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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dimensions of Brand Activism as Predictors of Customer Purchase Intention: A Study of Multinational Brands in Nigeria

Stanley Akpevwe Onobrakpeya[1*], **Ilelinachi Chimbuzor Obialor**[2], **& Omodafe, U. Philomena**[2]

[1]*Department of Marketing, Federal Polytechnic Orogun, Delta State*
[2]*Department of Marketing, Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-uku*
***Corresponding author:** akpevwestanley@gmail.com*

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Abstract

The research evaluated the effect of brand activism on customer purchase intention toward multinational companies' products in South-West Nigeria. The research adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The study's population was limited to customers of multinational companies in South-West Nigeria. The sample size of 384 participants was selected for the study. It was determined using the Cochran formula. The study used the judgmental sampling technique. The data for this study were generated from the primary source through the use of a structured questionnaire. The study used internal consistency reliability. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques in order to arrive at a conclusion. The findings revealed that value-driven communications have a positive and significant effect on customer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.139$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that ethical and value-based messaging can influence consumers, though with a relatively modest impact. Brand authenticity emerged as the strongest predictor of customer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.721$, $p < 0.05$), underscoring the critical role of perceived sincerity, consistency, and credibility in shaping consumer trust and emotional attachment. In contrast, woke-washing was found to have a negative and significant effect on customer purchase intention ($\beta = -0.080$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that consumers penalize brands perceived to engage in superficial or insincere activism. The study concludes that while value-driven communications are important, authentic and consistent brand activism is far more influential in driving purchase intentions, whereas woke-washing undermines trust and weakens brand–consumer relationships. It therefore recommends that multinational companies

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align activism messages with tangible actions, prioritize authenticity, and ensure transparency and long-term commitment to social causes to enhance customer purchase intention.

Keywords: *Brand Activism, Customer Purchase Intention, Multinational Brands*

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era where neutrality is increasingly viewed as complicity, brand activism has emerged as a transformative shift in the relationship between business and society. Brand activism has surged in prominence since it enables brands to publicly articulate their stance on contentious sociopolitical matters. Moorman (2020) asserts that brands can be regarded as political agents that deliberately and thoughtfully engage with societal issues. Brand activism aims to enhance a company's performance by increasing profits, building brand image, and fostering consumer loyalty. Additionally, it seeks to promote social transformation (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Research indicates that effective brand activism strategies can have several positive outcomes (Berestova et al., 2022; Herzberg & Rudeloff, 2022). These include increased market and company value, higher sales volume, improved brand perception, online visibility, purchase intention, customer loyalty, increased consumer readiness to pay a premium, and intensified consumer appreciation, admiration, and advocacy. Herzberg and Rudeloff (2022) discovered that decision-makers exhibiting boldness through engagement in brand activism are more inclined to attain rewards.

The connection between consumers and brands increasingly relies on the alignment of the brand's declared purpose with the consumer's fundamental values (Williams et al., 2022). A brand activism advertising strategy acknowledges that consumers are increasingly attracted to brands that resonate with their important life goals, offering brands an opportunity to engage with consumers on contentious issues and debates (Fletcher-Brown et al., 2024). Studies indicate that engagement in social or political causes offers distinct benefits, including market differentiation (Middleton & Turnbull, 2021), enhanced likelihood of purchase (Moorman, 2020; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018), and increased brand support (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010).

With the erosion of consumer trust in governments, brands are expected to undertake increased civic duties (Edelman, 2019) by actively addressing social issues (Cone Communications, 2017; Schmidt et al., 2022) instead of merely focusing on profit maximisation. Currently, consumers make purchase decisions not just based on products and prices but also on the values and ideals embodied by the brand (Barton et al., 2018). Gen Z and Millennials, born between 1981 and 2012, anticipate that corporations would attentively address their problems and publicly articulate their stance on controversial matters (Edelman, 2021; Title, 2020). Due to the intrinsic scepticism of young consumers regarding corporate ethics (Chatzopoulou & de Kiewiet, 2021), brand activism is now an essential strategy for achieving this vital goal. However, this business strategy carries inherent risks, as consumers scrutinise brands for their underlying intentions (Barton et al., 2018). Consumer confidence may diminish if they view a product or brand as inauthentic and predominantly motivated by profit. Nike encountered public reproach for their endorsement of the "Black Lives Matter" movement due to inconsistency in its activities, as the corporation lacked any Black Board members (Ritson, 2020). Consequently, by understanding the implications of this position, a company can select the causes that align most effectively with their interests.

Notwithstanding certain discrepancies between the brand and the cause, along with a lack of proficiency in pro-social business practices, message, purpose, and values, the brand garnered a lot of reactions from consumers (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Despite receiving negative consumer reactions, the company's campaign ultimately attained considerable success. The company witnessed a notable 31% surge in online sales. Furthermore, it acquired significant earned media and free PR, valued at around 43 million dollars (Sterling, 2018).

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the effect of brand activism on customer purchase intentions for products of multinational companies in Nigeria. The study's specific objectives are to:

- RO1: assess the effect of value-driven communications on customer purchase intentions for products of multinational companies.

- RO2: evaluate the effect of brand authenticity on customer purchase intentions for products of multinational companies.
- RO3: determine the effect of woke-washing on customer purchase intentions for products of multinational companies.

The study results will assist global companies in formulating more efficacious and genuine activism initiatives that appeal with consumers and cultivate enduring brand loyalty. Understanding the distinctions between authentic brand activism and woke-washing can assist organisations in developing significant and effective campaigns that promote beneficial consumer behaviour.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Conceptual Review

2.2. Concept of Brand Activism

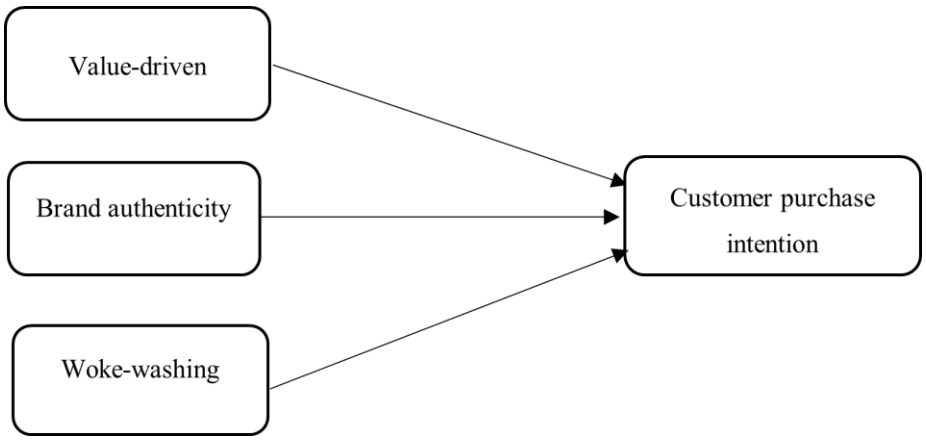
Brand activism denotes a company's initiatives to advocate for or endorse social, environmental, economic, or political causes. Advertising efforts emphasising relevant social and ecological concerns that resonate with consumers have gained prominence in marketing strategies (Dahlén & Rosengren, 2016). Moorman (2020) characterises corporate political manifestations as public discourses or actions, focused on partisan issues, conducted by a company or on its behalf, utilising its corporate or individual brand identity. A social movement of concerned citizens (consumers) typically generates these expressions. Nalick et al. (2016) identify these factors as major social challenges that persist unaddressed and incite controversial disputes among diverse societal groups and institutions. Vredenburg et al. (2020) define brand activism as a strategic approach wherein a brand adopts a non-neutral stance on socially and politically contentious subjects to effectuate social change and attain marketing success. For brand activism to be effective, it is essential that its components such as its objectives, values, sociopolitical message, and business practices are aligned. This alignment must consider the relevant context, since certain reasons may be more problematic than others (Mirzaei et al., 2022). Brand activism functions as a bridge between the

marketplace and society by merging thoughts and actions as a strategic policy (Nassar et al., 2021).

Brand activism denotes the public endorsement or dissent over contentious social or political issues by a brand or an affiliated individual (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). Brand activism emerges when a company or brand publicly endorses a social, economic, environmental, cultural, or political cause that aligns with its core values and long-term objectives (Shetty et al., 2019). Brand activism is a predominant corporate strategy in which brands publicly articulate their views on what they consider advantageous for society (Cian et al., 2018). Schmidt et al. (2022) assert that firms and brands may possess diverse incentives for adopting a stance on an issue. Motivations may encompass alignment with fundamental values and the founder's vision, pursuit of favourable publicity, enhancement of financial performance, or additional variables (Hodge, 2020). Brand activism includes many acts, such as publicly articulating a position, championing a cause, providing financial support, and employing cause-related messaging in marketing and advertising initiatives. This form of activism not only attracts the attention of the target consumer demographic but also engenders considerable recognition for the enterprise (Shetty et al., 2019). Furthermore, activism enhances companies and brands by positively impacting their financial performance, reinforcing consumer loyalty, and aligning with customers who share analogous values and ideas. Sarkar and Kotler (2018) contend that brand activism represents an evolution beyond values-driven corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) efforts. Moreover, they contend that CSR and ESG, which predominantly concentrate on companies and markets, lack the requisite urgency and boldness to challenge the existing status quo, including entrenched value systems and customs, within the majority of firms. Brand activism, unlike corporate social responsibility (CSR), focusses on tackling the most urgent and significant issues facing society. It involves adopting a position on contentious social or political matters that remain unresolved throughout society. Brand activism differs from corporate social responsibility, which is regarded as less controversial and mostly concentrates on non-polarizing, advantageous issues like as disaster relief or community engagement (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020).

Brand activism can offer substantial opportunities for companies. Moorman (2020) asserted that brand activism is a strategic method, enabling brands to position themselves as political entities. Adopting a brand activism strategy can augment brand equity over an extended duration (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Furthermore, it helps to distinguish the company from competitors that decides to be in a neutral position (Moorman, 2020). Wettstein and Baur (2016) asserted that three characteristics are essential for effectively arguing for a cause: consistency, plausibility, and authenticity. Consistency signifies that the matter is in accordance with the company's principles. Plausibility signifies that the selected causes constitute a long-term commitment. Authenticity signifies that endorsing a cause necessitates tangible actions rather than mere rhetoric. The notion of "walking the talk" pertains to the fundamental prerequisites for authentic brand activism behaviours (Sibai et al., 2021). Figure 1 illustrates how the components of brand activism, including value-driven communications, brand authenticity, and woke-washing, affect customer purchase intention.

Figure 1
Dimensions of Brand Activism



Source: Authors Desk Research

2.3. Value-driven Communications and Customer Purchase Intention

Value-driven communications are marketing messages and campaigns that embody the fundamental values and principles of a firm. These communications extend beyond product and service promotion to champion causes that reflect the company's values and resonate with

its audience. Brands that effectively engage their target audience can enhance brand loyalty and provoke favourable customer reactions by establishing trust and credibility using social media, advertising, public relations, and cause-related marketing. Companies may use product labels, displays, or posters at the point of sale to effectively convey information to consumers and endeavour to persuade them (Omodafe & Onobrakpeya, 2020). Brand activism employs a communication strategy whereby a brand adopts a definitive stance on socially and politically contentious issues, such as same-sex marriage or gun regulation, in alignment with its values and mission (Bhagwat et al., 2020). Brand activism predominantly manifests through communication initiatives, including cause-related advertising and campaigns (Eyada, 2020). At present, social media significantly enhances communication and facilitates action (Murthy, 2018). These channels function as venues for political and social dialogue, enabling people to articulate their individual perspectives freely. This cultivates a unified collective identity, hence enhancing the recruitment and mobilisation of individuals who endorse the same cause (Chon & Park, 2020). Before marketing a product, companies acknowledge that consumers need information regarding both product use and the benefits of purchasing it, as well as its implications (Omodafe & Onobrakpeya, 2022). Social media platforms offer avenues for engagement that enable activist businesses to demonstrate the authenticity of their mission (Sibai et al., 2021). By actively engaging with the community and resolving their concerns, the brand can augment the authenticity of its objective. This can be accomplished by cultivating relationships and promoting social engagement in a concrete manner (Kampf, 2018). Moreover, by leveraging several social media platforms, the activist brand can adeptly customise its message to meet the transparency standards required to showcase its efforts (Korschun, 2021). For example, via corporate blogs and websites, the activist brand can present concrete evidence of its acts and underscore the expression of its ideas and values, while also supplying verifiable proof of its endeavours.

Demonstrating authentic commitment can sometimes be problematic. Brands that take a definitive stance on specific topics frequently encounter heightened scrutiny of their conduct (Carlos & Lewis, 2018). An activist brand must engage in significant and potentially more forceful initiatives capable of effecting rapid change (Eilert & Cherup, 2020). Furthermore, it must diligently pursue the common good (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). Therefore, if a company

promotes diversity and racial equality, it is essential that these ideas are reflected in the demographic composition of its workforce. In a corporate environment, when brand activism aims to modify attitudes and behaviours to tackle an issue, firms might implement several efforts directed at diverse institutional stakeholders. The aim is to apply pressure and effect change by swaying these stakeholders. Consumers frequently establish an emotional connection with brands that support causes they endorse, increasing their likelihood of selecting these products over alternatives. Value-driven communications enable firms to differentiate themselves in a saturated market by highlighting their dedication to significant issues, thereby appealing to consumers who prioritise these values in their buying choices. Value-driven communications serve as signals that convey a brand's ethical stance and social responsibility, helping consumers form favorable perceptions. However, the influence of such communications depends on their clarity and consistency, as consumers increasingly evaluate whether these messages reflect genuine commitment or mere promotional intent.

2.4. Brand Authenticity and Customer Purchase Intention

Brand authenticity denotes the view of a brand as real, transparent, and aligned with its declared values and objective. Authenticity is essential for establishing trust and emotional bonds with consumers. Consumers are more inclined to endorse firms they see as authentically dedicated to the causes they advocate. Recognising the authenticity of brand activism leads to a more substantial positive impact on brand equity and an enhanced ability to facilitate essential social change. Genuine brand activism is considered the most effective form of brand activism, since it maximises brand value while minimising costs and complications related to brand choice (Vredenburg et al., 2020). To preserve authenticity, it is imperative that brand declarations and corporate strategy are congruent (Lyon et al., 2018). Schmidt et al. (2022) found that brand activism can cultivate emotional connections only when perceived as more than basic communication. Nonetheless, while the alignment between practice and message is important, it is inadequate on its own to ensure authenticity. Vredenburg et al. (2020) assert that to create a comprehensive system, it is crucial to synchronise four fundamental elements: purpose, values, message, and practice.

Numerous scholars in the literature have investigated the notion of brand authenticity, linking it to factors such as a brand's history, origin, production methods, credibility, and ethical issues (Bruhn et al., 2012; Morhart et al., 2015). According to Mirzaei et al. (2022), six elements are deemed legitimate in brand activism: social context independence (campaigns unaffected by current social issues); inclusion (messages that are impartial concerning gender, race, age, and political issues); sacrifice (a brand's readiness to relinquish profit in favour of a cause); practice (the degree to which brands adhere to their proclaimed values); and fit (the congruence between the brand: To be regarded as genuine in their pursuit of social change, firms must consistently align their publicly stated objectives with their actual conduct. Before incorporating social issues into their positioning strategy, it is essential for them to possess a comprehensive understanding of how to effectively address these challenges (Champlin et al., 2019). In activism, the notion of authenticity is significantly contingent upon the personal commitment of CEOs to the social issues being addressed. To effectively include employees and stakeholders in promoting a cause, it is essential to maintain consistency in addressing social issues and ensure that all corporate policies and decisions fit with these social objectives (Chatterji & Toffel, 2018). Genuine brands cultivate loyalty since consumers are certain that the brand's actions and commitments are sincere. Authenticity elevates the brand's overall perception, increasing customer propensity for support. Consumers frequently prioritise authenticity to such an extent that they are prepared to pay a premium for products from companies they regard as real and trustworthy. When brand values, corporate practices, and activist claims are aligned, consumers are more likely to develop trust and emotional attachment to the brand. Authenticity therefore strengthens confidence in purchase decisions, as consumers believe the brand's engagement with social causes is driven by genuine concern rather than opportunistic motives.

2.5. Woke-washing and Customer Purchase Intention

Woke-washing refers to corporations that partake in superficial or disingenuous activism primarily for marketing and public relations, without a serious dedication to the causes they profess to endorse. When consumers view a company's activity as disingenuous or exploitative, it may result in scepticism and a reduction in purchase intent. Conversely, brand activism is perceived as insincere when companies lack a clearly articulated brand goal and

values, intentionally obscure their unethical activities, or do not exhibit sufficient prosocial corporate activity. Consequently, the existence of disingenuous brand activism may undermine consumer confidence and create adverse brand associations. Brands in this context are participating in "woke washing," denoting the discrepancy between a brand's declarations of activism and its genuine ideals, objectives, and behaviours (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Mirzaei et al. (2022) provide two examples: the advertisements of Gillette and Nike. Both examples include brands being accused of opportunism as they seek financial advantage by addressing societal issues, mostly to enhance profitability. When brand activist messages in the media are inconsistent with their actual behaviours, when brands neglect to implement substantive pro-social corporate practices, or when they intentionally obscure the absence of such practices, it can be characterised as an inauthentic form of brand activism referred to as "woke washing" (Sobande, 2020). The term "woke" derives from African American culture and signifies social consciousness. Woke washing denotes brands that exhibit ambiguous or unclear conduct about social practices while actively marketing themselves as socially and politically involved, often lacking a comprehensive understanding of the relevant topics. Frequently, these businesses engage in socio-political movements solely due to perceived pressure or the necessity to satisfy commercial expectations. Consequently, their communications grow estranged from their authentic purpose, beliefs, and organisational practices (Campbell, 2007). This opportunistic engagement may result in the view of brand activism as disingenuous, inauthentic, or misleading.

Consequently, it is expected that a brand activism strategy demonstrating a robust alignment between the brand and the cause, alongside a significant degree of authenticity (termed Authentic Brand Activism), will be more likely to succeed than an activist strategy characterised by misalignment and minimal authenticity (referred to as woke washing). Nonetheless, even if brand activism constitutes a sincere element of an organization's strategic objectives, consumer perception of the virtue-signaling initiatives as inauthentic may lead to detrimental consequences for the brand, including backlash or boycotts (Mirzaei et al., 2022). Nike saw public backlash for endorsing the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, attributed to the company's insufficient board diversity, as highlighted by critics (Ritson, 2020). The company encountered accusations of "woke washing" and received criticism for participating

in disingenuous brand activism. Brands exposed as insincere in their dedication to brand activism frequently face allegations of employing misleading marketing tactics (Eccles & Serafeim, 2013), thus undermining previously harmonious brand-consumer relationships (Ozanne & Murray, 1995). Sceptical customers may collaborate to scrutinise marketing methods (Minocher, 2019). Disenchanted customers are prone to disseminating their adverse experiences, exacerbating the harm to the brand's reputation. Consumers are less inclined to purchase from brands they view as deceitful or manipulative, resulting in decreased sales and diminished consumer loyalty. When consumers perceive brand activism as superficial or insincere, it generates skepticism and erodes trust in the brand. Such perceptions lead consumers to attribute the brand's actions to self-serving motives, which can weaken brand–consumer relationships and discourage purchasing. This finding highlights that insincere activism not only fails to enhance purchase intentions but can also harm a brand's credibility and long-term consumer support.

2.6. Consumer Skepticism

Consumer scepticism denotes the doubt and mistrust that customers may possess regarding a brand's intentions, especially in relation to social and environmental initiatives (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Webb & Mohr, 1998). Previous studies have shown that sceptical customers are wary of woke-washing tactics (Feng et al., 2019; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Mohr et al. (1998) indicated that elevated consumer scepticism results in a more adverse reaction to initiatives within the realm of CRM. This unfavourable assessment stems from diminished brand credibility resulting from consumer scepticism regarding the company's intentions (Patel et al., 2017). When corporations assert a commitment to public-serving goals while primarily pursuing self-serving interests, consumer scepticism amplifies the negative effects of this inauthenticity on consumer attitudes (Sindhu, 2022; Wang & Bouroncle, 2023).

Scepticism, while safeguarding against false assertions and deceptive marketing methods, may also undermine the overall efficacy of marketing initiatives (Kim & Lee, 2009; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Consumers gradually acquire the ability to perceive and evaluate the objectives and strategies of persuasive agents, such as advertising firms, utilising this information to manage persuasive efforts and diminish their receptiveness to advertising

messages (Petrescu et al., 2019). Scepticism may diminish receptivity to advertising assertions (Kim & Lee, 2009; Obermiller et al., 2005), causing consumers to view corporate participation in cause-related initiatives as self-serving rather than really supportive of a cause (Manuel et al., 2014; Webb & Mohr, 1998).

Obermiller et al. (2005) assert that highly sceptical consumers exhibit diminished attention towards commercials, particularly those that are informational rather than emotional. This negligence does not arise from diminished interest in the cause or in comprehending corporations' actual conduct. A critical consumer attitude enhances the propensity to validate the veracity of advertising assertions (Obermiller et al., 2005). Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013) further asserted that sceptical consumers are not intrinsically less engaged; rather, they exhibit heightened sensitivity to negative information and are less inclined to disregard signs that a company's commitment to a cause may lack authenticity.

2.7. Theoretical Review

Signaling Theory

Signalling theory originates from information economics and addresses scenarios where buyers and sellers have asymmetric information during market interactions (Spence, 1974). Asymmetric information occurs when one party possesses more knowledge than others due to certain attributes being imperceptible (Van de Calseyde et al., 2014). Signalling theory elucidates how claims of environmental sustainability convey eco-friendly characteristics to customers (Walter et al., 2024). Ambiguous green signals foster scepticism and diminish credibility (Huh & Kim, 2024). Signalling theory elucidates how brands convey their ideals via activism. Public involvement in social issues serves as an indicator of corporate identity, aiding consumers in evaluating the brand's authenticity and ethical congruence. The efficacy of these signals relies on their clarity, consistency, and perceived authenticity, which subsequently affect customer perceptions and behaviours (Confetto et al., 2023; Francioni et al., 2025). Signalling theory elucidates how brand activism communications function as indicators that mitigate information asymmetry between multinational corporations and consumers in Nigeria. Value-driven communications convey a company's ethical position and societal responsibilities, aiding consumers in assessing the brand's legitimacy. Clear and

consistent signals build trust and favourably affect purchase intentions; conversely, ambiguous or inconsistent signals foster scepticism and diminish the efficacy of brand activism.

Self-Congruency Theory

Consumers are more inclined to view items or services as compatible with their self-concept when these offerings reflect values that resonate with their target consumers' self-concept, hence enhancing acceptance and purchase intent (Jin, 2025). The cognitive process of juxtaposing the representation of brands, products, or companies with one's self-image is referred to as self-congruity. Self-congruency denotes the extent to which a consumer views a brand or product as aligned with their self-image or personality (Stevens et al., 2023). Self-congruency theory posits that customers are predisposed to form favourable judgements and assessments of items or services that align with their self-concept (Hu et al., 2022). Self-congruency theory posits that customers can form emotional attachments to a brand, which is seen to possess a distinct personality or identity that resonates with the consumer's self-concept (Shafiee et al., 2022). Self-congruency theory connects brand authenticity to customer purchase intentions by highlighting the alignment of values between the brand and consumers' self-concept. Genuine brand activism that aligns with consumers' social and ethical ideals fosters emotional connection and positive brand assessments. Consequently, customers are increasingly inclined to acquire items from international corporations whose activism resonates with their identity and values.

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory is a domain of social psychology that seeks to elucidate how individuals ascertain the causes of events or behaviours, along with the implications of such attributions on their subsequent actions. Initially proposed by Heider (1958), the primary theoretical frameworks were subsequently advanced by Kelley (1967, 1973). Kelley posits that when analysing an individual's behaviour in response to a particular stimulus at a given moment, one can ascribe that behaviour to three distinct factors: the individual, the stimulus (termed the "entity" by Kelley), and/or the situational context (designated as "time" by Kelley). This form of attribution is based on the notion of covariance: "an effect is ascribed to one of its

potential causes with which it covaries over time (Kelley, 1973). Covariance is determined by three factors: consistency (does this individual consistently exhibit the same behaviour in response to analogous stimuli across different timeframes), consensus (do others exhibit similar behaviour when faced with comparable stimuli), and distinctiveness (does this individual demonstrate similar behaviour when confronted with diverse stimuli). Observers will ascribe the causes of another person's behaviour to either internal factors (pertaining to the individual) or external factors (associated with the stimulus or context), based on the levels of consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness. Attribution theory elucidates consumer responses to woke-washing by examining how customers discern the intentions of brand advocacy. When advocacy is viewed as disingenuous or commercially motivated, people ascribe it to ulterior intentions, diminishing trust and intention to purchase. In contrast, activism perceived as authentic and consistent fosters favourable perceptions, enhancing brand confidence and promoting purchasing choices.

2.8. Empirical Review

The experimental study by Walter et al. (2024), involving 278 individuals and centred on anti-racism, examines the influence of the method employed (genuine, woke washing, or neutral) on brand credibility. The findings demonstrate that a genuine brand purpose enhances brand trust, while woke washing adversely decreases it in comparison to a neutral stance. Moreover, cause involvement and customer scepticism moderate the association between the brand's purpose-driven strategy and brand credibility. Increased cause engagement and consumer scepticism lead to a more positive evaluation of firms with a genuine purpose-driven strategy and a more negative opinion of brands engaging in woke-washing. This underscores the significance of brands synchronising their behaviour with their proclaimed beliefs – that is, practicing what they advocate.

Guha and Korschun (2024) investigated the impact of peer activism on a brand's propensity to engage in social media activism. Through an analysis of tweets from 177 brands over five years, we have identified substantial evidence that brands actively monitor and react to social media activism from their counterparts, with these influences permeating all industries. The analysis concentrated on three major sociopolitical issues: Black Lives Matter, LGBTQIA

rights, and COVID-19 regulations. Furthermore, the findings validate the notion that brands monitor customer reactions to peer social media engagement to evaluate the implications of articulating a stance as well as the repercussions of maintaining silence. The findings suggest that brand managers, when evaluating the merits and drawbacks of engaging in social media activism, must meticulously monitor both the activism of competing firms and the rapid public reactions to such initiatives.

Moumade et al. (2024) examined the influence of brand legitimacy and psychological distance on the consumer-brand relationship in France, with a particular emphasis on brand activism. This study analysed two brand activism initiatives: one addressing social issues and the other pertaining to environmental concerns. The study protocol is qualitative and includes 36 individuals. The Online Album On-Line (AOL) method was employed with 24 participants, supplemented by 12 semi-structured interviews. This study reveals two mechanisms: an emotional process termed psychological distance and a cognitive mechanism referred to as brand validity. This study highlights the three essential dimensions of legitimacy: moral, cognitive, and pragmatic. Moreover, when customers view a brand as overly detached from the cause, they experience a sense of disconnection and question its legitimacy.

Confetto et al. (2023) performed a comparative analysis of brand activism about sustainable development goals within the beauty and personal care sector. This study aims to evaluate and compare the inclusive brands Dove and L'Oréal to comprehend their approaches to brand activism via corporate strategies, encompassing their articulated ideals, actions, and digital communication. The study emphasised that numerous activist techniques can attain success, provided they uphold steadfast and resolute principles. The findings demonstrate that, although utilising divergent activism strategies—one more communicative and the other less so—both companies attain success by embodying authentic and steadfast principles that are positively perceived by consumers.

Rivaroli et al. (2022) investigated the influence of customers' evaluations of a company's reputation, competence, credibility, and compassion on their brand trust and loyalty levels. This research focusses on the Italian brand "Libera Terra" ("Free Land"). The study utilised a

sample of 366 randomly selected supermarket shoppers, indicating that consumers' perceptions of brand performance significantly influence their levels of brand trust. Brand trust significantly influences consumer loyalty to the brand. This study confirms the necessity of aligning an organization's beliefs, business processes, and marketing strategies to attain effective and authentic brand activism. It underscores the imperative for firms to intentionally adopt brand activism and avoid participating in misleading "woke washing" methods.

Shetty et al. (2019) executed an empirical investigation about the perceptions of Indian millennials towards brand activism. The employed technique is HTAB (Hypothesise, Test, Action, Business). The sample comprised 286 respondents. The final dataset had 286 observations and 45 attributes categorised into seven groups. Studies indicate that millennials prefer to buy things from brands that are associated with a cause or purpose. Conversely, they are likely to withdraw their support for brands that exhibit unethical conduct. Moreover, it was observed that millennials display no gender discrepancy in their perspectives on brand advocacy. Moreover, individuals of the millennial generation, irrespective of their financial status, exhibit similar perspectives on brand involvement. Moreover, it has been established that millennials' emotional affiliation with a corporation advocating for a cause transcends fluctuations in pricing and brands espousing a political stance. Deliberately selecting themes and exhibiting disruptive behaviour elicits a pronounced negative response towards the brand and incites considerable backlash.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The selected research design for this study is the cross-sectional survey research design. Utilising cross-sectional surveys allowed the researchers to ascertain the real happenings within the organisation, rather than merely depending on reported data. Having a full awareness of the difficulties that companies are confronting is advantageous for developing a foundation or conducting preliminary research.

3.2. Population and Sample Size

The study's population was limited to customers of multinational companies in the South-West Nigeria. Respondents were identified as customers of multinational companies based on their self-reported patronage and usage of products or services offered by selected multinational companies within key sectors such as fast-moving consumer goods, telecommunications, and beverages. To ensure that only required respondents were included, a screening question was administered at the point of data collection to confirm that participants had purchased or used at least one product of a multinational company within a specified period prior to the survey.

In addition, data were collected at strategic locations where customers of multinational companies are most likely to be found, such as shopping malls, supermarkets, retail outlets, and commercial centres that stock or distribute multinational brands. This approach provided a practical basis for identifying eligible respondents and helped to ensure that participants had direct experience with multinational products, which was essential for providing informed responses to the study objectives.

The sample size of 384 participants was calculated using the Cochran (1977) formula, given the population size of the study is not known. It involves creating assumptions about the required level of precision, the desired level of confidence, and an anticipated proportion of the population displaying a particular attribute (Onobrakpeya & Onyenanu, 2024). The formula for the Cochran sample size calculation is as follows:

$$n = z\text{^}2(PQ) / e\text{^}2 \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots (1)$$

The study adopted the judgmental sampling technique. This approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on specific groups within the community who are more familiar with the subject under investigation and are therefore better positioned to provide informed and reliable responses. By relying on the researchers' understanding of the study area and the research objectives, judgmental sampling enabled the selection of participants who could offer rich, relevant, and context-specific data, thereby enhancing the depth and quality of the findings.

However, the use of judgmental sampling also presents certain limitations. Since the selection of respondents is based on the researchers' discretion, there is a possibility of selection bias, which may affect the objectivity of the sample. Furthermore, the results may reflect the perspectives of the chosen group rather than the broader population. Despite these limitations, the technique remains suitable for the study because it allows for the collection of relevant and insightful data from respondents who are most capable of addressing the research objectives.

3.3. Sources of Data

The data for this study were obtained from the primary source through the use of a structured questionnaire that used a response format based on the five-point Likert scale. The use of a structured questionnaire enabled the researchers to assess public opinion at ease. The reason for choosing this approach was that surveys are the most effective method for conducting scientific research. Participants were given validated questionnaires directly during face-to-face interactions. The questionnaire contained 20 items structured to align directly with the specific objectives of the study. It measured the dimensions of brand activism and the measures of purchase intention (See Table 1).

Table 1
Structured Questionnaire

Construct	**Items**	**CronbachAlpha**
Value-Driven Communications (VDC)	1.The messages communicated by this multinational company reflect values that are important to me.	0.754
	2. The company clearly communicates its commitment to social and environmental causes.	
	3. The company's communication on social issues is consistent across different media platforms.	
	4. I perceive the company's communications about social causes as meaningful and purposeful.	
	5. The company's value-driven communications positively influence my perception of its products.	
Brand Authenticity (BA)	6. This company is sincere in its support for social or environmental causes.	0.742
	7. The company's actions are consistent with its public communications on social issues.	

	8. I trust this company to act responsibly beyond profit-making.	
	9. The company's brand activism appears genuine rather than promotional.	
	10. The company demonstrates long-term commitment to the causes it supports.	
Woke-Washing (WW)	11. The company uses social causes mainly as a publicity strategy.	0.754
	12. The company exaggerates its involvement in social or environmental issues.	
	13. I feel the company supports social causes only when it benefits its public image.	
	14. The company's brand activism lacks real action or measurable impact.	
	15. The company's activism appears superficial and insincere.	
Customer Purchase Intention (CPI)	16. I am likely to purchase products from this company.	0.755
	17. I would prefer this company's products to those of competing brands.	
	18. The company's stance on social issues encourages me to buy its products.	
	19. I am willing to recommend this company's products to others.	
	20. I intend to continue purchasing products from this company in the future.	

A pilot study was conducted to thoroughly scrutinise the research instrument and identify any possible difficulties before its complete implementation. The objective was to administer a preliminary test of the questionnaire and do assessments of its validity and reliability. The study employed internal consistency reliability as a means of assessing the efficacy of the questionnaire items. If there is a significant connection between these objects, then there is a noticeable degree of internal coherence. The Cronbach alpha coefficients were computed to assess internal consistency. A construct's criterion can be considered reliable if it has a minimum composite reliability value of 0.7 and is additionally supported by a Cronbach's alpha value higher than 0.6 (Ghozali, 2015) From the data shown in Table 1, it can be deduced that the Cronbach's alpha for each variable exceeds 0.7. These results indicate that each variable has met the required criteria, suggesting that the indicators used to measure the variables are considered reliable.

Common Method Bias

Given that data for this study were collected from a single source using a structured questionnaire, there is a potential risk of common method bias (CMB). To minimise this risk, several procedural remedies were adopted. First, the questionnaire items measuring the independent variables (value-driven marketing, brand authenticity, and woke-washing) and the dependent variable (purchase intention) were clearly separated into different sections of the instrument. Second, respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to reduce evaluation apprehension and social desirability bias, thereby encouraging honest responses. Third, simple, clear, and neutral wording was used in all items to avoid ambiguity and leading questions. These measures helped to reduce the likelihood that observed relationships were inflated due to measurement method rather than actual associations among the constructs.

Ethical Procedures

The study adhered strictly to established ethical standards in social science research. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes. Respondents were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. No personal identifiers such as names, contact details, or addresses were collected, ensuring respondent anonymity and data confidentiality throughout the research process.

Methods of Data Analysis

The gathered data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods in order to arrive at a result. The demographic features of the respondents were analysed using frequencies and simple percentages as descriptive statistics. The inferential statistical technique adopted was multiple regression analysis. Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the statistical significance of the associations between variables. The analysis was performed using the SPSS for Windows programme, namely version 25.

Model Specification

The study specifies a functional and econometric model to examine the effect of brand activism components on customer purchase intention. The functional relationship between the dependent and independent variables is expressed as:

$$Y = F(X) \dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots (1)$$

This indicates that customer purchase intention is a function of brand activism components. The model is further specified as:

$$\text{CPI} = F(\text{VDC}, \text{BA}, \text{WW}) \dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots . (2)$$

This shows that customer purchase intention depends on value-driven communications, brand authenticity, and woke-washing. To empirically estimate this relationship, a linear regression model is formulated as follows:

$$\text{CPI} = \beta o + \beta 1\text{VDC} + \beta 2\text{BA} + \beta 3\text{WW} + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots\dots\dots (3)$$

Where:

β_o = Constant Coefficient

β_1- β_3 = Coefficients

CPI = Customer Purchase Intention

VDC = Value-Driven Communications

BA = Brand Authenticity

WW = Woke Washing

β0 = Constant term, representing the value of customer purchase intention when all independent variables are held constant.

β1, β2, β3 = Regression coefficients, measuring the magnitude and direction of the effect of each independent variable on customer purchase intention.

ε = Error term, capturing the influence of other factors affecting customer purchase intention that are not included in the model.

4. RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

This section is dedicated to the analysis of the data obtained from the participants.

Table 2
Response rate

S/N	Description of Response	Number	Ratio (%)
1	Total questionnaires administered	384	100
2	Questionnaires retrieved	373	97
3	Questionnaires rejected	6	2
4	Questionnaires analyzed	367	96

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 2 had a response rate of 96%. The researchers deemed a 96% response rate satisfactory to proceed with the analysis.

Table 3
Sample demographics (N=367)

Variable	Category	Number	Ratio (%)
Gender	Male	183	50
	Female	184	50
Age	18-25	40	11
	26-32	84	23
	33-39	99	27
	40-46	106	29
	47-53	38	10
Marital status	Single	125	34
	Married	224	61
	Divorced	18	5
Education level	SSCE	55	15
	OND	84	23
	HND/ B.Sc.	180	49
	Postgraduate degree	48	13

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 3 indicates that the samples were evenly split between males and females, with each gender accounting for 50% of the total. The poll revealed that 11% of the participants fell within the age range of 18 to 25, 23% were aged between 26 and 32, 27% were aged between

33 and 39, 29% were aged between 40 and 46, and 10% were aged between 47 and 53. The poll revealed that 34% of the respondents were not married, while 61% were in a marital union, and 5% had gone through a divorce. 49% of the participants have an educational background that includes either a Higher National Diploma (HND) or a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree.

Table 4
Brand Activism and Customer Purchase Intention

Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1(Constant)	-.131	2.257		-.058	.954		
Value-Driven Communications	.331	.090	.139	3.678	.000	.978	1.023
Brand Authenticity	.735	.053	.721	13.928	.000	.521	1.920
Woke Washing	-.084	.054	-.080	-1.549	.122	.527	1.898

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Purchase Intention
Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 4 indicates that value-driven communications have a positive effect on customer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.139$, $p < 0.05$). Brand authenticity has a positive effect on customer purchase intention, as indicated by a significant beta coefficient of 0.721 ($p < 0.05$). Woke washing has a negative effect on customer purchase intention ($\beta = -0.080$, $p < 0.05$). The analysis revealed that there is no multicollinearity, since the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) for value-driven communications (1.023), brand authenticity (1.920), and woke washing (1.898) in relation to Customer Purchase Intention are all below the threshold of 10. In addition, the tolerance level exceeds 0.1, whereas value-driven communications have a tolerance level of 0.978, brand authenticity have a tolerance level of 0.521, and woke washing have a tolerance level of 0.527.

Table 5
Analysis of Variance

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	859.139	3	286.380	117.945	.000[b]
	Residual	881.390	363	2.428		
	Total	1740.529	366			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Purchase Intention
b. Predictors: (Constant), Value-Driven Communications, Brand Authenticity, Woke Washing
Source: Field Survey (2025)

Nevertheless, the independent variables served as reliable indicators of brand activism. This was corroborated by the F measurement of 117.945 and the p value (0.000), which was below the significance level of 0.05. Hence, the model exhibited statistical significance.

Table 6
Model Summary

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.703[a]	.494	.489	1.558

a. Predictors: (Constant), Value-Driven Communications, Brand Authenticity, Woke Washing
Source: Field Survey (2025)

Moreover, the dimensions of brand activism were considered to be significant factors in explaining the variances in customer purchase intention, as indicated by the adjusted R square value of 0.489. Brand activism components accounted for 49% of the variations in customer purchase intention.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

This study examined the effect of brand activism on customer purchase intention for products of multinational companies in Nigeria, focusing on value-driven communications, brand authenticity, and woke-washing. The findings provide important theoretical and practical insights into how consumers interpret and respond to corporate engagement with social causes in an environment characterized by increasing consumer awareness and skepticism. Findings indicated that value-driven communications have a positive effect on customer purchase

intention ($\beta = 0.139$, $p < 0.05$). From a signaling theory perspective**,** value-driven communications function as informational signals that help reduce information asymmetry between firms and consumers (Spence, 1974). Through social media campaigns, public statements, and advocacy messages, brands signal their ethical stance and corporate identity. However, the relatively modest magnitude of this effect indicates that communication alone may be insufficient to fully convince consumers of a brand's sincerity. This finding aligns with the consumer skepticism literature, which suggests that contemporary consumers are increasingly cautious of corporate messages related to social responsibility (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Skeptical consumers tend to critically evaluate brand messages, especially when such messages are perceived as symbolic rather than substantiated by concrete actions. Consequently, while value-driven communications may attract attention and generate initial interest, their influence on purchase intention is constrained when consumers question the underlying motives of the firm. This explains why value-driven communications, although significant, exert a weaker effect compared to brand authenticity.

In contrast, brand authenticity emerged as the strongest predictor of customer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.721$, $p < 0.05$). This substantial effect underscores the critical role of perceived sincerity, consistency, and credibility in shaping consumer responses to brand activism. Unlike value-driven communications, which rely primarily on messaging, brand authenticity reflects the alignment between a company's stated values, actual practices, and long-term commitment to social causes. From a signaling theory standpoint**,** authentic brand activism represents a *high-quality signal* that is more difficult to imitate, thereby enhancing its credibility and persuasive power (Confetto et al., 2023). The strong influence of brand authenticity can also be explained through self-congruency (moral congruence) theory, which posits that consumers are more likely to support brands whose values align with their own self-concept and moral identity. When consumers perceive a brand as authentic, they experience a sense of moral congruence, fostering emotional attachment, trust, and loyalty. This emotional bond goes beyond rational evaluation and significantly strengthens purchase intention. The findings therefore suggest that authenticity enables consumers to internalize

brand values as extensions of their own identities, making purchasing decisions feel morally justified and personally meaningful.

Furthermore, attribution theory provides additional explanatory depth. Consumers actively interpret and assign motives to brand activism initiatives. When a brand demonstrates authenticity, consumers are more likely to attribute its actions to *internal motives*—such as genuine concern for societal welfare rather than *external motives* like profit maximization or reputation management. Such internal attributions enhance brand credibility and positively influence purchase intention. Conversely, when authenticity is lacking, consumers tend to attribute activism efforts to opportunistic or self-serving motives, which weakens persuasion and trust.

The findings regarding woke-washing reinforce this interpretation**,** as woke-washing was found to have a negative and significant effect on customer purchase intention ($\beta = –0.080$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that consumers penalize brands perceived to engage in superficial or insincere activism. The consumer skepticism literature provides a strong theoretical basis for this outcome. Highly skeptical consumers are more sensitive to inconsistencies between corporate claims and actual behaviours and are less willing to overlook signs of deception (Obermiller et al., 2005; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). When activism is perceived as exaggerated or symbolic, skepticism intensifies, leading to distrust, negative attitudes, and reduced purchase intention.

From an attribution theory perspective, woke-washing triggers negative external attributions, whereby consumers conclude that the brand's activism is driven primarily by self-interest rather than moral responsibility. This perception not only diminishes the credibility of the specific campaign but can also damage the overall brand–consumer relationship, resulting in backlash or avoidance behaviors. Moreover, consumer skepticism acts as a moderating psychological mechanism that amplifies the negative consequences of inauthentic activism, as skeptical consumers are more likely to verify claims and attend to negative information.

5. CONCLUSION

Brands that engage in activism can differentiate themselves from competitors, making their products more appealing to customers who share similar values. When brands take a stand on social issues, customers are more likely to develop an emotional connection, leading to increased loyalty and repeat business. Value-driven communications and brand authenticity positively influence customer purchase intention by building trust, fostering emotional connections, and enhancing brand differentiation. In contrast, woke-washing has a negative impact, eroding trust, damaging the brand's reputation, and reducing customer purchase intention. Multinational companies need to ensure their activism efforts are genuine and aligned with their values to effectively enhance customer purchase intentions.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Multinational companies should embed value-driven communications within authentic corporate practices rather than treating them as standalone messaging tools. Although the findings indicate that value-driven communications have a positive effect on customer purchase intention, the relatively modest effect size suggests that communication alone is insufficient to strongly influence consumer behaviour. Therefore, multinational companies should ensure that their value-based messages are supported by tangible actions such as ethical sourcing, fair labour practices, and sustained social investments. This alignment strengthens credibility and prevents consumer scepticism, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of value-driven communications in driving purchase intention.

Multinational companies should prioritize brand authenticity as a strategic foundation for brand activism initiatives. The study’s findings imply that authenticity plays a more critical role than mere communication because consumers increasingly evaluate *why* a brand supports a cause rather than *what* it says. Authenticity matters more as it signals sincerity, trustworthiness, and long-term commitment, which are key drivers of consumer confidence and emotional attachment. Multinational companies should therefore demonstrate consistency between their stated values, historical behaviour, and current activism efforts to build trust, which in turn strengthens customers’ willingness to purchase their products.

Multinational companies should deliberately avoid woke-washing by ensuring activism efforts are supported by measurable and sustained commitments. The findings suggest that superficial or opportunistic activism can undermine customer purchase intention by eroding trust. Woke-washing weakens the positive impact of brand activism because consumers perceive it as manipulative and insincere. To mitigate this risk, multinational companies should clearly communicate the scope, limitations, and progress of their activism initiatives, including measurable outcomes and long-term goals. Such transparency reinforces authenticity and enhances the credibility of brand activism, thereby improving its influence on customer purchase intention.

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