

# Exploring consumer support for brand activism: a four-segment typology

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – While it is accepted that consumer demand has driven brand activism, it remains unclear which consumers desire brand activism, about what topics, how they may show support and why they think firms engage in such initiatives. This study aims to provide initial insights on these topics by developing a typology of Brand Activism Supporters.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The Reasoned Action Approach and two-step cluster analyses are employed to discern segments of Brand Activism Supporters.

**Findings** – Brand Activism Supporters represent the following four segments: Profit Perceivers, Conscientious Conservatives, Progress Patrons and Balanced Believers.

**Research limitations/implications** – This theoretically grounded typology provides a foundation for understanding consumer responses to brand activism and can guide research examining the factors thereof. A research agenda is provided to aid such endeavors.

**Practical implications** – This research provides a typology that can be used to target consumers most likely to support a planned brand activism initiative. To facilitate the practical use of the typology, survey, analysis and strategy tools are provided via Web Appendices A–C.

**Originality/value** – In developing the first typology of Brand Activism Supporters, this research examines factors including consumers' attitudes about supporting activism initiatives, perceptions of firms' motivations for engaging in activism and perceived control over their support behaviors.

**Keywords** Brand activism, Consumer behavior, Consumer–brand relationships, Consumer psychology, Consumer typology, Cluster analysis, Reasoned Action Approach

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

As the sociopolitical landscape has grown increasingly polarized, marketing scholars and practitioners contend that consumers expect firms to communicate their positions on salient issues (Fernandes *et al.*, 2024; France *et al.*, 2024). In response, many firms engage in brand activism, taking public stances on controversial topics such as climate change, health care, income inequality, racial discrimination, religious freedom and geopolitical crises (Moorman, 2020; Nalick *et al.*, 2016; Schmidt *et al.*, 2022; Tsoungkou *et al.*, 2025). Research has examined brand-level factors that affect the variability of reactions to such initiatives, including alignment between the firm's stance and consumers' views (Dodd and Supa, 2015; Mukherjee and Althuisen, 2020), the perceived authenticity of the stance (Ahmad *et al.*, 2024; Luna-Amador *et al.*, 2025;

Melloni *et al.*, 2023; Mirzaei *et al.*, 2022; Vredenburg *et al.*, 2020) and the firm's market share (Hydock *et al.*, 2020). However, consumer responses to marketing are driven by brand- and consumer-level variables (Wilkie *et al.*, 2023). At present, no belief-based consumer typology explains why support for brand activism varies among consumers amenable to such initiatives. Thus, while the literature acknowledges that consumer responses to brand activism differ, it does not yet specify the belief structures that produce such variation.

These gaps have led scholars and institutions to call for research on consumer-level characteristics influencing

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responses to brand activism (Hydock *et al.*, 2019; Marketing Science Institute, 2016, 2022). For example, Cammarota *et al.* (2023, p. 1685) ask: “Is it possible to carry out consumer profiling to identify targets that might respond positively to activist campaigns and targets that might respond negatively?” Addressing such questions requires a theoretically grounded framework for examining consumer reactions to brand activism (Bennett *et al.*, 2025; Wilkie *et al.*, 2023). While Pimentel *et al.* (2024) recently introduced a framework for examining brand activism as a marketing strategy, no comparable framework has been identified to guide research on consumer responses. The absence of such tools highlights a broader relevance gap in marketing scholarship, whereby research often prioritizes theoretical abstraction over managerial utility (Henseler, 2017). To begin to bridge this divide, this research adopts a design science orientation (Henseler, 2017), moving beyond explanatory analysis to develop a practical segmentation typology. Consequently, this study advances literature by providing a belief-based, theory-grounded segmentation of Brand Activism Supporters. In doing so, it moves beyond dichotomizing “supporters” and “non-supporters” (Bennett *et al.*, 2025) to uncover nuanced differences among consumers amenable to brand activism initiatives.

This research makes five contributions. First, grounding the segmentation in the Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010) enables the identification of four segments distinguished by their underlying belief structures – attitudes, subjective norms, perceived control and behavioral/normative beliefs toward supporting brand activism (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010; Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007) – rather than by ideology or static demographics. Second, because the typology is theory-based, it illuminates relationships and constructs that scholars can leverage in future research (Doty and Glick, 1994; Fiss, 2011; Jaakkola, 2020). Third, the typology demonstrates how belief-based profiles can help marketers anticipate downstream support behaviors – such as advocacy or purchase – and tailor campaign strategies to align with supporters’ preferences. Fourth, this research provides practitioners with survey, analysis and strategy tools (Web Appendices A–C) to authentically apply its findings (Ahmad *et al.*, 2024; Vredenburg *et al.*, 2020). Finally, by synthesizing fragmented insights, this typology addresses several unresolved questions:

- Q1. Who is most likely to support brand activism (Cammarota *et al.*, 2023)?
- Q2. What topics do Supporters perceive as most (least) appropriate for brand activism (Austin *et al.*, 2019; Hoppner and Vadakkepatt, 2019; Xu *et al.*, 2021)?
- Q3. How are supporters likely to demonstrate their approval for such initiatives (Austin *et al.*, 2019; Xu *et al.*, 2021)?
- Q4. Why do consumers think that firms engage in brand activism (Eilert and Cherup, 2020; Dodd and Supa, 2015; Parcha and Westerman, 2020)?

The remainder of this research is structured as follows. First, the theoretical development is presented, introducing brand activism and highlighting the relevance of the Reasoned Action Approach as the foundation for segmentation. Next, the

methodology is described, including survey procedures, measurement and analytic strategy. Results are then reported, with detailed profiles of each identified segment. Finally, the findings are discussed, outlining both theoretical and practical implications of segmenting brand activism supporters. The manuscript concludes with limitations and directions for future research.

## 2. Theoretical development

### 2.1 Brand activism

Brand activism refers to a firm’s deliberate engagement with controversial issues – including those in the social, political, economic and environmental domains – through actions intended to influence outcomes toward progressive or conservative ends. Progressive activism seeks to implement reform or challenge the status quo, whereas conservative activism aims to uphold established norms and systems (Moorman, 2020; Nalick *et al.*, 2016; Sarkar and Kotler, 2020). This dual orientation underscores that brand activism spans a spectrum of ideological goals that consumers may interpret and evaluate differently (Pöyry and Laaksonen, 2022; Schmidt *et al.*, 2022). Brand activism represents a strategic shift in how brands interact with sociopolitical discourse and is an increasingly prominent domain in marketing research and practice (Edelman, 2019, 2022; Luna-Amador *et al.*, 2025; Verlegh, 2024). While activism can enhance brand equity and strengthen consumer relationships when managed effectively (Fernandes *et al.*, 2024; Pimentel *et al.*, 2024; Schmidt *et al.*, 2022), its divisive nature also creates risk, as brands may alienate consumer segments (Haupt *et al.*, 2023; Jain *et al.*, 2021; Klostermann *et al.*, 2022; Zhao *et al.*, 2024). Such potential has contributed to the proliferation of brand activism across industries, with stakeholders increasingly evaluating brands through the lens of their activist engagement (Bhagwat *et al.*, 2020).

The brand activism literature highlights several brand-level factors shaping consumer responses. Value alignment between the brand’s stance and consumer views is strongly related to support (Dodd and Supa, 2015; Haupt *et al.*, 2023; Klostermann *et al.*, 2022; Mukherjee and Althuizen, 2020; Zhao *et al.*, 2024). Perceptions of authenticity also play a central role, as activism perceived as opportunistic often elicits consumer skepticism and cynicism (Ahmad *et al.*, 2024; Fernandes *et al.*, 2024; Hoppner and Vadakkepatt, 2019; Schmidt *et al.*, 2022; Silva and Abreu, 2025; Verlegh, 2024; Vredenburg *et al.*, 2020). Some research indicates asymmetry in reactions: Consumers misaligned with a brand’s stance react more negatively than aligned consumers react positively (Mukherjee and Althuizen, 2020; Hydock *et al.*, 2020). Messaging strategies further shape outcomes, such that inconsistent engagement (Malik *et al.*, 2025) or the retraction of an activist stance often backfires among consumers who support the original position, heightening perceptions of hypocrisy, although appeals to safety needs can mitigate this outcome (Milfeld *et al.*, 2025). Brand responses to consumer backlash on social media also impact consumer evaluations (Batista *et al.*, 2022), and brands might strategically communicate activist stances in an attempt to atone for prior transgressions (Francioni *et al.*, 2025).

While these studies advance understanding of brand-level determinants of consumer response, less attention has been directed toward identifying the consumers likely to support brand activism initiatives. Work in this area has typically emphasized political ideology as the primary driver of response (Flight and Coker, 2022; Haupt *et al.*, 2023). While ideology is informative, reliance on this single factor risks obscuring consumer heterogeneity. Emerging studies highlight additional influences, such as perceived motives (Aboelenien and Nguyen, 2024) and emotional drivers (Abitbol and VanDyke, 2023); yet the literature still lacks a comprehensive, theory-driven approach to consumer segmentation. Scholars have called for research that develops clearer profiles of consumers who are more likely to respond positively to brand activism and that specifies the factors underlying such reactions (Cammarota *et al.*, 2023; Hydock *et al.*, 2019; Marketing Science Institute, 2016, 2022). This research responds to these calls by proposing a novel segmentation of Brand Activism Supporters grounded in the Reasoned Action Approach. This framework moves beyond demographic or ideological indicators to account for attitudinal and behavioral predictors of brand activism support.

## 2.2 The Reasoned Action Approach

The Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010; Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007; Figure 1), which integrates the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), provides a robust framework for linking attitudes, social norms and control beliefs to behavioral intentions. The approach was designed not only to explain but also to predict and influence consumer behavior (Ajzen, 1991). For example, it has been used in health research to identify individuals with low preventive intentions and to design interventions to shift their beliefs and attitudes and strengthen behavioral intent (Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007).

Grounding segmentation in the Reasoned Action Approach extends these insights to brand activism: This approach not only identifies consumers more likely to support brand activism but also reveals belief dimensions that marketers can target to encourage migration between segments. Unlike generally static demographic traits, beliefs represent dynamic psychological states that provide more strategically actionable bases for segmentation (Shaw and Shiu, 2003). This research also

emphasizes consumers' general orientation toward supporting brand activism initiatives, rather than their reactions to specific issues, enabling scalable strategies across issue categories. By identifying psychologically distinct groups with shared belief structures, this research produces insights more actionable than those derived from demographic or ideological segmentation alone.

The Reasoned Action Approach posits that action flows from behavioral intentions, which are shaped by *attitudes* toward the behavior, *subjective norms* in relation to the behavior and *perceived control* over engaging in the behavior. These factors stem, respectively, from *behavioral*, *normative* and *control beliefs* about the behavior, which are influenced by *background factors* (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010; Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007). While these dimensions are fixed within the model, the Reasoned Action Approach allows researchers to determine context-specific constructs based on prior literature. Consistent with this flexibility, this research adopts Jaakkola's (2020) suggestions for conceptual studies and applies the dimensions of the approach to synthesize fragmented findings related to consumer support for brand activism (Anker *et al.*, 2021; Burgess *et al.*, 2023; Schroeder, 2017).

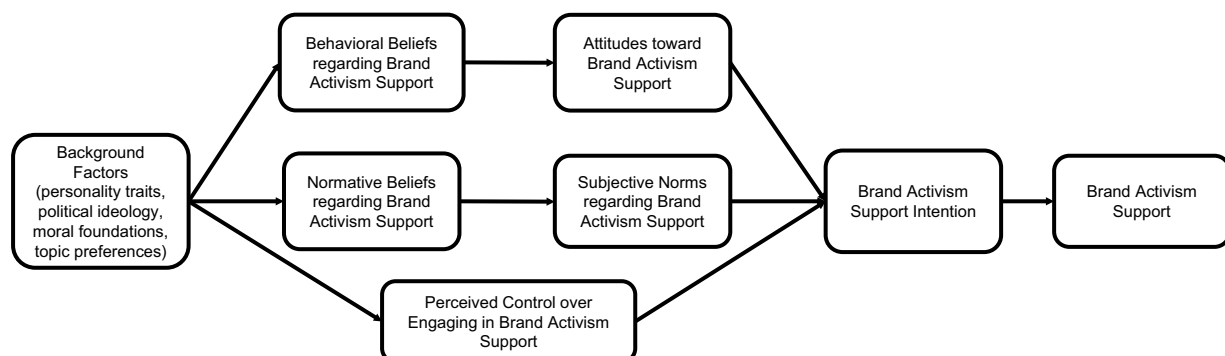
The derived segments of Brand Activism Supporters are expected to differ significantly across the dimensions of the Reasoned Action Approach, which should translate to differences in support intentions and behaviors (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010; Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007). The inclusion of background factors further enables detailed profiling of segments, offering insights about the antecedents of downstream support for brand activism initiatives.

Having outlined the theoretical foundations of the Reasoned Action Approach and its relevance to segmenting Brand Activism Supporters, the following subsections detail how this research assesses support intention, attitudes and beliefs, subjective norms, perceived control and background factors. Specific measurement items are provided in Web Appendix D.

### 2.2.1 Brand activism support intention

Intention to engage in brand activism support was measured using the item on which study inclusion was based: "In general, how likely are you to support a company that engages in brand activism over the next year?" A temporal anchor was included because prior research suggests that anchoring intentions to a defined time horizon improves concreteness and reliability

**Figure 1** The Reasoned Action Approach in assessing brand activism support



Source: Authors' own work; adapted from Ajzen (2012)



(Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Referencing the upcoming year reduces ambiguity around “the future” and promotes consistency across responses. Given the volatility of public discourse and increasing polarization (Levin *et al.*, 2021), anchoring also standardizes participants’ interpretations of time, mitigating variability in reported intentions.

Consumers show their support of brand activism in various ways, each associated with a particular value for the firm. For example, increased purchase intention (Dodd and Supa, 2015; Hydock *et al.*, 2019; Zhao *et al.*, 2024) and positive word-of-mouth (Haupt *et al.*, 2023) enhance brand equity, while social media engagement (Park and Jiang, 2023) and issue advocacy (Wannow *et al.*, 2024) help achieve sociopolitical goals (Eilert and Cherup, 2020; Parcha and Westerman, 2020; Schmidt *et al.*, 2022). This research, therefore, assesses consumers’ likelihood to engage in specific support behaviors via measures adapted from Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* (2012). While segment membership is based on the support intention item, specific means of support are used to provide greater insights into the defining characteristics of the segments.

### 2.2.2 Attitudes and behavioral beliefs

According to the Reasoned Action Approach, consumers’ attitudes toward engaging in the target behavior are central determinants of behavioral intention (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). Prior research has examined consumers’ attitudes toward firms’ engagement in activism (Austin *et al.*, 2019; Garg and Saluja, 2022; Saracevic and Schlegelmilch, 2024), but attitudes toward *supporting* activism initiatives remain underexplored. This research, therefore, adapts validated measures from Austin *et al.* (2019) and Garg and Saluja (2022) to provide initial insights on the relationship between consumers’ attitudes toward supporting brand activism and their behavioral intentions.

Behavioral beliefs, defined as subjective evaluations of an action and its outcomes, form the foundation of attitudes (Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). In this research, behavioral beliefs are measured as consumers’ perceptions of firms’ motivations for engaging in activism, the appropriateness and benefits of activism as a marketing strategy and the outcomes of both activism itself and consumers’ support for it (Ajzen, 2006). Existing literature suggests that consumers’ perceptions of whether a brand is motivated by profits or social change might impact their attitudes toward activism (Kim and He, 2025; Saracevic and Schlegelmilch, 2024). To capture these dynamics, this research adapts validated scales from Austin *et al.* (2019), Garg and Saluja (2022) and Melnyk *et al.* (2022).

### 2.2.3 Subjective norms and normative beliefs

Subjective norms represent consumers’ perceptions of behaviors that are encouraged, discouraged or expected by their in-groups (Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007; Melnyk *et al.*, 2022). Norms are acquired through social learning and feedback, and meta-analytic evidence highlights their role in shaping consumer behavior (Melnik *et al.*, 2022). This research adapts validated scales (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010; Melnyk *et al.*, 2022) to assess consumers’ perceptions of whether close others would approve of their support for brand activism.

Normative beliefs, which inform subjective norms, are formed by observing others and act as heuristics to reduce uncertainty in decision-making (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Melnyk *et al.*, 2022). Validated measures of normative beliefs are adapted from Melnyk *et al.* (2022) to assess consumers’ perceptions of whether others engage in brand activism support.

### 2.2.4 Perceived control

Perceived control captures the extent to which consumers believe that they can engage in brand activism support despite potential barriers (Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007). Examples of barriers include income constraints limiting the ability to purchase activism-linked products and opportunity costs associated with activism-related engagement (Melnik *et al.*, 2022). Validated scales from Melnyk *et al.* (2022) are adapted to measure participants’ perceptions of their control over engaging in brand activism support.

### 2.2.5 Background factors

The Reasoned Action Approach recognizes that background factors influence behavioral, normative and control beliefs and thereby indirectly affect behavioral intentions (Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007). Consistent with Burgess *et al.* (2023), this research identifies personality traits (Sandy *et al.*, 2013), political ideology (Garg and Saluja, 2022; Pöyry and Laaksonen, 2022), political and civic engagement (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.*, 2012), moral foundations (Anderson *et al.*, 2024; Goenka and Thomas, 2024; Graham *et al.*, 2009) and topic preferences (O’Connor and Sullivan, 1995) as background factors relevant to brand activism support.

Personality traits were measured using the validated short-form Mini-IPIP (Donnellan *et al.*, 2006), capturing extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. Validated measurements of political ideology (Jost *et al.*, 2008) and political and civic engagement (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.*, 2012) are also adapted. Political ideology, while a strong predictor of brand activism response (Flight and Coker, 2022; Garg and Saluja, 2022; Haupt *et al.*, 2023; Jost *et al.*, 2008), is treated as a background factor rather than a direct antecedent of support behavior, given its influence on beliefs and perceptions (Jost *et al.*, 2008). This underscores the added value of the Reasoned Action Approach: Whereas background factors such as personality and political ideology are difficult to change, the ability to influence attitudes (Gregory *et al.*, 2020; Park *et al.*, 2022; Tseng and Wang, 2023), normative beliefs (Childs and Kim, 2019; Herter *et al.*, 2023; Khan *et al.*, 2022, 2023) and perceptions of control (Bennett and Grigoropoulou, 2024; Cooper *et al.*, 2023; Yao *et al.*, 2023) is well established.

This research assesses supporters’ moral foundations via the 30-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ30; Graham *et al.*, 2009). The study of consumers’ moral foundations and their responses to brand activism is in its infancy (Goenka and Thomas, 2024), with research suggesting that campaigns that activate perceptions of undue authority or unfairness are more likely to result in online backlash (Anderson *et al.*, 2024). Finally, this research offers insights on the degree to which consumers’ perceive brand activism is appropriate in relation to polarizing topics in the USA. (Nadeem, 2023; Newport, 2023; United States Department of State, 2024).

Taken together, these measurements reflect the distinctive strength of the Reasoned Action Approach. Demographic and ideological variables are relatively static and provide limited managerial leverage, whereas the belief-based dimensions of the Reasoned Action Approach – attitudes, subjective norms and perceived control – are measurable and influenceable through marketing interventions. By focusing on beliefs rather than fixed attributes, this research provides a more dynamic and strategically relevant understanding of Brand Activism Supporters.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Survey procedure

The data collection procedures for this study were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of [University Redacted] (Protocol ID: EXMT-B-24-SUM-1). All participants provided informed consent prior to participating. A survey was developed in Qualtrics to assess the dimensions of the Reasoned Action Approach (Ajzen, 2006, 2012). In summer 2024, 473 participants were recruited through CloudResearch Connect and completed the questionnaire for monetary compensation (Singh and Masuku, 2014). To minimize common method bias (CMB), the order of scales and measurement items was counterbalanced (Tehseen *et al.*, 2017). Forced-response settings were applied to reduce the likelihood of missing data (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2016). To limit acquiescence bias, the questionnaire was self-administered and respondents were assured that participation was voluntary and anonymous (Jaffe and Pasternak, 1997).

Because the research focuses on Brand Activism Supporters, inclusion was based on participants' response to the item: "In general, how likely are you to support a firm's brand activism in the next year?" The associated Likert scale was anchored by 1 ("Extremely unlikely") and 7 ("Extremely likely"), and only respondents indicating at least neutral support intentions were permitted to complete the survey (Lee and Haley, 2022). Consistent with segmentation best practices (Wedel and Kamakura, 2000), participants with neutral intentions were retained to preserve the variance necessary to identify heterogeneity in support motivations. Excluding this boundary group would risk restriction of range, limiting the analysis to intensity of support rather than distinct motivational profiles. Furthermore, these respondents represent a segment of latent demand: consumers who distinguish themselves from opponents by their lack of resistance, thereby possessing a non-zero propensity to support (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010) that is managerially distinct from active rejection.

To ensure consistent conceptualization, participants were provided with the following definition of brand activism (adapted from Dodd and Supa, 2015): "Brand activism refers to businesses' adopting a non-neutral stance on a social and/or political issue. Examples of brand activism include:

- 1 Hobby Lobby's refusal to cover certain contraceptives due to the founders' religious beliefs, which view them as a form of abortion.
- 2 Nike's advertising campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick after the football player's protest over racial injustice.

Participants were then asked to identify the correct definition of brand activism from several options. Participants who selected

an incorrect option were again provided with the Brand Activism definition before proceeding.

To enhance generalizability, respondents were required to reside in the USA, and sample quotas were aligned with 2020 US Census benchmarks (United States Census Bureau, 2023). A reCAPTCHA item was included to control for automated responses. The item generates a score ranging from 0 to 1, with values of 0.5 or higher indicating humanness (Qualtrics, 2024). Eight participants scored less than 0.5 and were removed, resulting in a final sample of  $n = 465$ .

### 4. Analyses

Analyses were conducted to evaluate the validity, consistency and reliability of all constructs (please see Web Appendix D for measurement items and their means, standard deviations and, where applicable, Cronbach's alpha, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin [KMO] values and variance explained). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for all constructs exceeded 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency among scale items (Boateng *et al.*, 2018; MacKenzie *et al.*, 2011). A Varimax-rotated exploratory factor analysis with the KMO measure of sampling adequacy yielded values between 0.50 and 0.90, demonstrating moderate adequacy (Dessart *et al.*, 2016; Higuchi and Machara, 2021). Harman's single-factor test further supported the absence of CMB: No signal factor accounted for the majority of the survey's variance, and the first factor explained 38.21% of total variance (Harman, 1976; Podsakoff and Organ, 1986).

The final typology of Brand Activism Supporters was identified through a two-step cluster analysis (Table 1; Balderjahn *et al.*, 2018; Lee and Haley, 2022; Punj and Stewart, 1983). A hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method was first applied to the 11 variables representing the dimensions of the Reasoned Action Approach (Balderjahn *et al.*, 2018; Shao *et al.*, 2015). Visual inspection of the dendrogram suggested a four-cluster solution (Suman *et al.*, 2021), which a K-means cluster analysis confirmed (Balderjahn *et al.*, 2018; Lee and Haley, 2022; Shao *et al.*, 2015). Discriminant analyses results (Web Appendix E) indicate that 95.70% of participants were classified correctly, supporting the four-cluster structure. A Wilks' Lambda value of 0.10 confirmed significant separation between the clusters (Hair, 2009). Multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA; Table 2) also revealed significant differences ( $p < 0.001$ ) among the cluster centers for all factors. The following section profiles each of the segments, in order of least to most likely to support brand activism initiatives.

### 5. Segment profiles

A one-way MANOVA with paired contrast was performed to identify unique differences across the segments of Brand Activism Supporters (Table 2; Web Appendix F; Balderjahn *et al.*, 2018). The defining characteristics of each segment were examined, emphasizing attributes of differentiation and descriptive labels were assigned to enhance interpretability (Barry and Weinstein, 2009; Hair, 2009; Punj and Stewart, 1983; Shao *et al.*, 2015).

With the exception of education (Balanced Believers were most likely to hold a bachelor's degree;  $p < 0.001$ ) and urbanicity (Balanced Believers were most likely to reside in the

Table 1 Cluster centers for brand activism supporter segments

| Segment Cluster #                             | Profit Perceivers<br>1 | Conscientious Conservatives<br>2 | Progress Patrons<br>3 | Balanced Believers<br>4 | Total sample |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| <i>n</i>                                      | 94                     | 47                               | 189                   | 135                     | 465          |
| %                                             | 20.22                  | 10.11                            | 40.65                 | 29.03                   |              |
| <i>Clustering factor</i>                      |                        |                                  |                       |                         | <i>Sig.</i>  |
| <i>Attitudes and behavioral beliefs</i>       |                        |                                  |                       |                         |              |
| Behavioral beliefs                            | 1.90                   | 1.74                             | 3.59                  | 5.61                    | <0.001       |
| Attitudes                                     | 3.00                   | 2.63                             | 4.35                  | 5.60                    | <0.001       |
| Firms' brand activism motivation:             | 3.74                   | 3.50                             | 4.85                  | 5.62                    | <0.001       |
| <i>Social change</i>                          |                        |                                  |                       |                         |              |
| Firms' brand activism motivation:             | 6.05                   | 4.33                             | 5.22                  | 5.79                    | <0.001       |
| <i>Profits</i>                                |                        |                                  |                       |                         |              |
| Brand activism: Social change                 | 4.27                   | 3.04                             | 5.13                  | 6.30                    | <0.001       |
| Brand activism: Profits                       | 3.66                   | 2.45                             | 4.59                  | 5.39                    | <0.001       |
| Support: Social change                        | 3.79                   | 2.80                             | 4.96                  | 6.14                    | <0.001       |
| Support: Profits                              | 5.07                   | 2.49                             | 4.90                  | 5.76                    | <0.001       |
| <i>Subjective norms and normative beliefs</i> |                        |                                  |                       |                         |              |
| Normative beliefs                             | 3.59                   | 3.76                             | 3.77                  | 4.80                    | <0.001       |
| Subjective norms                              | 4.44                   | 3.11                             | 4.47                  | 5.97                    | <0.001       |
| <i>Perceived control</i>                      |                        |                                  |                       |                         |              |
| Perceived control                             | 5.70                   | 4.63                             | 5.53                  | 6.24                    | <0.001       |

Source(s): Authors' own work

suburbs;  $p = 0.037$ ), there were no significant differences among the demographics of the segments (Web Appendix G). Additionally, several psychographic variables did not yield significant differences. For personality traits, all segments scored relatively high on conscientiousness ( $M = 4.96$ – $5.40$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ – $1.42$ ,  $p = 0.311$ ) and low on neuroticism ( $M = 3.05$ – $3.32$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ – $1.45$ ,  $p = 0.385$ ). The segments also placed moderate emphasis on the moral foundation of authority ( $M = 4.09$ – $4.64$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ – $1.68$ ,  $p = 0.201$ ) and low emphasis on purity ( $M = 3.35$ – $3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ – $1.89$ ,  $p = 0.058$ ) while prioritizing harm and fairness ( $M > 5$ ). Each segment identified environmental issues as the most appropriate domain for brand activism. With respect to political and civic engagement, all segments indicate the greatest likelihood of voting, followed by engaging on social media and donating. Purchase was consistently ranked the highest support behavior, followed by word-of-mouth and social media engagement.

These findings highlight several dimensions that apply broadly across all Brand Activism Supporters, representing important considerations for future research and marketing communications. Simultaneously, the clusters retain distinct characteristics that differentiate them, underscoring the value of this Reasoned Action Approach-based segmentation.

### 5.1 Segment 1: Profit Perceivers

Profit Perceivers (20.22% of the sample) report the lowest support intentions ( $M = 4.41$ ) and score second lowest across nearly all dimensions of the Reasoned Action Approach. They are distinguished by their perception that firms that engage in brand activism primarily for profit ( $M = 6.05$ ). This skepticism extends to their belief that supporting brand activism contributes to firm

profitability ( $M = 5.07$ ), a perception that they evaluate negatively ( $M = 3.66$ ). Despite this disillusionment, this segment has the second highest sense of control over its support ( $M = 5.70$ ).

On personality dimensions, Profit Perceivers report similar ratings for openness ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ), agreeableness ( $M = 5.22$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) and conscientiousness ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) and low levels of neuroticism ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) and extraversion ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ). They are the second-most conservative segment ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ) and are the least likely to civically engage by attending meetings ( $M = 1.35$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ); displaying signs, banners or stickers ( $M = 1.40$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ); or contacting public officials or media ( $M = 1.60$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ; tied with Conscientious Conservatives).

Moral foundations receive low emphasis from this segment. Members score lowest across purity ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ), loyalty ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) and authority ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ), and second lowest on harm ( $M = 5.63$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) and fairness ( $M = 5.54$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). They identify environmental concerns as most appropriate for brand activism ( $M = 5.22$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ), followed by infrastructure ( $M = 4.14$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ), the economy ( $M = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) and health and welfare ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ). Immigration ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ), legal and justice issues ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) and security ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ) are viewed as least appropriate. They are the least likely to express support by contacting public officials or media outlets ( $M = 1.60$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ).

### 5.2 Segment 2: Conscientious Conservatives

Conscientious Conservatives are the smallest segment (10.11%) and report the second lowest support intentions ( $M = 4.43$ ). They score below average for all dimensions of the

Table 2 MANOVA comparison of segments

| Segment Cluster #                        | Profit Perceivers<br>1 | Conscientious Conservatives<br>2 | Progress Patrons<br>3 | Balanced Believers<br>4 | Total sample | F (3.262) | p      |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|-----------|--------|
| <i>n</i>                                 | 94                     | 47                               | 189                   | 135                     | 465          |           |        |
| %                                        | 20.22                  | 10.11                            | 40.65                 | 29.03                   |              |           |        |
| Support intention (M)                    | 4.41                   | 4.43                             | 5.04                  | 6.01                    |              |           |        |
| <i>Personality</i>                       |                        |                                  |                       |                         |              |           |        |
| Extraversion                             | 3.00 (1.44)            | 3.04 (1.63)                      | 3.42 (1.51)           | 4.06 (1.76)             | 3.48 (1.63)  | 10.19     | <0.001 |
| Agreeableness                            | 5.22 (1.18)            | 4.88 (1.19)                      | 5.32 (1.17)           | 5.84 (1.07)             | 5.40 (1.18)  | 10.89     | <0.001 |
| Conscientiousness                        | 5.16 (1.23)            | 5.31 (1.22)                      | 4.96 (1.28)           | 5.13 (1.42)             | 5.08 (1.31)  | 10.96     | 0.311  |
| Neuroticism                              | 3.08 (1.36)            | 3.05 (1.33)                      | 3.32 (1.45)           | 3.11 (1.44)             | 3.18 (1.42)  | 10.02     | 0.385  |
| Openness                                 | 5.36 (1.39)            | 5.10 (1.56)                      | 5.47 (1.22)           | 5.85 (1.15)             | 5.52 (1.29)  | 50.38     | 0.001  |
| <i>Political ideology and engagement</i> |                        |                                  |                       |                         |              |           |        |
| Political ideology                       | 3.50 (1.64)            | 4.19 (1.84)                      | 3.13 (1.70)           | 2.78 (1.77)             | 3.21 (1.76)  | 80.96     | <0.001 |
| Attend meetings                          | 1.35 (0.97)            | 1.38 (0.95)                      | 1.88 (1.44)           | 2.60 (1.93)             | 1.93 (1.56)  | 16.12     | <0.001 |
| Participate in demonstrations            | 1.40 (1.06)            | 1.32 (1.00)                      | 1.95 (1.57)           | 2.66 (2.01)             | 1.98 (1.65)  | 15.23     | <0.001 |
| Contact public officials/media           | 1.60 (1.27)            | 1.60 (1.35)                      | 2.55 (1.90)           | 3.04 (2.08)             | 2.40 (1.88)  | 15.5      | <0.001 |
| Display signs, banners, stickers         | 1.40 (1.04)            | 1.45 (1.04)                      | 2.21 (1.71)           | 3.00 (2.10)             | 2.20 (1.77)  | 20.6      | <0.001 |
| Engage on social media                   | 3.04 (1.88)            | 2.81 (2.06)                      | 3.74 (1.96)           | 4.95 (1.92)             | 3.86 (2.09)  | 24.49     | <0.001 |
| Vote                                     | 4.73 (2.55)            | 4.43 (2.58)                      | 4.91 (2.48)           | 5.77 (1.93)             | 5.08 (2.40)  | 60.07     | <0.001 |
| Donate time/money                        | 2.22 (1.82)            | 1.79 (1.47)                      | 2.70 (1.87)           | 3.42 (2.19)             | 2.72 (1.99)  | 11.8      | <0.001 |
| <i>Moral foundations</i>                 |                        |                                  |                       |                         |              |           |        |
| Harm                                     | 5.63 (1.07)            | 5.38 (1.23)                      | 5.67 (1.10)           | 5.95 (1.09)             | 5.71 (1.12)  | 30.85     | 0.010  |
| Fairness                                 | 5.54 (1.11)            | 5.30 (1.33)                      | 5.63 (1.21)           | 6.05 (1.09)             | 5.70 (1.19)  | 60.65     | <0.001 |
| Loyalty                                  | 3.46 (1.20)            | 4.23 (1.71)                      | 3.90 (1.48)           | 4.05 (1.50)             | 3.89 (1.47)  | 40.17     | 0.006  |
| Authority                                | 4.09 (1.36)            | 4.64 (1.68)                      | 4.35 (1.46)           | 4.25 (1.59)             | 4.30 (1.51)  | 10.55     | 0.201  |
| Purity                                   | 3.35 (1.65)            | 3.97 (1.89)                      | 3.88 (1.57)           | 3.89 (1.95)             | 3.79 (1.75)  | 20.51     | 0.058  |
| <i>Brand activism preferences</i>        |                        |                                  |                       |                         |              |           |        |
| Environmental                            | 5.22 (1.61)            | 4.26 (2.21)                      | 5.78 (1.49)           | 6.38 (1.05)             | 5.69 (1.62)  | 27.28     | <0.001 |
| Family & social                          | 3.40 (1.72)            | 2.98 (2.03)                      | 4.75 (1.69)           | 5.94 (1.39)             | 4.64 (1.95)  | 61.59     | <0.001 |
| Health & welfare                         | 3.81 (1.76)            | 3.57 (1.20)                      | 5.02 (1.64)           | 5.99 (1.34)             | 4.91 (1.84)  | 45.26     | <0.001 |
| Legal & justice                          | 3.24 (1.71)            | 3.00 (2.09)                      | 4.74 (1.53)           | 5.64 (1.63)             | 4.52 (1.92)  | 53.3      | <0.001 |
| Immigration                              | 3.05 (1.59)            | 2.83 (2.07)                      | 4.28 (1.71)           | 5.33 (1.62)             | 4.19 (1.93)  | 44.53     | <0.001 |
| Economic policy                          | 3.99 (1.70)            | 3.72 (1.84)                      | 4.88 (1.60)           | 5.84 (1.47)             | 4.86 (1.77)  | 33.66     | <0.001 |
| Infrastructure                           | 4.14 (1.68)            | 3.89 (1.91)                      | 4.95 (1.59)           | 5.74 (1.40)             | 4.91 (1.72)  | 25.98     | <0.001 |
| Security & terrorism                     | 3.34 (1.56)            | 3.04 (1.97)                      | 4.22 (1.64)           | 4.76 (1.93)             | 4.08 (1.84)  | 18.29     | 0.005  |
| Global wars & conflicts                  | 3.46 (1.84)            | 2.79 (1.83)                      | 4.25 (1.68)           | 5.27 (1.66)             | 4.24 (1.90)  | 33.62     | <0.001 |
| <i>Types of brand activism support</i>   |                        |                                  |                       |                         |              |           |        |
| Engage on social media                   | 2.07 (1.48)            | 1.89 (1.55)                      | 3.61 (1.80)           | 5.34 (1.74)             | 3.63 (2.12)  | 88.56     | <0.001 |
| Word-of mouth                            | 2.36 (1.54)            | 2.06 (1.62)                      | 3.98 (1.55)           | 5.44 (1.30)             | 3.88 (1.93)  | 105.87    | <0.001 |
| Purchase                                 | 3.66 (1.43)            | 3.02 (1.74)                      | 4.62 (1.22)           | 5.94 (1.08)             | 4.65 (1.61)  | 89.11     | <0.001 |
| Donate time/money                        | 1.70 (1.13)            | 1.34 (0.96)                      | 2.89 (1.70)           | 3.91 (1.99)             | 2.79 (1.87)  | 47.5      | <0.001 |
| Contact public officials/media           | 1.18 (0.57)            | 1.32 (0.86)                      | 2.35 (1.59)           | 3.22 (2.05)             | 2.26 (1.73)  | 38.7      | <0.001 |

Note(s): Standard deviations in parentheses

Source(s): Authors' own work



Reasoned Action Approach yet share nearly identical normative beliefs ( $M = 3.76$ ) with Progress Patrons ( $M = 3.77$ ). This similarity suggests that comparable perceptions of others' activism support can produce divergent behavioral intentions. Their low subjective norms ( $M = 3.11$ ), indicate that they anticipate disapproval from close others for supporting brand activism. They also report a low sense of control over engaging in activism support ( $M = 4.63$ ). These patterns suggest that the segment's reluctance might stem from concern over negative social judgment (Melnyk *et al.*, 2022).

Personality traits further distinguish this segment. They display the highest conscientiousness of all groups ( $M = 5.31$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ), low extraversion ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ) and the lowest neuroticism ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ). These traits align with norm-adherence tendencies identified in prior research (Donnellan *et al.*, 2006). They are the most politically conservative segment ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ) and report the lowest political and civic engagement, with the exception of displaying signs, buttons and stickers, for which they are second lowest ( $M = 1.45$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ). Their moral profile reflects their conservative ideologies (Graham *et al.*, 2009): They emphasize authority ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ), loyalty ( $M = 4.23$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ) and purity ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ) more than the other segments, while placing the least emphasis on harm ( $M = 5.38$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) and fairness ( $M = 5.30$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ).

This group expresses the lowest support for all measured issues. Within that pattern, environmental issues ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 2.21$ ), infrastructure ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ), the economy ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ) and health and welfare ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) emerge as the most acceptable domains for activism. Global conflicts ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ), immigration ( $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 2.07$ ) and family issues ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ) are viewed as least appropriate. When supportive, Conscientious Conservatives are most likely to purchase activism-affiliated products ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ) and spread positive word-of-mouth ( $M = 2.06$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ).

### 5.3 Segment 3: Progress Patrons

Progress Patrons represent the largest segment (40.65%) and the second highest support intentions ( $M = 5.04$ ). They score above average for most behavioral beliefs and hold views that contrast with those of Profit Perceivers regarding the profitability of brand activism. Progress Patrons report the second lowest perceptions that firms engage in activism primarily for profit ( $M = 5.22$ ) and that their support enhances firm profitability ( $M = 4.90$ ). Simultaneously, this segment expresses the second-highest approval of profitability resulting from activism initiatives ( $M = 4.59$ ). Their perceptions of subjective norms ( $M = 4.47$ ) closely mirror those of Profit Perceivers ( $M = 4.44$ ), indicating expectations of neutral reactions from referent others. Progress Patrons report the second-lowest perceived control over support behaviors ( $M = 5.53$ ).

In terms of personality, this segment scores second highest across all traits except conscientiousness, for which they score lowest ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ). They are the second most liberal segment ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) and the second most likely to engage in all measured forms of political and civic activities. Moral foundations also distinguish this group: Progress Patrons emphasize harm ( $M = 5.67$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) and fairness ( $M = 5.63$ ,

$SD = 1.21$ ) nearly equally, though both values are slightly lower than the sample average.

Issue preferences indicate that members favor brand activism focused on domestic concerns. Alongside the environment ( $M = 5.78$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ), they identify health and welfare ( $M = 5.02$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ), infrastructure ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ) and the economy ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ) as appropriate domains for activism. They consider security and terrorism ( $M = 4.22$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ), global wars and conflicts ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ) and immigration ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ) to be least appropriate. They are the second most likely segment to engage in all measured support behaviors.

### 5.4 Segment 4: Balanced Believers

Balanced Believers (29.03%) possess strong perceptions that activist firms are motivated by social change ( $M = 5.62$ ), activism producing social change is positive ( $M = 6.30$ ) and their support contributes to such change ( $M = 6.14$ ). They report the highest intention to support ( $M = 6.01$ ) and demonstrate the most positive attitudes ( $M = 5.60$ ) and behavioral beliefs ( $M = 5.61$ ) toward supporting brand activism, the strongest normative beliefs ( $M = 4.80$ ) and subjective norms ( $M = 5.97$ ) and the highest perceived control over support behaviors ( $M = 6.24$ ).

Personality traits reinforce their support tendencies: Balanced Believers are the most extraverted ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ) and agreeable ( $M = 5.84$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) of the segments, consistent with research linking these dimensions to social activism (Dollbaum and Robertson, 2023). They also report the highest openness ( $M = 5.85$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ), which has been associated with receptivity to novel solutions to social issues (Donnellan *et al.*, 2006).

This is the most politically liberal segment ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ), and members are the most active across all measured political and civic behaviors. It is the only segment with above-average likelihood to attend meetings ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.93$ ) and demonstrations ( $M = 2.66$ ,  $SD = 2.01$ ); display signs, banners and stickers ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 2.10$ ); engage on social media ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ); vote ( $M = 5.77$ ,  $SD = 1.93$ ); and donate ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 2.19$ ). In terms of moral foundations, members place the strongest emphasis on fairness ( $M = 6.05$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) and harm ( $M = 5.95$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), surpassing all other segments.

Like Progress Patrons, Balanced Believers prefer that firms focus their activism on domestic issues. In addition to strong support for environmental initiatives ( $M = 6.38$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ), they view health and welfare ( $M = 5.99$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ), family and social issues ( $M = 5.94$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) and economic concerns ( $M = 5.84$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ) as appropriate domains for activism. Security and terrorism ( $M = 4.76$ ,  $SD = 1.93$ ), global conflicts ( $M = 5.27$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ) and immigration ( $M = 5.33$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ) are considered less appropriate. They are the most likely to engage in all forms of activism support.

## 6. Discussion

Marketing scholars (Hoppner and Vadakkepatt, 2019; Hydock *et al.*, 2020) and practitioners (Edelman, 2019, 2022) broadly agree that consumers expect brands to take stances on controversial sociopolitical issues through brand activism



(Moorman, 2020; Nalick *et al.*, 2016). Consumer response to these initiatives, however, remains complex and shaped by both firm- and consumer-level factors. Although prior research has examined brand tactics designed to encourage support, less attention has been given to the consumer characteristics that drive downstream behaviors. As a result, the field has lacked a theory-grounded framework for analyzing consumer responses to brand activism – an absence that limits both scholarly advancement and practitioners' ability to design effective initiatives (Bennett *et al.*, 2025).

This research addresses that gap by developing a four-segment typology of consumers who are likely to support brand activism, grounded in the Reasoned Action Approach. In doing so, it answers longstanding calls for insight into consumer-level drivers of brand activism outcomes (Hydock *et al.*, 2019; Marketing Science Institute, 2016). The findings extend ongoing discussions of consumer attitudes toward activism (Austin *et al.*, 2019; Garg and Saluja, 2022; Saracevic and Schlegelmilch, 2024) and the role of political ideology (Garg and Saluja, 2022; Jost *et al.*, 2008), while incorporating previously unexamined constructs and relationships.

By applying the Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010), this research demonstrates that consumers' attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and behavioral and normative beliefs influence their intentions to support a firm's activism efforts. These belief-based dimensions provide the foundation for profiling Brand Activism Supporters, further differentiated by personality traits, political ideology, political and civic engagement, moral foundations, issue preferences and anticipated modes of support.

While prior studies examine consumer responses to specific activism issues, firms or contexts (Austin *et al.*, 2019), this research investigates support for brand activism in general. The resulting typology represents the first empirically derived, theory-grounded segmentation of potential supporters, based on such responses. By clarifying how and why consumers differ in their support, this research provides a valuable framework that organizes complex patterns into intuitive segments, advancing academic inquiry and managerial strategy (Fiss, 2011).

### 6.1 Practical implications

A central application of this research lies in forecasting consumers' likely reactions to planned brand activism initiatives. Firms routinely evaluate demographic and psychographic characteristics of customers (Dagger and O'Brien, 2010). Demographics remain useful for locating audiences and preventing unintended reach, while belief-based profiles are more diagnostic of why and how support is expressed (Barry and Weinstein, 2009). Taken together, the perspectives provide complementary insights for planning. By mapping survey responses or engagement signals onto the segments identified in this research, brands can anticipate likely reactions to activism initiatives and select sociopolitical issues that align with their customer base. For example, if customers resemble Profit Perceivers, the company may emphasize less polarizing topics, such as infrastructure rather than immigration (Hydock *et al.*, 2020), as long as they can do so authentically (Vredenburg *et al.*, 2020).

The typology can also assist firms in identifying audiences beyond their current customer base, addressing debates about

the effectiveness of activism as a strategy for market expansion (Edelman, 2019). For instance, liberal and conservative consumers alike respond more positively to communications aligned with their moral foundations (Kidwell *et al.*, 2013). Progress Patrons might respond more favorably to messages framed around harm and injustice, whereas communications targeting Conscientious Conservatives could emphasize loyalty and authority. Segment characteristics further enrich these strategic considerations. Balanced Believers, for example, exhibit high openness and may be especially receptive to campaigns that encourage consumer co-creation and interactive engagement (Addis *et al.*, 2021).

The Reasoned Action Approach also points to pathways for influencing support by targeting attitudes, subjective norms and perceptions of control (Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007). Although Balanced Believers represent an attractive audience for many campaigns, their market size might not always justify exclusive targeting. In such cases, firms might complement outreach to this segment with campaigns designed to shift Progress Patrons toward similar attitudes and behaviors, such as emphasizing the societal impact of initiatives and invite consumer participation in driving change.

A critical consideration for practitioners is how to leverage this segmentation without compromising the authenticity of their activist stance. Varying the core message or moral position across segments is cautioned against, as inconsistency undermines credibility (Vredenburg *et al.*, 2020). Instead, it is recommended that marketing managers attempting to utilize this typology of likely Brand Activism Supporters adopt a *unified stance, differentiated action* strategy. With this approach, the brand's public commitments remain constant across broad-reach channels to maintain credibility (Batra and Keller, 2016). However, firms can use addressable channels, such as email, loyalty apps and/or targeted social advertising (Blattberg and Deighton, 1991), to tailor the call to action to the specific motivations of the targeted segment. For example, because Balanced Believers have high degrees of trait openness, they might be more willing than other segments to engage in high-effort advocacy behaviors (e.g. attending events, co-creation). Conversely, low-friction support mechanisms, such as purchase-linked donations, might be better tools for engaging Profit Perceivers and other segments with lower efficacy beliefs. Such distinctions allow firms to maximize downstream support behaviors without fragmenting their brand voice.

To facilitate such applications, survey instruments, analysis procedures and strategy tools that can be directly adapted for practice are available via Web Appendices A–C. These non-validated resources are designed to help managers translate the segmentation framework into actionable insights and to map their customers onto the identified supporter types.

### 6.2 Theoretical implications

This research enriches the growing literature on consumer responses to brand activism (Abitbol and VanDyke, 2023; Aboelenien and Nguyen, 2024; Flight and Coker, 2022) by moving beyond a binary view of support versus opposition. While prior scholarship has often treated support for activism initiatives as a uniform outcome contingent largely on perceived authenticity (Vredenburg *et al.*, 2020), the findings demonstrate that support is a multifaceted construct driven by

Table 3 Future research questions based on this research

| Dimension                                                                                                                      | Research questions                                                                                                                                                                     | Belief dimension; relevant segment (s)                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Clustering variables (<i>behavioral beliefs, attitudes, normative beliefs, subjective norms, perceived control</i>)</b>     | Do higher subjective norms predict greater advocacy intentions even when attitudes are comparable?                                                                                     | Norms; Balanced Believers, Progress Patrons                     |
|                                                                                                                                | Is perceived control more strongly associated with low-effort support behaviors among less supportive segments (e.g. Conscientious Conservatives) than among more supportive segments? | Control; Conscientious Conservatives                            |
|                                                                                                                                | Do perceptions of firm motives (profit vs social change) moderate the relationship between supportive attitudes and willingness to advocate?                                           | Attitudes, motives; Profit Perceivers, Balanced Believers       |
|                                                                                                                                | How does progressive vs conservative issue framing interact with belief structures to shape perceived appropriateness of activism?                                                     | Beliefs; progress Patrons, Conscientious Conservatives          |
|                                                                                                                                | Do belief-based profiles explain unique variance in support behaviors beyond political ideology and demographics?                                                                      | All segments                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                | How do consumers' initial beliefs, attitudes, norms and perceptions of control compare with their long-term support behaviors?                                                         | All segments                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                | What factors do consumers perceive as facilitating or constraining their ability to support brand activism, and how do these perceptions affect behavioral intent?                     | Control; all segments                                           |
|                                                                                                                                | Which clustering variables mediate the relationship between background factors (e.g. personality, ideology, moral foundations) and behavioral intentions?                              | All segments                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                | What similarities and differences emerge when applying this typology in non-US contexts or diverse cultures?                                                                           | All segments                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                | What role does ethnocultural background play in shaping beliefs, attitudes and downstream support of brand activism?                                                                   | All segments                                                    |
| <b>Background factors (<i>personality, political ideology, political/civic engagement, moral foundations, preferences</i>)</b> | How do personality traits and moral foundations work together or in opposition in predicting support behaviors?                                                                        | Balanced Believers, Conscientious Conservatives                 |
|                                                                                                                                | For which issues will consumers prefer brand activism in five or ten years? Which issues remain consistently salient?                                                                  | Beliefs; all segments                                           |
|                                                                                                                                | How do consumers develop preferences for activism on certain topics but not others, and what internal/external factors shape these choices?                                            | Beliefs, background; all segments                               |
|                                                                                                                                | What smaller personas exist within the identified supporter segments?                                                                                                                  | All segments                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                | What distinct segments exist among brand activism Non-Supporters?                                                                                                                      | Passive vs. Active Non-Supporters                               |
|                                                                                                                                | What differentiates consumers who ignore, oppose or retaliate against brand activism?                                                                                                  | Beliefs, opposition; Non-Supporters                             |
|                                                                                                                                | What is the relationship between activism campaign messaging and consumers' long-term beliefs, attitudes and support behaviors regarding the target issue?                             | Beliefs; all segments                                           |
|                                                                                                                                | What factors facilitate consumers' migration from less supportive to more supportive segments?                                                                                         | Norms, attitudes; Conscientious Conservatives, Progress Patrons |
|                                                                                                                                | What factors facilitate migration from Non-Supporters to supporters?                                                                                                                   | Attitudes, motives; Non-Supporters                              |
|                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                 |
| <b>Consumer segments</b>                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                 |
| <b>Campaign effectiveness</b>                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                 |

Source(s): Authors' own work

distinct belief profiles. By differentiating between segments such as Profit Perceivers, who align support with firm financial viability, and Balanced Believers, who integrate moral and practical motivations, this typology refines the understanding of consumer–brand identification in the activist sphere (Haupt *et al.*, 2023; Silva and Abreu, 2025). The findings suggest that

consumer responses are not solely driven by ideological alignment, but also by nuanced beliefs regarding factors such as firm motives and perceived behavioral control, offering a more granular lens for future theoretical models.

A strong theoretical foundation is essential for advancing understanding of consumer responses to brand activism, yet

the field has lacked a widely accepted framework to anchor such investigations. The Reasoned Action Approach provides a robust model for explaining, predicting and influencing consumer behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). Grounding this typology in that framework enables the examination of consumer-level factors that have received limited attention in the activism literature, including attitudes, behavioral and normative beliefs, subjective norms and perceived control over activism-related support. The Reasoned Action Approach also positions background characteristics as antecedents of these belief constructs, offering a mechanism through which stable attributes such as ideology or personality translate into specific support intentions.

Applying this framework, this research identifies four distinct consumer segments with the potential to support brand activism in the coming year: Profit Perceivers, Conscientious Conservatives, Progress Patrons and Balanced Believers. While commonalities across segments reflect general patterns among supporters, each segment is defined by a unique configuration of beliefs and behavioral intentions. Segments also differ on personality traits, moral foundations, political ideology, preferred forms of political and civic engagement and evaluations of issue appropriateness. These differences demonstrate that consumer heterogeneity in activism response is not reducible to demographics or ideology alone. Instead, belief-based profiles provide incremental validity, explaining variance in support behaviors beyond static attributes. This reinforces the theoretical contribution of the framework: Beliefs are both measurable and influenceable and therefore provide a more useful foundation for theory development and strategic application.

Several pathways for theory-building emerge from this foundation. Stronger subjective norms appear to translate into greater advocacy intentions, even when attitudes are constant. Perceived control may shape low-effort behaviors (e.g. social media engagement) more strongly among consumers with less supportive attitudes, such as Conscientious Conservatives, than among those with more supportive attitudes. Perceived firm motives for engaging in activism – i.e. profit- or socially driven – likely moderate the relationship between attitudes and willingness to advocate on behalf of brands. Finally, framing issues as progressive or conservative may interact with underlying belief structures to shape perceptions of appropriateness. These insights illustrate how the Reasoned Action Approach can be leveraged to specify and test theoretically grounded mechanisms explaining support for brand activism.

By delineating these differences through a validated theoretical lens, this research establishes a reference point for scholars designing new research questions and agendas in the domain of brand activism (Doty and Glick, 1994; Fiss, 2011). Table 3 extends this contribution by aligning potential future research directions with the belief dimensions and supporter segments most relevant to each inquiry.

### 6.3 Limitations and future research

This study is the first to present a typology of consumer support for brand activism, yet several limitations warrant attention. As an exploratory investigation, the generalizability of the findings is limited. The results reflect responses from a representative sample of US adults on issues salient at the time of data

collection. Because sociopolitical issues evolve over time – what is polarizing today might not remain so (Pew Research Center, 2015) – the insights presented here should be interpreted within that temporal context. Replications across time and issue domains will be important for assessing stability. The findings may extend to other Western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic societies (Muthukrishna *et al.*, 2020), yet additional research is needed to validate comparable supporter segments in other cultural contexts.

Although the survey design included controls for CMB, reliance on cross-sectional, self-report data means that CMB remains a potential concern (Jaffe and Pasternak, 1997). The study did not incorporate additional safeguards to verify the accuracy of responses to the activism screening question. However, participants were not informed that eligibility was contingent on their answers, reducing the incentive to misreport. Future research should include other validity checks (e.g. consistency items, cross-validation with related measures) or indirect questioning techniques to further reduce the risk of response bias. While multiple safeguards were employed to enhance data quality (e.g. forced-response settings, reCAPTCHA, quotas and item counterbalancing), this research did not include formal checks for inattentive respondents. Future research should incorporate such safeguards.

This research identifies consumer-level characteristics associated with brand activism support but does not establish the causal mechanisms linking these characteristics to behavioral intentions. Experimental designs are necessary to strengthen causal inference and clarify the psychological processes underlying support. Qualitative approaches could provide deeper insight into the values, perceptions and motivations of segment members. Further research should also investigate variation within the broader domains of support behaviors. Distinctions among activities such as purchasing, advocacy and social media engagement may reveal whether engaging in certain forms of support influences participation in others (Hydock *et al.*, 2019).

Identifying consumers who do not support brand activism was beyond the scope of this study but represents an important avenue for future inquiry. Non-supporters likely include both passive consumers who dismiss activism efforts and active opponents who retaliate against them. Passive non-supporters may question the legitimacy of brands engaging with sociopolitical issues (Hoppner and Vadakkepatt, 2019; Özturan and Grinstein, 2022), whereas active opponents may view activism stances as moral violations that trigger hate and anti-brand activism (Gani *et al.*, 2025; Pöyry and Laaksonen, 2022).

Finally, there is a need for research examining how supporter segments evolve over time and the long-term outcomes of brand activism. Longitudinal studies could shed light on brand activism's effectiveness as a marketing strategy and as a potential driver of sociopolitical change (Dodd and Supa, 2015).

### Author Contribution

Andrea R. Bennett: Conceptualization; Funding acquisition; Project Administration; Supervision; Writing – Original Draft; Writing – Review & Editing.



Laura Pricer: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Project Administration; Writing – Original Draft; Writing – Review & Editing.

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## Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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