

From Silence to Stance: Mapping the Rise of Brand Activism Research

– Rubina Bhardwaj*

Assistant Professor (Guest), Motilal Nehru College, University of Delhi

 bhardwajrubina93@gmail.com  <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7258-4060>

– Kanishk Koushik

Research Scholar, School of Management Studies (SOMS), Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi

 kanishkkoushik@gmail.com  <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1583-1399>

– Madhulika P. Sarkar

Professor, School of Management Studies (SOMS), Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi

 madhulikap.sarkar@ignou.ac.in  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0506-7090>



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to examine the evolution, intellectual structure, and thematic development of brand activism research. Specifically, it investigates publication and citation trends, identifies influential contributors, and highlights the major themes and future research directions in the brand activism domain.

Design/methodology/approach: The study adopts a bibliometric analysis approach using Scopus-indexed publications on brand activism from 2007 to 2026. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 181 documents were retained for final analysis. Performance analysis was conducted to identify publication trends, citation patterns, leading authors, productive countries, influential institutions, prominent journals, and highly cited documents. Further, science mapping techniques, including co-citation analysis and author keyword co-occurrence analysis, were performed using VOSviewer software to examine and visualize the intellectual and thematic structure of the field.

Findings: The findings reveal that research on brand activism had been budding till 2020, and grew exponentially after 2021. Thus, in recent years, far more scholars have paid attention to brands' involvement in social, political, ethical and environmental issues. The U.S. and the U.K. were determined as the most influential countries, with Amanda Spry, Jessica Vredenburg, Sommer Kapitan, Joya A. Kemper and Chris Hydock identified as leading authors. The top-cited journals were Journal of Public Policy and Marketing, Journal of Business Research, and Journal of Brand Management. Several studies have played an influential role in shaping the brand activism literature. Among them, Vredenburg et al. (2020), Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020), and Hydock et al. (2020) are particularly significant, as these works provide foundational insights into authentic brand activism, consumer responses to controversial brand stances, and the impact of corporate political advocacy on brand outcomes. A co-citation analysis highlights three key intellectual streams associated with proactive brand behavior. These include the strategic and socio-political foundations of brand activism; authenticity and woke-washing; and consumer responses to activist brand messages. The keyword analysis showed that CSR, authenticity, woke washing, brand purpose, political ideology, boycott, buycott, social media, and consumer-brand identification are key themes in brand activism research.

Originality/value: This study adds to the existing literature on brand activism by giving a systematic and data-based overview of the evolution of the field. This bibliometric study contrasts traditional narrative reviews by mapping brand activism research's performance, intellectual foundations, and thematic evolution. This study provides a framework for scholars to better understand the domain and offers future research directions for examining authenticity, consumer polarization, political ideology and activism, woke washing, and the long-term impact of brand activism on brand performance.

KEYWORDS: Brand Activism | Cause-Related Marketing | Bibliometric Paper | Corporate Social Responsibility

*Corresponding Author (Rubina)

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Introduction

According to growing research on consumer behavior, consumers are becoming more concerned about a range of social issues, including climate change, environmental conservation and sustainable development, gender equality and diversity, and employee welfare (Koushik et al., 2026). As a result, companies are under mounting stakeholder expectations on these dimensions (Calderon-Monge et al., 2020; Legendre et al., 2024; Thøgersen, 2021). In recent years, ESG, CSR, MeToo, and other social issues were the most searched topics on Google. Between 2016 and 2022, the Google Search Volume Index for “environmental, social and governance” increased steadily. Public attention on climate change and gender equality similarly saw upticks on Google. CSR reporting by large companies also rose dramatically. By 2019, almost 90% of S&P 500 companies published CSR reports, up from 20% in 2011 (Aliano et al., 2023; Cook & Luo, 2022; Legendre et al., 2024). As consumers’ social awareness grows, brand management is increasingly moving from merely selling products and services to engaging with social issues (Koushik & Sarkar, 2026). The overall trends in branding reflected in the indicators have shifted from one that was focused on product or brand attributes (functional or emotional) to one that is now more and more concerned with corporate values. In this process, there is an increasing integration of sustainability and CSR into brand management practice (e.g., Golob et al., 2022; Palazzo & Basu, 2007; Schmidt et al., 2022; Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017). As a result, the shift towards a societal marketing orientation has made firms more accountable to the communities in which they operate (Moorman, 2020). Brand activism is gaining prominence in the strategic marketing toolbox and worthy of academic inquiry (Marketing Science Institute, 2020).

According to Sarkar and Kotler (2020), brand activism is a term for efforts by companies to influence political, social, economic, or environmental change with a view to appealing to progressive customers. A firm is said to embrace corporate activism when it makes a public statement about controversial sociopolitical issues that shows a proactive and unique commitment to addressing relevant social issues (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Brand activism differs from conventional corporate social responsibility (CSR) and cause-related marketing by not only communicating but also reinforcing the brand’s values by engaging with controversial socio-political issues (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022). Brand activism can, therefore, be defined as an intentionality/value-driven strategy by which corporations publicly take positions on tough issues for the sake of social good while accomplishing economic goals (Hydock et al., 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Brands can just be organisations, but in some situations, they resort to activism. At the core, brand activism is the effort made by brands to support, oppose or influence social

change or the status quo by associating with sensitive and often controversial issues (Sarkar & Kotler, 2020). In practice, companies signify their brand activism when they publicly express a divisive matter. These include president of Chick-fil-A opposed same sex marriage (Atanga et al., 2022), Airbnb offers accommodation for refugees (Nelson, 2021) and delta stopped benefits to NRA members (Hydock et al., 2020). The increasing number of firms adopting activist practices suggests the growing pressure on companies to act responsibly and to take clear public stances on what is deemed socially right and wrong (Swaminathan et al., 2020). Also, with growing social and political polarization and stakeholder expectations for responsible business conduct, firms are facing both strategic opportunities and managerial challenges (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020; Varadarajan, 2016).

Brand activism is a new field of study that is theoretically interesting and practically important for persuasion, branding, and CSR research despite attracting little academic attention so far. There is hence still little understanding of how the brand activism literature has evolved over the years, which conceptual underpinnings influences it and which authors, journals, countries, organizations, and issues have had the most impact on its development.

This ongoing research study contributes to the brand activism literature in a number of ways. Brand activism is playing an increasingly important role in contemporary marketing and branding discourse. Yet, there are very few comprehensive review studies that offer a systematic and data-driven understanding of the field. Earlier assessments have merely edited previous results instead of mapping out the overall intellectual, conceptual, and thematic architecture of the domains. Consequently, this study is timely given how fast brand activism is changing and the recent increase in the academic interest in brand activism.

Second, this study uses bibliometric analysis to track the evolution of brand activism research between 2007 and 2026. Bibliometric analysis refers to a systematic method for assessing publication trends, authors, journals, countries, institutions, most-cited documents, co-citation patterns, and pattern of thematic keywords structure (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). As a result, it allows the research to take a step beyond narrative synthesis towards a more objective assessment of development in the field.

Third, to the best of our knowledge, the use of bibliometric research to investigate brand activism has only been highlighted in one study. This indicates that there is an adequate necessity of bibliometric study on brand activism. The present study analyzes various Scopus-indexed articles to better understand the knowledge structure, emerging topics, and future directions of research in the brand activism field.

The bibliometric analysis is increasingly being viewed as a suitable methodological tools in this connection, as this helps in the quantification and mapping of the research productivity, citation impact and intellectual content of a definite research domain (Koushik et al., 2025; Yadav et al., 2025). This approach aids in recognizing patterns in publication and citation, leading authors, key sources, and major research themes. For researchers and practitioners, these are useful findings. Thus, based on the above reasoning, the present study aims to explore the evolution and current state of affairs of brand activism research. The research objectives are specified below :

RO1: To investigate the publication and citation patterns in brand activism research.

RO2: To identify the primary contributions to the creation of brand activism literature.

RO3: To identify important theme areas and propose future research paths in brand activism.

The study essentially undertakes a performance analysis, as well as investigates publishing and citation patterns, and major author, journal, organization and country contributions in the brand activism domain, to achieve these objectives. This is followed by science mapping to demonstrate the intellectual and thematic composition of the field, identifying the key knowledge clusters and linkages that facilitate brand activism studies.

Bibliometric Research Method

Determine the relevant search word

All strings and keywords set are used to extract data from Scopus, as shown in Table 1. “Brand Activism” is used in the Scopus database.

Acquiring Data

The Scopus database has a wide coverage of peer-reviewed articles published in good quality journals which have been rated with high impact factor published by following double blind reviewing process i.e. (Groff et al., 2020). A Systematic Methodology is employed in reaching the final stage of 259 Articles. The phrase “Brand Activism” will only cover articles and reviews published in the English language from the subject areas of Business, Management and Accounting, Economics, Econometrics and Finance, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Environmental Science, and Psychology.

Because of errors in bibliographical and bibliometric details, data obtained from Scopus or any other online database may contain errors (Baker et al., 2021). Therefore, using this extracted dataset without doing a cleaning process will generate a highly dangerous and erroneous analysis. Consequently, the data is cleaned using several processes.

Selecting the analysis method

Various bibliometric techniques have been employed to understand research on brand activism. In addition to its ability to handle large datasets (Donthu et al., 2021), bibliometric analysis detects patterns in publications, identifies emerging themes, and plots the evolution of themes. This helps look back and forecast future research areas (Ciampi et al., 2021; do Prado et al., 2016; Pattnaik et al., 2021). The study utilized many bibliometric analytic techniques such as citation analysis, co-citation, and co-occurrence analysis.

Table 1: Filtering Criteria/Search Term and inclusion and Exclusion document

Criteria	Scopus	
	Exclude	Include
Search Date:25-06-2026		259
Database: Scopus		
Search Term: “Brand Activism”		
Subject Area: Business, Management and Accounting, Economics, Econometrics and Finance, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Environmental Science and Psychology	27	232
Article, Review	45	187
Language: English	5	182
Duplicate deleted	1	181

Findings

Evaluation of performance

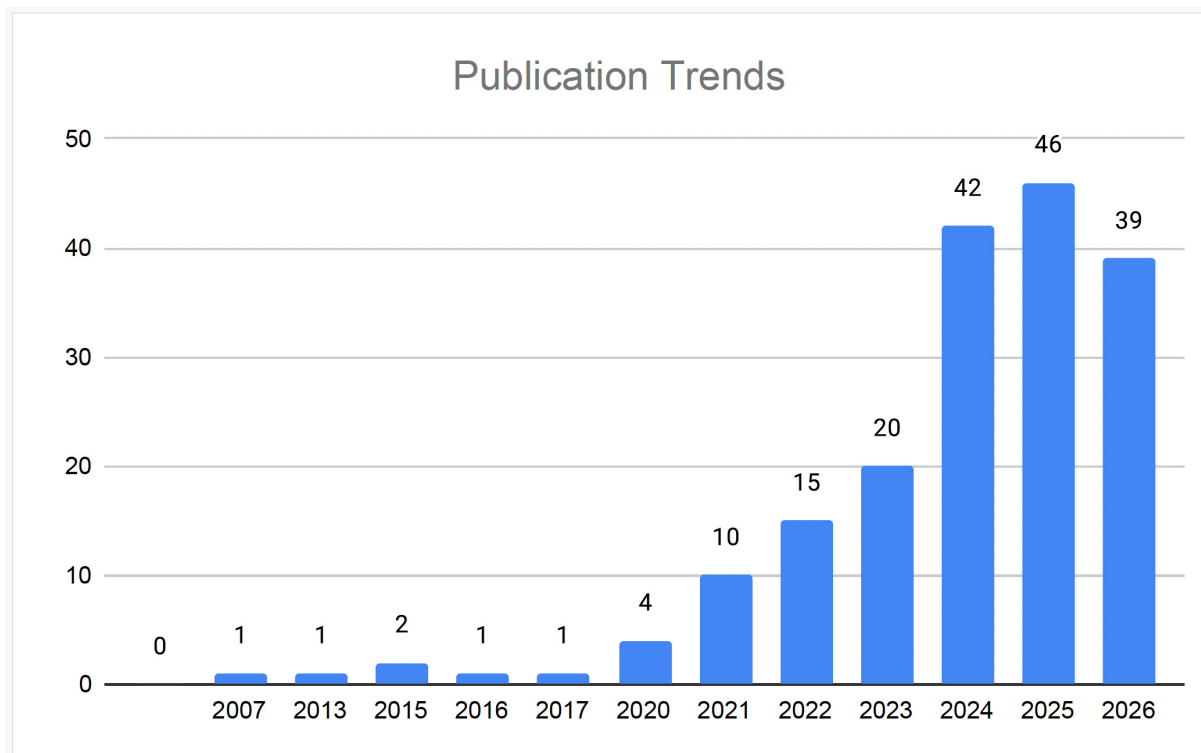


Figure 1 Brand Activism Publishing Trends

The trend of publications in brand activism is presented in Figure 1 for the years 2007 to 2026. The trend shows that research on brand activism remained very limited in the earlier years, with only one or two publications between 2007 and 2017. This shows that brand activism was a nascent and little-discussed subject in marketing, branding, and consumer research in the early years.

After 2020, a noticeable increase commences with the number of publications increasing from 4 in 2020 to 10 in 2021, 15 in 2022, and 20 in 2023. This growth suggests that brand activism has gained scholars' attention since brands began taking public positions on social, political, ethical, and environmental issues. The sharpest increase takes place in 2024 and 2025 with 42 and 46 publications, respectively, thus highlighting that brand activism is an emerging and growing field.

Many reasons may account for the upward trend. To begin with, consumers increasingly expect brands to take a clear stance on social and political issues, beyond profit. Second, the social media phenomenon has put more actions on the brand agenda, thus making activist brand messages more visible. In the third place, issues such as racial justice,

gender equality, climate change, LGBTQ+ rights, war, nationalism, and political polarization have led brands to engage in sensitive public debates (Koushik & Sarkar, 2025) only a small number of studies have done thorough literature reviews. Consequently, this study integrates SPAR 4 SLR (Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews). In the fourth place, the growing concern about woke washing and authenticity has prompted scholars to examine whether brands' activism is real or symbolic (Pimentel et al., 2024). In conclusion, the rise of consumer boycotts, buycotts, cancel culture, and electronic word-of-mouth has made basic brand activism increasingly important for understanding consumer-brand relationships (Huang & Chen, 2025).

The data indicates that brand activism is no longer limited to a niche area of research and has come to be accepted in the field of marketing and branding. The surge of publications after 2020 shows the growing significance of brand activism in modern-day consumerism, and there is ample opportunity for further research on authenticity, consumer response, political ideology, and brand purpose more generally.

Notable authors, organizations, and countries in Brand Activism research

Table 2: Most influential authors, organizations, and nations

TC	Author	TP	TC	Country	TP	TC	Organization	TP
769	Spry, Amanda	5	844	United states	59	274	Audencia Business School	1
743	Vredenburg, Jessica	3	705	United Kingdom	21	274	Montpellier Business School,	1
708	Kapitan, Sommer	2	376	Australia	11	219	LuiSS University In Roma, United Kingdom	1
708	Kemper, joya a.	2	374	Italy	14	219	University Of Modena And Reggio Emilia, Viale Berengario	1
369	Hydock, Chris	4	359	Germany	14	219	School Of Management, University Of Bath, United Kingdom	1
274	Althuizen, Niek	1	342	France	7	219	Stephen m. Ross school of business, university of michigan,	1
274	Mukherjee, Sourjo	1	150	India	9	194	Adelaide University, Sa, Australia	1
230	Zarantonello, Lia	2	140	New Zealand	3	194	Macquarie University, Australia	1
226	Blair, Sean	2	132	Brazil	7	165	walker college of business, appalachian state university, united states	2
226	Paharia, Neeru	2	94	South Korea	3	165	College Of Business, University Of North Texas, United States	2
219	Bagozzi, richard p.	1	93	Switzerland	2	124	University Of Sussex Business School, Brighton, United Kingdom	1
219	Grappi, Silvia	1	78	Vietnam	4	124	Cass Business School, Management City, University Of London, London, United Kingdom	1
219	Romani, Simona	1	70	Malaysia	4	124	Birkbeck, University Of London, London, United Kingdom	1
194	Mirzaei, Abas	1	70	Sweden	3	99	Vellore Institute Of Technology, Vellore, India	1
194	Siuki, Helen	1	69	Singapore	4	92	School Of Sport, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, United Kingdom	1
194	Wilkie, dean c.	1	63	Pakistan	3	92	University Of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany	1
187	Guzmán, Francisco	5	57	Finland	1	92	University Of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany	1
184	Ahmad, Fayez	4	47	Canada	7	89	University Of Lausanne, Switzerland	1
132	Haupt, Martin	2	44	Saudi Arabia	1	89	University of Lausanne, Internef, Lausanne, Vd, Switzerland	1
132	Wannow, Stefanie	2	41	Portugal	5	89	Said Business School, University Of Oxford, United Kingdom	1

Source: Authors' own

Note(s): TC = "total citations" TP = "total publications" .

Table 2 presents the most influential authors, countries, and organizations in the field of brand activism based on total citations (TC) and total publications (TP). Among the authors, Spry Amanda emerges as the most influential, receiving 769 citations from five publications, followed by Vredenburg Jessica with 743 citations from three publications. Kapitan Sommer and Kemper Joya A. also hold significant positions with 708 citations each, despite having only two publications each. In terms of productivity, Spry Amanda and Guzmán Francisco are the most productive authors, with five publications each, followed by Hydock Chris and Ahmad Fayez with four publications each.

At the country level, the United States is the most influential and productive nation in brand activism research, with 844 citations and 59 publications. The United Kingdom ranks second with 705 citations and 21 publications, followed by Australia with 376 citations and 11 publications. Italy and Germany also show strong contributions, each having 14

publications and more than 350 citations. Although India has nine publications, it ranks seventh in terms of citations with 150 citations, indicating its growing contribution to brand activism research.

With respect to organizations, Audencia Business School and Montpellier Business School are the most influential institutions, each receiving 274 citations from one publication. LUISS University in Roma, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, University of Bath, and Stephen M. Ross School of Business also show high citation impact, each receiving 219 citations from one publication. In terms of productivity, Walker College of Business, Appalachian State University, and College of Business, University of North Texas are the most productive organizations, with two publications each. Overall, the table indicates that brand activism research is largely dominated by authors and institutions from developed countries, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom.

Notable Journals in Brand Activism research

Table 3 Leading Journals in Brand Activism field

Journal	TP	TC
Journal of public policy and marketing	4	755
Journal of business research	19	526
Journal of brand management	13	471
International journal of research in marketing	1	274
Journal of marketing research	1	226
Journal of product and brand management	16	188
Psychology and marketing	6	171
Journal of business ethics	3	127
International journal of advertising	7	112
Feminist media studies	1	99
Journal of strategic marketing	4	99
International journal of sports marketing and sponsorship	1	92
Journal of consumer culture	2	84
Journal of advertising	3	76
European journal of marketing	2	59
Industrial marketing management	2	56
Journal of the association for consumer research	2	53
Journal of interactive marketing	1	47
Heliyon	1	44
Journal of consumer psychology	2	44

Source: Authors' own

Note(s): TC = "Total citations". TP = "Total number of article(s) publications".

Table 3 lists the most referenced journals in brand activism based on total publications (TP) and total citations (TC). The Journal of Public Policy and Marketing is the most influential source, generating 755 citations from four publications, which indicates that it has a strong citation impact. After the Sustainability Journal, the Journal of Business Research ranks second with 19 published documents and 526 citations, making it the most productive in the area.

The Journal of Brand Management is another major publication with 13 articles and 471 citations, suggesting the relevance of its publications related to brand activism and consumer response. The International Journal of Research in Marketing was published only once, but it has received 274 citations, indicating a very high impact per publication.

Likewise, a Journal of Marketing Research paper with 226 citations further indicates that a handful of cited articles are shaping the brand activism literature.

Other journals worth noting include the Journal of Product and Brand Management, which has 16 publications and 188 citations, Psychology and Marketing, with six publications and 171 citations, and the Journal of Business Ethics, with three publications and 127 citations. The journals showcase the interdisciplinary nature of brand activism research, including marketing strategy, consumer psychology, ethics, advertising, and brand management. Brand activism research is published mainly in leading marketing, branding, public policy, and business ethics journals, as shown in the table.

Most Influential articles on Brand Activism

Table 4: Top Significant articles

Rank	Author	Article Title	Source	TC
1	Vredenburg et al. (2020)	<i>Brands Taking a Stand: Authentic Brand Activism or Woke Washing?</i>	Journal of Public Policy and Marketing	654
2	Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020)	<i>Brand activism: Does courting controversy help or hurt a brand?</i>	International Journal of Research in Marketing	274
3	Hydock et al. (2020)	<i>Should Your Brand Pick a Side? How Market Share Determines the Impact of Corporate Political Advocacy</i>	Journal of Marketing Research	226
4	Romani et al. (2015)	<i>The revenge of the consumer: How brand moral violations lead to consumer anti-brand activism</i>	Journal of Brand Management	219
5	Mirzaei et al. (2022)	<i>Woke brand activism authenticity or the lack of it</i>	Journal of Business Research	194
6	Sibai et al. (2021)	<i>Authenticating brand activism: Negotiating the boundaries of free speech to make a change</i>	Psychology and Marketing	124
7	Varghese and Kumar (2022)	<i>Feminism in advertising: Irony or revolution? A critical review of femvertising</i>	Feminist Media Studies	99
8	Popp et al. (2016)	<i>We love to hate them! Social media-based anti-brand communities in professional football</i>	International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship	92
9	Palazzo and Basu (2007)	<i>The ethical backlash of corporate branding</i>	Journal of Business Ethics	89
10	Ahmad et al. (2024)	<i>Brand activism and the consequence of woke washing</i>	Journal of Business Research	84
11	Ahmad et al. (2022)	<i>Effective messaging strategies to increase brand love for sociopolitical activist brands</i>	Journal of Business Research	81
12	Weber et al. (2023)	<i>Differential Response to Corporate Political Advocacy and Corporate Social Responsibility</i>	Journal of Public Policy and Marketing	79
13	Wannow et al. (2024)	<i>Is brand activism an emotional affair? The role of moral emotions in consumer responses to brand activism</i>	Journal of Brand Management	75
14	Chu et al. (2023)	<i>When brands get real: the role of authenticity and electronic word-of-mouth in brand activism</i>	International Journal of Advertising	72
15	Key et al. (2023)	<i>Brand activism change agents: strategic storytelling for impact and authenticity</i>	Journal of Strategic Marketing	70
16	Klostermann et al. (2022)	<i>The effect of corporate political advocacy on brand perception</i>	Journal of Product and Brand Management	64
17	Haupt et al. (2023)	<i>Who is more responsive to brand activism? The role of consumer-brand identification and political ideology</i>	Journal of Product and Brand Management	57
18	Pöyry and Laaksonen (2022)	<i>Opposing brand activism: triggers and strategies of consumers' anti-brand actions</i>	European Journal of Marketing	57
19	Kapitan et al. (2022)	<i>Strategic B2B brand activism: Building conscientious purpose for social impact</i>	Industrial Marketing Management	54
20	Garg and Saluja (2022)	<i>A Tale of Two "Ideologies": Differences in Consumer Response to Brand Activism</i>	Journal of the Association for Consumer Research	52

Source: Authors' own

As indicated in Table 4, the article with the highest citation count is the top-cited document in the field of brand activism. According to the authors, the Vredenburg et al. (2020) paper has been the most influential paper of the year published in the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, that has been cited 654 times. This piece seems to be a fundamental addition to brand activism studies, especially since it turns out to be a distinction between authentic brand activism and woke washing. Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) *Brand activism: Does courting controversy help or hurt a brand?* is the second most cited article, published in the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*; this work has garnered 274 citations. The paper by Hydock et al. (2020), published in the *Journal of Marketing Research*, is third with 226 citations. The paper studies the effect of market share on consumer

outcomes for corporate political advocacy.

Another highly cited study is Romani et al. (2015), with 219 citations, examining consumer anti-brand activism due to brand moral violations. Mirzaei et al. (2022), with 194 citations, is also quite popular, focusing on the authenticity of woke brand activism. Sibai et al. (2021) is another notable work with 124 citations on authenticating brand activism and limits to free speech. The majority of the referred documents relate to consumer backlash, moral emotions, anti-brand activism, and a few other topics. The first of these is a reference document and is based on ethics. These articles have been cited widely, as many others and subsequent scholars will see.

Knowledge Foundation of Brand Activism Research

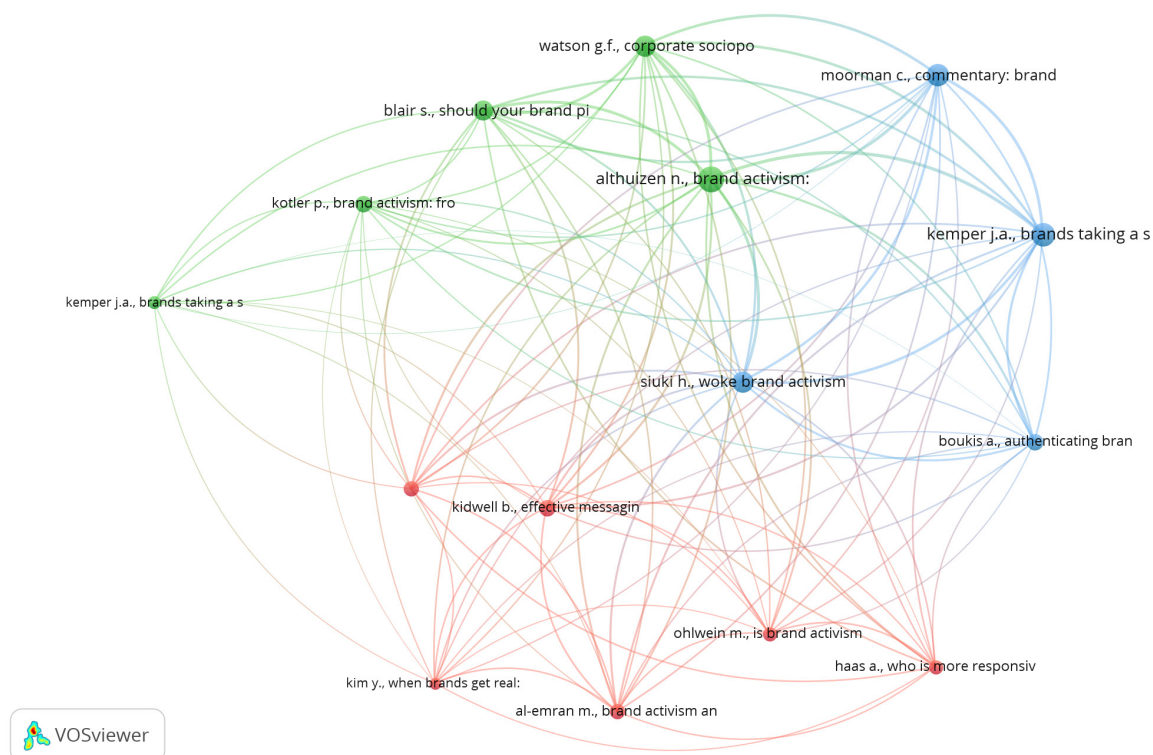


Figure 2. Co-citation of references in Brand activism domain

Note(s): "Each node in the network represents either a cited reference or a semantic cluster of references sharing thematic similarities". "The size of nodes corresponds to the degree of local citations, where larger nodes indicate a higher concentration of local citations". "Links between nodes signify co-citations, and the thickness of these links reflects the degree of co-citation intensity; thicker linkages indicate a stronger association in terms of co-citations between the referenced items".

The co-citation network for the brand activism domain, based on cited references, is presented in Fig. 2. The essential premise of co-citation analysis is that if two references are cited together often enough, they become intellectually related. As illustrated in the figure, nodes represent references, and links represent co-citation relations among references. As the color intensities vary, so will the strength of the ties, which shows the degree of intellectual association among the cited works. Furthermore, the colors indicate distinct thematic clusters in the brand activism literature.

Three significant co-citation clusters are present. Research on brand activism has a conceptual and strategic basis (green cluster). These references, like Althuizen et al. (2020), Brand activism: Does courting controversy benefit or hinder a brand, are closely related. This reference has the greatest overall link strength (411) and the most citations (89) of all cited references. Blair et al. (2020), Kotler and Sarkar's Brand activity: From Purpose to Action (2018), and Watson et al. (2020) on corporate sociopolitical activity and company value are some more noteworthy references in this cluster.

The present cluster indicates that brand activism is portrayed as a socio-political, contentious, and strategic branding phenomenon.

Authenticity, woke washing, and consumer evaluation of activist brands are the main focuses of the blue cluster. Kemper and associates (2020). Brands Taking a Position: Woke Washing or Real Brand Activism? With 310 citations and a total link strength of 1,481, Reference 1—which addresses the fiber optics market—is the most referenced. With 209 citations and a total link strength of 761, Giudici et al.'s (2020) paper, which addresses merger negotiations in a triple negotiation setting, has a significant impact on this cluster. Additional important sources are Bradley et al. on the expansion of P2P transactions and Benson et al. (2022), which examines the contemporary stock market. According to this categorization, intellectual issues of authenticity and woke washing are addressed in brand activism literature.

The cluster represented in red relates to consumer responses, emotional reactions, brand love, electronic word-

of-mouth, and backlash-related outcomes. Some important references in this cluster are Al-Emran et al. (2024) on brand activism and the fallout from woke washing, Kidwell et al. (2022) on effective messaging strategies to help brands considered sociopolitical activists, Kim et al. (2023) on authenticity and electronic word-of-mouth, Ohlwein et al. (2024) on moral elevation and moral anger, and Haas et al. (2023) on consumer-brand identification and political ideology. This cluster indicates a growing interest in consumer interpretations of, support for, resistance to, and emotional responses to brand activism.

The network of co-citation reveals that research into brand activism consolidates around three competing yet linking intellectual streams, namely the strategic and sociopolitical foundations of brand activism, authenticity and woke washing, as well as consumers' responses to the activist brand messages. The references by Althuizen et al. (2020), Kemper et al. (2020), Siuki et al. (2022), Watson et al. (2020), and Moorman (2020) have a high total link strength, which means they are key intellectual articles of the brand activism literature.

Thematic trends of Brand Activism research

The themes and foundations of co-citation and bibliographic coupling are expanded upon in co-occurrence analysis. The author's keywords are used for co-occurrence analysis. The words that appeared in at least five publications in the review corpus were then filtered chronologically using those Keywords to understand the topical evolution of the concern. Figures 3 indicate an evolving theme.

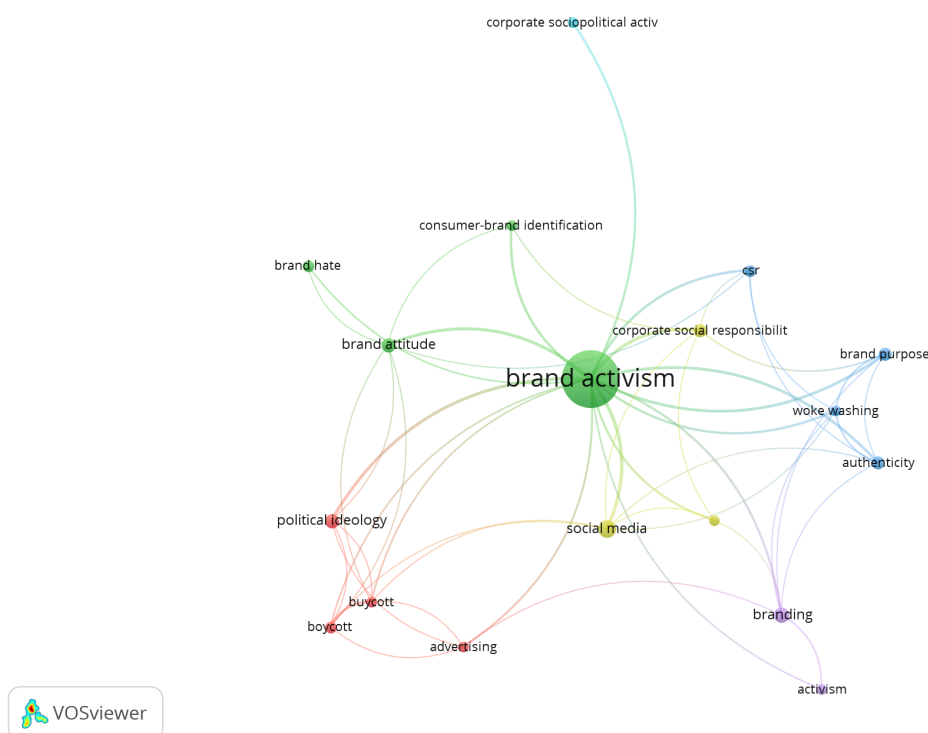


Figure 3: Thematic Keyword Analysis of Brand Activism Research



The author keyword co-occurrence illustrates brand activism research, as shown in Figure 3. The keyword co-occurrence analysis shows the major areas of activity and their conceptual relationship in a particular domain of research. The figure shows the keywords in each node, and the links show the co-occurrence relationship among them. The bigger the node, the more times that keyword comes up, with different colors to signify different themes.

The phrase “brand activism” is the most important and central term in the network. Its large node size and strong connections with other keywords suggest that it is the central theme around which literature revolves. Brand activism research is closely related to the strategic branding concepts of corporate social responsibility, woke washing, authenticity, brand purpose, and social media, as well as to the consumer-level concerns of political ideology and consumer-brand identification.

The green cluster mainly represents consumer-related responses to brand activism. Terms like ‘brand attitude’, ‘consumer-brand identification’ and ‘brand hate’ signal that scholars are looking at the evaluation of activist brand messages by consumers and the effect of such messages on emotional and attitudinal outcomes. This cluster could therefore suggest that consumer perception and identification issues are critical to understanding whether brand activism creates support or resistance.

The blue cluster focuses on authenticity-oriented and purpose-driven activism. Keywords like “woke washing,” “authenticity,” “brand purpose,” and “CSR” show that a major stream of research investigates whether activist brand actions are perceived as genuine or just symbolic. Moreover, it is noteworthy that authenticity is important to accept brand activism by the consumer.

The red mass symbolizes political and resistance themes. The words “political ideology,” “boycott,” “buycott” and “advertising” indicate that brand activism often polarizes consumers. The group indicates consumers can have buycotts or boycotts depending on their ideological alignment with the brand’s activism views.

The purple cluster is related to broader themes of branding and activism such as ‘branding’ and ‘activism’. This suggests that brand activism is not just viewed as a marketing communication strategy but also as an overarching branding phenomenon connected with social and political change. The inclusion of “social media” in this network implies that online platforms are key in amplifying activist brands messages to consumers and shaping interactions with consumers.

Thematic keyword analysis shows that the brand activism research is organized around four themes which are consumer response and brand attitude, authenticity and woke washing,

political ideology and consumer resistance and branding for social activism. The “brand activism” definitely shows the field is evolving as a research area, linking branding, CSR, authenticity, ideology, social media and consumer activism.

Discussion

The current study offers a thorough bibliometric overview of brand activism literature while also mapping its development between 2007 and 2026. In doing so, it makes use of the Scopus-indexed literature along with the deployment of performance analysis and science mapping. Consequently, the study offers insights into publication trends, citation patterns, key authors, leading journals, productive countries, prominent institutions, highly cited documents, co-citation networks, and the key thematic areas impacting the brand activism domain.

The study found that brand activism was a limited and emerging area of research between 2007 and 2017, with only a handful of publications. From 2020 onwards, however, it can be seen that there was a steep rise in academic output. Rising expectations of consumers from brands to take public stances on social, political, environmental, and ethical issues and the ability of consumers to see what brands actually do – thanks to social media, cancel culture, boycotts and buycotts and concerns about woke washing and authenticity.

According to the performance analysis, the countries with the 1most influence in brand activism research are the United States, followed by the United Kingdom. Likewise, the authors who show the largest contribution to brand activism are Amanda Spry, Jessica Vredenburg, Sommer Kapitan, Joya A. Kemper, Chris Hydock, and Francisco Guzmán. According to an analysis of the journal literature, brand activism research is primarily published in credible journals, including the Journal of Public Policy and Marketing, the Journal of Business Research, the Journal of Brand Management, the International Journal of Research in Marketing, and the Journal of Marketing Research. As seen in the contemporary journals, brand activism is a multidisciplinary research field that brings together the disciplines of marketing strategy, brand management, consumer psychology, business ethics, advertising, and public policy.

The most cited articles in brand activism literature are Vredenburg et al. (2020), Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020), Hydock et al. (2020), Romani et al. (2015), and Mirzaei et al. (2020), according to citation analysis. The intellectual architecture of brand activism has been built on the constructs of authentic brand activism, woke washing, corporate political advocacy, consumer backlash, moral violation, and anti-brand activism. This is explained by these works. Brand activism involves three major intellectual streams. The first stream studies its strategic and socio-political foundations. The second stream investigates authenticity and woke-

washing. The last stream analyses consumer responses to activist brand messages.

The thematic keyword analysis at the heart of the field is branded activism. Furthermore, it is strongly related to keywords such as corporate social responsibility, authenticity, woke washing, brand purpose, social media, political ideology, boycott and buycott, consumer-brand identification, and brand attitude. These themes suggest that research at present is more concerned with how consumers evaluate activist brand messages, how authenticity shapes responses to brand activism, how political ideology engenders support or resistance, and how digital platforms amplify activist brand communication.

Overall, this research delivers evidence-based data on the advancement, intellectual framework, and research trends that emerged in the study of brand activism literature. According to the findings, brand activism is no longer a niche subject; it is now an important area of marketing and branding scholarship. The study lays a clear groundwork for researchers to pinpoint future research opportunities. For practitioners, it underscores the necessity of authenticity, value alignment, stakeholder sensitivity and responsible communication when brands take a stand on contentious issues.

Using other databases, e.g., Web of Science, Dimensions, or Google Scholar, future studies may extend this work to comprehensively compare bibliometric patterns across these sources. Further research can look into consumer reactions across cultures, the use of AI in activist communication, ways to measure authenticity, political ideology and consumer polarization, the role of virtual influencers in brand activism, as well as the long-term effects of brand activism on brand equity and firm performance. Brand activism will continue to be a growing area of academic research and managerial practice as more brands take a stand on disputed social and political issues.

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Annexure 18.1.6

Submission Date	Submission Id	Word Count	Character Count
25-Jan-2026	6238417 (DrillBit)	5689	38552

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9 SIMILARITY %

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A GRADE

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B-Upgrade (11-40%)
C-Poor (41-60%)
D-Unacceptable (61-100%)

LOCATION	MATCHED DOMAIN	%	SOURCE TYPE
1	Brand activism Research trends and cluster analysis, by Luna-Amador, Jorge, Yr-2025	<1	Publication
2	digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu	2	Publication
3	d-nb.info	<1	Publication
4	d-nb.info	1	Publication
5	www.ama.org	1	Publication
6	www.dx.doi.org	1	Publication
7	d-nb.info	1	Publication
8	etd.cput.ac.za	1	Publication
10	repository.penerbitareka.com	<1	Internet Data
11	www.mdpi.com	<1	Internet Data
12	d-nb.info	<1	Publication
13	www.exoplanetes.umontreal.ca	<1	Publication
15	www.ijfmr.com	<1	Publication

Reviewers Memorandum



Reviewer's Comment 1: The manuscript provides a timely and comprehensive bibliometric review of brand activism research, an area that has gained considerable scholarly attention in recent years. The use of performance analysis alongside science mapping techniques offers a systematic understanding of the field's evolution, influential contributors, and emerging research themes. The discussion on publication trends, co-citation networks, and thematic keyword analysis is well-presented and provides valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners.

Reviewer's Comment 2: The study makes a significant contribution by mapping the intellectual structure of brand activism through bibliometric techniques. The identification of leading authors, influential journals, countries, and foundational studies provides an excellent reference point for future scholars entering this research domain. The interpretation of the co-citation and keyword co-occurrence analyses is logical and enhances the understanding of major research streams, including authenticity, woke washing, and consumer responses to activist brands.

Reviewer's Comment 3: This manuscript is well-organized, clearly written, and supported by an extensive collection of recent and relevant literature. The study successfully demonstrates how brand activism has evolved into an important area of marketing and branding research, while also identifying meaningful research gaps related to political ideology, consumer polarization, authenticity, and social media. The practical implications for both academics and marketing practitioners are noteworthy. As a suggestion for future research, the authors may consider extending the analysis by incorporating additional databases such as Web of Science or Dimensions to provide a broader perspective on the evolution of brand activism literature.



Rubina Bhardwaj, Kanishk Koushik
and Madhulika P. Sarkar

"From Silence to Stance: Mapping the Rise
of Brand Activism Research"

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Conflict of Interest: Author of a Paper
had no conflict neither financially nor academically.

Editorial Excerpt



The article has 9% of plagiarism which is the accepted percentage as per the norms and standards of the journal for publication. As per the editorial board's observations and blind reviewers' remarks the paper had some minor revisions which were communicated on a timely basis to the authors (Rubina, Kanishk and Madhulika), and accordingly, all the corrections had been incorporated as and when directed and required to do so. The comments related to this manuscript are noticeably related to the theme "From Silence to Stance: Mapping the Rise of Brand Activism Research" both subject-wise and research-wise. The manuscript presents a high-quality bibliometric review that offers a comprehensive overview of the evolution, intellectual foundations, and thematic development of brand activism research. The study employs appropriate bibliometric methods, is supported by an extensive and up-to-date dataset, and provides valuable insights into publication trends, influential contributors, and emerging research themes. The discussion is relevant, timely, and contributes meaningfully to the growing literature on brand activism and contemporary marketing. After comprehensive reviews and the editorial board's remarks, the manuscript has been categorized and decided to publish under the "Review of literature" category.

Acknowledgement



The acknowledgment section is an essential part of all academic research papers. It provides appropriate recognition to all contributors for their hard work and effort taken while writing a paper. The data presented and analyzed in this paper by (Rubina, Kanishk and Madhulika) were collected first handily and wherever it has been taken the proper acknowledgment and endorsement depicts. The authors are highly indebted to others who facilitated accomplishing the research. Last but not least, endorse all reviewers and editors of GJEIS in publishing in the present issue.

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