Brand Activism in New Zealand: Consumer Boycotting and Buycotting Behaviour toward Global and Local Brands.

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A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business

2025

School of Business

Abstract

Purpose: This study explores how consumers in New Zealand respond to brand activism by global versus local brands, focusing on whether people choose to boycott or buycott. It examines how consumers interpret activist messages, how they judge a brand's motives and follow-through, and whether the campaign feels culturally relevant in New Zealand. This matters because brand activism is increasingly common and can create real business risk. The same campaign can build trust and loyalty, trigger backlash and punishment, or be ignored. Brands need clearer insight into what drives these different outcomes in a bicultural and multicultural context.

Methodology: This research uses a qualitative, interpretivist approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with New Zealand consumers following exposure to brief campaign stimuli (priming) featuring a global brand (Patagonia) and a local New Zealand brand (Ecostore). The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, supported by a Gioia-style coding process to develop themes from participant insights.

Findings: Findings show a global–local trade-off in how consumers evaluate brand activism, with perceived authenticity as the decision rule. Global brands were seen as capable of wider impact but faced a higher proof burden, with greater scepticism when activism appeared generic or reputation driven. Local brands were more often viewed as culturally closer and community-connected, yet credibility weakened when activism seemed performative, inconsistent, or lacking visible outcomes. Across both brand types, these evaluations shaped three response patterns: buycotting when activism was seen as credible and relevant, boycotting when it was viewed as opportunistic or value-incongruent, and disengagement when campaigns felt irrelevant.

Originality: This study contributes a New Zealand-based comparison of global versus local brand activism and shows how authenticity and cultural relevance shape boycott, buycott, and disengagement responses.

Limitations: The small sample size, culturally concentrated participant group, and differences in the stimuli used for the global and local brand campaigns may affect the generalisability of the findings.

Keywords: Brand activism, consumer responses, authenticity, cultural relevance, global vs local brands, boycotting, buycotting, New Zealand.

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Attestation of Authorship

I declare that this submission is entirely my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it includes no material that has been previously published or written by another person, except where clearly acknowledged. I further declare that this work has not been submitted, in whole or in substantial part, for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or other higher education institution.

Signature: _______________

Date: 28/01/2026

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

More than ever, consumers are not just buying products, they're buying into the values brands stand for. In today's socially conscious landscape, contemporary brands are increasingly shaped by growing public demands for social justice and reform a movement often referred to as brand activism. The global rise of movements such as *Black Lives Matter* and *Me Too*, alongside local advocacy groups like *ActionStation* in New Zealand, shows a group effort to change the system. This cultural shift has mirrored an increasing desire for brand accountability and social change engagement (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

However, the notion of brand activism is occasionally confused with corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is often framed around charitable giving and compliance (Carroll, 1991). In contrast, brand activism entails taking more explicit public positions on controversial issues, potentially attracting both criticism and support from diverse stakeholder groups.

1.2 Definition of Brand Activism

Brand activism involves brands taking intentional positions and backing them with actions on social, environmental, economic, and political issues, with credibility depending on alignment between stated purpose and actual practice (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). It reflects a strong effort by activist brands to express their value driven intention through their expressing stance. At the same time, brand activism is often used as a strategic marketing approach. When activist messaging is perceived as authentic, audiences tend to respond more favourably and are more willing to amplify or support the brand. In contrast, inauthentic efforts may prompt backlash (Cammarota et al., 2023).

1.3 Problem Statement

Brands increasingly engage in sociopolitical issues to strengthen consumer relationships and differentiate themselves, yet such activism can also provoke backlash. When activist (or advocacy) messaging is perceived as inconsistent with corporate actions, consumers may respond with negative electronic word-of-mouth and boycott intentions (Zhou & Dong, 2021). In contrast, when consumers engage in activism connected to a brand, this involvement can deepen the consumer–brand relationship and is linked to higher brand loyalty (Johnson et al., 2022). These mixed outcomes highlight that the effects of brand activism depend heavily on consumers' judgments of credibility and authenticity (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Cammarota et al., 2023).

A further challenge is that activism is increasingly undertaken by both global and local brands, raising questions about whether consumers apply the same evaluative standards across brand origins. Prior work suggests that global brands are often associated with scale and influence, while local brands may be viewed as more embedded in local communities and contexts (Moorman, 2020; Visser, 2020). However, limited research directly compares how brand origin (global vs local) shapes consumer political consumerism responses particularly boycotting and buycotting intentions within the New Zealand context.

Accordingly, this study investigates: How does brand activism by global versus local brands in New Zealand impact consumer engagement in boycotting and buycotting intention?

1.4 Context

Brand activism has become increasingly visible in contemporary marketing (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). In New Zealand, this trend unfolds within a distinctive sociocultural context shaped by bicultural foundations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, ongoing debates about equity and inclusion, and strong public expectations around environmental responsibility. As a result, activism campaigns are not evaluated solely as marketing communications but as signals of corporate legitimacy and social accountability (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). At the same time, consumers' responses to brand activism remain mixed: activism can stimulate support and deeper engagement, yet it can also trigger scepticism, negative word-of-mouth, and boycotting when perceived as performative or inconsistent with corporate behaviour. As brand activism has become more mainstream, it has also increasingly become a global phenomenon, with multinational brands taking public stances across multiple markets and media systems. In international contexts, however, activism is rarely interpreted uniformly: when a brand operates across countries, evaluations of activism can vary with cultural norms, local issue salience, and perceived legitimacy of "outsider" brands speaking on local concerns. This makes brand origin (global vs local) a potentially important lens for understanding how consumers judge activism authenticity and decide whether to reward or punish activist brands (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

These tensions are increasingly salient as brand activism is undertaken by both multinational (global) brands operating across borders and locally embedded brands situated within specific communities. Prior scholarship indicates that global brand activism can generate heightened visibility but also invite scepticism, particularly when audiences question the consistency between activist claims and corporate conduct across diverse cultural and political contexts (Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). In parallel, brand origin may shape how activism is interpreted through perceptions of proximity, contextual relevance, and credibility which can influence political consumerism responses such as buycotting and boycotting (Moorman, 2020; Visser, 2020). However, comparative research remains limited on how global versus local

brand activism shapes buycotting and boycotting intentions within the New Zealand marketplace.

1.5 Purpose

This study examines how consumers in New Zealand respond to brand activism enacted by global versus local brands, with a particular focus on boycotting and buycotting intentions.

Research Question (RQ):
How does brand activism by global versus local brands in New Zealand impact consumer engagement in boycotting and buycotting intention?

Research Objectives:

1. To explore how consumers in New Zealand interpret and evaluate brand activism by global versus local brands.
2. To examine how perceptions of authenticity and cultural relevance shape consumers' intentions to buycott or boycott brands engaging in activism.
3. To identify the key conditions under which brand activism strengthens consumer–brand relationships versus triggers scepticism, or punitive responses.

1.6 Significance and Scope

This research contributes to brand activism scholarship by clarifying how brand origin (global vs local) shapes consumer evaluations and behavioural intentions within a specific national context. While prior studies show that activism can produce both supportive and punitive outcomes, fewer studies directly compare global and local brand activism in terms of how consumers translate perceptions into boycotting and buycotting intentions. Practically, the findings can inform brand managers and communication strategists about how to design activism initiatives that are culturally resonant and perceived as credible, while reducing the risk of backlash.

This issue is particularly important in practice because brands increasingly face pressure to respond publicly to social and environmental issues (Vredenburg et al.,

2020). However, consumers may not evaluate all forms of brand activism in the same way. Their expectations may differ depending on whether the brand is perceived as a global corporation or a locally embedded business. Global brands may be assessed through expectations of consistency, transparency, and accountability across markets, whereas local brands may be evaluated through their perceived connection to local communities, national identity, and everyday social concerns. This distinction is especially relevant in New Zealand, where brands can contribute to consumers' sense of national identity and belonging (Bulmer & Buchanan-Oliver, 2010), and where local consumption may be associated with community support and local embeddedness. In this context, activism by local brands may be interpreted as more culturally relevant and personally meaningful when it aligns with local values, while activism by global brands may be scrutinised more closely for authenticity and consistency. Understanding these differences therefore has real-world relevance for organisations deciding whether, when, and how to engage in activism communication.

The study focuses on consumer responses within New Zealand, examining boycotting and buycotting intentions as primary outcomes of interest. It concentrates on how consumers make sense of activism communication and brand behaviour, particularly through the lenses of authenticity and cultural relevance. The study does not aim to evaluate the objective social impact of activism campaigns or to measure financial performance outcomes, instead, it prioritises consumers' interpretations and intended marketplace responses. Findings should therefore be understood as context-specific and shaped by participants' perspectives within the New Zealand setting.

Why New Zealand?

New Zealand provides a theoretically relevant context for examining brand activism because it is a small, highly connected market where brands' public positions can become visible and discussable quickly. The country also has a strong public discourse around environmental sustainability and social wellbeing, meaning activist messages may be evaluated not only for their stance but for whether they appear authentic and locally meaningful. This context is further supported by research suggesting that sustainable lifestyles, ethical consumption, and local buying orientations are salient for at least some segments of the New Zealand market (Hasan, 2025; Schnack et al., 2024). As a result, consumers may evaluate activist brand messages not only in relation to the social or environmental issue itself, but also in terms of whether the brand's stance aligns with locally relevant values, everyday practices, and expectations of credibility. These features make New Zealand a useful setting for exploring how consumers interpret activism through authenticity and cultural relevance, and how such interpretations translate into intentions to buycott or boycott.

1.7 Thesis Outline

This thesis is structured into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study by outlining the background and New Zealand context of brand activism, clarifying the problem statement, and presenting the research question, purpose, and the study's significance and scope. Chapter 2 reviews the key literatures on brand activism and political consumerism particularly boycotting and boycotting alongside work on authenticity and consumer evaluations of global versus local brands, to build the conceptual framing that guides the study.

Chapter 3 details the research methodology, including the underpinning research paradigm, overall design, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, and the approach to data analysis, as well as ethical considerations and criteria for trustworthiness and rigour. Chapter 4 presents the findings by reporting the main themes and patterns in how New Zealand consumers interpret and respond to brand activism by global and local brands. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to existing theory and research, outlines key theoretical and practical implications, acknowledges limitations, and proposes directions for future research. Finally, Chapter 6 finishes the thesis by summarizing the principal results and contributions of the study, underlining the implications, and providing a final reflection on the overall significance of the research.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the study by situating brand activism within the New Zealand context and explaining why consumer responses to activism matter for both theory and practice. It outlined the central problem that brand activism can generate mixed marketplace outcomes ranging from supportive engagement to backlash and argued that these outcomes are strongly shaped by how consumers judge authenticity and cultural relevance, particularly when activism is enacted by global versus local brands. The chapter then presented the study's purpose, research question, and guiding objectives, and clarified the significance of examining boycotting and buycotting intentions as key expressions of political consumerism. In addition, the scope of the research was defined to set clear boundaries around what the study addresses and what it does not seek to measure. Finally, an overview of the thesis structure was provided to show how the argument develops across chapters. Building on this foundation, the next chapter reviews the literature on brand activism and political consumerism and synthesises prior work on authenticity and global–local brand evaluations to establish the conceptual framework that informs the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 BRAND ACTIVISM

While both corporate social responsibility (CSR) and brand activism are framed as serving societal interests, brand activism is increasingly treated as conceptually distinct from earlier CSR approaches (Vredenburg et al., 2020). CSR is commonly defined as organisational actions that respond to stakeholder and societal expectations beyond legal compliance and may include philanthropic contributions (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Building on this tradition, brand activism is typically more overt and values-driven, involving non-neutral stances on contested sociopolitical issues that are expressed through both brand communications and corporate practices (Vredenburg et al., 2020). In contrast to conventional CSR, which is often discussed in terms of responsibility frameworks and legitimacy management (Carroll, 1991), brand activism is characterised by more explicit engagement with potentially polarising social and political issues aligned with a brand's stated values and perceived consumer expectations (Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). This shift reflects growing expectations for brands to contribute to social change, particularly as younger consumers increasingly prioritise ethical and purpose-driven consumption (Bhagwat et al., 2020).

2.1.1 Authentic Brand Activism

The primary factor driving the impact of brand activism on both social change and consumer behavior is the perceived authenticity of a brand's actions. Authentic brand activism is present when a company's initiatives align closely with its core values and are deeply embedded in its organisational culture (Vredenburg et al., 2020). In contrast, inauthentic efforts often described as "woke-washing" involve superficial support for social causes primarily for marketing gains, rather than genuine commitment (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Such performative activism can be detrimental, as Walter et al. (2024) note that woke-washing undermines brand credibility, increases consumer scepticism, and erodes trust. Therefore, authenticity is essential for any brand aiming to meaningfully engage with social issues.

Mirzaei et al. (2022) propose six dimensions of authentic woke brand activism that can be used to evaluate whether a brand's activist efforts are perceived as sincere. Social context independency refers to the extent to which a brand's values and actions remain consistent across different markets. Consistency can signal authenticity by suggesting that activism is not merely adjusted to suit local preferences or short-term reputational benefits. At the same time, brands often need to navigate local sociopolitical norms and legal constraints, as issues such as LGBTQ+ rights can carry different meanings and consequences across countries. In global contexts, authenticity may be judged by whether a brand keeps a consistent stance across markets, while adapting how it acts in each place in ways that do not seem selective or opportunistic.

A second dimension is inclusion, which emphasises diversity, equal representation, and a genuine sense of belonging for underrepresented groups. When brands engage meaningfully with groups such as LGBTQ+ communities through substantive practices rather than symbolic cues, they can build stronger emotional connections and trust. However, inclusion efforts that are limited to messaging without material support may be interpreted as virtue signalling, which can reduce credibility and trigger scepticism. For global brands, inclusion may be judged across countries with different cultural norms, so people look for consistent and respectful practice rather than symbolic gestures.

Sacrifice is another defining characteristic of authentic activism and refers to a brand's willingness to incur costs such as forgoing profit or accepting short-term financial risk to uphold societal values. For example, Patagonia's "1% for the Planet" initiative, which donates 1% of annual sales (not only profits) to environmental causes, is often cited as an example of an embedded commitment to sustainability (Patagonia, 2002). Nevertheless, Kotler and Sarkar (2018) note that firms must manage tensions between social responsibility and financial viability, particularly when activism challenges profitability. When comparing global and local brands, some audiences may look for stronger signs of sacrifice from multinational brands because they have more resources. By contrast, local brands may be assessed more on whether their commitment seems credible and workable within their smaller capacity.

The practice dimension concerns whether brands translate activist messaging into consistent, values-aligned actions. Bhagwat et al. (2020) suggest that perceived alignment between stated values and operational behaviour strengthens trustworthiness. In practice, however, multinational brands may find it difficult to maintain consistency when market conditions differ and when activism may generate backlash or legal risk. For example, a firm may promote LGBTQ+ inclusion in some contexts but avoid doing so in countries with restrictive laws, which can create perceptions of selective activism. In global contexts, authenticity is therefore often evaluated through cross-market consistency between what a brand claims and what it is willing (or able) to do in different environments.

The dimension of fit refers to the perceived alignment between the cause a brand supports and its core business, historical identity, and brand positioning. When activism is congruent with a brand's established purpose or mission, it is more likely to be interpreted as authentic. In contrast, activism that appears disconnected from a brand's identity may be viewed as opportunistic or trend-driven. Gillette's 2019 "The Best Men Can Be" campaign, for instance, generated both support and criticism partly because some audiences perceived a misalignment with the brand's historically masculine positioning (Mirzaei et al., 2022). In global–local comparisons, fit may be assessed both against a brand's global identity and against its perceived relevance within a local market context.

Finally, the dimension of motivation concerns how audiences interpret the underlying intentions behind activist initiatives. Importantly, brand activism is not always evaluated through a simple altruistic versus self-serving binary; campaigns can advance societal goals while also generating business value when executed credibly (Kotler & Sarkar, 2021). Even so, consumers scrutinise whether commercial outcomes appear to dominate the initiative, and whether commitment to the cause is substantive and sustained over time. When activism is perceived as primarily reputational or sales-driven, authenticity is more likely to be questioned even if the messaging aligns with prevailing social values. In global contexts, motivation may be examined more sceptically because audiences can compare actions across markets and because large firms are often held to higher standards of accountability than local brands.

Overall, this framework suggests that effective brand activism depends on authenticity across multiple dimensions which are consistency across contexts, meaningful inclusion, demonstrated sacrifice, credible practice, cause–brand fit, and perceived motivation. Consistent with this view, Cammarota et al. (2023) note that when brand activism is perceived as inauthentic, consumers may react negatively, including rejecting the campaign and potentially boycotting the brand.

2.2 CONSUMER RESPONSES TO BRAND ACTIVISM

Consumer responses to brand activism vary widely and are influenced by the perceived authenticity of a brand's actions. Authenticity is typically evaluated through dimensions such as value congruence, brand–cause fit, and the consistency between a brand's stated commitments and its operational practices (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Zhou & Dong, 2021). When activism is perceived as genuine and aligned with core brand values, it can elicit positive consumer reactions, including increased trust, loyalty, and advocacy (Cammarota et al., 2021; Moorman, 2020; Saracevic & Schlegelmilch, 2024). However, when brand activism is perceived as opportunistic or inconsistent, it may provoke scepticism, backlash, or even organized resistance such as boycotts (Zhou & Dong, 2021).

Notably, negative reactions to inauthentic or misplaced brand activism can outweigh the advantages of successful efforts. Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) found that consumer dissatisfaction with a brand's sociopolitical stance has a large negative impact on brand sentiments, whereas alignment produces relatively small improvements. This aligns with the psychological principle that "bad is stronger than good" (Baumeister et al., 2001), whereby negative experiences exert a greater impact on perception and behavior than positive ones. Lewis and Vredenburg (2024) further reinforce this notion, showing that consumer backlash following missteps in brand activism is often more intense and enduring than the praise generated by well-executed campaigns.

Consumer identity and political ideology also play an important role and should not be overlooked (Haupt et al., 2023). According to Eilert and Cherup (2020),

individuals are more likely to support activism when it aligns with their personal values and socio-political beliefs. Conversely, incongruence between brand activism and consumer ideology can exacerbate distrust and catalyze punitive actions such as boycotting. In summary, customer responses to brand activism are heavily influenced by perceptions of authenticity, ideological affinity, and executional consistency. Brands involved in activism must strike a difficult balance between meaningful engagement and reputational damage.

2.2.1 The Role of Boycotting: Anti-Brand Action in the Context of Brand Activism

While some consumers reward brands for taking a stand, others respond through anti-brand actions, particularly when a brand's activism is perceived as inauthentic, morally offensive, or ideologically misaligned (Romani et al., 2015; Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022). A central and widely recognised form of such resistance is boycotting, which refers to consumers' deliberate withdrawal of economic support to express disapproval and exert pressure on the brand (Friedman, 1996; Micheletti, 2003). Understanding boycotting in the context of brand activism is crucial for assessing the risks brands face when entering polarising public debates.

When a brand's stance conflicts with consumers' values or group identities, it can provoke boycott intentions and broader anti-brand behaviour aimed at punishing or undermining the brand. Romani et al. (2015) suggest that these reactions often stem from perceptions of brand moral violations, in which consumers interpret a brand as having breached ethical or societal norms, triggering feelings of betrayal, anger, or injustice. Such perceptions can escalate into more visible forms of backlash, particularly in digitally mediated environments where consumer responses are amplified.

Pöyry and Laaksonen (2022) further conceptualise anti-brand action as a spectrum that includes boycotting, discrediting, and trapping. Boycotting involves withdrawing purchases to communicate resistance. Discrediting refers to spreading negative information and criticism to damage the brand's credibility, often through social media. Trapping describes digitally driven resistance, such as hijacking brand

hashtags, disrupting campaigns, or manipulating public platforms to draw attention to grievances. These practices can rapidly erode reputation in highly visible online spaces.

A key driver of boycotting and related backlash is perceived value incongruence. When consumers feel a brand's activism contradicts their beliefs or cultural expectations, they may interpret it as an identity threat and respond with retaliatory behaviours. Dalakas et al. (2022) show that political ideology can shape these reactions, with both conservative and liberal consumers engaging in backlash when they perceive their values to be challenged. This highlights the inherently risky nature of brand activism, particularly when it involves contentious sociopolitical issues. Authenticity perceptions also play a pivotal role. Vredenburg et al. (2020) argue that consumers are more likely to react negatively when they interpret brand activism as opportunistic or disingenuous often labelled "woke-washing." When consumers suspect that activism is driven primarily by marketing benefits rather than moral commitment, trust erodes and the likelihood of boycott and backlash increases.

The digital environment has further amplified anti-brand activism. Social media platforms allow consumers to organize, amplify their messages, and directly challenge brands in real time. Tactics like hashtag hijacking, review bombing, and campaign subversion enable consumers to publicly resist brands and influence broader public discourse (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022). These actions not only disrupt brand messaging but can also shape brand narratives by framing the brand as socially or ethically irresponsible.

In summary, anti-brand action in the context of brand activism arises when consumers perceive a misalignment between a brand's sociopolitical stance and their own values or moral expectations. These actions fueled by emotional responses, identity threats, and perceived inauthenticity can range from passive resistance to organized digital retaliation (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022). While brand activism has the potential to build loyalty and differentiate a brand, it also exposes companies to heightened scrutiny and backlash, particularly in a fragmented and politicized consumer landscape.

2.2.2 The Role of Buycotting: Consumers' Supportive Actions in Brand Activism

Alongside anti-brand resistance, consumers may also respond to brand activism through buycotting, defined as the deliberate act of purchasing from brands perceived to support values congruent with the consumer's personal beliefs (Hoffmann & Müller, 2009). Unlike boycotting, which involves withdrawing support to punish perceived wrongdoing, buycotting reflects a proactive form of political consumerism aimed at rewarding brands perceived as ethical, authentic, and socially responsible (Friedman, 1996; Micheletti, 2003). Importantly, buycotting may occur as a stand-alone positive reaction to a brand's activism. However, it may also emerge when consumers boycott one brand due to misaligned activism and redirect purchases toward another brand that better reflects their values.

Consumers are increasingly motivated by value alignment when choosing brands to support. Studies show that individuals are more likely to engage in buycotting when they perceive a brand's activism to be authentic and aligned with their moral or ideological views (Bhagwat et al., 2020). The perceived authenticity of brand activism therefore plays a key role in encouraging buycotting. When brands demonstrate commitment to a cause across messaging, operations, and corporate culture, consumers develop trust and loyalty that can translate into supportive behaviours such as buycotting and positive word-of-mouth (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Walter et al., 2024). Conversely, perceived inauthenticity which often described as "woke-washing" can undermine trust and reduce consumer support (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Walter et al., 2024).

Buycotting may also be explained through social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which proposes that individuals derive part of their identity from the groups they belong to. Supporting activist brands can allow consumers to reinforce their self-concept and signal solidarity with particular causes or communities (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020). Additionally, the visibility and ease of action enabled by digital platforms can strengthen buycotting behaviour by helping consumers identify activist brands, express support publicly, and encourage others to follow suit (Johnstone & Lindh, 2018). Campaigns that clearly communicate tangible social outcomes may

further increase perceptions of effectiveness and motivate repeated engagement (Brunk & Bluemelhuber, 2011).

Buycotting is not without constraints. Consumers may face an ethical intention–behaviour gap when their ethical beliefs conflict with practical constraints such as convenience, price sensitivity, and limited product availability (Carrington et al., 2014). Moreover, supportive consumption may be episodic rather than sustained, with consumers engaging during heightened campaign periods but reverting to conventional choices thereafter (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011). Overall, buycotting represents a meaningful form of consumer support in the context of brand activism, shaped by authenticity perceptions, value congruence, identity signalling, and beliefs about the efficacy of market choices.

However, consumer responses to brand activism are not fixed and may extend beyond boycotting and buycotting into more nuanced forms (e.g., indifference, conditional support, or sceptical engagement). This indicates a need for further interpretive research to better understand how consumers make sense of activism and translate evaluations into behavioural intentions.

2.3 GLOBAL VERSUS LOCAL BRAND ACTIVISM

Brand activism has become an increasingly visible strategy for both global and local firms seeking to signal values, differentiate in competitive markets, and build consumer relationships. Brand activism has become an increasingly visible strategy for both global and local firms seeking to signal values, differentiate in competitive markets, and build consumer-brand relationships.

2.3.1 Defining Global and Local Brands

In this thesis, global brands refer to brands that operate across multiple countries and are commonly associated with broad international availability and recognition. Importantly, globalness is not only an objective organisational feature (e.g., multinational presence) but also a consumer perception, often captured as perceived

brand globalness (PBG), which refers to the extent to which consumers believe a brand is marketed and recognised worldwide (Steenkamp et al., 2003). By contrast, local brands refer to brands that are anchored primarily in a specific national or regional market and are often tied to local culture, identity, and everyday consumption contexts. Similar to globalness, localness can be understood as a consumer perception, often conceptualised as perceived brand localness (PBL), which refers to the extent to which consumers see a brand as connected to and representative of the local market and community (Schuiling et al., 2003). Since globalness and localness are partly perceived rather than purely objective, consumers may evaluate the same activist stance differently depending on whether the brand is seen as global or local. This makes brand origin a relevant lens for understanding differences in perceived authenticity, cultural fit, and consumer support. (Steenkamp et al., 2003; Swoboda et al., 2012; Halkias et al., 2016).

2.3.2 Global Brand Activism

Global brands, supported by substantial financial resources and extensive communication reach, increasingly engage in brand activism to strengthen legitimacy, appeal to values-driven consumers, and rebuild trust following reputational challenges. Moorman (2020) argues that multinational corporations now more frequently take public stances on social and political issues to demonstrate commitment to societal well-being beyond short-term profit motives. When these stances align with consumers' beliefs, activism can reinforce a brand's moral positioning and deepen engagement among supportive audiences.

Brand activism has also been framed as a strategic differentiation tool, particularly for global firms operating across culturally diverse markets (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). These efforts may be especially valuable for brands seeking to recover from reputational concerns. For example, Shukla et al. (2025) show that even brands experiencing reputational damage can improve consumer satisfaction when activism involves credible sacrifice, such as operational changes or meaningful philanthropic commitments. Similarly, Bhagwat et al. (2020) find that activism can enhance global brand equity, consumer trust, and loyalty especially when campaigns are perceived as

authentic. Together, these studies suggest that activism has shifted from being a peripheral extension of CSR to a more central component of branding strategy in global markets.

However, consumer responses to brand activism are generally conditional on factors such as ideology and perceived sincerity. However, these dynamics become especially pronounced in the global context because global brands operate across culturally diverse markets and are often evaluated through cues of foreignness and national identity. In such settings, political ideology and ethnocentrism can shape whether a global brand's stance is interpreted as legitimate or intrusive, largely by influencing consumers' motive inferences. Tsougkou et al. (2024) show that ideology, ethnocentrism, and perceived sincerity affect attitudes toward global brand activists through perceived motivation, highlighting that authenticity judgements are filtered through culturally situated beliefs. However, despite the emphasis on authenticity in the global brand activism literature, there is still limited clarity on how consumers construct authenticity judgements for global brands across markets and how these judgements differ relative to local brands. This gap is particularly relevant in the New Zealand context, where perceptions of foreignness, identity, and local embeddedness may shape evaluations. This suggests that for global brands, activism carries a heightened risk of cross-market misalignment and polarised reactions, making credibility management more complex than in single-market settings.

Social media is a distinct driver of global brand activism because it allows multinational corporations to convey activist positions at scale while also managing cultural differences between markets. On platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter), global brands can communicate sociopolitical stances rapidly, build affective connections through storytelling, and mobilise engagement in real time (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Shukla et al., 2025). However, what is especially unique in the global landscape is that brands must decide how consistent versus how localised their activism should be. Some global brands take an overarching values-based stance that they communicate across markets with relatively consistent framing. For example, Patagonia's environmental positioning and campaigns such as "Don't Buy This Jacket," which reinforce a stable activist identity rather than tailoring the core message to each market (Patagonia, 2013). Others pursue globally consistent values with locally adapted

execution, tailoring framing, cultural references, and emphasis to align with local norms and sensitivities while retaining a unified brand purpose and voice. This strategic choice matters because sociopolitical messaging is highly visible and contestable on social media (Gambetti & Biraghi, 2023), increasing the likelihood of scrutiny and backlash if consumers perceive cultural insensitivity or inconsistency between messaging and practice. These dynamics suggest that brand origin shapes not only the scale of activist communication but also the criteria consumers use to evaluate it. The next section therefore turns to local brand activism, which may be interpreted through stronger cues of community embeddedness and in-group identity.

2.3.2 Local Brand Activism

Despite growing scholarly attention to brand activism, there remains comparatively limited research on how local brands engage in and benefit from activism, particularly in relation to grassroots or community-based movements (Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). This study addresses this gap by investigating the role of local brands in brand activism and contrasting consumer assessments of local and global brand activism. In this thesis, local brand activism is defined as a local brand's public stance and supporting actions on social, political, economic, or environmental issues, aimed at influencing outcomes beyond the marketplace within its home community and national context. In local contexts, where consumers can more easily observe a brand's behaviour and community contribution, activism is more likely to be evaluated through message–practice alignment, making perceived authenticity central to credibility (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Moorman, 2020).

Drawing on cross-cultural literature on global versus local brands, local brand activism is often characterised as more culturally embedded and contextually responsive**.** This proximity can foster trust and authenticity which are central to activism effectiveness (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Roy and Chau (2011) show that preferences for global versus local brands vary by consumers' status-seeking motivation. This moderation effect may be relevant in the New Zealand context, where

consumer evaluations may rely less on status-signalling and more on perceived fit and local meaning (an assumption examined in this study).

Social Identity Theory frames consumer judgement as group based. People partly define themselves through the groups they belong to (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When a local brand reflects shared community values, it can be perceived as an in-group member, supporting trust and loyalty (Halkias et al., 2016). Global brands may still be evaluated positively for competence and reputation but perceived as more distant because they are seen as outside the local group.

Even when intentions are strong, local brand activism is conditioned by structural constraints that shape the scope and visibility of action. Compared with global brands, local brands often face limited resources, reduced media reach, and less institutional support, which can restrict the scale and visibility of activist efforts (Halkias et al., 2016; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Nevertheless, being culturally close to the community can help local brands overcome some of these limits. Because they are seen as legitimate and "part of the community," they can engage niche groups more effectively and stay credible by consistently focusing on issues that matter locally (Cayla & Arnould, 2008; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Overall, local brand activism may offer particular potential to build authentic consumer relationships and achieve locally meaningful impact. This study extends existing literature by examining how these dynamics unfold in practice within the context of New Zealand local brands.

2.3.3 Social Identity Theory as a Supporting Lens

This study adopts social identity theory as a useful lens for interpreting how consumers make sense of brand activism and why they may respond through support or rejection. Social identity theory suggests that people define part of who they are through membership in social groups (e.g., nationality, culture, political orientation, environmental identity), and they seek to maintain a positive and coherent sense of self through these group-based identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Because marketplace choices can be identity-expressive, brand-related decisions may function as a way to signal values and group alignment, especially when brands take visible stances on sociopolitical issues (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Reed et al., 2012).

From this perspective, consumer responses to brand activism may depend on whether the brand's stance is perceived as identity-consistent or identity-threatening. When activism affirms values linked to a salient identity, consumers may feel validated and respond with support, advocacy, or buycotting intentions. In contrast, when activism is perceived as conflicting with important values or group norms, consumers may react defensively through disengagement, negative word-of-mouth, or boycotting behaviour. These outcomes are likely to be stronger when the issue is personally important and tied to identities that consumers hold strongly.

This lens is also relevant for understanding differences in responses to global versus local brand activism. Activism by global brands may be interpreted through broader symbolic meanings (e.g., perceptions of corporate power or cultural distance), which can shape whether the stance feels relevant and legitimate in a New Zealand context. By contrast, local brands may be judged through community-based identities and their perceived closeness to local realities. This can strengthen perceived authenticity when the cause fits local values, but it can also increase backlash when activism is seen as inconsistent with local norms. In this way, social identity theory complements authenticity-focused explanations by showing how perceived value alignment and cultural relevance shape consumers' support or rejection, including buycotting and boycotting intentions (Reed et al., 2012; Micheletti, 2017).

2.3.4 The Need for Comparative Understanding

While global companies can mobilise attention at scale, local brands may generate stronger affective resonance through perceived community embeddedness and alignment (Cayla & Arnould, 2008; Roy & Chau, 2011; Davvetas & Halkias, 2019). Despite the growing visibility of brand activism, comparative evidence remains limited on how consumers interpret activist initiatives when they are undertaken by global versus local brands. This gap matters because authenticity judgements are typically multi-criteria and context dependent. Consumers may interpret signals such as a brand's perceived intentions, the fit between the issue and the brand, and alignment between what it says and what it does differently depending on whether the brand is global or local. Importantly, activism also carries asymmetric risk. Opponents of a brand's stance often respond more intensely than supporters, increasing the likelihood of backlash and reputational harm (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). However, the nature and severity of

this backlash may differ across brand types, as consumers' perceived cultural closeness to the brand, expectations of accountability, and the brand's public visibility are not the same. Accordingly, this study examines how brand type (global vs local) shapes consumer perceptions, involvement, and perceived authenticity of activist actions across cultural contexts, offering a comparative account of how consumers evaluate brand activism.

To consolidate these evaluative criteria, table 1 summarises the key cues identified in prior research that consumers draw on when judging activism by global versus local brands, and links each cue to its implications for buycotting, boycotting, or campaign dismissal.

Table 1
Comparative Understanding of Global and Local Brand Activism Perceptions

Salient cue	Global brands are often perceived as…	Local brands are often perceived as…	Why does this matter for activism perceptions?
Cultural embeddedness (Davvetas & Halkias, 2019)	less locally embedded	culturally embedded	Shapes fit & authenticity judgements
Identity linkage (Sichtmann et al., 2019)	out-group cues (Halkias et al., 2016)	in-group cues (Halkias et al., 2016)	Affects trust/support vs resistance
Motive inference	competence-based inferences	warmth/positive-intentions inferences	Drives woke-washing / sincerity assessments (Vredenburg et al., 2020)
Authenticity burden	higher proof needed	trust via proximity	Activism is evaluated by message–practice alignment (Vredenburg et al., 2020)
Backlash exposure	wider scrutiny	community scrutiny	Opponents can punish strongly → asymmetric risk (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020)

Communication dynamics	high reach, high contestation	lower reach, relational credibility	Social media amplifies scrutiny; activism communications differ from CSR (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Cammarota et al., 2023)

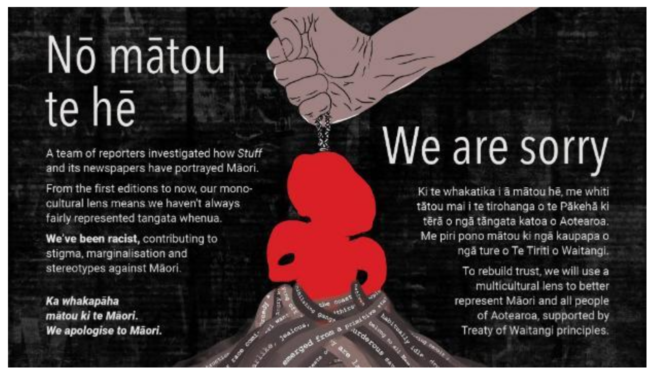
Note. This table summarises key literature on differences in how global and local brands are perceived in relation to brand activism.

The purpose of this table is to synthesise evaluative cues from prior literature on brand activism and global–local branding, summarising how they shape consumer interpretations and marketplace responses. The cues draw on work on authentic brand activism and consumer evaluations (e.g., Vredenburg et al., 2020; Moorman, 2020; Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020) and on global–local branding research concerning origin-based legitimacy and cultural relevance across markets (Steenkamp, 2019). The table is presented as a summary following Sections 2.3.2–2.3.3 to consolidate the key points developed in the text and to signpost the evaluative criteria used in the remainder of the chapter.

2.4 Brand Activism in New Zealand

Brand activism is increasingly prominent in New Zealand, yet it remains comparatively under-examined within academic literature. The nation's socio-political setting is defined by its bicultural foundations in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and by expanding multicultural influences from Pacific and migrant communities (Kukutai & Rata, 2017). These factors create a context in which brand activism must be both socially responsive and culturally grounded to secure consumer legitimacy. This highlights a distinctive dimension of brand activism in New Zealand that centres on indigenous rights and environmental sustainability. A compelling example is the Our Truth, Tā Mātou Pono campaign by Stuff. This nationwide journalistic initiative seeks to move beyond Eurocentric storytelling about New Zealand's history by amplifying Māori, Pasifika, Asian, LGBTQ+, and other marginalised voices.

Figure 1: Nō mātou te hē / We are sorry designed by Johnson Witehira.



Note. Adapted from *"We are sorry" – Stuff issues public apology to Māori*, by M. McKenzie, 2020, *StopPress* (https://stoppress.co.nz/news/we-are-sorry-stuff-issues-public-apology-to-maori/?utm_source=chatgpt.com). Illustration by Johnson Witehira.

One illustration of issue advocacy in the New Zealand public sphere is Stuff's *Our Truth, Tā Mātou Pono* initiative, which aims to broaden dominant narratives of national history by elevating Māori, Pasifika, Asian, LGBTQ+, and other marginalised perspectives. As shown in Figure 1, the campaign foregrounds contested and sometimes uncomfortable histories such as racism, land injustice, and violence against queer communities positioning these narratives as part of how New Zealanders understand collective identity. While this example sits within a media organisation rather than a conventional consumer brand, it highlights how cultural politics and historical recognition can shape the legitimacy conditions under which organisations communicate social issues in Aotearoa.

Consumer expectations also suggest that social responsibility can influence marketplace responses. In the Better Futures Report (Colmar Brunton, 2020), a proportion of respondents indicated that brands should contribute to addressing social and environmental challenges, and many reported higher purchase intentions toward companies perceived as responsible. This implies that activism can function as more than a promotional tactic; however, it also increases reputational risk when actions are perceived as symbolic, inconsistent, or strategically motivated.
Local brands have engaged with these expectations in different ways. For example, Ecostore's *No Laundry Day* campaign translated sustainability positioning into a simple behavioural prompt by encouraging consumers to skip one wash cycle, thereby drawing

attention to the environmental costs of habitual laundering (StopPress, 2023). This type of initiative reflects the potential advantage of cultural embeddedness: New Zealand-based firms may be perceived as more credible when activist narratives connect to local values and everyday practices, rather than relying on generic or universalised messaging (Roper, 2005; Wilson et al., 2021). Taken together, the New Zealand context suggests that authenticity judgements are likely to be shaped by cultural grounding and perceived local relevance an implication that is directly relevant to this thesis, which examines how activism by global versus local brands influences consumer intentions to boycott or buycott in New Zealand.

Figure 2: No Laundry Day campaign visual (ecostore).

Note. Adapted from *No Laundry Day: 25th August 2023*, by ecostore, 2023 (blog post) (https://ecostore.com/en-nz/blogs/news/no-laundry-day-25th-august-2023).

Ecostore, a purpose-driven producer of plant-based household goods, launched "No Laundry Day" to highlight the environmental costs of habitual washing. By encouraging consumers to forgo one laundry cycle, the campaign translated the brand's sustainability ethos into an accessible behavioural challenge and underscored the ecological benefits of mindful consumption (Ecostore, 2023).

Such initiatives illustrate the advantage of cultural embeddedness. New Zealand-based companies frequently craft activist narratives that resonate with local values, historical consciousness, and communal identities, rather than imposing a

universalised template (Roper, 2005; Wilson et al., 2021). In a market where social trust and perceived authenticity strongly shape consumer responses, this alignment is critical.

At the same time, the New Zealand context also shows that a well-known global ethical/activist brand identity does not automatically translate into stable local operations or consumer support. The Body Shop, a global brand strongly associated with ethical sourcing and values-led positioning, entered voluntary administration in New Zealand in January 2025 and was subsequently placed into liquidation, with stores closing nationwide. Notably, the brand later returned under a new local franchise owner, reopening a physical store and online channel. While these outcomes likely reflect multiple commercial and structural pressures rather than activism alone, the case is analytically useful because it illustrates how the legitimacy and viability of global activist branding can be reshaped by local market conditions and local expectations of authenticity.

Taken together, brand activism in Aotearoa New Zealand appears strongly shaped by cultural grounding and perceived local relevance, an implication that directly informs this thesis, which examines how activism by global versus local brands influences consumer intentions to boycott and buycott in New Zealand.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This literature review has examined the rise of brand activism and how consumers evaluate and respond to brands that take public stances on social, political, and environmental issues. In contrast to conventional CSR often associated with broadly supported, "consensus" initiatives brand activism is inherently more polarising, creating higher reputational upside/downside and requiring careful justification of why the brand is intervening in public debate (Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020; Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020). The literature also highlights that activism goes beyond messaging (e.g., statements or campaigns) and can include efforts to influence institutions and stakeholder behaviour, framing firms as social-change agents within their surrounding contexts (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020).

A central theme of the chapter is that consumer responses depend strongly on perceived authenticity**.** Authentic activism refers to activist efforts that are consistent with a brand's core values and organisational culture, whereas "woke-washing" describes shallow or symbolic cause support pursued mainly to enhance reputation (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Walter et al., 2024). Drawing on Mirzaei et al. (2022), this chapter presented six dimensions of authenticity which are social context independency, inclusion, sacrifice, practice, fit, and motivation showing that consumers evaluate activism using multiple criteria, with especially high expectations for brands operating across markets. These dynamics also suggest that when activism is perceived as insincere, it can trigger resistance and boycotting (Cammarota et al., 2023).

The chapter then examined consumer responses to activism, emphasising that positive outcomes (trust, loyalty, advocacy) are more likely when activism is viewed as value-congruent and consistent, whereas opportunistic or ideologically misaligned activism can trigger scepticism and backlash (Moorman, 2020; Zhou & Dong, 2021; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). It further advanced the idea of negativity-driven backlash asymmetry, whereby activism that is perceived as "wrong" can trigger disproportionately strong negative responses relative to potential gains consistent with the broader claim that bad is stronger than good (Baumeister et al., 2001; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020) and with evidence that consumers can be unforgiving when activism executions go wrong (Lewis & Vredenburg, 2024). The chapter deepened this discussion through political consumerism behaviours: boycotting as deliberate withdrawal of support (Friedman, 1996; Micheletti, 2003) and buycotting as proactive support for value-aligned brands (Hoffmann & Müller, 2009), including digitally amplified anti-brand tactics such as discrediting and campaign disruption (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022). Social identity theory was presented as a supporting lens to explain how activism can be experienced as identity-affirming or identity-threatening, shaping boycott/buycott tendencies (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Reed et al., 2012; Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

Finally, the chapter argued for the importance of brand origin in activism evaluations by defining global versus local brands through perceived globalness and localness (Steenkamp et al., 2003; Schuiling et al., 2003) and it synthesised how cues

such as cultural embeddedness, identity linkage, motive inferences, and visibility may systematically influence the standards consumers use to judge authenticity, as well as the likelihood and intensity of backlash (Halkias et al., 2016; Davvetas & Halkias, 2019; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). This comparative perspective was then situated within Aotearoa New Zealand, where legitimacy conditions are influenced by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and a multicultural sociopolitical landscape (Kukutai & Rata, 2017). Illustrative cases—Stuff's *Our Truth, Tā Mātou Pono* campaign and Ecostore's *No Laundry Day*—demonstrated how activism-like initiatives can foreground history, identity, and sustainability in locally resonant ways (Colmar Brunton, 2020; StopPress, 2023; Ecostore, 2023). The chapter concluded by highlighting a gap: despite growing visibility, there remains limited comparative understanding of how New Zealand consumers interpret and respond to global versus local brand activism, motivating the present study's focus on authenticity perceptions and boycotting and buycotting intentions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER

Understanding how consumers interpret brand activism requires a methodological approach capable of capturing nuance, shifts in reasoning, and the meanings constructed within specific contexts. In this study, responses were not fixed or consistent. Participants moved between admiration, scepticism, and indifference depending on the brand, the cause, and its cultural framing. This complexity aligns with an interpretivist perspective, which views social reality as negotiated and meaning as constructed through experience and reflection (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 1994).

Guided by this perspective, the study investigates how consumers in New Zealand perceive and respond to brand activism, and how these responses differ when activism originates from a global versus a local brand. To facilitate contextualised reflection, the study used two campaign cases: Patagonia's *Don't Buy This Jacket* representing global brand activism, and Ecostore's *No Laundry Day* representing local brand activism. A qualitative research design was therefore adopted, using semi-structured interviews and campaign stimuli to prompt discussion around authenticity, responsibility, and brand origin.

The data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019), enabling interpretation beyond surface-level accounts toward more latent insights into how participants made sense of brand activism. This chapter outlines the study's philosophical foundations, research design, recruitment process and data collection procedures, and the analytic approach that guided the development of the final themes.

3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Every research study is shaped by an underlying philosophical stance that frames assumptions about reality and how knowledge is produced. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasise that such positioning guides both what researchers investigate and how they interpret social phenomena. Ontologically, this study adopts a relativist stance, recognising reality as multiple and socially constructed rather than

singular or fixed. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) note, individuals interpret the world through their cultural and experiential lenses. Therefore, each participant's interpretation of brand activism constitutes a valid and distinct reality.

Epistemologically, the research aligns with subjectivism, which views knowledge as co-created through dialogue and interpretation. Crotty (1998) argues that meaning does not exist independently but emerges through interaction, a perspective echoed by Saunders et al. (2019), who highlight its suitability for exploring complex, context-dependent human interpretations.

This philosophical foundation positions the study within an interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand how people make sense of their experiences (Bryman, 2016). Interpretivism, as Denzin and Lincoln (2018) suggest, focuses on the meanings individuals assign to social actions making it well-suited for examining how consumers perceive authenticity and trust in global and local brand activism. The study also draws on social constructivism, which emphasises meanings formed through cultural and social interaction. Schwandt (2000) highlights its relevance when examining how shared understandings develop within specific contexts such as New Zealand.

Together, interpretivism and constructivism justify the use of a qualitative research design, enabling detailed exploration of participants' subjective meaning-making. Qualitative methods are valuable for uncovering complex interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and capturing lived experiences in depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Accordingly, semi-structured interviews were selected to allow participants to articulate their thoughts and emotions freely (Bryman, 2016).

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

Building on the interpretivist philosophical stance, this study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research approach. A qualitative approach is appropriate for exploring complex and context-dependent social phenomena such as consumer perceptions of brand activism, which cannot be easily quantified or measured (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The exploratory nature of the study aligns with its aim to uncover how consumers construct meaning around global and local brand activism rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, which is more characteristic of deductive, quantitatively oriented research designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). It seeks to understand participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to them. This approach is suitable for examining how consumers perceive authenticity, trust, and ethical alignment in brand activism campaigns. It enables the researcher to capture participants' perspectives in their own words and to interpret the nuances of emotional, cultural, and moral reasoning that underlie their responses.

Given the limited empirical work comparing global versus local brand activism, this research follows an inductive approach (Saunders et al., 2019). Induction allows theoretical insights to emerge from the data rather than being imposed a priori. Through iterative analysis of participants' narratives, patterns and themes were identified to develop conceptual understanding of how brand origin influences consumers' responses to activism.

3.3.1 Research Design

The study employs a qualitative exploratory design using semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. This design provides flexibility to probe participants' attitudes and interpretations while maintaining a consistent set of guiding questions (Bryman, 2016). Semi-structured interviews allow participants to express their personal experiences and reflections on brand activism in depth, providing rich qualitative data suitable for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3.2 Brand Activism Case Examples

To enhance contextual relevance, two case examples were introduced during the interviews (Appendix F): Patagonia's "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign, representing global brand activism, and Ecostore's "No Laundry Day" campaign, representing local brand activism. These cases were purposefully selected because they are widely recognised as aligning with sustainability and activism-oriented values, while simultaneously embodying contrasting brand origins (global vs. local) and communication styles. Using these cases as prompts helped participants ground their reflections in concrete examples while also enabling comparisons between global and local brand activism (Barter & Renold, 1999; Martin et al., 2024). Although the two campaigns were not identical in all respects, they were considered conceptually comparable in that both encouraged consumers to reduce unnecessary consumption and framed behavioural restraint as part of environmental responsibility. This shared sustainability orientation provided a common basis for comparing how participants responded to activism communicated by a global versus a local brand.

Patagonia was chosen as a global exemplar because it is widely recognised in marketing and brand activism scholarship as a paradigmatic activist brand whose environmental mission is deeply embedded in its business model and communication. Across the brand activism literature, Patagonia is frequently described as a purpose- and values-driven company characterised by socio-political engagement and sustained issue advocacy, often used as a benchmark case for authentic brand activism (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Patagonia's "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign explicitly encouraged consumers to reconsider unnecessary purchases and positioned reduced consumption as part of environmental responsibility (Patagonia, 2011; Allchin, 2013; Solomon, 2019).

Ecostore was chosen as a local exemplar because it is a New Zealand–founded brand with a long-standing commitment to environmental sustainability and social responsibility. Its recurring "No Laundry Day" initiative encourages households to skip doing laundry for a day and adopt "smarter" laundry habits, thereby reducing unnecessary washing, saving energy and water, and drawing attention to the environmental impacts of everyday routines illustrating activism oriented towards

community-level behavioural change (Ecostore, 2023). As a brand embedded in local culture and widely recognised for its sustainability leadership within New Zealand, Ecostore exemplifies how activist positioning can be enacted by homegrown companies operating in the New Zealand market context.

The use of two predefined campaign cases was intended to provide a shared basis for discussion across interviews, allowing participants to respond to a specific example rather than relying solely on unprompted recall of brand activism cases from personal experience. During the interviews, participants were randomly shown the campaign materials and brief contextual information for one of the cases, as outlined in Appendix F. This resulted in half of the participants reporting their views on the global brand activism case example and half on the local brand activism case example. Participants were then invited to reflect on their perceptions, emotional responses, and likely behavioural intentions in relation to the case they were shown. While some participants may have had prior familiarity with the brands, the cases were introduced during the interview to establish a minimum level of shared understanding across participants. Together, these two contrasting cases provided a meaningful basis for participants to reflect on differences in perceived authenticity, credibility, and trust towards global versus local brands engaging in activism.

3.4 SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANTS

Guided by an interpretivist paradigm, this study prioritised depth of understanding and the inclusion of varied perspectives rather than statistical representativeness. Accordingly, purposive sampling was used to recruit participants with relevant knowledge and experience of brand activism. This approach enables the deliberate selection of information-rich participants who can provide detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015).

3.4.1 Sampling Criteria

Participants were required to be individuals currently living in Auckland, New Zealand, regardless of their visa type. Participants were included regardless of visa type because the study was concerned primarily with participants' interpretations of brand activism within the New Zealand consumer context, rather than with differences based on immigration or residency status. This was appropriate given Auckland's demographic diversity as New Zealand's largest urban centre, where overseas-born residents make up a substantial proportion of the population and where ethnic and cultural diversity continues to increase (Auckland Council, 2026; Stats NZ, 2023). More broadly, New Zealand's migration system includes a range of temporary and residence-based pathways, including work, student, visitor, and residence visas, meaning that residents may hold varied immigration statuses while still participating in everyday consumer life (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022). In this sense, visa type was not expected to function as a central analytical variable in shaping responses to the campaign stimuli.

They were also expected to be between 18 and 44 years old, as consumers within this age range, primarily Generation Z and Millennials, are widely recognised as being more socially conscious, digitally active, and highly engaged with brand activism and social-issue marketing (Dimock, 2019; Vredenburg et al., 2020). In addition, participants needed to have familiarity with brand activism–related or social-issue marketing and to be aware of, or able to reflect on, examples of brand activism from both global and local brands. Such purposive criteria ensured that participants possessed sufficient contextual understanding to discuss brand activism meaningfully and to share informed perspectives on concepts such as authenticity, trust, and consumer responses within the New Zealand market context (Patton, 2015).

3.4.2 Recruitment Process

Participants were recruited through social media postings, university networks, and word-of-mouth referrals, with snowball sampling applied where appropriate to reach individuals with relevant experiences. Social-media recruitment was conducted primarily through New Zealand–based Facebook community groups focused on sustainability, ethical consumption, and community-oriented environmental initiatives.

These groups were selected because their members were more likely to be familiar with sustainability discourse and brand-led social or environmental campaigns, making them well aligned with the research focus. In addition, recruitment was supported through university networks by registering the study on the AUT research participation webpage, which allows students and community members to volunteer for academic research projects. This platform enabled the researcher to reach a broader pool of potential participants beyond personal networks while maintaining transparency and ethical recruitment standards.

An invitation outlining the purpose of the study and participation criteria was shared across these channels. Participants who met the criteria were also invited to share the study information with others in their personal or professional networks, facilitating a snowball sampling process. Through this approach, potential participants were able to learn about the study via trusted community and institutional channels while retaining full autonomy in deciding whether to participate. Interested individuals contacted the researcher directly, ensuring voluntary participation and minimizing recruitment pressure. All participants received an information sheet detailing the research purpose, confidentiality measures, and their rights to voluntary participation and withdrawal.

A total of 12 participants were interviewed. This sample size was considered appropriate for qualitative research, as it enabled data depth and thematic saturation while remaining manageable for in-depth analysis (Guest et al., 2006; Vasileiou et al., 2018). The sample included both male and female participants aged between 18 and 44 years**,** representing young to middle-aged adult consumers who are typically active on social media and more likely to encounter discussions of brand activism. This age range was selected because younger and middle-aged consumers tend to be more socially conscious, digitally connected, and engaged with ethical and environmental issues, making them more likely to form and articulate views on corporate activism and brand authenticity (Moorman, 2020; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Vredenburg et al., 2020). The diversity of participants' cultural backgrounds, occupations category reflects Auckland's multicultural population and supports the study's aim to capture varied interpretations of brand activism within the New Zealand context.

Table 2
Participant Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Cultural background (broad)	Occupation category (Industry)	Case exposure
P01	M	Asian	Business Student	Global
P02	M	Asian	Employee (Hospitality)	Local
P03	F	Asian	PhD Student	Local
P04	M	Asian	Self-employed (Construction)	Global
P05	F	Asian	Employee (Architecture)	Global
P06	F	Asian	Student	Global
P07	F	New Zealand-born	Employee	Global
P08	F	Asian	PhD Student	Local
P09	M	Asian	Employee	Local
P10	M	Asian	Employee	Local
P11	M	New Zealand-born	Employee (Hotel)	Local
P12	M	Asian	Employee	Global

Note. Case exposure refers to whether participants were exposed to the global or local brand activism stimulus during the interview.

3.4.3 Sample Size Justification

Recruitment and analysis in this qualitative study followed an iterative process, with sample adequacy assessed in relation to thematic saturation rather than statistical representativeness. Thematic saturation refers to the point at which no substantially new themes emerge from the data (Guest et al., 2006). Given the focused nature of the research question and the use of two predefined campaign stimuli across all interviews, the study was able to identify recurring patterns within a relatively small sample. After approximately ten interviews, consistent patterns had begun to emerge in participants' discussions of perceived authenticity, scepticism towards global brands, and emotional involvement in local activist initiatives. Two further interviews were then conducted to assess whether additional data would extend or alter the developing thematic structure. While methodological literature suggests that data collection may continue beyond the point at which saturation is first observed in order to confirm the stability of the emerging themes (Guest et al., 2020), the final two interviews in this study served that confirmatory purpose. Although these interviews provided further depth and illustrative examples, they did not generate new first-order codes or overarching themes. This study follows Hennink & Kaiser, 2022 who suggest that research saturation can be achieved with 9-17 interviews. As such, the final sample of twelve participants was considered sufficient to provide a rich and focused dataset for addressing the exploratory aims of this study. Nevertheless, saturation is understood here in a practical rather than absolute sense, and the relatively small sample should be interpreted alongside the study's contextual limitations.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews, a well-established qualitative method for exploring participants' beliefs, meanings, and interpretations in depth (Bryman, 2016; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This approach aligns with an interpretivist paradigm by enabling participants to articulate how they understand brand activism and how they evaluate authenticity and trust, while allowing the researcher to probe emerging ideas and clarify participants' reasoning during the interview.

3.5.1 Interview Structure and Inductive Questioning

The interview guide (Appendix C) was designed to elicit an inductive, participant-led account of how consumers interpret brand activism and translate these interpretations into trust and behavioural intentions. To provide structure while preserving flexibility for probing, the semi-structured guide was organised into six parts that moved from general views to more specific evaluations of campaign examples, cultural fit, and intention-related outcomes.

Part 1 explored participants' general perceptions of brand activism, including how they defined it and the criteria they used to judge authenticity and trust. This opening stage was intended to capture participants' baseline understandings before any specific campaign stimuli were introduced. Part 2 then examined participants' broader perceptions of the focal brands at a general level, such as existing familiarity, brand associations, and baseline credibility. After these initial perceptions had been explored, the campaign stimuli were introduced. Participants were shown the case materials for Patagonia's *Don't Buy This Jacket* OR Ecostore's *No Laundry Day* (Appendix F), with brief contextual information, in order to establish a shared basis for discussion across interviews.

Part 3 focused on participants' reactions to the campaign examples, inviting them to describe their immediate interpretations of the message, perceived motives, and factors shaping authenticity and trust judgments. Part 4 examined cultural relevance and

perceived fit within the New Zealand context, probing whether the activism framing, examples, and proposed actions were seen as locally meaningful, appropriate, or resonant. Part 5 addressed intention-related responses by exploring the conditions under which participants would engage in buycotting, boycotting, or remain neutral, and the reasoning underpinning these choices. Finally, Part 6 explicitly investigated the perceived influence of brand origin (global versus local) on these evaluations and intentions, asking participants to reflect on how origin shaped perceived legitimacy, credibility, and willingness to buycott, boycott, or stay neutral.

Across all parts, open-ended questioning and follow-up probes were used to capture participants' own meaning-making and to clarify the contextual logic behind their evaluations. This sequencing was intended to minimise the risk that the campaign examples would shape participants' initial definitions or general perceptions of brand activism, while still enabling a structured comparison of responses to global and local brand activism.

Table 3
Summary of Interview Structure

Part	Section title	Purpose	Example guiding questions	Key outputs / constructs
1	General Perceptions of Brand Activism	Establish baseline understanding and evaluation criteria	"How familiar are you with the concept of brand activism?"	Baseline meanings; authenticity/trust cues; general scepticism triggers
2	General Perceptions of Brand Case	Capture pre-existing brand associations before campaign discussion	"What comes to mind when you think of [Ecostore/Patagonia]?"	Familiarity; prior attitudes; baseline credibility
3	Campaign Reactions	Elicit first interpretations of the campaign and reasoning behind judgments	"What stood out to you?" "What do you think the brand is trying to do?" "What feels authentic/inauthentic and why?"	Campaign interpretation; perceived motives; credibility assessments; trust judgments
4	Cultural Relevance and Fit (NZ context)	Explore perceived local resonance and appropriateness	"How relevant is this to NZ?" "Does the framing fit NZ values?"	Perceived fit; local relevance; legitimacy in NZ context
5	Boycotting and Buycotting Behaviour	Translate evaluations into intention outcomes (incl. neutral)	"Would this make you support/buy from the brand?" "Would you avoid it?" "When would you stay neutral and why?"	Intentions: buycott/boycott/neutral; conditions and justifications
6	Brand Origin Influence (Global vs Local)	Identify how brand origin shapes legitimacy, trust, and intentions	"Does it matter if the brand is global or local?" "How does origin affect trust?"	Role of origin; perceived distance/proximity; legitimacy; intention differences

Note. This table summarises the structure of the semi-structured interview guide, including the purpose of each section, example guiding questions, and the key constructs explored during the interviews.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The interview data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). This approach is compatible with the study's interpretivist and constructivist paradigm reflexive role of the researcher in generating themes rather than "discovering" them as objective entities. RTA was selected because it provides a flexible yet rigorous framework for examining how participants construct meanings around brand activism, authenticity, and trust in relation to global and local brands.

The process followed Braun and Clarke's key phases:

1. **Familiarisation**
All interviews were transcribed, anonymised, and read several times. The researcher made brief notes about initial impressions, recurring ideas, and early contrasts between responses to the global and local campaigns.

2. **Generating initial codes**
Using NVivo, the researcher coded meaningful segments of text across the entire data set (e.g., references to authenticity, hypocrisy, value alignment, emotional engagement). Coding was flexible and inclusive, with both Patagonia and Ecostore interviews coded within the same framework to enable later comparison.

3. **Searching for themes**
Related codes were then grouped into broader candidate themes that captured patterned ways of talking about brand activism, such as how participants assessed authenticity or differentiated global and local brands.

4. **Reviewing themes**
Candidate themes were checked against the coded extracts and the full data set. At this stage, some themes were refined, combined, or separated to ensure they were coherent internally and distinct from each other.

5. **Defining and naming themes**

Each theme was then clearly defined and named to reflect its central organising idea, with attention to how brand origin (global vs. local) shaped participants' interpretations.

6. **Producing the analysis**

Finally, themes were written up with illustrative quotations to show how they were grounded in participants' accounts. Throughout the process, reflexive notes were used to document analytic decisions and the researcher's own assumptions, supporting transparency and coherence in the final thematic structure.

Figure 3: Data Structure

Figure 3 depicts an overview of the data structure created during the investigation. The first-order concepts reflect the participants' own words and meanings, which were organized into five major topics. These primary aspects create the overarching theme of consumer response to brand activism, which guides the organisation of the findings provided in this chapter

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

This study received ethical approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC; Ref. 25/112) (Appendix F), and all procedures followed AUTEC guidelines for research with human participants. Prospective participants were given a participant information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, what participation involved, how their data would be used, and their right to withdraw. Those who agreed to take part signed a consent form prior to the interview.

Anonymity and confidentiality were protected by assigning pseudonyms and removing or generalising identifying details in transcripts and reported findings. Audio recordings, transcripts, and consent forms were stored in a secure, password-protected folder accessible only to the researcher and supervisory team and will be retained and disposed of in line with AUT and AUTEC requirements. To acknowledge their time, each participant received a NZD $20 gift card after completing the interview.

3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the methodological foundations and procedures used to address the study's research aim. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm and informed by a constructivist view of meaning-making, the study adopted a qualitative, exploratory design to examine how consumers in New Zealand interpret brand activism and how responses differ between global and local brand contexts.

It explained the sampling strategy and recruitment process, including the use of purposive and snowball sampling, and described how data were generated through individual semi-structured interviews supported by campaign stimuli (Patagonia's *"Don't Buy This Jacket"* and Ecostore's *"No Laundry Day"*). The chapter also detailed the ethical procedures and data management practices applied to protect participants' confidentiality. Finally, it described the analytic process using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019), which guided the development of themes presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Finding

4.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

This chapter presents the key findings derived from twelve semi-structured interviews that explored consumer responses to brand activism, with particular attention to how these responses vary depending on whether the activism is initiated by a global brand or a local brand. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-phase framework for reflexive thematic analysis, which guided the process of familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, developing themes, and refining them. To enhance conceptual clarity and transparency, the analysis also drew on Gioia et al.'s (2013) methodology, which structures qualitative findings through first-order concepts, second-order themes, and an overarching aggregate dimension.

By using these two types of analysis together, five second-order themes (referred to as main themes from now on in this chapter) were created that show how participants understood, judged, and felt about brand activism campaigns. These main themes are: (1) Consumers' perception of brand activism, (2) Perception toward global brand activism, (3) Perception toward local brand activism, (4) Comparative perceptions of global and local brand activism, and (5) Consumer intentions toward brand activism. Across these themes, participants typically applied a two-stage evaluative process**.** They first assessed activism using authenticity-related cues (e.g., sincerity, knowledge, action consistency), and then layered additional expectations based on brand origin (global versus local). Importantly, when participants engaged with specific campaigns (Patagonia and Ecostore), evaluations became more concrete and sometimes shifted away from general assumptions toward campaign-level credibility judgements.

4.2 Between Purpose and Performance: Consumers' Perception of Brand Activism

This section synthesises participants' overall perceptions of brand activism across the interviews, collapsing responses from both the global and local case conditions. Rather than separating evaluations by brand origin, it focuses on the shared criteria participants used to judge whether activism reflected a genuine moral commitment or primarily a strategic marketing motive.

Two interrelated dimensions emerged from this cross-case analysis: Authenticity as the Basis of Trust, capturing how participants assessed moral integrity, coherence, and sincerity in activist efforts. And Performative Activism and Consumer Scepticism**,** reflecting doubts toward brands perceived to leverage social causes mainly for reputational or promotional gain rather than meaningful social contribution. Where relevant, any notable variation by brand origin is signposted, but the emphasis here is on the overarching evaluative logic participants applied across contexts.

4.2.1 Authenticity as the Foundation of Trust

Participants emphasised that authenticity was central to how they evaluated a brand's activism and determined whether it was worthy of trust. Before deciding to support a brand, participants often engaged in an assessment process questioning the brand's motives and sincerity. As one participant expressed:

"I would assess that activism first — is it general? Is it authentic or not? And then, if I see that brand as genuinely authentic, I think I would buy that brand instead of any brand that just uses trendy social issues as a way to create trends." (P01)

This suggests that customers focus on the brand's moral motives when judging the action, rather than its promotional value. Authenticity was perceived as the foundation for trust, shaping participants' willingness to engage with or purchase from a brand. Participants also highlighted that authentic activism involves making a meaningful statement rather than merely promoting products. As one participant stated,

"I think it's more than just selling stuff now. It's more about, like, making a statement." (P04)

For some participants, this “statement” reflected a brand’s clear social or moral stance which showing values that go beyond commercial motives. They appreciated when brands used activism to raise awareness or educate the public about social and environmental issues. In contrast, when such statements appeared vague, participants viewed them as less credible or lacking trustworthiness.

Furthermore, participants expected brands to demonstrate depth, accuracy, and inclusivity when addressing social or environmental issues. They valued activism that involved real understanding and collaboration with affected communities:

“The right way, I mean, is to give correct information. I think they should have deeper knowledge — maybe discuss or get advice from the real people in those communities, and use the correct terms when doing marketing.” (P06)

Authenticity was also linked to sustained and tangible action, rather than short-term campaigns. Some participants perceived activism as more authentic when brands took visible steps to raise awareness and engage the public in ongoing issues. As one participant reflected,

“I see the picture of the brand that they started to run the campaign to spread awareness to their customers, to people — for example, when they want to have a campaign about climate change.” (P06)

Together, these accounts reveal that authenticity builds consumer trust through genuine intention, informed engagement, and consistent action. Brands that “walk the talk” by aligning their activism with long-term ethical commitments were more likely to be perceived as credible and trustworthy.

4.2.2 Performative Activism and Consumer Scepticism

In contrast to the desire for authenticity, several participants expressed scepticism toward brand activism that appeared superficial, opportunistic, or marketing-driven. Participants noted that while activism has become more visible

across industries, many initiatives appeared to prioritize brand image rather than genuine social impact.
Consequently, participants questioned whether such engagements were genuinely motivated by ethical commitment or merely an attempt to attract consumer attention. As one participant observed,

"Many companies jump on active trends for only short-term attention, not long-term impact." (P01)

Participants additionally stated that brands often link themselves to popular causes such as LGBTQ+ rights or sustainability, not because they really care about them, but because they want to improve their image and get people's attention. One participant reflected,

"Like a brand supports some community such as sustainability or LGBTQ group or the nature. It feels to me like maybe it's part of their marketing and helps them sell a product." (P05)

These remarks highlight an underlying scepticism of activism as a branding strategy, when political or moral reasons are employed as differentiators in competitive markets. Another participant raised similar concerns about the motivations of businesses, stating,

"I think the brands that do activism sometimes just want to do their marketing." (P06)

Although such efforts were not always viewed negatively, participants tended to interpret them as performative when there was limited evidence of ongoing involvement or demonstrable results. Their comments highlight that consumers now evaluate activism not only by its message but also by its depth, consistency, and perceived sincerity.

Overall, this dimension reflects that consumer scepticism operates on a spectrum which is ranging from cynical perceptions of corporate opportunism to more moderate views that recognise good intentions but still question the depth of commitment.

The contrasting evaluations of authenticity and performativity illustrate how participants negotiated their trust in brands' activist communication, balancing critical awareness with a willingness to believe in genuine engagement. While authentic efforts fostered trust and emotional resonance, perceived performativity often triggered scepticism and reflective questioning. These judgements, however, were not made in a vacuum. Participants frequently drew on whether a brand was seen as global or local when assessing how sincere, responsible, or impactful its activism appeared. This origin-based lens shaped expectations of credibility and accountability, leading into the next theme on perceptions toward global brand activism.

Table 4
Summary and description of first order concepts and second order themes relating to consumers' perception of brand activism

Second order themes	First order concepts	Description	Example quotes
Authenticity as the Foundation of Trust	Perception of Brand Activism	Authenticity was the key criterion participants used to assess brand activism across global and local brands. They trusted activism that appeared informed and sincere, and questioned campaigns that felt superficial or trend driven.	"I would to access that activism first, is it general? Is it authentic or not? And then, from associate that if I see that brand, it's generally authentic. So, I think I would buy that brand instead of any brand that just uses trendy social issues as a way to create trends." (P01) "The right way, I mean, is to give correct information. I think they should have deeper knowledge, maybe discuss or get advice from the real people in those communities and use the correct terms when doing marketing." (P06)
Performative Activism Consumer Scepticism	Perception of Brand Activism	Participants were sceptical of activism that seemed superficial, opportunistic, or inconsistent with a brand's practices. While they valued issue visibility, many viewed these campaigns as "for show" and marketing-driven.	"many companies jump on active trends for only short-term attention, not long-term impact." (P01) "Like a brand support some community such as like sustainability or LGBTQ group or the nature. It feels for me like part maybe it's part of their marketing and helps them sell a product." (P05) "I think the brand that do activism sometimes they just want to do their marketing." (P06)

4.3 Perception toward Global Brand Activism

Participants perceived global brands as powerful global actors with the capacity and influence to address large-scale social and environmental issues such as climate change, overconsumption, and ethical labor. Their substantial resources, global visibility, and technological capability positioned them as key players capable of shaping public awareness and industry standards. However, this perceived power also created heightened expectations for ethical consistency and genuine commitment.

4.3.1 Responsibility and Influence

Participants consistently perceived global brands as having a greater sense of responsibility and capacity to address large-scale issues such as climate change, overconsumption, and ethical labour. Because of their extensive resources and global reach, these brands were viewed as being in a stronger power to influence both public awareness and industry practices.

"Maybe the global brands should be concerned about global climate change, global issues. But then they also process the capability in developing the technology for developing new products to serve the world. So, the roles of local products and the role of global products might be different." (P03)

Another participant reinforced this sentiment, emphasizing that global brands should lead by example in demonstrating genuine commitment and accountability in their activist practices:

"I have higher expectations for a global brand. I expect a lot more from them. They have more resources, they have more connections. They have a much bigger presence in the world than my local brand." (P07)

Such views illustrate that participants associated global activism with power, reach, and moral obligation. However, this perceived authority also generated ambivalence. While participants admired global brands for their capability to drive change, some also expressed scepticism toward their motivations. The scale of corporate operations rendered certain activism initiatives seemingly remote, impersonal, or motivated by profit, thereby generating discord between expectation and trust. As one participant remarked,

"The fact that it's such a global brand, I still sometimes look at it with a little bit of scepticism because it still has operating costs. It still has overheads. It needs to pay. It's still there to make profit." (P07)

These accounts reveal that global brands' power and influence are a double-edged sword: they activate large-scale impact but also invite greater scrutiny. Participants expected these powerful global actors to demonstrate authenticity through consistent, value-driven action rather than symbolic or promotional efforts.

4.3.2 Relevance and Impact

Participants' perceptions of global brand activism revealed a nuanced tension between global reach and local relevance. While global brands such as Patagonia were often admired for their scale, influence, and commitment to sustainability, participants differed in how they interpreted the relevance of such activism within the New Zealand context.

For some participants, global brand activism raised questions about contextual fit. These individuals felt that while the intentions of global brands were commendable, campaigns may not always speak directly to the everyday realities of New Zealand consumers. As one participant expressed,

"It's a global brand. I sometimes wonder how relevant its work is for New Zealand." (P07)

This sentiment reflects a broader concern that global campaigns may appear geographically distant or insufficiently tailored to local community needs. Similarly, another participant noted that local brands often resonate more strongly because their messaging is more "New Zealand–specific":

"A global one… it's not geographic-area specific. A local one that targets New Zealand is more about New Zealand and that's what resonates." (P11)

However, this view was not universal. Many participants strongly believed that global activism particularly environmental sustainability was highly compatible with New Zealand cultural values. These participants emphasised that global messages about

protecting the planet, reducing waste, and preserving ecosystems aligned closely with national concerns and everyday practices. As one participant stated:

"I think it's quite aligned in New Zealand society because in New Zealand we value sustainability, ecosystems… and reducing waste. I think it's a thing that New Zealand tries to do the most." (P05)

For these individuals, global activism was not seen as irrelevant, but rather amplifying values that New Zealanders already consider important. The scale of global brands was seen as an asset, enabling wider influence and broader societal impact. As P12 explained:

"Whenever a global brand contributes to activism about protecting the earth… they have a wider reach compared to local brands that can only contribute to their local community." (P12)

Several participants also described expectations that global brands *should* pursue bigger goals due to their resources, visibility, and influence:

"I expect that they should have a bigger goal than local brands… local ones usually focus on supporting something more community-based or local." (P09)

Taken together, these findings indicate that participants assessed the importance of global brand activism using two interconnected but separate logics. On the one hand, a local-context logic informed their expectations that campaigns should address New Zealand-specific issues and daily reality; when activism appeared geographically distant or inadequately targeted, its relevance was called into question. A value-alignment logic, on the other hand, led participants to consider global sustainability campaigns significant when they reflected New Zealand's broader environmental ethos, such as ecosystem care, waste reduction, and environmental protection. In this way, the relevance of global brand activism was influenced not just by geography, but also by how closely campaigns connected with New Zealand values, expectations of accountability, and perceived capacity for real impact.

4.3.3 Campaign-specific response after priming: Patagonia – "Don't Buy This Jacket"

When participants were shown Patagonia's "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign, evaluations became more cue-based and, for several participants, less reliant on general assumptions about global brands. Rather than judging the campaign primarily through Patagonia's global origin, participants responded to campaign-level signals especially the counter-commercial framing and clear positioning against fast fashion which were interpreted as credibility cues.

For example, one participant expressed admiration for the unexpected anti-consumption message:

"it's the last thing I would expect a clothing brand to tell me don't buy this jacket. So it's a really amazing idea. Hats off to the marketing team" (P07).

This indicates that the campaign's message structure itself served as evidence of authenticity for some participants, because it appeared to run against immediate sales incentives. Participants also linked the campaign to a clearly defined and socially relevant issue (fast fashion), strengthening positive perceptions. As P06 explained:

"I never had any bad perception about Patagonia before and this one, they really know what the problems now in the world, particularly the fast fashion. They don't want people to buy too many clothes. It quite made me feel good to have good perception about them" (P06).

Patagonia was also positioned as a benchmark for activism quality relative to brands that treat issues as temporary trends:

"Patagonia… set a high standard… [vs] temporary marketing trends." (P01)

Taken together, these responses suggest that priming shifted evaluation from an origin-based assumption ("global brands are profit-driven") toward a campaign-level credibility assessment. Patagonia's campaign decreased baseline scepticism for some of participants and produced more positive affective and moral judgments than those

suggested by broad generalizations about global brands, even though participants continued to recognise the economic context of these companies.

Table 5
Summary and description of first order concepts and second order themes relating to perception toward global brand activism

Second order themes	First order concepts	Description	Example quotes
Responsibility and Influence	Perception toward Global Brand Activism	Global brands were seen as more capable and therefore more responsible for driving large-scale change, but also more scrutinised for consistency. Some participants felt their scale can make activism seem impersonal or promotional.	"Maybe the global brands should be concerned about global climate change, global issues. But then they also process the capability in developing the technology for developing new products to serve the world. So, the roles of local products and the role of global products might be different." (P03) "I have higher expectations for a global brand. I expect a lot more from them. They have more resources; they have more connections. They have a much bigger presence in the world than my local." (P07)
Relevance and Impact	Perception toward Global Brand Activism	Participants had mixed views on how relevant global activism felt in New Zealand. Some saw global campaigns as distant or insufficiently local, but many felt global sustainability activism aligned with NZ's environmental values; relevance depended on value alignment and	"it's a global brand. I sometimes wonder how relevant its work is for New Zealand" (P07) "I think it's quite aligned in New Zealand society because in New Zealand we value sustainability, ecosystems… and reducing waste. I think it's a thing that New Zealand tries to do the most." (P05)

		expected scale, not just locality.	
Campaign-specific evaluation after priming (Patagonia: "Don't Buy This Jacket")	Perception toward Global Brand Activism	Priming with Patagonia's campaign increased specificity and positivity, as the anti-consumption message enhanced credibility and reduced default scepticism.	"it's the last thing I would expect a clothing brand to tell me don't buy this jacket… Hats off to the marketing team." (P07) "I never had any bad perception about Patagonia before… particularly the fast fashion… It quite made me feel good to have good perception about them." (P06) "Patagonia… set a high standard… [vs] temporary marketing trends." (P01)

4.4 Perception toward Local Brand Activism

Participants stated that although they linked global brands to authority, and ethical responsibility, these same attributes frequently made global activism seem distant or disconnected from local reality. In contrast, local brands were perceived as more relatable, grounded, and culturally aligned with consumers' everyday lives. Participants believed that local companies possess an intimate understanding of community values and social contexts, which allowed their activism to appear more authentic and emotionally resonant.

This shift in perspective highlights how perceptions of brand authenticity and impact are influenced not only by what brands stand for, but also by where they operate and whom they serve. The following dimension, Cultural and Emotional Resonance, explores how participants interpreted the activism of local brands, particularly in terms of their cultural and emotional resonance.

4.4.1 Cultural and Emotional Resonance

Participants expressed a clear emotional connection with local brands and local identity, emphasizing how such activism reflected shared New Zealand values and community belonging and everyday experiences. Local brands were viewed as being "closer to their market" and more capable of addressing issues that reflect the realities of New Zealand society. This proximity fostered a sense of authenticity and belonging among consumers. As one participant described,

"Local brands are probably more closer to their market. To this small market in a community so they can tackle local issues and make a real impact to them that feels more real to their people." (P04)

Participants also associated local brands with New Zealand identity, often linked to honesty, community spirit, and care for the environment. They viewed local companies as transparent, socially responsible, and more attuned to national values. One participant shared,

"I like New Zealand companies to support New Zealand. So that's always a good thing. I support the idea straight away of conserving water and energy. I think that's necessary and also to help change people's idea of what they think about their everyday habits." (P11)

In local brand activism, trust, pride, and moral credibility were strengthened by this emotional and cultural congruence. Campaigns like Ecostore's No Laundry Day were cited as examples of genuine efforts to engage local audiences and promote sustainable habits in relatable ways. Another participant commented,

"Since it's a local brand, I believe that they are in tune with New Zealand values. And again, it's in their campaign; they talk about things like water consumption in New Zealand. So that's a good transparency that they're giving to their customers." (P12)

Overall, participants regarded local brand activism as more emotionally significant and culturally rooted, enhancing the sense of connection and belonging between the values of brand activism campaigns and the lived experiences of New Zealand consumers.

4.4.2 Awareness Raising but Limited Scale and Impact

Despite participants' strong emotional connection to local brands, they often framed local brand activism as modest in scale, oriented toward everyday habit change

rather than large-scale transformation. In this sense, local campaigns were valued for encouraging practical reflection and small behavioural adjustments. P11, for example, described local activism as supporting conservation and influencing routine thinking:

"I support the idea straight away of conserving water and energy… to help change people's idea of what they think about their everyday habits" (P11).

Similarly, P12 emphasised that local initiatives were perceived as more genuine precisely because they aimed to shift consumption practices rather than drive sales:

"their messaging is towards changing the consumption behavior… , not the buying behavior or not the purchasing behavior of their consumers."(P12).

Together, these accounts suggest that participants understood local activism as authentic and constructive, but inherently smaller in ambition and intended outcomes.

At the same time, some participants questioned whether these awareness-oriented initiatives produce measurable behavioural impact. While campaigns were seen as well-intentioned and educational, they were sometimes interpreted as symbolic prompts that do not necessarily translate into observable reductions in behaviour. P03 illustrated this scepticism when reflecting on "No Laundry Day," suggesting that the message may not lead to actual change:

"it doesn't mean that there would be less laundry" (P03).

This perspective highlights a perceived gap between campaign intention and practical outcome, where awareness may increase without substantially altering routines.

Nevertheless, participants still expressed appreciation for the educational value and local relevance of these campaigns. As P11 noted, local initiatives were meaningful because they teach consumers something tangible and relatable:

"You learn something from the campaign as well… It's actually teaching you a little bit" (P11).

Overall, participants tended to evaluate local brand activism as authentic and community-oriented, with strengths in awareness raising and everyday learning, yet limited in scale (modest behavioural aims) and impact (uncertain measurable change) compared with what they expected from larger global actors.

The preceding themes illustrate how participants distinguished between the moral responsibility and global influence of international brands and the authenticity and community focus of local ones. While global brand activism was admired for its capacity to address large-scale challenges, it was often perceived as distant or commercially motivated. In contrast, local brand activism fostered emotional connection and cultural resonance but was viewed as limited in scale and impact.

Together, these insights highlight that participants' evaluations were shaped not only by what brands advocated for, but also by where the activism originated and how it aligned with consumers' lived experiences. This led participants to make explicit comparisons between global and local initiatives, assessing which type of brand activism they found more trustworthy, relevant, and impactful. The following main theme, Comparative Perceptions of Global and Local Brand Activism, explores how participants negotiated these contrasts and formed judgments about the authenticity and effectiveness of activism across different brand origin and contexts.

4.4.3 Campaign-specific response after priming: Ecostore – "No Laundry Day"

After participants were shown Ecostore's "No Laundry Day" campaign, their evaluations became more campaign-specific and, in some cases, more mixed than their general assumptions about local brand activism. Some participants expressed scepticism about the persuasiveness of the message and questioned whether the campaign relied on promotional exaggeration, noting that *"They would have to exaggerate a little bit to advertise,"* and describing the campaign as *"difficult to say how I feel… not impress…" (P03).*

At the same time, other participants interpreted the campaign as a genuine extension of Ecostore's values and mission, emphasising that the messaging focused on changing consumption behaviour rather than encouraging purchases:

“they're really genuine about their store company values and mission… their messaging is towards changing the consumption behavior… not the buying behavior” (P11).

Taken together, these responses indicate that local brand origin alone did not guarantee uniformly positive evaluations. Priming shifted some judgements from origin-based trust (“local brands feel authentic”) toward campaign-level plausibility testing (“is the message convincing and likely to change behaviour?”). As a result, Ecostore’s campaign produced both supportive and sceptical interpretations, demonstrating that credibility is ultimately negotiated at the campaign level rather than determined solely by brand origin.

Table 6
Summary and description of first order concepts and second order themes relating to perception toward local brand activism

Second order themes	First order concepts	Description	Example quotes
Cultural and Emotional Resonance	Perception toward Local Brand Activism	Participants linked local brands with cultural closeness and emotional connection. Local activism was seen as aligned with NZ values (community, environmental care, honesty), which strengthened authenticity, "Kiwi identity," and trust.	"Local brands are probably more closer to their market. To this small market in a community so they can tackle local issues and make a real impact to them that feels more real to their people." (P04) "I like New Zealand companies to support New Zealand. So that's always a good thing. I support the idea straight away of conserving water and energy. I think that's necessary and also to help change people's idea of what they think about their everyday habits." (P11)
Awareness Raising but Limited Scale and Impact	Perception toward Local Brand Activism	Local brand activism is perceived as authentic and community-oriented, primarily raising awareness and encouraging small everyday habit changes. However, participants questioned whether these campaigns deliver measurable behavioural impact, often viewing outcomes as modest or	"it doesn't mean that there would be less laundry" (P03). "I support the idea straight away of conserving water and energy… to help change people's idea of what they think about their everyday habits" (P11).

		symbolic rather than transformative.	
Campaign-specific evaluation after priming (Ecostore: "No Laundry Day")	Perception toward Local Brand Activism	After viewing the campaign, participants' evaluations became more mixed: some questioned whether the message was exaggerated or unconvincing, while others viewed it as genuine values-led activism aimed at changing consumption behaviour rather than driving purchases.	"They would have to exaggerate a little bit to advertise… it's difficult to say how I feel… not impress…" (P03) "They're really genuine about their company values and mission… their messaging is towards changing the consumption behavior… not the buying behavior." (P11)

4.5 Comparative Perceptions of Global and Local Brand Activism

When comparing both global and local brand activism together, participants often made direct comparisons between the two, evaluating which appeared more authentic, trustworthy, emotional connection and relevant to their lives. Their reflections revealed a nuanced understanding of how brand scale and proximity influence perceived sincerity and impact.

4.5.1 Perceived Differences in Authenticity and Trust

Participants drew clear distinctions between global and local brands in terms of authenticity, transparency, and accountability. They generally trusted local brands more, perceiving them as more accountable and visible within the community. Because local companies were seen as closer to consumers and more directly affected by their reputation, participants believed their activism carried a higher degree of sincerity and moral responsibility. As one participant noted,

"I have more trust of local brands than global ones because local brands are more accountable. You know that there's more for them to lose if they get their image wrong in New Zealand. Global brands, we're just one market of many." (P10)

While participants acknowledged that global brands have greater resources and visibility, they also emphasised that the way each brand strategizes its activism strongly influences how its authenticity is perceived. One participant explained,

"I will judge them differently. Depends how global companies and local companies do their strategy in terms of brand activism." (P12)

These reflections indicate that trust was shaped by proximity and perceived accountability rather than by scale or prestige. Local brands earned credibility through relational closeness and visible engagement, whereas global brands were often evaluated through a more critical lens that questioned their motives. Overall, participants' comparisons reveal that authenticity is relational and context-dependent, grounded in how directly a brand's activism connects to consumers' social and moral environment.

4.5.2 Perceived Differences in Emotional Connection

Participants also differentiated global and local brand activism in terms of emotional closeness and relational warmth. Local brands were often described as personally relatable and emotionally resonant, partly because they represented shared community values and were perceived to understand local realities. This familiarity strengthened participants' sense of connection, belonging, and empathy toward local initiatives. As one participant reflected,

"The local brands, I think one thing that's good about them is they know what they are doing because they are sometimes the people in that community that want to spread those awareness from that community." (P06)

By contrast, when participants spoke about global brands, their tone was more ambivalent. While they continued to purchase global products and respected their innovation, they felt that such brands lacked emotional intimacy or cultural alignment. One participant captured this dual feeling by saying,

"I do prefer the local things. I can still use and go for global things as I want to. I'm not someone who's just thinking local." (P10)

This comment reflects how participants could value global brands for their practicality or prestige while still feeling a stronger emotional bond with local ones. Global activism was often seen as aspirational rather than relational, admired from a distance but less capable of creating a sense of shared identity or belonging. Overall, participants' comparisons suggest that emotional connection in brand activism depends on perceived proximity and shared social meaning, which make activism feel genuine and personally relevant.

4.5.3 Perceived Differences in Impact and Relevance

Rather than focusing only on scale, participants evaluated the effectiveness and contextual fit of global and local brand activism. Their reflections revealed that impact was not defined merely by visibility or resources but by how relevant and meaningful activism felt within their social environment. Global brands were recognised for their visibility and resources but were often expected to focus on large-scale issues rather than local concerns. As one participant noted,

"Maybe the global brands should be concerned about global climate change, global issues." (P03)

This comment illustrates participants' view that global brands are expected to lead on global causes, yet their efforts were often perceived as less connected to everyday New Zealand life. Another participant questioned whether such activism translated meaningfully to their own context:

"It's a global brand. I sometimes wonder how relevant its work is for New Zealand." (P07)

These reflections highlight how global activism, while powerful in reach, risked lacking contextual resonance. Participants acknowledged the symbolic importance of global

initiatives but tended to value activism that linked to their personal or national experience. One participant explained,

"I believe global brands because they have the more resources to be able to contribute in terms of brand activists, activism, et cetera. Unlike local brands who don't have like the financial resources or the operational resources as compared to like a global company." (P12)

This statement captures participants' balanced perspective that recognizing the potential of global brands to make broad contributions while also understanding the constraints local brands face. Overall, participants viewed global activism as high in visibility but lower in contextual relevance, and local activism as limited in scale but more relatable and meaningful. The comparison underscores how consumers evaluate brand activism not only by its scope but by how effectively it connects to the lived experiences and values of their community.

Table 7

Summary and description of first order concepts and second order themes relating to comparative perceptions of global and local brand activism

Second order themes	First order concepts	Description	Example quotes
Perceived Differences in Authenticity and Trust	Comparative Perceptions of Global and Local Brand Activism	Participants saw local and global brands as differing in authenticity and accountability. Local brands were generally trusted more due to greater visibility and perceived responsibility, while global brands were sometimes seen as distant or profit-driven, prompting more scepticism.	"I have more trust of local brands than global ones because local brands are more accountable. You know that there's more for them to lose if they get their image wrong in New Zealand. Global brands, we're just one market of many." (P10) "I will judge them differently. Depends how global companies and local companies do their strategy in terms of brand activism." (P12)
Perceived Differences in Emotional Connection	Comparative Perceptions of Global and Local Brand Activism	Emotional attachment was stronger for local brands (closeness and belonging), while global brands were admired for scale and innovation but felt more distant and aspirational.	"The local brands I think one thing that's good about them is they know what they are doing because they are sometimes the people in that community that want to spread those awareness from that community." (P06) "I do prefer the local things. I can still use and go for global things as I want to. I'm not someone who's just thinking local." (P10)
Perceived Differences	Comparative Perceptions	Participants perceived differences in both impact and relevance	"Maybe the global brands should be concerned about

in Impact and Relevance	of Global and Local Brand Activism	across brand types. Global brands were seen as capable of wider-scale influence, while local brands felt more locally meaningful and community-grounded.	global climate change, global issues." (P03) "it's a global brand. I sometimes wonder how relevant its work is for New Zealand" (P07) "I believe global brands because they have the more resources to be able to contribute in terms of brand activists, activism, et cetera. Unlike local brands who doesn't have like the financial resources or the operational resources as compared to like a global company." (P12)

4.6 Consumer Intention towards Brand Activism

Although participants rarely articulated buycott or boycott intentions through explicit comparisons between global and local brands, their reasoning suggested that brand origin sometimes contributed to how they evaluated activism. Decisions to support, avoid, or disengage from brand activism were shaped by expectations around magnitude, authenticity, and contextual significance that emerged in earlier reflections. Alongside other evaluative cues, brand origin functioned as an interpretive lens that could subtly inform these intentions, even when not explicitly stated.

Participants' reflections revealed three main patterns of behavioural intention in response to brand activism: Buycott (Support), Boycott (Avoidance), and Campaign-Irrelevant. These intentions were shaped by participants' perceptions of authenticity, ethical alignment, and the perceived relevance of activist messages to their own values and consumption context.

4.6.1 Buycott Intention (Support)

Participants expressed clear intentions to support brands whose activism aligned with their personal values or addressed meaningful social concerns. For these individuals, authentic activism enhanced their motivation to purchase or advocate for the brand. As one participant noted:

“Because I think I want to buy a brand that has good activism in the sense that they raise social issues in an authentic way.” (P01)

Others emphasised that activism strengthened their emotional connection to brands they already liked. For instance:

“Yeah, definitely. I think I’ll be more motivated because I already like their products, but knowing they take a stand on big issues makes me feel like I want to support.” (P04)

Supportive behaviour also extended beyond buying. Several participants said they would promote the brand through social or interpersonal channels:

“I’ll look into the campaign whether the campaign sounds reasonable and whether it’s something that should be supported… if it helps raise more awareness… I’ll buy the product and also spread the word about their brand activism.” (P09)

“If I don’t need the product… I’ll still support them in other ways like telling other people or posting about it on my social media to show support.” (P09)

A particularly strong pattern in the data was participants’ preference for supporting local brands. Unlike earlier reflections about authenticity (where global versus local differences were often implicit), participants here explicitly described a greater willingness to buycott local companies. Local activism generated feelings of moral satisfaction, fairness, and community uplift. As one participant stated:

“I’d probably go with the local ones, even though they might not be as popular as global brands. I’d still keep supporting the local brand.” (P09)

Another participant similarly emphasised the emotional and ethical value of supporting smaller businesses with fewer resources:

“I would more if I supported a local business who doesn't have the millions that Patagonia has. Yeah, I would feel better about it. I do prefer to buy local if I can afford it.” (P07)

These explicit statements reinforce participants’ earlier reasoning that global brands were viewed as capable of large-scale influence, but local brands were associated with sincerity, fairness, and community relevance. Together, these perceptions directly shaped buycott intentions, with many participants expressing a stronger personal and moral motivation to support local activism where possible.

4.6.2 Boycott Intention (Avoidance)

Boycott intentions emerged when participants perceived a disconnect between the brand’s activism and their own ethical expectations. For some, this manifested as a quiet withdrawal without public criticism. For example:

“If the campaign doesn’t really make me feel like I should support the brand, then I’d probably avoid buying their products… I’d just quietly avoid using their products myself.” (P09)

In other instances, participants described stronger moral objections, especially when brand decisions were viewed as irresponsible or harmful:

“If a brand makes such poor decisions… it shows a real lack of judgment… Only irresponsible people would make decisions that support war or exploitation.” (P11)

Boycott behaviour was framed as a principled refusal rather than a reactive response. Participants expected activism to align with coherent values, and misalignment triggered moral distancing.

Although participants did not explicitly articulate different boycott behaviours for global versus local brands, their earlier reasoning indicated that global brands were held to higher standards due to their reach, influence, and visibility. This meant that global brands were more likely to trigger disappointment or moral resistance when their actions were perceived as inconsistent. In contrast, participants tended to withdraw more quietly from local brands, whose limited resources appeared to soften expectations of accountability.

4.6.3 Campaign Irrelevance

A subset of participants perceived brand activism as unrelated to their purchasing decisions. For these individuals, product attributes such as design, quality, or utility remained the primary basis for choice. As one participant noted:

"People might not think about the campaign… the feature they consider would be the design of the package… their campaigns would be an additional factor." (P03)

Others acknowledged the value of activism but felt it did not outweigh practical considerations:

"I probably judge the campaign… but I'd judge it more on the benefits or outcomes whether it's actually helping people… or if it's just something they're doing because it's trendy." (P09)

Even positive impressions of activism were insufficient to influence purchase for some respondents:

"They're doing all this great activism work… but is it going to tip me over the edge towards buying it? No." (P07)

In these cases, brand origin played minimal direct role in behavioural decisions. However, earlier reflections showed that irrelevance often stemmed from different sources across global and local brands. Global activism was sometimes seen as distant from everyday life in New Zealand, whereas local activism was relatable but perceived as too small-scale to influence behaviour. These contextual differences helped explain why activism did not always translate into action.

Across supportive, avoidant, and neutral responses, consumer intention toward brand activism was shaped by value alignment, perceived sincerity, and assessments of moral coherence. While participants did not consistently frame their behaviours through explicit global–local comparisons, their earlier evaluations revealed that brand origin subtly shaped how activism was interpreted. Global brands were associated with greater capacity and therefore higher accountability, which amplified both support and scrutiny. Local brands, conversely, elicited strong buycott intentions due to perceptions of authenticity, community relevance, and resource scarcity, while generating more muted forms of disengagement when expectations were not met. These origin-based assumptions operated as a latent evaluative layer, shaping how participants translated meanings into behavioural outcomes.

Table 8
Summary and description of first order concepts and second order themes relating to consumer intention towards brand activism

Second order themes	First order concepts	Description	Example quotes
Buycott Intention	Consumer intention towards brand activism	Participants supported or purchased from brands whose activism matched their values. Perceived authenticity, trust, and emotional resonance drove buycott intentions and positive word-of-mouth.	"Because I think I want to buy a brand that has a good activism in the sense that they raise social issues in an authentic way" (P01) "I would more if I supported a local business who doesn't have the millions that Patagonia has. Yeah, I would feel better about it. I do prefer to buy local if I can afford it." (P07)
Boycott Intention	Consumer intention towards brand activism	Boycott intentions emerged when activism violated consumers' moral standards. Perceived ethical conflict triggered emotional rejection, leading to deliberate avoidance and disengagement.	"I think if the campaign doesn't really make me feel like I should support the brand, then I'd probably avoid buying their products. However, I wouldn't insult them or say negative things about them. I'd just quietly avoid using their products myself." (P09) "If a brand makes such poor decisions that people like me start choosing not to use it, it shows a real lack of judgment from those managing it. Only irresponsible people would make decisions that support war or exploitation. That's

			how I see it if I were running a brand, I would make sure it aligns with my values." (P11)
Campaign Irrelevance	Consumer intention towards brand activism	Some participants viewed activism as peripheral to purchase decisions, prioritising price, quality, and functionality instead.	"I probably judge the campaign, but not based on whether it's from a local or global brand. I'd judge it more on the benefits or the outcomes of that specific campaign whether it's actually helping people or working toward a meaningful goal, or if it's just something they're doing because it's trendy and they want attention from customers." (P09) "I should buy it because they're doing all this great activism work in another part of the world? Probably not. I might look at the brand in a more favourable way over time. But is it at that point of purchase? Is it going to tip me over the edge towards buying it? No." (P07)

4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented findings from twelve semi-structured interviews across five main themes: consumers' perception of brand activism, perceptions toward global brand activism, perceptions toward local brand activism, comparative perceptions, and consumer intentions. Across themes, participants evaluated activism primarily through perceived authenticity, focusing on cues such as alignment between activist messaging and organisational behaviour, perceived sincerity of motives, issue knowledge, and signs of sustained commitment. When these cues were present, activism strengthened trust and positive affect; when activism appeared vague, opportunistic, or inconsistent, it triggered scepticism and reputational doubt.

A key comparative pattern is that brand origin influenced the standards applied. Global brands were frequently assessed under stricter expectations because participants assumed they have greater resources, visibility, and responsibility and therefore less excuse for superficial or performative action. At the same time, global activism was sometimes perceived as culturally distant even when the issue was globally important (e.g., climate change), participants questioned whether global campaigns meaningfully connected to New Zealand consumers' lived realities. This "distance" reduced emotional resonance and made some activism feel generic, depoliticised, or symbolic rather than locally meaningful. At the same time, the Patagonia campaign demonstrated that global-brand scepticism was not fixed when participants evaluated a concrete campaign with counter-commercial framing and clear issue focus, judgements often became more favourable and campaign-driven rather than origin-driven.

By contrast, local brand activism was often described as more community-embedded and easier to trust, because local brands were seen as closer to everyday life and better positioned to understand local norms and concerns. Participants valued this cultural proximity and the sense of "shared value" which could enhance credibility and emotional connection. However, local origin did not guarantee uniformly positive evaluations. When primed with Ecostore's campaign, participants scrutinised message plausibility and behavioural feasibility, resulting in mixed responses that depended on campaign-level credibility cues.

These evaluations translated into three broad forms of consumer intention. buycotting when activism matched personal values and seemed sincere; boycotting when it felt hypocritical or morally wrong; and irrelevance when activism was detached from purchase decisions, with price and quality taking priority unless the issue became personally salient.

Overall, participants described New Zealand evaluations of brand activism as conditional rather than uniform. Global brands were held to higher standards and faced heavier scrutiny, whereas local brands were more readily trusted due to perceived proximity but were judged in terms of what seemed feasible and impactful at the

campaign level. Taken together, these responses reflect a capability closeness trade-off in how activism is assessed.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

This chapter addresses the overall aim of the thesis, which is to examine how global and local brand activism shape consumers' perceptions and responses in Aotearoa New Zealand. Drawing on the thematic analysis of twelve semi-structured interviews, it discusses the findings in relation to existing literature on brand activism, authenticity, global–local brand relationships, and political consumerism. The chapter first explores how participants made sense of brand activism through the lens of authenticity, then examines their perceptions of global and local activist brands and finally considers how these perceptions translated into three broad forms of consumer intention: buycott, boycott, and campaign irrelevance. Collectively, these themes offer a comprehensive comprehension of how consumers in New Zealand evaluate, embrace, reject, or overlook brand activism in their daily lives.

5.2 Consumers' Perception of Brand Activism

Core mechanism: authenticity cues as a decision rule

A central contribution of this study is showing that participants did not treat "authenticity" as an abstract attitude. They employed authenticity as a decision rule that guided their interpretation of brand activism. Their accounts strongly resonate with Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) conceptualisation of authentic brand activism as the alignment between a brand's explicit purpose and values, its activist marketing messages, and its prosocial corporate practices. When this alignment was visible, participants tended to describe activism as real and trustworthy. In contrast, they immediately suspected "woke-washing" or opportunistic promotion when messaging seemed disconnected from the brand's history or core identity.

What mattered most in this NZ context (not all dimensions mattered equally)

While prior work identifies multiple dimensions used to evaluate the authenticity of brand activism such as fit, motivation, practice, sacrifice, inclusion, and

context sensitivity (Mirzaei et al., 2022). The findings from this New Zealand context suggest that participants did not weigh all cues equally. Instead, they relied most strongly on three signals when judging activism: evidence of practice (action beyond messaging), signs of sacrifice or constraint (whether the stance seemed to limit easy profit-seeking), and clarity of motive (values-led rather than trend-led). This aligns with Saracevic and Schlegelmilch's (2024) view of authenticity as perceived genuineness and reliability, while extending it by showing how genuineness was inferred in practice: participants used visible practice and sacrifice-like signals as credibility shortcuts.

Performative activism: scepticism triggered by specific cues, not by activism itself

Participants' scepticism resembled the "woke-washing" critique discussed in contemporary brand activism literature (Vredenburg et al., 2020) and the argument that performative activism can erode credibility (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). However, the findings refine this by demonstrating that scepticism was not uniformly directed at activism. It was activated by cues notably trend-chasing, weak evidence of action, and messaging that looked like promotional differentiation. In this sense, consumers in this study operated as "active moral evaluators" (Moorman, 2020), but their evaluations were conditional and cue-driven rather than purely cynical. A key boundary condition emerging from the data is that favourable evaluations of activism depended on the presence of credibility cues particularly perceived constraint/sacrifice and issue specificity whereas scepticism intensified when campaigns relied on generalised, fashionable, or ambiguous cause messaging that could be interpreted as reputational marketing, regardless of cause popularity.

5.3 Perceptions toward Global Brand Activism

Moderator: brand scale increased both responsibility expectations and scrutiny

Participants framed global brands as influential actors because of their resources and reach, using scale as a lens that both raised responsibility expectations and intensified scrutiny (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Moorman, 2020; Tsougkou et al., 2024). The key contribution here is specifying the moderating role of “globalness”: participants used global scale as a lens that intensified both (a) what brands should do and (b) how closely they should be interrogated. In other words, globalness did not automatically trigger rejection. It raised the standard participants applied. When participants focused on corporate overheads and profit imperatives, global activism was scrutinised as potentially strategic self-interest an evaluation consistent with research showing perceived motivation is pivotal to global activist brand attitudes (Tsougkou et al., 2024). When participants focused on capability and influence, global brands were expected to lead on systemic issues (Moorman, 2020), meaning activism carried greater moral weight.

Beyond scale, participants evaluated global brand activism against stricter authenticity standards. They expected coherence between activist messaging and corporate behaviour, transparent communication of intent and commitments, and evidence of sustained organisational engagement rather than short-lived campaigns. These expectations align with brand activism research linking perceived authenticity to consistency across brand purpose, activist communication, and prosocial practice (Vredenburg et al., 2020). They also reflect prior work showing that authenticity judgements rely on cues such as perceived fit and motivation, and critically a willingness to incur meaningful costs or trade-offs (“sacrifice”) rather than treating activism as symbolic positioning (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Saracevic & Schlegelmilch, 2024). Participants’ emphasis on motive and follow-through is consistent with Moorman’s (2020) argument that global brands are particularly exposed to accusations of woke-washing because their activism is highly visible, politicised, and easily

compared across markets. It also resonates with Tsougkou et al.'s (2024) finding that attitudes toward global brand activists are shaped not only by ideology and prior brand attitudes, but by whether activism is perceived as genuine concern or strategic self-interest. In this study, perceived motivation functioned as an implicit filter through which participants judged whether global activism was credible and worthy of support.

Patagonia as a "hard test" case and the fairness logic of scale

Patagonia also matters methodologically as a "hard test" case for global brand activism. Unlike global brands that have been repeatedly accused of "woke-washing," Patagonia is widely positioned as a credible activist brand with a relatively coherent sustainability identity. This indicates that any scepticism voiced by participants cannot be exclusively linked to notions of hypocrisy or a dubious political history but may instead signify a more broader "globalness" perspective, where scale and profit motives provoke curiosity regardless of brand reputation. Participants described Patagonia as "very strong about the environment" (P11) and suggested it "set a high standard" compared with brands that use social issues as "temporary marketing trends" (P01). This relatively positive assessment aligns with research defining authentic brand activism as congruence between brand purpose/values, activist messaging, and prosocial actions (Vredenburg et al., 2020), as well as multidimensional perspectives emphasising alignment, practice, and sacrifice (Mirzaei et al., 2022).

At the same time, participants' comparisons revealed a fairness-oriented rationale linked to scale. Some favoured endorsing local enterprises because they "don't have the millions that Patagonia has" (P07), whereas others argued that global brands with extensive resources "should" give back to the community and environment (P06). In other words, globalness shaped the standards applied rather than determining scepticism. Evaluations were subsequently organised around authenticity cues and perceived motivations, consistent with evidence that consumer responses to global brand activists are strongly influenced by perceived motives (Tsougkou et al., 2024). Where concerns were expressed, they were often less about rejecting the cause and more about whether activism translated into locally meaningful outcomes in Aotearoa New Zealand—especially when campaigns felt generic or detached from local context.

Cultural distance and the importance of local resonance

Building on this conditionality, a notable pattern was participants' concern about the cultural distance of global brand activism. While participants acknowledged the broad societal relevance of global issues such as climate change, they questioned whether global initiatives meaningfully resonated with New Zealand consumers' lived realities. Drawing on Scharlach's (2024) depoliticisation framework (developed in the context of platforms' corporate social initiatives), this suggests that some global campaigns may be interpreted as distancing the brand from conflict and power struggles, thereby weakening emotional and political resonance. The present study extends this insight by showing that perceived cultural detachment can also weaken perceived authenticity in the context of brand activism. When campaigns appeared generic, decontextualised, or insufficiently tailored to the Aotearoa New Zealand context, participants were less likely to perceive them as sincere or morally grounded—even when they agreed with the underlying cause. Global activism was viewed as more legitimate when it embedded localised meaning and recognised the specificity of New Zealand social and environmental concerns.

Trend-based activism and temporal inconsistency as warning signs

Participants were also especially wary of one-off or trend-based activism, which they commonly linked to large global companies seeking reputational or commercial benefit from popular cultural movements. Global campaigns that appeared to follow marketing trends, rather than reflect sustained organisational change, were frequently interpreted as examples of purpose-washing. This perspective aligns with critiques of activism as a marketing-led tactic in which activist rhetoric becomes a campaignable asset without being embedded into core business practice (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Temporal inconsistency was a salient warning sign: when activism emerged only during periods of heightened public attention and then faded, it was read as strategic opportunism rather than sustained moral commitment.

Overall, global brand activism was interpreted within a delicate tension. On one hand, global brands were seen as uniquely positioned to drive meaningful change because of their scale, visibility, and resources. On the other, that same scale raised expectations and intensified scrutiny. The findings suggest that consumers do not evaluate global brand activism on message content alone. Rather, they draw on multiple cues brand scale, perceived motives, authenticity (including sacrifice and consistency),

cultural resonance in Aotearoa New Zealand, and endurance over time to decide whether activism is credible and worthy of support.

5.4 Perceptions toward Local Brand Activism

Moderator: localness functioned as an authenticity cue but not a guarantee

Local activist brands were perceived as closer, more familiar, and more embedded in participants' everyday environments. Participants frequently described local brands as "part of the community". This resonates with research on perceived brand localness, which frames local brands as symbolising local values and being closely associated with local culture and communities (Safeer et al., 2022). A key contribution of this study is showing that localness itself acted as an authenticity cue. Participants often inferred sincerity from local embeddedness and perceived accountability. This resonates with authenticity work linking heritage and sincerity to credibility (Napoli et al., 2014) and with community embeddedness perspectives where proximity increases perceived accountability (Spence, 2004; Lähdesmäki et al., 2019). However, local activism was not accepted uncritically. The study adds nuance by showing that participants often applied a feasibility test to local campaigns especially when activism required behavioural change. When the campaign's behavioural logic felt impractical or its outcomes uncertain, participants expressed mixed responses. Importantly, participants often interpreted such shortcomings as capacity limitations rather than cynical intent, which helps explain why disengagement from local brands was often moderated rather than punitive

5.5 Comparative Perceptions of Global and Local Brand Activism

Contribution: an "asymmetrical evaluative framework," not a simple preference

Participants' comparative judgements indicate an asymmetrical but coherent evaluative framework rather than a simple preference for either global or local activism. Global brands were assessed through a capacity-and-responsibility lens, which

combined higher expectations with heightened scrutiny. Local brands, by contrast, were assessed through a proximity-and-accountability lens, where perceived closeness to community fostered trust while also lowering scale-based expectations. This pattern aligns with research on perceived brand globalness and localness (Liu et al., 2021; Safeer et al., 2022) and extends it by showing how these perceptions organise evaluations of activism: perceived capacity shaped what global brands were expected to deliver, while perceived closeness shaped baseline trust for local brands.

A second mechanism emerging from comparison is fairness reasoning. Participants sometimes expressed moral satisfaction in supporting local brands precisely because they were seen as the "smaller player" operating with fewer resources, while simultaneously expecting global brands to "give back" because of their scale and influence. This indicates that perceived scale shaped not only scepticism but also moral expectations about what brands owe to society, complementing evidence that perceived motivation is pivotal in evaluations of global activist brands (Tsougkou et al., 2024).

This asymmetry was especially visible in how participants applied authenticity standards. Global activist brands were expected to demonstrate strong alignment between activist claims, corporate practice, and long-term strategic direction, consistent with work emphasising coherence, motivation, and sacrifice as central to authentic brand activism (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Mirzaei et al., 2022; Saracevic & Schlegelmilch, 2024). Local brands were granted greater latitude: participants were more willing to accept smaller-scale impact, gradual progress, or occasional inconsistency if the brand was perceived as grounded in local values and operating within real constraints. As one participant summarised, "I'd probably go with the local ones… I'd keep supporting the local brand" (P09). In this sense, authenticity expectations were not uniform; they varied with perceptions of capacity and structural position.

Relatedly, perceived localness functioned as an authenticity cue in its own right. Participants frequently described local brands as "closer," "more real," or "part of the community," suggesting that proximity generated credibility even when local interventions were modest. This resonates with research linking brand localness to authenticity and credibility through associations with heritage, continuity, and moral proximity (Napoli et al., 2014; Safeer et al., 2021). Participants' accounts also implied

a relational obligation: supporting local activism was framed as contributing back to one's community, whereas global activism was evaluated less relationally and more through abstract standards of responsibility, impact, and consistency.

Finally, participants integrated scale, place, and impact when deciding whether activism was worth supporting. Global campaigns were valued for their potential to drive systemic change but criticised when they felt culturally distant from Aotearoa New Zealand or detached from everyday practice. Local activism was valued for contextual relevance and everyday resonance, even when broader structural impact was perceived as limited. Taken together, these findings suggest consumers do not rank global and local activist brands on a single continuum of "better" activism. Instead, they use a comparative framework that weights capacity, authenticity, cultural embeddedness, and fairness differently across global and local contexts (Safeer et al., 2022).

5.6 Consumer Intention towards Brand Activism

Participants' intentions toward brand activism were best characterised as conditional rather than uniformly supportive or resistant. Responses were shaped by perceived authenticity, relevance, and perceived effectiveness, consistent with research showing that consumer reactions to brand activism and corporate political advocacy vary with perceived congruence, credibility, and motivation (Moorman, 2020; Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020; Cammarota et al., 2023).

Across narratives, three forms of intention emerged: buycott**,** boycott, and what is conceptualised here as campaign irrelevance. The first two align with political consumerism scholarship distinguishing boycotting (withdrawing purchases to punish objectionable practices) and buycotting (purchasing to reward value-aligned behaviour) (Friedman, 1996, 1999; Micheletti, 2003; Neilson, 2010).

Buycott intentions reflected willingness to actively support brands whose activism was perceived as authentic, aligned with the brand's core identity, and connected to issues participants personally cared about. Participants were more inclined to buycott when the cause felt close to their lives, communities, or social values often favouring local activist brands perceived as "doing their best" within the community,

and supporting global brands when campaigns were translated into concrete, locally meaningful initiatives in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Boycott intentions arose through two routes. The first was perceived inauthenticity**,** where activism was read as opportunistic, misaligned with corporate behaviour, or indicative of woke-washing/purpose-washing. Under such conditions, participants described withdrawing patronage, avoiding products, or warning others—patterns consistent with conceptualisations of boycott as market withdrawal to sanction irresponsible conduct (Friedman, 1999; Hoffmann et al., 2018) and with evidence that misaligned activism can escalate punitive consumer responses (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018).

A second route to boycott was value conflict. In this pathway, boycott was not primarily a reaction to hypocrisy but a response to activist positions participants judged morally unacceptable. As P11 explained:
"If a brand makes such poor decisions that people like me start choosing not to use it, it shows a real lack of judgment from those managing it. Only irresponsible people would make decisions that support war or exploitation. That's how I see it if I were running a brand, I would make sure it aligns with my values." (P11)
This account reflects a value-driven boycott logic in which consumers withdraw support to protect moral identity and maintain alignment between personal ethics and marketplace behaviour.

These boycott intentions were discussed more frequently in relation to global brands, where scale and visibility amplified perceived inconsistencies and intensified suspicions of profit-first motives (e.g., reputation management or market expansion). Local brands were less often positioned as targets of outright boycott; shortcomings in local activism were more commonly interpreted as capacity-related rather than bad faith, except where behaviour was perceived as clearly exploitative or hypocritical.

A third pattern, campaign irrelevance captures situations in which participants noticed an activist message but felt no motivation to either support or oppose the brand. Campaigns were described as generic, distant from everyday life, or unlikely to produce concrete outcomes. In addition, participants sometimes prioritised immediate constraints (e.g., financial limits, competing responsibilities, or limited cognitive

capacity), such that even agreement with a cause did not translate into behavioural change. This resonates with research documenting an attitude–behaviour gap in ethical and sustainable consumption when practical trade-offs intervene (Auger & Devinney, 2007; Carrington et al., 2010). Conceptually, campaign irrelevance extends dominant political consumerism accounts by highlighting non-response as a meaningful outcome: activism may be acknowledged yet treated as background noise when it lacks personal relevance or when pragmatic constraints dominate.

5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has addressed the overall aim of the thesis, which is to examine how global and local brand activism shape consumers' perceptions and responses in Aotearoa New Zealand. It has discussed the findings in relation to existing literature on brand activism, authenticity, and global–local brand relationships (e.g., Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020; Mirzaei et al., 2022; Tsougkou et al., 2024). The analysis showed that consumers interpret and evaluate activist communications primarily through the lens of authenticity, drawing on perceived alignment between brand values, activist messaging, and organisational practice, in line with recent work on authentic brand activism and perceived activist motivation (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Mirzaei et al., 2022; Saracevic & Schlegelmilch, 2024).

The chapter also revealed clear differences in how participants viewed global and local brand activism. Global brands were seen as having more power and responsibility, but they were also judged more strictly on authenticity and faced higher levels of scepticism (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Moorman, 2020; Tsougkou et al., 2024). Local brands, on the other hand, were judged less strictly in terms of the scale and impact of their activism when they were perceived as rooted in, and accountable to, local communities, which is consistent with research on perceived brand localness and community embeddedness (Napoli et al., 2014; Safeer et al., 2022). In addition, the chapter examined how these perceptions translated into three broad forms of consumer intention: buycott, boycott, and campaign irrelevance. Together, these intention patterns demonstrate that brand activism does not elicit uniformly positive responses

but instead stimulates a range of reward, sanction, and non-response behaviours shaped by authenticity judgements, perceived relevance, and practical constraints.

Taken together, this discussion is important because it moves beyond simply describing participants' views to explain how consumers in Aotearoa New Zealand actively interpret, judge, and respond to global and local brand activism. By linking these interpretations to authenticity, brand origin, and behavioural intention, the chapter shows when activism is likely to be rewarded, punished, or ignored, and it highlights both the potential and the limits of brand activism as a tool for influencing consumer behaviour. The next chapter concludes the thesis by synthesising these insights, outlining key theoretical and practical contributions, and identifying limitations and directions for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

This concluding chapter synthesises the core insights of the thesis and explains what they mean for theory, practice, and future research on brand activism. The goal of the study was to determine how New Zealand consumers perceive brand activism by global versus local activist brands and how these perceptions influence customers' intentions to support (buycott), penalize (boycott), or ignore (campaign irrelevance) activist brand campaigns. Rather than treating brand activism as a uniformly positive or negative influence, the findings show that consumer responses are conditional and negotiated that built through authenticity judgements, perceived relevance to lived realities, perceived brand capacity and responsibility, and the practical feasibility of acting on activist messages.

6.2 RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this research was to examine how brand activism by global versus local brands in New Zealand shapes consumers' interpretations and evaluative judgements, and how these judgements translate into intentions to buycott, boycott, or disengage. The findings of the study, consumer reactions to brand activism represent a negotiated process in which brand origin (local versus global) functions as a contextual lens shaping perceptions of cultural relevance and authenticity. This influences whether activism fosters stronger relationships between consumers and brands or instead causes scepticism, disengagement, and punitive reactions. To achieve this aim, the research pursued three objectives. First, to explore how consumers in New Zealand interpret and evaluate brand activism by global versus local brands; second, to examine how perceptions of authenticity and cultural relevance shape consumers' intentions to buycott or boycott brands engaging in activism; and third, to identify the key conditions under which brand activism enhances consumer–brand relationships versus triggers doubt, withdrawal, or sanctioning behaviours.

6.3 IMPLICATION

6.3.1 Theoretical Implication

First, the study advances understanding of authenticity as an origin-shaped standard. Prior brand activism research positions perceived authenticity often grounded in alignment between activist messaging and organisational behaviour, clarity of motives, and evidence of commitment as a central mechanism shaping consumer trust and subsequent supportive or punitive responses (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Mirzaei et al., 2022). This study extends that logic by showing that consumers do not apply authenticity criteria uniformly. Global brands were evaluated through stricter expectations of proof, consistency, and long-term engagement, partly because they were assumed to possess greater resources and influence, whereas local brands were more readily granted sincerity and community alignment yet still questioned for limited reach or capacity to generate tangible change. This suggests that current authenticity frameworks may operate differently based on customers' expectations about organisational scale and accountability, as authenticity is not a set threshold but rather a negotiated judgment affected by brand origin and perceived capabilities.

Second, the findings sharpen the role of contextual resonance in shaping brand activism outcomes. While brand activism scholarship frequently emphasises "fit" as alignment between a brand's purpose and the focal social issue (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Mirzaei et al., 2022), participants in this study also evaluated whether activism meaningfully connected to New Zealand realities**.** For global brands, activism could be perceived as culturally distant indicating that consumers assess not only brand–cause alignment but also context–consumer alignment**.** This builds on global brand activism research by suggesting that cultural resonance influences consumers' interpretations, affecting whether activism is viewed as contextually relevant or broadly framed (Tsougkou et al., 2024; Shukla et al., 2025).

Third, the thesis reinforces that consumer response to brand activism is best conceptualised as a three-pathway outcome: reward, sanction, or non-response**.** Political consumerism research has long distinguished boycotting from buycotting as different forms of marketplace engagement (Friedman, 1996; Copeland, 2013), and brand activism scholarship shows that activist positioning can also trigger backlash and

anti-brand action when consumers perceive moral violations or unacceptable stances (Romani et al., 2015; Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022; Sandikci & Ekici, 2009). However, the present findings indicate that campaign irrelevance is also common, particularly when consumers prioritise price, quality, habit, or convenience. This pattern is in line with studies on the intention-behavior gap in ethical consumption, which show that moral acceptance does occasionally translate into action in daily consumption (Carrington et al., 2014; Papaoikonomou et al., 2011). In addition to avoiding exaggerating the behavioural impact of brand activism, treating irrelevance as analytically significant offers a more accurate explanation of inconsistent market results.

Finally, the findings can be further interpreted through a social identity lens. From a social identity perspective, market decisions including boycotting and buycotting can serve as both identity-protective and identity-expressive actions (Reed et al., 2012), where consumers reject brands perceived to pose a threat to identity-consistent values and embrace brands that affirm significant identities (Copeland, 2013). In this study, buycott intentions were more likely when activism reinforced participants' self-definitions and moral commitments. For example, participants who interpreted the campaign as reflecting genuine environmental commitment described intentions to support the brand through purchasing and positive word-of-mouth**.** Whereas boycotts and other anti-brand actions are more likely to arise when a brand is perceived to have committed a moral transgression or to have taken a stance that is incongruent with consumers' values or ideology**.** In brand-activism contexts, disagreement with the cause and politicised interpretations of the campaign can similarly trigger consumer opposition, including boycotting (Romani et al., 2015; Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022). Importantly, the prevalence of campaign irrelevance suggests that identity-based mechanisms are not always activated; when activism is not identity-relevant, consumers may default to functional decision criteria such as price and quality, limiting behavioural effects.

6.3.2 Practical Implications

The findings suggest several practical implications for brands engaging in activism in New Zealand.

Practical Implication for Global Brand Activism

For global brands, consumers' responses indicate a strong preference for evidence over symbolism. When activism is backed by apparent actions, explicit promises, and persistent follow-through over time, it becomes more convincing. Global campaigns are also likely to be evaluated more positively when brands localise the substance of their activism, not merely the communication, by grounding initiatives in New Zealand-relevant partnerships, outcomes, or community connections rather than relying on generic global framing. In addition, global brands should clarify purpose and trade-offs where motives are ambiguous. Activism may be perceived as a reputational tactic; however, transparent explanations on the brand's participation, the operational commitments, and its willingness to undergo sacrifices might mitigate scepticism.

Practical Implication for Local Brand Activism

For local brands, the results highlight the importance of leveraging perceived community credibility while enhancing perceptions of impact. Although local activism was often viewed as sincere, its effectiveness can be increased by sharing concrete outcomes (even on a modest scale), providing progress markers, and offering clear behavioural pathways for consumers. Additionally, local brands should refrain from making excessive claims because modest objectives and incremental reporting can preserve credibility. Finally, when local campaigns are constructed around practical consumer action, they are more likely to result in behavioural support by reducing friction through straightforward alternatives, unambiguous instructions, and useful cues.

Across both global and local brands, the results underscore that consumer reactions are not consistent. Some consumers will reward authentic activism through buycotting, others may sanction perceived moral violations through boycotting, and many will treat activism as secondary unless it strongly aligns with personal values or crosses ethical thresholds. Accordingly, brands should anticipate segment differences within the New Zealand market and assess activism using measures beyond short-term sales uplift, including trust, advocacy, and issue-specific outcomes over time.

6.3.3 Methodological Implications

This research offers methodological insights for studying brand activism in context. First, the findings highlight the significance of an interpretivist qualitative method to capturing ambivalence and sensemaking. Participants did not hold fixed attitudes, they moved between support, scepticism, and indifference depending on the brand, cause, perceived capacity, perceived authenticity and perceived realism of impact. A qualitative design was therefore well-suited to reveal how evaluations are constructed rather than assumed. Second, using campaign stimuli (global and local cases) helped elicit comparative judgement processes. The study illustrates that consumers often evaluate activism relationally by comparing perceived scale, responsibility, and relevance rather than evaluating a campaign in isolation. Third, the study highlights the value of treating non-response as a meaningful outcome in its own right. Rather than viewing irrelevance as a leftover category, recognising it as a distinct response improves how accurately brand activism effects are explained and provides a clearer basis for future quantitative testing and model development.

6.4 LIMITATIONS

As with all qualitative research, the findings of this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the study reflects the views of a relatively small group of participants in New Zealand within a particular time and setting. The sample was also shaped by purposive and snowball recruitment, which may have favoured individuals who were more active on social media and those with relatively higher levels of education. In addition, the participant group was culturally concentrated, with a large proportion of participants identifying with Asian backgrounds. A further limitation concerns the inclusion of participants regardless of visa type. While visa status was not treated as an analytical variable in this study, participants may have differed in the length and depth of their engagement with the New Zealand social and cultural context. This is particularly relevant in Auckland, where consumers may hold a wide range of visa or residency statuses. As a result, participants may not have shared the same degree of local embeddedness when interpreting local brand activism, which may have influenced how they understood cultural relevance and authenticity. Future research may therefore benefit from applying a more context-specific inclusion criterion, such as requiring participants to have lived in New Zealand for at least three

years, in order to better capture familiarity with the New Zealand market and local brands. Accordingly, the findings offer depth of understanding rather than statistical generalisability, and their transferability to other consumer groups should be considered with caution.

Second, the data capture participants' stated perceptions and behavioural intentions rather than their actual marketplace behaviour. As a result, expressions of support, scepticism, boycotting, or buycotting intention may not always translate into real purchasing decisions in everyday market conditions.

Third, the insights were shaped using two predefined campaign cases. Although Patagonia's *Don't Buy This Jacket* and Ecostore's *No Laundry Day* were selected because both promoted reduced consumption as an environmentally responsible practice, the two cases were not fully equivalent in all respects. They differed in historical timing, contextual background, and the specific way sustainability activism was communicated. These differences may have influenced how participants evaluated the authenticity, credibility, and relevance of each campaign.

Fourth, participants' responses may have been shaped not only by the campaign materials themselves but also by the contextual information provided during the interviews to support a shared understanding of the cases. While this approach helped create a more structured basis for comparison, it may also have influenced participants' interpretations of the campaigns.

Finally, brand activism is time-sensitive and dynamic. Consumer perceptions may shift as brand actions evolve, new information becomes available, or media and social media discourse changes. For this reason, the findings should be understood as context-specific rather than fixed across time or issues.

6.5 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Building on these limitations, future research could extend this thesis in several directions. First, quantitative studies using surveys or experiments could test the relationships suggested by the findings, particularly whether brand origin moderates the

effect of perceived authenticity on buycott and boycott intentions, and whether contextual resonance predicts consumer engagement beyond authenticity perceptions.

Second, future research could employ more diverse and balanced samples in order to examine whether the patterns identified in this study hold across broader demographic and cultural groups. In particular, comparative work involving participants from different ethnic backgrounds, levels of education, and degrees of social media engagement would help assess the transferability of the present findings beyond the relatively concentrated sample in this study.

Third, future studies could adopt behavioural and longitudinal designs to examine whether brand activism produces sustained behavioural change over time, for example by tracking purchasing patterns, using panel data, or collecting repeated measures as campaigns develop. This would help address the gap between stated intentions and actual marketplace behaviour.

Fourth, future research could refine the comparative design by using campaign stimuli that are more closely matched in terms of issue focus, timing, and communication format. For example, studies could compare global and local brand activism campaigns addressing the same cause within a similar time period, or alternatively draw more directly on consumers' lived experiences of activism campaigns they have encountered in everyday life. This would help clarify whether the differences observed are driven primarily by brand origin or by other campaign-specific features.

Fifth, cross-country comparative research could assess whether the origin-based standards identified in this study operate similarly in other markets or whether the New Zealand context produces distinct evaluation patterns. Such research would be especially valuable in examining how local cultural expectations shape perceptions of authenticity, credibility, and legitimacy in brand activism.

Finally, future research should examine digital and platform dynamics in greater depth, as brand activism is often interpreted and contested in highly mediated online environments. Specifically, studies could investigate how platform-specific cues, including the tone and volume of user comments, the visibility of call-out discourse, and the framing provided by influencers or other third-party actors, shape consumer

interpretations of activist messaging. This line of inquiry could also explore how algorithmic amplification, virality, and social proof, such as likes, shares, and trending topics, influence the speed and intensity with which supportive behaviours, such as advocacy and buycotting, or punitive behaviours, such as boycotting and anti-brand actions, spread through online networks.

6.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter concluded the thesis by synthesising the key findings and demonstrating how they address the research objectives. This outlined the theoretical, practical, and methodological implications arising from the analysis, acknowledged the study's limitations, and proposed directions for future research. The study concludes that brand activism in New Zealand is evaluated through layered judgements of authenticity, contextual resonance, and perceived capacity/responsibility, which together shape whether consumers reward brands (buycott), sanction brands (boycott), or disregard activism as irrelevant. Importantly, global and local brands are not judged by identical standards. Global brands are typically held to higher expectations of evidence and impact, while local brands benefit from perceived community alignment but may face doubts about scale and tangible outcomes. The chapter also outlined theoretical, practical, and methodological implications, acknowledged limitations, and proposed directions for future research to deepen understanding of how brand activism translates (or fails to translate) into consumer action.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Social Media Advertisement for Participant Recruitment

📢 Participants Wanted for My Master's Research!

I'm currently recruiting participants for my study at Auckland University of Technology on:

✨ Brand Activism in New Zealand: Consumer Boycotting and Buycotting Behaviour toward Global and Local Brands.

If you're 18–44 years old, living in Auckland (any visa status), and have noticed or engaged with brands taking a stand on social or environmental issues—I'd love to hear from you!

✔️ 30–45 minute interview (at a time you choose)

✔️ Small gift of appreciation for your time

Your insights will help us better understand how brand activism shapes consumer choices here in New Zealand.

📅 Interested? Please scan the QR code on the poster or reach out to me directly at **fqb3327@autuni.ac.nz**. OR inbox me!

Thank you for supporting local research! 🌱

Appendix B

Poster for Participant Recruitment

PARTICIPANTS WANTED!

Brand Activism in New Zealand: Consumer Boycotting and Buycotting Behavior toward Global and Local Brands.

- Are you passionate about the social and political actions of brand?
- Have you ever supported or boycotted brands based on their value?

If Yes, We want to hear from you!

You can participate if you are;

18 - 44 years old

living in Auckland, NZ, regardless of your visa status

Have seen or noticed brands taking a stand on social or environmental issues

A small gift of appreciation will be given for your time

30 - 45 minutes interview

You choose your time

Fill out short screening form here

Researcher: Rotjarek Nitiworrarat
Master's student, Auckland University of Technology
For any questions, please email me at: fqb3327@autuni.ac.nz
Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee Ref no: 25/112

Appendix C
Interview Questionnaires

Indicative Questions for Interview in Research Title:

Brand Activism in New Zealand: Consumer Boycotting and Buycotting Behaviour toward Global and Local Brands.

❖ **Interview Grouping Explanation**

Participants will be divided into two groups based on a screening questionnaire about which type of activist brands they are more familiar with or have stronger opinions about:

- Group A: Focused on global brand (Patagonia).
- Group B: Focused on local brand (Ecostore).

Each group will be asked tailored questions related to the specific brand type, allowing for more relevant discussion and comparison between responses to global and local brand activism.

Interview Questions

Part 1: General Perceptions of Brand Activism (for both group)

1.How familiar are you with the concept of brand activism?

2.What comes to mind when you hear the term "brand activism"?

3.Can you share a brand activism campaign you are familiar with?

Part 2: General Perceptions (for both groups)

4.How familiar are you with [Patagonia/Ecostore]?

5.What comes to mind when you think of [Patagonia/Ecostore]?

6.Do you generally trust brands that engage in activism? Why or why not?

7. Do you think global or local brands have a greater right or responsibility to speak out on activism issues? Why or how do you think that is?

Part 3: Campaign Reactions

(Show a brief summary or visual of the campaign first.)

Global Brand: Patagonia – "Don't Buy This Jacket" Campaign

Campaign Summary:

Patagonia launched its bold "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign on Black Friday in The New York Times, urging consumers to reconsider unnecessary consumption. The campaign was a protest against overconsumption and highlighted Patagonia's commitment to environmental sustainability. It encouraged customers to reduce, repair, reuse, and recycle clothing—even their own.

Patagonia backed this up with programs like Worn Wear (used gear), free garment repairs, and long-lasting product design.

Local Brand: Ecostore – "No Laundry Day" Campaign

Campaign Summary:
Ecostore, a New Zealand eco-friendly brand, launched the “No Laundry Day” campaign to raise awareness about water use and environmental impact in daily life. The brand encouraged Kiwis to skip doing laundry for one day to conserve water, reduce energy use, and think more consciously about everyday habits.
The campaign also served to promote Ecostore's values of sustainability and responsible living, aligning closely with its eco-safe product range.

Questions:
8. What is your first impression of [“Don’t buy this jacket” / “No Laundry Day”] campaign?
9. Do you think the message is authentic? Why/ Why not?
10. How does the [“Don’t buy this jacket” / “No Laundry Day”] campaign make you feel about the brand?

Part 4: Cultural Relevance and Fit

11.In what ways do you think this campaign aligns or conflicts with the values commonly seen in New Zealand society? Please explain your thoughts.
12.Do you find global or local brand activism campaigns more suitable for engaging in activism? Why?

Part 5: Boycotting and Buycotting behaviour

Introductory Exploratory Question:

13. Before we go further, we’d like to understand how you generally respond to brand activism. When a brand takes a public stance on a social or environmental issue, which of the following best describes your usual reaction?

☐ Support the brand by buying more from them (Buycotting tendency)

☐ Avoid the brand if you disagree with their stance (Boycotting tendency)

☐ Neither - it doesn’t really influence your shopping behaviour (Neutral)

(Follow-up questions will depend on their response)

If the participant leans toward BUYCOTTING behaviour:

14. After seeing this campaign by [Patagonia/Ecostore], would you feel more motivated to buy their products? Why or why not?
15. Do you see this campaign as something that would increase your loyalty to [Patagonia/Ecostore]? In what way?

16. Would you be more likely to recommend [Patagonia/Ecostore] to friends or family because of this campaign? Why or why not?
17. Do you feel that [Patagonia/Ecostore]'s activism aligns with your personal values enough to influence your buying behaviour? Why or why not?

If the participant leans toward BOYCOTTING behaviour:
18. If you found [Patagonia/Ecostore]'s activism to be performative or untrustworthy, would that make you less likely to buy from them? Why or why not?
19. Can you imagine any part of this campaign that might make some people want to avoid supporting [Patagonia/Ecostore]? Why or why not?
20. If [Patagonia/Ecostore] did something you strongly disagreed with, would you personally stop buying their products? Why or why not?

If participant selects " Neither - it doesn't really influence your shopping behaviour":
21. You mentioned that brand activism doesn't really influence your shopping behaviour-can you tell me more about why that is?
22. Are there any specific values, causes, or issues that might influence your buying decisions if a brand took a stand on them?
23. While activism doesn't directly influence your shopping, do you think it might affect others? In what way?

Part 6: Brand Origin Influence (Buycott/Boycott and Global vs. Local)
24.Does the fact that [Patagonia is a global brand / Ecostore is a local NZ brand] influence your reaction to this campaign? In what way?
25.Are you more likely to support a local brand like Ecostore or a global brand like Patagonia when they take a stand on environmental issues? Why?
26.Would you judge activism by a global brand differently than a local one? For example, are you more sceptical of Patagonia's campaign than Ecostore's, or vice versa?

-- end---------------------------------------

Appendix D

Consent Form

Consent Form

Project title: ***Brand Activism in New Zealand: Consumer Boycotting and Buycotting Behavior toward Global and Local Brands.***

Project Supervisor: ***Dr. Jessica Vredenburg***

Researcher: ***Rotjarek Nitiworrarat***

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated July 15th, 2025.

○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be recorded and transcribed.

○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study within two weeks following my interview should I no longer wish to be included, without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used in a de-identified form. However, once the findings have been analyzed, removal of my data may not be possible.

○ I agree to take part in this research.

○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○ No○

Participant's signature: ....

Participant's name: ....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

....

....

....

....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on type the date on which the final approval was granted AUTEC Reference number type the AUTEC reference number

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

Appendix E

Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Date that data collection will start:

July 15th, 2025

Project Title

Brand Activism in New Zealand: *Consumer Boycotting and Buycotting Behavior toward Global and Local Brands.*

Kia ora!

You're invited to participate in a research study exploring how New Zealand consumers respond to **brand activism** by global (e.g., Patagonia) and local (e.g., Ecostore) brands. The study investigates how activism affects consumer decisions to **boycott (avoid) or buycott (support)** brands.

What's Involved

- Questions about your awareness, experiences, and attitudes toward brand activism

Who Can Participate?

✓ Be 18 - 44 years old.

✓ Be living in Auckland, New Zealand, regardless of your visa status (e.g., citizen, resident visa, work visa, student visa, or other valid visa holders).

✓ Familiar with brands taking public stances on social/political issues (but not employed by them)

Friends and family of the primary researcher will be excluded from participation to avoid conflicts of interest or coercion.

If you meet the inclusion criteria and are interested in participating, we encourage you to take part in the study. Your insights will help deepen our understanding of consumer responses to brand activism. If you are interested in participating, please contact the researcher directly using the details below.

Researcher Contact Details:

Researcher Name: Rotjarek Nitiworrarat, Master's student in Marketing, Auckland University of Technology.

E-mail address: fqb3327@autuni.ac.nz

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can withdraw from the study at any time by informing the Researcher. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then [information collected up until your withdrawal from the study will continue to be used and included in the study to protect its quality / you can ask for information collected up until your withdrawal from the study to be deleted unless you withdraw after the study analyses have been undertaken].

If you decide to take part, you will need to complete a *Consent Form* before participating. The Consent Form will be provided to you via email or a website link, and you will be asked to read and sign it before starting the study.

What will my participation involve?

You will be asked to share your opinions on brand activism and how it influences your purchasing decisions. Your participation is expected to take approximately 30-45 minutes via Microsoft Team or in person. In-person interviews will be conducted on AUT premises. This study does not involve any physical assessments or interventions.

Themes of Questions

During the interview, you will be asked about:

- Your awareness of brands engaging in activism.
- Whether you have ever boycotted (avoided) or buycotted (supported) a brand due to its activism.
- Your perceptions of activism by global vs. local brands.
- The factors influencing your decision to support or avoid a brand.

Benefits

- **Direct:** Reflect on your consumer values and decision.
- **Thank You Gift:** Participants receive a small token of thanks.
- This research contributes to the primary researcher's Master's degree requirements.

Risks & Confidentiality

- Your identity will be kept confidential with final research presented in summary form and de-identified.
- Interviews are recorded and securely stored on a password-protected AUT server for six years.
- Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data.

Voluntary Participation

- Participation is voluntary.
- You'll be asked to sign a Consent Form before participating.
- After receiving this information, you have one week to decide if you would like to participate.

Publication & Feedback

- Results will be shared in a Master's thesis.
- Outputs from this research will include a thesis for Master's degree at AUT. There will be no journal articles or conference presentations produced from this study.
- You can request a summary of the findings or your individual interview summary. If requested, the researcher will send the summary to participants' email address after the study is completed.

Know Someone Who Might Be Interested?

If you enjoy the interview and know someone else who fits the criteria, you're welcome to tell them about the study! You can share this information sheet with them so they can decide if they'd like to take part too.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr.Jessica Vredenburg, jessica.vredenburg@aut.ac.nz, and (09)921 9999 Ext.5411.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, *ethics@aut.ac.nz*, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Who do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Researcher Name: Rotjarek Nitiworrarat, Master's student in Marketing, Auckland University of Technology.

E-mail address: fqb3327@autuni.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Supervisor Name: Dr.Jessica Vredenburg

E-mail address: jessica.vredenburg@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date final ethics approval was granted*, AUTEC Reference number *type the reference number*.

Appendix G

AUTEC Ethics Approva

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

3 July 2025

Jessica Vredenburg
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Jessica

Re Ethics Application: **25/112 Brand Activism in New Zealand: Consumer Boycotting and Buycotting Behavior toward Global and Local Brands.**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEC's conditions.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 3 July 2028.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

For any enquiries, please contact the Secretariat at ethics@aut.ac.nz
(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: fqb3327@autuni.ac.nz

Auckland University of Technology, D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, New Zealand.
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316: E: ethics@aut.ac.nz: www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

Appendix F

Interview Stimuli / Campaign Materials

Figure F1. Patagonia ‘Don’t Buy This Jacket’ poster used as an interview prompt

Note. Compiled by the researcher for interview prompting purposes. Images and campaign information adapted from Patagonia (2011).

Figure F2. Ecostore ‘No Laundry Day’ poster used as an interview prompt

Note. Compiled by the researcher for interview prompting purposes. Images and campaign information adapted from Ecostore (2023).