussion. After showing the videos we asked the participants questions from the focus group guide. The concept of the second round was similar where the same questions were used, but only questions 1-6, 10 and 11 were asked. The reason for excluding four questions was because the participants would have answered in a similar manner as round one. We then showed the three remaining campaigns, “Kraft Now, Pay Later” from Kraft Heinz, “Pecan Resist” from Ben & Jerry's and “Live for Now” from Pepsi. The reason for grouping these three campaigns were because the global brands all operate within the food and drink industry. The two reasons for the groupings were to make it easier for the participants to discuss and identify similarities and differences between the campaigns. As a final question, we asked the group to decide which of the six campaigns they liked the most and respectively liked the least.

Note. Retrieved image from Wieden+Kennedy (2018) and video from The Guardian (2018)¹

¹ Note. Wieden+Kennedy is the company that produced the campaign, which Nike is the original creator of. However, since publication the campaign has been removed from Nike’s website (Nike, n.d.). Therefore, an original source cannot be provided.
3.5 Data Analysis

The collected primary data of this qualitative study was based on the focus groups. To analyse the collected data the discussions were recorded and transcribed. According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), qualitative data could be analysed by firstly sorting the collected data, secondly reducing and compressing it into categories and lastly argumentation. The first step sorting was done when we transcribed the data from the focus group that was recorded via audio into written format (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Recordings of the audio needs to be transcribed to ensure what the participants discussed (Denscombe, 2016). The transcript provided us the opportunity to work closely and in-depth with the data. In the transcribing process, we sorted what the participants discussed based on themes. Before sorting the data into themes, we had to translate the audio from Swedish to English. The themes helped us structure the data material and sort relevant information. We used the themes brand perception, brand loyalty, and other. Both brand perception and brand loyalty were divided into the subthemes positive and negative. All themes and subthemes were then colour coded, to make the analysis process more effective. Full phrases and fragments of the participants’ statements were used to sort into subthemes. Additionally, the participants’ statements were presented with initials, age and group to provide anonymity of their full names. The second step, reducing was implemented as we sorted the data. The theme other, contained material which we believed was unnecessary for the study. We decided to reduce the data one more time after the first step was completed to ensure that the material was relevant. The final step, argumentation is presented in chapter four and five, where we present and discuss the findings based on the theoretical and empirical data that was collected during the research process.

3.6 Trustworthiness

According to Bryman and Bell (2019), there are four criteria for determining the trustworthiness of a qualitative research. Credibility measures how credible the researcher’s description of the studied social reality is, which can be ensured by ethical practices and triangulation. Triangulation can be used as a form of cross-checking the empirical findings with existing theories (Bryman & Bell, 2019). To ensure the credibility in this study we supported the empirical findings with the literature review in chapter five. We chose to use triangulation as it aligned with the explorative nature of this study. Transferability evaluates if the research is
transferable to a bigger context. A qualitative study is hard to replicate because the research is based on how an individual interprets the studied social reality. Transferability can be increased by giving thorough explanations of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2019). To make our study more replicable, we provided detailed descriptions of the examples used in the focus group discussions, the course of action and how the focus groups were conducted. Dependability depicts if all necessary parts of the research are included and accessible for others (Bryman & Bell, 2019). The collected data, such as the transcript and notes from the focus groups are saved on both the author's personal devices and online to ensure the transparency of the study. Confirmability means that there is no existing subjectivity from the researchers in the study (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Confirmability was sought in the study as we objectively reviewed the collected data to provide transparency.

3.7 Limitations

This study contains a few limitations which could influence its trustworthiness. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the focus groups needed to be held online, which created harder circumstances for more natural discussions. Technical difficulties also occurred during one of the focus groups. Furthermore, due to the focus groups being conducted in the participants' mother tongue, it had to be translated into English which could have led to mistranslation and misinterpretation. In addition, the great use of Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) examples of campaigns could be limiting. There are other sources and examples of global brands’ activist campaigns that could have been as or more appropriate for the topic of discussion. Lastly, the chosen activist campaigns might not have been targeted towards female Gen Z consumers. However, since the aim was to explore female Gen Z consumers’ thoughts and feelings towards brand activism in general the target audience of the campaigns were not the central focus.
4. Empirical Findings

This chapter describes the empirical findings of the collected data during the focus groups. The findings were collected using a semi-structured method and was later sorted into two main themes; brand perception and brand loyalty. The empirical findings on how female Gen Z consumers perceived brand activism and how it influenced their brand loyalty, is presented according to Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) four quadrants.

4.1 Brand Perception

The first theme, brand perception, explained how the respondents perceived the brands’ activist campaigns for instance, the message, the video, and its clarity. Additionally, it presents which campaigns each group liked the most and respectively liked the least. Lastly, the theme summarizes the respondents’ general thoughts about activist campaigns and how it could influence their brand perceptions.

4.1.1 Absence of Brand Activism

Most respondents perceived the message of gender equality to be interesting in Audi’s campaign “Daughter”. However, some respondents felt that the campaign was unclear. They had a hard time identifying that the campaign was from Audi and they did not understand the connection between the brand and the message. As the discussion progressed the respondents had an overall positive perception about car brands addressing gender equality, as it brought attention to the issue. The following quotes summarized the respondents’ brand perception:

*I thought that the subject was good to bring up, but it was not so clear.* - S.L, 25. (Group 3)

*I also did not first understand the connection between Audi and what they were talking about. How should I tell my daughter? [...] - L.S, 25. (Group 1)*

*It felt like the commercial did not have that much to do with the product they sell. I love equality campaigns but this feels forced, like they do not really mean*
it and that they are trying to reach a bigger audience to sell more. - D.K, 22.

(Group 1)

There were mixed responses amongst the respondents in terms of the intentions and delivery of the campaign. Some of the respondents saw the campaign as sincere. However, the majority believed the campaign to be over exaggerated and forced to bring awareness to gender equality. The respondents were sceptical if they wanted to bring awareness to the cause or if Audi wanted to show consumers that they were good. The respondents even questioned if Audi really did something about the problem. They discussed that it is hard to believe Audi since the message lacked connection to their product. They found the message not credible since Audi operates within the car industry, which they explained as male dominated. As one respondent stated;

The campaign from Audi [...] is about gender equality, which is easy to notice. However, I do not understand the brand’s purpose. It feels like the company is following a trend and wants to be included to retain their position in the market.
- E.G, 21. (Group 3)

Among the groups, group number four especially discussed that Audi failed to include women, who were the focus of the campaign. They mentioned that the narrator was a man and that the focus was on the dad to teach her daughter to drive, which bothered them. The following quote explains how one respondent expressed herself;

[...] it was a male talking but it would have been nice if it was a ‘her’ who narrated. - S.T, 21. (Group 4)

In total, the respondents had a relatively positive perception of the message that Audi was mediating. However, there were some differences within the group discussions. For example, group three disliked the campaign the most, as they did not believe the campaign to be inclusive of women in terms of looks. The other groups discussed the campaign in a more positive manner. For example, group two discussed how they would appreciate their favourite car manufacturer to do something similar. Even though the groups discussed the campaign differently all respondents came to a similar conclusion about the campaign not being interesting enough or believable as they questioned Audi’s intention.
4.1.2 Silent Brand Activism

All respondents had a positive perception of “Kraft Now, Pay Later” from Kraft Heinz. Although the respondents did not have much knowledge about the brand or their offerings, the respondents mentioned that the message was easy to understand and that it felt genuine. The genuine feeling was explained as Kraft Heinz did not focus on themselves but instead praised other brands as well. Recurring words that were mentioned during the discussion were inspiring and interesting. Two respondents, S.J and P.K, explained it as follows;

*Kraft Heinz’s message felt genuine. They showed that they had good intentions and that they wanted to help others.* - S.J, 22. (Group 1)

*I liked the structure of Kraft since they first talked about the problem, then how to solve it and lastly about their own brand. Which means that they are not trying to promote themselves instead they are trying to help.* - P.K, 21. (Group 4)

As the groups decided which of the campaigns they liked the most and respectively the least, group one chose “Kraft Now, Pay Later” as their favourite campaign. The group selected Kraft Heinz’s campaign because they liked the purpose of helping others and that the brand was grateful for other brands who helped them. The following quote from H.B explains why group one chose the campaign as their favourite;

* [...] I did not get the feeling that they were prestigious or that they were a bit of ‘look how great we are’, but at the same time they still lifted the people who were a part of this. They showed gratitude toward the others who helped them. I felt it was quite a good balance in between that they shone a good light on themselves and emphasized that it helped the individuals who it affected.* - H.B, 21. (Group 1)

Nonetheless, all respondents had a positive perception of Kraft Heinz. However, group three had the hardest time understanding what the concept of paying back later meant. They wondered if the families had to pay back eventually. Despite not understanding the concept, they still liked that Kraft Heinz helped families who could not afford food at the time. The three remaining groups only had positive things to say about the campaign.
4.1.3 Authentic Brand Activism

All respondents shared positive perceptions for the campaign “Dream Crazy” by Nike. They considered the message to be very clear and inclusive not only of genders, but religion and disabilities as well. Respondent S.T summarized the respondents' thoughts well.

The uplifting message in the commercial was very positive and encouraged that what you do is not worthless. Quite suitable for Nike who operates within sports. - S.T, 21. (Group 4)

The respondents discussed the connection between Nike and their message. They called the campaign “on-brand” since they have seen previous campaigns from Nike with similar purpose. They also discussed the balance between the message and Nike’s own products, which they referred to as genuine. The respondents believed that Nike managed to showcase societal issues, such as, lack of equality from a sports perspective that the brand has knowledge within. Therefore, the campaign was perceived very well by the respondents. A recurring word that all the groups mentioned was inclusive. They liked that the commercial included a diverse group of people who did sports and encouraged them to dream big, which they found motivating. They believed the campaign provided the viewers an ability to recognize themselves. The two quotes below from J.W and H.D explains how the respondents perceived Nike’s campaign;

I think it is good that they take up societal issues and show it in the right way. For example, Nike brought up that everyone is equal and that everyone can do it, I think that is good. They really push people and can help people with bad self-esteem to believe in themselves. - J.W, 21. (Group 4)

[…] felt like a motivational video where everyone regardless of gender or if they are disabled etc. they should feel included to do what they want without limitations. Even though the video was about sports, the message could be related to everything else in life. - H.D, 22. (Group 2)

The second campaign “Pecan Resist” by Ben & Jerry’s, had the most mixed perceptions. The respondents' individual responses were either that the message was confusing or that it was completely understandable. The respondents who thought it to be confusing later on in the discussion changed their opinions, as other group members who understood the message
explained their perception. The respondents who directly understood the message explained that they had previous knowledge about the brand, which they shared with their group members. They considered the campaign to be “on-brand” because the message reflected Ben & Jerry’s values. Overall, the respondents considered the campaign to be simple with a good message. However, some respondents felt that the campaign was a bit too short. The quotes below explains the respondents’ general thoughts about Ben & Jerry’s campaign;

*Short, however both the brand and the message is presented in a good way, could be a little longer to be clearer.* - L.T, 23. (Group 2)

*I actually thought the balance was perfect, because it feels like the others really milk it politically. But Ben & Jerry's was like we stand for it and this is what we sell. It was very short and concise.* - S.J, 22. (Group 1)

For example, when one of the respondents in group one explained her previous knowledge about the brand. The other respondents who had earlier stated that Ben & Jerry’s campaign was confusing changed their perception. Similar occurrences took place in other groups as well. The respondent explained it as follows;

*Another thing is that since they started they have always had a niche in their ice cream and what their company values are [...] From the beginning we already know what type of company it is and they just build and elaborate that idea, and we are not surprised with what commercials they make at all. Just because they already have that as their brand.* - H.B, 21. (Group 1)

All four groups had a positive perception of Nike’s “Dream Crazy” and “Pecan Resist” from Ben & Jerry’s, because they perceived the message to have a connection to the brand. Even though the two campaigns were discussed differently the respondents were not sceptical of the intention behind the campaigns. The group discussions carried out very similarly where the groups mentioned the brands' previous history and shared their existing knowledge about the brand. The similarities can be seen in the group ranking of the campaigns. Group two chose Ben & Jerry’s as their favourite campaign, whereas group three and four selected Nike’s campaign as their favourite.
4.1.4 Inauthentic Brand Activism

The respondents had a lot to say about “The Best Man Can Be” by Gillette and “Live for Now” by Pepsi. During the discussion, the respondents were visibly upset and irritated by both campaigns.

The respondents considered the first campaign “The Best Man Can Be” by Gillette to have a good and educational message. However, they also felt like the message only was targeted towards men and that it did not feel genuine. The respondents felt like Gillette hopped on a trend during the #MeToo movement and used an everyday problem women must face and made it into a joke. Furthermore, three out of four groups discussed how Gillette sold different razors to men and women. Therefore, the three groups believed that the brand contradicted themselves with their campaign. Most respondents had difficulties relating the message to the brand and their product. There was some lack of clarity between the respondents about which razor brand was behind the campaign. Many of the respondents only found out that it was Gillette at the end. They thought the brand focused too much on delivering the message without any connection to their identity. The respondents’ perception of Gillette’s campaign can be explained with the quotes below from S.J and S.R;

 [...] they have a campaign for equality and men should be nicer to women etc.
But still they make a campaign for a product that is only for men. - S.J, 22.
(Group 1)

I like that ‘female oppression’ has received more attention and that bigger companies bring up the subject so that it can reach many. I hope it is not a way for them to market themselves aka ‘trend’, but that they do it for real and want to make a difference. - S.R, 21. (Group 3)

The respondents questioned the intention of the brand and how much Gillette genuinely cared for women's issues. They believed that Gillette wanted viewers to think they cared about women to get a better reputation. The groups discussed that Gillette tried to use important problems to lift their brand, which did not work well. Moreover, they believed that the campaign probably had little to no effect on stopping sexual harassment towards women. Two respondents explained their perception of Gillette’s campaign as seen below;
“The message was really good, but it felt like it was diminished with the commercial because it felt like a joke.” - A.J, 19. (Group 4)

“It was good but did not include everyone. The subject was good, that a person does not have to fit a certain gender role and be tough like a man, however, it did not include everyone. I do not mean women, I mean men who have disabilities, or classify as men but look different. The whole point was to eliminate the gender roles but they did a bad representation of it” - E.G, 21. (Group 3)

Majority of the respondents were familiar with the second campaign “Live for Now” from Pepsi and had seen it before on social media, where it received backlash. The respondents had a lot to say about Pepsi’s campaign and were almost angry at the brand for releasing the campaign and Jenner for participating. They considered the campaign to be unrealistic, as it did not accurately represent the reality. An example discussed in all groups was that the brand portrayed a staged and peaceful demonstration. In addition, they disliked Pepsi's use of a celebrity to solve the problem with a can of Pepsi. The respondents did not consider there to be a connection between the brand, the product or with the cause of spreading awareness of police brutality in the US. Therefore, they questioned the intention behind the campaign and thought Pepsi only wanted attention to promote their product. The below quotes exemplify how most respondents expressed themselves about Pepsi’s campaign;

*The campaign gave me the vibe ‘take a Pepsi and all problems will be solved’ which is very unrealistic and I did not understand the purpose with Kendall.*
- S.J, 19. (Group 4)

*The message was unclear, hard to understand what they want to reach, they exploit societal issues that they clearly do not have knowledge about. If someone would have done exactly what Kendall did in the campaign the outcome would not have been the same.* - E.G, 21. (Group 3)

Furthermore, the respondents questioned the connection between the message and Jenner. Almost all respondents considered Jenner to be the wrong person for the campaign. They instead wanted a more diverse and activist candidate within the subject for the campaign and
considered Pepsi’s choice to be hypocritical. However, all group also stated that even if it were another candidate the campaign would still be problematic. Group one and three believed that the creators of the campaigns lacked knowledge and that they were not suitable to make a video with an activist message. However, all respondents felt like Pepsi trivialised the societal issue in the campaign. D.K explained her frustration with the campaign as follows;

*I do not understand how they thought that it would be okay in any way. They cannot take such big issues in society and trivialise it so much and then use a white woman. Think that when making a campaign there are several hundred people who work, edit, write it, pay money for it and then later act in the commercial. [...] then they send it to bosses and get confirmation ‘yes this is a good commercial’ [...] and make it public. It is a long process to publish a commercial and still no one thought it was weird, maybe we should not publish this?* - D.K, 22. (Group 1)

Overall, the respondents had a bad perception about the two inauthentic campaigns. The groups discussed both campaigns similarly. They had the most to say about the inauthentic brands and were the most engaged in the discussions after watching them. However, based on the rankings “Live for Now” was nominated as the worst campaign by all groups. The respondents believed that the campaign was hypocritical and that it created controversy. Even though the respondents believed the message of the two campaigns to be good they considered the brands to have executed the campaigns in a bad manner. Hence, the respondents considered both campaigns a bad choice.

4.1.5 Overall Perception about Brand Activism

Overall, the respondents perceive brands that spread activist messages positively if they could create a change. In addition, they explained that it is great that brands use their platforms to inform others. The respondents wanted brands to engage in brand activism. However, they were sceptical on what intentions companies really have. For instance, group three claimed that it is easy to get fooled by the campaigns. All respondents discussed that they needed to see a connection between the cause, product and the message of the campaign to believe the brands’ intentions. They questioned if the campaigns were genuine or if the motive was money. The
The topic of money came up several times as the respondents believed that the campaigns were launched to increase sales. M.K and D.K explained their brand perception as follows;

_In general I am sceptical towards these campaigns since if you do a quick research about the brands you understand that most of them are not telling the truth._ - M.K, 24. (Group 2)

_As long as it has an effect and that they make a difference, then it is good that they spread it. The thought behind it should not matter that much. [...] If in the end, it is a positive effect it should not really matter. You should just be happy that big companies try._ - D.K, 22. (Group 1)

The respondents perceived global brands differently from small local brands. For example, they expected more of big brands to engage in activism. They expected more because global brands have a lot of power and money. They thought that big brands need to utilize their great power to take a stand. They also discussed that big brands have the recourses to spend more money on activist campaigns than smaller brands. In addition, the respondents were more sceptical towards big companies and had a harder time believing them. The groups drew parallels to other big brands. For example, group one was more sceptical towards Oatly, an oat milk brand, since it has been bought by a company who goes against the brand’s values. The respondents explained that smaller companies who stand for activist messages usually are niched from the start on certain socio-political issues, such as sustainability, to reach a specific consumer group. Meanwhile, bigger companies follow trends and movements such as #MeToo and BLM. E.G explained her thoughts on brand activism regarding small local brands and global brands as follows;

_Smaller brands do not have the same budget as big brands do, and if they support it is more meaningful and it feels more credible. Smaller brands do not have the same need to follow the trends._ - E.G, 21. (Group 3)

The respondents believed that global brands want the customers to perceive them in a positive light. Furthermore, they claimed that global brands also want consumers to associate the brands with political success with their products. The respondents stated that big brands want to be perceived as “woke” and avoid being boycotted by the customers. They expressed that they are
not even surprised by these types of messages from brands nowadays. The following quote summarized how most respondents felt;

I believe campaigns more when companies also in their foundation advocate what they make a campaign about. As mentioned, if they jump on a trend, now it is BLM or MeToo or something else then suddenly put out a campaign. [...] There, you jumped on something just because it was a trend. But if you genuinely work with those questions and have it in their values as a company. I think you notice it a bit as a consumer [...]. - H.B, 21. (Group 1)

The respondents wanted brands to show activism and bring up societal issues in the right way. According to the respondents, the campaigns need to use the brand to lift problems and not try to lift problems in favour of the brand.

Based on the respondents’ overall perceptions, the summarizing table below (Table 2) explains how the respondents perceived brands’ engagement in activism. The table is divided based on Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) four quadrants. The column of brand perception ranges from very negative to very positive. Relative positive perception displays that the respondents had a perception that is mainly negative towards absence of brand activism, this is because they are sceptical of the brands’ intentions. However, they are slightly positive that absent brands are engaging in activism because they spread the message. Positive perception shows the respondents’ perceptions for silent brand activism. They had a positive perception of the engagement because they believed that the silent brands are genuinely trying to spread the message, without putting too much focus on presenting themselves in a positive light. Very positive perception reflects the respondents’ perception of authentic brand activism. They were not surprised by this form of brand activism, since they saw a connection to the brands and the cause. Very negative perception describes the respondents’ perception of the brands’ engagement in inauthentic activism. The respondents were sceptical of the brands’ intentions and considered the brands to only engage to increase their profits.
**TABLE 2**

*Overall brand perception of global brand’s engagement in brand activism*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Brand perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of brand activism</td>
<td>Relative positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent brand activism</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic brand activism</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauthentic brand activism</td>
<td>Very negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. A table summarizing how the responding female Gen Z consumers perceived global brand’s engagement in activism.*

### 4.2 Brand Loyalty

The second theme, brand loyalty, describes if the respondents’ loyalty was influenced by their perception of brand activism. The theme presents which brands the respondents wanted to recommend to others and explains if they were more or less inclined to buy the brand’s offerings solely based on the campaign. Finally, it also presents the respondents’ general thoughts about loyalty based on the brand’s activism.

#### 4.2.1 Absence of Brand Activism

Based on the respondents' perception the groups did not feel any necessary need or a reason to support Audi because of the campaign. Beside the message of gender equality, the respondents thought that the commercial was like any other car campaign. They discuss that the decision of buying cars takes more than the viewing of a short campaign. The respondents explained that it is an expensive decision and that they need to compare it to other cars on the market. I.N and P.K elaborated their point of view in the following way;

*I would not buy an Audi just based on the campaign I think you would have compared with other cars [...].* - I.N, 22. (Group 1)
There was something in the video where they wrote something that ‘progress is for everyone’. Then they make cars that cost 1 million and say that it is for everyone, but everyone cannot afford it. - P.K, 21. (Group 4)

Overall, the respondents perceived the campaign relatively positively. However, they did not see a change in their support for the brand. All groups’ discussions indicated no will to support the brand. None of the respondents wanted to purchase from Audi or recommend their campaign to friends and family. Many of the respondents thought the message in the video was positive, but they claimed that their support towards the company was not influenced in any way. However, they thought that other target groups such as families and middle aged men could be influenced by the campaign.

4.2.2 Silent Brand Activism

The respondents liked the message of the campaign and wanted to support Kraft Heinz. Some respondents discussed how they would like to share the campaign with friends and families. For example, group one and three explained that they wanted to recommend others to watch the campaign because of the simple storyline and the good message. All respondents explained that Kraft Heinz’s campaign made them feel inspired and that they would have liked to help others in a similar way. The campaign made the respondents want to support the brand because they saw Kraft Heinz do something good for the society. Two respondents, P.K and L.S, explained their support as follows;

*I think […] if a customer watches the commercial and sees that the company has the same values as you, it would make them more loyal to the company because it would make them feel like they can identify themselves with the company more.* - P.K, 21. (Group 4)

*The first one may be a little hard to support because we live in Sweden and it is in the US, but it was positive.* - L.S, 22. (Group 2)

Overall, the respondents looked up to Kraft Heinz’s actions and wanted to support the brand by recommending the campaign. However, group two mentioned that showing support for Kraft Heinz’s is hard because their products are mostly sold in the US. Thus, group two showed less
support. The other respondents explained that they wanted to support the brand because they had a positive perception of the brand and campaign since it made them feel empathy and wanting to help people in need.

4.2.3 Authentic Brand Activism

All groups wanted to recommend the campaign by Nike to others, because of its diversity and message. They believed that it was the easiest campaign to follow and was the only one that included everyone in society. The respondents liked the message and stated their extra support for Nike. For example, their will to buy their products or recommend them to others. Three respondents explained their support for Nike as follows:

Nike is one of my favourite brands, but I did not know that they did such a campaign so it feels good of course. - D.A, 23. (Group 2)

Now that you have seen Nike’s commercial and it is so genuine, you think about how you can go out and talk about how you like the brand more. For example, if somebody would ask me, ‘I am looking for new shoes’, I would say go to Nike because I feel like I have created a connection to the brand. - P.K, 21. (Group 4)

The campaign from Nike makes me want to buy some comfortable shoes or like I really liked the shirt. I get a feeling that I can do it. - H.B, 21. (Group 1)

The respondents previously had a relationship with Nike and owned their products. They discussed how activist campaigns from familiar brands, such as Nike, can influence their loyalty. For example, the respondents liked Nike’s campaign and explained that if you look at Nike you could see that they are trying to include everyone in sports. The respondents liked that Nike is trying to adjust their products to suit disabled people or that they created hijabs for women who swim, which makes it more possible to trust them.

Similar support was explained during the discussion of Ben & Jerry’s campaign. For example, respondents from group two wanted to support the brand by recommending the campaign to friends and family. Overall, there was a positive support for the brand even though not all
respondents understood the message of the campaign. Everyone wanted to buy Ben & Jerry’s ice cream because they understood that a part of the money was being donated to the cause. For example, group one discussed that Ben & Jerry's offers more expensive products, because they use fair trade chocolate and that they hire people that have more difficulties to get work and provide them with fair wages. Furthermore, they like that if consumers buy the ice cream some of the proceeds will go to the cause. One respondent explained her desire to support the brand as follows;

*It is not strange that Ben & Jerry’s releases campaigns like these since you also know where the money goes, so 60kr for half a litre of ice cream feels okay.*
- I.N, 22. (Group 1)

The respondents perceived Nike and Ben & Jerry’s positively and they wanted to support the brands by recommending others to watch the campaign, buying the brand’s products themselves or encouraging others to do so. All groups came to the same conclusion of wanting to support both authentic brands, which matched their very positive perception. They wanted to support the brand because they could recognize themselves and see how their purchases could create further impact.

### 4.2.4 Inauthentic Brand Activism

The respondents had a very negative perception of both inauthentic campaigns. However, how the respondents’ brand perception influenced their loyalty towards the brand differed. Some respondents claimed that their brand perception influenced their support for the brands, whereas the majority did not feel their perceptions influenced their support at all. Most respondents did not want to recommend or support Gillette based on the campaign. The following quotes show the mixed responses from the groups’ support towards Gillette;

“[…] for example, I would not like their posts on social media or share them and tell my friends to go buy this from Nike if their commercial looked like Gillette's.” - P.K, 21. (Group 4)

*Basically, I think that if you like the products, advertising cannot affect you so much that you stop buying it completely.* - S.L, 25. (Group 3)
The respondents had the most negative perceptions about Pepsi. They did not express that they wanted to recommend the campaign. However, they would still consider buying their products. Except for one respondent in group one who claimed that it might be an underlying reason for not buying their products. In contrast, another respondent from group three claimed the campaign did not influence her brand loyalty. The two dissimilarities in answers are displayed as follows;

*I think so much about this, there are so many things wrong. I hate the commercial, therefore I do not buy Pepsi. [...] I like the taste but why do I buy Coke? [...] perhaps something underlying.* - H.B, 21. (Group 1)

*When I think about Pepsi I do not think about this campaign. But if it was an unknown brand I never had heard about before I would have thought about it more.* - A.S, 22. (Group 3)

The inauthentic campaigns did not majorly influence the respondents' loyalty as they believed the campaigns were not powerful enough to change their previous relationship with the companies. However, all groups explained that they would not support the brands’ campaigns. An exception was group number two who wanted to recommend Gillette’s campaign to male acquaintances, solely because of its message.

### 4.2.5 Brand Activism’s Overall Influence on Brand Loyalty

The respondents claimed that it is better to engage by putting out activist campaigns than ignoring the societal issue, regardless if the brands’ agenda is good or bad. However, the respondents discussed that activist campaigns are not enough to change their buying habits even if they perceive the campaign to be bad. They expressed that they would use social media, such as Facebook or YouTube, to support the brands. They stated that the platforms give them the ability to receive information on the campaigns and discuss their thoughts with others. Furthermore, the respondents claimed that they would like and dislike the brands' messages on social media and discuss it with their friends, but not take further actions. Three respondents expressed their general thoughts on brand loyalty and brand activism as follows;
[...] it is always positive when they dare to take a stand and discuss questions that are current in society. Whereas there are others who do not dare to take a stand and are cowards, then they lose many customers. - L.T, 23. (Group 2)

If my friends have the same values as me, I would send the commercial to them and be like 'have you seen this commercial?' [...] - A.G, 19. (Group 4)

I do not believe it influences my loyalty or that it will increase or decrease. I could have liked it but I do not think it would have influenced my loyalty to buy.
- S.L, 25. (Group 3)

The respondents claimed that they needed to know and identify with the brand to trust and support them. They stated that they were more inclined to be loyal if they shared the same values as the brand, because it created positive feelings. The respondents drew parallels to their favourite brands. A respondent from group one discussed why she would support her favourite razor brand more if they did a campaign like Nike’s, as quoted below;

[...] If you already know what a company stands for, then you would only get positive feelings. Or if the brand from the beginning stands for something that is not good you would not get positively influenced. For example, would the brand that I buy my razors from release a campaign like this, I would be happy [...] since I know what they truly stand for. All their products are vegan and cruelty free etc. then you can still support them. - I.N, 22. (Group 1)

The respondents also discussed that if a brand showcased something that went against their values it would lead to more negative feelings towards the brand. For example, they stated that they would less likely like or share the brand’s posts. Instead they stated that they would send the commercials on social media to their friends to see if they felt the same way. Respondents from group one drew a parallel about Oatly. They claimed to have liked the brand before Oatly went against their values and that they now prefer other brands' products. H.B describes her support towards her previous favourite brand as stated below;
For example, Oatly was my favourite oat milk brand until they screwed it up as they sold a share of the company to others who basically went against what I liked about them. - H.B, 22. (Group 1)

The respondents believed that if campaigns were targeted to a specific consumer group that the brand catered too, the campaign could possibly influence the consumers’ loyalty. However, the respondents had a hard time finding that the shown campaigns could influence their own brand loyalty, regardless of the brand’s engagement in activism. Nevertheless, they themselves claimed to not be more or less inclined to support the brand. Another respondent from group three drew a parallel as portrayed below;

If you are so loyal to a brand you need more to quit buying from them. For instance, Apple does not have any campaigns like these and we still buy an iPhone. - E.G, 21. (Group 3)

The respondents claimed that an activist campaign was not enough to influence their brand loyalty. They explained that as customers they needed to build a connection to the brand and see how they directly influence the brand through their purchases.

The summarizing table below (Table 3) explains the respondents’ brand loyalty towards activism, based on their brand perception. This table is also divided according to Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) four quadrants. The second column, brand loyalty ranges from very negative to very positive influence. The respondents showed neither positive or negative loyalty towards absence of brand activism. They did not want to purchase the absent brand's offerings or recommend them to family and friends. Therefore, there was no influence on brand loyalty based on their relative positive perception. The respondents indicated positive loyalty towards silent brand activism. They wanted to support the brand by recommending and buying their products. Thus, their positive brand perception influenced their brand loyalty in a positive manner. The respondents also showed positive loyalty towards authentic brand activism. However, the positive loyalty was expressed in a stronger way. They claimed that they were very inclined to buy the brands’ products and recommend them to friends and family. The respondents’ very positive perception of authentic engagement in activism influenced their brand loyalty in a similar manner. The respondents indicated minimal loyalty that was both positive and negative towards inauthentic brand activism. The respondents explain that they
would perhaps dislike their social media posts and would not recommend the campaigns to others. However, the majority still wanted to buy the brands’ products. They explained that an inauthentic campaign would not stop them from purchasing. The respondents’ very negative perception of inauthentic engagement showed both positive and negative influence on their loyalty.

**TABLE 3**

*Brand activism’s overall influence on brand loyalty*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Brand Loyalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of brand activism</td>
<td>Neither positive nor negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent brand activism</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic brand activism</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauthentic brand activism</td>
<td>Minimal positive or negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. A table summarizing how the responding female Gen Z consumers’ brand loyalty was influenced based on their brand perception of global brand’s engagement in activism.*
5. Analysis and Discussion

This chapter analyses and discusses the empirical findings collected from the focus groups in relation to the literature review, in a manner which will answer the research question. The findings will explore how female Gen Z consumers perceive global brands’ engagement in brand activism and how this perception influenced their brand loyalty.

5.1 Brand Perception

The female Gen Z consumers in this study perceived global brands in a particular manner that related to two out of Holt et al.’s (2004) three characteristics about global brands and Manfredi-Sánchez’s (2019) four characteristics about brand activism. The two different sets of characteristics strengthened the discovery on how the respondents perceived global brands’ activism. The studied female Gen Z consumers believed that brand activism could influence their brand perceptions. The respondents’ beliefs on brand activism was similar to Manfredi-Sánchez’s (2019) characteristic, that brand activism has symbolic value and character which could influence consumers’ who consider brands to impact their status. According to Holt et al.’s (2004) characteristic of quality signal, consumers associate global brands with better quality and are willing to pay a higher price. However, the respondents were only willing to pay a premium price if they had a positive perception.

Furthermore, the respondents explained that if brands share the same values as them, they are more likely to perceive them in a positive manner and support the brands. The respondents’ perception relates to Holt et al.’s (2004) characteristic, global myths, that global brands portray a brand identity that consumers want to identify with. In addition, the discovery related to Manfredi-Sánchez’s (2019) characteristic that it is the recipient who defines brand activism, as the respondents perceived brand’s activism differently. Moreover, the respondents appreciated that brands spread messages of socio-political issues. Their claim can be put in comparison to Manfredi-Sánchez’s (2019) characteristic that brand activism redefines politics by addressing controversial topics. Their perception was similar to Holt et al.’s (2004) characteristic of social responsibility, as the female Gen Z consumers in this study had high expectations of global brands to address socio-political issues. They had high expectations because they considered global brands to have great power and large funds. Despite their high expectation, the
respondents questioned if the brands got engaged because of genuineness or if the motive was to create more wealth.

Additionally, female Gen Z consumers in this study claimed that they used social media platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram, to gather information or to express their opinions about brand activism. Many respondents stated they had seen some of the campaigns online which was strengthened by Manfredi-Sánchez’s (2019) characteristic that brand activism has its foundation digitally. The respondents' use of social media to access information globally was in line with what previous research stated about Gen Z being a digital generation who have high expectations of brands to engage in activism (Duffett, 2017; Hudson et al., 2015).

The female Gen Z consumers in this study perceived and responded to brand activism in a manner that was slightly different from Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) typology of brand activism and framework of optimal incongruence. According to Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) typology, authenticity of brand activism is discussed from brands' previous prosocial practice and marketing message. Furthermore, Vredenburg et al. (2020) explained in their framework, that incongruence between the message, brand identity, socio-political cause, previous engagement consumers’ self-identity and social norms leads to three consumers' responses; delight, satisfaction and outrage. However, the female Gen Z consumer in this study discussed brand activism based on the campaigns’ message, its connection to the brand and the brand’s offerings. Even though the respondents based their perception and response differently they resonated in a similar way as described in Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) typology and framework.

Female Gen Z consumers in this study believed that brands with an absence of brand activism lacked a genuine connection to the activist cause. The respondents thought the message was unclear, especially in relation to the brand’s offerings. Even though the respondents questioned if Audi did anything about the societal problem, they still appreciated that the brand spread the message of gender equality. Overall the respondents’ perception was in line with Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) explanation of absent brands. Vredenburg et al. (2020) explained that there often is a lack of connection, because absent brands usually operate in the manufacturing industry where consumers have less expectations of activism. However, the respondents claimed that they wanted manufacturing brands to get more engaged in activism, which is strengthened by Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) reflection that consumers nowadays expect more brand activism. The respondents were appreciative that the absent brand engaged in activism, which is also
strengthened by Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) statement that absence of brand activism provides an opportunity to get involved and that it may cause delight. However, the studied female Gen Z consumers' responses to the campaign was satisfaction, where the missing piece to create delight was the connection between the brand’s offering and the message.

The studied female Gen Z consumers liked the message of silent brand activism and described that the campaign felt genuine. Vredenburg et al. (2020) explained that silent brands have already shown signs of authenticity; therefore, consumers respond more positively to the activism. Even though the respondents lacked knowledge about the brand’s identity and previous engagement, the studied female Gen Z consumers responded in delight when encountering silent brand activism in Kraft Heinz’s campaign. The respondents were delighted because there was congruence between the message, brand identity and brand’s offerings. According to Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) silent activism was less likely to cause delight. However, in contrast the respondents felt delighted as they discussed the campaign.

The female Gen Z consumers in this study positively perceived authentic brands and their thoughts were very similar to Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) explanation in regard to authentic brand activism. The respondents explained that they saw a genuine connection to the brand’s identity and the message in the campaigns. Vredenburg et al. (2020) similarly explained that authentic brand activism is often driven by a purpose, which minimizes the risk for consumers to not believe their intentions. In contrast to the previous discoveries about absent and silent brands, the respondents based their thoughts towards authentic brand activism by including the brands’ previous prosocial practices, which Vredenburg et al. (2020) included in their typology and framework. Due to the respondents’ previous knowledge about the brands’ they were not surprised by the campaigns. The respondents were delighted towards the campaigns by Nike and Ben & Jerry’s. How the studied female Gen Z consumers responded was in line with Vredenburg et al. ’s (2020) finding that incongruence between the cause, consumer’s values, the brand’s previous practices, activist message and social norms will lead to delight. Their response contradicted Vredenburg et al.’s (2020) prediction that authentic brand activism is less likely to cause delight, because the consumers already expect engagement from authentic brands. Even though the campaigns did not surprise the respondents, the delight the respondents felt was because the campaigns were “on-brand”.
The studied female Gen Z consumers were visibly upset by inauthentic brand activism in Gillette’s and Pepsi’s campaigns. Even though the respondents were upset they appreciated that the brands brought attention to socio-political issues. The respondents’ perception of inauthentic brand activism related to Vredenburg et al. ’s (2020) description of outrage, since there was a lack of connection to the activist message which strays from consumers’ self-identity. The respondents were outraged by the message in the campaigns because the brands lacked knowledge of activism and it lacked connection to their offerings. Vredenburg et al. (2020) explained that outrage is caused by complete incongruence between the cause, consumer’s values, the brand’s previous practices, activist message and social norms. The respondents justified their outrage by explaining how the campaigns felt disingenuous, unrealistic, and probably did not lead to a societal change. According to Vredenburg et al. (2020), inauthentic brand activism rarely leads to brands achieving change in society. The respondents questioned the intentions behind the campaigns and were skeptical if the brands used activism in a disingenuous way to increase sales. The inauthentic brands did not manage to create positive responses amongst the studied female Gen Z consumers by using incompatible activism as Vredenburg et al. (2020) stated is a method for brands to differentiate themselves.

5.2 Brand Loyalty

The studied female Gen Z consumers’ brand perception did influence their brand loyalty even though the respondents stated otherwise. However, the respondents’ influence on brand loyalty was different based on the brands’ engagement. Previous research (e.g. Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Rodrigues & Martins, 2016; Vredenburg et al., 2020) stated that positive and negative perceptual dimensions influenced consumer behavior and that it can lead to different outcomes on brand equity. The study showed that respondents' positive perceptions influenced their brand loyalty in a positive manner, whereas the negative perceptions did not manage to influence the respondents' loyalty. However, parts of the discovery contradicted previous research which stated that consumers only become more loyal by creating a positive perception of a certain brand (Rodrigues & Martins, 2016; Sasmita & Suki, 2015).

The respondents were more inclined to be loyal towards brands that shared the same values as them, because they felt positive emotions. Furthermore, the respondents’ perceptions influenced their loyalty towards the brand, for example their will to spread WoM or pay a
premium price. The discovery was in line with Ismail’s (2017) and Shetty et al. (2019) claim of self-identification, since the consumers’ self-identity and values are reflected in their perception and support for the brands. Additionally, Gen Z consumers support and trust brands that are authentic, transparent and reflect their own self-image (Fromm and Read, 2018), especially young females (Papista, 2012).

The studied female Gen Z consumers’ perceived absence of brand activism in a relatively positive manner. However, the relative positive perception did not result in any support for the brand. None of the respondents wanted to purchase the offerings because of its high price or recommend the campaign. The respondents’ lack of support towards absence of brand activism indicates that their relatively positive perception does not influence the studied female Gen Z consumers’ brand loyalty. Thus, Sasmita and Suki’s (2015) statement that a positive perception is required to create brand loyalty was strengthened, in relation to absence of brand activism.

The female Gen Z consumers in this study showed the most brand loyalty towards authentic and silent brand activism. The respondents would like to support the authentic and silent brands by buying their products, spreading positive WoM and showing support on social media. The respondents’ will to support the brands related with Sasmita and Suki’s (2015) explanation that loyal consumers are more willing to pay premium pricing. Furthermore, the study was in line with Ismail’s (2017) claim that loyalty will lead to consumers spreading positive reputation about a brand. The respondents explained that they probably would show their support by liking and sharing the brands’ social media posts, which related to Djafarova and Bowes’s (2021) research on female Gen Z consumers’ use of social media platforms. The discovery also strengthened Lee and Workman’s (2018) explanation that female consumers tend to spread positive WoM electronically. The reason for the respondents’ positive loyalty for authentic brands might be caused because of their previous relationships, which related with Ismail’s (2017) observation that loyalty can be rooted in emotional attachment in consumer’s brand relationships.

The studied female Gen Z consumers’ very negative perception of inauthentic brand activism minimal positive and negative influence on their loyalty. The respondents did not want to recommend the inauthentic brands. Despite not wanting to recommend the brand’s campaign the respondents were not less loyal in terms of buying the brands’ offerings. The respondents claimed that it takes more than activist campaigns for them to act against a brand. A possible
explanation for this might be that young consumers do not show as much brand loyalty compared to older generations (Nawaz et al., 2020). Another possible explanation for the discovery is that Gen Z consumers in general are very good at filtering away inauthentic marketing, especially on social media (Duffett, 2017), where activism is usually found (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). This outcome was in line with Harris and Khatami’s (2017) explanation that low levels of satisfaction do not influence loyalty. However, the discovery contradicted previous research claim that that negative brand perception can influence consumer’s brand loyalty by decreasing their trust for the brand (Vredenburg et al., 2020), their will to buy their products (Sasmita & Suki, 2015) and can even sometimes lead to boycotts (Holt et al., 2004; Lightfoot, 2019).

The new model (Figure 5) is an extension of the conceptual model, where the question marks are unraveled. The discovery is now displayed through a full figure that portrays the studied female Gen Z consumers, since their thoughts and feelings have been understood. There is also a full line between the three cogwheels, four quadrants, the thermometer, and the shopping bag to represent the relation. The thermometer shows how positive or negative the respondents' brand perception was based on the four quadrants. How the respondents' perception influenced their loyalty is revealed in the shopping bag.

FIGURE 5
The responding female Gen Z consumers’ perception and loyalty towards global brands’ activism

Note. A revised conceptual model that includes the empirical findings
6. Conclusion

This final chapter summarizes the thesis and concludes how female Gen Z consumers perceive global brands’ activism, and how this perception influences their brand loyalty. Furthermore, the theoretical contributions and practical implications of this explorative study is described. Lastly, the chapter presents a critical review and suggestions for future research.

6.1 Summary of Thesis

Young consumers, especially females (Bennett, 2020) are actively engaged in activism. Therefore, young consumers have high expectations of brands to address socio-political issues (Auger & Devinney, 2007; Marris, 2019; Rosenblatt, 2020; Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Shetty et al., 2019). Consumers’ high expectations has resulted in an increase of brands publicly taking a stand on socio-political issues (CMO Survey, 2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020). However, brands’ engagement in activism is not always authentic. Many brands use activism as a marketing tactic to differentiate themselves from competitors (Edelman, 2020; Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Female Gen Z consumers' frequent use of social media (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021) exposes them to brand activism because of its digital foundation (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). The aim of this thesis was to explore female Gen Z consumers’ perception of global brands’ engagement in activism, and how this perception influences their brand loyalty. Gen Z is typically studied as a homogenous group (Duffett, 2017). However, previous researchers indicated that men and women have different perceptions (Chéron et al., 2012; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010; Shetty et al., 2019) that influences consumers’ purchasing behaviour (Hur et al., 2016; Kim, 2020).

With the help of the literature review a conceptual model was developed which included the following main components; brand activism, brand perception, and brand loyalty. To collect data a qualitative method was used. Four online focus groups were conducted and in total 20 female Gen Z consumers participated. The focus group discussions provided an insight and understanding on how an average female Gen Z could perceive the six activist video campaigns that represented different global brands’ engagement in activism. The empirical findings indicated that the female Gen Z consumers in this study had an overall positive perception of
global brand’ engagement in activism. Additionally, their brand perceptions influenced their brand loyalty depending on brands’ different engagement in activism.

6.2 Summary of Findings

This study aimed to explore female Gen Z consumer perception of global brands’ engagement in activism. In addition, it aimed to explore how female Gen Z consumers’ perception of engagement could influence their brand loyalty. Theories from previous research were crucial for this study as it was the foundation for the conceptual model. Previous research stated that consumers responded in a certain manner toward brand activism based on the brands’ engagement (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Moreover, earlier research stated that perception influences consumers’ behaviour, such as brand loyalty (Rodrigues & Martins, 2016; Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Previous research explained how young consumers are actively engaged in activism (Shetty et al., 2019) and that women tend to respond strongly towards marketing that is connected to socio-political issues (Deckman et al., 2020; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010). The analysis and discussion revealed three main findings.

The first finding showed that female Gen Z consumers in this study positively perceived global brands’ engagement in activism. The respondents’ perception was more positive if they could recognize their self-identity in the brands’ campaigns. In addition, the discovery showed that the respondents had higher expectations of global brands to address socio-political issues due to their wealth and power. The respondents were appreciative of global brands’ engagement and attempt to create change. However, they were still skeptical if the brands' intentions were to increase their own wealth. The respondents positively perceived brands' use of social media, in relation to brand activism. The first finding was in line with Manfredi-Sánchez’s (2019) four characteristics of brand activism; symbolic and value character, redefines politics, recipient identifies, and foundation digitally. Moreover, the finding related with two of Holt et al. 's (2004) characteristics about global brands; global myths and social responsibility. However, the finding did not relate to Holt et al. 's (2004) third characteristic; quality signal. The respondents were only willing to pay a higher price for “better quality” if they had a positive perception.

The second finding showed that female Gen Z consumers in this study perceived and reacted to brand activism based on three criteria; the campaigns’ message, its connection to the brand
and the brand’s offerings. The criterion the respondents used differentiated from Vredenburg et al. 's (2020) criterion for the typology of brand activism and framework of optimal incongruence. Despite the different criterion, similarities were found in the respondents’ overall brand perception and response. The respondents’ relative positive perception of absence of brand activism was in line with Vredenburg et al. 's (2020) typology. The respondents felt that a connection between the message and brand identity was missing, which Vredenburg et al. (2020) explained is commonly missing in absent brands’ activism. The respondents felt satisfaction towards the campaign. However, according to Vredenburg et al. 's (2020) framework, absence of brand activism is more likely to cause delight or outrage because of consumers’ low expectation.

The respondents had positive perceptions of silent and authentic brand activism, which was strengthened by Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) typology. The respondents saw a strong connection between the message and brand identity, which Vredenburg et al. 's (2020) claimed can be expected from authentic brands. The respondents felt delight when they saw the campaigns. However, in Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) framework, silent and authentic brands are more likely to cause satisfaction than delight because consumers expect the activist messages. The respondents had a negative perception of inauthentic brand activism. The respondents saw no connection between the message and the brand identity. They believed inauthentic brands used activism as a deceiving marketing tactic, which related to Vredenburg et al. 's (2020) typology. Their response of outrage was also in line with Vredenburg et al. 's (2020) statement that consumers' lack of expectations for inauthentic brands, their activism is more likely to cause outrage.

The third finding showed that the studied female Gen Z consumers’ brand perception had influence on their brand loyalty. However, the influence on brand loyalty differed based on the brands’ engagement in activism. The discovery showed that the respondents' positive perceptions increased their loyalty for silent and authentic brands. The respondents wanted to purchase and recommend the brands' offerings. Hence, the influence on loyalty regarding silent and authentic brand activism, strengthened researchers’ claim that a positive perception is required to create brand loyalty (Rodrigues & Martin, 2016; Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Absent and inauthentic brand activism did not influence the respondents’ brand loyalty even though they had a bad perception of the brands’ activism. The respondents claimed that brand activism is not strong enough to influence their loyalty. Consequently, their bad perceptions had no or
minimal influence on the respondents' loyalty for absent and inauthentic brands. The finding contradicted previous research which indicated that consumers’ negative perceptions influences loyalty, such as their trust and will to buy the brand's offerings (Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Vredenburg et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the three findings showed that female Gen Z consumers in this study expected global brands to engage in activism and appreciated their efforts. They perceived and responded to brand activism based on the activist message in relation to the brand and its offerings. Overall, the studied female Gen Z consumers had a positive perception of brand activism. Lastly, their brand perception did influence their brand loyalty based on the different engagement in activism.

6.3 Theoretical Contribution

From a theoretical point of view, this study contributes to the existing theory of brand activism with four contributions. Previous research has been limited to Millennials’ perspective of the topic (e.g. Duffett, 2017; Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Shetty et al., 2019). However, since Gen Z is the newest young generation of consumers there was a gap in relation to brand activism that could be explored. Firstly, this study contributes with an understanding from a consumer perspective, on how a group of female Gen Z consumers born 1996-2003, could think and feel about brand activism. Secondly, the study contributes with three new criterions on how some female Gen Z consumers perceive brand activism. Thirdly, the study contributes to the discovery that brand loyalty is not always influenced negatively by negative brand perceptions based on six brand activist campaigns. Lastly, the study contributes with knowledge of the studied Gen Z’s homogenous attributes in a developed country, which Duffett (2017) suggested should be further studied. Consequently, the explorative study increased understanding of female Gen Z consumers’ perception and its influence on brand loyalty, in relation to brand activism.

6.4 Practical Implications

The study contributes to an understanding of a group of female Gen Z consumers' thoughts and feelings on brand activism. By understanding consumers’ perception, brands and marketers can avoid negative consumer responses when engaging in activism. The practical implications of
this study are that consumers want to see a connection between its message, the brand, and its offerings. Even though the studied female Gen Z consumers' negative brand perception does not influence purchasing habits, brands should strive to engage in activism in a silent or authentic manner. Genuine brand activism is appreciated by the studied female Gen Z consumers since they have higher expectations of global brands and want to support brands that share the same values as them. The study adds to global brands’ marketers’ knowledge on activist campaigns that can generate positive outcomes from female Gen Z consumers.

6.5 Critical Review and Future Research

A critical review of the thesis is needed to be objective. However, the limitations of this study provide opportunities for future research. As brand activism is related to social movements the number of brands’ activist statements tend to fluctuate based on what is prevailing. Certain socio-political topics are more current and trendy, which can influence how consumers feel about them. Additionally, how trendy the issues are can influence which activist messages brands puts out. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine how different fluctuations in socio-political issues influence how consumers feel about them.

There is also an opportunity to select a more diverse sample according to socio-political issues in the activist campaigns that address the participants’ self-identity, since it could be a relevant factor in brand perception and brand loyalty. Future research could also select global brands’ campaigns with offerings that are more similar. For example, by showcasing campaigns from brands with the same product category that have a similar price range. Moreover, since this study only provides a female consumer perspective there are future opportunities to study different perspectives. For example, the perspective of male Gen Z consumers or Gen Z consumers could be studied to understand if there are differences in perception and behaviour in relation to brand activism. Future research could use a qualitative or preferably a quantitative research strategy that could make the results more transferable and generalizable to the population.
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Appendix 1 - Focus Group Guide

Introduction

- Welcome all participants by introducing ourselves as well as letting the participants introduce themselves.
- Explain the agenda of the discussion (campaigns, 2 rounds etcetera).
- Inform that the data will be recorded and will be only used in the context of our research study.
- Encourage participants to express their opinions but also to be considerate and let others finish their statements.
- Asking the participants to write down their thoughts after each campaign which they will later send in a private message in the chat to the moderator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Have you seen these campaigns before?</td>
<td>General question: get the participants warmed up for discussion and get an understanding if they had seen the campaign before and where they had seen it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What messages do you think the brands are trying to convey in the campaigns? Which brand conveys the message the clearest?</td>
<td>Brand perception: understand if the participants comprehend what the brands are trying to convey in their campaigns and which message was the easiest to understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What were the first things you thought of when you saw the campaigns?</td>
<td>Brand perception: comprehend the participants” thoughts and feelings regarding activist campaigns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What do you think the intentions behind the brands’ campaigns are?</td>
<td>Brand perception: find out if the participants were sceptical and hesitant of trusting global brands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Decide as a group three aspect you liked respectively disliked about each campaign.</td>
<td>Brand perception: explore positive and negative brand perceptions based on the campaigns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Rank the campaigns as a group based on your perception. Start with the campaign which you felt the most positively about.</td>
<td>Brand perception: explore positive and negative brand perceptions by comparing the campaigns, to further elaborate discussion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Discuss your general thoughts about campaigns with messages like these? How do you feel about them?

8. Do you believe campaigns like these could influence your view of a brand? How?

9. Do you think campaigns with messages like these could influence your trust for a brand? How?

10. Did any of the campaigns make you want to support the brand? Base your discussion solely on the viewed videos

11. If only choosing one of the campaigns, which would you recommend your friends and family to watch? Why?

12. Imagine if your favourite brand did a campaign with a similar message, how would you feel and react?

13. Could you as a group conclude which of the six campaigns was your favourite and least favourite? Explain why.

**Brand perception:** comprehend the participants’ thoughts and feelings regarding activist campaigns in general.

**Brand perception:** understand if brand activism could influence consumers’ view of brands.

**Brand loyalty:** explore if brand perception could influence participants' trust towards brands.

**Brand loyalty:** investigate if brand activism could influence participants' loyalty positively or negatively.

**Brand loyalty:** investigate if brand activism could influence participants’ loyalty positively or negatively, in terms of WoM.

**Brand loyalty:** get an understanding if brand perception differs towards a brand you already have a relationship with, as the participants’ draws a parallel to their favourite brand.

**Ending question:** Understand which campaign the participants liked the most versus least, by letting the participants compare all campaigns and their different brand activism engagement.
Appendix 2 - Swedish Focus Group Questions

Frågor

Generell fråga
1. Har ni sett dessa kampanjer tidigare?

Varumärkesuppfattning
2. Vilka budskap tror ni att varumärkena försöker förmedla genom kampanjerna? Vilket budskap förmedlas tydligast?
3. Vad var det första som kom i åtanke när ni såg kampanjerna?
4. Vad tror ni varumärkena hade för avsikter med dessa kampanjer?
5. Kom överens i gruppen om tre aspekter ni gillade respektive inte gillade om vardera kampanj.
7. Diskutera era generella tankar om kampanjer som har liknande budskap som dessa? Hur känner ni om detta?
8. Tror ni att kampanjer som liknar dessa skulle kunna påverka er bild/uppfattning av ett varumärke? Hur?

Varumärkeslojalitet
9. Tror ni att kampanjer med budskap som dessa kan påverka er tillit för ett varumärke? Hur?
10. Fick någon av kampanjerna er att vilja stödja varumärkena? Basera er diskussion enbart på de videoklipp som vi visat.
11. Ifall ni enbart kunde välja en kampanj, vilken skulle ni rekommendera era vänner och familj att kolla på? Motivera varför.
12. Föreställ er att er favorit varumärke skulle släppt en kampanj med liknande budskap, hur skulle detta fått er att känna och reagera?

Avslutande fråga
Appendix 3 - Multiple case study

All the global brand’s activist campaigns covered the time of 2016 - 2019.

The campaign “Daughter” from Audi was released in 2017 during the Super Bowl. The campaign was about a father reflecting on how to tell his daughter that there is gender inequality in the world. The campaign was created to show that Audi is in support of equal pay between men and women. Audi deviated from their traditional marketing by releasing a TV commercial with an activist message during the Super Bowl (Lopez-Medel, 2017). As “Daughter” is not from Vredenburg et al. (2020) examples we still based it on the typology of brand activism and categorized it as absence. For instance, Vredenburg et al. (2020) explained that manufacturing brands tend to be more absent in brand activism (Vredenburg et al., 2020) and Audi is a one of the leading car manufacturers (Audi, n.d.).

![Image: (Gut, 2017)](image)

Video: [Venables Bell + Partners, 2017](video)

The campaign “The Best Man Can Be” by Gillette in 2019 showed the brand’s support of the #MeToo movement by going against toxic masculinity. The campaign presented different scenarios where men acted inappropriate towards women without having to face any consequences. The brand questioned themselves of their use of the slogan “the best a man can get” at the start of the video. Gillette then changed their slogan to “the best of men” and claimed that men should be held accountable for the boys of the future to act right (Gillette, 2019). Gillette’s attempt at marketing with a strong activist message and lack of previous engagement in feminism can be categorized as inauthentic brand activism according to Vredenburg et al. (2020).
The campaign “Kraft Now, Pay Later” from Kraft Heinz took place during 2018 and 2019 (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Kraft Heinz opened a pop-up store in Washington D.C to supply free Kraft food for the government workers who lost their salary due to a shutdown in the US government. The brand also asked their consumers to donate to the cause instead of paying for the products (Kraft Heinz, n.d). Vredenburg et al. (2020) categorized Kraft Heinz campaign as silent brand activism. The brand focused on showing activist behaviour instead of using much marketing to show their good intentions to increase their brand equity (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

The campaign “Pecan Resist”, from Ben & Jerry’s was released in 2018 and showcased their new anti-Trump administration ice cream flavour (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Vredenburg et al. (2020) categorized the brand’s engagement as authentic brand activism. Due to Ben & Jerry's previous engagement in activism there is a strong connection to socio-political issues and marketing messages, which further shows a connection to their brand identity (Ben & Jerry, n.d.). This previous engagement allows them to take a stand on other socio-political issues (Vredenburg et al., 2020).
The campaign “Live for Now” by Pepsi in 2017 starred the reality star Kendall Jenner displayed a protest where Jenner is seen handing over a Pepsi can to a police officer, to diffuse the situation. The campaign went viral online because Pepsi lacked previous engagement in socio-political issues, such as BLM (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Therefore, this attempt of activist marketing Vredenburg et al. (2020) considered to be inauthentic, even woke washing.

Note. The original creator of the campaign is Pepsi, but since publication the campaign has since been removed. Therefore, an original source cannot be provided.