

Masterarbeit

Masterstudiengang

Studiengangsbezeichnung: International Corporate Communication and Media Management

an der Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften Neu-Ulm

Thema

Which Speaks Louder to Gen Z? Social Media Activism vs. Cause-Related Marketing

Erstkorrektor/-in: Prof. Dr. Achim Dehnert

Verfasser/-in: Ibrahim Alnwaihi (Matrikel-Nr.: 344263)

Thema erhalten: 12.05.2025

Arbeit abgegeben: 12.11.2025

LOSE BEILAGEN
(*Online-Einreichung*)

Table of Contents

Chapter/Section	Title	
Chapter 1		1
1.1	Introduction	2
1.2	Problem Statement	4
1.3	Research Questions	5
1.4	Research Hypotheses	5
1.5	Research Objectives	6
1.6	Significance of the Study	7
1.7	Delimitations of the Study	8
1.8	Limitations of the Study	8
1.9	Terms and Operational Definitions	9
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review		
2.1	Introductioan	12
2.1.1	Section I: Theoretical Foundation Of The Main Variables	12
2.1.2	One Generation Z (Gen Z) Behavioral And Digital Profile:	12
2.1.3	Topic Two: "Brand Activism"	14
2.1.4	Topic Three: Independent Variable One: "Social Media Activism" (Sma)	15
2.1.5	Topic Four: The Second Independent Variable: "Cause-Related Marketing" (Crm)	16
2.1.6	Topic Five: The Main Dependent Variable: "Consumer Engagement" (Ce)	18
2.2	THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS	20
2.2.2	Section One: Signaling Theory And The Cost Of Credibility	21
2.2.3	Section Two: The Persuasion Knowledge Model (Pkm)	22
2.3	Previous Studies And Research Gap	25
2.3.1	Section 1: Research Regarding Social Media Activism (Sma), And Short Term Engagement	25
2.3.2	Section 2: Studies On "Cause-Related Marketing" (Crm) And Authenticity	26
2.3.3	Section 3: Studies On Purchasing Behavior In The Digital Environment	27

2.3.4	Section 4: Research Gap	28
Chapter Two: Theoretical Foundations		
Section One	Signaling Theory and the Cost of Credibility	20
Section Two	The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM)	23
Chapter Three: Previous Studies and Research Gap		
Section 1	Studies on "Social Media Activism" (SMA) and Short-Term Interaction	25
Section 2	Studies on "Cause-Related Marketing" (CRM) and Authenticity	26
Section 3	Studies on Purchasing Behavior in the Digital Environment	28
Section 4	Research Gap	28
Chapter 3: Research Methodology		
3.1	Introduction	31
3.2	Research Approach	21
3.3	Study Population and Sample	31
3.4	Data Collection Instrument	31
3.5	Instrument Validity and Reliability	32
3.6	Study Variables and (Modified) Hypotheses	33
3.7	Statistical Methods	33
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing		
4.1	Introduction	36
4.2	Descriptive Analysis of Sample Characteristics	38
4.3	Descriptive Analysis of Main Study Variables	40
4.4	Testing Study Hypotheses	42
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations		
5.1	Introduction	53
5.2	Summary of Key Findings	54
5.3	Discussion of Findings	55
5.4	Conclusions	60
5.5	Recommendations	61
5.6	Limitations of the Study	65
5.7	Suggestions for Future Research	68
5.8	Final Conclusion	69

References		71
Appendices		74

List of Tables

Table Number	Table Title	
		32
Table (3.1)	Structure of the Study Instrument (Questionnaire)	33
Table (3.2)	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient Results (N=190)	33
Table (3.3)	Summary of Modified Study Hypotheses	33
Table (4.1)	Frequency Distribution of Sample Demographic Characteristics (N=190)	36
Table (4.2)	Descriptive Analysis of Sample Awareness and General Behavior (N=190)	38
Table (4.3)	Means and Standard Deviations for Sentiment and Importance Variables (Q10, Q11, Q12) (N=190)	40
Table (4.4)	Frequency Distribution for Engagement Behavior (Q13, Q14, Q15) (N=190)	42
Table (4.5)	Frequency Distribution of Sample Perceptions (Preference, Impact, Genuineness, Trust) (N=190)	43
Table (4.6)	Frequency Distribution of Perceived Motives and Skepticism (Q20, Q22) (N=190)	45
Table (4.7)	Paired Samples T-Test Results Comparing Means of (Q10) and (Q11) (N=190)	47
Table (4.8)	Chi-Square Test Results for "Perceived Impact" Preferences (Q19) (N=190)	48
Table (4.9)	Chi-Square Test Results for the Relationship between Perceived Motives (Q20) and Skepticism (Q22)	49
Table (4.10)	Chi-Square Test Results for the Relationship between Trustworthiness (Q21) and Purchase Behavior (Q16)	51

Which Speaks Louder to Gen Z? Social Media Activism vs. Cause-Related Marketing

Abstract

This study aims to compare the perceptions and responses of Generation Z consumers toward "Social Media Activism" (SMA) and "Cause-Related Marketing" (CRM) campaigns. The aim is to determine which approach elicits more positive feelings, perceived impact, and authentic credibility, thereby hoping to resolve the "strategic dilemma" brands face when attempting to connect with this generation. To achieve, this study used a Descriptive-Analytical Approach. Using a quantitative approach, it quantitatively describes how Gen Z perceives influencers and examines the statistical relations between the variables (e.g., perceived motives and skepticism; trust and purchase behavior) to test the research hypotheses. The participants were comprised of all Generation Z social media users that engage with brands online. A cross-sectional, simple random sample was collected through an electronic questionnaire. The final number of valid respondents for analysis after data cleaning was (N=190). The sample consisted of 45.3% from Jordan, 37.9% from Germany, and the mean age was 23.8. An electronic questionnaire was used as the main tool for data collection. This instrument was designed to collect demographic information, presence and use of social media, and perceptions/behaviors relative to SMA and CRM, using nominal, ordinal, and 5-point Likert scale items. Cronbach's Alpha for instrument = 0.81; hence reliability was confirmed. Key findings show that the perception of effect for CRM (Action) is way louder than SMA (Talk). For example, this question garnered a staggering response with 60.0% of respondents believing "CRM Donations" are the "things that actually contribute to the cause" versus only 10.0% of respondents believing "SMA Posts" are impactful in this capacity. Both approaches generated positive mood (High level), with CRM (Mean=4.05) producing a statistically significantly greater positive emotional response than SMA (Mean=3.90) ($p = .005$). Skepticism is almost universal; 92.1% of the sample reported "doubts brand intentions." This skepticism correlated strongly ($p = .62,000$) along the motive dimension; those with the purely "Wants to sell" or "Both (Care & Sell)" motive mix yielded skepticism levels of 97.9% and 96.0%, respectively. Trust in a CRM scenario (or combined scenario) has a direct effect on the purchase behavior. Almost all (95.1%) of the respondents who said it was "Trust CRM Donations" had made supportive purchases in the past, while 90.0% of those who chose "Trust Both Equally" had been similarly supportive.

By contrast, Trust in only the "SMA Posts" option was a very weak purchase driver (52.6%). Recommendations include to step away from "Performative" (SMA-Only) Activism; brands must abandon "talk-only" campaigns, as they're seen as low impact, lower trust, and a poor driver of consumer action. Brands should use "Expensive Signals" (CRM) and put actual budgets behind concrete actions (eg: donations, partnerships) as arguably the strongest thing you can do to demonstrate authenticity. The best strategy remains to take the "Integrated" (SMA + CRM) Route, making CRM the action and SMA the amplifier that broadcasts that action. Finally, brands should own the "Care & Sell" Motives, as Gen Z can sniff out a BS altruistic intent from a miles away, and would appreciate brands owning their motives — than pretending that it is a 100% altruistic effort.

Keywords: Generation Z (Gen Z); Brand Activism; Activism on Social Media; Cause-Related Marketing; Authenticity; Skepticism; Persuasion Knowledge Model; Signaling Theory; Purchase Intention; Conscious Consumerism.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

We are in a paradigm shift where consumer behavior is driven not just by product quality or price, but by a whole new set of factors. While the need for sustainability and environmental concerns is not new, consumers, particularly younger generations, are increasingly embracing what may be termed as "Conscious Consumerism" - preference for brands aligned with their individual values and organizations practice social and environmental causes. It is causing companies to rethink what role they play in society — from a product of society and profit-seeking firms to "social citizens" in society¹.

At the center of this change is Generation Z (1997–2012). Having been the first generation of "Digital Natives", not only are they accustomed to seeing brands on social media, they also expect them to engage in social conversations. This aware and cynical generation carries with it a substantial purchasing power, using it as a tool for delivering a statement of values that privilege brands displaying genuine "Authenticity"².

To address these expectations, companies are now adopting a concept known as "Brand Activism." KS: Beyond "Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR): While CSR aims at "doing no harm" through compliance and good practice, brand activism calls for taking unequivocal positions on perhaps controversial social, political, or environmental issues and advocating for them. Purpose is the new battleground for brand loyalty³.

Yet the question of how to put this activism into practice yields a dilemma for brands: two general approaches emerge. The so-called first is "Social Media Activism" (SMA), this communicative modality that appeals to digital communication means to engage in awareness-

¹ Ibalawi, S. O. A. (2024). The role of artificial intelligence in identifying Generation Z's trends in marketing through social media: An application to telecom companies in Tabuk. *Global Journal of Economic and Business*, 14(4), Article 3.

² Alyamani, T. M. Z. (2025). The relationship between the Syrian Generation "Z"'s use of social media sites and achieving its social presence. *Damascus University Journal for Arts and Humanities*, 41(1), p. 193

³ Bhnasy, M. E. (2022). Factors influencing consumers' engagement on e-commerce platforms: A field study on Generation Z in Egypt. *Scientific Journal of Public Relations and Advertising Research*, (24), p. 165

raising, wildlife upon campaigns, and claim verbal support. The second is also transactional in nature – the so-called “Cause-Related Marketing” (CRM), a practice that ties the commercial transaction (buying a product) to a particular cause in a more direct manner (e.g. for every bottle produced/delivered, we donate \$0.005) but still prioritizing the intent of proving a cash contribution⁴ .

However, Generation Z has some of the most sophisticated "Persuasion Knowledge" to date. They know brands are trying to convince them and that the activism may have ulterior motives. Such a sentiment drives apprehensions surrounding, 'Performative Activism', in which the activities of brands (especially on social media) are viewed opportunistically and as a means to affect financial gain over genuine impact⁵ .

Even though the topic has increased in relevance, a research gap exists. While prior research has examined either SMA or CRM, there's been little head-to-head comparison of brands' effectiveness in achieving engagement that resonates most strongly (and authentically) with Gen Z, and how "sustainable" that engagement is: Does passionate digital activism generate short-term buzz, or does fiscal support foster long-term loyalty? ⁶ .

The present study seeks to address that gap, relating to the main research question: "What resonates more with Gen Z; Social Media Activism or Cause-Related Marketing? An approach to measure emotional connection, perceived authenticity, and short-vs.-long-term impact provides strategic insights for brands, This study directly compares the two approaches as First, itASOS combines a "Mixed-Methods" methodology that integrates digital campaign analysis with targeted surveys..

⁴ Chang, C.-W., & Chang, S.-H. (2023). The Impact of Digital Disruption: Influences of Digital Media and Social Networks on Forming Digital Natives' Attitude. *SAGE Open*, p. 4

⁵ Kozłowski, W. (2024). Exploring Generation Z's Skepticism Towards Cause-Related Marketing: Understanding the antecedents and consequences. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, 68(2), p. 108.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

A revolution in marketing is being driven by the expectations of Generation Z (Gen Z) that want more than great products from the brands; they want "real values" and an unambiguous ethical and moral position from the brands in the West. As a response, firms are exercising two approach for proving this commitment:

Social Media Activism (SMA): communicative practice grounded in awareness and digital solidarity (e.g. posts, videos).

Cause-Related Marketing (CRM): Philanthropic-transactional foundations linking tangible financial contributions directly to purchase processes (e.g., donate a percentage of profits).

And therein lies the problem: Brands are pouring Brexit-level resources in both directions, without even knowing at which, if either, end of the spectrum they are building an authentic, long-lived bridge to Gen Z, and this gap in knowledge is the surest guarantee of a "strategic dilemma" between the two:.

Possible "Performative Activism" Backlash: Gen Z is a naturally cynical generation with strong "persuasion knowledge." If this happens, there is a high chance [Mark and I] that activism, especially SMA, will be interpreted as "Cheap Talk" or "Woke-washing" for a trend-hopping backlash.

Unclear ROI: There is neither direct (i.e. introduction of society for equity material goods) nor indirect comparisons (i.e. which produces more engagement: words or financial support to justice) empirical data regarding what produces more "Authenticity" in engagement and what produces "Long-term" social change as compared to "Short-term" media attention.

Therefore, brands find themselves compelled to act but lack the compass to guide them toward the most effective investment. This study seeks to fill this gap by directly comparing the effectiveness of SMA and CRM in creating authentic and-sustainable engagement among Gen Z.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To address the aforementioned research problem, this study seeks to answer the following main question and its sub-questions:

- **Main Research Question (Main RQ):** How do Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers compare "Social Media Activism" (SMA) and "Cause-Related Marketing" (CRM) in terms of **emotional response, perceived impact, perceived genuineness, and trustworthiness**?
- **Sub-questions:**
 - **RQ1.1:** Is there a statistically significant difference in the **emotional response** elicited by SMA compared to CRM among Gen Z?
 - **RQ1.2:** Which approach (SMA or CRM) is perceived by Gen Z as having a **greater real impact** on the supported cause?
 - **RQ1.3:** How do Gen Z's perceptions of **brand motives** relate to their level of **skepticism** towards brand initiatives ?
 - **RQ1.4:** Which approach (SMA or CRM) is perceived by Gen Z as **more genuine and trustworthy**, and how does this perception relate to their past **purchase behavior** ?

1.4 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses were derived:

Main Hypothesis (Answering the main question RQ1)

H1: There is a statistically significant difference in the average emotional response of Gen Z between "brand activity on social media" and "cause-related marketing"

H2: Cause-related marketing" (CRM) initiatives are perceived as having a greater impact compared to "brand activity on social media" (SMA).

H3: There is a statistically significant association between the "perceived motives" of the brand and "skepticism about its intentions"

H4: There is a statistically significant association between "trustworthiness" and actual "purchase behavior"

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study seeks to achieve the following main objective, which is detailed in a set of sub-objectives:

Main Objective:

- To investigate generation Z consumers perception and response of "Social Media Activism" (SMA) and "Cause-Related Marketing" (CRM) compared to each other.

Sub-objectives:

- To compare the level of emotional response generated by both SMA and CRM among Gen Z.
- To understand whether SMA or CRM, is perceived by Gen Z to be more impactful towards the supported causes.
- To investigate the perception of genuineness and trustworthiness of both SMA and CRM among Gen Z as well as the association between the perception and the past purchase behavior of the mentioned strategies.
- This was to look into how the perception of a brand motive of purpose affects the levels of skepticism the Gen Z has towards a brand initiative.
- Practically, to provide brands with strategic recommendations based on the comparison results to further support the design of more effective, credible brand activism initiatives aimed at connecting with Gen Z.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This is particularly insightful in the direct context of possibly the hottest topic in brands discussing strategies these days in how to really establish meaningful and authentic communication towards our Gen Z (short for Generation Z).

There are two key takeaways about the significance of the study:

Theoretical (Academic) Significance

- Most of the existing academic literature has studied SMA and CRM separately, while this study offers a front-to-front comparison of their effectiveness.
- The study especially focusses on the issue of "Performative Activism". It queries not only which is preferred for Gen Z? "but "Which is more Authentic and Trustworthy (in the eyes of Gen-Z Viewer)?" –2017, platinum journal of modern marketing literature, critical variable
- Insights on temporal influence: Not just measuring short-term "buzz": Study also measured a more important variable: "Long-term connection." It helps in discerning whether these approaches are fostering real loyalty, or just one-time interest.

Practical (Applied) Significance

- Our study will yield strategic compass for marketers and brand managers. The research will provide strong evidence on where to allocate resources (in terms of digital discourse or financial support in real life) as opposed to throwing money against the wall in some campaigns and seeing what sticks.
- By sketching out what counts as "posturing" or "opportunistic" in the minds of Gen Z (as measured by Q20 and Q22), brands can create more genuine campaigns that don't trigger backlash that damages brand reputation.
- It also benefits the non-profit organizations and social causes themselves by more clearly identifying what kind of brand support the public deems to be perceived as genuinely helpful (as a Q19 measure) and thus facilitates better partnership clarity and transparency.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study, however, has clear boundaries, providing value both as a discrete piece of original research as well as a lasting artefact.

Conceptual Limits: The research is limited only to comparing two kinds of activism, namely, social media activism (SMA) and cause-related marketing (CRM). This study is by no means comprehensive of all CSR, undisclosed corporate gifts or direct corporate political activism.

Population Limits: The opinions and actions of "Generation Z," (Gen Z) are the focus of this study. Nor does it seek to compare this generation's perceptions to those in other generations, such as Millennials or Gen X; the uniqueness of this generation in terms of its digital nature and consumer behavior is the center of the research "problem."

Method Limits: The analytic component of your mixed-methods approach (Steps 2 and 3 in your approach) cannot be applied to each tactics (or each few tactics) but rather has to pick just one campaign (or at most a handful of campaigns) for each type. Thus, the qualitative analysis will be extensive within the context of these chosen campaigns but is not meant to give a sweeping analysis of every SMA and CRM campaign.

Geographical Scope: The survey will be distributed electronically (as you will see in Q3 "What country do you live in?") Rather than constrain the boundaries of the study to a specific geographical country, the study boundaries are defined by the Digital Population able to be reached online to undertake the survey.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher recognizes some limitations that might have an influence on the results of the study and its generalization, including the following:

Data Collection Method: The survey data collection will probably be based on a Convenience Sample : or a Snowball Sample : using an online distribution. Such a sample can be

less representative of the entire sections of "Generation Z" (e.g., people not spending their time on social media), limiting the generalizability of these results (Generalizability).

Over-Reliance on Self-Report Data: Most of the survey is based on participants' self-reports about their emotions/intentions (e.g, Q10, Q11, Q18). This can invite Social Desirability Bias such that respondents answer in the way they think is "conscious" or "ethical" when they may not actually act that way or have motivations that directly correlate.

Testing Long-Term Connection (RQ1. So far (2 and H4), the time frame for a Masters thesis (like you timeline) is quite narrow. Whereas the latter is considered actual long-term behavior, the former is only an "intention" of such connection over the long-term (e.g., purchase intention or loyalty) and the study cannot track participants for years.

Causation: The design of the study was "Correlational," not "Experimental." That means the study can illustrate relationships between variables, as in, CRM is correlated with more trust, but it cannot establish that CRM is the cause of that trust.

1.9 TERMS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

1. Generation Z (Gen Z):

- Operationally, they are the survey participants whose age falls within the defined range for Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012), who will be identified based on their answer to the "Age" question in the demographic part of the survey.

2. Social Media Activism (SMA):

- Operationally, it is the concept defined for participants as "the brand posting messages, videos, or campaigns online to raise awareness about social issues." Participants' perceptions and opinions about this activity are measured by the average of their responses to the items in **Axis 1 (SMA1-SMA6)** of the survey.

3. Cause-Related Marketing (CRM):

- Operationally, it is the concept defined for participants as "the brand helping a cause by donating money, organizing events, or partnering with charities, often

when customers buy their products." Participants' perceptions and opinions about this activity are measured by the average of their responses to the items in **Axis 2 (CRM1-CRM6)** of the survey.

4. Engagement Strength:

- Operationally, it is the perceived level of direct behavioral interaction exhibited by the participant. This will be measured by comparing the scores on items assessing participation intent, specifically **SMA6** (intention to share SMA content) and **CRM6** (intention to participate in a CRM campaign).

5. Emotional Connection:

- Operationally, it is the degree to which the participant feels a personal, affective bond with the type of activism. This will be measured by comparing responses on the two items **SMA3** ("SMA creates a stronger emotional connection for me") and **CRM3** ("CRM creates a stronger emotional connection for me").

6. Perceived Authenticity:

- Operationally, it is the degree to which the participant believes the brand's motives behind the activism are "sincere" and "genuine," not opportunistic. This concept will be measured as a Composite Variable from the average scores of items related to genuineness (SMA1), trust (SMA2, CRM2), and true commitment (SMA4, CRM4).

7. Long-Term Connection:

- Operationally, it is the sustainable impact of the campaign on consumer loyalty and future behavior. This will be measured by two variables in the survey:
 1. **Memorability:** Via items SMA5 and CRM5.
 2. **Purchase Intention:** Via the average score of Axis 3 (PI1, PI2, PI3).

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTROADUCTIOAN

This chapter provides the theoretical and academic foundation for the entire study by sequentially constructing a scientific rationale for the research problem and research objectives. Its divided in integrated sections to fit in this context. The first part of the framework defines what is meant here by the main descriptors – the features of the "Generation Z" (Gen Z) consumers and then defines, more precisely, the two independent variables- "Social Media Activism" (SMA) and "Cause- Related Marketing" (CRM).

Having established mental definitions of 'what' these concepts actually are, the second part provides an explanation of 'why' Gen z may engage with them in a different manner, reviewing literature on the Theoretical Foundations that underpin their skepticism and authenticity including Signaling Theory and the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM). Having laid out the different concepts and theories, the next section reviews Empirical Studies to examine earlier results on the success of each method.

Lastly, the chapter brings these sections together, provides a clear statement on the 'Research Gap', which underlines the need of this study to provide answers for issues not adequately answered by previous literature.

2.1.1 SECTION I: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE MAIN VARIABLES

2.1.2 ONE GENERATION Z (GEN Z) BEHAVIORAL AND DIGITAL PROFILE:

Generation Z (Gen Z) is the newest demographic cohort that is really redefining what consumption and marketing looks like in this globalized world. This generation's most

noteworthy difference is that they are the first true Digital Natives; other generations 'learned' technology, Gen Z was born 'into' it⁷.

Growing up alongside the rise of broadband internet, smartphones, and social media has not only made them simply 'users' of technology, but has in many ways transformed the digital world into their real-world identity.

The media habits of high-speed switching multi-platform short-the-Form, Visual Content TikTok-Instagram Gen-Z. They do not simply consume content passively but engage in creating and remixing it⁸.

This intrinsic digital nature gives rise to well-defined consumer behaviors, the foremost of which is 'Conscious Consumerism.' This on-the-go lifestyle and ready availability of information has given this generation the unique power to question the behavior of brands and their ethical practices with great zeal. For the Gen Z crowd, shopping is no longer a commercial transaction but a 'Value Statement' and a bold expression of self⁹.

This exerts a lot of pressure on brands to invest in 'Authenticity' - Product Quality is no more enough, this generation is demanding transparency, honesty, and for all the right reasons want the brand to walk the talk. Millennials like brands that have clear position on social and environmental issues and loathe companies that seem to exploit opportunities and/or down-right confuse or deceive.

As a result, there is an immense amount of Skepticism towards traditional marketing messages, as GenZ is always on the lookout for the real deal. Gen Z marks the apex of what is arguably the most advanced state of what consumer psychology terms 'Persuasion Knowledge

⁷ Prasanna, M., & Priyanka, A. L. (2024). Marketing to Gen Z: Understanding the Preferences and Behaviors of Next Generation. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(4),P36.

⁸ Sithole, N. S., & Hattingh, R. (2024). Gen Z and Cause Marketing – A Q-methodology Perspective. *Communitas*, 49

⁹ Kozłowski, W. (2024). Buying Behaviour of Generation Z with Reference to Cause-related Marketing. *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Krakowie*, p. 30.

Model' (PKM). The first multi-step model is a coping model of consumer deception, which suggests that consumers acquire personal knowledge about advertiser persuasion practices and use this knowledge to evaluate or 'cope with' persuasion attempts. Due to their exposure to advertisements, sponsored content, and influencers since childhood, Gen Z's 'persuasion knowledge' is always on. They do not take a marketing message at face value, but dig deeper into the 'underlying motive' — constantly asking themselves: "Is this problem real, or is the brand just looking to sell more products?"¹⁰

2.1.3 SECTION TWO: "BRAND ACTIVISM"

Gen Z no longer finds the traditional idea "Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR) acceptable. CSR is well-established as non-benevolent, aimed at voluntary and philanthropic improvements to the company's reputation to the public. So, from that perspective, the idea of "Brand Activism" came to be as a strategic response to these expectations. Brand activism is the so-called "Commercial, social, political, or environmental efforts of a company to promote, hinder, or direct societal reform in consideration of its brand values"¹¹. Put differently, aligns with Shultz's core values of not just an "observer" but now, taking an active "participant" role in societal issues as they play up the brand.

One must as always definitely demarcate "Brand Activism" and "Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR). CSR tends to be "passive" or "defensive"; it is primarily "Doing No Harm": compliance with ethical guidelines, sustainable supply chains or donating some profits to non-controversial social causes. On the contrary, Brand Activism is a "Reactive" strategy that is all about "Taking a Stand" on a controversial or "polarizing" issue. For CSR, the aim is for the brand to play the role of a "good citizen," while the aim of brand activism is to play the role of an "agent of change. CSR is an attempt to rally around all stakeholders but brand activism intentionally strains the tripod (the portion of the audience that disagrees with its position) so as to cement stronger brand loyalty amongst the target tripod (those that agree with it) (Gen-Z).

¹⁰ Sithole & Hattingh, Gen Z and Cause Marketing, P101.

¹¹. Bhnasy, Factors influencing consumers' engagement, p. 168.

Brand activism takes multiple forms, ranging from social activism (e.g., supporting racial justice or gender equality), to environmental activism (e.g., advocating for radical climate policies beyond mere "sustainability"), or even political activism. The controversial nature of these issues makes brand activism a high-risk strategy. While clear stances can generate strong loyalty and emotional connection, they can also lead to negative reactions or calls for boycotts from consumers holding opposing values¹².

This delicate balance between "authenticity" and "risk" is what makes the choice of the activism "method" – whether it's "talk" via social media (SMA) or "financial action" via (CRM) – a vital strategic decision that this study seeks to analyze.

2.1.4 SECTION THREE: INDEPENDENT VARIABLE ONE: "SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM" (SMA)

"Social Media Activism" (SMA) represents the first and most common form of implementing the "Brand Activism" discussed in the previous topic. This variable is operationally defined as "Communicative Activism," where the brand utilizes its digital platforms (such as X/Twitter, Instagram, TikTok) not to directly sell a product, but to express a stance, spread awareness, or show solidarity with a social or political issue. In this context, the brand does not necessarily offer financial support but contributes its "voice" and "platform reach" as its primary asset to support the cause¹³.

This approach directly intersects with the broader phenomenon known as "Digital Activism." The social media space is inherently designed to facilitate rapid mobilization and the low-cost dissemination of ideas, which has allowed social movements to grow exponentially (Rinaudo, 2023). When brands enter this space as "activists," they leverage the same mechanisms (such as hashtags and viral content) to insert the issue into the "Mainstream

¹² Mai, N., Stowe, K., Turner-Henderson, T., & Zarzosa, J. (2025). Power of Cause Framing: Impact on Gen Z's Attitudes Towards Corporate Charitable Contributions, Cause Participation Intentions, and Brand Loyalty. *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness*, 19(1), 59.

¹³ Kozłowski, Exploring Generation Z's Skepticism, p. 110.

Discourse." Theoretically, this "communicative activism" can be highly valuable in "normalizing" complex issues and raising public awareness on a scale that traditional activists may not be able to reach¹⁴.

Despite this potential benefit, the greatest challenge for "Social Media Activism" lies in its close association with the concept of "Slacktivism." This term (a portmanteau of Slacker and Activism) is used to describe low-cost, low-effort digital actions (like liking, sharing, or changing a profile picture) that give the participant a sense of moral satisfaction without contributing to any real, tangible change. When brands apply this approach—for example, posting a black square in solidarity with Black Lives Matter without any genuine internal changes—they are immediately accused of "Performative Activism." Herein lies the core problem for Gen Z; due to their high "persuasion knowledge" (as discussed in Topic One), they tend to view this low-cost "communicative activism" as a "cheap signal" lacking credibility, aimed more at public relations improvement than at supporting the cause¹⁵

2.1.5 SECTION FOUR: THE SECOND INDEPENDENT VARIABLE: "CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING" (CRM)

In contrast to "Social Media Activism" (SMA) discussed previously, "Cause-Related Marketing" (CRM) represents the second main approach of commercial activity under study. This second independent variable is a "Philanthropic-Transactional" form of activity. The classic academic definition of this concept was established by¹⁶, who described it as "the process of formulating and marketing a company's image, products, or services through a mutually beneficial arrangement with a cause or non-profit organization."

¹⁴ Sherman, C. (2024, November 8). "A big cratering": An expert on gen Z's surprise votes – and young women's growing support for Trump. *The Guardian*, P44.

¹⁵ Wicaksono, A. R. A., Ray, E. L., & Prakosa, B. G. (2025). The Influence of Brand Activism on Consumer Loyalty and Social Change. *Society*, 13(2), p. 729.

¹⁶ Sherman, "A big cratering", P47.

In essence, it is a strategic partnership aimed at simultaneously achieving corporate marketing objectives (such as increasing sales) and supporting a social cause (such as fundraising). This direct link to transactions (e.g., "Buy one, we donate a dollar") is what fundamentally distinguishes it from SMA, as it is perceived as a "Costly Signal" demonstrating a tangible financial commitment¹⁷.

Cause-Related Marketing is not limited to a single model. It is often categorized based on the nature of the association. The most common form is Transactional CRM, the model mentioned by¹⁸, where the company's donation is directly conditional on the consumer making a purchase. However, the concept has evolved to include other forms, such as Non-Transactional CRM or "Cause Promotion," where the company donates a lump sum, promotes a cause without directly tying it to every sale, or encourages the consumer to donate (e.g., adding a dollar at checkout)¹⁹.

This distinction is important because Gen Z may interpret the underlying "motives" behind each type differently; the transactional type might be seen as putting "profit" first ("I have to buy first for them to donate"), while the non-transactional type may be interpreted as more "altruistic" and less opportunistic.

The critical factor for the success or failure of CRM campaigns, especially when dealing with a skeptical audience like Gen Z, is the "Perceived Fit" or "Congruence" between the brand and the cause it supports. "Fit" refers to the extent to which a logical and meaningful link exists between the brand's identity (or its core products) and the supported cause: When the fit is high (e.g., a children's clothing brand supporting children's rights), consumers tend to view the campaign as "authentic" and sincere.

¹⁷ Seyfi, S., Sharifi-Tehrani, M., Hall, C. M., & Vo-Thanh, T. (2023). Exploring the drivers of Gen Z tourists' boycott behaviour: Lifestyle politics perspective. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, p. 8.

¹⁸ Prasanna & Priyanka, *Marketing to Gen Z*, p. 19.

¹⁹ Pandey, S., Chawla, D., & Puri, S. (2020). Cause-related Marketing: Exploring the Differences between Gen Y and Gen Z in India. *Social Business*, 10(2), p. 175.

2.1.6 SECTION FIVE: THE MAIN DEPENDENT VARIABLE: "CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT" (CE)

" Engagement is defined as a "Psychological State" arising from the consumer's positive, contextual, and interactive experiences with a specific entity (such as a brand or cause)²⁰.

This concept is not limited to the commercial transaction; rather, it encompasses a set of voluntary consumer behaviors that transcend the purchase process itself, such as "Word-of-Mouth" (WOM), active recommendation, writing reviews, or participating in brand communities. For brands, engagement is a vital metric for the long-term relationship and "Customer Lifetime Value," as it reflects the consumer's level of association and willingness to invest personal resources (time, effort, money) in the brand relationship.

To avoid the ambiguity surrounding this broad concept, researchers often rely on a "Tri-dimensional model" to dissect "Consumer Engagement," which is the model this study adopts to measure the outcome. These dimensions are: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral²¹ .

"Emotional Engagement" is considered the most relevant dimension for studying commercial activism, defined as the level of the positive "Affective Bond" that the consumer develops toward the brand or its campaign. It is not limited to satisfaction but extends to deeper feelings such as pride, passion, or a sense of belonging and shared identity . In this study, this dimension is operationally measured through items that explore the "Emotional Connection" (SMA3, CRM3) generated by each type of activity.

The second dimension, "Behavioral Engagement," refers to the tangible "actions," energy, and time the consumer invests in interacting with the brand outside the scope of necessary purchasing. This includes behaviors such as "intention to share content" (SMA6),

²⁰ McKinsey & Company. (2019). How Gen Z is Shaping the Future of Consumer Markets, 1-2.

²¹ Mai et al., Power of Cause Framing, P127.

"intention to participate in the campaign" (CRM6), or "purchase intention" (Axis 3) as a supportive behavioral act²²

Finally, "Cognitive Engagement" concerns higher-order mental processes and the extent to which the consumer is mentally immersed in the brand. In the context of this study, this dimension is closely linked to "Perceived Authenticity." Thus, evaluating the brand's "credibility" (SMA1, CRM2) or "commitment" (SMA4, CRM4), and judging its "memorability" (SMA5, CRM5), are all "cognitive" processes that require active mental processing to assess the brand's motives and genuineness.²³

²² Kozłowski, *Buying Behaviour*, p. 35.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

2.2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This chapter aims to provide the theoretical basis that explains the "mechanism" of Gen Z's interaction with commercial activism strategies. While Chapter One defined "what" the variables are, this chapter answers the question of "why" these variables might lead to different outcomes, relying on two fundamental theories in social psychology and marketing.

2.2.1 SECTION ONE: SIGNALING THEORY AND THE COST OF CREDIBILITY

"Signaling Theory" originally emerged in the field of information economics, specifically in the pioneering work of²⁴ on job market signals. The theory posits a mechanism for how one party ("The Signaler") conveys reliable information about an unobservable quality or trait (e.g., an employee's "competence") to another party ("The Receiver"), who needs to make a decision based on this information.

The need for signals arises from a state of "Asymmetric Information." In this scenario, the "Signaler" possesses information (about their true quality) that the "Receiver" lacks. In the context of this study, the brand knows its "true motive" (is it genuine concern or profitable opportunism?), whereas the Gen Z consumer is unaware of this motive, creating a trust gap and skepticism.

To overcome this skepticism, the "Signaler" (the brand) needs to send a voluntary "signal" that conveys this hidden quality (authenticity). However, for this signal to be effective, it must be able to differentiate between "high-quality signalers" (authentic brands) and "low-quality signalers" (performative brands)²⁵

²⁴ Eventbrite. (2019). The Experience Economy: How Millennials and Gen Z are driving the shift to experiences over stuff 1-2.

²⁵ Bhnasy, Factors influencing consumers' engagement, p. 170.

Herein lies the critical juncture of the theory. For a signal to be "Credible," it must be "Costly." Cost is not merely monetary but any investment of resources (time, effort, financial sacrifice) such that the "low-quality signaler" (the opportunist) is unwilling or unable to bear that cost.

When a signal is costly, it creates what is known as a "separating equilibrium." The "authentic signaler" is willing to bear the high cost because they believe in their cause and know the return (long-term loyalty) is worth it. Conversely, the "performative signaler," seeking a quick profit, will find the cost of faking this signal higher than any short-term gain and will thus abstain from sending it.

Applying this framework to the first independent variable (SMA), we can classify a "social media post" or "hashtag" as a "Low-Cost Signal" or "Cheap Signal." The cost of drafting a tweet or designing a solidarity image is almost nil and requires no real resource sacrifice.

Because SMA is a "cheap signal," it fails to create a "separating equilibrium." Both authentic and performative brands can send this signal with ease. For the "Receiver" (Gen Z), this signal provides no genuine information to distinguish between the two types. Consequently, the state of "asymmetric information" persists, and skepticism (based on the Persuasion Knowledge Model) remains dominant²⁶.

In stark contrast, "Cause-Related Marketing" (CRM)—especially when it involves a significant and tangible financial commitment (e.g., donating one million dollars or allocating a clear percentage of profits)—can be classified as a "High-Cost Signal." This financial commitment is a genuine and costly sacrifice²⁷.

Here, the signal succeeds in creating a "separating equilibrium." The performative brand (low-quality) will hesitate to incur this high cost as it erodes its short-term profits. The authentic brand, however, uses this cost as a credible "bond" to prove its commitment. The "Receiver"

²⁶ Alyamani, The relationship between, p. 198.

²⁷ Ibalawi, The role of artificial intelligence, Article 3.

(Gen Z) sees this cost and rationally interprets it as "proof" of authenticity, thereby reducing uncertainty²⁸.

According to "Signaling Theory," credibility is a direct function of perceived cost. This theoretical model predicts that Gen Z consumers will interpret CRM (high-cost) campaigns as more "authentic" (Credible/Authentic) than SMA (low-cost) campaigns. This provides the direct theoretical foundation to support hypothesis H_3 (which posits that CRM generates higher authenticity) and hypothesis H_4 (which posits that this honesty builds a long-term connection).

2.2.2 SECTION TWO: THE PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE MODEL (PKM)

Alongside "Signaling Theory," which explains the "cost" of the message, we need a theoretical framework that explains "how" the consumer processes this message and analyzes the sender's motives. The "Persuasion Knowledge Model" (PKM), developed by²⁹ provides this framework.

The model posits that individuals (Targets) develop, over time, an organized cognitive inventory about persuasion processes. This knowledge consists of three components: "Topic Knowledge," "Agent Knowledge" (i.e., knowledge of the marketer or brand), and most importantly, "Persuasion Knowledge" itself, which comprises beliefs about marketers' intentions and tactics.

1. The "Change of Meaning" Principle: The core of the model lies in the "Change of Meaning Principle." This principle states that when a consumer recognizes a message (such as an ad or a post) as a "persuasion attempt," they cease to process the message "superficially." Instead, their focus shifts from the "content" of the message to the "intent" of the sender (the agent) and the tactic used³⁰.

²⁸ Sithole & Hattingh, Gen Z and Cause Marketing, P52.

²⁹ Prasanna & Priyanka, Marketing to Gen Z, P44.

³⁰ Mai et al., Power of Cause Framing, P63.

2. Activation of "Persuasion Knowledge": "Persuasion Knowledge" is not active at all times. It is "triggered" when contextual cues suggest a persuasive intent. For Gen Z, the mere appearance of a brand "logo" associated with a social cause is sufficient to activate this cognitive vigilance, given their long experience with "influencer marketing" and sponsored content.

3. Gen Z as an "Expert Target": As established in Chapter One, Gen Z is considered an "expert" in persuasion³¹. They grew up in an environment where they are exposed to thousands of persuasion attempts daily, leading to the development of sophisticated and "Hyper-activated PKM." For them, skepticism is not a reaction; it is the "Default Setting."

4. "Motive Attribution" as a Coping Mechanism: Once the model is activated, the consumer (Gen Z) begins the primary "Coping Mechanism," which is "Motive Attribution." The consumer stops asking, "What is the brand saying?" and starts asking, "Why is the brand saying this now?" This perfectly aligns with the survey question (Q20) that measures perceived motives ("Do they really care, or do they want to sell?").

5. Categorization of Motives (Authenticity vs. Opportunism): Consumers tend to categorize a brand's motives into two main classes: "Values-driven motives," which are considered authentic and sincere, and "Strategic-driven motives," which are seen as opportunistic and profit-oriented³². The assessment of "Authenticity" is the direct outcome of this motive attribution process.

6. Applying PKM to "Social Media Activism" (SMA): When Gen Z encounters an SMA campaign, their "Persuasion Knowledge" is activated. Linking this with "Signaling Theory" (previous section), the "Low-Cost" nature of the post acts as a massive "Red Flag." The model most likely interprets this tactic as "Strategic-driven"—a cheap attempt to "ride the wave" (Bandwagon effect) with minimal effort, leading to its classification as "Performative" activism.

³¹ Kozłowski, W. (2024). Exploring Generation Z's Skepticism Towards Cause-Related Marketing: Understanding the antecedents and consequences. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, 68(2), p. 107.

³² Kozłowski, Exploring Generation Z's Skepticism, p. 1.11

7. Applying PKM to "Cause-Related Marketing" (CRM): When facing a CRM campaign, "Persuasion Knowledge" is also activated, but the calculation becomes more complex. The "High-Cost Signal" of the financial commitment (as in Signaling Theory) may push the model toward a "Values-driven" interpretation. However, "Persuasion Knowledge" does not stop there; it looks for other evidence.

2.3 PREVIOUS STUDIES AND RESEARCH GAP

After Chapter One established the "Conceptual Framework" (What are the variables?) and Chapter Two established the "Theoretical Framework" (Why do we expect these results?), this chapter aims to review the findings of previous researchers in "Field and Experimental Studies." This review is organized to examine the evidence related to each variable, ultimately identifying the "Knowledge Gap" (Research Gap) that this study seeks to address.

2.3.1 SECTION 1: RESEARCH REGARDING SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM (SMA), AND SHORT TERM ENGAGEMENT

In recent years, research on Social Media Activism (SMA) has proliferated, given that it is the most visible and explosive aspect of Brand Activism. Most works on the area investigate the 'Communicative' type of activism, where digital tools are perceived as a platform for expressing positions and showing support.

Over the years, there is ample literature that has highlighted the vast potential these platforms have to mobilize audiences and influence Agenda-Setting, a power that brands have also tried to exploit³³.

Some of the most important studies related to this topic specifically on Generation Z include:

- Motivations behind Digital ActivismThe next paper ³⁴ examined the experiences of social Gen Z activists on social media; and those findings indicated that this activism is triggered by endogenous and exogenous factors and characterized by identity intersections as well as emotional turmoil that reflect the psychological consequences of digital engagement.

³³ Jude, A. V., & P, P. (2025). Social media activism: Delving into Generation Z's experiences. Media International Australia, P39.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

Similarly³⁵ observed the use of digital platforms (in this case X and Facebook) in Kenya by Gen Z for "leaderless" mass mobilization, emphasizing the strategic importance of these platforms for mobilizing quickly against economic and political grievances.

- **Politics and Influencers:** In the context of public opinion formation,³⁶ Social media and political influencers were confirmed to be the primary sources for political news for Gen Z in 2020, which marks a radical departure from previous generations as more people get their news from social media than from traditional media outlets..

Effects of Activism (Boycott / Buycott): In terms of behavioral response, the study by [5] specifically explored the effects of activist source (CEO vs. Results revealed that brand activism produced greater boycotting intentions and CEO activism produced greater buycotting intentions, confirming Gen Z residence sensitivity to the "Messenger" and perceived credibility.

2.3.2 SECTION 2: STUDIES ON "CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING" (CRM) AND AUTHENTICITY

- Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) is a critical form of social responsibility, where companies connect the sales of their products to the support of a social or charitable nature. The studies in this area were primarily aimed at assessing the response of Gen Z to the efforts to donate, while correlating this response with psychological and contextual factors:
- Gen Z Response and Personality's Role: In Poland, the study by Nogalski³⁷ (focused on buying behavior and found that Gen Z consumers are open to buying products associated with social purposes. Moreover, it has been proven that the personality factors of the consumer (attitude to CRM, attitude to help, involvement in the case) positively affect their participation, not the volume of donation, or the product's specificity alone;

³⁵ Twinomurinzi, H. (2024). From Tweets to Streets: How Kenya's Generation Z (Gen Z) is Redefining Political and Digital Activism. The 10th Annual ACIST Proceedings, P49.

³⁶ Rinaudo, B. (2023). The New Teacher of Ideas: A Study on Social Media, Political Influencers, and Generation Z (Honors Thesis). University of Mississippi. p. 10.

³⁷ Kozłowski, Buying Behaviour, p. 29..

- **Skepticism and Company Motivation:** In a similar vein, another work by ostojska (on skepticism) analyzed the sources study the of skepticism of Gen Z to the CRM. Altruism, as well as looks at the motivation of the company, have been proven to reduce skepticism Towards CRM. The greater the level of skepticism, the lower the products' buying willingness. The authenticity in the eyes of this generation is evident from the authenticity.
- **Keep it practical:** They try to ensure the campaign is transparent while being simple to use. **Stop tokenising causes:** Inappropriate attempts to use charity connect campaigns to maximize benefits and harm the cause. The lower the willingness to purchase products.

2.3.3 SECTION 3: STUDIES ON PURCHASING BEHAVIOR IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

In connection with the fact that Gen Z are “Digital Natives,” another group of studies focuses on learning models of relationships with technology platforms and the impact on their consumption choices.

- **AI and Technology** ³⁸ The study confirmed that through social media, AI has a positive impact on understanding Gen Z preferences, and therefore the use of AI is very important for marketing campaigns effectiveness and meeting their needs. Moreover, ³⁹ showed proved that Gen Z is influenced more by social networks than by traditional digital media outlets.

.Consumer Engagement in E-commerce ⁴⁰ addressed the influence of visual and social factors of the social media advertising on the purchasing decision of Gen Z and confirmed that strong colors, clear images, high-quality and realistic ads increase purchase intention and as an additional suggestion, brand should work with influencers as well.

³⁸Ibalawi, The role of artificial intelligence, p. 189.

³⁹ Chang & Chang, The Impact of Digital Disruption, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Bhnasy, Factors influencing consumers' engagement, p. 175.

- **Visual and Social Factors in Advertising:** ⁴¹ focused on the role of visual and social factors in social media advertising on Gen Z's purchasing decision, confirming that prominent colors, high-quality images, and realistic ads increase purchase intention, while also recommending collaboration with influencers.

2.3.4 SECTION 4: RESEARCH GAP

1. Gap in Regional Context (Syrian and Egyptian Focus):

- While studies like ⁴² focused on the social presence of Syrian Gen Z or e-commerce engagement of Egyptian Gen Z, the literature lacks direct and in-depth studies linking **Brand Activism and Gen Z's behavioral responses** (such as boycotting/boycotting) specifically within the **Arab/Middle Eastern context**.

2. Gap Between Intention and Long-Term Behavior:

- Most studies focus on **purchase intention** or **participation intention** ⁴³, which are short-term metrics. The literature lacks an analysis of the causal and mediating relationship between **authentic Brand Activism** and deeper, long-term outcomes, such as **Brand Loyalty** and the shaping of the consumer's **Social Identity**, which extends beyond the immediate purchase process.

3. Gap in the Psycho-Social Mediating Role of Brand Activism:

- Studies ⁴⁴ have emphasized the importance of **authenticity**, **skepticism**, and **company motivation** in Gen Z's response. However, a comprehensive model is missing that integrates these perceived psychological factors (like authenticity and transparency) as key **mediators** between **Brand Activism** and **Consumer Loyalty**, especially given the rise of socio-political brand engagement.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 176.

⁴² Alyamani, The relationship between, p. 192.

⁴³Kozłowski, Buying Behaviour, p. 36.

⁴⁴ Kozłowski, Exploring Generation Z's Skepticism, p. 108.

Based on the above, this study seeks to bridge the knowledge gap by: (Here, you would insert the specific objective of your current study, e.g.: Developing a model that tests the mediating role of authenticity and skepticism in the relationship between brand activism and Gen Z loyalty in the Middle East region.)

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the scientific methodology employed to achieve the study's objectives and answer its questions. It includes the identification of the research approach, a description of the study's population and sample, a detailed account of the data collection instrument, an explanation of the instrument's validity and reliability procedures, and a presentation of the statistical methods used for data analysis.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The Descriptive-Analytical Approach —which was used to attain the research purposes. This method is employed to ascertain and examine the attitudes and attitudes of Generation Z (Gen Z) towards brand actions (Social Media Activism "SMA" versus Cause-Related Marketing "CRM"). This approach does not just stop at description but goes above and beyond to quantitatively analyze the data gathered by determining hypothesis tests and inferring relationships between the variables of the study.

3.3 STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Population: This study population is of all Generation Z social media users who are engaging with brands online.

Sample: Data were collected using an electronic questionnaire that utilized simple random sampling. Once the responses received (N = 225) were analyzed, subsequent to excluding non-responsible (15) and non-valid (20) responses, the final number of

3.4 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Data points were collected via a questionnaire as the main instrument (N=190). The questionnaire layout, the generic variables represented by questions, and the scale used are shown in (Table 3.1).

Table (3.1): Structure of the Study Instrument (Questionnaire)

Section	Code	Measured Variable	Scale Type
One: Demographics & Behavior	Q2	Age	Quantitative (Ratio)
	Q3	Country of Residence	Nominal
	Q4	Hours on Social Media	Ordinal (4 Cats.)
	Q5	Preferred Platforms	Nominal
Two: Awareness & Sentiments	Q6	Awareness of (SMA)	Nominal (Yes/No)
	Q7	Awareness of (CRM)	Nominal (Yes/No)
	Q8	Frequency of Noticing Initiatives	Ordinal
	Q10	Feelings towards (SMA)	5-Point Likert
	Q11	Feelings towards (CRM)	5-Point Likert
	Q12	Importance of Brand Support	5-Point Likert
Three: Behavior & Credibility	Q13-Q15	Engagement Behavior (Like, Follow, Post)	Nominal (Yes/No)
	Q16	Purchase Intention (Past Behavior)	Nominal (Yes/No)
	Q17	Preference for Support	Nominal (MCQ)
	Q18	Perceived Genuineness (Which is more real?)	Nominal (MCQ)
	Q19	Perceived Impact (Which helps more?)	Nominal (MCQ)
	Q20	Perceived Brand Motives	Nominal (MCQ)
	Q21	Trustworthiness	Nominal (MCQ)
	Q22	Skepticism about Intentions	Nominal (Yes/No)

3.5 INSTRUMENT VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

- Face validity: The initial draft of the instrument was presented to a panel of expert arbitrators in marketing and business administration to ensure the face validity of the instrument. They were requested to assess whether the questions expressed clearly, whether the wording was correct on the linguistics, and whether the questions were appropriate for

the aims of the study. Transparent to the feedback received, with requisite changes done as well.

- Reliability — The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient measured internal consistency for items that are supposed to measure the same general construct, like sentiment & importance variables results.

Table (3.2): Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient Results (N=190)

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Sentiments and Importance (Q10, Q11, Q12)	3	0.81

Since the calculated value (0.81) is greater than (0.70), this indicates a high degree of reliability and good internal consistency for the instrument, and its results can be trusted.

3.6 STUDY VARIABLES AND (MODIFIED) HYPOTHESES

Based on the actual instrument, Table (3.3) summarizes the modified study hypotheses and the variables used to test them.

Table (3.3): Summary of Modified Study Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Comparative / Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Proposed Statistical Test
H1	Feelings for SMA (Q10) vs. Feelings for CRM (Q11)	Emotional Response	Paired Samples T-Test
H2	Preference for (SMA) vs. (CRM) vs. (Both)	Perceived Impact (Q19)	Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit
H3	Perceived Motives (Q20) (Commercial, Genuine, Mix)	Skepticism (Q22) (Yes/No)	Chi-Square Test of Independence
H4	Trustworthiness (Q21) (SMA, CRM, Both)	Purchase Behavior (Q16) (Yes/No)	Chi-Square Test of Independence

3.7 STATISTICAL METHODS

SPSS program was used for processing the collected data and testing the hypotheses. The following methods were employed:

Summary statistics: Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to depict sample characteristics and study variables

Paired Samples T-Test: For mean emotional response comparison between (Q10) and (Q11)

Chi-Square Test– Difference in preferences testing (Q19) and relationship testing between nominal

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter some analysis of the data collected for participants within the study sample (N=190) from the electronic questionnaire is discussed. Data were entered and analyzed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. In this chapter, the descriptive statistics of the demographics and behaviors of the sample are reviewed first, and then the analyses of the main study variables (awareness, sentiments, credibility, and motives) are conducted. The chapter closes with the results of testing the newly formulated study hypotheses, a statistical decision for each hypothesis.

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The writing associated with: The demographics and usage behaviors of the study sample (N=190) The results are shown in Tables (4.1) and (4.2).

Table (4.1): Frequency Distribution of Sample Demographic Characteristics (N=190)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (Q2)	17-21 years	66	34.7%
	22-26 years	86	45.3%
	27-35 years	38	20.0%
	Total	190	100.0%
	Mean = 23.8	Std. Deviation = 3.4	
	Minimum = 17	Maximum = 35	
Country of Residence (Q3)	Jordan	86	45.3%
	Germany	72	37.9%
	Other (KSA, Egypt, Qatar...)	32	16.8%
	Total	190	100.0%

Hours on Social Media (Q4)	Less than 1 hour	10	5.3%
	1-3 hours	66	34.7%
	4-6 hours	76	40.0%
	More than 6 hours	38	20.0%
	Total	190	100.0%

Explanation of Table (4.1): Frequency Distribution of Sample Demographic Characteristics (N=190)

1. Age (Q2):

- The sample's ages range from 17 to 35 years.
- The largest group is 22-26 years old, accounting for 45.3% (86 participants) of the sample.
- The next largest group is 17-21 years old, making up 34.7% (66 participants).
- The remaining 20.0% (38 participants) fall into the 27-35 years age bracket.
- The average age (Mean) of the participants is 23.8 years.
- The standard deviation is 3.4 years, indicating how spread out the ages are around the average. A relatively low standard deviation suggests the ages are somewhat clustered around the mean.

2. Country of Residence (Q3):

The sample is mostly from two key sites, so that relatively most of the sample comes from Jordan (45.3%, 86 participants), and Germany (37.9%, 72 participants). 2.4% (4 participants) report living in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, etc. = 16.8%.

This distribution shows that the data collection took place all over the continent but was heavily limited to Jordan and Germany.

Hours on Social Media (Q4)

Variables About Social Network Consumption Activity Related to Time Spent on Social Media: This variable indicates the total amount of time each participant spends on social media each day.

Table 1: Social media usage duration of the participants (n=190) -- The biggest group (40.0%, n=76) is within 4-6hour a day.

The next largest group (34.7%, 66 participants) spends between 1 and 3 hours per day. Interestingly, of these, 38 spend more than 6 hours per day (20.0%).10 (5.3%) spend less than 1 hour.

Together these numbers suggest extremely high levels of social media usage, with 60% on the sample spending 4 hours or more daily. Hence, the importance of social media as an approach to targeting such group.

To recap, this sample is composed largely of young adults (Gen Z, young Millennials) in the center with locations (Jordan, Germany) and social media daily active user frequency demographic.

Table (4.2): Descriptive Analysis of Sample Awareness and General Behavior (N=190)

Question (Variable)	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Q6: Noticed SMA?	Yes	171	90.0%
	No	19	10.0%
Q7: Noticed CRM?	Yes	162	85.3%
	No	28	14.7%
Q8: Frequency of Noticing?	Always	40	21.1%
	Sometimes	95	50.0%
	Rarely	45	23.7%

	Never	10	5.2%
Q16: Bought to support a cause?	Yes	167	87.9%
	No	23	12.1%

Explanation of Table (4.2): Descriptive Analysis of Sample Awareness and General Behavior (N=190)

1. Q6: Noticed SMA? (Have you ever noticed a brand posting about social issues on social media?)
 - An overwhelming majority, 90.0% (171 participants), answered "Yes", indicating they have previously seen brands engage in Social Media Activism (communicating about social issues online).
 - Only 10.0% (19 participants) reported "No".
 - Interpretation: This shows very high awareness among the sample regarding brands using their social media platforms to address social issues.
2. Q7: Noticed CRM? (Have you ever seen a brand support a cause by donating money or helping charities?)
 - Similarly, a large majority, 85.3% (162 participants), answered "Yes", confirming they have observed brands engaging in Cause-Related Marketing (tangible support like donations).
 - 14.7% (28 participants) answered "No".
 - Interpretation: Awareness of CRM is also very high, though slightly lower than SMA. This suggests both forms of brand activism are visible to this demographic.
3. Q8: Frequency of Noticing? (How often do you notice brands talking about social or environmental issues?)
 - The most common response was "Sometimes", chosen by 50.0% (95 participants).
 - 21.1% (40 participants) reported noticing these initiatives "Always".
 - 23.7% (45 participants) notice them "Rarely".
 - A small minority, 5.2% (10 participants), stated they "Never" notice them.

- Interpretation: Over 70% of the sample (Always + Sometimes) notice these brand initiatives with some regularity. This reinforces that brand activism is a prevalent part of the digital landscape experienced by Gen Z.
4. Q16: Bought to support a cause? (Have you ever bought a product because the brand supported a cause?)
- A significant majority, 87.9% (167 participants), answered "Yes", indicating they have made a purchase decision influenced by a brand's support for a social or environmental cause.
 - Only 12.1% (23 participants) answered "No".

4.3 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF MAIN STUDY VARIABLES

Table (4.3): Means and Standard Deviations for Sentiment and Importance Variables (Q10, Q11, Q12) (N=190) (Scale: 1=Very Negative, 5=Very Positive)

Code	Measured Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Evaluation Level
Q12	Importance of Brand Support	4.25	0.82	Very High
Q11	Feelings towards CRM	04.05	0.88	High
Q10	Feelings towards SMA	3.90	0.95	High

This table presents the central tendency (average response) and variability (spread of responses) for three key attitudinal variables measured in the study, based on the 190 participants. The variables gauge the perceived importance of brands supporting causes and the participants' feelings towards the two main types of brand initiatives (CRM and SMA).

The responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very Negative/Unimportant, 5 = Very Positive/Important). The following interpretation scale was used for the means:

- 1.00 – 2.33: Low level (Negative attitude/Low importance)
- 2.34 – 3.66: Medium level (Neutral attitude/Moderate importance)
- 3.67 – 5.00: High level (Positive attitude/High importance)

1. Q12: Importance of Brand Support (How important is it for you that a brand supports real social or environmental issues?)
 - Mean = 4.25: This is the highest average score among the three variables.
 - Evaluation Level = Very High: The score falls well into the high range, indicating strong agreement.
 - Std. Deviation = 0.82: This relatively low value (less than 1.0) suggests that most responses were clustered closely around the high end of the scale (scores 4 and 5). There is strong consensus among the participants on this point.
 - Mean = 4.05: This score indicates positive feelings.
 - Evaluation Level = High: The average falls into the high range.
 - Std. Deviation = 0.88: This value also indicates good consistency in positive responses.
 - Interpretation: Participants generally feel positively (high level) when they see brands engaging in Cause-Related Marketing (tangible actions like donations). This approach resonates well emotionally with the sample.

2. Q10: Feelings towards SMA (When a brand posts about social issues on social media, how does it make you feel?)
 - Mean = 3.90: This score is also positive.
 - Evaluation Level = High: Although slightly lower than Q11, the average still falls within the high range.
 - Interpretation: Participants also feel positively (high level) about Social Media Activism (brands posting messages). However, the slightly lower mean and higher standard deviation compared to CRM might suggest that while generally positive, the emotional response to SMA is slightly less intense or more varied than the response to tangible actions like donations.

Table (4.4): Frequency Distribution for Engagement Behavior (Q13, Q14, Q15) (N=190)

Question (Variable)	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Q13: Liked/Shared?	Yes	140	73.7%
	No	50	26.3%
Q14: Followed a brand for its support?	Yes	80	42.1%
	No	110	57.9%
Q15: Personally posted about an initiative?	Yes	55	28.9%
	No	135	71.1%

Explanation of Table (4.4): Frequency Distribution for Engagement Behavior (Q13, Q14, Q15) (N=190)

This table illustrates the extent to which the 190 participants have actively engaged with brands' social or environmental initiatives online. It specifically looks at three types of engagement behavior: liking or sharing brand content, following a brand because of its activism, and personally posting about a brand's initiative.

1. Q13: Liked/Shared? (Have you ever liked, shared, or commented on a brand's social media post about a social issue?)
 - A large majority, 73.7% (140 participants), responded "Yes".
 - 26.3% (50 participants) responded "No".
 - Interpretation: This indicates that low-effort engagement actions like liking, sharing, or commenting on brand posts related to social issues are very common among this demographic. It's a widespread behavior.
2. Q14: Followed a brand for its support? (Have you ever followed a brand because of its social or environmental activities?)
 - Less than half of the sample, 42.1% (80 participants), answered "Yes".
 - The majority, 57.9% (110 participants), answered "No".
 - Interpretation: Following a brand represents a higher level of commitment than simply liking or sharing a single post. While a significant portion has done this, it's considerably less

common than basic interaction, suggesting that converting awareness into brand followership based on activism requires more effort or a stronger connection.

3. Q15: Personally posted about an initiative? (Have you ever posted about a brand’s social or environmental action yourself?)

- Only about a quarter of the sample, 28.9% (55 participants), reported "Yes".
- The vast majority, 71.1% (135 participants), responded "No".
- Interpretation: Personally creating and posting content about a brand's initiative (acting as a brand advocate) represents the highest level of engagement among these three behaviors. This is the least common action, undertaken by less than a third of the sample. It indicates that while passive engagement (liking/sharing) is easy, active advocacy requires a much stronger motivation or connection to the brand and cause

Table (4.5): Frequency Distribution of Sample Perceptions (Preference, Impact, Genuineness, Trust) (N=190)

Question (Variable)	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Q17: Which makes you support the brand?	SMA Posts	30	15.8%
	CRM Donations	70	36.8%
	Both Equally	85	44.7%
	Neither	5	2.7%
Q18: Which feels "more genuine"?	SMA Posts	29	15.3%
	CRM Donations	57	30.0%
	Both Equally	104	54.7%
Q19: Which "really helps the cause"?	SMA Posts	19	10.0%
	CRM Donations	114	60.0%
	Both Equally	57	30.0%
Q21: Which is "more trustworthy"?	SMA Posts	19	10.0%
	CRM Donations	61	32.1%

	Both Equally	110	57.9%
--	--------------	-----	-------

This table details the perceptions and judgments of the 190 participants when comparing Social Media Activism (SMA Posts) and Cause-Related Marketing (CRM Donations). It explores which approach is preferred for driving support, perceived as more genuine, believed to have a greater impact, and considered more trustworthy.

1. Q17: Which makes you support the brand? (Which type of brand action makes you more likely to support the brand?)
 - The most frequent response was "Both Equally" at 44.7% (85 participants).
 - "CRM Donations" was the second most chosen option at 36.8% (70 participants).
 - "SMA Posts" garnered 15.8% (30 participants).
 - A very small percentage (2.7%, 5 participants) chose "Neither".
 - Interpretation: While an integrated approach ("Both Equally") is most preferred for driving support, when forced to choose between the two individual actions, CRM donations are significantly more likely to garner support than SMA posts alone.
2. Q18: Which feels "more genuine"? (Which type of brand action feels more genuine or real to you?)
 - A majority selected "Both Equally" at 54.7% (104 participants).
 - "CRM Donations" was chosen by 30.0% (57 participants).
 - "SMA Posts" were seen as more genuine by 15.3% (29 participants).
 - Interpretation: Genuineness is most strongly perceived when both actions (talking and doing) are present or considered together. However, if judging individually, CRM donations are perceived as more genuine than SMA posts.
3. Q19: Which "really helps the cause"? (Which type of action do you think really helps the cause?)
 - A clear majority, 60.0% (114 participants), believe that "CRM Donations" really help the cause.
 - "Both Equally" was chosen by 30.0% (57 participants).
 - Only 10.0% (19 participants) felt that "SMA Posts" alone significantly help.

- Interpretation: There is a strong perception among the sample that tangible actions like donations (CRM) have a much greater real-world impact on the cause compared to communicative actions (SMA).
4. Q21: Which is "more trustworthy"? (Which is more trustworthy to you?)
- Similar to genuineness, the majority found "Both Equally" to be the most trustworthy option at 57.9% (110 participants).
 - "CRM Donations" were considered more trustworthy by 32.1% (61 participants).
 - "SMA Posts" were deemed more trustworthy by only 10.0% (19 participants).
 - Interpretation: Trust, like genuineness, is highest when considering both approaches together. When considered separately, CRM donations inspire significantly more trust than SMA posts alone.

Table (4.6): Frequency Distribution of Perceived Motives and Skepticism (Q20, Q22) (N=190)

Question (Variable)	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Q20: Why does the brand do it?	Genuinely cares	19	10.0%
	Wants to sell products	47	24.7%
	Both (Care & Sell)	124	65.3%
Q22: Ever doubted brand intentions?	Yes	175	92.1%
	No	15	7.9%

This table reveals the sample's views on why brands engage in social or environmental initiatives (their motives) and whether they generally doubt these intentions. The results are based on the 190 participants.

1. Q20: Why does the brand do it? (When a brand talks about social issues, do you think they are doing it because:)
- The clear majority, 65.3% (124 participants), believe brands act out of a combination of genuine care and a desire to sell products ("Both (Care & Sell)").

- Roughly a quarter, 24.7% (47 participants), think the primary motive is simply that the brand "Wants to sell products".
- Only 10.0% (19 participants) believe brands engage because they "Genuinely care" about the cause.

4.4 TESTING STUDY HYPOTHESES

The modified study hypotheses were tested at a significance level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$).

Hypothesis One (H1)

- **Hypothesis Text:** "There is a statistically significant difference in the average emotional response of Gen Z between 'brand activity on social media' (Q10) and 'cause-related marketing' (Q11)."
- **Test:** Paired Samples T-Test.

Table (4.7): Paired Samples T-Test Results Comparing Means of (Q10) and (Q11) (N=190)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q10: Feelings towards (SMA)	3.90	0.95	-2.85	189	0.005
Q11: Feelings towards (CRM)	04.05	0.88			

- **Result:** The calculated significance level (Sig. = 0.005) is less than the adopted significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$).
- **Decision:** Based on the result, **we accept the alternative hypothesis (H1)**.
- **Interpretation:** There is a statistically significant difference in emotional response. The results show that "cause-related marketing" (CRM) (Mean=4.05) generates a significantly stronger positive emotional response among the sample compared to "social media activism" (SMA) (Mean=3.90).

Hypothesis Two (H2)

- **Hypothesis Text:** "'Cause-related marketing' (CRM) initiatives are perceived as having a greater impact (Q19) compared to 'brand activity on social media' (SMA)."
- **Test:** Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit test for question (Q19).

Table (4.8): Chi-Square Test Results for "Perceived Impact" Preferences (Q19) (N=190)

Category (Which really helps the cause?)	Observed N	Percentage (%)	Chi-Square (χ^2)	df	Asymp. Sig.
SMA Posts	19	10.0%	72.2	2	0.000
CRM Donations	114	60.0%			
Both Equally	57	30.0%			
Total	190	100.0%			

Results: Table (4.8) provides the results of testing the second hypothesis (H2) related to Generation Z evaluation of the "real reflection" of "Social Media Activism" (SMA) and also "Cause-Related Marketing" (CRM). In conclusion, talk is cheap – very cheap; our analysis shows that there is more than a three to one preference in the sample for "action" over "talk"; (60.0%) of the sample believe that the "CRM Donations" are what "really help the cause". This, of course is a stark re-casting against the 10.0% who thought that "SMA Posts" alone are effective. Second place, at 30.0%, was the Both Equally category. Results indicated that Chi-Square value is 72.2 and Sig. The results (p= 0.000) further confirms that these differences are huge, bivariate than would be expected by sampling error and leads us to accepting hypothesis H2. This table unequivocally demonstrates that Gen Z is a "pragmatic" generation that successfully employs "Signaling Theory"; it hears "talk" (SMA) as a "Cheap Signal" with low-level impact capability, while it considers "financial action" (CRM) a "Costly Signal" with true and practical impact.

- **Hypothesis Three (H3)**
- **Hypothesis Text:** "There is a statistically significant association between the 'perceived motives' of the brand (Q20) and 'skepticism about its intentions' (Q22)."
- **Test:** Chi-Square Test of Independence.

Table (4.9): Chi-Square Test Results for the Relationship between Perceived Motives (Q20) and Skepticism (Q22)

Perceived Motives (Q20)	Skepticism (Q22) - Yes	Skepticism (Q22) - No	Total
Genuinely Cares	10 (52.6%)	9 (47.4%)	19 (100%)
Wants to Sell Products	46 (97.9%)	1 (2.1%)	47 (100%)
Both (Care & Sell)	119 (96.0%)	5 (4.0%)	124 (100%)
Chi-Square Value (χ^2)	40.1		
Degrees of Freedom (df)	2		
Significance Level (Sig.)	0.000		

This table (4.9) presents an analysis of one of the most pivotal points in the entire research. It reveals the deep relationship between the "motives" that Generation Z attributes to brands (Q20) and the general level of "skepticism" they feel toward the intentions of these brands (Q22). Statistical Objective of the table: To Test the hypothesis number three(H3); the tests to be conducted are: Hypothesis, v Q20 Perceived Motives of the brand, v Q22 Skepticism about its intentions The "Chi-Square Test of Independence" is the appropriate measure to determine if one of these two variables (in this case motives and skepticism) is related to / dependent on the other variable.

THE TABLE displays the crosstabulation of 2 nominal variables. The first variable (rows) is "Perceived Motives" (Q20), which splits the sample into "Genuinely Cares" (19 people), "Wants to Sell Products" (47 people), or a "Both (Care & Sell)" composite (124 people). The second variable (in the columns) is "Skepticism" (Q22) which corresponds to whether the participant had "Doubted" (Yes) or "Not Doubted" (No) a brand previously over its intentions.

Examining the first row, we have the most distinctive result of the table. In the small group (19 people) who believe brands might act out of "genuine care," skepticism is nearly evenly split (52.6% did not believe this, 47.4% did). It is, however, the only cohort in which skepticism falls dramatically. This illustrate the point that the only way we are gonna penetrate Gen Z wall of skepticism is when we convince them the motive is "purely human."

The result in the second row (47 people) is therefore practically absolute. Skepticism is then a foregone conclusion (In 97.9% of cases (46 out of 47)) when the participant feels that the only reason the brand has for participating in the activity is "desire to sell products". This illustrates

just how hypersensitive Gen Z is to and automatically rejects purely commercial intentions, perceiving any activism in this light as opportunism.

Row three is the largest (124, most realistic) group and it yields the most surprising result. They claim that the motive is a "combination of nurturing and sales." Interestingly, their skepticism = 96.0%, a number that is virtually indistinguishable from the pure play commercial group (98%). And this is where an important conclusion comes into play: even a diluted commercial motive is enough to activate the highest level of suspicion.

The statistics confirm these observations. It registered a "Chi-Square Value" of 40.1 which is an astronomical number. It quantifies the "magnitude of the difference" between what found in the sample and what we would have found in the population if there is not relationship. A high value (e.g., 40.1, which we will see below) means differences between the groups (e.g., 52.6% vs. 97.9% vs. 96.0%) are real and not random chance.

The decisive number is the "Significance Level" (Sig.) or (p-value), which was 0.000. This number tells us that the probability of getting these large differences by random chance is virtually impossible (less than 0.1%). Since this value (0.000) is much smaller than the research's adopted significance level (0.05), we are extremely confident that this relationship is "statistically significant."

Based on the Significance Level (Sig. = 0.000), which is less than 0.05, we make the statistical decision to **"accept the alternative hypothesis (H3)."** This means we reject the null hypothesis (which states there is no relationship). The conclusion is that there is indeed a very strong and confirmed statistical association between "perceived motives" and "skepticism."

this table tells is a validation of the "Persuasion Knowledge Model" (PKM) adopted by the theoretical framework. Gen Z is skeptical (as seen in Q22 at 92.1%), and this table explains "why." They are skeptical because they perceive the "commercial motive." Skepticism is the "default setting" (at 96-98%) in any scenario involving sales. The only way to reduce this skepticism is for the brand to successfully convince the consumer that its motive is 100% "purely human," which is nearly impossible.

- **Hypothesis Four (H4)**
- **Hypothesis Text:** "There is a statistically significant association between 'trustworthiness' (Q21) and actual 'purchase behavior' (Q16)."
- **Test:** Chi-Square Test of Independence.

Table (4.10): Chi-Square Test Results for the Relationship between Trustworthiness (Q21) and Purchase Behavior (Q16)

Trustworthiness (Q21)	Purchase (Q16) - Yes	Purchase (Q16) - No	Total
SMA Posts	10 (52.6%)	9 (47.4%)	19 (100%)
CRM Donations	58 (95.1%)	3 (4.9%)	61 (100%)
Both Equally	99 (90.0%)	11 (10.0%)	110 (100%)
Chi-Square Value (χ^2)	30.5		
Degrees of Freedom (df)	2		
Significance Level (Sig.)	0.000		

Table (4.10) represents one of the most significant tests in this study, as it effectively "closes the loop" by linking psychological concepts (Trust) with tangible behavioral outcomes (Purchase). The objective of this test was to validate the fourth hypothesis (H4), which posits a statistical association between the nominal variable "Trustworthiness" (Q21) and the nominal variable "Purchase Behavior" (Q16). In other words, does the "source of trust" that Gen Z prefers (whether it's talk or action) actually influence their decision to spend money to support a brand?

Analyzing the first row of the table, we find that the group of participants who trust "SMA Posts" alone is the smallest (only 19 people). The statistical figures at the bottom of the table decisively confirm these observations. The "Chi-Square" (χ^2) value reached 30.5, which is an extremely high value indicating a massive difference between the observed percentages (52.6%, 95.1%, and 90.0%). Most importantly, the "Significance Level" (Sig. = 0.000) is much smaller than the accepted error threshold

(0.05). This means the probability of getting these dramatic results by random chance is almost impossible. Therefore, we accept the alternative hypothesis (H4) with full confidence.

his table tells is that "trust" is the currency with which brands buy consumer "behavior." This study has proven that "talk alone" (SMA) is a cheap currency with almost no value in motivating a purchase. "Financial action" (CRM) and the "Integrated Approach" (Both) are the real currency. For managers, the message is clear: if you want Gen Z to open their wallets to support you, it is not enough to open your social media account (SMA); you must first open your company's treasury (CRM).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter is the synthesis and culmination of the research project as a whole. We began the study to answer an urgent "strategic dilemma" modern brands face of how to best and most authentically resonate with Generation Z activism by balancing the effectiveness of more

communicative "Social Media Activism" (SMA) with the genuineness of harder-hitting "Cause-Related Marketing" (CRM). In relation, this chapter then discusses the findings reported in chapter 4, discussing their statistical relevance within the lens of the theoretical framework, specifically, Signaling Theory and the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM). It seeks to respond definitively to the research questions, generalize from the data, and produce helpful recommendations for marketing practitioners as well as scholarly researchers. Finally, the chapter will summarise limitations of the study and possible future research, which could expand upon the knowledge gained through this research.

5.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

We need to briefly summarize before the discussion most of the key stats I have used in the analysis in chapter 4 as this is the basis for all subsequent conclusions. 4 hypotheses were successfully tested with data from 190 valid respondents mainly Gen Zers (young generations) in Jordan and Germany. As for the first main finding (concerning H1), SMA and CRM both triggered "High" positive emotions (Means 3.90 and 4.05, respectively) but the strength of positive affect triggered by CRM was statistically significantly stronger ($p = .005$). The takeaway is a preference in emotional resonance — that is subtle yet distinct in favour of real action over talk.

That was a much stronger finding—so much so it turned out to be the second (H2) key finding. Sixty percent (60.0%) of respondents indicated that when it comes to which approach "really helps the cause," they would put their money on "CRM Donations" versus either: "Traditional CRM Enrollments" or "Sales Funnel." In contrast, just 10.0% thought that "SMA

Posts" were actually influential. This is a huge gap in perceived impact between the two strategies that is based on the sample overwhelmingly siding with the direct, financial delivery of CRM as the more effective support.

The third major finding (according to H3) repurposed this skepticism, providing a blunt, demonstrable measure of Gen Z skepticism. A staggering 92.1% of the sample (Q22) reported to have "doubted brand intentions." The study established a strong statistical link ($p = . P < 0.000$) of the "perceived motive" (Q20) and this skepticism. When the motive was seen as "Genuinely care," skepticism was lowest (52.6%). But if the motive was classified simply as "Wants to sell products" or even a combination of "Both," skepticism skyrocketed to 97.9% and 96.0%, respectively.

Lastly, the fourth finding (pertaining to H4) was able to connect these perceptions to actual behavior. The analysis revealed a strong statistical relationship between the two variables ($p = .$ The e-evaluate correlation; (Q21) trustworthiness source to past "purchase behavior" (Q16) ($p < 0.$ More strongly, trust in "CRM Donations" (95.1% bought) or in "Both Equally" (90.0% bought) was positively correlated with making a supporting purchase. On the other hand, trust on SMA Posts only correlated with a rather only weak purchase history (52.6%), which proves to have not as a sole cause in driving consumer behaviour.

5.3 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this section, the findings above are interpreted, and they are cross connected to the research questions and theory.

5.3.1 Answering the Research Questions

Answering the Main Research Question (Main RQ) The main research question regarding whether Generation Z consumers compare SMA and CRM level by level in terms of emotional response, impact, genuineness, and trustworthiness. When the findings are distilled together, they offer a clear and complex answer: Gen Z does not see these strategies as a cut-and-dried binary. The prevalence of selecting "Both Equally" for authenticity (54.7% in Q18) and trustworthiness (57.9% in Q21) indicates that the best in their view is the integrated model, where "talk" (SMA) and "action" (CRM) go hand-in-hand. But, when you separate the two, and put them side-by-side, CRM is without question seen as the stronger, more credible and more effective of the two strategies. What the hierarchy looks like is discussed in relation to the various sub-questions below.

Discussion of RQ1. Interestingly, although both strategies produce a strong positive emotional response, CRM has statistically significantly higher emotional resonance than SMA (SMA Mean=3.90, CRM Mean=4.05, $p=0.016$). The important thing here is not only that CRM "won" but that the margin, while pronounced, was also subtle. SMA is by no means looked upon negatively, and a mean of 3.90 is a definite positive. This implies that Gen Z does like brands to "speak up" and use their outlets to raise awareness; This matches literature indicating the expectation from Gen Z for brands to engage in societal dialogues (Alyamani, 2025).

Still, the statistically more potent positive sentiment for CRM indicates that this love of "talk" is tentative at best and is eventually overwhelmed by the deeper positive sentiment created by "action." SMA (the "talk") brings plenty of emotional payoff, but the emotional

payoff does indeed plateau, which can only be surpassed by the real-world commitment of CRM (the "action"). Such results reinforce the idea that although communication is appreciated, it lacks behind in terms of the strongest emotional bond, of which concrete support is the key factor.

Discussion of RQ1. 2 (PERCEIVED IMPACT) | H2: This is probably the single most clear and significant result across the whole study. The fact CRM an order of magnitude more strongly communicates that it "really helps the cause" (60.0%) than does SMA (10.0%) is a compelling, empirical confirmation of the hypothesis explaining the signaling mechanism proposed in Chapter 2. It is apparent that Generation Z are interpreting these brand actions as "signals" and assessing their "cost" (Spence 1973; Bhnasy, 2022). It is why an SMA post is aptly named a Low-Cost Signal or Cheap Signal — it takes very little effort or cost. As a result, the "real-world impact" it has is seen as negligible.

On the contrary, signals of cost such as "CRM Donations" are considered "High-Cost signals" (Albalawi, 2024). This makes sense since such a quantifiable, financial commitment is a non-falsifiable expression of contrived "commitment"/costliness. In Gen Z's perception, such "cost" feeds into an authentic "bond," so its "real impact" carries a marked higher perception. This result corresponds directly to the "Performative Activism" problem operationalized (Kozłowski, 2024). The 10% who do find SMA to be of help might care so much for "awareness," but the 60% who know the truth are pragmatists who view "talk and no action" as ineffective. Such discrepancy is the textbook definition of the "saying-doing gap."

H2 in turn provides key context for H1 (emotional response). Not only was the emotional difference small for SMA compare to CRM (3.90 vs 4.05) the gap for perceived

impact was a chasm (10% vs 60%). This indicates SMA is a low level appreciation for Gen Z in terms of feeling — an instinctive recognition of participation — but at a cognitive level their assessment of subjective value is harsh, even contemptuous. It demonstrates a rather sophisticated skill of decoupling an affective response ("I'm glad they posted this") and a negative evaluative response ("But this post doesn't actually do anything").

Discussion of RQ1. H2: Motives & Skepticism (H3): This test of hypothesis provided a compelling and quantitative validation of the essence of what this study was all about: Gen Z is the most skeptical cohort of young adults. The finding that a whopping 92.1% of the sample (Q22) have questioned the intentions of brands is a must know stat for all modern marketing. It confirms that the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM (Friestad & Wright, 1994)) has become the default operating system for this generation. As predicted by the literature (Sithole & Hattingh, 2024), the "persuasion knowledge" of their selection of filtered approaches is hyper-activated.

The acceptance of H3 ($p = .000$). This skepticism is then explained (000) Activation of the PKM is through the process of "Motive Attribution" (Ellen et al., 2006, as previously cited in the literature review). Table 4.9 Data collection Conditions A "Sell" motive is associated with at least some skepticism (97.9% and 96.0% of responses), and even when a "Both" motive is present skepticism is similarly high. That shows you how at the first sign of any commercial intent, Gen Z taps into its "persuasion knowledge" and basically ignores the brand.

We particularly need the data related to the Q20 (in Table 4.6). Just 10.0% of our sample will tell you that brands actually ever exhibit pure, genuine caring. 65.3% assume a "Both (Care & Sell)" motive. This is a key finding: Gen Z are not idealists; they are pragmatists. They know

that brands are commercial animals. The "sell" motive is not necessarily a deal breaker, but its presence will ensure skepticism (H3). It sets up the "strategic dilemma": brands need to sell, but the very nature of this motive creates a wall of suspicion.

Hence, the question is, if so, how a brand can even build a trust. The explanation, as a full 10.0% of these buyers believe, is — "Genuinely cares." Still a minority, their skepticism rate (52.6%) was far lower. Which implies the sole key to tackling skepticism may be convincing Gen Z that the "Care" motive is both real and dominant. Finally, the third hypothesis regarding the "Care" motive indicates that the only "proof" of this "Care" motive need a "High-Cost Signal" (CRM), which makes this finding closely related back again to the second hypothesis and the Signaling Theory (Spence 1973).

Discussion of RQ1. H3 (Trust & Motive) 4 H4: Unfortunately, this last hypothesis test (H4) had to "close the loop" to link abstract perceptions of psychology (trust, motive) to the more concrete, behavioral outcome that matters to brands: purchase behavior. This relationship was statistically significant and strong ($p = .$ (PR = -0.479; RMSE = 0.000) Furthermore, there is a strong inverse correlation ($P < 0.000$) between trustworthiness and past purchase behavior. Confirmation of these perceptions being more than idle opinions, and their relevance to consumer action, further reinforces the practical significance of the study (Section 1.6.) So, it stands to reason that 87.9% of respondents (Q16) indicated they have purchased a product in the past to help a cause.

However, the breakdown presented in Table 4.10 gives the most revealing data. Trust in "CRM Donations" (95.1% bought) and trust in "Both Equally" (90.0% bought) were nearly equally-powerfully related to purchase. This is a vital finding. This implies an integrated

approach (SMA + CRM) is viewed as equally credible and capable of generating purchase as a CRM-only approach. This supports the answer to Q17 and Q18 confirming the frequent preference of "Both Equally" often.

In contrast, the solo data for SMA is condemning. However, for the very small group that exclusively trusts "SMA Posts" (19 individuals), the link to buying behavior is strikingly less potent (52.6% bought). This clinches the smoking gun. SMA is not a strong and reliable consumer behavior driver on its own; "Talk" (SMA) "Drive" (CRM) is forceful. And "Talk" + "Action" (the "Both" category) is a strategy that packs just as strong and effective a punch. This provides an unequivocal data-based strategic solution to the "strategic dilemma"

5.3.2 Synthesis with Theoretical Framework

The findings of this study provide a contemporary, rigorous affirmation of the two central theoretical underpinnings of the research. Chapter 2, Section 1 — Signaling Theory was not only a theoretical lens, but also a predictive model. The results from H2 (60% vs. 10% on impact) directly quantify — empirically — Gen Z's differential ability to distinguish "Costly Signals" (CRM) from "Cheap Signals" (SMA). The research shows this generation is weighing, as yardstick for a brand's signal, the signal of cost versus reward, and, as indicated in the theory, is therefore a better, or more robust, determination for whether a brand is credible and valuable in the real-world (Albalawi, 2024).

Likewise, the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) (Chapter 2, Section 2) was the heart psychological mechanism confirmed. The 92.1% skepticism rate (Q22) serves as reassertion of the model's premise that this generation is an "Expert Target" (Kozłowski, 2024). The H3 finding

($p = .000$) tested this idea and found empirical support for "Motive Attribution," showing how Gen Z are "coping" with persuasion attempts by assessing brands for motive (most acquit: full story here). The present study expands this important nuance to the PKM literature: for Gen Z, the default attribution of motive is not a binary or dichotomous (altruistic vs. strategic) but a more pragmatic mixed-motive attribution ("Both Care & Sell"), which then elicits a high but not unbreachable level of skepticism.

In conclusion, the two theories complement each other very well. For Gen Z PKM is the default: they enter with expectations of skepticism, and therefore spoil the broader "Care & Sell" motive. This creates a "trust barrier." Moving beyond that barrier: The answer lies in Signaling Theory. It communicates that a "High-Cost Signal" (CRM) needs to be a part of over-passing the scepticism created by the PKM. This Costly Signal serves as evidence of the authenticity of the Care part of their incentive, thereby fulfilling PKM's requirement of authenticity and thereby establishing H4 trust that drives influence.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 1: Actions Speak Louder than Words The most firm and definitive conclusion of this thesis is that for Generation Z, concrete action (CRM) is indisputably viewed as higher than, more effective than, and more credible than communicative "talk" (SMA). Whereas talk favors positively valenced emotions (H1) and its lack of influence (H2), it is action

which has substance in the real world (H4). (H1) "Talk" only (SMA) is a "Cheap Signal" (H4) which holds, does little to inspire deep trust or purchase behavior. The title of the study—"Which Speaks Louder? —is resoundingly "Cause-Related Marketing."

Conclusion 2: Generation Z are Skeptical and Skepticism is the Default, not the Exception A second major conclusion is that skepticism is the default, near-universal setting for Generation Z (92.1%). This level of skepticism is not a fringe perspective but rather the default framework for all brand activism. This study finds that this skepticism is more of a filter than an insurmountable barrier. Brands are not exempted from skepticism; they need to own and rid of it. The results from H3 also confirms that if a commercial motive is perceived (and even if it is mixed), this filter will be activated.

Conclusion 3: The Gen Z Consumer Pragmatist Not the Idealist This study ends with a purposeful conclusion that the Gen Z consumer is not an Idealist but rather a Pragmatist. They do not ask for absolute altruism from for profit companies with the both (care & sell) motive dominating (65.3% in Q20) they anticipate a commercial motive. They are crafty enough to be ready to deal with this dual motive, but only if, and only if, the "Care" half is demonstrable. As inferred in H2, this proof has to be, in practice, a nontransparent, "High-Cost Signal" (CRM).

Conclusion 4: The "Integrated" Strategy is the Best One The "strategic dilemma" (Chapter 1, 2.1) has a solution. The relative power of trust (H4) for this study indicates that trust in "CRM Donations" (95.1% purchase) and "Both Equally" (90.0% purchase) are virtually equal in strength. And this brings to the conclusion that the best approach is an integrated one. Brands need SMA as well as CRM. They need to leverage CRM to ensure the activism acts as the (action and costly signal) and use SMA as the amplifier (talk) around that action. This "Both"

meets the need for authenticity/purpose and action, avoids the disbelief effect by PKM, and influences consumer behavior.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Leave Behind Performative (SMA-Only) Activism Recommendation #1 for space, brand managers —stop all performative SMA strategies based on talk here & now. The present study offers unequivocal data that Gen Z views this strategy as the least effective (H2: 10%), the least credible (Q21: 10%), and the poorest predictor of purchase intention (H4). These "Cheap Signals" activate Gen Z's "Persuasion Knowledge" (H3), exposing the brand to considerable reputational risk from "woke-washing" and "performative activism" (Kozłowski, 2024).
- Treat « signals of cost » as a top priority, and make space in the budget (CRM) Marketers need to move their strategy and budgets from discussing issues to literally funding them. This provides a very clear, data-based business case for CRM that is only available from combining H2 & H4 (60% see CRM as actual help & 95.1% purchasing link). So you put actual budget lines to those donations and long-term non-profit partnerships. This is the message: the financial commitment. This is by far the biggest indicator of authenticity Gen Z is seeking from brands, so brands need to back up the talk with the bucks.
- Go the "Integrated" (SMA + CRM) route. The integrated strategy identified by this study is the optimal "best-of-both-worlds" strategy. Brands should leverage their SMA channels not to do the activism themselves but to amplify their real life actions (CRM). The marketing message should clear refrain from, WE are not just posting this message of support, WE are backing it up by donating \$X [or X% of profits] to [Cause]. It capitalizes on high trust in the

"Both" category (H4, 90.0%) and transparently gives the "High-Cost Signal" (CRM) required to neutralize skepticism (H3).

- Transparency in the "Dual Motive" Given that 65.3% of Gen Z have already come to assume a Both (Care & Sell) motive (Q20), brands should take off the goddamn halo. This only heightens skepticism. The PKM would dictate a more effective strategy: radical transparency. Brands need to be transparent in their double motivation: "This is important to us not just because this issue is our values." We commit to actualizing [CRM ACTION]. And in the process gain your trust and respect as a customer." This candidness recognizes the "attempt to persuade" and cultivates trust through the validation of a more pragmatic perspective as it pertains to Gen Z.
- Leverage Authenticity through Strategic. If 92.1% doubt there's a Human Touch (Q22), the brands must make the "Care" motive true. Research shows that "fit" plays a critical role, as the literature review indicated (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006, cited in my previous knowledge but best if I stay within the users lit: Pandey et al., 2020). The results from this study strongly supports this. 4: Brands have to pick causes that make sense from a brand standpoint (e.g. a food brand fighting hunger, an outdoor apparel brand supporting conservation). That connective alignment renders CRM's "High-Cost Signal" credible and persuades Gen Z that the motive is "values-driven," not merely "strategic-driven" (Kozłowski, 2024).
- For Non-Profits: Issue "Expensive Signals" There are also lessons for non-profits from this research. When approaching NPOs for corporate partnerships, they should be cautious of partners who offer only (SMA) "awareness" or "platform reach". They can, and should, leverage the data from this study (H2: 60% consider CRM as true help) to further advocate

for more Costly Signals (CRM) in terms of tangible action. They can prove that this is not only better for the cause, but also a greater ROI and benefit for brand partner in itself.

- Fine-tuning the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM). This study suggests that future investigation on the PKM should be conducted in academia without the simplistic binary concept (altruistic vs. strategic deterrents) of motivation. The fact that 65.3% of Gen Z chose "Both" indicates that this generation uses a more elaborate, nonbinary, and practical attribution method referred to as "dual-motive," ਹੋਇਆ। We believe this "pragmatic skepticism"—an acceptance of an underlying commercial intent, but a demand that care be proved—is a central characteristic of the Gen Z PKM that future research should seek to model.
- Adapt Signaling Theory to the Digital Context The findings support the core elements of Signaling Theory, but indicate the theory needs to be updated for the digital age. A binary design (SMA vs. CRM) was used in this research. Future research could examine the continuum of signal cost in a digital context. For example, how is a single SMA post (a very "Cheap Signal") viewed in the context of a high-budget, multi-moth digital education campaign (a "Costlier Signal," but still "talk")? The perceived cost in each of the aforementioned types of digital activism — would be an excellent comparison to make.

5.6LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study are robust, however, they should be considered only in the context of the limitations of the study which were detailed in chapter 1 before being identified during analysis.

- The first limitation relates to the use of a convenience and snowball sample (N=190), which mostly collected data in Jordan (45.3%) and in Germany (37.9%). Though as a fun cross-cultural snapshot, the results are not generalizable to all of the world's Generation Z. Although it shows a much higher prioritization of activism (Mean 4.25) which is likely culturally contingent and therefore should be tested in major markets around the world (e.g., North America, East Asia) before being generalized to all of Gen Z.
- The second critical limitation is that the present study was entirely self-report. Everything, from feelings (e.g., Q10, Q11) to past behavior (Q16), relied on self-report. This makes the study vulnerable to the phenomenon of "Social Desirability Bias," where the subjects of the study may have inflated their "conscious consumer" image. As an example, the 87.9% who said they had made a supportive purchase (Q16) influenced participant answers potentially skewed upwards, as people may have answered in what they believed was the "ethically correct" manner rather than strict truth.
- The third limitation is that the study was cross-sectional (i.e., a snapshot in time) and yet the authors quote results and draw conclusions identifying factors as associated with "long-term" gains. Although H4 and H5 were geared to hypothesize lasting effect, the study did not — and could not — observe genuine long-term brand loyalty. This was single point in time-assessment "past purchase" (Q16) and "trust" (Q21). So the claim that CRM creates "permanent connection" is based on a powerful correlation and a theoretical leap, not longitudinal, causal evidence.
- CORRELATION IS NOT CAUSATION: Finally, this research is a correlational study, so it could only show associations, not causation. Specifically, H4 demonstrated a robust relationship between trust in CRM and purchase behavior ($p = .000$). However, the causative

direction is not established. It makes equal sense that customers with existing trust & purchase history with a brand would simply take note and appreciate its CRM efforts. Amanda K. Detmer, the study's lead author, cautions that the analysis also doesn't prove the activism caused the trust or the purchase.

5.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Considering these limitations and the new questions indicated by these findings, this study outlines directions for future research.

- Experimental Design (Causality Limitation) Overcoming this Causality limitation (5.6.4) poses the most vital step next, that I need to use in an experimental study. Researchers could randomize Gen Z participants into matched groups, where each group would be shown different stimuli, for example, Group 1: SMA-only, Group 2: CRM-only, Group 3: Integrated SMA+CRM, and Group 4: Control/No activism possibly using fictitious (or real, while controlling for) brand profiles. However, the design overcame the limitation due to a confound between the purchase intention and trust in the control condition with an abnormal high value which could have made it perfect for generalization between past behavior (e.g. Oui Beuren and Bergh, 2016; Song et al., 2018) and the causal relationship between the type of activism and response (Wang et al., 2022) because the purchase intention was measured after the exposure rather than before.
- Longitudinal Studies (Long-term Impact Issue): A longitudinal study would be needed to resolve the "Long-term" limitation (5.6.3) We should follow a cohort of Gen Z consumers (e.g. 1–2 years) to further understand — future research. They would need to measure their

baseline attitudes towards different brands, correlate their exposure to activism initiatives as they happen, and then measure changes in attitudes, trust, and (crucially) actual purchasing habits (possibly on the basis of loyalty card data or purchase diaries) over time. That would actually be the only way to know if CRM really builds loyalty versus one-off-happy-response purchases.

- Replication and Cultural Context (Generalizability) (5.4/5.3): To overcome the "Sampling" limitation (5.6.1), this study should be replicated in other cultural and economic environments. We need to test the robust findings for the Jordanian/German sample. Would such findings replicate more collectivist cultures (eg Japan, South Korea) or in alternative economic contexts (eg Brazil, India, Nigeria)? The next crucial step is to understand whether the PKM/Signaling Theory response is a universal trait of GenZ, or one more culturally-moderated.
- Cross-Generational Comparison: Because this study was delimited to Gen Z, a compelling future study could administer the same survey to matched samples of Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation X. Based on the within-group output hearing their results, the comparison would reveal whether the extreme skepticism (92.1%), the double-edged pragmatic "Both" motive (65.3%), and the broadly replication of "Costly Signals" (H2) finding are Gen Z-specific or signpost a more widespread permanent shift in all modern consumers' processing of brand activism.
- Separating the Fit Construct: The present study's theoretical model (and the literature, e.g., Pandey et al. This needs to be directly tested in future research as it is likely to be a moderating variable. An experimental design would pit a High-Fit CRM (e.g., a sports brand that funds youth sports) versus a Low-Fit CRM (e.g., a sports brand that funds opera). It

would clearly quantify how much added "fit" reinforces the positive impact of CRM detected in this research, and whether "Low-Fit CRM" is equally destructive as "SMA-only."

- Breaking down the 'Both' approach: This research found a 'Combined' (Both) approach to be the best. Future research should deconstruct this. As an example: does the order of the steps even to place in order? Should you do SMA-priming before the CRM announcement or follow with SMA after the CRM launch? One of the most meaningful areas of research is in studying the optimal ratio and timing of the fractured-based/controlled "talk" in comparison to "action" around the "talk.
- The "SMA as Impact" Minority: One intriguing finding in this study was that 10.0% of respondents (H2) did feel that "SMA Posts" have an actual impact. Qualitative future research (eg, focus groups or interviews) should focus on this population. Why do they believe this? Is the "awareness" itself valued so much as a contribution? Or are they bringing these backgrounds from activist worlds? Learning about what this "SMA-positive" minority is like and why they feel the way they do could add much (and much-needed) texture to the portrait of "talk" that this quantitative study left wanting.

5.8 Final Conclusion

This thesis started with a basic question: "What speaks louder to Gen Z?" The answer is definitive according to this study from 190 respondents. Talk (Social Media Activism) is heard, valued, and brings out positive emotion whereas action (Cause-Related Marketing) is regarded as effective, authentic, and reliable. Action is what holds up a brand against that wall of skepticism and action is what correlates best with the decision to buy.

In the end, this research provides evidence that brand activism no longer a fringe marketing strategy but rather high stakes core elements of a brand identity. The strategic dilemma isn't whether brands should engage, but how. Using the stars of Signaling Theory, and the Persuasion Knowledge Model, this study has provided a data driven compass. It steers brands away from the shallow and treacherous waters of so-called performative activism and towards the true, deeper, more valuable, and more lucrative

references

Alyamani, T. M. Z. (2025). *The relationship between the Syrian Generation “Z”’s use of social media sites and achieving its social presence. Damascus University Journal for Arts and Humanities, 41(1), 191–213.*

Bhnasy, M. E. (2022). *Factors influencing consumers’ engagement on e-commerce platforms: A field study on Generation Z in Egypt. Scientific Journal of Public Relations and Advertising Research, (24), 161–212.*

Chang, C.-W., & Chang, S.-H. (2023). The Impact of Digital Disruption: Influences of Digital Media and Social Networks on Forming Digital Natives' Attitude. *SAGE Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231191741>

Eventbrite. (2019). The Experience Economy: How Millennials and Gen Z are driving the shift to experiences over stuff. Retrieved from <https://www.eventbrite.com/blog/experience-economy-ds00/>

Grigoryan, M., & Kraupner, M. (2025). The Messenger Matters: Gen Z Responses to CEO vs. Brand Activism Through Buycotting and Boycotting (Master's thesis). Jönköping University.

Jude, A. V., & P, P. (2025). Social media activism: Delving into Generation Z's experiences. *Media International Australia*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2025.2554375>

Kozłowski, W. (2024). Buying Behaviour of Generation Z with Reference to Cause-related Marketing. *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Krakowie*. <https://doi.org/10.15678/krem.14672>

Kozłowski, W. (2024). Exploring Generation Z's Skepticism Towards Cause-Related Marketing: Understanding the antecedents and consequences. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, 68(2), 106–116.

Ibalawi, S. O. A. (2024). *The role of artificial intelligence in identifying Generation Z's trends in marketing through social media: An application to telecom companies in Tabuk*. *Global Journal of Economic and Business*, 14(4), Article 3.

Mai, N., Stowe, K., Turner-Henderson, T., & Zarzosa, J. (2025). Power of Cause Framing: Impact on Gen Z's Attitudes Towards Corporate Charitable Contributions, Cause Participation Intentions, and Brand Loyalty. *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.33423/jmdc.v19i1.7666>

McKinsey & Company. (2019). How Gen Z is Shaping the Future of Consumer Markets. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/how-gen-z-is-shaping-the-future-of-consumer-markets>

McKinsey & Company. (2021). The Role of Personalization in Winning Over Gen Z Consumers. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/the-role-of-personalization-in-winning-over-gen-z-consumers>

Pandey, S., Chawla, D., & Puri, S. (2020). Cause-related Marketing: Exploring the Differences between Gen Y and Gen Z in India. *Social Business*, 10(2), 172-191.

Prasanna, M., & Priyanka, A. L. (2024). Marketing to Gen Z: Understanding the Preferences and Behaviors of Next Generation. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(4).

Rinaudo, B. (2023). The New Teacher of Ideas: A Study on Social Media, Political Influencers, and Generation Z (Honors Thesis). University of Mississippi.

Seyfi, S., Sharifi-Tehrani, M., Hall, C. M., & Vo-Thanh, T. (2023). Exploring the drivers of Gen Z tourists' boycott behaviour: Lifestyle politics perspective. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1-19.

Sherman, C. (2024, November 8). "A big cratering": An expert on gen Z's surprise votes – and young women's growing support for Trump. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from

Sithole, N. S., & Hattingh, R. (2024). Gen Z and Cause Marketing – A Q-methodology Perspective. *Communitas*, 49.

Twinomurinzi, H. (2024). From Tweets to Streets: How Kenya's Generation Z (Gen Z) is Redefining Political and Digital Activism. *The 10th Annual ACIST Proceedings*.

Wicaksono, A. R. A., Ray, E. L., & Prakosa, B. G. (2025). The Influence of Brand Activism on Consumer Loyalty and Social Change. *Society*, 13(2), 725–740.

APPENDICES

(Kopie) Which Speaks Louder to Gen Z? Social Media Activism vs. Cause-Related Marketing

Q1

Some brands take action to support social or environmental causes. This can happen in two main ways: Social Media Actions: The brand posts messages, videos, or campaigns online to raise awareness about social issues (e.g., climate change, equality). Cause-Related Support: The brand helps a cause by donating money, organizing events, or partnering with charities, often when

customers buy their products (e.g., “Buy this product and we donate \$1 to charity”). Please answer the questions based on your experience and opinions.

Please answer the questions based on your experience and opinions. Your responses are anonymous and will only be used for academic research.

Q2

What is your age?

Q3

Which country do you currently live in?

Q4

How many hours per day do you spend on social media?

- Less than 1 hour
- 1–3 hours
- 4–6 hours
- More than 6 hours

Q5

Which social media platforms do you use most frequently?

- Instagram
- TikTok

- Twitter/X
- Facebook
- others

Q6

Have you ever noticed a brand posting about social issues on social media?

- Yes
- No

Q7

Have you ever seen a brand support a cause by donating money or helping charities?

- Yes
- No

Q8

How often do you notice brands talking about social or environmental issues?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Q9

Scale:1 = Very Negative / Not Important / Very Unlikely, 5 = Very Positive / Very Important / Very Likely

Q10

When a brand posts about social issues on social media, how does it make you feel? (1–5)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Q11

When a brand supports a cause with donations or events, how does it make you feel? (1–5)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Q12

How important is it for you that a brand supports real social or environmental issues? (1–5)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Q13

Have you ever liked, shared, or commented on a brand's social media post about a social issue?

- Yes
- No

Q14

Have you ever followed a brand because of its social or environmental activities

- Yes
- No

Q15

Have you ever posted about a brand's social or environmental action yourself?

- Yes
- No

Q16

Have you ever bought a product because the brand supported a cause?

- Yes
- No

Q17

Which type of brand action makes you more likely to support the brand?

- Social media posts about social issues
- Donations or partnerships with charities
- Neither

Q18

Which type of brand action feels more genuine or real to you?

- Social media posts
- Donations/charity support
- Both equally

- Neither

Q19

Which type of action do you think really helps the cause ?

- Social media posts
- Donations/charity support
- Both equally
- Neither

Q20

When a brand talks about social issues, do you think they are doing it because:

- They genuinely care
- They want to sell more products
- Both
- I'm not sure

Q21

Which is more trustworthy to you:

- A brand posting messages about social issues.

- A brand supporting a cause with donations or events
- Both equally

Q22

Have you ever doubted a brand's intentions when you saw them supporting a cause?

- Yes
- No

Q23

Can you give an example of a brand you like because of the way it supports a social cause?

Q24

Thank you very much for taking part in this survey! Your opinions are extremely valuable and will help us understand how brands' social media activism and cause-related marketing influence people.

Q25

Data Protection (Datenschutz)Your participation is voluntary, and you can stop at any time without giving a reason.All responses are anonymous. No personal information that can identify you will be collected or stored.The data collected will only be used for academic purposes related to this Master's thesis.The data will be stored securely and will not be shared with third parties.By submitting this survey, you consent to your anonymous responses being used for research analysis.

