

From warmth to warrior: Impacts of non-profit brand activism on brand bravery, brand hypocrisy and brand equity

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**From warmth to warrior: Impacts of non-profit brand activism on brand bravery,
brand hypocrisy and brand equity**

Abstract

Empirical evidence concerning the effects of brand activism on brand equity is growing but remains mixed at best. Although non-profit brands increasingly implement activism initiatives, there are not yet any studies that look outside the commercial sector. Non-profit brands are well placed to step up and engage in political dialogue – social change is at their core. Yet, the risks of neglecting a warm charitable image are considerable in terms of alienating current supporters and losing donations. Our research contributes to this debate by employing signalling theory to examine the effects of non-profit brand activism on brand equity in the ‘third sector’. The mediating roles of brand bravery and brand hypocrisy in this central relationship are also explored. Survey data were obtained from 518 British respondents and analysed using structural equation modelling. Our results show evidence of partial serial mediation, where the direct negative effect of non-profit brand activism on brand equity is eliminated in the presence of brand bravery and brand hypocrisy. Interestingly, in studying the mediated-moderation links, we also find the strengthening effects of a donor’s moral foundations at play. Our study suggests that there are equity gains for non-profit brands that shed traditional ‘warmth’ positioning and embrace activism and bravery.

Keywords: brand activism, brand equity, non-profit branding, brand bravery, brand hypocrisy, virtue signalling

Introduction

‘Charities too often maintain the structures of power and privilege in our society rather than striving to dismantle them’ - Charity So White

More and more brands are stepping into the domain of activism to achieve business and social goals. Accordingly, academic research on ‘brands doing good’ has proliferated (e.g., Iglesias and Ind, 2020; Kapitan *et al*, 2022; Mirzaei *et al*, 2021; Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg *et al*, 2020). Yet, the literature remains relatively silent on brand activism in the non-profit sector. Brand activism is defined as taking a public stance on a divisive sociopolitical issue (Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg *et al*, 2020). While this strategy emerged in the commercial sector, examples amongst non-profit organisations (NPOs) also abound. Consider Charity So White, a campaign group that originated to tackle institutional racism among charities positioning themselves as ‘white saviours’ and relying on ‘poverty porn’ to meet fundraising goals. More recently, Shelter, a homelessness charity launched an activist-driven campaign called ‘Fight for Home’, in which they took a public stand in support of the human right to safe housing (Farndon-Taylor, 2021). But do donors respond positively to activism campaigns from non-profit brands?

In the brand activism context, NPOs present an interesting paradox, which makes this an important avenue of inquiry. On one hand, NPOs exert a strong cultural and moral authority (Moorman, 2020) as a result of being ‘higher purpose natives’ (Mirzaei *et al*, 2021, p. 186) with civic and political engagement as fundamental responsibilities (LeRoux, 2007; Suárez, 2009). Thus, unlike their commercial counterparts, NPOs do not need to employ brand activism to signal a ‘virtuous’ position in the marketplace. Yet, NPOs face a crisis relating to their identity and role (Lee and Bourne, 2017). While once regarded as providers of public services considered critical to community well-being (Charity Commission, 2020), their legitimacy is now being questioned as a result of declining transparency and trust (Becker *et al*, 2020;

Edelman, 2022). Moreover, their marketplace relevance is dubious – meaningful differentiation was already difficult to sustain, given the exponential growth in competition in the last four decades (Mirzaei *et al*, 2021). This is now intensified by commercial brands encroaching on their prosocial positioning by adopting activism. Meanwhile, sector-wide funding cuts (du Bois and Langley-Cook, 2022; Michaelidou *et al*, 2015a) make it all the more important to achieve differentiation and relevance and, in turn, attract donations. To survive this downturn, NPOs have a history of borrowing branding strategies from the commercial sector – for example, by crafting a desirable brand image (Wymer *et al*, 2016), adopting a strong brand orientation (Da Silva *et al*, 2020; Lee, 2013; Napoli, 2006) and communicating a credible brand purpose (Mirzaei *et al*, 2021). Most recently, this has been attempted with the rise of brand activism in the non-profit sector, as a strategic avenue to adapt and survive.

Looking to the brand activism literature, empirical evidence of the success of this strategy is mixed. Brand activism holds potential to create positive social change (Moorman, 2020) and build brand equity when authenticity is carefully maintained (Korschun *et al*, 2020; Schmidt *et al*, 2022; Vredenburg *et al*, 2020). But this strategy is polarising and its outcomes, unpredictable (Bhagwat *et al*, 2020; Hydock *et al*, 2020). This drastically departs from the ‘warm and fuzzy’ brand images historically used by NPOs to draw in donations (Michel and Rieunier, 2012; Mirzaei *et al*, 2021; Venable *et al*, 2005). Together, the non-profit branding and brand activism literatures do not provide a clear picture of the relationship between non-profit brand activism and brand equity, a key question to be answered for NPOs considering an activism strategy.

The current paper proposes that non-profit brand activism can shape brand equity (1) positively via brand bravery and (2) negatively via brand hypocrisy. In contrast to the traditional warmth appeals employed in the charitable sector, which can at times be interpreted

as incompetent (Kim and Ball, 2021), brand bravery depicts a distinct and strategic brand identity of boldness, determination and resilience in upholding core beliefs and values (Jain *et al.*, 2021). Thus, we argue that when non-profit brand activism is perceived by donors as brave, there will be positive flow-on effects to brand equity. On the other hand, the risk of judgements of brand hypocrisy is also elevated when ‘virtue signalling’ tactics are employed (Berthon *et al.*, 2021), due to the departure this represents from the known and understood warmth appeals, characteristic of NPOs. We argue that when brand activism is instead perceived as hypocritical, there will be negative brand equity effects. Therefore, the present work empirically examines the mediating effects of both bravery and hypocrisy as two mechanisms to explain the potential for positive and negative effects, respectively, of non-profit brand activism on brand equity. Last, given that activism and morality are interlinked, the moderating effect of the individual donor’s moral foundations - namely, their concern for justice - is also investigated.

Our results reveal a significant negative effect of non-profit brand activism on brand equity. However, this effect was eliminated in the presence of brand bravery and brand hypocrisy, showing support for partial serial mediation. Brand bravery plays a key role – non-profit brand activism has potential to indirectly and positively affect brand equity when mediated by bravery, and brand bravery effectively mitigates the negative effect of hypocrisy on brand equity. In addition, the relationship between non-profit brand activism and bravery is intensified when a donor’s concern for justice is high. Our research thus makes three important theoretical contributions. First, we contribute to the evolving debate in the non-profit brand activism literature about the direction of its effects on brand equity, empirically demonstrating that it has the potential to be positive in the presence of bravery. Second, we speak to the ongoing conversation in the non-profit branding literature about how contemporary branding approaches can be successfully transplanted to the third sector to provide strategic solutions to problems caused by funding cuts, increased competition and decreased differentiation. Last,

we offer brand activism to the NPO sector as an avenue to disrupt problematic discourses that underlie inequitable institutions and structures.

The paper is organised as follows. First, we map the literature on brand activism, non-profit branding and signalling theory, all of which inform our conceptual framework and hypotheses development. The empirical aspects of the paper are then presented, including research methods and results. The paper concludes with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications, as well as a note about future research on the evolution of brand activism within the non-profit sector.

Theoretical background

Brand activism

Brand activism is defined as a ‘purpose- and values-driven strategy in which a brand adopts a nonneutral stance on institutionally contested sociopolitical issues, to create social change and marketing success’ (Vredenburg *et al*, 2020, p. 446). Unlike corporate firms that were the first to adopt brand activism, NPOs have inherently always attended to their societal duties - as Mirzaei and colleagues (2021) note, NPOs are ‘higher purpose natives’ (p. 186). What makes brand activism different from the existing environmental, political and social change efforts of NPOs and therefore worthy of study in this context?

First, the domain of non-profit brands has historically been more closely aligned to corporate social responsibility (CSR) - indeed one of the most common CSR practices is to strategically partner with a non-profit (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2005). Yet, there are clear differences between brand activism, CSR and other strategies of brands ‘doing good’ (Iglesias and Ind, 2020). CSR entails company policies and practices that reflect their responsibilities to the wider society (Matten and Moon, 2008). Moreover, CSR programs tend to be tightly linked to organisational value and perceived to benefit the majority of the society (Wettstein and Baur,

2016). While brand activism has evolved from CSR (Sarkar and Kotler 2018) as a result of increasing consumer pressure for brands to take a stand on important political and social issues, it is a distinctly different strategy. Because brand activism expresses support for or opposition to controversial sociopolitical issues (Moorman, 2020), whether or not these issues should be resolved and what constitutes a viable solution tends to be highly debated, garnering polarised audience reactions (Bhagwat *et al*, 2020; Vredenburg *et al*, 2020). Thus, unlike CSR, brand activism is inherently divisive as there is no ‘correct’ solution as to how brands should address social and political issues, nor guidance as to which issues to address (Korschun *et al* 2019, Vredenburg *et al* 2020). Due to brand activism’s engagement with partisan issues (Moorman, 2020), it would not necessarily be as well received as related strategies such as brand purpose have been in the non-profit sector (Mirzaei *et al*, 2021). Consider Barnardo’s, a leading UK children’s charity – while its mission to protect vulnerable children has never been contested by the public, Barnardo’s recent spotlight on racial injustice and white privilege attracted major backlash and complaints (Blackall, 2020). The charity published guides for parents to discuss white privilege with their children, which was a relatively ‘brave’ approach, involving issues of equity, class and race, and represented a departure from the conventional warm and fuzzy messaging used by NPOs.

Second, brand activism has been linked to both positive and negative outcomes. Authentic brand activism, which entails alignment of marketing messaging with corporate practice, purpose and values, can strengthen brand equity whereas woke washing, where brands pay lip service to a sociopolitical issue without taking action, diminishes brand equity (Korschun *et al*, 2019; Schmidt *et al*, 2022; Vredenburg *et al*, 2020). Corporate sociopolitical activism and political advocacy work documents adverse reactions from investors (Bhagwat *et al*, 2020) and the likelihood of repelling existing customers for reasons of identity-based

consumption and negative bias (Hydock *et al*, 2020). One can expect even greater unpredictability when brand activism is used by NPOs due to multiple stakeholders espousing diverse values (Bennett and Sargeant, 2005; Boenigk and Becker, 2016; Chad, 2015) and the risk of it being interpreted as over-commercialised (Sepulcri *et al*, 2020). For example, such a business-like strategy (Maier *et al*, 2016) can be perceived as hypocritical and deceitful when employed by NPOs (see Table 1 for key differences between brand activism when used by corporations versus NPOs). Yet, understanding the impact of branding strategies is important given the pivotal role that strong brands serve for NPOs (Chapleo, 2015). We now turn to the non-profit branding literature to better understand brand activism in this new context.

Table 1: Comparison of non-profit and for-profit brand activism

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Non-profit branding and the dualities of non-profit brands

Unlike commercial brands, non-profit brands must navigate complex identity issues (Lee and Bourne, 2017; Lee and Davies, 2021). Central to our conceptualisation is the duality of advocacy and service provision logics embedded in NPOs (Beaton *et al*, 2021). While this duality demonstrates that the notion of non-profits participating in advocacy is not new, many organisations have historically been forced to prioritise service provision over advocacy (Schmid *et al*, 2008). This is echoed across non-profit brand image and personality studies, which indicate that NPOs have traditionally crafted their identities around being caring and compassionate (Sargeant *et al*, 2008). Non-profit brands also emphasise generous and friendly

images (Michel and Rieunier, 2012) and nurturing personalities (Venable *et al*, 2005). Political orientation is scarcely considered in the non-profit branding literature (with the exception of Bennett and Gabriel, 2003), despite civic engagement being a fundamental responsibility of NPOs (Beaton *et al*, 2021; LeRoux, 2007). With this background, advocacy and service provision are now conceived as competing institutional logics (Beaton *et al*, 2021). Thus, non-profit brands that adopt activism – connoting a tilt towards advocacy rather than service provision - would likely be viewed by donors as a significant departure from the norm in this sector. Next, as brands play a crucial ‘signalling’ role in communicating such significant changes in strategic functions and objectives (Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli, 2015) and managing stakeholders’ reactions (Stuart, 2018), we draw on signalling theory to understand this further.

Signalling theory

Signalling theory (Spence, 1973) is useful for explaining how people will respond to new brand information where there are information asymmetries between sender and receiver (Erdem and Swait, 1998). A brand is situated as a signal in the marketplace. Recent theory iterations speak to the notion of ‘virtue signalling’ (Berthon *et al*, 2021), defined as ‘the action or practice of publicly expressing opinions or sentiments intended to demonstrate one’s good character or the moral correctness of one’s position on a particular issue’. Indeed, these authors point to the trend of *brand* virtue signalling, which has the specific goal of defining or enhancing brand image. We suggest brand activism can act as a virtue signal assisting the brand in establishing a ‘virtuous’ position and, in turn, brand equity.

In the non-profit context, however, we argue that brands do not need to adopt activist positioning for the purpose of signalling a ‘virtuous’ position in the marketplace, as they have mission and purpose encoded into their brand DNA (Mirzaei *et al*, 2021). Instead, brand

activism could be employed by NPOs to signal strategic intent to achieve differentiation, relevance and growth within the sector, particularly in response to the commercial companies that are increasingly leveraging social and political issues as part of their marketing communications to establish a prosocial positioning. Indeed, brand virtue signalling carves out differentiation and demonstrates the brand's sentiment on an issue of importance to its donors (Berthon *et al*, 2021). Consistent with the brand activism literature, brand virtue signalling also has potential to attract negative reactions (Berthon *et al*, 2021). Namely, it can be perceived as moral grandstanding in a climate which calls into question the appropriateness of businesses and CEOs as moral leaders (e.g., Branicki *et al*, 2021).

Synthesising the brand activism and non-profit branding literatures with signalling theory, it becomes clear that what is needed is to identify and unpack possible mechanisms that could explain the opposing outcomes of non-profit brand activism. We therefore propose (1) brand bravery and (2) brand hypocrisy as missing links that mediate the brand activism-brand equity relationship and explain the positive and negative effects, respectively, that have been documented in the literature. Figure 1 depicts our conceptual framework. Next, we define the constructs and hypothesise their relationships in more detail.

Fig 1: Conceptual framework

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Effects of non-profit brand activism on brand bravery

We define non-profit brand activism from the donor's perspective, namely the extent to which donors perceive (1) a brand's identity to encompass activism and (2) a brand's commitment to

activism (Corning and Myers, 2002; Klar and Kasser, 2009). Brand bravery is a differentiated and strategic aspect of brand identity that reflects a sense of being ‘altruistic, bold, courageous, determined, enduring, fearless or gritty’ (Jain *et al*, 2021, p. 1222). Perceptions of bravery, in particular, are established by demonstrating a determination to uphold and communicate beliefs and values, even when this requires courage and risk to ‘intercept the future and not just flow with it’ (Jain *et al*, 2021, p. 1215). Practitioners suggest that being brave requires moving away from what is considered the norm or traditional in marketing communications (Adams, 2018). We reason that the very actions and values discussed above as essential to building brand bravery are inherent to a strategy of brand activism. Activist brands use a ‘controversial pathway’ toward challenging the status quo and are regarded as ‘moral subjects’ (Sibai *et al*, 2021), which are purpose and values driven (Wettstein and Baur, 2016; Vredenburg *et al*, 2020). Thus, brand activism has potential to contribute to the formation of a courageous and emancipatory - a brave - brand identity. In the marketing literature, more generally, ‘wokeness’ is associated with courage (Sobande, 2020). In sum, we propose a positive relationship between brand activism and brand bravery.

H1 Perceived non-profit brand activism has a positive impact on brand bravery.

Effects of non-profit brand activism on brand hypocrisy

Acts of virtue signalling are often viewed as questionable and therefore can garner positive *or* negative reactions (Berthon *et al*, 2021); the interpretation and in turn, the decision-making process depends on the receiver (Bergh *et al*, 2014; Connelly *et al*, 2011). Thus, we hypothesise that perceived non-profit brand activism can also have negative effects, namely breeding judgements of brand hypocrisy. Brand hypocrisy is based on the concept of corporate hypocrisy

(Wagner *et al*, 2009) and refers to the perception that a brand is claiming to be something that it is not, arising from ‘distance between assertions and performance’ (Shklar, 1984, p. 62). Korschun *et al* (2019) further suggest that hypocrisy can emerge in the activism context when a company remains silent on an issue.

We reason that this negative effect could occur because brand virtue signalling -which is exhibited through brand activism - invites a high degree of scrutiny from the marketplace (Berthon *et al*, 2021) in terms of brand activism authenticity (Mirzaei *et al*, 2022; Vredenburg *et al*, 2020) and brand signal credibility (e.g., Erdem and Swait, 1998; 2004). Authenticity is concerned with the alignment of message and practice (Vredenburg *et al*, 2020), while credibility refers to the extent to which the information about a brand’s position (in this case, the stance on a sociopolitical issue expressed in the brand activism campaign) is truthful and dependable (Erdem and Swait, 1998). Thus, there are clear parallels between authenticity, credibility and hypocrisy as these concepts all emphasise a brand delivering on its promises.

Hypocrisy is a major risk of brand virtue signalling (Berthon *et al*, 2021) as it can be interpreted as a display of ‘conspicuous compassion’ rather than actual political commitment or responsibility (West, 2004). Extant studies further caution the risks of virtue signalling - being perceived as moral grandstanding (Grubbs *et al*, 2019) or presenting themselves as ‘woke’ to enhance their status (Tosi and Warmke, 2016). Hence, whilst brand activism can be interpreted positively for non-profits because their *raison d’être* is to do good rather than to make money, it is also likely to lead to perceptions of hypocrisy if viewed as a drastic departure from traditional charitable service provision (Beaton *et al*, 2021). Such hypocritical perceptions are likely for charities because activist messaging deviates from the expected compassionate and caring tone (Becker-Olsen *et al*, 2006). Overall, we predict that higher perceived non-profit brand activism leads to greater brand hypocrisy.

H2 Perceived non-profit brand activism has a positive impact on brand hypocrisy.

Effects of brand bravery on brand hypocrisy

Next, we propose a negative relationship between brand bravery and brand hypocrisy. Hypocrisy judgements are a reaction to information exposure that indicates a difference between a brand's assertions and actions (Wagner *et al*, 2009). While non-profit brand activism was argued to directly and positively relate to brand hypocrisy (H2), brand bravery plays an important mediating role with the potential to mitigate negative reactions to non-profit brand activism. It does this by conveying a brand's actions and values thereby minimising the distance that donors perceive between these and a brand's claims (which gives rise to hypocrisy) and by buffering the effect of negative information on donors and the brand evaluations formed.

First, brand bravery goes beyond caring for the cause - it resonates with the brand's core identity as well as actions and values (Jain *et al*, 2021). Brands that fit the 'brave' (Jain *et al*, 2021) and 'hero' (Pearson and Mark, 2001; Smith 2016) personality archetypes take courageous and difficult actions and privilege purpose above profit (Smith and Milligan, 2011). Specifically, brand bravery as an identity reflected in brand's core values, culture, positioning and personality (de Chernatony, 2002; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Kapferer, 2012), communicates to donors that a brand is altruistic and courageous in its actions and values. Hence, bravery works to minimise the distance between perceived prosocial actions and assertions that breeds hypocrisy. By contrast, when brands engage with sociopolitical issues for opportunistic reasons or as a response under pressure, perceptions of woke washing can result (Vredenburg *et al*, 2020), which, like hypocrisy, signals a mismatch between what a brand says and what it does. Second, brand bravery can create a buffering effect on the consumers, making them resistant to negative information against the brand (Jain *et al*, 2021).

Hence, holding beliefs about a brand as brave can reduce the risk of hypocrisy perceptions forming from certain information exposure, thus protecting the brand.

H3 Brand bravery has a negative impact on brand hypocrisy.

Effects of brand bravery on brand equity

Brand equity has become an outcome of interest in the NPO sector as branding is used to achieve competitive differentiation (Baghi and Gabrielli, 2013; Khan and Ede, 2009; Randle *et al*, 2013; Wymer and Akbar, 2017). We follow Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006) and define non-profit brand equity according to four stepwise components: (1) brand identity, (2) brand meaning, (3) brand response and (4) brand relationship. We choose this definition because it is derived from the widely adopted Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model (Keller and Swaminathan, 2020).

We hypothesise a positive relationship between brand bravery and brand equity. Initially, brand bravery can strengthen brand identity by setting a brand apart from competitors, and favourably shaping brand associations related to being altruistic, bold and courageous. Brand bravery can further establish positive brand meanings via performance attributes (such as empathy and ability to satisfy donor needs) and abstract imagery (Keller, 1993). How people think about brands abstractly is particularly important for NPOs because of the intangibility and social context of their offerings (Venable *et al*, 2005). Brand bravery conveys a brand's identity, which includes upholding its core values and beliefs by engaging in altruistic and empathetic actions and, in turn, defines and differentiates brand meanings.

Next, as brand bravery is associated with altruistic and courageous acts, it can further elicit favourable affective brand responses (Jain *et al*, 2021), such as feelings of inspiration and goodwill that become associated with the non-profit brand (Amos, 1982; Dawson, 1988;

Wunderink, 2002). Brand bravery can effectively contribute to credibility perceptions by communicating the brand's actions, beliefs and values and how those support a brand's promises made in its activism campaign. Finally, the brand relationship is the ultimate link in the chain of responses that builds brand equity. Perceived bravery is likely to reinforce favourable brand associations and brand images, increase credibility and trust and generate positive feelings of inspiration and goodwill, which result in more benevolent attitudes and behavioural intentions, which characterise relationships with NPOs (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006).

H4 Brand bravery has a positive impact on brand equity.

Effects of brand hypocrisy on brand equity

We hypothesise a negative relationship between brand hypocrisy and brand equity. While brand hypocrisy may not compromise brand awareness, it will create negative brand image and sales relating to perceived deviation between a brand's sociopolitical messaging and business practice (Wagner *et al*, 2009). Related research on greenwashing and woke washing clearly demonstrates that consumers feel misled by these practices and view them as unethical (Delmas and Burbano, 2011; Vredenburg *et al*, 2020). This will tarnish and create inconsistencies across images and beliefs, which negatively shapes brand meanings (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006).

Brand hypocrisy further negatively impacts credibility and trust, which form the brand response (Keller and Swaminathan, 2020). Credibility is driven by confidence in the brand to deliver on its promises (Erdem and Swait, 1998; Hoeffler and Keller, 2002). Having confidence in the brand to act dependably and truthfully (in this case, in relation to the brand's position on the sociopolitical issue) improves its utility and thereby adds value or 'equity' to the brand (Erdem and Swait, 1998). Where brand hypocrisy exists, therefore, credibility and, in turn,

brand equity, will be compromised. Last, to brand relationships, research shows that negative perceptions and lack of trust in a non-profit means individuals do not want to donate to or volunteer with a charity (Haski-Leventhal and Foot, 2016), which are key elements of brand relationships and in turn, brand equity.

H5 Brand hypocrisy has a negative impact on brand equity.

Non-profit brand activism, brand bravery, brand hypocrisy and brand equity

Perceived brand bravery plays a pivotal role in the formation of donors' emotional and evaluative reactions (Jain *et al*, 2021). In the domain of non-profit brand activism where donors may react positively or negatively, we propose that brand bravery is an important link that mitigates negative judgements (i.e., brand hypocrisy) and reinforces positive outcomes (i.e., brand equity) of non-profit brand activism.

The literature suggests that brand bravery has the power to bolster positive brand attitudes and behaviours and buffer against negative brand information (Jain *et al*, 2021). Being driven by a higher purpose - a notion related to brand bravery - is a crucial aspect of a brand's identity (Kapferer, 2012), which, in turn, helps to build brand equity (Madhavaram *et al*, 2005). Moreover, a brave brand identity, which embodies the upholding of altruistic values and taking courageous actions, mitigates judgements of brand hypocrisy that can hamper brand equity. Combining these research streams, the current study proposes the influence of perceived non-profit brand activism on brand equity via brand bravery and brand hypocrisy.

H6 The relationship between perceived non-profit brand activism and brand equity is sequentially mediated by brand bravery and brand hypocrisy, respectively.

Moderating effects of donors' moral foundations

Research suggests that the strategy of activism warrants questions about motivations and effects of morality (Branicki *et al*, 2020). Thus, we consider the moderating effect of a donor's moral foundations on the non-profit brand activism-brand bravery relationship. Specifically, we examine the extent of concern for justice that individual donors display (herein concern for justice), which alludes to a donor's individualising moral foundation and their interest in the fair protection and treatment of individuals (Haidt and Joseph, 2004). Reactions to virtue signalling depend on the audience's point of view (Berthon *et al*, 2021), and moral foundations account for the broad psychological system that an individual possesses and guides their cognitions (Haidt and Joseph, 2004).

We argue that a donor's concern for justice strengthens the positive relationship between perceived non-profit brand activism and brand bravery. The literature shows that those who prioritise individualising moral foundations tend to evaluate matters of justice to be of greater moral importance (Haidt, 2012) and respond to these in ways that are congruent with their identity (Reed *et al*, 2007; Winterich *et al*, 2012). Moreover, the bravery literature suggests that moral foundations shape impressions of what constitutes heroic behaviour. Individuals with stronger individualising moral foundations view those involved in defending rights and bucking oppressive social norms as heroic and value them as such (Jayawickreme and Di Stefano, 2012). Along the lines of these arguments, donors with a higher concern for justice will be more likely to perceive non-profit brand activism positively as a means to disrupt problematic discourses as this is compatible with their moral foundations that emphasise justice. Specifically, these donors are more likely to perceive non-profit brand activism as heroic, which strengthens its positive relationship to brand bravery.

H7 The effect of non-profit brand activism on brand bravery is moderated by a donor's concern for justice.

Methodology

Research context

The empirical context for this study was the UK non-profit sector. This sector is highly competitive with 169,000 charities (Statista, 2021), generating charitable value of £11.3 billion in 2020 (CAF, 2021). The UK is also ranked as the second most generous country in the world in terms of charitable giving (Statista, 2019).

Research instrument, data collection and sampling

The data for this study were collected using an online questionnaire composed of closed-ended questions/statements accompanied by a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The constructs in our study were measured using pre-developed scales from the marketing literature. There are five main constructs in this study: (1) Perceived non-profit brand activism, (2) Brand bravery, (3) Non-profit brand equity, (4) Brand hypocrisy and (5) Donor's concern for justice. Where necessary, these scales were adapted to the non-profit context. Table 2 provides the list of items for each construct, including appropriate dimensions and sources.

Perceived non-profit brand activism was measured using an eight-item scale from the political psychology literature, which provides a good grounding for orientation towards engagement in social and political action (Corning and Myers, 2002; Klar and Kasser, 2009). Using this scale, brand activism was operationalised as a second-order construct with identity and commitment dimensions. The brand bravery measure was adopted from Jain *et al* (2021) and consisted of 13 items as a second-order construct. Non-profit brand equity was measured using 13 items with four dimensions: brand identity, brand meaning, brand response and brand

relationships (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006; Washburn and Plank, 2002). Brand hypocrisy was measured using three items (Wagner *et al*, 2009), and donor's concern for justice used a single universal item adapted from Graham *et al* (2011). The content and face validity of the constructs was examined by a panel of six marketing academics. Several attention checks or "trap questions" (Jones *et al*, 2015) were included throughout to ensure quality data capturing.

Greenpeace was selected as the focal non-profit brand for this study. The decision to study a single NPO follows previous research that studies a single, purposely-selected brand/firm because it serves as benchmark for the phenomenon of interest (Batt *et al*, 2021; Ladhari *et al*, 2022; Sultan and Wong, 2019). The Greenpeace brand was selected by the first and second authors by referring to the Charity Index Ranking 2020 – Top 50 charities (YouGov, 2020) and subsequently identifying eight charities that had high reported levels of familiarity amongst the UK public and were known to have recently engaged in activism campaigns. We then consulted with two external marketing experts (an academic and a practitioner, both with a high level of exposure to and knowledge of the UK charitable sector). Based on this process, we selected Greenpeace, which has 94% familiarity (YouGov, 2022). Furthermore, Greenpeace is a globally-recognised environmental activist organisation (Becker *et al*, 2020; She, 2022; Villo *et al*, 2020), and Moorman (2020) suggests brand activism studies should focus on companies with self-evident political missions that drive decisions and actions. Finally, Greenpeace was chosen to establish ecological validity (Van Heerde *et al*, 2021) - it represents a known exemplar of environmental activism and is highly polarising, garnering both supporters and sceptics (BBC News, 2022). Its polarising nature furthermore aimed to maximise variance in brand equity dimensions. All respondents were provided with a brief description of the Greenpeace brand's mission, history and activities and instructed to answer all survey questions with reference to Greenpeace.

<Insert Table 2 here >

Using Prolific Academic, which is common in marketing and branding research (Palan and Schitter, 2018), we obtained a sample of 518 UK residents. Consistent with prior research (Michaelidou *et al*, 2015b), participants were invited to the study if they reported donating to charity in the past six months. Initially, 553 participants completed the questionnaire. However, we removed those who indicated that they are not aware of the Greenpeace brand (stating ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’ and ‘somewhat disagree’ for this item) as well as those who failed the attention checks, resulting in a final sample size of 518. See Table 3 for demographic data.

<Insert Table 3 here>

Data analysis and results

This study utilised a four-step procedure to examine the hypotheses. Firstly, the demographic profile and the distribution of the data were investigated to ensure reliable sampling. Next, the measurement model reliability was tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). This was followed by a covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) using AMOS 27 software to examine hypotheses 1-5 (Hair *et al*, 2017). Path coefficients were used to test the direct effects of factors (H1 to H5), and the sizes of indirect effects were explored to reveal the mediation effect of brand bravery on brand equity. The moderation and serial mediation (H6 and H7) effects were investigated using the PROCESS macro model.

Reliability and validity of measurement

Before analysing the conceptual model, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and model reliability were tested for all endogenous and exogenous variables (Hair *et al*, 2017). Normality of the data was assessed by using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (Hair *et al*, 2017). A value of 0.72 ($p < 0.001$) was obtained indicating adequate sampling. In addition, all items had skewness and kurtosis values less than 2, indicating a fairly normally-distributed data pattern (Hair *et al*, 2017). The multicollinearity test showed that VIF ranged from 1.04 to 1.56, which is well below 10, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern (Hair *et al*, 2017).

CFA was used to verify the convergent and discriminant validity. All standardised regression weights were above 0.50 and significant at 0.001. All items had factor loadings greater than 0.70, indicating item-level convergent validity. All Average Variance Extracted values (AVEs) were higher than 0.50, suggesting convergent validity at the factor level. Further, we tested the condition for discriminant validity among constructs as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), and all AVEs were larger than the squared correlation between the construct and any others (Table 4). All the measures exhibited strong reliability, with composite reliabilities ranging from .85 to .95 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988) and all Cronbach's Alphas exceeding 0.80.

The CFA fit statistics indicated that the measurement model fit well with the data (χ^2 [518] = 1352.53, $p < .00$; $\chi^2/df = 2$, GFI = .87; TLI = .95; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.05; Bryne, 2013; Hair *et al*, 2017). Therefore, the measurement model was deemed appropriate for measuring latent constructs.

Common method variance (CMV) was also examined to check if a single latent variable accounts for the majority of manifest variable variance (Podsakoff *et al*, 2012). These authors offer procedural and statistical remedies, which we followed. In the questionnaire design and

sampling procedures, we randomised the presentation order of items for respondents, separated the measurement of the predictor and outcome variables and protected respondent anonymity using Prolific Academic's ID system. We also introduced an additional latent common method factor (LCMF), which every item in the baseline model was allowed to load on (in addition to loading on its respective construct). The LCMF accounted for 39.9% of the total variance, which was less than 50% following Harman's one-factor method (Podsakoff *et al*, 2012). The results indicated that CMV was not an issue in this study.

<Insert Table 4 here>

Structural model assessment and hypothesis testing

The hypotheses were tested with a structural model based on p-value (H1 to H5) and a series of analyses using bootstrapping with the SPSS macro PROCESS (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) (H6 and H7). We used 95% confidence intervals to check the indirect, direct and total estimates of path coefficients, with 5000 samples.

To examine hypotheses 1 to 5, a CB-SEM analysis was conducted. The results revealed an overall good fit of this model ($\chi^2 [518] = 1331.57$, $p < .00$; $\chi^2/df = 2$, GFI = .87; TLI = .95; CFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.05; R² Brand bravery = .12; R² Brand hypocrisy = .45; R² Brand equity = .60). The second-order factor loadings were all significant (see Table 5). More specifically, we found non-profit brand activism positively influenced brand bravery ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$), supporting H1. However, non-profit brand activism had a positive but non-significant relationship with brand hypocrisy ($\beta = .01$, n.s.). As such, H2 was rejected. Brand bravery was negatively related to brand hypocrisy ($\beta = -.99$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, brand bravery had a positive effect on brand equity ($\beta = .29$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3 and H4 respectively. Brand hypocrisy was found to have a negative effect on brand equity ($\beta = -.45$, $p < 0.001$), supporting

H5. Alternative analysis using SPSS macro PROCESS reconfirmed similar results – see Model 1, 2 and 3 in Table 6 in the next section.

<Insert Table 5 here>

The mediating roles of brand bravery and brand hypocrisy

To examine the serial mediating effects of brand bravery and brand hypocrisy in the relationship between non-profit brand activism as a predictor and brand equity as an outcome, we conducted a series of analyses using the bootstrapping procedure with the SPSS macro PROCESS (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). The total, direct and indirect effects in a model with two serial mediators were tested (Hayes, 2018). In a PROCESS model 6, the direct effect of non-profit brand activism was not significant (effect = -.09, $p = .07$). However, there was a positive and significant total indirect effect (effect = .25, $p < .001$, LLCI = .16 and ULCI = .36) of non-profit brand activism on brand equity. The indirect effect of *brand activism* → *brand bravery* → *brand equity* was positive and significant (effect = .15, $p < .001$, LLCI = .10 and ULCI = .20) as was the indirect effect of *brand activism* → *brand bravery* → *brand hypocrisy* → *brand equity* (effect = .12, $p < .001$, LLCI = .08 and ULCI = .16). Thus, there is a partial serial mediation, supporting H6. See Figure 2 for the process model effect.

<Insert Figure 2 here >

Finally, we used Model 83 in PROCESS to test for moderated mediation (H7) – namely, that a donor’s concern for justice moderates the indirect relationship between non-profit brand activism and brand equity, through brand bravery and brand hypocrisy. In Table 7, we found

the interaction effect was positive and significant, and H7 was supported ($\beta = .01$; $p < .001$, LLCI = .07 and ULCI = .19).

<Insert Table 6 and 7 here>

Discussion

Theoretical contributions

This study extends prior research on brand activism in the B2C and B2B contexts (Kapitan *et al*, 2022; Moorman, 2020; Schmidt *et al*, 2022; Vredenburg *et al*, 2020) by providing an initial inquiry into brand activism in the third sector, presenting some of the first empirical evidence on the relationship between non-profit brand activism and brand equity. First, this study found that the relationship between non-profit brand activism and brand equity is positive but only in the presence of brand bravery. This implies that, in the non-profit sector, relevant mediators for translating the strategic value of non-profit brand activism into positive brand equity are required. This finding is interesting because previous research has highlighted the importance of authenticity, finding significant risks to brands taking a stand (Mukherjee and Althuizen, 2020) as they may lack perceived authenticity (Ahmad *et al*, 2022; Vredenburg *et al*, 2020). This risk is heightened in the non-profit context, as mentioned - a sharp shift to an activist-driven ‘warrior’ image contradicts traditional donor expectations of NPOs to possess a caring, nurturing ‘warmth’ image. Accordingly, this research has shown that developing a sense of bravery, such that the brand is perceived as bold, determined, enduring, and fearless is indispensable if brands want to harness brand activism for improved brand equity in the non-profit sector. This means that NPOs need to implement what is necessary to disrupt the status quo, by achieving an authentic alignment between ‘bold’ communications and action regarding focal socio-political issue (Vredenburg *et al*, 2020). In addition, NPOs should be ‘brave

enough' to make sacrifices (e.g., alienating stakeholders), another important driver for authenticity that eventually leads to brand equity (Mirzaei *et al*, 2022). We extend this thinking about authenticity by identifying brand bravery – a unique and strategic facet of brand identity (Jain *et al*, 2021) – as critical for a non-profit brand activism strategy to realise brand-equity gains. This theorising and testing for brand bravery's mediating role helps to 'open the black box' of the relationship between non-profit brand activism and brand equity by identifying one missing link that connects the strategy with the outcome.

In addition, this study reveals that brand bravery mitigates the formation of brand hypocrisy judgements that can arise from non-profit brand activism and, in turn, diminish brand equity. This is a significant finding that builds on Korschun *et al* (2019) by showing when and how a sense of hypocrisy can be reduced. Relatedly, brand activism has been documented to lead to higher perceptions of hypocrisy in value-driven firms as compared to market-driven ones when they fail to take a stand (Korschun *et al*, 2019). In the non-profit setting, however, we did not find a direct correlation between non-profit activism and hypocrisy. Despite non-profits being seen as business-like (Maier *et al*, 2016) and suffering declining trust (Becker *et al*, 2020), donors apparently maintain faith in NPOs while they leverage a new activist positioning, in a bid to not only disrupt problematic discourses in their sector but also to maintain marketplace relevance. This is consistent with Korschun *et al* (2019), which shows consumers respond positively towards firms taking a stand when the issue aligns with their values. It is further relevant to mention that the serial mediation of brand bravery and brand hypocrisy is strengthened when donors have a greater concern for justice, echoing extant research argues that individuals view organisations defending their rights as heroic (Jayawickreme and Di Stefano, 2012). Thus, our findings indicate that increasing an individual's perceptions of justice increases positive outcomes of non-profit brand activism.

Second, this study contributes to the non-profit branding literature by examining non-profit brand activism as an emerging strategy and unpacking the unique tension that NPOs face in shifting away from the traditional image as a charitable service provider toward one as a powerful political advocate. The literature highlights a number of dualities that non-profit brands must navigate and reconcile to successfully achieve their aims – for example, pursuing both income and mission goals (Lee and Bourne, 2017). Our study points to a new strategic tension that arises when NPOs participate in non-profit brand activism. Past studies show that consumers respond positively to marketing communications that utilise warmth and empathy appeals to drive donations (Bennett and Gabriel, 2003; Michaelidou *et al*, 2015a; Michel and Rieunier, 2012; Venable *et al*, 2005). This is diametrically misaligned with an activist positioning. We show that brand bravery is essential as a bridge between these two market positions and enables brands to craft a balanced identity as a *compassionate warrior* that not only empathises with consumers’ concerns but also courageously challenges the status quo.

Finally, we contribute to the evolving conversation in the marketing literature about the societal responsibilities and roles of brands as agents of change. Alongside brand activism, the literature reveals an array of branding concepts with a social edge. While these studies consider how brands and branding can drive transformation at different levels, from micro (within consumers) to meso (within organisations) to macro (within market and societal systems; Spry *et al*, 2021), they predominantly speak to the commercial sector (with the exception of Mirzaei *et al*, 2021). Some may consider the non-profit sector as one that does not require this type of change or transformation – after all, the primary function of this sector is to provide services that strengthen community accessibility and safety. However, there are growing discussions about the inequalities that persist in the sector due to problematic institutions, systems and structures. For example, the humanitarian sector and aid organisations (e.g., Oxfam) are understood to operate with a white saviour mentality grounded in colonialist and racist histories

(Hirsch, 2018), and initiatives such as Charity So White, are now operating to bring such organisations into alignment with their espoused values. Therefore, our study builds on this burgeoning stream of research by highlighting non-profit brand activism as a catalyst for change within the third sector, specifically where the unquestioned ‘goodness’ of NPOs may be actively obstructing the broader pursuit of social justice.

Managerial implications

The findings of this study have three significant implications for NPO marketing managers navigating brand activism. The overarching take away is that non-profit brand activism is an effective tool for building brand equity indirectly through building brand bravery and suggests guidelines for managing both non-profit brand activism as a strategy and brand bravery as an identity. First, implementing a strategy of non-profit brand activism has the potential to deliver positive effects on brand equity, but these are not guaranteed or immediate. NPOs perceived to have a salient identity as an activist and a steadfast commitment to the cause have the most to gain but also the most to lose in terms of brand equity. Specifically, stronger perceptions that a brand is implementing activism leads to brand bravery but also elevates the risk of donors forming judgements of brand hypocrisy. Marketing managers should focus on brand bravery as an essential ingredient and strategic roadmap for maximising positive outcomes of non-profit brand activism and minimising the risk of negative outcomes. This may include organisation-initiated assessments of non-profit brand activism strategies prior to launch to gather preliminary insights into how these would be perceived by donors – brave or hypocritical?

More broadly, our study corroborates the positive outcomes of brand bravery and calls for marketing managers to consider more courageous means to enhancing donor intentions and

behaviours (Jain *et al*, 2021). In times of deep mistrust of societal institutions (Edelman, 2022), rather than avoid political messaging (Robson and Hart, 2020), our findings encourage NPO marketing managers to bravely embrace activism that allows for both achievement of brand equity and the advancement of social goals.

Second, our findings provide insights into how non-profits can effectively communicate activism initiatives to potential donors. Given that non-profit brand activism can be perceived by audiences as brave or hypocritical, it is crucial to have a strategic view of the creative execution. Practitioners can consider adopting a more charged and determined tone of voice and visuals elements. For example, Shelter - which works to end homelessness and inadequate housing in the UK - rebranded and launched a new campaign called Fight For Home, in which they take a public stand in support of the human right to safe housing. Where Shelter had previously used the 'polite' promotional trope (Wong, 2021) common to the charity sector, the new direction motivated the activist edge evident in the new campaign. Continuing with a gentle rather than brave approach impedes the ability of NPOs to affect true social change.

Third, by providing the first examination of non-profit brand activism, this study offers the strategy as a novel avenue for effectively engaging a younger donor cohort, which remains a common challenge in the sector. When a NPOs core supporters are mainly elderly, it is imperative to safeguard against future losses in donations. In the UK, many household non-profit brands have strong equity amongst older supporters and are reluctant to make dramatic changes to take part in social movements (Dufour, 2019). However, non-profit brand activism presents an opportunity to communicate a change in the NPOs strategic direction towards advocacy and refresh the brand image. Generation Z has been termed the 'activist generation' (Callaghan, 2019) – they take the view that 'my dollar is my vote' and as such, they deliberately patronise brands that make a social impact (Admirand, 2020). Millennials similarly display a

preference for supportive and caring brands (Jain *et al*, 2021). Non-profits can take steps towards appealing to and even collaborating with grassroots youth activists and speaking out to these young potential donors.

Limitations and future research

This research has several limitations, which point to important avenues for future research. First, our study is based on Greenpeace as an exemplar of NPO brand activism. Given the activist history of the Greenpeace brand (Becker *et al*, 2020), such strongly-held consumer associations and perceptions may not be apparent when considering other non-profit brands that are newly engaged in activism. This could hinder the generalisability of our results to other non-profit contexts. Hence, it would be fruitful for future research to explore fictitious non-profit brands or a wider variety of real brands that are newly embracing a strategy of activism and attempting to address other issues, such as gender inequality and systemic racism. It would be particularly interesting to compare activism efforts relating to causes that are popular and unpopular with the public (Body and Breeze, 2022).

A related limitation is the cross-sectional design utilised herein. This was appropriate for the chosen brand given the enduring stability of its positioning as an environmental activist and correlation with brand equity (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006). However, it does not allow inferences of causality, which were beyond the scope of this research. Future research could consider an experimental design that manipulates and captures the dynamics of a brand shifting to this strategy. Future research could also consider employing a longitudinal design to map the navigation of non-profit brand activism over time. The findings would build on those here within to test the causality between variables, providing additional support or a different

perspective on the influence of brand bravery and brand hypocrisy on non-profit brand activism, thus providing further useful managerial implications.

Second, our study is based on a UK sample and, on balance, primarily reflects a developed economy and Western culture. It remains for future research to examine the international applicability of the observed effects by replicating our results with samples from other countries. Our focal variables may take on different meanings in different cultures. There is clear merit in examining consumers' reactions to non-profit brand activism beyond those that occur in European and North American countries. For example, how differently would non-profit brand activism be received in countries with stricter censorship rules or citizen rights to free speech? How would it be interpreted in communities that tend to be culturally marginalised? Moreover, what is considered brave and heroic in one culture may be different as compared to another. In a highly individualistic culture, those who defend rights and buck oppressive social norms have historically been highly valued whereas those who protect in-group interest and integrity may be heralded as heroes in collectivistic cultures (Jayawickreme and Di Stefano, 2012).

Third, our study is the first to investigate brand activism in the non-profit sector, so to provide a clearer and fuller picture of brand equity implications, it would be useful for future research to examine additional boundary conditions. As for brand-level factors, there is scope to consider the historical positioning of the non-profit brand as an activist versus philanthropist as well as the image and personality (e.g., nurturing, rugged, sincere). Moral foundations of non-profit brands could also be examined. Prior research (Winterich *et al*, 2012) suggests that donors may infer a charity brand's moral foundations based on its management and mission and this, in turn, can significantly affect giving. In this vein, it would be similarly illuminating to more fully understand how donors' moral foundations (beyond concern for justice) and

political identity shape their receptivity to non-profit brand activism and their donation behaviour, especially when these are perceived to be aligned/misaligned with those of the NPO.

To conclude, difficulties abound in the non-profit sector: cuts to corporate and government funding, increases in competition for donors and volunteers, risks to being perceived as overly commercial in the branding tactics used to differentiate, and widespread public mistrust. While non-profits as purpose natives have always had an advocacy role to play, a growing number are once again embracing this role and positioning themselves as activists by engaging with controversial and divisive issues within the third sector. Overall, this study aims to contribute to the burgeoning body of work addressing brand activism and provide a first step towards examining what happens when a non-profit brand makes a strategic shift away from being warm to being a warrior, a shift from doing 'good' to doing what's 'right'.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Table 1: Comparison of non-profit and for-profit brand activism

	Non-profit (NPO) brand activism	For-profit (FPO) brand activism
Contextual foundations	Traditionally caring and compassionate; higher-purpose native	Profit-driven business
Activism drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To differentiate and stand out To better align with the mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumer expectations Maintaining relevance through taking part in sociocultural movements
Sources of income	Government funding, donations or funding from corporate partners, fees for services provided, donations/fundraising	Sales revenue
Stakeholders	Trustees, employees, donors, volunteers, supporters, service users	Customers, suppliers, board members, employees, shareholders
Key strategic issues related to engaging in brand activism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to shift from a ‘warm’ compassionate communication style to a ‘warrior’ activist one The ‘stickiness’ of the traditional caring and compassionate brand image of NPOs that drives donations Concern around stakeholder perceptions of over-commercialisation and adopting business-like strategies Likely to garner polarised reactions - due to contested nature of focal sociopolitical issues and a departure from the traditional caring and nurturing service-provision role of NPOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to create a credible and authentic identity Risks of woke washing Risks of alienating some customers Likely to garner polarised reactions - due to contested nature of focal sociopolitical issues and appropriateness of holding up businesses as moral leaders
Intended brand activism outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased brand equity, with the aim of increasing donations and support for charitable service provision, in turn Change and impact related to focal sociopolitical issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased brand equity, with the aim of increasing market leadership and financial performance, in turn Change and impact related to focal sociopolitical issue
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greenpeace (campaigning for environmental protection and peace), Shelter’s Fight for Home campaign (e.g., 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nike’s support of the Black Lives Matter social movement, Oreo’s support of the LGBTQIA+

	equality and justice in safe housing); Charity So White (tackling racism in the sector)	community via the Pride campaign
Indicative literature	Beaton <i>et al</i> (2021); Lee and Davies (2021); Michel and Rieunier, (2012); Mirzaei <i>et al</i> (2021)	Korschun <i>et al</i> (2019); Moorman (2020); Schmidt <i>et al</i> (2022); Vredenburg <i>et al</i> (2020)

Tables 2: Measurements

Latent variables and scale items	Loadings
Brand Activism (Cronbach Alpha = 0.94); Klar and Kasser (2009), Corning and Myers (2002)	
Brand activism identity	
1. Being an activist is central to who the charity[brand] is.	.86
2. I identify the [brand] charity as an activist.	.75
3. People who know the [brand] well would call the charity an activist.	.79
4. Being an activist is an important reflection of who the charity is	.84
Brand activism commitment	
1. The charity is truly committed to engaging in activism.	.85
2. The charity make time for activism amongst all their other activities.	.70
3. The charity goes out of their way to engage in activism.	.82
4. The charity takes time to engage in activism.	.83
Brand Bravery (Cronbach Alpha = 0.95); Jain <i>et al.</i> (2021)	
Bold	
1. The brand has a path distinct from its competitors	.71
2. The brand is true to itself	.80
Determined	
1. The brand remains relentless and refuses to succumb to external power	.85
2. The brand challenges the status quo	.78
3. The brand is resolute and holds on to its values	.85
4. The spirit of the Brand remains unshaken despite failures	.81
Enduring	
1. The brand stands up to its competitors	.77
2. The brand has a never-say-die vision	.74
Fearless	
1. The brand is fearless in venturing into new territories	.86
2. The brand defines new frontiers in business	.70
3. The brand is courageous in taking changes/risks	.81
Gritty	
1. The brand is revolutionary and questions the existing stereotypes	.81
2. The brand is innovative and defies the industry norms	.85
Brand Equity (Cronbach Alpha = 0.96); Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006), Washburn and Plank (2002)	
Brand identity	
1. This brand is all about protecting the planet	.73

2. This brand helps make the planet greener, healthier, and more peaceful	.93
Brand meaning	
1. This brand delivers the desired benefits to the brand	.78
2. This brand is a vital part of the community	.81
3. This brand is a positive force in the community	.84
Brand response	
1. This brand is one you can trust	.92
2. This brand can be donated to with confidence	.90
3. I like this brand	.92
4. This is a good brand	.93
5. This is a helpful brand	.89
Brand relationship	
1. If I were to donate money to charity, I would likely donate to [charity brand]	.86
2. If I were to volunteer personal time with charity, I would likely volunteer with [charity brand]	.82
3. I am likely to recommend this brand	.96
Brand Hypocrisy (<i>Cronbach Alpha = 0.86</i>); <i>Wagner et al. (2009)</i>	
1. This brand acts hypocritically	.78
2. What this brand says and does are two different things	.80
3. This brand pretends to be something that it is not	.86
Donor's Concern for Justice , <i>Graham et al. (2011)</i> – one universal item	
1. Justice is the most important requirement for a society	n.a.

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of the sample (N=518)

Demographic Factors	Items	Count	Percentage
Gender	Female	321	62.0
	Male	196	37.8
	Other	1	.2
	Total	518	100
Age	18-29	71	13.7
	30-39	142	27.4
	40-49	132	25.5
	50-59	106	20.5
	60 and more	67	12.9
	Total	518	100

Table 4: Descriptive statistics, reliability, discriminant validity

Constructs	Mean	S.D.	CR	AVE	CA	BRA	BH	BA	BE
Brand bravery (BRA)	6.12	0.74	0.95	0.79	0.93	1 (0.89^a)			
Brand hypocrisy (BH)	2.99	1.25	0.85	0.66	0.86	-0.66***	1(0.81)		
Brand activism (BA)	6.12	0.74	0.89	0.80	0.90	0.34***	-0.15**	1 (0.89)	
Brand equity (BE)	4.74	1.12	0.95	0.83	0.96	0.63***	-0.75***	0.094	1 (0.91)

*BRA= Brand Bravery; BH = Brand Hypocrisy; BA = Brand Activism; BE = Brand Equity; CR =Composite reliability, CA = Cronbach alpha

^a Average variance extracted (AVE); ^b Squared correlation.

Significant of correlations:

+p < 0.100; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

Table 5: Model fit and structural coefficients

Constructs	2 nd -order factor loading	Critical Ratio	p-value
BA → AI	.89	9.56	.000
BA → AC	.89	-	.000
BRA → BB	.95	-	.000
BRA → BD	.92	17.14	.000
BRA → BEN	.92	15.92	.000
BRA → BF	.85	15.88	.000
BRA → BG	.82	15.72	.000
BE → BI	.80	17.39	.000
BE → BM	.94	-	.000
BE → BR	.95	19.18	.000
BE → BRL	.86	15.92	.000

Table 6: Indirect effects for mediation models: The PROCESS Macro Models

Independent variables	Model 1 Brand Bravery	Model 2 Brand Hypocrisy	Model 3 Brand Equity	Hypothesis
Brand activism	.35 (9.79)	.01 (n.s.)	-.09 (n.s)	H1 supported H2 rejected
Brand bravery	-	-.77 (-14.44)	.42 (8.71)	H3 supported H4 supported
Brand hypocrisy	-	-	-.43 (-12.88)	H5 supported
R2	.08	.30	.50	
Indirect effects	Effect	LLCI	UCLI	
BA →BRA→ BH →BE	.12	.08	.16	H6 supported
Indirect effects	Effect	LLCI	UCLI	
BA →BRA →BE	.15	.10	.20	

N= 518; *t* values in bracket

LLCI lower level of the 95% confidence interval, *UCLI* upper level of the 95% confidence interval

*Significant at the .01 (2-tailed *t* test)

Table 7: Test of conditional indirect effect of donor's concern for justice on the brand activism and brand equity

Moderators	Conditional indirect effects of brand activism on brand equity via brand bravery BA →BRA →BE			Conditional indirect effects of brand activism on brand equity via brand bravery and brand hypocrisy BA →BRA→ BH →BE			
	Level	b	CI _{95%low}	CI _{95%high}	b	CI _{95%low}	CI _{95%high}
Donor's concern for justice	(-1 SD)	.08	.02	.15	.07	.01	.12
	(Mean)	.14	.09	.20	.11	.07	.16
	(+ 1 SD)	.19	.12	.28	.15	.09	.23
Index of moderated mediation		.05	.006	.100	.04	.005	.082

CI confidence interval; *b* unstandardized coefficient

Fig.1 Conceptual framework of the effects of non-profit brand activism on non-profit brand equity

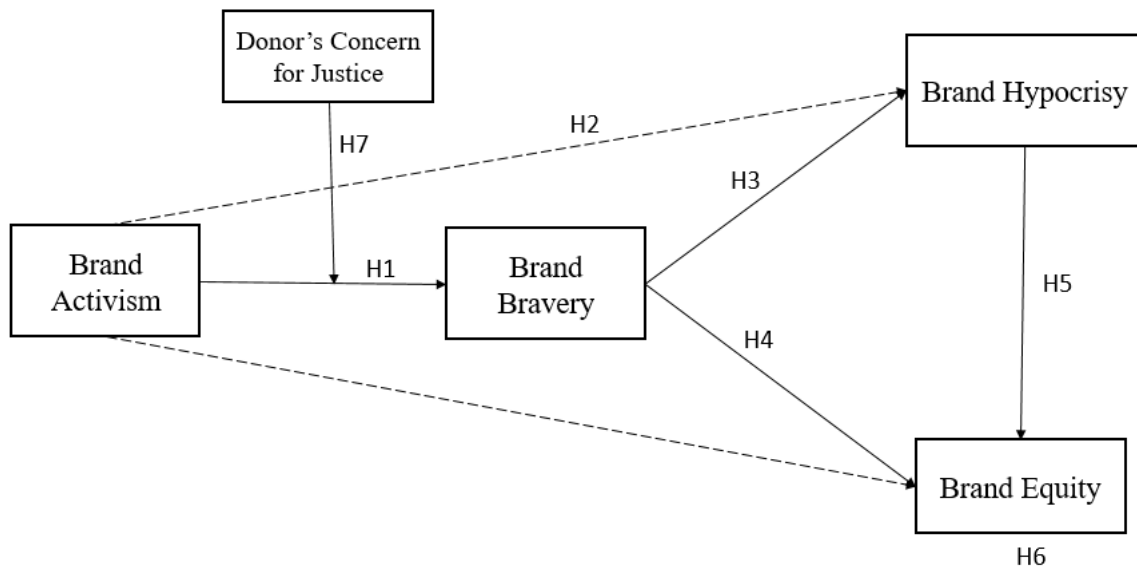


Fig.2 Process model results for the effect of non-profit brand activism

