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# **CORPORATE SOCIOPOLITICAL ACTIVISM IN CONTEXT: AUTHENTICITY, POLITICAL CONSUMERISM, AND THE PRIMACY OF PRODUCT VALUE**

CORPORATE SOCIOPOLITICAL INVOLVEMENT INFLUENCES CONSUMERS—BUT NOT IN THE WAY MANY ASSUME. MY FINDINGS SHOW THAT GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARD CORPORATE ACTIVISM HAVE LITTLE IMPACT ON BEHAVIOR. INSTEAD, CONSUMERS RESPOND WHEN ACTIVISM FEELS AUTHENTIC AND WHEN THEY ALREADY ENGAGE IN POLITICAL CONSUMERISM. IN OTHER WORDS, ACTIVISM MATTERS MOST FOR CONSUMERS WHO USE THE MARKETPLACE TO EXPRESS THEIR POLITICAL VALUES.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW & SURVEY DEVELOPMENT**

- PRIOR RESEARCH SHOWS THAT CONSUMERS INTERPRET CORPORATE SOCIOPOLITICAL ACTIVISM THROUGH ATTITUDES TOWARD ACTIVISM, PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY, POLITICAL CONSUMERISM AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS.
- FOUNDATIONAL CSA STUDIES (E.G., BHAGWAT ET AL., 2020) DEFINE THE BOUNDARIES OF ACTIVISM AND PROVIDE VALIDATED MEASUREMENT APPROACHES.
- THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT FOR THIS STUDY WAS BUILT BY ADAPTING ITEMS FROM ESTABLISHED CSA, AUTHENTICITY, AND POLITICAL CONSUMERISM SCALES TO ENSURE THEORETICAL ALIGNMENT.
- ITEMS WERE REFINED THROUGH REVIEW FOR CONTENT VALIDITY, THEN ORGANIZED INTO A 12-ITEM, FOUR-CONSTRUCT STRUCTURE CONSISTENT WITH PSYCHOMETRIC STANDARDS IN CSA RESEARCH.

## **THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

ITEMS ADAPTED FROM ESTABLISHED CSA AND POLITICAL CONSUMERISM LITERATURE (E.G., BHAGWAT ET AL., 2020; POLITICAL CONSUMERISM SCALES).

- WORDING REFINED TO ENSURE CLARITY, FACE VALIDITY, AND ALIGNMENT WITH MY CONCEPTUAL MODEL.
- ORGANIZED INTO A BALANCED 12-ITEM LIKERT-SCALE INSTRUMENT (1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE TO 5 = STRONGLY AGREE).
- REVIEWED FOR CONTENT VALIDITY AND CONSTRUCT COHERENCE PRIOR TO DATA COLLECTION.

## **THE 12 ITEMS WERE DIVIDED INTO 4 CATEGORIES:**

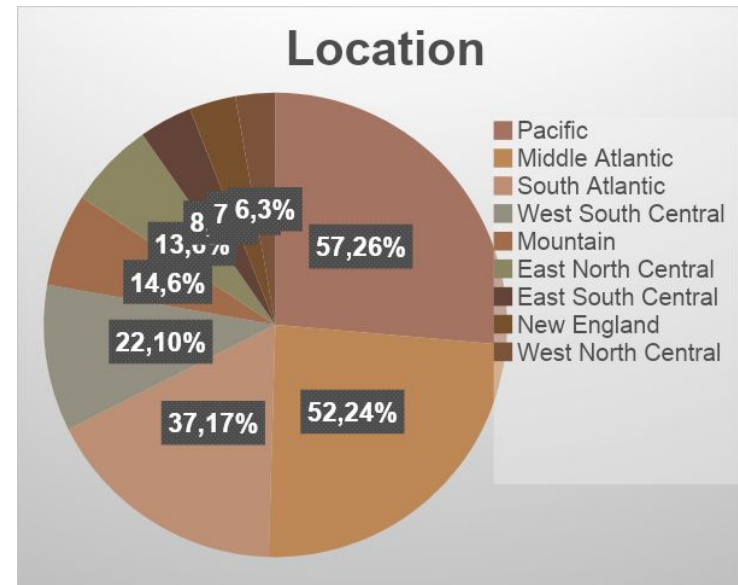
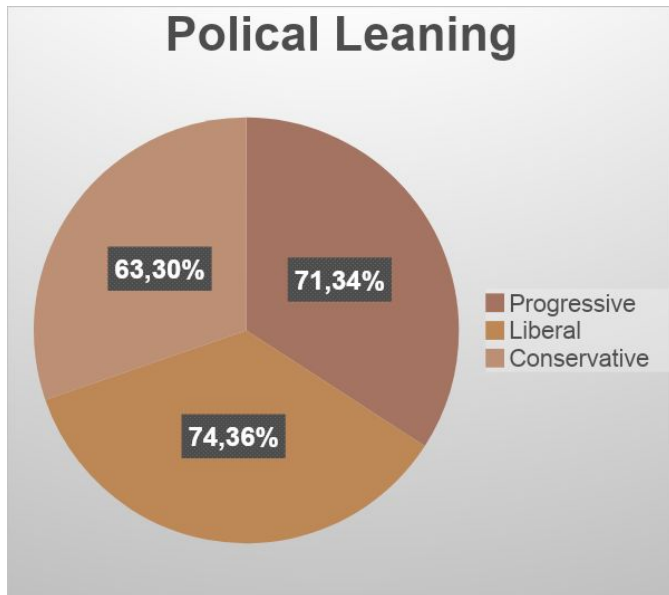
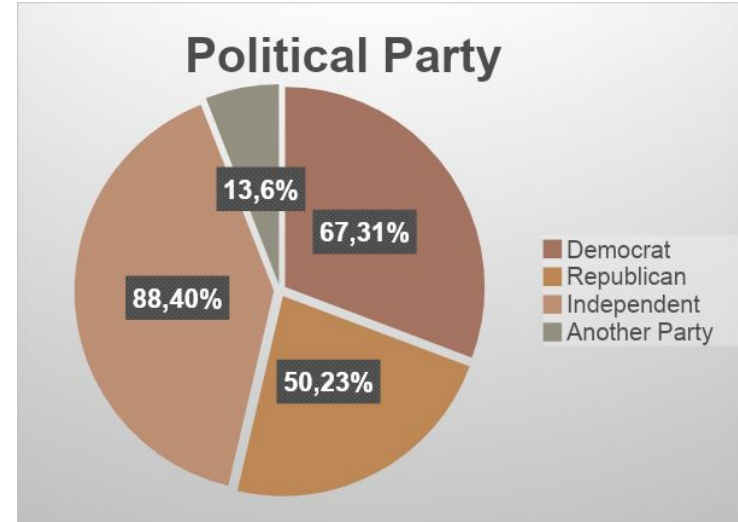
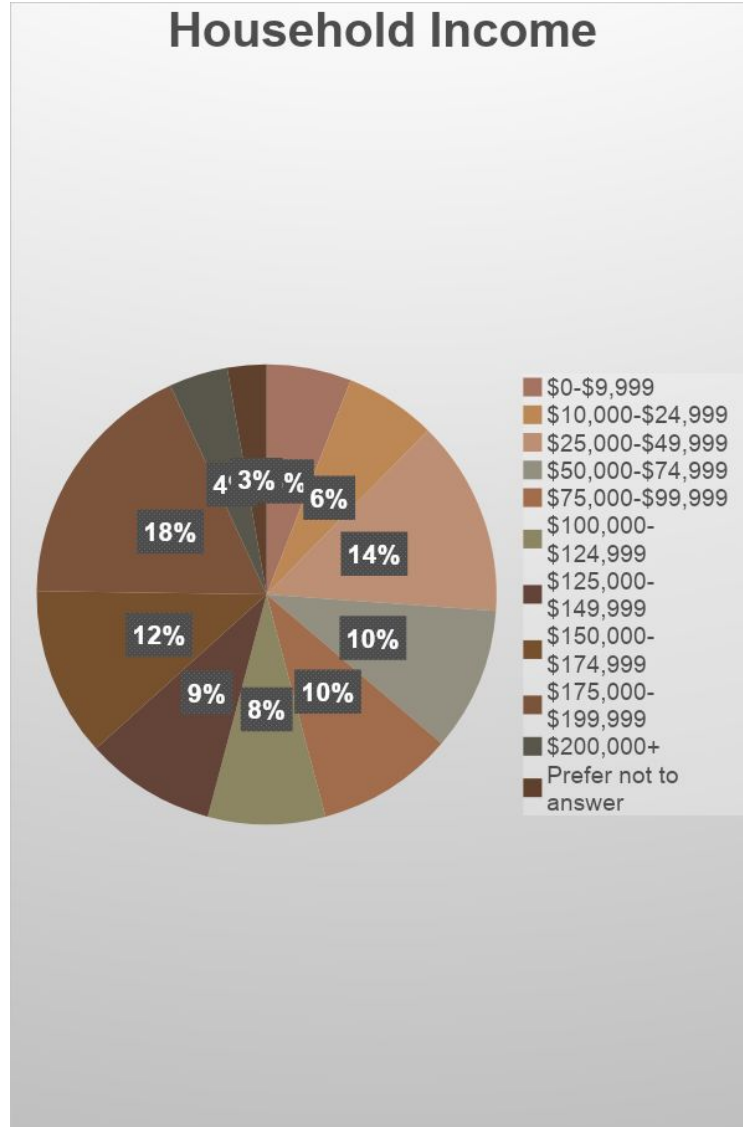
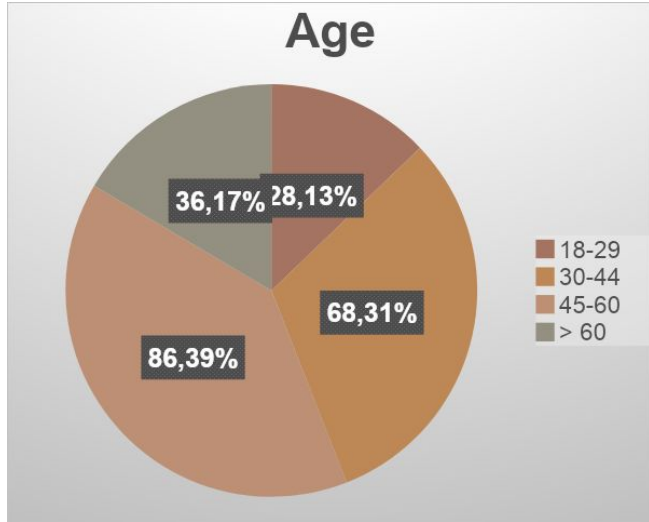
- 1) GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARD CSA – (OVERALL FAVORABILITY TOWARD CORPORATE ACTIVISM)
- 2) PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY – (WHETHER CONSUMERS VIEW ACTIVISM AS SINCERE OR VALUES-DRIVEN)
- 3) POLITICAL CONSUMER TENDENCIES – (USE OF PURCHASING TO EXPRESS POLITICAL/SOCIAL VALUES)
- 4) CONSUMER BEHAVIOR & INTENTIONS - (HOW ACTIVISM INFLUENCES PURCHASE DECISIONS AND SUPPORT)

# Instrument Reliability and Validity

**Cronbach's alpha** was used to evaluate the internal consistency of each multi-item scale. This statistic indicates how well the items within a subscale measure the same underlying construct. Values closer to 1.0 reflect stronger reliability, with coefficients above .70 typically considered acceptable in social science research. Higher alpha values suggest that items are strongly correlated and conceptually aligned, while lower values indicate weaker cohesion among items.

After confirming internal consistency, a follow-up validity check was conducted using **factor analysis** to verify the structural integrity of the survey instrument. This test assessed whether items grouped together as expected and aligned with the four theorized constructs. Clear factor patterns supported the conclusion that the instrument measured the intended dimensions reliably and coherently.

# THE SAMPLE



## Results

This regression shows that two factors—perceived authenticity and political consumerism—strongly predict consumer behavior, with both showing large, statistically significant effects. Perceived authenticity has a moderate positive impact, while political consumerism is the strongest predictor overall. General attitudes, however, do not significantly influence behavior once the other variables are included. Overall, the model suggests that consumers respond most when they view a company’s actions as authentic and aligned with their political or ethical values.



Predictor	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	.626	.136		4.616	< .001
General Attitudes	.059	.046	.066	1.301	.195
Perceived Authenticity	.331	.048	.365	6.936	< .001
Political Consumerism	.484	.043	.530	11.272	< .001

In addition to the core constructs, respondents were asked to identify the single most important factor influencing their purchase decisions from a list of seven common drivers. The results were unambiguous: **traditional product attributes overwhelmingly dominated**. *Quality* was selected by the largest share of respondents (44.7%), *price* (25.4%), followed by service quality 10.8 %, while *political activism* ranked near the bottom at only 5.2%. This pattern reinforces a central tension in contemporary consumer behavior. Although sociopolitical activism meaningfully shapes attitudes, perceived authenticity, and even purchase intentions in the regression model, consumers still anchor their final decisions in the fundamentals of product value. In other words, activism may enhance or suppress willingness to buy, but it rarely overrides the core expectations of quality and affordability that remain the primary drivers of marketplace choice.

## Summary Remarks

- 1) Authenticity is the core driver of positive consumer response to sociopolitical activism.
- 2) Political consumerism is the strongest predictor of supportive behavior—activism resonates most with consumers who already make values-based choices.
- 3) General attitudes toward activism don't matter unless the message feels credible and aligned with the firm's identity.
- 4) Companies should treat activism as a strategic commitment, not a marketing tactic.
- 5) Practical attributes such as quality and price are by far the strongest drivers of Consumer behavior.

## Future Research

Future research should explore the emergence of a psycho-demographic consumer segment that intentionally aligns purchasing behavior with sociopolitical values. This study suggests such a group may be especially responsive to corporate activism, and researchers should examine its size, growth trajectory, and influence on corporate strategy.

Two illustrative case analyses—Nike's Dream Crazy campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick and Cracker Barrel's modern rebranding effort—offer contrasting outcomes that illuminate when corporate social activism succeeds or fails.

Nike's Dream Crazy campaign was a commercial and cultural success, fueled by strong support in values-aligned regions like the Portland and Seattle metropolitan areas. Despite significant national backlash, Nike's stock dipped only briefly before surpassing pre-campaign levels. As one of the Pacific Northwest's most globally visible companies, Nike drew on a geographic legitimacy base where progressive activism matched its brand identity and regional consumer ethos. Future research should examine how firms balance short-term authenticity signaling with long-term brand flexibility when activism resonates in some regions but polarizes others.

Cracker Barrel's rebranding produced the opposite result. The company lacked the value congruence, brand-issue alignment, and regional support Nike enjoyed. Its core customers skew conservative, and its brand identity is rooted in nostalgia and rural Americana. Unlike Nike, Cracker Barrel had no geographic market where progressive activism aligned with its brand, leaving no consumer segment positioned to absorb the backlash.

These findings carry important implications for the Pacific Northwest. Although the region is known for civic engagement and attentiveness to corporate sociopolitical positioning, respondents in this study overwhelmingly prioritized product quality and price—with political activism ranking near the bottom. Over-reliance on boycotts or punitive activism risks creating an unpredictable business climate without meaningfully influencing the factors that actually drive purchasing decisions. A more effective strategy encourages authentic corporate engagement while maintaining stable conditions for firms to deliver high-quality products at competitive prices, allowing the region to support its social values without undermining its economic fundamentals.