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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Does Social Brand Activism Shape Brand Attitudes? Insights from Sri Lankan Cosmetic Consumers

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Abstract

In recent years, social brand activism has emerged as a strategic marketing approach whereby firms advocate for social causes alongside commercial objectives, particularly within consumer-oriented industries such as cosmetics. This study investigates the impact of social brand activism in advertising on the perceived brand attitudes of Millennials and Generation Z consumers in Sri Lanka. The proposed model conceptualizes social brand activism as the independent variable, comprising six dimensions: information credibility, celebrity trustworthiness, perceived argument quality, issue involvement, perceived authenticity, and brand–cause fit, while perceived brand attitude is treated as the dependent variable. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed to 150 randomly selected young consumers of cosmetics brands, and analyzed using SPSS version 25 through descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and regression analysis. The findings reveal that social brand activism significantly and positively influences perceived brand attitude, with all six dimensions showing meaningful contributions. The study offers practical insights for brand managers, policymakers, and advertisers by emphasizing the effectiveness of socially responsible advertising strategies in shaping positive consumer perceptions.

Keywords: *Advertising, Gen Z consumers, Millennials, Perceived Brand Attitude, Social Brand Activism*

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1. Introduction

Today, the whole world is concerned about issues related to the natural environment, society, politics, etc. Similarly, consumers are more worried about the impact of organizational activities on society. Thus, the organizations are making great efforts to raise their voices and respond to such significant issues reflecting their concern. Previously, they adopted Corporate Social Responsibility and Cause-Related Marketing activities to address society's problems. Eventually, it has shifted towards the Brand Activism introduced by Kotler and Sarkar (2017) as a progression of CSR and CRM that focuses on the socio-political spectrum (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). This sociopolitical context has been categorized into six sections by Kotler and Sarkar (2017).

Figure 1

Classification of Brand Activism



Note. Adapted from Kotler and Sarkar (2017).

Since there have been few published types of research on the impact of this growing phenomenon of Brand Activism and its implications for brands (Schmidt et al., 2022), this study mainly focuses on the context of Social Brand Activism. Kotler & Sarkar, 2017 state that gender equality, LGBT, race, age, etc., are examples of social activism. It also covers society and community concerns like clean water, food, hygiene, education, school funding, etc. Consequently, within this study, three main societal problems Gender Inequality, Sexual Harassment, and a high number of Suicide cases specific to the Sri Lankan Context are scrutinized under social activism.

Table 1

Annually Reported Sexual Harassment Cases in Sri Lanka

Province / Police division	2018	2019	2020
Northern Province	**84**	**75**	**86**
Jaffna	23	21	21
Kankasanthurai	3	2	11
Vavuniya	21	24	34
Mannar	13	8	9
Kilinochchi	11	5	3
Mulathivu	13	15	8
Eastern Province	**133**	**137**	**163**
Ampara	40	67	81
Batticaloa	18	30	26
Kanthale	37	23	26
Trincomalee	38	17	30
Central Province	**214**	**243**	**265**
Gampola	25	23	16
Hatton	18	8	13
Kandy	117	115	95
Nuwara Eliya	19	34	31
Matale	35	49	67
Theldeniya	—	14	43
Western Province	**521**	**512**	**477**
Colombo North	15	15	15
Colombo South	18	21	30
Colombo Central	14	17	13
Gampaha	75	51	73
Kelaniya	40	47	33
Negombo	77	60	54
Kalutara	64	80	56
Mount Lavinia	74	68	49
Nugegoda	87	102	85
Panadura	57	51	69

Province / Police division	2018	2019	2020
North Central Province	**210**	**230**	**269**
Anuradhapura	156	171	210
Polonnaruwa	54	59	59
North Western Province	**286**	**249**	**305**
Kurunegala	89	92	93
Kuliyapitiya	78	56	65
Puttalam	44	33	56
Chilaw	26	24	46
Nikaweratiya	49	44	45
Southern Province	**397**	**372**	**368**
Elpitiya	69	60	62
Galle	96	84	86
Matara	130	113	92
Tangalle	102	115	128
Uva Province	**141**	**135**	**168**
Monaragala	56	58	65
Badulla	47	43	58
Bandarawela	38	34	45
Sabaragamuwa Province	**319**	**186**	**331**
Kegalle	114	92	81
Ratnapura	141	36	148
Seethawakapura	64	47	67
Embilipitiya	—	11	35
Women & Child Bureau	7	5	8
Total	**2,312**	**2,144**	**2,440**

Note. Data source: Sri Lanka Police, Women & Child Bureau, Colombo 14; field survey 2022. An em dash indicates that no value was reported in the source table.

2. Study Significance

Since brand activism is relatively a new concept introduced by Kotler and Sarkar (2017), limited studies have been conducted domestically and internationally. Furthermore, no research has been conducted on brand activism in the Sri Lankan context. As a result, there is

an emerging need for studies related to the field of Brand Activism. Most research studies have been focused on environmental activism (Elkan, 2018; Schleier, 2021; Shetty et al., 2019). Consequently, fewer studies focus on social brand activism, and most of them are of a case-study nature (Eyada, 2020; Lee & Yoon, 2020; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Rasmussen, 2021). Considering current increasing trends in social issues such as gender inequality, Sexual Harassment, Suicides, poverty, etc., globally and domestically, it provides some signals for researchers to structure their studies based on social brand activism. Social issues such as Street Harassment, the High Number of Male Suicide Cases, and Gender Inequality, it is evident that they are much more prominent within the current context in Sri Lanka. Moreover, Young consumers are the social group openly exposed to these issues predominantly. Thus, young consumers are the drivers of dramatic social change because they are at the forefront of such change (Miles, 2015). Therefore, there is a requirement to investigate these young consumers' brand attitudes towards these brands when addressing these social issues through their marketing campaigns. Most importantly, some specific brands address these social issues in Sri Lanka (ex: Loreal, Gold, British Cosmetics, Unilever, Mas Holdings, Brandix, etc.). However, no research has been done on brand activism in the Sri Lankan context. The most crucial thing is that fewer studies have been conducted to investigate the consumers' social brand activism and perceived brand attitude according to the developing country's perspective. Therefore, there is a need for research contributions within developing countries (Eyada, 2020; Schleier, 2021; Schmidt et al., 2022). Most scholars stated that the lack of brand activism study investigations makes analyzing activist advertising difficult. Besides, they suggest future studies should concentrate on societal issues and concerns about brand associations by strengthening social activism advertising research and implementation (Eyada, 2020). Consequently, this study attempts to investigate the impact of social brand activism in advertising on the perceived brand attitude of millennials and generation z consumers concerning cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Social Brand Activism

According to Kotler and Sarkar (2017), Brand Activism is defined as "consists of all business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and environmental reform or stasis with the desire to make improvements in society." Additionally, Vredenburg et al. (2020) stated Brand Activism as a marketing technique for brands that want to stand out by taking a public stance on social and political issues. According to Kotler and Sarkar (2017), Brand activism develops as a values-driven strategy for businesses concerned about society's future and the earth's health. A feeling of justice and fairness for all is the driving force behind growth. The same study stated that equality, gender, LGBT, race, age, and so on are examples of social activism. It also covers society and community concerns like education, school finance, etc. The growth of socially conscious brands indicates that brands may stand for a purpose other than the product or service they provide(Moorman, 2020). According to Schmidt et al. (2022), sociopolitical activist brands have been defined as brands that make a "public demonstration (statements and actions) of support for or opposition to one side of a contentious sociopolitical issue." Further, brands can take a sociopolitical stance because they see an opportunity to stand out and build goodwill or because managers know that brands exist in a social context and should value a variety of stakeholders (Schmidt et al., 2022). Most importantly, the conservative nature of sociopolitical activism, on the other hand, elevates risk and uncertainty above standard CSR programs (Bhagwat et al., 2020). Within this study, three different social issues in the Sri Lankan context associated with varying advertising campaigns are discussed under social brand activism. The most prominent social issues were examined in the introduction chapter, and those issues are Sexual Harassment, Gender Inequality, and an Increase Number of Suicide cases. Moreover, the study focuses on the brands that take a stance against these dominant social issues.

3.2. Consumers' Perceived Brand Attitude

Consumers' brand attitudes are considered the most essential and critical factor in understanding consumer behavior (Marticotte & Arcand, 2017). Thus, the Consumers' beliefs and feelings about the brand's attributes and benefits determine the consumers' brand attitude.

Similarly, the combination of all crucial brand elements existent in consumers' memories and is obtained through encountering the particular brand at various levels such as brand usage, communication, and product purchase is also referred to as consumers' brand attitude (Keller, 2003; Langaro et al., 2018). According to Bartsch et al. (2016), consumers' attitudes toward a brand indicate positive or negative brand evaluations and potentially impact consumer behavior. As a result, favorable brand attitudes lead to positive brand evaluations. When a brand presents an image that consumers like, they might become attached (Kim et al., 2019). Moreover, researching how relevant target groups digest advertising and how this affects brand attitude is of uttermost importance for academics and practitioners. Besides, examining the function of a consumer's advertising response as a predictor of brand attitude is a typical technique in advertising research (Gahlot Sarkar et al., 2019). Furthermore, Brand Activism in advertisements carries brands' stands against socio-political issues. According to Ajzen (2005), attitude changes throughout time while resurfacing various societal problems. Consequently, with the emergence of Brand Activism practices, scholars have been researching brand activism on consumers' brand attitudes (Dahlin, 2021; Loubna et al., 2018; Schleier, 2021). When measuring the impact of brand attitude, studies including Ahn et al. (2019); Liu et al. (2020); Spangenberg and Grohmann (n.d.); Wu and Wang (2011), have considered cognitive/utilitarian and affective/hedonic components as perceptual attitude variables of perceived brand attitude, whereas product/brand attitude has been regarded as a single dimension in a few others. Consequently, this study measures perceived brand attitude in perceptual attitude variables, including cognitive and affective dimensions. According to Wu and Wang (2011), cognitive and affective components can be defined as follows,

“The cognitive component is the product's knowledge or cognition resulting from integrating direct experience or information gained.” (Wu & Wang, 2011)

“The affective component is the consumer's emotion or affective reaction to a product or brand, expressing the consumer's direct or overall evaluation of the product.” (Wu & Wang, 2011)

3.3. Consumer responses to Social Brand Activism

Brands must take a stand on social problems, according to consumers. However, a position must be based on a long-term commitment consistent with the brand's strategy and values to be credible (Schmidt et al., 2022). Most young consumers favor brands that take a stand on a social, political, or environmental issue over those that remain silent(Admirand, 2020). However, if a company shares its beliefs and sticks up for them, millennials will be loyal and prepared to pay a premium price. On the other side, if their favorite companies promoted ambiguous issues, they would switch brands and face significant criticism. Moreover, younger generations, in particular, are aware of marketing practices and are not afraid to boycott, ignore, or change brands based on their views on social issues (Kam & Deichert, 2020). According to Edelman (2019), Customers feel that too many firms nowadays use brand activism solely as a profit-generating strategy, thus according to 56%. Consequently, if a business promotes ethical values in its marketing while disguising its commercial aims of profit, this brand activism may easily be misinterpreted as "woke washing." Therefore, this study focuses on how young consumers including Generation Z and Millennials, respond to advertisements related to brand activism.

3.4. Perceived Brand Attitude and Social Brand Activism in Advertising

Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) investigated brand activism in the context of hypothetical and well-known brands, finding that customers who disagree with a business's stance on an issue have negative attitudes about the brand. Furthermore, there is no discernible shift in attitudes among consumers who support a brand's position. Consequently, they discovered that brand activism had an asymmetric impact on brand attitude construction and customer behavior. Moreover, compared to generic advertisements focused on a product, Elkan (2018) observed that U.S. Millennials had positive attitudes regarding activist advertisements but not toward the brand. Finally, it can be assumed that, if done correctly, brand activism may favorably affect attitude development and, as a result, brand loyalty in the long run. Therefore, considering the facts, the following hypothesis has been developed,

Hypothesis 1: Social Brand Activism in Advertising significantly impacts the perceived brand attitude.

3.5. Perceived Brand Attitude and Information Credibility

According to Metzger (2007) "Credibility of a source or message is a receiver-based assessment that encompasses both objective judgments of information quality or accuracy and subjective views of the source's trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness." The research findings show that in viral marketing, the source of message credibility directly impacts consumer attitudes toward the brand (Wu & Wang, 2011). Furthermore, when there is a high level of participation, the message's intellectual appeal significantly influences customer attitudes about the brand. In general, the source of message credibility has a more significant influence on customer attitudes than message appeal. Moreover, several researchers have looked at the influence of perceived credibility on persuasive claims. Only statements that are viewed as credible are said to have an informational social impact (Park et al., 2011). Therefore, considering the facts, the following hypothesis has been developed,

Hypothesis 2: Information Credibility significantly impacts the perceived brand attitude.

3.6. Perceived Brand Attitude and Celebrity Trustworthiness

A celebrity who is regarded as trustworthy should be picked to represent the brand since credibility is crucial in raising the public's perception of the advertisement, the brand, and buying intentions (Vidyanata et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017). Further, the key determinants of brand attitude are consumers' perceptions of endorser credibility and trustworthiness. As a result, the critical cause for customers' positive brand attitudes is their sense of the endorser's trustworthiness (Spears & Singh, 2004; Vidyanata et al., 2018). In conclusion, the more positively a customer perceives an endorser; the more positively the consumer perceives the brand (brand attitude), and vice versa (Vidyanata et al., 2018). Therefore, considering the facts, the following hypothesis has been developed,

Hypothesis 3: Celebrity Trustworthiness significantly impacts the perceived brand attitude.

3.7. Perceived Brand Attitude and Perceived Argument Quality

The strength of arguments is referred to as argument quality. It is important to discern between communications with weak and strong arguments. Consumers acquire favorable judgments

when the quality of the arguments is high, and the arguments are compelling. When the quality of an argument is judged to be poor, serious consideration of the message leads to negative thoughts and evaluations of the message (Schleier, 2021). Supportively, when a person elaborates on a message more, the quality of the arguments has a more substantial influence on his or her views than when a person elaborates on a message less. Although marketers would never intentionally utilize weak arguments in a marketing campaign, manipulations of argument quality in earlier studies have shown variances in receivers' elaboration of different messages (Chu & Kamal, 2008). Consequently, Brand activism may easily result in backlash due to skepticism among customers and a lack of concern for appropriate activist messaging and activities. As a result, it is reasonable to infer that customers' perceptions of argument quality play an important part in predicting their brand attitudes(Edelman, 2019). Therefore, considering the facts, the following hypothesis has been developed,

Hypothesis 4: Perceived Argument Quality significantly impacts the perceived brand attitude.

3.8. Perceived Brand Attitude and Issue Involvement

According to Hajjat (2003), compared to customers with limited cause involvement, consumers who are highly connected with a cause have the appropriate ability and a desire for persuasive communication, which will alter their attitude toward the brand. When consumers are passionate about a subject, they will want many facts to be convinced. At the same time, Personal participation in the cause positively impacts attitudes regarding cause-brand alliances (Hajjat, 2003; Trimble & Rifon, 2006). Therefore, considering the facts, the following hypothesis has been developed,

Hypothesis 5: Issue Involvement significantly impacts the perceived brand attitude

3.9. Perceived Brand Attitude and Perceived Authenticity

One of the most essential fundamental aspects of the idea of brand activism is perceived authenticity (Vredenburg et al., 2020). When the brand's messages, basic beliefs, and business practices are aligned, it is defined as authentic brand activism. Otherwise, brand activism may come off as inauthentic, leading to negative consequences such as boycotts. As a result, a

business that uses activist messaging in its advertising must be also seen as genuine (Schleier, 2021). Many studies have looked at the importance of authenticity in CSR research, and they have discovered that it has a significant impact on consumer attitudes. According to them, consumers will have positive attitudes toward authentic brands when participating in CSR activities (Alhouti et al., 2016). Previous studies on authenticity in CSR and the theoretically researched idea of brand activism have given us reason to believe that this variable is also vital for forming attitudes in the context of brand activism. Therefore, considering the facts, the following hypothesis has been developed,

Hypothesis 6: Perceived Authenticity significantly impacts the perceived brand attitude

3.10. Perceived Brand Attitude and Perceived Brand Cause Fit

Consumers usually expect brands to promote a cause or social problem only if it aligns with the company's values and can be readily connected to the brand (Du et al., 2010). Supportively, the majority of prior research has revealed that brand attitudes are supported by perceived strong brand-cause fit (Du et al., 2010; Melero & Montaner, 2016). However, Lafferty (2007) controlled brand-cause fit and showed that a perceived fit does not always have a massive impact on brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Furthermore, Xiaoli and Kwangjun (2007) asserted that CRM messages are often more positive than generic advertisements regardless of the brand-cause fit. However, in their experiment, they discovered that a high brand-cause fit elicits more positive attitudes toward the brand than a low brand-cause fit in a CRM message. Therefore, considering the facts, the following hypothesis has been developed,

Hypothesis 7: Brand Cause-Fit significantly impacts the perceived brand attitude

1. **Conceptual Framework**

Figure 21

2Proposed Research Model

Note. Adapted from Schleier (2021) and Xiao et al. (2018).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

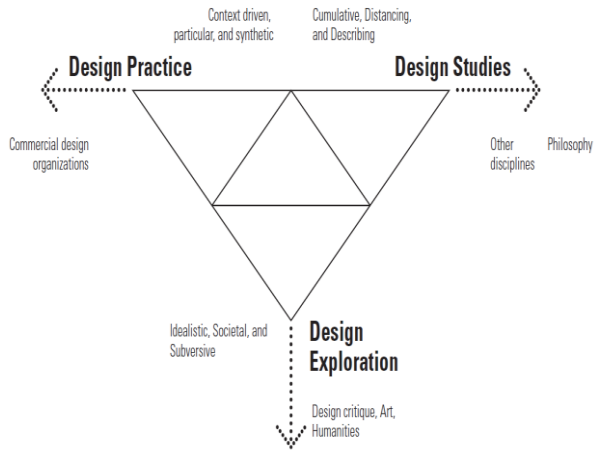
According to Fallman (2008), the activities outlined in the three extremes are defined as the research design. Design Practices – The researcher must have a specific design research question in mind. The scope of a research question might range from "reflective" to "proactive."

Research Exploration - Design exploration attempts to test and pose concepts and stimulate, criticize, and experiment with them. Design exploration produces artifacts that are frequently societal and occasionally even revolutionary. In contracts, the researcher reviews this section's prior findings and factors. Then, using past theories and alternative foundations, analyze and provoke the conclusions to make space for the research design.

Design Studies - Design studies are usually involved in analytical work and continuing discussions regarding design theory, design methodology, and design history.

Figure 3

The Model of Interaction Design Research in Its Most Basic Form



Note. Adapted from Fallman (2008).

With the direction of the above-stated model, this study was designed to investigate the impact of social brand activism in advertising on the perceived brand attitude of millennials and generation z consumers concerning cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka.

4.2. Research Approach

This research used the quantitative research approach to investigate the impact of social brand activism in advertising on the perceived brand attitude of millennials and generation z consumers concerning cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka.

4.3. Research Method

The survey method can be identified as a mechanism for formulating and executing measurements using a pre-designed questionnaire and interviews (Connaway & Powell, 2010; Rahi, 2017). As a result, the survey research method was chosen as the best method for this study.

4.4. Research Population and Sampling

4.4.1.Population and sample

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), the population is "the total group of people, events, or items of interest that the researcher aimed to investigate.”. The sample is the proportion of the population that is examined to represent the entire population (Rahi, 2017). According to this study, the population can be identified as Millennials and Generation Z consumers in Sri Lanka. As the proportion of the population, this study selected Millennials and Generation Z consumer groups who live in the western province based on the three reports related to three major social issues investigated in the first chapter of the study.

4.4.2.Sample Size

150 consumers representing Millennials and Generation Z consumers traveling using the bus as public transportation from three selected police divisions were identified as the sample size for this study.

4.4.3.Sampling Technique

Table 2

Annually Reported Suicide Cases in the Western Province of Sri Lanka

Police division	2018 Male	2018 Female	2018 Total	2019 Male	2019 Female	2019 Total	2020 Male	2020 Female	2020 Total
Colombo North	19	8	27	29	10	39	31	2	33
Colombo South	19	7	26	15	3	18	12	2	14
Colombo Central	14	0	14	12	4	16	11	0	11
Kelaniya	69	13	82	37	12	49	37	12	49
Negombo	87	13	100	86	18	104	88	22	110
Gampaha	115	15	130	109	24	133	111	16	127
Nugegoda	85	31	116	73	16	89	59	11	70
Panadura	43	5	48	46	7	53	59	6	65
Kalutara	59	15	74	77	10	87	67	14	81
Mount Lavinia	44	6	50	60	13	73	35	14	49
Total	554	113	667	544	117	661	510	99	609

Note. Data source: Sri Lanka Police, Crime Intelligence, Analyzing and Preventive Division, No. 145, Main Road, Battaramulla; field survey 2022. Sex-specific subheadings are inferred from the three-value pattern within each year in the source table.

Therefore, following the multi-stage stratified sampling technique, the Western Province is chosen among other provinces in the first stage. In the second stage, three Districts of the Western provinces were selected. In the third stage, three major police divisions of the Western Province: Kaluthara, Negombo, and Gampaha, were identified as the highest cases reporting police divisions in the year 2020. according to that, the sample of 150 respondents from the three police divisions was randomly selected. In the final stage, a sample of respondents from the three police divisions was chosen using a systematic sampling method, which included choosing three passengers from a bus that arrived every fifteen minutes at the major bus stops of the three police divisions between the time 7 am to 6 pm at different time slots.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Reliability Statistics

Table 3

Reliability Statistics for the Overall Model

Cronbach's α	Cronbach's α based on standardized items	Number of items
.959	.960	37

Note. Based on SPSS output from the 2022 survey data.

Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be.959, which is more than 0.7 in this study. As a result, this reliability analysis shows that the questionnaire is generally reliable and that the items utilized in this research have internal consistency since the value is more significant than 0.7.

Table 4

Reliability Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Cronbach's α	Standardized α	Number of items
Information credibility	.897	.900	5
Celebrity trustworthiness	.931	.930	5
Perceived argument quality	.874	.876	5
Issue involvement	.839	.875	5
Perceived authenticity	.814	.819	5
Brand cause fit	.920	.921	4
Perceived brand attitude	.954	.955	8

Note. Based on SPSS output from the 2022 survey data. The source table's label "Brand Course Fit" was standardized to "Brand Cause Fit" to match the construct used throughout the article.

Cronbach's alpha is greater than 0.7 for all independent and dependent variables. It means that each of the variables utilized in this research has high internal consistency**.**

5.2. Summary of Karl Pearson's Correlation Analysis

Table 5

Summary of Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	r	Relationship
Social brand activism in advertising and perceived brand attitude	.709	Strong positive
Information credibility and perceived brand attitude	.420	Moderate positive
Celebrity trustworthiness and perceived brand attitude	.549	Strong positive
Perceived argument quality and perceived brand attitude	.551	Strong positive
Issue involvement and perceived brand attitude	.670	Strong positive
Perceived authenticity and perceived brand attitude	.736	Strong positive
Brand cause fit and perceived brand attitude	.630	Strong positive

Note. Based on SPSS output from the 2022 survey data.

According to Karl Pearson's Correlation Analysis, the above results show that the Perceived Brand Attitude of millennials and generation Z consumers of cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka is strongly positively related to Perceived Authenticity than Celebrity Trustworthiness, Perceived Argument Quality, Issue Involvement, and Brand Cause Fit. Moreover, Perceived Brand Attitude is moderately positively related to Information Credibility

5.3. Regression Analysis

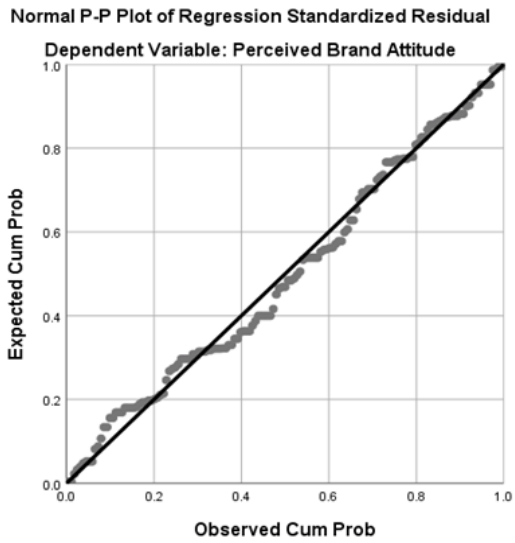
5.3.1. Assumption of Normality test

Regression suggests that data should be normally distributed under this assumption. In this study, data were normally distributed by verifying the P-value as .000, thus supporting the first assumption. The graphical implication of the normally distributed data is shown in the following figure. z

As seen in the diagram above, the residuals are scattered toward the linear line. As a result, it has been shown that residuals are normally distributed in this study. In addition, the standardized residual of the regression analysis has a normal distribution. As a result, the assumption of normality is satisfied.

Figure 4

Normality Test



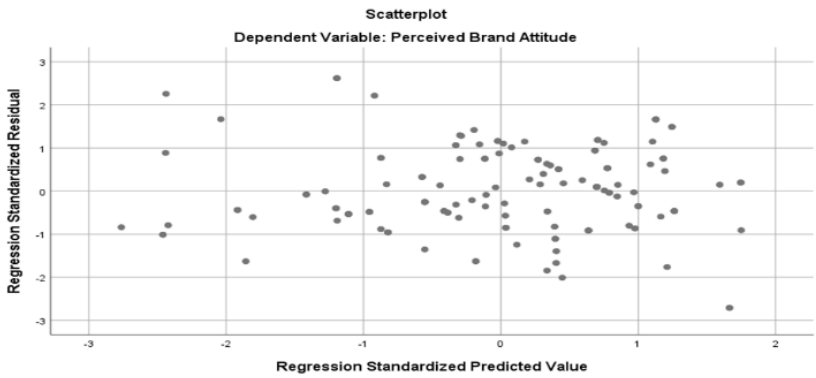
Note. Based on SPSS output from survey data (2022).

5.3.2. Assumption of Homoscedasticity test

When the variance of the error term in the regression model is constant, the homoscedasticity assumption is satisfied. When the variance of the error term remains constant, the model is well specified. According to this research, no distinctive pattern emerged when disseminating data. As a result, it has been determined that there is no significant influence on the form of residuals. As a result, the assumption of homoscedasticity has been met. The graphical representation of this analysis is shown in the following figure, which is unaffected by heteroscedasticity.

Figure 5

Homoscedasticity Test



Note. Based on SPSS output from survey data (2022).

5.4. Assumption of Multi Collinearity

Table 6

Multicollinearity Diagnostics

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF
Information credibility	.355	2.817
Celebrity trustworthiness	.414	2.417
Perceived argument quality	.233	4.295
Issue involvement	.237	4.214
Perceived authenticity	.349	2.868
Brand cause fit	.486	2.057

Note. Dependent variable: perceived brand attitude. Based on SPSS output from the 2022 survey data.

A multicollinearity diagnostic was used to determine whether or not independent variables are highly correlated. The Pearson correlation coefficients from the inter-correlation matrix were less than 0.90, tolerance values and Variance Inflation Factors were determined to be greater than 0.2, and VIF values were less than 5. As a result, the Tolerance and VIF values are both within the predicted range, preventing multicollinearity.

5.5. Assumption of Autocorrelation

Table 7

Durbin-Watson Test for Autocorrelation

Model	Durbin-Watson
1	2.167

Note. Predictors: brand cause fit, information credibility, celebrity trustworthiness, perceived authenticity, issue involvement, and perceived argument quality. Dependent variable: perceived brand attitude.

The Durbin-Watson value of the model was used to determine the study's autocorrelation assumption. The autocorrelation in the residuals was identified using the Durbin-Watson value. When it comes to the Durbin-Watson value rule, 1.5 to 2.5 is acceptable. The result of 2 or close to 2 indicates that the obtained data is free of autocorrelation. The Durbin-Watson score in this research is 2.167, which is 2. The Durbin-Watson value has shown that the given data may be used for regression analysis.

6. Discussion of the Hypothesis testing

This study has tested the hypothesis to identify the impact of social brand activism in advertising on the perceived brand attitude of millennials and generation z consumers concerning cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka. Information Credibility, Celebrity Trustworthiness, Perceived Argument Quality, Issue Involvement, Perceived Authenticity, and Brand Cause Fit were all assessed as part of the social brand activism in advertising to measure the impact of social brand activism in advertising on the perceived brand attitude of millennials and generation z consumers concerning cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka. All of the hypotheses were found to fail to reject based on the evidence presented. Simple linear regression has been performed to measure all hypotheses according to the study's hypotheses. A summary of the hypothesis testing can be shown in the chart below.

Table 8

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Decision
H1	Social brand activism in advertising significantly impacts perceived brand attitude.	Fail to reject (accepted)

Hypothesis	Statement	Decision
H2	Information credibility significantly impacts perceived brand attitude.	Fail to reject (accepted)
H3	Celebrity trustworthiness significantly impacts perceived brand attitude.	Fail to reject (accepted)
H4	Perceived argument quality significantly impacts perceived brand attitude.	Fail to reject (accepted)
H5	Issue involvement significantly impacts perceived brand attitude.	Fail to reject (accepted)
H6	Perceived authenticity significantly impacts perceived brand attitude.	Fail to reject (accepted)
H7	Brand cause fit significantly impacts perceived brand attitude.	Fail to reject (accepted)

Note. Based on SPSS output from the 2022 survey data. Decisions are reproduced from the source article.

7. Discussion of the objective

Objective; To investigate the impact of social brand activism in advertising on the perceived brand attitude of millennials and generation z consumers concerning cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka. This study was constructed based on past literature to achieve the stated objective. Brand Activism can be divided into six categories, (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017): Social Activism, Political Activism, Environmental Activism, Economic Activism, Workplace Activism, and Legal Activism. As a result, the focus of this study was on how Brand Activist advertising campaigns impact consumers' brand attitudes, particularly concerning three critical social concerns relevant to Sri Lanka's current social context. It has primarily employed the simple linear regression analysis model to achieve the study's objective. Further, the study employed Karl Pearson's Correlation Analysis to discover the link between the variables before determining the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable. According to the correlation analysis, all of the independent variables have a positive correlation with the dependent variable. The Perceived Brand Attitude has a strong positive correlation with Social Brand Activism (.709). Credibility has a moderately positive correlation with the perceived brand attitude (.420). At the same time, Celebrity Trustworthiness, Perceived Argument Quality, Issue Involvement, Perceived Authenticity, and Brand Cause Fit have strong correlations with the perceived brand attitude, with Karl Pearson's Correlation values

of (0.549), (0.551), (0.670), (0.736), (0.630) respectively. Using simple linear regression, the research found that if the social brand activism in advertising value is zero, millennials and Generation Z consumers' perceived brand attitude toward cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka is 0.729. Furthermore, according to this research, if the beauty and cosmetics industry in Sri Lanka enhanced social brand activism by one point, Millennials and generation z consumers' perceived brand attitude would improve by 0.784 points. As a result, it has been highlighted that social brand activism in advertising positively impacts Millennials and Generation Z consumers' perceived brand attitude toward cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, social brand activism in advertising has accounted for 57.5 percent of the overall brand attitude. As a result, there is a more significant percentage of the impact of social brand activism in advertising on Millennials and Generation Z consumers' brand attitudes towards cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka. The statistical findings show the P-value for social brand activism in advertising.000, indicating that it has a significant impact on Millennials and Generation Z consumers of cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, this study used simple linear regression to determine the impact of six sub-variables of social brand activism in advertising (Information Credibility, Celebrity Trustworthiness, Perceived Argument Quality, Issue Involvement, Perceived Authenticity, and Brand Cause Fit) on the perceived brand attitude of millennials and generation z consumers concerning cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka.

The Results correspondently showed that the impacts of variables, including Celebrity Trustworthiness, Perceived Argument Quality, Issue Involvement, Perceived Authenticity, and Brand Cause Fit on the perceived brand attitude of Millennials and Generation Z consumers, have strong positive impacts concerning the cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka. In contrast, Information Credibility has a moderately positive impact on perceived brand attitude. Statistics showed that when Information Credibility, Celebrity Trustworthiness, Perceived Argument Quality, Issue Involvement, Perceived Authenticity, and Brand Cause Fit increased by one point, it improved perceived brand attitude by 0.365, 0.541, 0.483, 0.585, 0.68, 0.673, respectively. It has been indicated that Perceived Authenticity, Brand Cause Fit, Issue Involvement, and Celebrity Trustworthiness have a significantly high impact on the perceived brand attitude than Information Credibility and perceived argument quality.

Considering the R Square values, two variables, Perceived Authenticity, and Issue Involvement values, are indicated as 0.598 and 0.506, respectively, which are greater than 0.5, which means that these two variables accounted for more than 50% of perceived brand attitude. Further, the impact of all variables on the perceived brand attitude has been significant at the level of .000. When considering cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka, the study proved that Social Brand Activism in Advertising significantly impacts the perceived brand attitude of Millennials and Generation Z consumers. The dimensions of social brand activism in advertising, including Information Credibility, Celebrity Trustworthiness, Perceived Argument Quality, Issue Involvement, Perceived Authenticity, and Brand Cause Fit, should be given proper consideration because every dimension has a significant impact on the perceived brand attitude of Millennials and Generation Z consumers. Under the social brand activism dimensions relatively higher proportion of perceived brand attitude has been described by the perceived authenticity and issue involvement than the other four variables. At the same time, improving one point of perceived authenticity increases the higher amount of perceived brand attitude of Millennials and Generation Z consumers in Sri Lanka.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the dimensions of social brand activism in advertising, including Information Credibility, Celebrity Trustworthiness, Perceived Argument Quality, Issue Involvement, Perceived Authenticity, and Brand Cause Fit, should be given proper consideration since Every dimension has a significant impact on the perceived brand attitude of Millennials and Generation Z consumers. Results also showed that a higher proportion of perceived brand attitude has been described by the perceived authenticity and issue involvement than the other four variables. At the same time, improving one point of perceived authenticity increases the higher amount of perceived brand attitude of Millennials and Generation Z consumers in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it has been indicated that there should be a priority for the variables such as Perceived authenticity and issue involvement while also addressing the other four variables when developing brand activist campaigns by beauty and cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka.

9. Implications

9.1. Theoretical Implications

Brand Activism is a relatively new concept introduced by (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017), which has evolved from the concepts of Cause-Related Marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility. As a result, scholars highlighted an emerging need for studies related to the field of Brand Activism. With that, the study has added more knowledge to the existing knowledge by analyzing specifically the impact of social brand activism in advertising on the perceived brand attitude of millennials and Generation Z consumers concerning cosmetics Brands in Sri Lanka. Instead of measuring the mediating or moderating effects, this research has measured the direct impact of all six variables. Moreover, it showed that all six variables positively impact the perceived brand attitude of young consumers. In addition, this has tested Celebrity trustworthiness as a dimension of Social Brand Activism for the first time within social brand activism. Furthermore, it also has shown a positive impact on perceived brand attitude. As a result, this study was able to fill in the gaps that earlier studies had found. Moreover, these findings will be beneficial for further studies emerging related to the field of Brand Activism.

9.2. Managerial Implications

This research gives scholars, Brand Managers, Policy Makers, Advertisers, Advertising Agents, and campaign planners interested in strategic communication a cause to dive more into the new phenomena of social brand activism. Because brand activism is a relatively new approach to reaching out to target audiences while advocating for social change or movement, it has the potential to improve the strategic communication of a brand. The majority of young customers are worried about socio-political concerns such as investigated issues: Sexual Harassment, Suicides, and Gender Inequality and want firms to communicate about these issues. However, when exhibiting a high congruence with the conveyed issue, companies that fight for social issues seem to be favored among young customers, including Millennials and Generation Z consumers.

10. Recommendations of the Study

It can make some recommendations based on the findings and discussion. The research showed success since the primary hypothesis was accepted within the study. If companies use social brand activism campaigns to drive the favorable brand attitude of young consumers about cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka, the study proved to be a success. Additionally, brand managers must carefully manage these dimensions (which include Information Credibility, Celebrity Trustworthiness, Perceived Argument Quality, Issue Involvement, Perceived Authenticity, and Brand Cause Fit), with perceived authenticity and consumer issue involvement taking precedence. It will result in a favorable shift in young customers' attitudes toward cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, in light of Sri Lanka's present situation, when a time that there are emerging socio-political issues in Sri Lanka, these brand activism-related experiments and campaigns are necessary, and there is an indication that these initiatives will benefit brands by enhancing customers' brand attitudes toward their respective brands while promoting social change.

11. Directions for future research

This study has investigated the Impact of social brand activism in advertising on the perceived brand attitude of Millennials and Generation Z consumers concerning cosmetics brands in Sri Lanka. Therefore, future research should compare attitudes among young consumers and older generations since they are also exposed to brand activism. In addition, this research only focused on social brand activism as a subcategory of brand activism. Future study is required to examine and analyze various types of brand activism, such as environmental brand activism, political brand activism, legal brand activism, corporate brand activism, and so on, with a particular emphasis on developing countries. Moreover, this research looked at the impact of social brand activism in advertising on perceived brand attitude in Sri Lankan cosmetics brands. However, given the country's present state, powerful brands from many sectors, such as apparel and textiles, telecommunications, food, and beverage, are participating in these brand activist campaigns. Therefore, future academics should concentrate on these brands rather than cosmetics.

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