Overall topic:

Brand activism in advertisements and consequently Millennials' attitudes towards the brand/ad
→ Effect of brand activism towards Millennials' brand attitudes/attitudes towards the ad
→ Experimental Investigation in order to find out causalities

Problem & Aim (Introduction):
- Brand activism as a "new" upcoming strategy in branding, not well-known yet, but something that will grow in the near future → Relevance
- Will become interesting in the future
- When is the use of activist messages actually beneficial for brands? What must be considered? (brand-cause fit, etc.) → giving recommendations for marketers and brands about how to "use" brand activism based on attitudes of consumers towards it

Research Question:

→ *To what extent does brand-cause fit within (environmental) brand activism and issue involvement influence Millennials' (& Gen Z's) attitude towards an ad and brand?*

Literature Review // Main topics to focus on + Synthesis in the end:

→ *all constructs I talk about need to be one headline*

- Concept of (Environmental) brand activism and its origins (CSR, CRM)
- Brand-cause fit and authenticity → studies about CSR & CRM related to brand-cause fit, role of authenticity in brand activism
- Issue/cause involvement
- Attitude towards an ad and brand (dependent constructs)→ Is this even necessary to include in the literature review? Maybe just a short paragraph about the relationship of attitude towards the ad and brands?

Theoretical framework:

→ Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty & Cacioppo (1986)
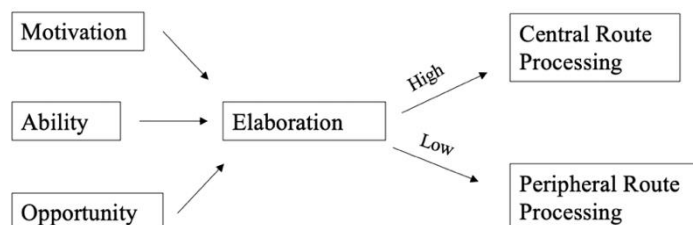
- <u>Central route (applied to my thesis):</u> when consumer have high issue involvement and have high elaboration of the activist messages, they rather process the information based on the central route: perceived authenticity

- Peripheral route (applied to my thesis): when consumers have low cause involvement, they evaluate the message based on peripheral cues such as source credibility (see theory). Peripheral cues are cues that have nothing to do with the message itself.

→ if the elaboration will be processed on the central route or peripheral route depends on involvement, therefore the focus is on "issue involvement" in my thesis
→ it is important to base the research model on the theoretical framework (ELM), testing the theory

Research Model & Hypotheses:

Developed Research Model based on the ELM:
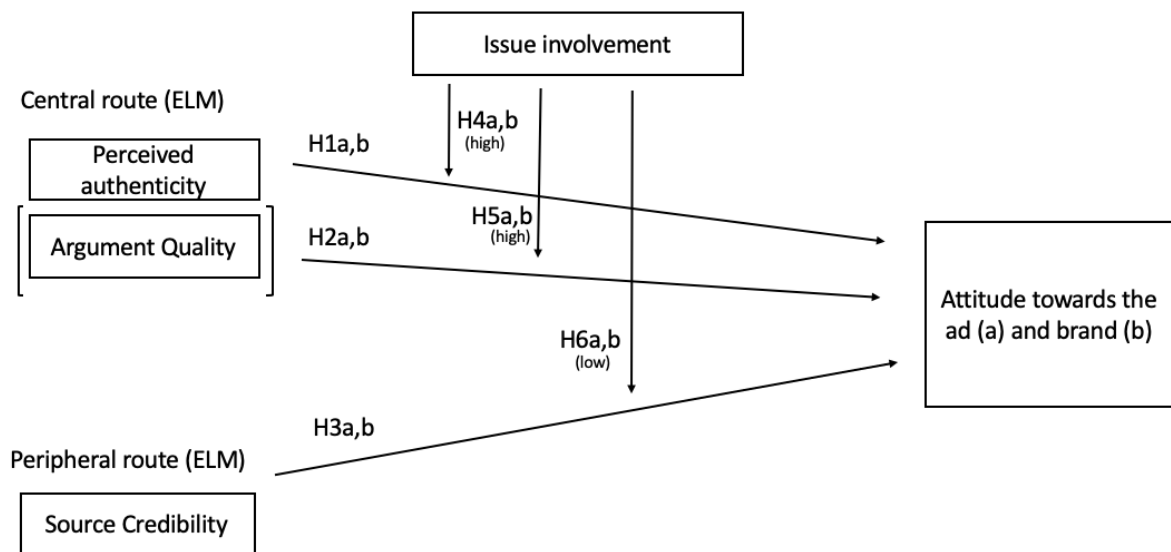
→ Independent variables: I added "perceived authenticity" since it fits to the concept of brand activism as an independent variable to the model. Or shall I replace "argument quality" wit with "perceived authenticity"?

→ Manipulated variable (brand-cause fit) would not be part of the model. I would first test the hypotheses in general and then split the groups, compare means and see if there is a difference when testing the model for the "high brand-cause fit group" vs. "low brand-cause fit group".

Hypotheses

H1a+b: *In the context of (environmental) brand activism in advertising, there is a positive significant relation between perceived authenticity and attitude towards the ad (a) and brand (b).*

- Central route: ELM: Perceived authenticity → Vredenburg et al. (2020) → important factor for successful brand activism
- **Independent variable:** perceived authenticity
- **Dependent variable:** attitude towards the brand/ad

H2a+b: *In the context of (environmental) brand activism in advertising, there is a positive significant relation between argument quality and attitude towards the ad (a) and brand (b).*

- Central route: ELM
- **Independent variable:** argument quality
- **Dependent variable:** attitude towards the brand/ad

H3a+b: *In the context of (environmental) brand activism in advertising, there is a positive significant relation between source credibility and attitude towards the ad (a) and brand (b).*

- Peripheral route: ELM (peripheral cue, most previous research uses source credibility as a peripheral cue)
- **Independent variable:** source credibility
- **Dependent variable:** attitude towards the brand/ad

H4a+b: *In the context of brand activism in advertising, greater issue involvement moderates the effect of perceived authenticity on attitude towards the ad (a) and brand (b).*

- Personal values of consumer as mediating → if brand activism resonates with the personal values of the consumer, it may result in buycotting where by buying the company product or service, the consumer shows his support for brand`s stand on controversial issues (Basci, 2014 in Shetty, Venkataramaiah & Anand, 2019)

- **Moderating variable:** issue involvement (personal values/knowledge, etc., opinion about brand activism)

H5a+b: *In the context of brand activism in advertising, greater issue involvement moderates the effect of argument quality on attitude towards the ad (a) and brand (b).*

- **Moderating variable:** issue involvement (personal values/knowledge, etc., opinion about brand activism)

H6a+b: *In the context of brand activism in advertising, less issue involvement moderates the effect of source credibility on attitude towards the ad (a) and brand (b).*

- **Moderating variable:** issue involvement (personal values/knowledge, etc., opinion about brand activism)

Methodology/ Survey design:

- Experimental investigation via Qualtrics in order to find out causalities, between subject design, manipulation of brand-cause fit "high" vs "low", fictional brand in order to control confounding variables
- How many participants in order to be valid? Around 200 when I have two groups?
- Is 2 weeks of data collection mid of march-end of march realistic?

Online Experiment (with 2 Groups):

/// INTRO TEXT////

Demographics

What is your age in number of years? (insert here)

Gender
- Female
- Male
- Non-Conforming
- Prefer not to say

What country do you live in?
- Sweden
- Germany
- Other: Please specify: (insert here)

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.
- I have not finished any formal education.
- Lower secondary education (e.g. comparable to primary school)
- Upper secondary education (e.g. comparable to high school)
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree

Please state your occupation.
- Student
- Working
- Unemployed

Please state annual household income before taxes.
- Less than €10.000
- €10.000 to €29.999
- €30.000 to €49.999
- €50.000 to €69.999
- €70.000 to €89.999
- €90.000 to €99.999
- €100.000 or more

Moderating variable: "Issue involvement" based on the scale of Nowak & Salmon (1987) (developed from Zaichkoswky, 1985)
→ 5 point Likert-Scale

Please state your overall perception towards (#BlackLivesMatter /climate change).

Important – Unimportant
Of no concern – Of concern
Irrelevant – Relevant
Very meaningful to me – means nothing to me
Trivial – Fundamental
Matters to me – Doesn't matter
Interesting – Not interesting
Significant – Insignificant
Vital – Superfluous
Boring – Exciting

OR

Moderating variable: "Issue involvement" based on Zaichkowsky, 1985:
→ 7 point Likert-Scale

Revised Personal Involvement Inventory (PII)

To me (object to be judged) is:

important	__:__:__:__:__:__:__	unimportant*
boring	__:__:__:__:__:__:__	interesting
relevant	__:__:__:__:__:__:__	irrelevant*
exciting	__:__:__:__:__:__:__	unexciting*
means nothing	__:__:__:__:__:__:__	means a lot to me
appealing	__:__:__:__:__:__:__	unappealing*
fascinating	__:__:__:__:__:__:__	mundane*
worthless	__:__:__:__:__:__:__	valuable
involving	__:__:__:__:__:__:__	uninvolving*
not needed	__:__:__:__:__:__:__	needed

You will now be introduced to a fictional brand and exposed to an advertisement, please look carefully.

In the following section, you will be asked to state the level to which you agree or disagree about the authenticity, credibility, and your overall beliefs towards the advertisement and the brand.

////TREATMENT/// randomly allocated via Qualtrics

Definition of the groups (will not be shown to the participants):

→ *creation of experimental groups according to the definition of brand-cause fit and brand activism*

- perceived congruence between a social issue and the company's business. (Du, Battacharya & Sen, 2010)
- brand messages align with brand practices (Vredenburg et al., 2020)

Group 1: Brand activism + high brand-cause fit
A fictional brand with an activist message.
High brand-cause fit: The company fits to the cause they stand up for: see description text, fitting "industry", core values and practices are according to the activist message.

Group 2: Brand activism + low brand-cause fit
A fictional brand with an activist message.
Low brand-cause fit: The company does not fit to the cause they stand up for: see description text, no fitting industry, core values and practices, are not according to the activist message

Implementation Idea 1:

→ *different brand, but same activist message within environmental brand activism*

Group 1: HIGH Brand-cause fit:
(brand name) operates in the sector of sustainable fashion. Sustainable fashion is a term to describe a movement and process of fostering change to fashion products and the fashion system towards greater ecological integrity and social justice.

Core values and practices of (brand name): „We build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm and actively inspire and implement solutions to the climate crisis. It is our purpose to save our home planet. We use the resources we have—our voice, our business and our community—to do something about the climate change. *(inspired by Patagonia's values)*

Group 2: LOW Brand-cause fit
(brand name) operates in the sector of fast fashion. Fast fashion is a term used to describe a highly profitable business model based on replicating catwalk trends and high-fashion designs, and mass-producing them at low cost.

Core values and practices of (brand name): „We build the best product and actively inspire with the newest fashion trends. It is our purpose to provide the best quality at the lowest price. We use the resources we have to make fashion available to everyone."

Advertisement (exactly the same for both groups):

Possible Messages:
1. The climate is changing, why aren't we?
2. Better environment, better tomorrow – Save the planet!

Further Message to support "activism":
- By 2030 fashion waste may increase to 148 million tonnes – choose your clothes wisely.
- We donate 50% of our sales to environmental charities/organizations
  https://betterworldapparel.com/learn/sustainable-fashion-facts/

Example Ad: (incl. brand name & logo + product: plain white t-shirt), background maybe a bit more neutral:

THE CLIMATE IS CHANGING, WHY AREN'T WE?

BY 2030 FASHION WASTE MAY INCREASE TO 148 MILLION TONNES - CHOOSE YOUR CLOTHES WISELY.

<mark>**Possible Problems with this idea:**</mark>

- Description text might be too different?
- Fashion as a high involvement product → is this a problem?

Implementation Idea 2:

→ *same brand, but different activist messages*

Both Groups receive the same info text about a fictional brand:

The brand Aquaa bottles operates with their business in an environmentally friendly way. Aquaa bottles produces premium quality products that are made out of only sustainable material in order to reduce our carbon footprint. Further, every bottle is produced in the headquarter and thus, production partners are brought closer together.

Aquaa's statement:
"We are devoted to change the world. It is our mission to be aware of our environment, cause no unnecessary harm and actively inspire and implement solutions to our climate crisis. We use the resources we have—our voice, our business and our community—to become active and do something about the climate change.

→ Other option: Just showing the brand name + logo: Aquaa bottles and a short slogan "Be aware of our environment!"

Group 1: Brand activism + high brand-cause fit
Message: Together we can make a difference. #SaveThePlanet

Group 2: Brand activism + low brand-cause fit
Message: Together we can make a difference. #BlackLivesMatter

→ ad with different activist messages needs to be designed, everything else stays the same, neutral background, etc.

<mark>**Possible Problems with this Idea:**</mark>

- I am not within one sector of brand activism anymore, but include social brand activism (#BlackLivesMatter) as well → difficult to compare and to control confounding variables?
- Need to ask about the issue involvement in both "#BlackLivesMatter" and "climate change"

<mark>→ Discussion of implementation ideas: Are these ideas going in the right direction? Is it better to take same brand, but different messages or different brand descriptions and same messages? Probably easier to stay within "environmental brand activism"?</mark>
<mark>→ Would you recommend to conduct a small pre-test of the survey in general (with approx. 5 people?)</mark>

Variable: "Perceived Brand activism authenticity" based on Alhouiti, Johnson & Holloway (2016):
→ 7 point Likert scale

Please rate the level to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding authenticity of the message.

- The brand's message is genuine.
- The brand's message preserves what the company means to me.
- The brand's message captures what makes the company unique to me.
- The brand's message is in accordance with the company's values and beliefs.
- The brand is being true to itself with its message.
- (With its message) The brand is standing up for what it believes in.
- (With its message) The brand is a socially responsible company.
- (With its message) The brand is concerned about improving the well-being of society.

<mark>→ Could I leave out the two grey marked items since it is a fictional brand and might be difficult to answer these?</mark>

Variable "Argument Quality" based on Sussman & Siegal, 2003 (developed from Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006):
→ 7 point Likert Scale

Please rate the level to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding the quality of the advertisement.

- The information provided in the advertisement was informative.
- The information provided in the advertisement was valuable
- The information provided in the advertisement was persuasive

Variable "Source credibility" based on Sussman & Siegal, 2003 (developed from Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006):
→ 7 point Likert Scale

Please rate the level to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding the credibility of the sender in the advertisement.

- The sender of the advertisement was knowledgeable on this topic

- The sender of the advertisement was trustworthy
- The sender of the advertisement was credible
- The sender of the advertisement appeared to be an expert on this topic

Dependent variable: "Attitude towards the ad" based on MacKenzie & Lutz (1989):
→ 7-point bipolar scale

Please state your overall belief towards the presented advertisement.

Bad – Good
Unpleasant – Pleasant
Unfavourable – Favourable
Unconvincing – Convincing
Unbelievable - Believable

Dependent variable: "Attitude towards the brand based on Wang & Anderson (2011) (developed from Hallahan 1999, Wang 2007):
→ 7-point bipolar scale

Please state your overall belief towards the brand (brand name).

Good – Bad
Pleasant – Unpleasant
High quality - low quality
Like it - Don't like it
Desirable - Not desirable
Favourable - Not favourable

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