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**ESCOLA DE COMUNICAÇÃO, ARQUITETURA, ARTES E TECNOLOGIAS
DA INFORMAÇÃO**

COMUNICAÇÃO, MARKETING E MEDIA DIGITAIS

Communication Strategy Proposal for a Luxury Brand to Avoid Woke-washing Accusation

Dissertação de Mestrado apresentada a provas públicas para a obtenção do grau de
Mestre em Comunicação, Marketing e Media Digitais orientada por Professor Doutor
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Resumo

Enquanto o ativismo da marca e a sustentabilidade em grandes marcas de moda de luxo são bem analisados e frequentemente objeto de ceticismo, esta pesquisa examina se o mesmo se aplica a marcas emergentes que constroem a sua identidade em torno destes valores desde o início, fazendo com que enfrentem menos riscos de inautenticidade percebida ou mesmo de *woke-washing*. A dissertação consiste num estudo de caso de uma pequena marca de luxo, analisando como a comunicação de ativismo nas redes sociais impacta o *engagement*, a percepção de autenticidade e o comportamento do consumidor. A análise das redes sociais e de um inquérito online revelou que declarações sociopolíticas e ambientais aumentam o *engagement*. Porém, a ausência de ações concretas e a comunicação inconsistente sobre CSR podem resultar em percepções de inautenticidade, menor disposição para pagar e menor probabilidade de partilha. O estudo oferece recomendações práticas para pequenas marcas de luxo: usar *storytelling* estratégico, desenvolver campanhas e destacar processos de produção para melhorar a transparência e a credibilidade. Realça ainda a importância de uma comunicação consistente sobre CSR e de ações concretas após declarações, sobretudo em períodos de grande visibilidade, como desfiles de moda, reforçando a autenticidade e evitando acusações de *woke-washing*.

Palavras-chave: Marca de moda de luxo; Ativismo de marca; Woke-washing; CSR; Estratégia de comunicação

Abstract

While brand activism and sustainability in major luxury fashion companies are well-researched and often met with scepticism, this research focuses on examining if the same applies to small and emerging luxury fashion brands which build their identity around these values from the start, causing them to face less risk of perceived inauthenticity or even *woke-washing*. This dissertation consists of a case study about a new small luxury brand, which provides insights into how the brand's activism communication on social media impacts engagement, perceived authenticity, and consumer behaviour. Through social media analysis and an online survey, the findings reveal that while socio-political statements increase engagement, insufficient follow-up actions and inconsistent CSR communication can lead to

perceived inauthenticity, reduced willingness to pay and likeliness to share. The study provides managerial implications for emerging luxury brands to enhance activism communication through strategic storytelling, product-linked campaigns, and highlight production processes. Findings emphasize the importance of consistent CSR communication and tangible actions following activist statements, particularly during high-engagement periods like fashion shows, to maintain authenticity and prevent woke-washing accusations.

Keywords: Luxury Fashion Branding; Brand Activism; Woke-washing; CSR; Communication Strategy

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Introduction

With the increasing concern of consumers about what the businesses they buy from support social-political and environmentally, brands have adopted more and more corporate social responsibility and activism strategies to respond to this (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). This trend is particularly crucial for luxury brands, which create deeper emotional bonds with consumers by allowing them to express their social status and personal values through consumption (Ko et al., 2019).

While extensive research has explored brand activism and sustainability efforts of large luxury fashion companies – often under the scope and targets of scepticism (Joy et al., 2023; Sipilä et al., 2020) – the practices of small or emerging luxury fashion brands remain underexplored. Therefore, this research aims to address this gap through a comprehensive case study of GmbH, a Berlin based small-scale luxury fashion brand. The primary research objectives are to examine GmbH's corporate social responsibility and brand activism strategies; Analyse consumer perceptions and responses to these initiatives and investigate if the potential risk of being perceived as inauthentic or engaging in woke-washing¹ exists. Is the brand communicating its values and activism effectively? What communication strategies could enhance the perceived authenticity of its social responsibility efforts?

Ultimately, by exploring these dimensions, this study seeks to provide actionable insights and guidance for similar-sized luxury brands seeking to incorporate corporate social responsibility and brand activism into their communication strategies while avoiding being perceived as woke-washing.

This study is structured by four key chapters: Literature review, Methodology, Findings and Discussion. In the Literature review, relevant existing literature is synthesized and grouped into 3 main topics: Luxury Branding, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and Brand Activism; Woke and woke-washing, and ethical consumption of luxury and how to approach the consumer. In the next chapter, Methodology, the mixed-method approach is presented and how the two conducted studies will provide valuable collected data for this research. In this same chapter, the object of this case study is also introduced. In Findings, the data collection

¹ Woke-washing is when brands publicly support social causes but don't follow through, creating a superficial image of social consciousness without genuine commitment or internal change (Ahmad et al., 2023)

procedure and analysis for both studies are explained. The first study is followed by a brief discussion, as it influences the structure of Study 2. Finally, in the Discussion chapter the findings from the two interconnected studies are compared and contextualized within previous mentioned literature, as also valuable discoveries are highlighted for managerial implications of the case study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Luxury Branding, CSR and Brand Activism

As the present study focuses on communication strategies for luxury brands, this section seeks to define better what luxury branding is; how it intersects with CSR; what consumers expect regarding brand responsibility in the luxury market, and what Brand Activism is.

2.1.1 Luxury Branding

Kapferer (2012) explains that branding is a comprehensive and long-term strategy that goes beyond mere product naming - it involves transforming product categories by infusing them with unique combinations of tangible and intangible attributes, creating differentiation and added value. The author further explains that effective branding materializes specific attributes, creates advantages, delivers benefits, and represents ideals, fundamentally altering how products or services are perceived and experienced by consumers. Additionally, branding is about deeply embedding the brands' identity and values into its offerings, making the branded item more valuable than its competitors' offer.

According to Fionda and Moore (2009), from the brand's point of view, there are several interrelated attributes that makes and characterizes it as part of the luxury segment: clear brand identity, marketing communications, product integrity, brand signature, premium price, exclusivity, luxury environment and experience, heritage, and culture.

Based on Ko et al. (2019), where it's stated that a brand can only be considered luxury if and only if it's also perceived that way by consumers, it must "offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional" (Ko et al., 2019, p.406). This corresponds to the clear brand identity attribute, in which the brand should clearly communicate its values to

attract consumers on an emotional and functional level (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Based on Kapferer's perspective, brand identity is the core vision that drives the creation of products and services under a brand name. It encompasses the brand's key beliefs and core values, serving as the foundation for its uniqueness and value proposition. Brand identity goes beyond the mere name or logo, representing the essence of what makes the brand distinct and appealing to consumers. Brand identity creates connections with consumers by providing a consistent and authentic representation of the brand's values and vision. This consistency allows consumers to form emotional attachments and loyalty to the brand beyond mere product satisfaction. As Kapferer states, "That vision, the key belief of the brands and its core values is called identity. It drives vibrant brands able to create advocates, a real cult and loyalty" (Kapferer, 2012, p. 149).

Another consumer perception of luxury brands is related to having high quality in terms of product, craftsmanship and service (Ko et al., 2019). This, similar in Fionda and Moore (2009), is defined as the product integrity, whereby luxury brands, in order to achieve the desired status, invest in creativity and innovation. Regarding quality service, it's related to the luxury environment and experience characteristic, in which personalized service is emphasized, involving staff dedicating time to customers, direct and personal contact, and providing a whole shopping experience. This superior service is essential to differentiate a luxury brand from other fashion brands (Fionda & Moore, 2009).

Premium pricing is also strongly associated with a luxury brand (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Ko et al., 2019), functioning as a strategy to create the idea of status besides being the result of the quality put into the products and the limited quantity of them. This leads to the intrinsic exclusivity attribute, which is also achieved by limiting the number of distributors of the brand and, therefore, controlling the accessibility to the items (Fionda & Moore, 2009).

A luxury brand should be "capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer" (Ko et al., 2019, p.406). Establishing this relationship between the luxury brand and the consumer is possible through a clear brand identity and brand awareness that increases by investing in marketing communications such as, advertising, fashion shows, direct marketing, public relations, and celebrity endorsement (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Kapferer states that clearly defining and communicating its identity, a brand can differentiate itself in a saturated market, resist the pressure to conform to consumer-centric marketing that leads to similarity among brands, and maintain its unique DNA or roots. This differentiation and

authenticity are crucial in forming strong, lasting connections with consumers who align with the brand's values and vision. As the author argues, "We have now entered an age of marketing similarities. When a brand innovates, it creates a new standard. The other brands must then catch up if they want to stay in the race" (Kapferer, 2012, p. 151). This underscores the importance of a strong brand identity in maintaining uniqueness and consumer connection in a competitive market.

In addition, luxury brands are often linked to heritage by placing significant importance on remaining true to their historical positioning or the vision of the brand's original and current designers. This strategy seeks to enhance and preserve the authenticity of the brand (Fionda & Moore, 2009). This attribute can relate to brands' "DNA" – the brand signature – which consists of maintaining a consistent and clear design across collections, iconic and unique to the brand, distinguishing from other luxury brands and making confusion with other brands impossible to consumers (Fionda & Moore, 2009).

Finally, developing a culture is also an important characteristic of a luxury brand which consists of commitment to the brand, internal dynamics and relationships but also external, like partnerships. Essentially, the organizational culture should be characterized by qualities like "honesty, integrity, morality and teamwork" (Fionda & Moore, 2009, p.358). This attribute leads us to the CSR of a brand.

2.1.2 CSR in Luxury Branding

According to Matten & Moon (2020), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) involves observable and measurable policies and practices implemented by corporations, which reflect their responsibility for wider societal good. The specific form and direction of CSR efforts, while being broad and adaptable, is determined by the corporation itself, thus having autonomy in how they contribute to society by creating initiatives based on cultural values and norms, industry context, and community needs (Matten & Moon, 2020). This aligns with the definition of CSR marketing provided by Haski-Leventhal (2018), who describes it as strategic campaigns designed to communicate a company's values, sustainability efforts, goodwill, and responsibility. These campaigns aim to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage rather than directly selling products or services.

When it comes to implementing CSR communication in luxury brands, with the attributes that they carry, it's a challenge to balance their exclusive image while committing to social responsibility (Zhang, 2024). There is a risk of negative outcomes that could affect the brand and may even face a disadvantage in CSR initiatives compared to mass-market brands, experiencing lower perceptions of image fit (Vock, 2022). Bustamante et al. (2021) links Schwartz's (2012) Basic Human Values with CSR, for instance "Universalism" which cultivates a sense of responsibility towards others and the environment. Wong & Dhanesh (2016), also based on Schwartz's framework, draws to the conclusion that there is a paradoxical divergence between the values of luxury and CSR, which are respectfully: elitism vs. equality, hedonism vs. universalism, excess vs. moderation and emotions vs. rationality. This might evoke a feeling of scepticism over the motivation of CSR practices coming from these brands and even lower the loyalty of customers to the brand. Sipilä et al., (2020) proved that, when consumers have time to think about a luxury brand's CSR activities, they tend to attribute these efforts to external motivations rather than genuine concern. Moreover, this increase in extrinsic CSR attributions can also lead eventually to lower financial performance in the long run (Sipilä et al., 2020).

Given these factors, the direct application of mainstream CSR theories to the luxury context may not work effectively for luxury brands, therefore a specialized approach to CSR in the luxury sector is needed (Vock, 2022). Luxury brands must particularly ensure their messaging is authentic and aligns with audience expectations. This approach is crucial to preserve their reputation and maintain consumer engagement (Zhang, 2024). More specifically, Sipilä et al. (2020) suggests that by framing the brand around sustainability rather than exclusivity can even increase loyalty. Similarly, Vock (2022), implies that luxury brands can enhance their CSR image fit by adopting strategies that align sustainable practices with traditional luxury values. This includes highlighting product innovation, conspicuous compassion, and using celebrity influence to integrate sustainability with luxury appeal. These approaches can help luxury brands benefit from visible CSR activities, which is essential for maintaining a competitive position in the evolving luxury sector. Furthermore, luxury brands can strengthen their reputation by adopting sustainability strategies and using authentic storytelling to connect emotionally with consumers, sharing their challenges and achievements to build trust (Zhang, 2024).

New luxury brands, however, are better positioned to align with consumer expectations for responsible practices, and, therefore, struggle less to incorporate CSR values in their

communication, because they seamlessly integrate them into their business models from the start (Vock, 2022).

The world leader and conglomerate in luxury (Faccioli & Martin, 2022), LVMH, launched an action program in 2020 which combines the values of desirability and sustainability – LIFE 360, LVMH Initiatives for the Environment – and aims to integrate sustainable development into the strategic business plans of all its Maisons (*LIFE - LVMH Initiative*, n.d.). Joy et al. (2023) analysed the reports from this program and argues that these reports construct a narrative about the multinational's efforts are consistent with the structure of a fairy tale, meaning that they seek to create an emotional connection with consumers by portraying themselves as a hero, environmental/social issues as a villain and a quest for a happy ending such as a sustainable future. Furthermore, the luxury brand Stella McCartney acclaimed for its sustainable practices (Borio, 2017), was acquired by LVMH in 2020 and fulfils the role as the helper “in the corporate narrative concerning the urgency of progress toward the sustainability goals” (Joy et al., 2023, p.97), reinforcing their credibility and reducing the possibility for scepticism.

The strategy behind the storytelling used by LVMH, positions itself as a leader in sustainable luxury and appealing to consumers, even though Joy et al. (2023) found evidence that suggests a gap between the company's narrative and its actual performance. This tactic is an example of greenwashing, in which marketing or advertising is used to create a false or exaggerated impression of environmental responsibility. In this case, it manipulates consumer perceptions to appear more sustainable than it is. Furthermore, this practice connects to the concept of woke-washing, which will be explored in depth later.

2.1.3 Brand activism and its authenticity

While CSR focuses on a company's internal practices and their effects, brand activism encourages brands to adopt “a nonneutral stance on institutionally contested sociopolitical issues” (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p.446) and debates that influence modern society while also being driven by society itself (Gerolin, 2021; Lou et al., 2024).

Manfredi-Sánchez (2019) describes brand activism as “a communication strategy whose aim is to influence the citizen-consumer by means of messages and campaigns created and sustained by political values” (p.348). This allows brands to shape new ways for communicating and managing their public image and building a positive reputation by aligning with sociopolitical values. The author argues that this shift is a response to the changing values of younger generations, more progressive and who may not identify with traditional political structures, and the increasing political polarization of society. While it doesn't necessarily involve supporting any specific political party, it focuses on broader, and often globally relevant, values like equality, environmental protection or social justice. Although brand activism is often associated with liberal or progressive positions on current issues, conservative activism is also possible, as long as a brand's messaging and actions align with its stated purpose and values - taking a clear stance on controversial topics can be considered genuine, regardless of political orientation (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Furthermore, brand activism aims for a global audience which is facilitated by digital media, allowing a widespread dissemination of campaigns and the formation of partnerships with NGOs (non-governmental organizations), activists, and celebrities. Besides, leveraging digital platforms “As a discursive strategy, it employs the languages, objects and techniques of the digital generations” (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019, p.349), while it also creates an authentic connection between the brand and audience through engaging narratives and transmitting values.

The beginning of brands practicing activism is hard to pinpoint. Gerolin (2021) suggests it arises from the complex interplay of the evolution of CSR from the 1970s onward, highlighting the intertwining of social movements, corporate behaviour, and shifting political landscapes. This led to a shift in where brands were more than just a product, transitioning from product-centric messaging to associating their narratives with societal and cultural values “so that the brand can make them its own and reflect them, and so that those same values or social images refer to the brand” (Gerolin, 2021, p.29).

Kapferer (2012) argues that brand activism occurs when certain brands transcend their role as mere market actors to become proactive forces shaping their industry and engaging with broader societal issues. These activist brands stimulate cultural innovation in their category, raise important debates beyond their products, demonstrate concern for their industry's future and customer well-being, and build communities, especially, as previously mentioned, through digital media. By taking on this expansive role as thought leaders and catalysts for change, these

brands can influence public discourse, attract followers and create a feeling of being able to relate with the brand and vice versa.

A study conducted by Herzberg & Rudeloff (2023) showed that brand activism has a more pronounced influence on building brand trust compared to CSR, which contributes to increased brand equity. This has a positive impact on consumers by influencing their rational and emotional perceptions of brands, as well as their purchasing intentions, word-of-mouth marketing, premium price acceptance, and brand identification, with women generally showing stronger positive effects than men.

On the other hand, compared to CSR, brand activism is riskier and more unpredictable because it involves taking more boundary-pushing attitudes, which may provoke strong reactions and uncertainty about the "correct" position to take (Lou et al., 2024). But this "counter-power through brand activism can be considered more authentic and therefore more convincing than CSR initiatives" (Michel et al., 2022, p.13), which is why many brands are increasingly adopting activist stances. The potential for deeper consumer engagement and the opportunity to drive meaningful social change often outweigh the risks, as socially conscious consumers are more likely to reward brands that align with their values and take bold stances on important issues.

From consumers' point of view, Lewis & Vredenburg (2023) state that contemporary consumers expect brand activism to be genuine and deeply rooted in a company's long-term internal commitment to a cause "beyond its trendy/popular period, educating staff, and amplifying the voices of others" (Lewis & Vredenburg, 2023, p.275). Furthermore, the research suggests that framing brand activism as a campaign may appear to be a marketing strategy to increase sales and therefore external communications through public relations about their internal commitment to a cause has a better chance to meet consumers expectations and reduce scepticism. Another expectation mentioned is transparency regarding the brands' intentions and setting measurable goals, as vagueness in statements is no longer accepted. Of course, there is always a risk of being unable to fully align the practices with a cause, besides new issues coming to surface (sometimes) unexpectedly, to which consumers show to be willing to forgive and "would like brands to disclose any past transgressions or misjudgements and to communicate what they are doing to move forward with transparency" (Lewis & Vredenburg, 2023, p.273). Lastly, amplifying the voices of individuals directly affected by socio-political issues or

educated on them, by giving a platform and influence of the brand, is seen as a genuine effort to stand in solidarity with the cause but only if it's in addition of internal commitment. Otherwise, it could be considered inauthentic.

Vredenburg et al. (2020) categorize brand activism in four different types: Absence, Silent, Authentic and Inauthentic. Absence of brand activism, as it speaks for itself, means that the brand hasn't engaged in any activist practices, as perhaps operate in an industry where partnering with sociopolitical causes has not traditionally been a focus and, therefore, the consumers won't expect the brand becoming involved in brand activism. Second, silent brand activism is when brands integrate and engage with prosocial practices linked to their internal values, quietly, without using it also as an advertising tool. These brands don't risk being perceived as sceptic "because they already have prosocial brand purpose, values, and corporate practices to align with their messaging, a necessary first step toward authentic brand activism" (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p.450). Which is this next category, authentic brand activism is considered the most effective form, as it builds trust with consumers and contributes to both social change and brand equity. This is because when a brand shows it's able to be truly committed to a cause while also to its own values, it fosters positive associations that enhance consumer-based brand equity, leading to favourable purchase decisions and long-term market success. Lastly, inauthentic brand activism, which will be explored in depth later, is when a brand communicates support for sociopolitical causes, but their efforts fail to align their actions with their words, the brand's practices are vague or even "or actively hide their absence of practices" (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p.451).

Paris (2022) found that it's crucial for fashion brands to engage with a cause, more than any other industry, as it's a reflection and representation of a person's personality and with what the consumer wants to be associated with or care for.

Borio (2017) investigated how two luxury brands (namely Vivienne Westwood and Stella McCartney) build trust with millennial luxury consumers through their activism. The author found that personification of the brand, whereby the designer/founder is personally involved in protests, outspoken interviews, and public statements about social and environmental issues, is an effective communication strategy to leverage the authenticity of the brands' commitment. This research also pointed out that the higher the risk the brand is

perceived to be taking by making a stance, “the more the consumer is willing to give credibility to the brand” (Borio, 2017, p.86).

Another form of brand activism often found in luxury fashion brands is the literal and direct expression of opinions incorporated into their products, namely garments, presented at big fashion shows. Krim (2023) illustrates how luxury fashion brands are increasingly engaging in the expression of feminist values as a form of brand activism, such as Dior’s remarkable t-shirts with the message "We Should All Be Feminists" featured at their fashion show in 2016, which sparked widespread discussion and debate around gender equality. Of course, as previously mentioned, this action alone wouldn’t be seen as genuine without further commitment to the issue. Therefore, to guarantee the genuineness of the brand' discourse, one of the initiatives was a mentorship program they launched the next year, Women@Dior (Krim, 2023), which also joined UNESCO’s global coalition for education to provide opportunities and guidance to young women from disadvantaged backgrounds (Giannini, 2024).

2.2 Woke and woke-washing

When a company or a brand publicly expresses awareness of and support for social and political causes, consumers might perceive the brand as so called “woke” – which means being in a state of awareness and well-informed (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). This section of the literature review seeks to understand the origin of being woke, the definition of woke-washing and the risks and consequences of this for brands in the luxury sector.

2.2.1 Being woke

Historical context and definition

While brand activism already existed for some time and its adoption by companies have increased over time, the term “woke” applied to companies started to happen relatively recent. As seen on Google trends, the word itself also doubled in popularity and interest over the past decade (see chart in Fig. 1).

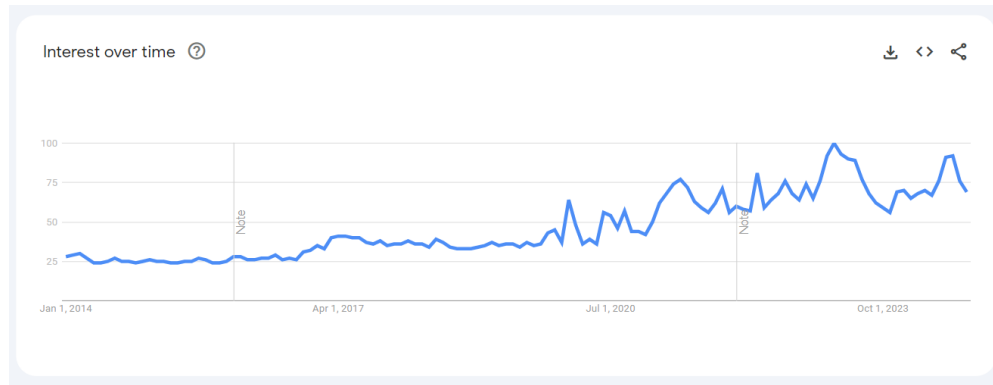


Figure 1 Search for the term "woke" on Google

Many authors agree that this phenomenon is due to the Black Lives Matter movement which resurged in mid-2020 that made numerous brands speak up about the injustice done and engage in brand activism by investing in woke advertising (Cristobal et al., 2022; Fredrikson, 2021; Gerolin, 2021; Selmani, 2020). This led to an increased use of "woke" in political debates and cultural discussions, resulting in more media coverage that further amplified its usage and reinforced its place in popular discourse (Fredrikson, 2021; Gerolin, 2021). However, this also provoked right-wing commentators to weaponize "woke" to criticize what they see as excessive political correctness and left-leaning viewpoints, making it carry a derogatory connotation, implying that "woke" individuals are overly sensitive or virtue-signalling (Crittenden, 2024).

Implications for brands and consumer's response

Another fact agreed on by many authors is that the younger generations of consumers, of whom the majority is a belief-driven buyer (Gerolin, 2021), are increasingly prioritizing ethical considerations over product quality or functionality, "favouring brands that are aligned with their values and avoiding those that don't" (Amed et al., 2019, p.45), leading brands to shift their focus towards social and political issues (Cristobal et al., 2022; Mirzaei, 2023). Mirzaei (2023) explains that people are "increasingly happy to make personal sacrifices to help create a better world" and suggests that woke branding is something marketing managers can't avoid any longer, otherwise brands risk becoming irrelevant especially among the younger consumers.

For the luxury market, this is valuable information as Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980) and Millennials (1981 – 1996) are leading current luxury purchases, but Gen Z (1997 – 2012) is driving this social and cultural shift. By 2030, Gen Z is estimated to account for 25-

30% of luxury purchases, and Millennials will represent 50-55% (D'Arpizio et al., 2024). In the luxury fashion market, brands started to engage in woke branding by investing more in diversity and inclusivity initiatives, especially as crisis response strategies after blunders that impacted disadvantaged groups or involved cultural appropriation (Zanotti, 2024). Sometimes this can be interpreted as inauthentic, leading to woke-washing, which will be explored in the next section. Furthermore, Amed et al. (2019) states "a new global ethos is emerging" (p.45) with Gen Z gaining more and more purchasing power. This is why, as the CEO of the luxury fashion brand Balenciaga states, "fashion cannot lock itself in the so-called ivory tower anymore. We need to be conscious of the world and reflect what's happening." (Amed et al., 2019, p.49).

Mirzaei et al. (2022) identifies six dimensions that contribute to the perception of authenticity in woke branding: Social context independency, referring to the extent to which a brand's activism appears independent of current trends or popular social movements; Inclusion, which focuses on the neutrality and inclusivity of the brand's messaging, ensuring it resonates with diverse audiences without alienating or attacking specific groups; Sacrifice, because consumers are more likely to believe a brand's activism is genuine if it's willing to make tangible sacrifices, potentially financial, to demonstrate its commitment to the cause; Practice, which involves demonstrable actions and initiatives that address the issue being advocated for; Fit, referring to the perceived alignment between the social issue being addressed and the brand's core business, values and image; and lastly, Motivation, which explains for itself - consumers assess whether the brand is genuinely driven by a desire to make a difference or primarily motivated by profit and self-interest.

2.2.2 Woke-washing, inauthentic brand activism and the consequences

While greenwashing, a term widely spoken about in the context of fashion where brands falsely promote their products or actions as environmentally friendly, woke-washing similarly adopts social justice values for profit without genuine commitment (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Not all brands that engage in brand activism are necessarily woke, because a brand can show authentic support for values that aren't necessarily progressive, as long it aligns with the brand's explicit purpose and values (Vredenburg et al., 2020). On the other hand, when a brand practices

woke-washing, this means it engages with inauthentic brand activism (Fredrikson, 2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020).

As previously mentioned, brand activism has a positive influence on purchase intentions. On the contrary, Arkema (2022), as expected, found that inauthentic brand activism led to significantly lower brand attitudes and a reduced intention to purchase the brand's products. Furthermore, not only does a brand damage their own reputation and credibility, woke-washing also leads to potential boycotts, negative word-of-mouth and widespread criticism on social media (Amed et al., 2020; Arkema, 2022; Fredrikson, 2021; Tan, 2023).

Another impactful consequence of woke-washing and inauthentic brand activism is that the brand risks getting “cancelled”, which Clark (2020) defines as “a designation, it should be noted, usually reserved for celebrities, brands, and otherwise out-of-reach figures – should be read as a last-ditch appeal for justice.” (p. 89). This term derives from the so called “cancel culture”, a mass rejection of a person or brand, usually caused when their actions are not aligned with values (Clark, 2020). This reaction happens more noticeable on digital platforms such as social media channels (Paris, 2022), because it allows large groups to act collectively and rapidly demand accountability from social elites (in this case brands) and exposing them to direct criticism from diverse voices (Clark, 2020).

As stated before, in the luxury fashion industry it's noticeable that brands are promoting inclusivity and diversity values through woke branding but sometimes the approach might unintentionally come over as insensitive and then the outcome is negative. This was the case of the Italian luxury brand Dolce & Gabbana's promotional videos under the campaign name “DG Loves China”, where a Chinese woman is instructed and clearly struggling to eat pizza with chopsticks - these videos were widely criticized for their stereotypical and demeaning portrayal of Chinese culture and “appeared as derogatory and offensive to Chinese consumers” (Zheng, 2020, p.2). While the purpose of the campaign was to pay tribute to the culture and promote diversity values (Vänskä & Gurova, 2021), the brand experienced boycott by Chinese consumers and social media backlash (Zanotti, 2024).

2.3 Ethical consumption of luxury and how to approach the consumer

As a few times mentioned above, CSR, brand activism and woke branding are all highly relevant for consumers, particularly the younger generation. As the study focuses on the luxury industry, this final literature review section will elaborate on consumer behaviour in this specific sector – What is ethical consumption and who is the prosocial consumer? How do consumers respond to communication strategies from luxury brands?

2.3.1 Ethical and prosocial consumption

Even though luxury brands might struggle to be perceived as sustainable and their brand activism as authentic due to the conflict of values referred to before (e.g. excess vs. moderation), they “are emerging as important role models for ethical consciousness within the fashion industry” (Septianto et al., 2020, p.211).

Park et al. (2022) found that when sustainable luxury products are perceived as highly scarce, consumers tend to have a higher purchase intent regardless even of their level of sustainability consciousness. Furthermore, the author indicates that this could mean that luxury brands can promote and motivate ethical consumption.

Marxen (2023) identified the demands of the newer generation luxury consumer regarding sustainability efforts, namely three themes: traceability in suppliers and material sourcing, reducing waste and emissions and extra initiatives, such as CSR activities. In parallel, these consumers expect ethical efforts to be embedded in the brands’ values and storytelling, visible across all channels and all activities and be innovative with the initiatives.

However, ethical luxury consumption is not reserved for only the newer generation. For a luxury brand, the best outcome would be if their sustainable commitment converted into an increase of the purchase intention and meet the satisfaction of any type of luxury consumer. Vanhamme et al. (2021), through a cluster analysis, found five types of personas in luxury consumers that engage in different levels of ethical luxury consumption. According to the study, luxury firms that highlight their social, economic and ecological efforts (functioning as sustainable entrepreneurs) should base their long-term sustainable commitment strategies on

two of these personas to achieve the highest efficiency. Both personas have high purchasing power and a genuine interest in aligning their consumption with their values, but the approach should be tailored for each: while one has “negative self-worth perceptions but also express faith in the goodness of people and the world; simultaneously ego-centric and altruistic in their motivations to purchase ethical luxury” (Vanhamme et al., 2021, p.52), the other one doesn’t experience internal conflicts and is motivated by genuine altruism and a desire to make a positive difference. To target the first persona, the authors suggest that luxury brands should highlight the prestige and status associated with the product, while also emphasizing its positive ethical impact and reassure the products’ quality and its contribution to a worthy cause. For the second case, to appeal to the personas’ values, being transparent regarding the brand’s practices and linking the quality and craftsmanship with responsible consumption is expected to be the most effective.

Kim et al. (2024) refers to prosocial consumer behaviour as actions that benefit others, even if those actions come at a cost or require sacrifices from the person performing them, such as volunteering to donating money or choosing to purchase sustainable products. Furthermore, the research’s focus is how anger could trigger and even increase this behaviour within the context of corporate social irresponsibility (breaches of the social agreement between corporations and society [Kim et al., 2024]). The findings revealed that consumers who feel personally connected to the corporate social irresponsibility are “intrinsically motivated to engage in prosocial behaviours, because they are more inherently interested in restoring the justice” (Kim et al., 2024, in Moderating role of CSI issue self-relevance section), for instance donating or opting to purchase environmentally friendly products. In addition, consumers with strong beliefs in their own ability to promote justice and make a difference are more likely to translate their anger into action, as “the potency of anger’s prosocial motivation increases when prosocial actions seem efficacious for achieving the goal of justice restoration” (Kim et al., 2024, in Theoretical implications). Although this study was conducted in different scenarios rather than in the luxury context, the findings are equally relevant to understanding the behaviour of the prosocial consumer.

Kim et al. (2022) investigated what strategy luxury brands could adopt to increase prosocial behaviour most effectively while also fitting the brand image– a donation-linked or a product-linked campaign. The authors suggest that luxury brands should prioritize product-linked campaigns. This means that the brand, through selling limited-edition products which is

linked to the cause, donates a portion of the sale to a charity. Product-linked campaigns work better for luxury brands as the limited-edition emphasizes scarcity “which potentially conveys higher status” (Kim et al., 2022, p.626). In addition, this type of campaign is more attractive to materialists which the authors defined as the target market for luxury brands. Moreover, the study concludes that luxury consumers potentially develop prosocial behaviour when engaging in product-linked campaign as the limited-edition products have visible indications of the cause or charity (e.g. “special markers such as logos or colours”, Kim et al., 2022, p.627), signalling others about the participation and thus status-enhancing.

2.3.2 Luxury brands’ social media presence and consumers response

Luxury brands “have recognized the importance of having an online presence and are taking steps to digitize their brands for better connections with consumers” (Zha et al., 2023, in Introduction). By reaching a certain level of engagement with consumers, brands seek to connect with them. Aldhamiri et al. (2024) identified and grouped several motivations behind active consumer engagement with luxury brands on social media (this includes liking, commenting and sharing posts): intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic motivations, where individuals are driven by personal interest, include entertainment seeking, brand authenticity seeking, brand gratitude seeking, brand experience seeking, brand nostalgia seeking, product aesthetic seeking and lifestyle inspiration seeking. The only extrinsic motivation, whereby a consumer is “engaging in an activity to attain a separate outcome or reward, distinct from the activity itself” (Aldhamiri et al., 2024, p.2), which was identified to be necessary was social status seeking.

Engaging with consumers on social media is highly relevant to eventually develop brand loyalty and even willingness to pay. Zha et al. (2023) refers to the term parasocial interaction as a result from brand engagement “to foster interpersonal communication with their customers, promote active participation in brand-related activities and disseminate brand information” (in Literature review), where social media platforms serve as tools to create meaningful connections with customers through various technological features that enable customer-brand interactions. Furthermore, the authors suggest creating this illusion of personal two-way connection with each consumer by adopting a personable and interactive communication style

on social media, such as maintaining “consistent interaction with customers’ comments, encompassing responses to inquiries, recognition of feedback, or engagement in casual dialogues” (Zha et al., 2023, in Theoretical implications), and by being open and authentic on social media through showing "behind-the-scenes" content to their audience, namely “showcasing the craftsmanship, precision and skill involved in creating luxury products can reinforce a sense of openness while emphasizing the history, value and quality associated with the brand” (Zha et al., 2023, in Practical implications). The findings of this research show that through these parasocial interactions, luxury brands are able to influence the consumers’ behaviour and foster brand loyalty and willingness to pay.

Septianto et al. (2020) found that luxury brands can effectively communicate their sustainability efforts by utilizing specific emotional appeals in their social media campaigns, namely pride and gratitude, to increase electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) which is “generally defined as consumers’ information sharing and exchange about a product or company via the Internet, social media...” (Chu, 2021, in Introduction). The findings state that when the pride appeal was present in the advertisement’s tagline, eWOM would increase in a way that emphasizes the luxury aspect and would lead to broadcasting (sharing to a larger audience) versus when gratitude was evoked, eWOM would be emphasized by the sustainability aspect and lead to narrowcasting (sharing to smaller audience, e.g. family).

Brand activism and sustainability communication strategies - cultural context

Brand’s communication strategies about brand activism and sustainability requires considering the cultural context for it to have a positive impact on the consumer. Leonidou et al. (2022) compared how environmental sustainability activism is perceived and manifested in western cultures (United States) versus eastern cultures (China) and found that in collectivistic cultures (such as in China), interdependence is positively related to environmental sustainability beliefs, meaning that “individuals with strong, cohesive in-group ties are more likely to care for the common good and develop pro-environmental beliefs as a way to protect the group” (p. 95) and being motivated primarily by protecting their families from future problems. Alternatively, the western individualistic culture, links generativity with environmental sustainability, requiring “a future-oriented and long-term perspective” (Leonidou et al., 2022, p.95) and, interestingly, sustainability beliefs more strongly motivate westerners toward group activism (e.g. petitions, protests) than individuals from an eastern

culture. Leonidou et al. (2022) explains this could likely be due to democratic freedoms in the west versus "the restrictive political environment" (p. 86) in eastern societies.

Regarding the communication of sustainability and brand activism of luxury brands through social media, Kong et al. (2020) found that in individualistic cultures like Germany, where individuals are more aware of sustainability, sustainable advertising positively affected luxury brand attitudes and increased eWOM. However, "increasing perception of sustainability had a less positive effect on consumers who generally trust the brand" (p. 9) and decreased purchase intention due to the conflicting luxury versus sustainability values. In collectivist cultures (like South Korea), where sustainability awareness is lower, sustainability communication had less impact and even reduced eWOM. The researchers conclude that "brands should avoid using one-size-fits-all advertising campaigns to promote dedication to sustainability" (p. 9).

Chapter 3: Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this thesis, a case study was conducted examining brand activism through the lens of the emerging luxury brand GmbH. The brand was selected based on its environmental and socio-political statements during Paris Fashion Week 2022 and 2024, respectively. A mixed-methods approach was chosen for the case study, as "collecting qualitative and quantitative data sets about the phenomenon provides researchers with more in-depth insights than would be obtained using only one type of data" (Heale & Twycross, 2017).

Therefore, two studies were conducted: Study 1 consists in performing an exploratory research using content analysis, whereby publicly available data was scraped from the brand's Instagram page to analyse the engagement at the time of the statements, measure the parasocial interaction and the communication of their sustainability values; followed by a descriptive research, in Study 2, based on an online survey where the brand's name is omitted and thus simulated by describing their brand activism and CSR efforts to understand the consumer's perception.

In Study 1, the dimensions that are possible to examine with the publicly available data scraped from Instagram are: comments on the brand's posts over time, as the likes amount became hidden from public since beginning 2023, which is used as an indication of the level of engagement with each post; how often the brand mentions "organic, recycled, upcycled, dead stock and biodegradable" (as claimed in their Environmental Policy [see Attachment I]), as well as "*faux*" (meaning artificial or synthetic material [Oxford English Dictionary, 2023], term often used in the high fashion industry e.g. *faux* leather or fur) and "vegan" on Instagram, which functions as an indication of how high the integration of these values actually are in their communication; lastly measuring the interactions between the brand and consumers (parasocial interactions), in this case replies to comments, could help indicate if the brand should put more effort in fostering willingness to pay and brand loyalty (Zha et al., 2023).

A script in Python was written to scrape the public data on the Instagram page of GmbH, namely all 466 posts from 2018 until November 1st, 2024. This resulted in gathering a total of 10090 comments, including 109 replies to the top-level comments, and graphs were created with the use of Matplotlib. Next, similar to the sentiment analysis of consumer responses in Cammarota et al. (2024), comments from relevant posts were manually categorized into

positive, negative, and neutral to analyse and group the data. This helps understand the consumers' sentiment as reaction to the statements. Proceeding to the communication of sustainable values, the keywords were filtered out based on the mentions of them in the description of the posts by the process of keyword matching. Although there are mentions of some of the keywords found in replies from the brand, this won't be considered as communication from brand to audience as it's directed to one single user at a time. For the parasocial interaction, the number of times the brand replied to consumers' comments under each post was summed up and compared with the total number comments.

The main objectives of Study 2, are to understand a) How important CSR and brand activism are in the luxury fashion context; b) the perceived transparency and authenticity of GmbH's CSR values and activism, respectively; c) the perceived brand activism authenticity in case no further commitment is made; d) the willingness to pay before and after knowing the brand's activism; e) the likeliness to share the brand with friends, family and followers before and after knowing the brand's activism; and lastly, f) how likely the consumer is to share a luxury brand with friends, family and followers compared to GmbH. This study will also indicate how high the expectation is for the brand to communicate their CSR values through social media. Lastly, while the perceived level of authenticity of the brand activism could indicate the risk at which GmbH's actions are to be perceived as woke-washing, the direct feedback on this topic will confirm or disprove this.

The survey was conducted through Google Forms and 74 answers were collected between November 25th and December 9th, 2024. The survey was divided into 3 sections. The questions in the first section aimed at understanding if the respondents are luxury consumers or not and what generation they belong to (question 1 and 2). The next section's questions focused on the perceived relevancy of CSR activities in the luxury market, perceived transparency regarding GmbH's CSR activities and consumer expectation of the brand's CSR communication (questions 3 to 7). This section finished with two questions about how likely the consumer is willing to pay for fashion from it and share the brand with others, based on what they know about the brand so far (questions 8 and 9). The last section's questions focused on the importance of brand activism in the luxury market for the consumer, the perceived authenticity of GmbH's brand activism and the risk of woke-washing (questions 10 to 16). This section finished with questions about how likely the consumer is willing to pay for fashion from

it and share the brand with others in general (question 17 and 18). The survey can be found under Appendix I.

The survey’s questions were essentially close-ended whereby the respondents had to answer mostly through a 5-point scale of Likert or by selecting “yes”, “no” and “maybe”. Only one question was open-ended. To analyse the data, the responses were exported to Excel where a statistical analysis was conducted through a t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means. With this test, the variation of the consumers’ perception, as well as likeliness to share and to be willing to pay will be able to be compared across different moments. To systematically investigate the impact of brand activism and test the potential effects on consumers, five hypotheses were formulated, each with a corresponding null and alternative hypothesis. Hypothesis 1 (H1) investigates consumer purchase intention, Hypothesis 2 (H2) explores the sharing intention, while Hypotheses 3 and 4 (H3, H4) evaluate the perceived authenticity of political and environmental statements. Hypothesis 5 (H5) compares the sharing intention of a brand with values that resonate with the consumer with the sharing intention of GmbH.

Each hypothesis is presented with its corresponding null hypothesis (H0) and alternative hypothesis (H1) in Table 1, providing a comprehensive framework for analysing the consumer response:

Hypothesis	Null hypothesis (H0)	Alternative hypothesis (H1)
1	There is no significant difference in the likelihood to buy the brand before and after learning about the brand's activism.	There is a significant difference in the likelihood to buy the brand before and after learning about the brand's activism.
2	There is no significant difference in the likelihood of sharing the brand before and after learning about the brand's activism.	There is a significant difference in the likelihood of sharing the brand before and after learning about the brand's activism.
3	The perceived authenticity of the political statement remains unchanged if the brand doesn't communicate further tangible commitment.	The perceived authenticity of the political statement changes if the brand doesn't communicate further tangible commitment.
4	The perceived authenticity of the environmental statement remains unchanged if the brand doesn't	The perceived authenticity of the environmental statement changes if the brand

	communicate further tangible commitment.	doesn't communicate further tangible commitment.
5	There is no significant difference between the likelihood of sharing a resonant luxury brand and sharing GmbH.	There is a significant difference between the likelihood of sharing a resonant luxury brand and sharing GmbH.

Table 1 Formulated hypothesis

3.1 The case of GmbH: the brand's origin, statements, CSR and social media presence

GmbH was founded in 2016 and is based in Berlin and with not more than 10 employees, it's a small emerging label (GmbH, n.d.). The two designers, Benjamin Huseby and Serhat Isik, that established the brand are from immigrant background, which inspired both to “weave these ideas [migration] and political statements into the clothes” (Williams, 2018), while also “raise awareness about the current world events and express them through fashion” (Highsnobiety, n.d.). Their offerings span from basic t-shirts (€160-270) and accessories (€50-100) to premium outerwear (€690-1,300), establishing the brand in the luxury segment. As previously mentioned in section 2.1.2, this positioning could allow them to seamlessly integrate CSR values into their business models from the start, facing less risk of perceived inauthenticity or woke-washing while aligning better with consumer expectations (Vock, 2022).

With each collection the brand develops, there is a symbolic meaning behind it related to a current socio-political or environmental issue. However, only a few had a clear statement related to them: at the Paris Fashion Week in January 2024, the two designers held a long political speech before the brand's show, titled as “Untitled Nations”, in which they referred to the Middle East conflict, pleading for a ceasefire and liberation of Palestinian territory (Vergara, 2024). Being the only label that dared to make this “bold political statement” (Davidson, 2024), it received a noticeable amount of media attention. As an example of a collection with an environmental cause as a meaning, in October 2022 the brand presented at the Paris Fashion Week “Ghazal” followed by a press release (see Attachment II) in which climate crisis and the displacement of millions of people due to the floods in Pakistan are referred to, besides pointing out that the fashion industry has remained silent about this issue whilst the country is one of the major cotton producers. To the best of the author's knowledge, no further commitment to these causes was made and/or communicated through the media.

Furthermore, the brand self-claimed to be committed to social and environmental responsibility since the start (GmbH, n.d.) and the products are described as being environmentally conscious (Business of Fashion, n.d.; Highsnobiety, n.d). The Environmental Policy is available on their website² in which it's stated that 90% of the material used is "organic, recycled, upcycled, dead stock and biodegradable", more specifically: Organic Cotton; Recycled cotton; Viscose from well managed sources; Lyocell from well managed sources; Recycled nylon, polyester and polyamide; Plant based bio-degradable polyamide; Wadding from recycled PET, PVC and CFC-FREE (*Environmental Policy*, n.d.). Additionally, the company states that most of their clothes are produced in Europe.

Although it's a relatively recent and small-scale brand, GmbH managed to gather until now 176 thousand followers on Instagram³ since their first post in 2018 and has currently 1100 followers on Tiktok⁴. For this reason, only data from Instagram is considered valuable for this study.

The brand combines high-quality tailoring with Berlin work and streetwear elements (Röthig, 2020) and based on Thomas (2024), "GmbH has become known for gender-subverting garments" (para. 13) meaning that their target consumer profile are fashion-forward individuals who reject traditional gender norms and conservative fashion norms. Furthermore, the article states that the designers seek to allow individuals to express themselves authentically and "also see the label as a tool for community building" (Thomas, 2024, para. 15), offering provocative, gender-fluid, and sexually expressive aesthetic, while also valuing diversity and a community-focused approach that challenges traditional fashion norms. This could indicate that the consumers are young belief-driven buyers interested in the brand's socio-political stance and CSR efforts, meaning that GmbH's consumer profile fits the focus of the thesis.

Furthermore, the brand has collaborated with other brands such as ASICS, Axel Arigato, Jack Wolfskin and Scholl and the products are sold through several stockists all over Europe, Asia, Oceania and North America, such as Farfetch, SSENSE and LN-CC (GmbH, n.d.; Highsnobiety, n.d.).

² <https://gmbhgmbh.eu/environmental-policy/>

³ @gmbh_official https://www.instagram.com/gmbh_official/?hl=en

⁴ @gmbh_official https://www.tiktok.com/@gmbh_official?lang=en

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Study 1: Brand activism and CSR on Instagram

4.1.1 Data results and analysis

After processing the data, the output regarding the number of comments over time in Figure 2 provides insight about which posts received more engagement and facilitated narrowing the research to specific moments and relevant posts.

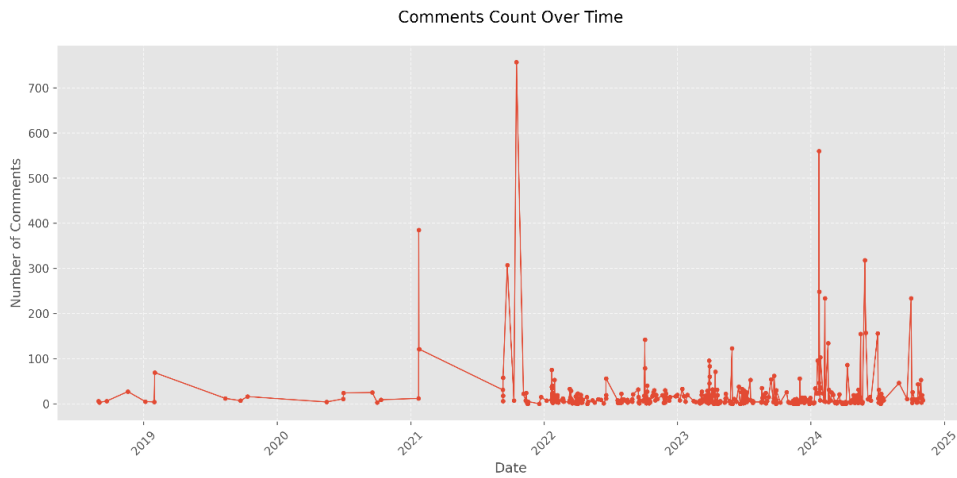


Figure 2 Comments over time

The three engagement spikes in 2021 were namely the presentation of their winter collection in January, which also happened to be the first time presenting a collection on Instagram but without further meaning communicated, and two other posts in September and October of a celebrity wearing GmbH. Therefore, these posts aren't of interest for this study.

The following Table 2 contains the description of the relevant spikes for better understanding:

Spike dates	Total number of comments	Theme	Attachment
2022-10-03 until 2022-10-04	221	“Ghazal” collection fashion show	III, IV
2024-01-23 until 2024-02-17	1066	“Untitled Nations” collection fashion show	V, VI, VII, VIII
2024-05-28	318	Call for Ceasefire Fire	IX
2024-10-01	234	Gala attendance with political message	X

Table 2 Description of the relevant spikes

In 2022 the brand presented “Ghazal” on October 3rd through a post followed by the press release in another post the next day which received a somewhat noticeable amount of engagement, specifically 142 and 79 comments (official number provided by Instagram). The comments that were possible to be scraped from both posts were categorized and analysed individually as seen in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4. Next, Table 3 shows examples of comments from both posts and how they’re identified.

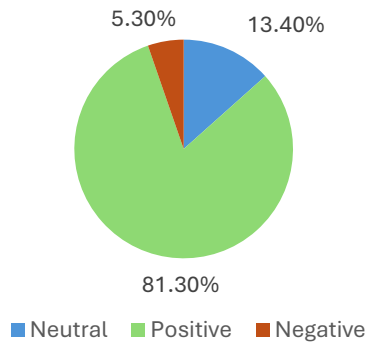


Figure 4 Sentiment Analysis Post 2022-10-03

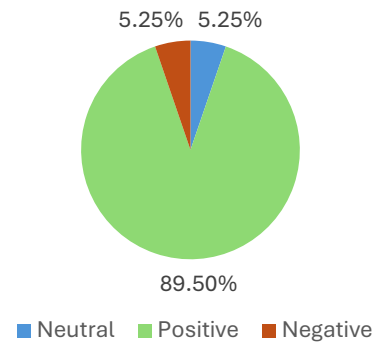


Figure 3 Sentiment Analysis Post 2022-10-04

Comments	Sentiment	Post Date
“Is it real fur?” “Second model name?”	Neutral	2022-10-03
“Not in love with this post, but it's definitely more than what any of the big fashion giants are doing or saying on the matter. Here's to hoping you grow even more and donate profits to relief efforts” “Thank you for creating awareness on the devastating flood in Pakistan. Would love if you would have collaborated with a Pakistani artist or fashion brand”	Neutral	2022-10-04
“Great show - great things ahead!” “OMG. This is epic, I haven't seen much diversity in model casting.”	Positive	2022-10-03
“Hell yaa!! Shoutout to u guys for featuring Syrian artists and other creatives from different cultures and part of the world! We love to see it” “Thank you so much for this!”	Positive	2022-10-04
“The music and the whole show is so uncoordinated, so pretentious bahaha” “Still looking for the 'Ghazal' reference in this collection”	Negative	2022-10-03
“Cringe. Just another performative activism. Your collaboration means sh*t if it only contributes to climate crisis and doesn't help any of the 33 million people affected by your collab” “I liked GmbH, you ruined your brand in my mind with this hollow wokeism words. You sound like all the big tech companies, before you moved things through you work... not by stating the obvious. Hope the ones responsible in the team rethink what path the brand wants to take. If you'd really care about the environment you would do different type of fashion...”	Negative	2022-10-04

Table 3 Examples of comments by sentiment

The beginning of 2024 was when the brand received the second highest engagement, noticeable with the spike of 560 comments. This post from January 23rd consists of a 10-minute-long video of their political speech on a ceasefire in the Middle East war before the “Untitled Nations” fashion show started. The brand continued to share 13 posts until February 17th from the fashion show and further information regarding their statement which received a visible amount of comments. For the relevance of this study, only the comments from the posts where the statement is clear (e.g. “GmbH closed Paris Men’s with a powerful message for peace in Palestine”, “UNTITLED NATIONS is a statement against exclusionary nationalism, and in support for all people displaced or denied in their homelands...”) were categorized and analysed as seen in Fig. 5, 6, 7 and 8. Afterwards, the brand started to promote mostly the new summer collection whereby the engagement also decreased, as seen in Fig. 2.

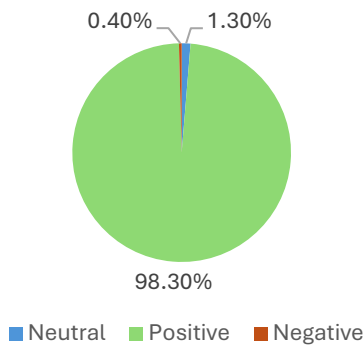


Figure 5 Sentiment Analysis Post 2024-01-23

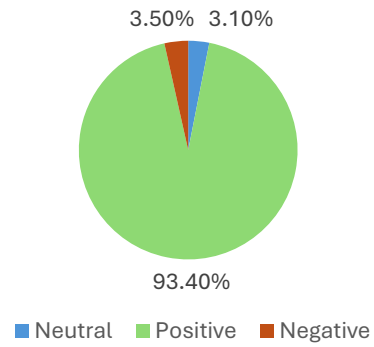


Figure 6 Sentiment Analysis Post 2024-01-24

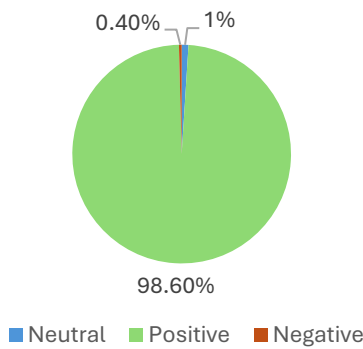


Figure 7 Sentiment Analysis Post 2024-02-08

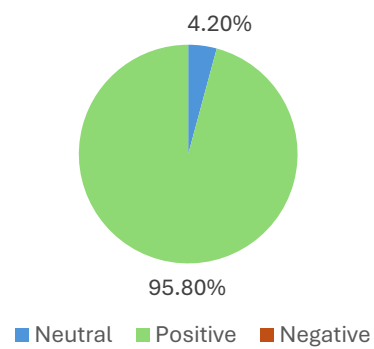


Figure 8 Sentiment Analysis Post 2024-02-17

Comments	Sentiment	Post Date
“Anyone else having trouble sharing this on your stories?”	Neutral	2024-01-23
“I can’t believe that this is not possible in Germany or wouldn’t be tolerated at the Berlin Fashion Week”	Neutral	2024-01-24
“You need to get @alii3bed in your next campaign”	Neutral	2024-02-08

“Oh god”	Neutral	2024-02-17
“Thank you for using your position and platform to speak up!! Blessings and good fortune for your business”	Positive	2024-01-23
“I loved the show, the collection, the speech and everything you put forward to make a point and speak up for the injustice In Palestine. You guys are amazing and nobody can say otherwise ever!!”	Positive	2024-01-24
“Fashion is supposed to be political and thank you for being one of the only designers brave enough to do that these days. Auntie Vivian Westwood would be very proud.”	Positive	2024-02-08
“So powerful. I saw your video and am following you since then. I wish you all the success because you deserve it. Morals not forgotten in an industry that is just interested in profits. Sending you love”	Positive	2024-02-17
“Gas 'em”	Negative	2024-01-23
“@gmbh_official you can be for peace, the ceasefire in Gaza, all that you can of course but how can you dress your mannequins like Hamas terrorists? Lack of inspiration? Or a real fascination and support for these terrorists.”	Negative	2024-01-24
“Thanks for banking with Zionists for this product”	Negative	2024-02-08
N.A.	Negative	2024-02-17

Table 4 Examples of comments by sentiment

The next spike consisted of a collection of images from other sources referencing the war and calling for a ceasefire posted on May 28th (attachment IX). Although it’s not of their own authorship, it’s a politically charged post and represents the stance the brand takes, making it eligible for the engagement to be categorized and analysed (Fig. 9).

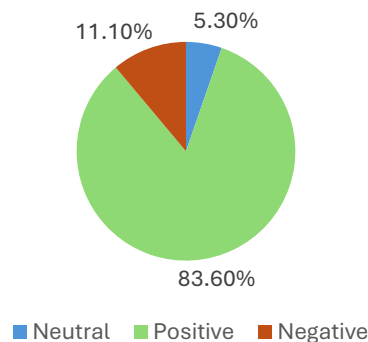


Figure 9 Sentiment Analysis Post 2024-05-28

Comments	Sentiment
“Ceasefire and release of the hostages, peace for all of the people. Also we should be aware of the propoganda of both sides (Gaza ministries are often in the hand of Hamas - not quite a trustworthy source of information these days...)”	Neutral
“Hamas need to stay away from civilians, if they really care for Innocent Palestinians ❤️ Fight like men or surrender”	

<p>“Ceasefire is the BARE MINIMUM! Dismantle the apartheid state, land back, right of return, FREE PALESTINE”</p> <p>“Love you guys for being on the right side of history. 🤔❤️🖤🤍💚”</p>	Positive
<p>“Gaza started and Israel will end it”</p> <p>“All Eyes on Kashmiri pandits, All Eyes on Hindus in Pakistani, All eyes on Hindus in Bangladesh All eyes on Hindus in West Bengal that time nobody posted story against this topics”</p>	Negative

Table 5 Examples of comments by sentiment

On October 1st the brand posted about the attendance of both designers at a gala related to the Fashion Week in Paris, captioned with a reference to the ongoing war and criticizing how “most people seemingly parade around in oblivion” (see attachment X), thus showing the stance they take in this. Fig. 10 reports the comments categorized and analysed.

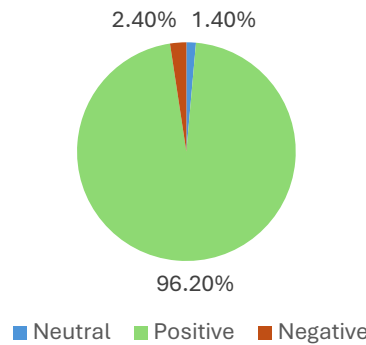


Figure 10 Sentiment Analysis Post 2024-10-01

Comments	Sentiment
“hi!!! how can i order this jacket for made to order??”	Neutral
<p>“The world needs this more than ever! Ditto the world is oblivious to what is happening as they are too privileged to be affected. It's real when loved ones are scrambling to get family out of Lebanon last week or oppression is normalised like facist regimes in Kashmir. More power to you 🍷❤️”</p> <p>“Welll done for your courage to stand up for justice and remind everyone of what's happening 🙌🙌🙌”</p>	Positive
<p>“Discutibile”</p> <p>“If you don't like what's happening, why don't you go to Gaza or Lebanon to support your people? What the hell are you doing then in Paris? Your double moral stinks.. you live on Berlin, Germany.. see how your Spezies behaves as guests in our country. So keep your mouth shut and do your fashion job!!!”</p>	Negative

Table 6 Examples of comments by sentiment

The following graph (Fig. 11) represents how often the CSR values are mentioned in the captions from posts. Over 466 posts, the keyword “Organic” was mentioned 0.64%*,

“Recycled” 0.64%*, Upcycled 0%, Dead Stock 0%, Biodegradable 0%, Vegan 2.15%* and *Faux* was mentioned 3.22%*.

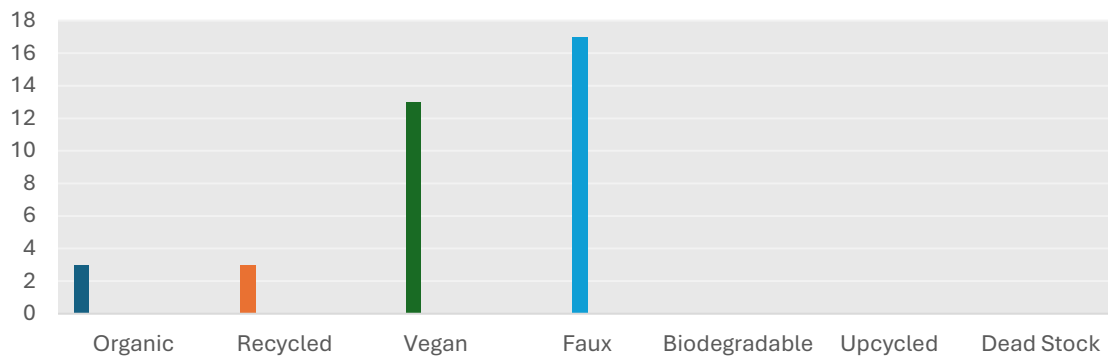


Figure 11 Number of CSR values mentions

Regarding the parasocial interaction, measured by counting the times of replies from the brand to comments under each post, the scraped data resulted in a total of 82 replies since the first post, as seen in Fig. 12. Besides the spike in 2021 which matches the presentation of their first collection analysed in Fig.2, the interaction appears relatively low even on the moments of higher engagement. The average percentage of interactions with consumers through comments results in 0,81% over all comments.

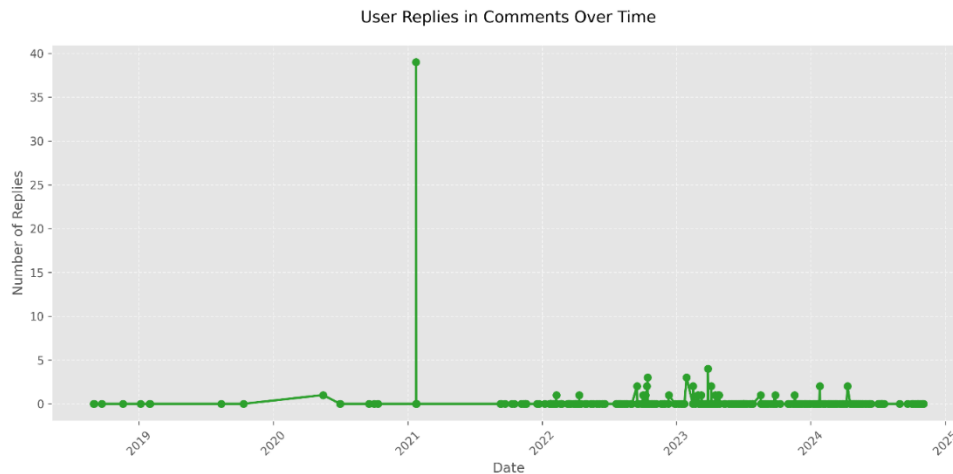


Figure 12 Parasocial interaction over time

* (mentioned at least once in a post)

4.1.2 Discussion

GmbH, as it's a "political" fashion brand, seeks or should seek to create an emotional connection with customers who believe that the choice of their purchase makes a difference in the world (Vanhamme et al., 2021). Based on the graph of Figure 2, it's evident that sociopolitical and environmental statements increase engagement and, by doing so, they're capable of building a community, which fulfils the designers' aspiration to do so through the label (Thomas, 2024) while also transcending their product role and stimulating cultural innovation (Kapferer, 2012). These engagement spikes could be considered as evidence of GmbH successfully building a community that supports and resonates the same values as the overall sentiment of the comments are positive in all the posts. This could possibly indicate that the brand activism is perceived as authentic, besides "that an activist brand's authenticity stems from its ongoing activism, a position on highly specific, contentious, and near issues that matter to the brand's target audience" (Cammarota et al., 2024, p.35).

However, the reactions are overall positive (>80%) since, in both moments, based on the brand's statements, they were the only ones speaking up about the issues. Moreover, as seen in Tables 3,4,5 and 6, most of the positive reactions were of a subjective nature (e.g. "OMG. This is epic, I haven't seen much diversity in model casting") while the few negative comments tend to be more objective (e.g. "All Eyes on Kashmiri pandits, All Eyes on Hindus in Pakistani, All eyes on Hindus in Bangladesh All eyes on Hindus in West Bengal that time nobody posted story against this topics"). Therefore, it's valuable for this research to understand how authentic the brand's activism is perceived, if the statements were isolated and presented in an objective manner to the consumer. Furthermore, through the analysis of the posts, none of them after the statements, showed further commitment in the form of concrete actions the brand carrying out, which could hypothetically mean that GmbH is practicing silent brand activism (Vredenburg et al., 2020). The question that now arises is if the brand should practice authentic brand activism besides the statements and if it chooses not to, would it create scepticism, leading to potential woke-washing?

Social and environmental responsibility has been a major principle since they were founded, which aligns with Vock (2022), whereby new luxury brands easily manage to integrate CSR. However, based on the graph of Figure 11, the brand's communication efforts on their CSR values are extremely low, meaning that there is an opportunity to improve their reputation and the consumer trust (Zhang, 2024). Through the questionnaire, this study seeks to examine

the potential effectiveness of enhanced CSR communication strategies for GmbH. Moreover, to further improve the connection between the brand and consumer, by increasing the engagement with their community in a consistent manner, GmbH could ensure and foster brand loyalty and willingness to pay (Zha et al., 2023), as evidenced by Fig. 12 where, aside from one moment, the brand's number of replies never exceeds five.

4.2 Study 2: The consumers' perceptions of the brand CSR and activism

4.2.1 Data results and analysis

Although only, 56.8% showed interest in luxury consumption, the opinion on expectations of luxury brands from the non-luxury consumer would still be considered valuable, since the focus is primarily on the perception of the brand activism and CSR values. The majority of the respondents were Gen Z with 70.3%, followed by Gen X representing 14.9%, Millennials representing 10.8% and 4.1% were from Generation Jones (born between 1955 – 1964).

The general relevancy of traceability and transparency in the supply chain of a luxury brand was $M=3.9$ ($SD= 1.1$) on the 5-point scale of Likert (1= not relevant, 5= very relevant) and the relevancy of incorporating brand activism as a luxury brand $M=3.7$ ($SD= 1.1$). The perceived transparency of GmbH's Environmental Policy regarding materials scored $M=3.6$ ($SD=0.9$) and regarding pollution $M=3.4$ ($SD= 1.1$) on the 5-point scale of Likert (1= not transparent, 5= very transparent). About the perceived level of authenticity of the brand's socio-political statement, the respondents considered it $M=2.9$ ($SD= 1.2$) on the 5-point scale of Likert (1= low authenticity, 5= high authenticity) and the perceived level of authenticity of the brand's environmental statement in a press release, scored $M=3.2$ ($SD= 1.1$).

Google Forms created graphs to visualize the data (see appendix I), which already gave empirical insights about the consumers' reactions. However, by performing a statistical analysis through a t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means, it's possible to compare the variation of the consumer's perception value across multiple moments and if it's statistically significant, $p<.05$.

The variables for H1 were the responses to the question “Based on what you learned from the brand until now, how likely are you willing to pay for fashion from it? (Regardless of your purchasing power or taste in fashion)” in the CSR section of the survey and the responses of the same question placed in the last section of the survey, after the respondents learned about the brand activism. The likeliness to buy in the first moment was $M=3.4$ and dropped to $M=2.7$ in the second moment, meaning that the brand’s activism had a negative impact on the consumer’s willingness to pay. This difference also showed being statistically significant with $p=.00001$ of $H0_1$ being true and therefore $H1_1$ was accepted.

For H2, the selected variables were the responses to the question placed in the CSR section “How likely would you share and/or recommend this brand to your family, friends or social media followers?”, which was also placed in the next section of the survey about brand activism. The difference in likeliness of sharing the brand with friends, family and followers also showed a decrease from $M=3.2$ to $M=2.7$, with a statistical significance $p=.00013$, from before and after learning the brand’s activism. Therefore, $H0_2$ was also rejected and $H1_2$ was accepted.

To test H3, the responses about the perceived authenticity of the brand’s socio-political statement (“The brand made a bold socio-political statement about a current war, moments before presenting their collection at a fashion show. How authentic do you consider this activism?”) were compared to the responses to “If no further tangible commitment to these causes was communicated through social media, how authentic would you perceive their brand activism?”. The perceived authenticity of the socio-political statement was $M=2.9$ versus $M=2.5$ if no further tangible commitment was communicated. While this difference isn’t substantial, it’s statistically significant as $p<.05$ ($p=.01211$), thus $H0_3$ was rejected and $H1_3$ was accepted.

Similarly, for H4, the responses about the perceived authenticity of the brand’s environmental statement in the press release (“The brand published a press release right after another fashion show explaining the meaning of the collection, including the following paragraph. How authentic do you consider this activism?”) were compared to responses from the question “If no further tangible commitment to these causes was communicated through social media, how authentic would you perceive their brand activism?”. The perceived authenticity for the environmental statement was higher, $M=3.2$, which makes the difference, to $M=2.5$ when no further tangible efforts are communicated, greater. The statistical

significance of this difference, $p = .000005$, shows the extremely low probability of null hypothesis H_{04} being true, therefore H_{14} is accepted.

Lastly, for H_5 , the variables were the responses to the question “How likely would you share with friends, family or followers, a luxury brand's post which communicates brand activism that resonates with your personal values?” and the responses from the last question “In general, how likely would you share and/or recommend this brand to your family, friends or social media followers?”. The respondents showed a likelihood of $M=3.3$ for sharing a luxury brand’s post that communicates brand activism and resonates with the consumer values, while for sharing GmbH it was $M=2.7$. The difference was statistically significant with $p = .00004$, meaning that H_{05} was rejected and H_{15} was accepted.

After presenting the Environmental Policy, 90.5% of the 74 respondents believed it was important for the brand to communicate its core values. Additionally, after presenting Figure 11, 79.7% expected the brand to mention these values more frequently.

From 62.1% of respondents that knew the meaning of woke and woke-washing, 18.9% didn’t perceive the brand’s actions as woke-washing, 29.7% would maybe consider it woke-washing and only 13.5% agreed on it being woke-washing. Next, the respondents, who perceived it as woke-washing, were asked to explain why. Even though the survey merely received 10 open-ended responses, similar sentiments and recurring themes were identified, making it possible to classify the answers (Table 7). The description of the theme of each answer was based on the dimensions of perceived authenticity in woke branding by Mirzaei et al. (2022), which in this case would be the lack of each dimension.

Open-ended responses	Theme and the lack of perceived authenticity dimensions in woke branding*
To be in the current bandwagon that can potentially carry more likes and engagement.	Social context independency, Motivation

* Based on Mirzaei et al. (2022) perceived authenticity dimensions in woke branding

<p>They are using an event with a wide reach to position themselves in a way that will benefit the firm, despite not living the principals. For me its more marketing and no authenticity at all. Its purely profit driven without helping the cause/what they claim to stand for. Its taking advantage of a disasters and exploiting people.</p>	<p>Social context independency, Motivation</p>
<p>Because there is no action taken after the press release or even after the show. If the brand truly cared I would expect them to follow up with that statement</p>	<p>Practice</p>
<p>I would expect further actions to be communicated by the brand after such statements</p>	<p>Practice</p>
<p>If the brands actions remain only via social media posts and not tangible efforts, it falls short. Especially being a luxury brand which we would assume would have the means to do more.</p>	<p>Practice, Sacrifice</p>
<p>They make strong statements, what everyone can do, without actually showing any more efforts like donating or similar.</p>	<p>Sacrifice</p>
<p>It feels as if the brand is only using the current world event to gain interest and attention for their brand, rather than out of sincerity</p>	<p>Social context independency, Motivation</p>
<p>They create a false image of being involved, however raising awareness is an important step in activism. But if your entire label is based on that mind set, you should also get more involved with campaigns or donations etc</p>	<p>Sacrifice, Practice</p>
<p>No action taken, hypothetical</p>	<p>Practice, Sacrifice</p>
<p>The sole goal of a publicly funded company is to bring profit to its shareholders. It's known that it will do this in a pragmatic way, flipping its views in accordance to what it believes to be the most popular. These issues should be kept separate out of respect and left to those with greater knowledge of such sensitive subjects.</p>	<p>Fit, Social context independency</p>

Table 7 Open-ended responses categorized by theme and dimensions

Chapter 5: General discussion

Study 2 indicated that it's relevant to a considerable extent ($M=3.7$) for a luxury brand to incorporate brand activism, this is in line with Paris (2022), confirming that GmbH's choice to be a political brand and engage with causes is important. Moreover, the direct involvement of the designers with making the statements, according to Borio's (2017) brand personification, should help increase the authenticity of the activism. This specific factor wasn't considered in Study 2, but it could be a possible explanation for the overall positive sentiment shown in the comments of GmbH's statements posts in Study 1, which, based on one of the conclusions from Cammarota et al. (2024), also indicates that their brand activism could be in fact be perceived as authentic.

However, findings of Study 2 show that the perceived authenticity significantly decreases if no further commitment to the cause is known to the audience (by not practicing it or not communicating it) as seen in Fig. 13. This aligns with contemporary consumer expectations for brand activism, which demands genuine, long-term internal commitment (Lewis & Vredenburg, 2023).

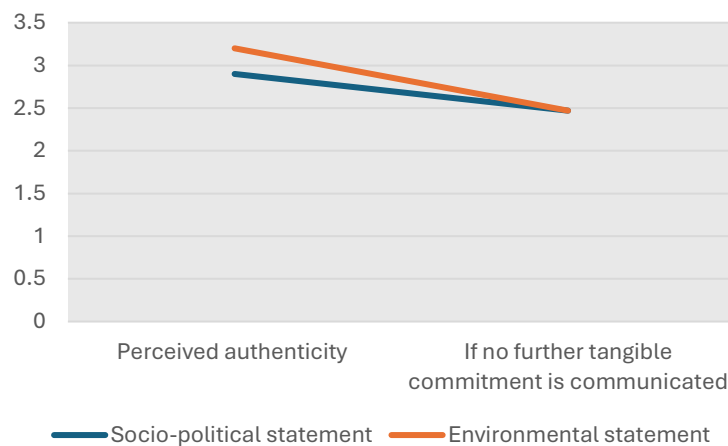


Figure 13 Perceived authenticity decrease

Also in Study 1, it was observed that the brand's values align with their community's values, which is especially important for the younger generation (Amed et al., 2019; Marxen 2023). In Study 2, it was shown that social media posts of a luxury brand with brand activism values that resonate with the consumer, would most likely lead to sharing intentions ($M=3.3$), which translates to positive eWOM. This finding aligns with Kong et al. (2020), as this research was also predominantly conducted in a western individualistic culture, where the consumer is

more aware of sustainability and motivated by sustainability beliefs to engage in activism. Furthermore, in Study 2, GmbH's communication of CSR values was found crucial, and evidence shows that 79.7% of the consumers expect the brand to communicate it more often. This could mean that there is potential to increase eWOM about the brand and consumer engagement, when the communication is combined with authenticity (Zhang, 2024). Furthermore, as also seen in Figure 12 from Study 1, the parasocial interaction between brand and consumer is relatively low, which with engaging authentic content and forming meaningful personal connections within their community would increase brand loyalty and willingness to pay (Zha et al., 2023). This is especially important since, despite GmbH's approach to sustainability and brand activism should mitigate the paradoxical divergence of values (Wong & Dhanesh, 2016), the likeliness of consumers to be willing to pay, measured in Study 2, decreased regardless after knowing about the brand's activism, which in any case didn't score a high perceived authenticity level. This decrease of willingness to pay paired with a perceived low authenticity of brand activism aligns with Arkema (2022), which argues that inauthentic brand activism reduces intention to purchase.

The ambiguity in the survey results from Study 2, about considering the brand's practices woke-washing, suggests that the respondents are also perhaps open to believe it's authentic and that, just like the overall positive sentiment expressed in the comments of Study 1, the bold nature of the statements created some initial credibility (Borio, 2017). However, Study 2 also confirmed that the possibility of practicing silent brand activism, as discussed in Study 1, isn't a strategy GmbH should adopt, since the majority could similarly be considering the possibility of it being woke-washing, most likely because of the lack of social context independency, which has a significant effect on woke activism campaign authenticity, and practice. This means, according to Mirzaei et al. (2022), in order for the brand to be practicing authentic woke branding, it should focus developing a genuine, long-term commitment to activism by demonstrating consistent, authentic involvement with social issues, ensuring their campaigns are deeply rooted in their core values and not perceived as opportunistic attempts to generate publicity from "topical social issues, for which there is a built-up tension in society" (Mirzaei et al., 2022, p.5). Additionally, for the lack of practice, which derives from the perceived virtue signalling with profit-seeking intentions, GmbH should demonstrate a proven record of supporting the causes they claim to care about, which helps to establish the credibility of the actual commitment and actions (Mirzaei et al., 2022). In summary, the brand should

communicate their possible further commitment to the causes, especially when they're not a trending topic.

Although GmbH took bold stances in both moments, by being the only brand that spoke up in "a fashion world that remained silent" (attachment II) during the floods in Pakistan and "while most people seemingly parade around in oblivion" (attachment X) when there is an ongoing war, which according to Borio (2017) would increase the perceived credibility of the brand activism, Study 2 revealed that the perceived authenticity depends on further commitment to these causes, as it significantly decreases if no additional actions are made.

Conclusion and managerial implications

The purpose of this study was to understand if GmbH was communicating effectively their CSR values and brand activism and if there was any potential risk of being perceived as inauthentic or practicing woke-washing. Therefore, first the Instagram page of the brand was analysed in Study 1, where findings revealed that a) environmental and socio-political statements increased engagement with the account, namely comments which were mostly positive, b) the brand doesn't communicate often their CSR values and c) the brand doesn't reply often to comments on their posts. The results from the survey conducted in Study 2 revealed that d) GmbH's statements would potentially lead to lower willingness to pay and intention to share, and e) no further tangible action has direct negative impact on the perceived authenticity, f) there is a chance of the statements being perceived as woke-washing and g) consumers expect the brand to communicate CSR values more often.

To respond to the research question, GmbH's communication strategy isn't effective and could improve on the CSR level as well as regarding their brand activism – if the brand communicated more the values referred in their Environmental Policy, it would satisfy the consumer's expectations and if the brand communicated further tangible actions after their statements, the authenticity perception wouldn't decrease. Based on the literature review, there are several aspects to the communication the political brand should consider: highlighting product innovation (Vock, 2022) and integrating storytelling (Marxen, 2023; Zhang, 2024) while showcasing the creation process of, for instances, a new collection (Vanhamme et al., 2021; Zha et al., 2023), this could also serve as an opportunity to introduce to the consumer an environmental or socio-political statement related to the meaning of the collection, as only presenting the statement at a fashion show could be perceived as a marketing trick (Mirzaei et al., 2022); developing a product-linked campaign (Kim et al., 2022) which is promoted during a fashion show, since that's when engagement with the brand's Instagram page peaks, profiting from eWOM that's increased by the community whose values feel resonated; ensuring trust and credibility by further committing to the cause (Lewis & Vredenburg, 2023) and engaging in authentic brand activism (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

For brands similar to GmbH in size and market position, this study highlights the importance of balancing activism with authentic brand communication. While consumers appreciate and engage with socio-political statements, they expect these statements to be backed

by concrete actions and consistent communication. This is particularly crucial for smaller luxury brands where woke-washing accusations might have bigger negative impact and, thus, authenticity and community engagement play vital roles in willingness to pay and consumer loyalty.

Limitations and future research

This research faced several methodological limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the social media analysis was constrained by Instagram's platform limitations. The brand's decision to hide like counts and Instagram's algorithmic filtering of comments may have affected the completeness of engagement data. Additionally, the potential presence of paid advertisements and the inability to access previous Instagram Stories may have impacted the comprehensive understanding of GmbH's communication strategy.

A significant methodological limitation relates to the execution of Study 2. Multiple control groups could have contributed to the study by helping isolate specific factors contributing to lower perceived authenticity of brand activism. Furthermore, while the study identified that lack of tangible action negatively impacts authenticity perception, it was unable to quantify the extent to which communicating concrete commitments might enhance authenticity perceptions.

These limitations, while not undermining the study's primary findings, suggest opportunities for more detailed investigation of the relationship between communication strategies and perceived authenticity in luxury brand activism. Future research could address several key questions: What types of concrete actions have the strongest impact on perceived authenticity? Given the limited research on small emerging luxury brands, how does brand size influence consumer expectations regarding CSR communication and activism authenticity when comparing small and large luxury brands?

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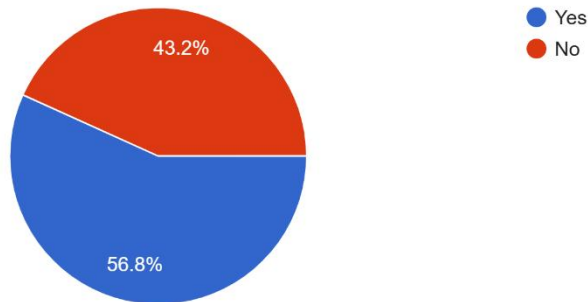
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Appendix

Appendix I

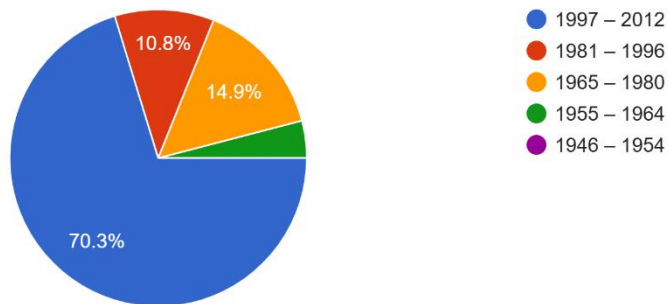
Are you a luxury consumer and/or are interested in luxury fashion?

74 responses



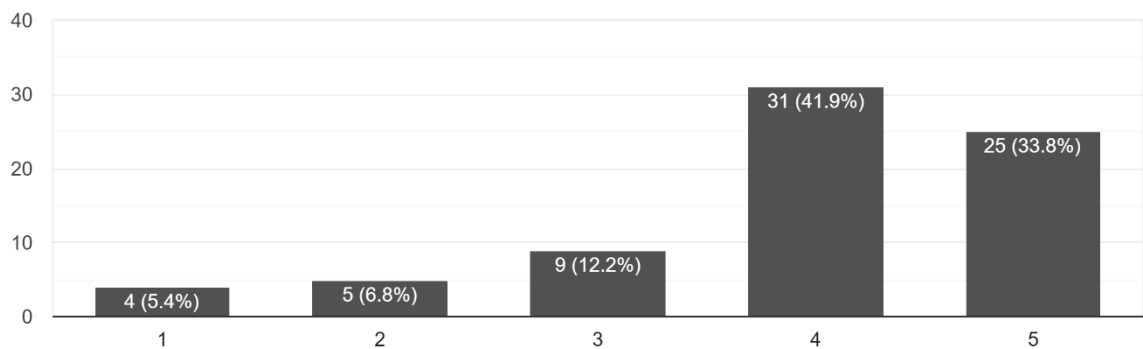
When were you born?

74 responses



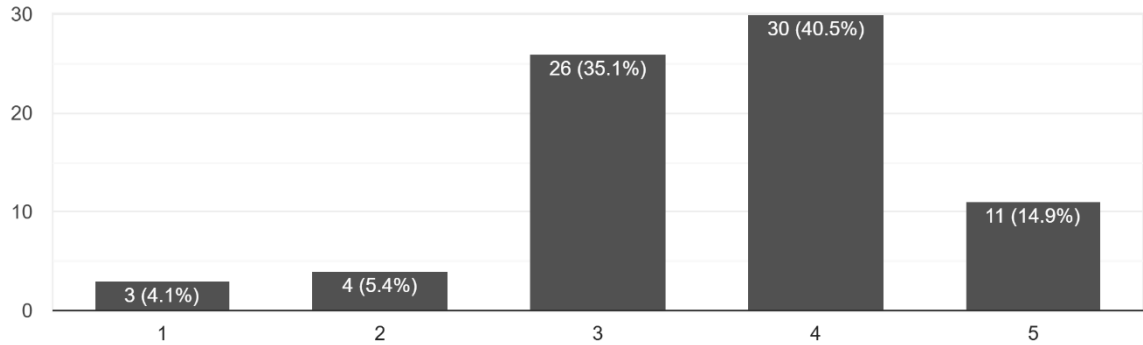
How relevant is traceability and transparency in the supply chain of a luxury brand to you?

74 responses



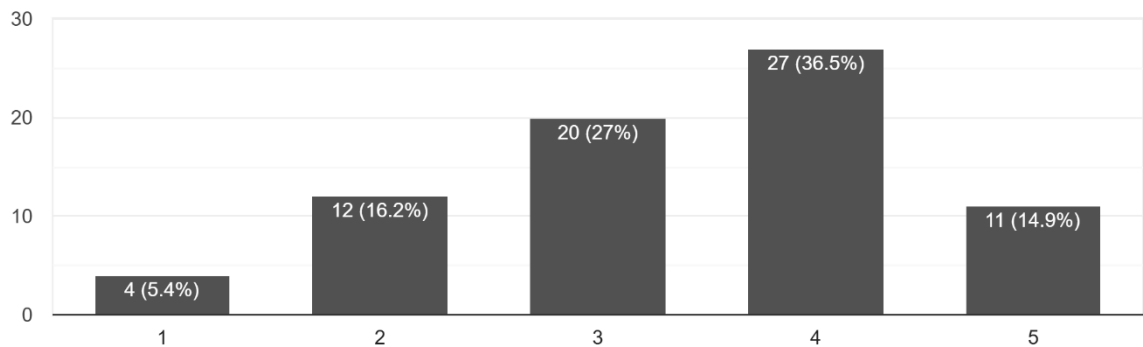
After reading the brand's Environmental Policy regarding materials, how transparent do you consider it?

74 responses



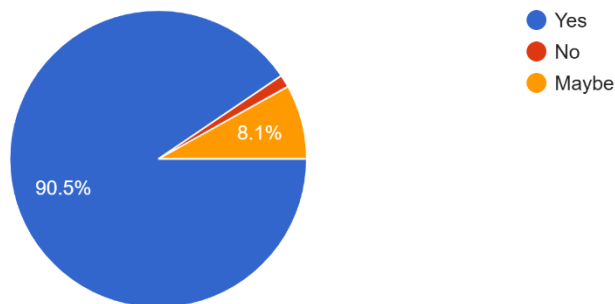
After reading the brand's Environmental Policy regarding pollution, how transparent do you consider it?

74 responses



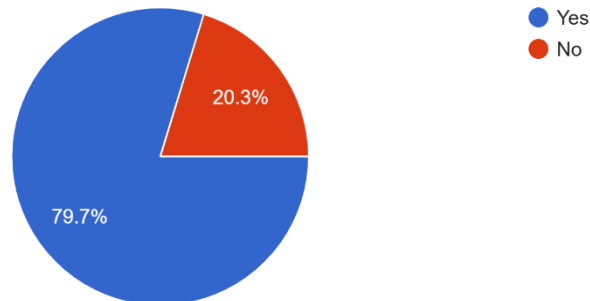
As "Environmental and social responsibility has been a major principal" since the brand was founded and described as a conscious brand in med... brand on other platforms, such as social media?

74 responses



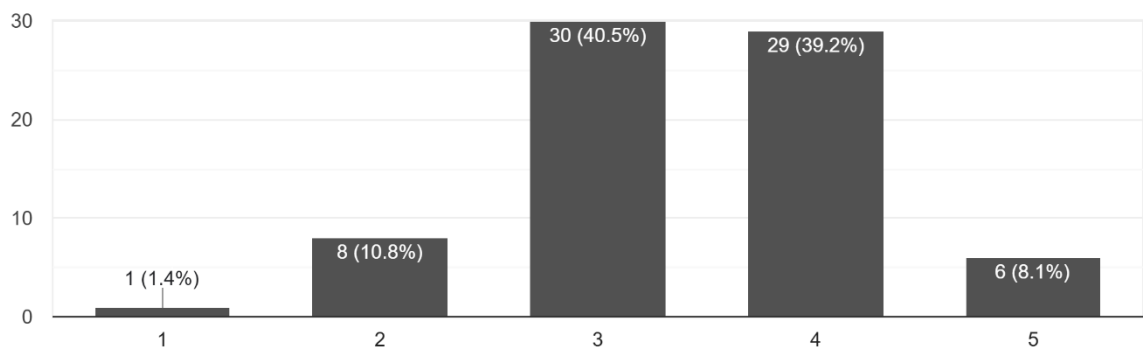
The following graph represents how often these values are mentioned over time in the description of the more than 400 brand's posts. Would you expect the values to be mentioned more often?

74 responses



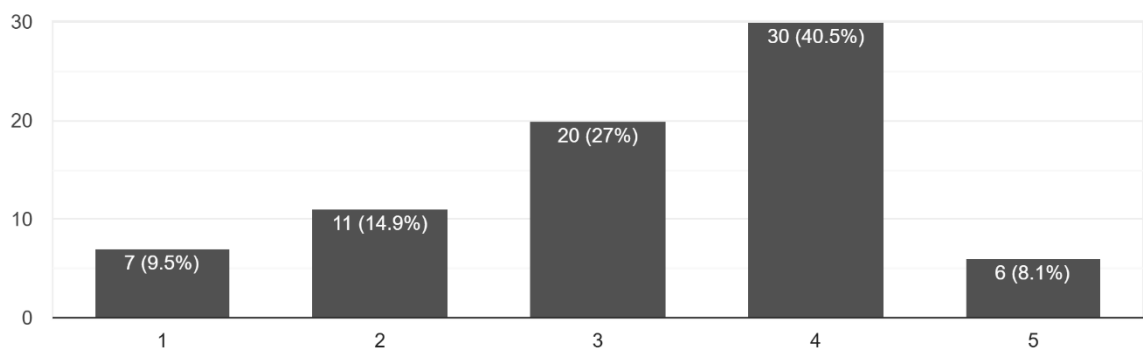
Based on what you learned from the brand until now, how likely are you willing to pay for fashion from it? (Regardless of your purchasing power or taste in fashion)

74 responses



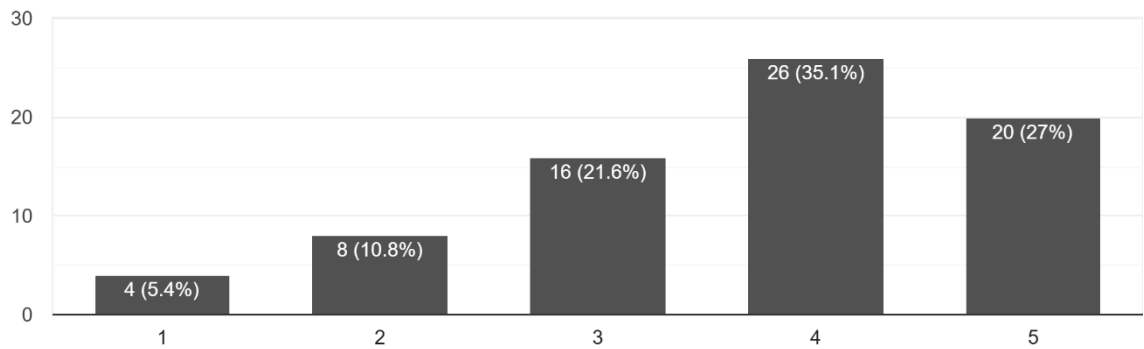
How likely would you share and/or recommend this brand to your family, friends or social media followers?

74 responses



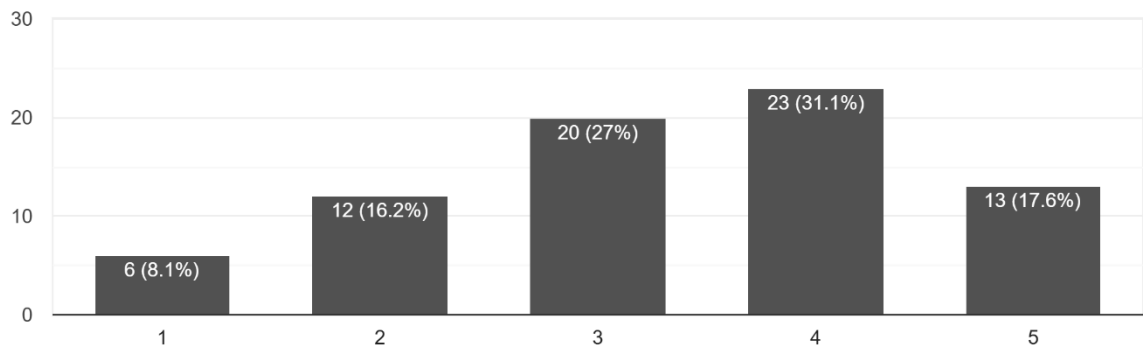
How relevant is incorporating brand activism as a luxury brand to you?

74 responses



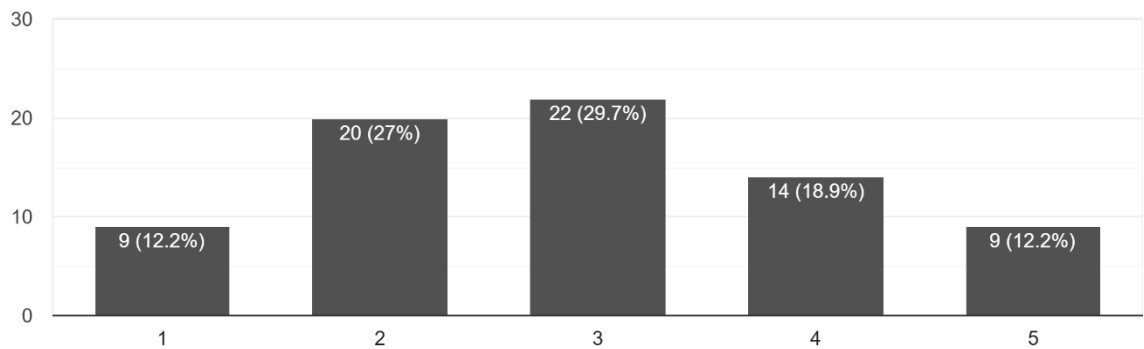
How likely would you share with friends, family or followers, a luxury brand's post which communicates brand activism that resonates with your personal values?

74 responses



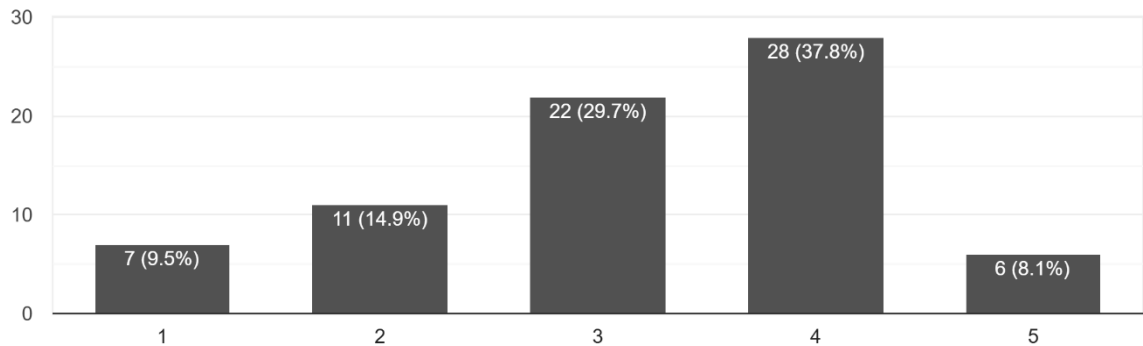
The brand made a bold socio-political statement about a current war, moments before presenting their collection at a fashion show. How authentic do you consider this activism?

74 responses



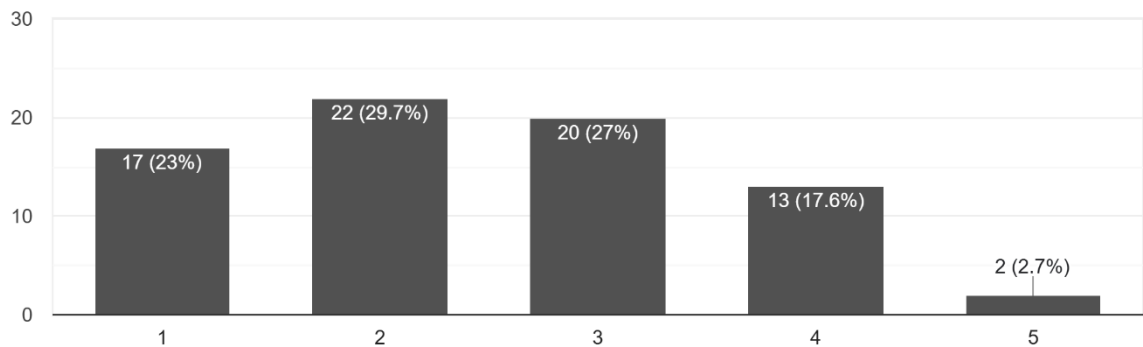
The brand published a press release right after another fashion show explaining the meaning of the collection, including the following paragraph. How authentic do you consider this activism?

74 responses



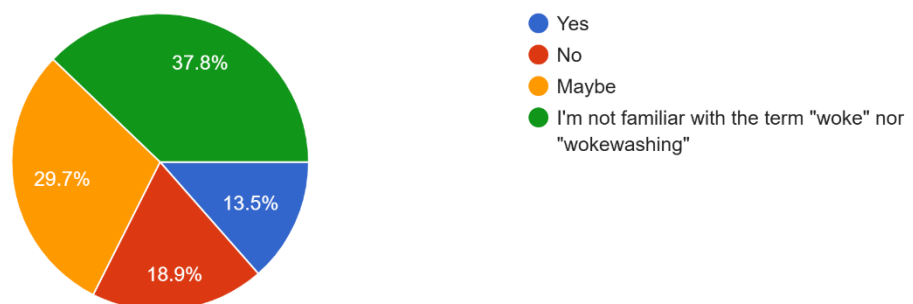
If no further tangible commitment to these causes was communicated through social media, how authentic would you perceive their brand activism?

74 responses



If you're familiar with the term woke, would you perceive the previous actions as wokewashing?

74 responses



If you responded **yes**, please answer why:

10 responses

To be in the current bandwagon that can potentially carry more likes and engagement.

They are using an event with a wide reach to position themselves in a way that will benefit the firm, despite not living the principals. For me its more marketing and no authenticity at all. Its purely profit driven without helping the cause/what they claim to stand for. Its taking advantage of a disasters and exploiting people.

Because there is no action taken after the press release or even after the show. If the brand truly cared I would expect them to follow up with that statement

I would expect further actions to be communicated by the brand after such statements

If the brands actions remain only via social media posts and not tangible efforts, it falls short. Especially being a luxury brand which we would assume would have the means to do more.

They make strong statements, what everyone can do, without actually showing any more efforts like donating or similar.

It feels as if the brand is only using the current world event to gain interest and attention for their brand, rather than out of sincerity

They create a false image of being involved, however raising awareness is an important step in activism. But if your entire label

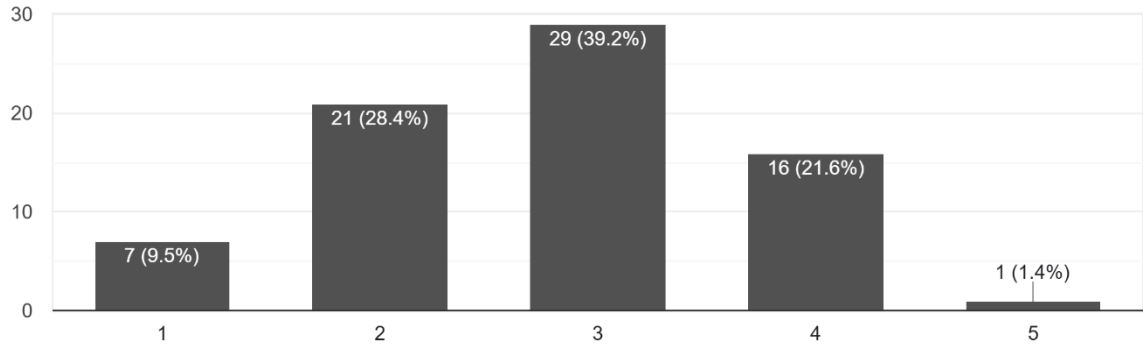
Is based on that mind set, you should also get more involved with campaigns or donations etc

The sole goal of a publicly funded company is to bring profit to its shareholders. It's know that it will do this in a pragmatic way, flipping its views in accordance to what it believes to be the most popular. These issues should be kept separate out of respect, and left to those with greater knowledge of such sensitive subjects.

No action taken, hypothetical

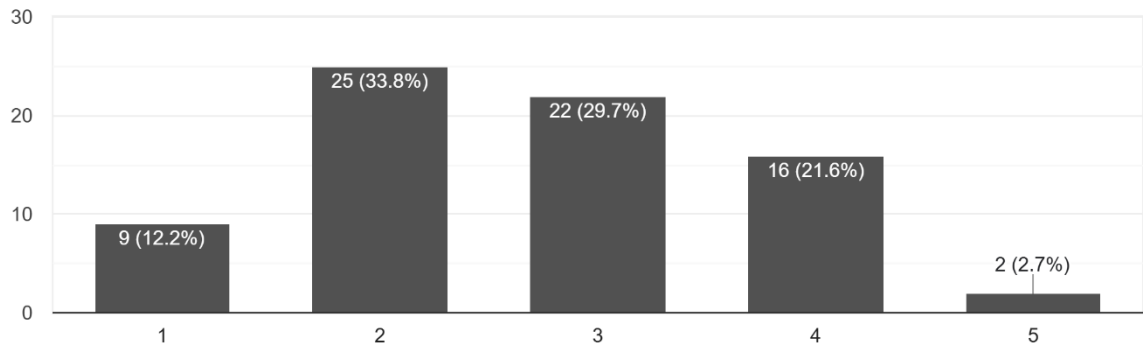
In general, how likely are you willing to pay for fashion from it? (Regardless of your purchasing power or taste in fashion)

74 responses



In general, how likely would you share and/or recommend this brand to your family, friends or social media followers?

74 responses



Attachments

Attachment I

Verzeichnis G > 9-5
 Company Data Central Registry
 Session: 02.12.18
 You are here: GmbH >> Environmental Policy Change

Environmental Policy
 Environmental and social responsibility has been a major principal at GmbH since we were founded in 2016. While we make no claim to be perfect, as no one should, environmental impact and ethical treatment of humans and animals is part of all design, development and production processes at GmbH.

Responsible Company Practices

<p>Better Materials</p>	<p>The biggest negative impact on the environment from fashion, happens when we produce fabrics. The first GmbH collections were made entirely from materials that would otherwise go to waste. As the collections have grown, about 90% of our materials now fulfill our Environmental Policy goals of being organic, recycled, upcycled, dead stock and biodegradable. We currently use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organic Cotton Recycled cotton Viscose from well managed sources Lycell from well managed sources Recycled nylon, polyester and polyamide Plant based bio-degradable polyamide Wadding from recycled PET PVC and CFC-FREE <p>Research suggests that cotton production alone is responsible for a quarter of all insecticides and herbicides used globally. Replacing conventional cotton with its organic alternative can save 62% of the primary energy demand. For polyester, estimates suggest that substituting one metric ton of virgin polyester with its recyclable counterpart can reduce toxic substances by up to 50%, energy consumption by 60% and emissions by up to 40%.</p> <p>As of the SS20 collection approximately 95% of our cotton is organic or recycled. Standards provided by suppliers include Q-NOVA, ECONYL, GOTS, OEKO-TEX, R.E.A.C.H., BLUESIGN, FSC Certification and NORDIC SWAN.</p>
<p>Pollution Reduction</p>	<p>90% of our fabrics and garments are produced in Europe, relatively close to our studio in Berlin, which reduces transport significantly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We ship in biodegradable and recycled bags and boxes We ship carbon neutral through carbon offsetting Our studio is powered with renewable energy from Greenpeace We recycle all our studio waste
<p>Animal Welfare</p>	<p>GmbH uses no leather, down, fur, feathers or exotic skins.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We use wool, and in the case of merino wool, non-mulesing wool when possible GmbH only consumes vegetarian and vegan food provided by a local biodynamic farm
<p>We Do Not Tolerate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child labour Slavery Unethical treatment of humans, animals or land

Alterszeichen
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Attachment II

GmbH

GmbH
SPRING 2023

غزل

'GHAZAL'
02.10.2022
18:00
PARIS

Dear,

It's been a while since we saw each other.
We have missed you, and we are so excited to see you, but also sad.
Since weeks Pakistan has experienced catastrophic floods due do the Climate Crisis, displacing an estimated 33 million people. Vast parts of the country is still under water.
Pakistan is the 5th biggest cotton producer in the world, but the fashion world has remained silent.
While we in the Global North are collectively the ones primarily responsible for the Climate Crisis, Pakistan, like other countries in the Global South, are often the ones affected the most.

Since months this collection was intended as a fragmented, personal celebration of South Asian beauty and culture, as part of our ongoing research into our own heritage(s).
GmbH is a project of unlearning, as we work towards decolonising our minds.
In this process we are reclaiming a kind of personal spirituality, within the complexities between freedom and morality.

For the SPRING 2023 'Ghazal' collection we collaborated with Muhammad Fatchurofi, known as Rofi, an Indonesian artist based on Java, for the seasonal prints. We were drawn to his drawings who often depict mindfulness and calm. The prints evolved out of our conversations about the healing and transformative properties of water. Waterdrops spell the words 'LOVEFULL'.


Continued are the prints originally made for AUTUMN 2022 'Talisman', by Abdelrazak Shaballot, a Syrian artist based in Berlin. Written in Arabic calligraphy, are the words 'SAFE FROM HARM', 'WISDOM' and 'KNOWLEDGE'.

Yours,



Benjamin & Serhat

Attachment III



gmbh_official • Follow
Duniya Kisie Ke Pyar Mein - Mehdi Hassan

gmbh_official • GmbH SPRING 2023 'GHAZAL'
Creative Directors @benjaminhuseby & @serhatisik__

Artistic Consultant @houseofemman
Hair @mustafayanaz
Make Up @peterphilipsmakeup
Nails @cam.t.artist
Casting @affaosman
Sound Design @lukas.heerich
Show Production @danielhettmannproduction

Jewellery @nhatvudang
Eyewear @maustein
Prints @roovvie
Calligraphy Abdelrazak Shaballot

This show was realised with kind support from @asics and @scholl_ionic
110 w

For you

iamhitks second model name ?
92 w 1 like Reply
View replies (1)

9,328 likes
3 October 2022

Add a comment... Post

Attachment IV

GmbH

GmbH
SPRING 2023
جس
'GHAZAL'
02.10.2022
18:00
PARIS

Dear,


It's been a while since we saw each other. We have missed you, and we are so excited to see you, but also sad. Since weeks Pakistan has experienced catastrophic floods due do the Climate Crisis, displacing an estimated 33 million people. Vast parts of the country is still under water. Pakistan is the 5th biggest cotton producer in the world, but the fashion world has remained silent. While we in the Global North are collectively the ones primarily responsible for the Climate Crisis, Pakistan, like other countries in the Global South, are often the ones affected the most.

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Continued are the prints originally made for AUTUMN 2022 'Talisman', by Abdelrazak Shaballot, a Syrian artist based in Berlin. Written in Arabic calligraphy, are the words 'SAFE FROM HARM', 'WISDOM' and 'KNOWLEDGE'.

Yours,



Benjamin & Serhat

gmbh_official • Follow

gmbh_official • Dear,

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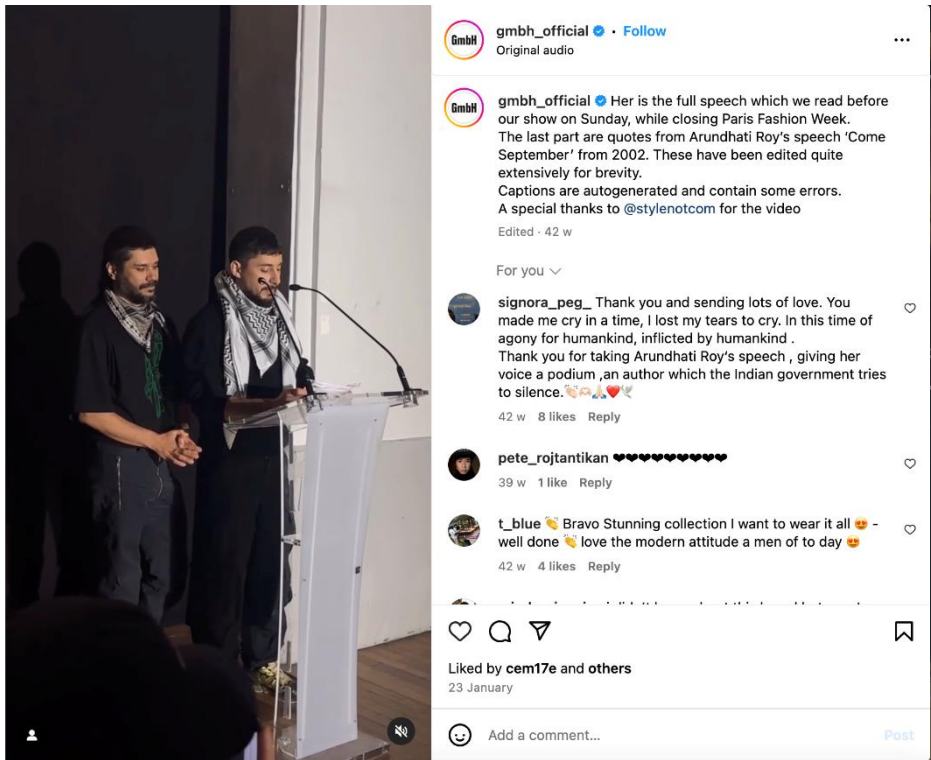
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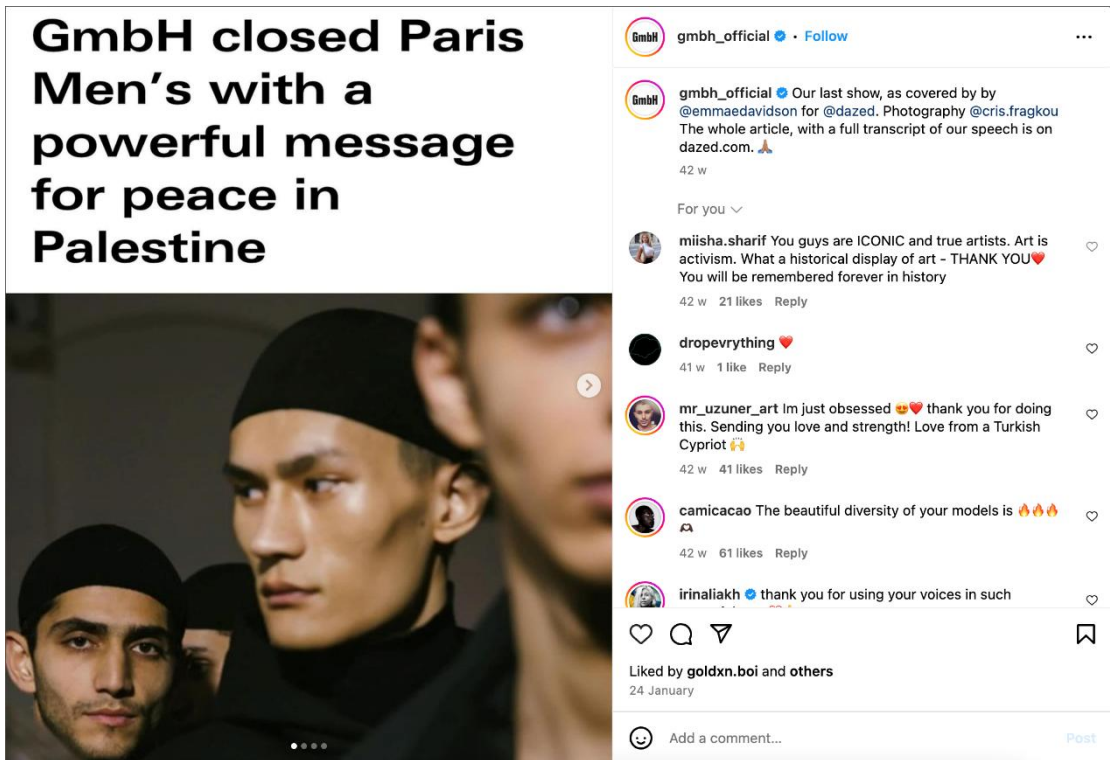
3,632 likes
4 October 2022

Add a comment... Post

Attachment V



Attachment VI



Attachment VII



gmbh_official • Follow

gmbh_official Wearing a keffiyeh, a woven Palestinian scarf, is perhaps the simplest way one can show solidarity with the Palestinian people and their decades long struggle for liberation.

We worked with @septhebrand to create the keffiyehs, and jackets that were in our last show. We used the hand embroidered keffiyehs they provided and cut them like fabric to tailor the jackets in our atelier.

Every SEP keffiyeh is embroidered by hand in the Jerash "Gaza" refugee camp in Jordan. The SEP Artists are Palestinian and Syrian refugees and each piece they create has a purpose: to tell their story, to celebrate and preserve their heritage, while the fight for a political solution to their displacement persists.

Models Nouredine and Bilal
Photography 1-3 @bleumanet
Photography 4-6 @marcktorri
Edited · 39 w

For you

hotelultra_conceptstore so good! will they be for sale & when?
39 w · 40 likes · Reply

View replies (4)

Liked by **hlotsk** and others
8 February

Add a comment... Post

Attachment VIII



gmbh_official • Follow
Paris, France

gmbh_official UNTITLED NATIONS is a statement against exclusionary nationalism, and in support for all people displaced or denied their homelands. This is the full statement we read at our show on 21.01.2024 at Paris Fashion Week, including the excerpts from Arundhati Roy's speech 'Come September' from 18.09.2002, 22 years ago.

The segments lifted from Roy's speech have been edited for brevity.

The white text was read by @serhatisik__ and the red text by @benjaminhuseby
#gmbh #pfw #aw24
Edited · 38 w

For you

ceval Love love love
38 w · 3 likes · Reply

ayshamattar_stylist Love love love
38 w · 1 like · Reply

sustainably_lb This is as beautiful as it is painful. Thank you for sharing your voices, your platform and your light. No one is free until all of us are free.
38 w · 30 likes · Reply


View replies (3)

Liked by **azhar_m_j** and others
17 February

Add a comment... Post

WINTER / SPRING 2024
STATEMENT INCLUDING A READING OF
'COME SEPTEMBER' BY ARUNDHATI ROY

Attachment IX



gmbh_official • Follow

gmbh_official A collection of other people's thoughts - as we have no words left.
24 w

For you ▾

mehhakk_89 Ceasefire now
24 w 4 likes Reply

kassie.naidoo Every morning I pray before I'm fully awake that somehow, by some miracle all these months of praying, shouting, educating, giving, speaking, working and praying will mean CEASEFIRE NOW! TODAY! 🙏
24 w 22 likes Reply

— View replies (1)

thecghh So it took months for Israel to perform a full accounting of the death numbers. How are Hamas getting then numbers out so fast and accurately? And this is on top the UN having to revise the death toll by basically half
24 w 6 likes Reply

— View replies (2)

alokmiishraa Israel should really fasten the cleaning process. It's quiet slow as of now

31,102 likes
28 May

Add a comment... Post

Attachment X



gmbh_official • Follow

gmbh_official Being at Paris Fashion Week this season, with our minds elsewhere, we felt strangely out of place. In the midst of everything, it's hard to ignore the disconnect—as most people seemingly parade around in oblivion. As believers that fashion is always political - we nevertheless showed up to the BOF Gala in Paris last Saturday, one of the fashion calendars most glamorous and star studded events - if for nothing else than to remind people that there is still a g*n_c ide happening.

Thank you @imranamed for having us.
LOVE & JUSTICE

The jackets are made from keffiyehs from @septhebrand
Edited - 6 w

For you ▾

leo.ben We need more like you ❤️
5 w 1 like Reply

c_loporto ❤️
4 w 1 like Reply

imranamed Thank you @serhatisik__ and @benjaminhuseby for being with us I loved your visual reminder to everyone there of what is happening. You demonstrated how fashion can be used to send important

Liked by glencita_ and others
1 October

Add a comment... Post