



# Handelshøyskolen BI

## GRA 19703 Master Thesis

Thesis Master of Science 100% - W

### Predefinert informasjon

**Startdato:** 09-01-2023 09:00 CET  
**Termin:** 202310  
**Sluttdato:** 03-07-2023 12:00 CEST  
**Vurderingsform:** Norsk 6-trinns skala (A-F)  
**Eksamensform:** T  
**Flowkode:** 202310||11184||IN00||W||T  
**Intern sensor:** (Anonymisert)

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### Informasjon fra deltaker

Tittel \*: THE IMPACT OF WOKE WASHING  
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Inneholder besvarelsen konfidensielt materiale? Nei  
Kan besvarelsen offentliggjøres? Ja

### Gruppe

Gruppenavn: (Anonymisert)  
Gruppenummer: 203  
Andre medlemmer i gruppen:

# THE IMPACT OF WOKE WASHING



BI Norwegian Business School  
GRA 19703 – Master Thesis  
MSc in Strategic Marketing Management

**Supervisor:**

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**Hand in Date:**

29.06.2023

## Abstract

This thesis investigates the phenomenon of woke washing and the impact on consumer attitudes, perception of credibility, and behavior. With an increasing expectation for brands to engage in socio-political matters, genuine brand activism has gained significance. However, inauthentic brand activism, known as woke washing, has emerged as a concern. Woke washing occurs when brands detach their messaging from their core values, purpose, and practices, capitalizing on social justice movements to enhance their brand image. This study explores the effects of woke washing on consumers by examining previous literature, theoretical frameworks such as brand authenticity and social activism, and empirical research. The findings reveal that woke washing significantly influences consumer responses, resulting in shifts in attitudes, perception of brand credibility, and purchase intentions. Consumers demand coherence, transparency, and responsible communication practices from brands engaging in social activism. The study emphasizes the importance of aligning brand actions with social goals, as well as proactively addressing criticism to maintain trustworthiness and minimize consumer backlash. It also highlights the vulnerability of brands in maintaining credibility when faced with negative feedback. The research contributes to the understanding of woke washing's implications for brand management, offering theoretical and practical insights. The study calls for brands to prioritize alignment with consumer values, while ensuring authenticity and consistency between brand messages and actions. The results underscore the need for brands to navigate the landscape of woke advertising carefully, maintaining coherence between their actions and the messages they promote. Overall, this study sheds light on the consequences of woke washing on consumers and provides guidance for brand managers in effectively engaging in social activism while maintaining consumer trust and credibility. This paper also provides recommendations for future research aiming to delve further into the impact of woke washing.

**Keywords:** *woke advertising, social activism, woke washing, brand activism, consumer behavior, brand management, brand communication, socio-political movements.*

## **Acknowledgments**

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to those who have supported and guided us throughout the completion of this thesis. First and foremost, we are immensely grateful for our supervisor Tarje Gaustad, for his valuable guidance and feedback, expertise, and support throughout the entire research process. Secondly, we are thankful to the faculty and staff at BI Norwegian Business School, whose commitment to excellence in education has provided us with a conducive academic environment for conducting this research. We would also like to thank our fellow colleagues and friends for their encouragement, motivation, and intellectual discussions. Their insights and perspectives have been invaluable in shaping our thinking and refining our ideas. Lastly, we would like to express our sincere appreciation for the exceptional teamwork, seamless cooperation, and unwavering support we provided to each other throughout the entire process. We acknowledged and valued each other's individual strengths and weaknesses, which allowed us to effectively collaborate and find the most optimal approach to working together.

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## 1.0 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing expectation for brands to take a stance on socio-political matters. When brands align their messaging, purpose, and values with socially responsible business practices, they participate in genuine brand activism. On the contrary, brands that detach their messaging from their core purpose, values, and practices engage in inauthentic brand activism, referred to as "woke washing". This practice can mislead consumers with false claims, resulting in harm to both brand equity and the potential for important social progress (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry & Kemper, 2020). Brand activism is utilized by brands to differentiate themselves in a divided marketplace by publicly taking positions on social and political issues (Moorman, 2020). However, this approach has become increasingly divisive and risky. Consumers have responded strongly to brands' public stances, with incidents like boycotting Gillette razors, burning Nike shoes or canceling Costco memberships. For instance, Gillette got accused of toxic masculinity in a 2019 viral video campaign (Hsu, 2019).

Consequently, customers began to express alienation and question whether Gillette was merely engaging in virtue-signaling (Cambridge University Press, n.d). These consumers found it unclear which values or practices supported the Gillette campaign, especially considering Gillette's continuation of higher prices for women's products through the "pink tax" (Tempesta, 2019). Another example is the iconic 2018 Colin Kaepernick 'Dream Crazy' campaign when brands, in this case Nike, increased their messaging in support of racial justice during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. However, consumers and critics pointed out the lack of supportive values, purpose, and practices, such as the absence of Black board members (Ritson, 2020). Even when brands transparently communicate their practices and values supporting a socio-political cause, they are not immune to controversy or claims of "woke washing". For example, Nike continued to sponsor NFL teams that rejected Colin Kaepernick, despite having embraced him as their endorser when he knelt as a Black Lives Matter protester (Carp, 2018). In this case, similar to greenwashing, firms and brands may

mislead consumers about their socio-political performance or the social benefits of their products, leading to “woke washing” (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

While the term "woke" originally emerged as a way to describe social and political awareness (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), it has now found its way into corporate boardrooms, marketing campaigns, and public relations strategies. Woke washing refers to the practice of companies capitalizing on social justice movements, such as feminism, racial equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and environmental activism, to enhance their brand image and appeal to socially conscious consumers. The rise of woke washing has sparked heated debates and discussions about the authenticity of corporate social activism. Thus, this study will delve into the concept of woke washing, and the impact it may have on consumers. The study embeds the analysis in theory such as brand authenticity and social activism to explain the consequences of “woke washing”. With guidance from hypotheses regarding attitude and level of knowledge pertaining to this phenomenon, the study sheds light on the consequences organizations could face when “woke washing”.

## 2.0 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Brand Authenticity

Authenticity has become a prominent concept in recent years, with diverse interpretations arising due to different philosophical standpoints, contexts, and relevance (Becker, Wiegand & Reinartz, 2019). The definition of authenticity has varied throughout history. Philosophers Heidegger and Sartre initially associated authenticity with moral behavior, emphasizing sincerity, responsibility, and value-based choices (Fritz, Schoenmüller & Bruhn, 2017, p.326). Trilling (1972, as cited in Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin & Grohmann, 2015) considered authenticity as an intrinsic quality of museum objects evaluated by experts. In the context of postmodern consumer culture, authenticity has become a multidimensional construct, valued as a countercultural phenomenon against perceived hollowness of brands (Holt, 2002; Young, 2017). This has led to brands adopting authenticity as a positioning tool (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Holt, 2002), resulting in skepticism among consumers and marketers (Becker et al., 2019). The complexity of authenticity is such that Potter (2010, p.271) suggests that finding true authenticity may require stopping the search for it.

Scholars have examined brand authenticity across various markets to understand its contemporary meaning to consumers. These studies have explored brand authenticity in tourism attractions (Grayson & Martinec, 2004), consumption subcultures (Leigh, Peters & Shelton, 2006), luxury wines (Beverland, 2006), advertisements (Beverland & Farrelly, 2008), and fast-moving consumer goods (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018).

The following sections aim to clarify the conceptualization of authenticity and provide an overview of the current understanding of brand authenticity. Additionally, it is important to note that simply labeling something as authentic does not guarantee the authenticity, emphasizing the significance of understanding why consumers actively seek authentic brands.

### *2.1.1 Perspectives on authenticity*

According to Grayson & Martinec (2004) and Morhart et al. (2015), the terms “realness”, “truthfulness”, and “genuineness” are frequently used to describe authenticity. However, this fundamental comprehension leaves room for additional investigation because it falls short of fully capturing the intricacy of authenticity. Due to varying philosophies, brand authenticity definitions among academic scholars are still fractured (Morhart et al., 2015).

Authenticity is a property of an object that can be assessed based on verifiable features such as history, provenance, and performance, leaving little space for interpretation, according to the objectivistic perspective (Morhart et al., 2015). Contrarily, the existential perspective views authenticity as being integral to a person’s sense of self, particularly in the context of marketing, where businesses are seen as authentic if they help customers find their true selves (Morhart et al., 2015).

According to the constructivist approach (Morhart et al., 2015; Oh, Prado, Korelo, & Frizzo, 2019), authenticity is a socially or personally constructed idea that is influenced by consumers’ interpretations, knowledge, and interests. In accordance with this viewpoint, as subjectivity permits a variety of attributions, authenticity is not limited to a single definition or a dichotomy of authentic vs. inauthentic (Leigh et al., 2006). Authenticity is socially produced and connected to consumer expectations, according to the constructivist viewpoint (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009 in Fritz et al., 2017). Brands must comply with consumers’ mental frames of what it is to be authentic within the branding context to be perceived as authentic (Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

Even though the term authenticity is still debatable among academics, it can be defined as being sincere, open, and true to oneself and others. This definition is influenced by the interaction between the aforementioned views. In line with the social constructivist viewpoint, it is critical to understand that authenticity is subjective and socially created (Morhart et al., 2015).

### *2.1.2 What is perceived brand authenticity?*

Authenticity in a brand is still a relative concept that varies according to academic viewpoints. As stated by Morhart et al. (2015, p.202), perceived brand authenticity “emerges to the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful and true toward itself and their consumers, and to support consumers being true to themselves”. Although there are several conceptualizations, it is generally agreed upon that authentic brands are not merely driven by business concerns but also intrinsically motivated, passionately dedicated, and compatible with their organizational values, instead of being solely driven by commercial results (Mourald et al., 2016). However, since brand authenticity is a socially constructed and constantly evolving concept influenced by social negotiations and abstract impressions (Leigh et al., 2006; Morhart et al., 2015), consumers’ assessments of the term may vary depending on how they personally define genuineness, realness, and truth (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), and depending on the mediation of the meanings associated with a brand (Pattuglia & Minigione, 2018).

There are four main dimensions that are seen to be crucial in a wide range of markets and situations, despite the fact that the precise conceptualization of brand authenticity may change depending on the context (Morhart et al., 2015). The ability of a brand to uphold a constant vision and set of values across time is referred to as continuity in the first dimension (Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer & Henrich., 2012; Morhart et al., 2015). The second factor is credibility, which emphasizes a brand’s dependability and capacity for keeping their commitments (Morhart et al., 2015). The third component, integrity, is concerned with the virtues, intents, and values that a brand conveys (Morhart et al., 2015). The capacity of a brand to reflect the values that customers view as crucial to their own self-identities is the subject of the fourth dimension, symbolism (Morhart et al., 2015).

Pursuant to Morhart et al. (2015), brand authenticity is formed from customers’ subjective views and constructions of a brand, which are influenced by the brand’s marketing initiatives and communications. According to the writers, brands are viewed as authentic to the extent that they meet these four criteria.

The subjective character of customer views and the particularities of each environment, however, must be recognized (Morhart et al., 2015).

### *2.1.3 What do authenticity cues mean in the branding context?*

The works of Grayson & Martinec (2004) and Morhart et al. (2015) establish three different sorts of cues that contribute to the formation of perceived authenticity by drawing on the viewpoint and dimensions that underpin brand authenticity. It is critical to understand how these authenticity cues are understood within the context of branding in the fields of marketing and communication.

Indexical cues are based on evidence, linked to verification and dependability, and may tell what is real from what is fake (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Indexical cues for brand authenticity in the context of branding can include things such as historical context, origin, production processes, or ingredients (Morhart et al., 2015). Ethics violations may be interpreted as betraying authenticity since these indications are communicated through brand behavior (Gilmore & Pine, 2007 in Morhart et al., 2015).

As stated in Fritz et al. (2017) and Morhart et al. (2015), iconic cues are characteristics of an object that correspond with a person's mental picture of how it should seem. These characteristics are subject to subjective interpretations that include emotions and feelings. Iconic cues appear in marketing and promotional elements such as advertising, visual imagery, design, and communication style in terms of brand authenticity (Leigh et al., 2006; Morhart et al., 2015). Consumers' mistrust of marketing strategies moderates the impact of iconic cues on perceived brand authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015).

The idea of one's inner self is encapsulated by existential clues, which also aid in the formation of identity (Morhart et al., 2015). According to the branding paradigm, brand authenticity acts as a resource for customers and is assessed according to how closely a brand adheres to its core values (Morhart et al., 2015). Additionally, in the context of connections between consumers and brands, brand anthropomorphism can be transmitting existential cues, aiding the perception of brand values and messaging (Morhart et al., 2015).

This study acknowledges authenticity as a multifaceted term that results from the fusion of indexical, iconic, and existential cues, even though these three types of cues each offer unique viewpoints on brand authenticity.

#### *2.1.4 Consumers' quest for brand authenticity*

Since customers are becoming more aware of artificiality, a lack of authenticity, and the meaninglessness of markets, authenticity is becoming increasingly important in modern culture (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Bruhn et al., 2012; Leigh et al., 2006). Responding to this, postmodern consumers have embraced a counterculture movement and demanded that businesses go beyond being just logos present in every part of their lives (Holt, 2002). Customers look for businesses that can help them with their identity projects by giving them original, culturally appropriate content to work with (Holt, 2002). Young (2017) makes a connection between Holt's (2002) theories on authenticity and the growth of cultural impressions and aspirational brands in the context of advertising. Because of the symbolic relationships between products, brands, and customer expectations, consumption is now understood to be more than just a consumeristic activity (Østergaard & Jantzen, 2000). As a result, consumers view genuine brands as ones that offer value (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland & Farrelly, 2016).

Brands are now relentlessly pursuing authenticity as a result of this change in consumer culture (Young, 2017). According to Arnould & Price (2000), consumers find it difficult to tell what is "real" and what is "fake" in post-modern marketplaces because of the branded warfare that exists there. Based on this, consumers' need for authenticity is seen as a pressing reaction to the present (Fritz et al., 2017; Guèvremont, 2018; Pattuglia & Mingione, 2018). Authenticity is seen as a contrast to the standardization and homogeneity of goods, brands, and experiences within the context of consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould & Price, 2000). Since genuine and distinctive claims are sought by customers across a range of consumption situations, authenticity appeals to them (Guèvremont, 2018).

### *2.1.5 Authenticity and advertising*

Marketing communications are an efficient way to communicate authenticity and motivate customers in their identity initiatives in a time when consumers actively seek authenticity in brands (Young, 2017). Since it affects consumers' expectations and opinions, brand advertising clearly has an impact on how legitimate a brand is regarded to be (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018). The need to create authentic commercials for effective communication is stressed by marketing and creative experts in a reciprocal connection (Becker et al., 2019). The interaction of authenticity and advertising also has the advantage of reducing the negative effects of brand-related news and controversies by projecting a genuine brand image through marketing communications (Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2018).

When it comes to directly affecting perceived brand authenticity and bolstering brand positioning through mediated processes, cues, statements, and symbols that represent the distinctive, real, and true characteristics of a brand are essential (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018). As per Becker et al. (2019), four essential factors should be considered when communicating authenticity through advertisements: maintaining the brand essence, honoring the brand legacy, providing a plausible story, and communicating a trustworthy message. As a result, these factors must be taken into account while developing an advertisement, including the language used, the tagline and logline, and any storytelling that takes place within the communication platform (Henriksen, 2018). Given the high level of customer cynicism toward marketing strategies, it is yet critical to emphasize the need for openness and real depiction in commercials (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000 in Becker et al., 2019).

## **2.2 Social Activism**

In response to the rising need for authenticity, the branding and advertising industries have seen an increase in activism statements and business acting as citizen-activists (Koch, 2020). Simply said, activism is taking direct, forceful action in favor of or against a contentious issue (Merriam-Webster, 2023, n.d.b.). Brand activism has become a significant turning point for businesses in post-modern marketplaces, according to Sarkar & Kotler (2018), as cited in

Vredenburg et al. (2020), as simple positioning is no longer adequate for distinction. People have reacted to issues of injustice, social justice, and prejudice, which has increased the relevance of the term “woke” in society. Consumers have observed brands taking a position on contentious socio-political issues and participating in various types of brand social activism, because firms are expected to satisfy customer requirements and represent their opinions. As a result, a variety of marketing techniques and communication plans have been developed at the nexus of activism, brands, and socio-politics (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019).

The next parts will examine brand activism, the idea of being woke, and brand social activism from both a consumer and a branding viewpoint to acquire a thorough grasp of the phenomenon and the ramifications.

### *2.2.1 To be woke: A consumer perspective on social activism*

Being woke involves having a strong concern for society issues that are now considered to be important and difficult. The idea of “woke citizenship” includes compassion, a caring philosophy, support for social structures that help reduce extremes in wealth and poverty, and belief in democracy and equality in society (Grant, 2018). This idea is based on the knowledge that people are always building their identity projects, and as consumers, they want businesses to share their values so they may stay true to who they are and what they believe (Grant, 2018; Castells, 2010). Because of this, woke consumers base their purchases on their convictions, actively support and promote businesses that share their values, and support brands that show concern for socially divisive and contentious subjects that they are passionate about (Amed, Balchandani, Beltrami, Berg, Hedrich & Rölkens, 2019).

As a result, in addition to the notion of the consumption-self, the concept of citizen-consumers also emerges, where people see their purchase decisions as a way to support or oppose organizations or social-political stances (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). Beyond simply satisfying wants, political consumption gives consumers a platform to voice their political and ethical opinions. This viewpoint is consistent with Belk’s (1988) theory of the extended self, which holds that one’s identity and sense of self are shaped in part by the things they consume.

Belk (1988) contends that our buying habits and material possessions serve as markers that mold the story of our projected consumer identities and affect how other people see us. Consequently, brands serve as anchors for the self-identities of consumers (Palazzo & Basu, 2007).

Citizen-consumers as a result frequently demonstrate adherence to particular lifestyles and strong moral principles that direct their behavior and shape their identities, and they anticipate brands to actively participate in this process. However, it is not always simple or possible for individuals to close the gap between the consumer-self and the citizen-self (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). Consequently, there is a big difference between the two. According to Manfredi-Sánchez (2019), when consumer and citizen interests are aligned, brands are seen as solidly meaning-laden symbolic frameworks. Nevertheless, it is up to each person to redefine these meanings in the context of their own social and cultural projects, which are crucial to their identity projects (Castells, 2010).

Individuals reframe their place in society by looking for a holistic meaning in their experiences and working for social change (Castells, 2010). Identity projects may develop in response to crises, displaying a revolutionary spirit and sense of bravery connected to the desire for social change and being a woke citizen (Sobande, 2019). Based on this transformative process, new power networks are created that are formed by informational codes and representations and act as the basis for societal structure, the emergence of new meanings, and novel behaviors (Castells, 2010). Therefore, a sense of collective consciousness characterizes this social shift. As stated by Grant (2018), woke citizens support educational settings that encourage relationships with un-woke people in order to spread awareness and co-create fresh perspectives on hot-button subjects. Hence, rather than being the result of individual activities, activism is rooted in social movements behaviors (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019).

### *2.2.2 Woke brands & Brand social activism*

The need for socially conscious and engaged brands arises if there are conscious and socially sensitive consumers. Based on the concept of being “woke”, “woke brands” are those that take a position on societal issues and link their messaging,

purpose, and values with prosocial business practices (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Ergo, the idea of woke brands and brand social activism are intimately related.

In the pursuit of being defined as a "woke" and trustworthy brand, organizational leaders must show caution regarding the benchmarks against which they seek to align themselves. In the heat of it all, it becomes critical for brands to maintain a delicate balance, ensuring that they do not stray too far from their core values and principles. Gaustad, Samuelsen, Warlop, and Fitzsimons (2018) reveal a negative consumer response when a brand undergoes a transformation that alters brand meaning. Therefore, if organizational leaders place an excessive emphasis on cultivating a perception of being "woke" and inadvertently shift the brand too extensively from their foundational principles, it may ultimately have negative implications for the brand's overall reputation and standing. Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) is also relevant in interaction with this aspect, as the consumer can experience psychological tension when their behavior is inconsistent with his or her thoughts and beliefs, as for instance purchasing from a brand who faces woke washing claims.

Incorporating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into a brand's value chain represented the first time that doing business includes acknowledging the importance of maintaining and enhancing the economic and social components of the market (Clemensen, 2017). Brand activism then became well-known as a trend in branding and marketing strategies. Brand activism has more immediate influence in responding to urgent social concerns than CSR, which is driven by corporations (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018, cited in Vredenburg et al., 2020).

As per Sarkar and Kotler (2018), cited in Vredenburg et al. (2020), brand activism refers to company initiatives intended to advance, thwart, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform or stasis in order to benefit society. In other words, brand activism occurs when a company adopts a stance on a contentious social issue while being guided by their fundamental values and vision (Shetty, Venkataramaiah & Anand, 2019). Brand activism is a marketing tactic that aims to sway citizen-consumers through initiatives based on political ideals (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Brand social activism is one of six categories that Sarkar and Kotler (2018), cited in Vredenburg et al. (2020),

divided brand activism into. The authors also address that brand social activism takes societal concerns such as equality, culture, immigration, racism, gender, and prejudice into consideration. As a result, this study adopts the definition of authentic brand social activism as a purpose- and value-driven strategy in which a brand adopts a non-neutral stance on institutionally contested socio-political issues in order to affect social change and achieve marketing success (Vredenburg et al., 2020). This definition builds on the concepts of being woke and authentic.

The demand from customers for companies to actively participate in social movements, dialogues, and act as citizen-activists has led to brands' involvement in social activism (Shetty et al., 2019; Koch, 2020). Brands have rapidly lost the privilege of remaining neutral in a situation where countercultural actions highlight the need to redefine the function of brands in society (Young, 2017). According to Sarkar & Kotler (2018), cited in Vredenburg et al. (2020), having a purpose in branding is not enough; firms must also put their words into reality and match their business practices with societal goals.

Proactive and reactive strategies can be distinguished in the context of brand activism. Some companies deliberately promote consumer knowledge of social concerns in order to engage them in problem-solving and capture their attention. This is known as brand social activism. While not actively promoting change, some people may simply react to social movements by making public statements that reflect their support for or opposition to societal developments (Koch, 2020; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018, referred to in Vredenburg et al., 2020). As a result, woke companies can be divided into two categories: those that appeal to customers and promote social change, acting as what Koch (2020) refers to as citizen-activists, and those that passively respond to social movements by disseminating advertising messages that express support or disapproval. This distinction is also reflected in the typology model of brand activism proposed by Vredenburg et al. (2020). Low levels of activist marketing messaging define silent brand activism, whereas high levels of activist marketing messaging define real brand activism (Vredenburg et al., 2020). In addition to striking a balance between consistency and relevance, a brand's activism is authentic to the extent of their zeal and

proactivity in addressing or publicizing the socio-political issue (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Being a woke brand emphasizes the value of honesty, consistency, coherence, and sincerity in order to be truly woke (Vredenburg et al., 2020), which eventually loops back to the idea of authenticity.

### *2.2.3 What is woke advertising?*

While including elements of brand activism and cause marketing, woke advertising focuses primarily on contentious societal tensions associated with woke topics and adopts a more direct style (Riley, 2020). The goal of woke advertising, as with brand activism advertising, is to build irreplaceable reputational worth through cognitive and emotional appeal (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Although it should be integrated across all marketing components, woke advertising is frequently distinct from brand products despite its significance (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018, referred to in Vredenburg et al., 2020). Young (2017) suggests the Big IdeaL model, which combines a brand's best self with a socially prevalent cultural contradiction. To build a system of beliefs that convey the brand's credo towards a social issue, this approach entails filling in the phrase "Brand X believes that the world would be a better place if..." (Young, 2017). Given that manifestos frequently capture cultural goals, the junction of these factors may result in effective woke advertising (Young, 2017).

An activism campaign primarily targets consumers who are already engaged and believe that a brand's voice can make a difference (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). While not exclusively digital, woke advertising often originates from digital or hybrid channels, utilizing language, logos, and symbols (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Woke advertisements go beyond mere emotional expression and employ various elements to convey the brand's stance, such as montages accompanied by inspirational music, social experiments that give voice to the social issue and propose solutions, or a focus on identity aspects like gender, sexuality, race, or politics (Riley, 2020). There are typically two types of communication strategies for brand activism through advertising: promotional, where the message highlights the brand's values, and participatory, where the message aims to engage the audience and entice consumers to participate (Kim, Cheong & Lim, 2015). The contrast between proactive and reactive woke brands is reflected in

this distinction. As stated by Kim et al. (2015), participatory communication tends to promote more favorable impressions of the brand's connection to the social cause and higher audience support.

Considering consumers' responses to brand social activism and woke advertising is crucial. By addressing sensitive and contentious issues, brands inherently spark controversy as they take a position on polarizing discussions – it is either “to be” or “not to be” (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Hence, woke advertising can be seen as differently and cannot satisfy everyone. The requirement for authenticity in woke advertising is highlighted by the fact that both woke and non-woke consumers increasingly show mistrust toward marketing strategies and claims (Bae, 2018). Riley (2020) contends that while woke advertising seeks to reflect the ideals of consumers, there are good reasons to question a brand's motivation. This mistrust is brought on by the idea that companies may employ woke advertising as a tool for marketing, which raises skepticism about the underlying motives (Bae, 2018). Consumers with a high level of skepticism use coping mechanisms to deal with brand claims of social activism and query the sincerity of a company's support for a social issue (Bae, 2018). The risk of either having a well-executed or false advertisement as well as the risk of customer scrutiny and skepticism in a counterculture society are thus part of the two folded risks when it comes to being a woke brand (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Holt, 2002).

Consumer's responses to brand advocacy can be positive or negative. Negative reactions can lead to backlash, boycotts, culture jamming, and anti-brand activism movements, whilst positive reactions can show up as viral word-of-mouth and support through purchasing habits (Kam & Deichert, 2020). Different audiences' reactions to woke advertising can differ based on demographics. Younger generations tend to be more receptive to brand social activism (Shetty et al., 2019). These audiences are, however, more likely to engage in boycotting and anti-brand activism if they believe a brand is acting unethically or against their beliefs, as a part of their reactionary nature (Shetty et al., 2019).

### 2.3 Woke washing advertising

In reaction to the ongoing crises and the rise in public activism, brands have been forced to demonstrate their position on social concerns, even if just by verbal

commitments (Moorman, 2020, p.392). This statement supports Riley's (2020) justification for why consumers are cynical of woke advertising. Woke advertising, which assumes that brands engage with genuine intents rather than just financial or corporate-driven objectives, has been more common in recent years as a way to address consumers' concerns about social justice and project brand identities. Nevertheless, brand activism has the disadvantage of having a short-term outlook. Brands frequently want to respond quickly and support a cause, yet they lack the knowledge to address the problem in a way that is consistent with their overall actions over the long term (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018, referred to in Vredenburg et al., 2020). Due to corporation's moral transgressions when supporting these causes, woke advertising has consequently become the target of scandals (Romani et al., 2015). As a consequence of this, the idea of "woke washing" has emerged, which refers to the inconsistency between how consumers and brands view the sincerity of brand social activism (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

However, the concept and understanding of the term "woke" are still quite recent. Despite the scant amount of literature that exists on the subject, two common characteristics of woke washing stand out: the absence of sincere intentions and authenticity, as well as lack of coherence (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

### *2.3.1 Perceptions of woke washing advertising*

*Woke washing is defined as the appropriation of ethical and progressive values as a form of advertising to improve the reputation of the company without demonstrating a real commitment to the values that are communicated (DoGoodPeople, 2023). The perception of woke washing advertising develops when brands use social issues for marketing goals, and their behavior is perceived as inauthentic, when brand activism should be driven by societal concerns and disassociated from commercial motives (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Sobane, 2019).*

The pioneers in this field of study, Vredenburg et al. (2020), contend that inauthentic brand activism is a result of businesses that separate their activist rhetoric from their goals and practices. Due to the lack of sincere objectives,

coherence, and congruence with actual activities, woke washing advertising is consequently linked to insincere brand activism. Consumers may form an unfavorable opinion of the advertisement because of such dishonest, self-serving, or opportunistic disconnect (Vredenburg et al., 2020). It is crucial to remember that consumers evaluate coherence based on relevance and expectations (Maille & Fleck, 2011). According to Vredenburg et al. (2020), consumers should evaluate a woke claim's coherence based on how well it fits with the goals, attributes, and purposes of the brand. Coherence is, however, perceived differently by different people depending on their knowledge, mental modes, and norms, making it somewhat fragile and open to reevaluation (Maille & Fleck, 2011).

The importance of a fit between the brand and the cause is also emphasized by Vredenburg et al. (2020) in order to prevent consumers from seeing marketing inauthenticity. Based on cause advertising, Roy (2010) proposes that a clear relationship between a brand and a cause, as well as the utilization of common traits between the brand and the cause's target audience, can help determine whether a brand and a cause are a good fit. In order to avoid inconsistency and incongruence in the advertising competition, it is also essential to take into account the tone, intent, and frequency of presentation (Roy, 2010).

If the brand's woke statement is perceived as deception or a superficial trend-following strategy by consumers, it can be more harmful than if the brand had chosen to ignore the social issue entirely. This may lead to consumer misinformation and damage the brand's equity as well as its potential to affect social change (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Additionally, such dishonest signaling entails unethical actions that erode consumer confidence, which is already a problem for advertising campaigns. In these circumstances, consumers are less inclined to ignore unauthentic aspects (Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2018). As a result, connecting indexical and iconic cues to the product being sold is crucial for authentic advertising (Beverland et al., 2008). A woke washing dilemma may result from failing to emphasize authenticity indicators in advertisements regarding woke topics. This is also supported by Brown, Thompson & Davis

(2018) who in a study found that brand credibility can be undermined by negative criticism and claims of woke washing.

### 3.0 Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology employed in the study, including the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques. The primary objective of this research was to investigate whether the consumers' attitudes towards a brand is affected negatively when the brand has communicated a certain message regarding a socio-political issue, but then also received negative feedback concerning their practices and claims of woke washing. The study also wanted to explore if this would have an impact on consumers' perception of the credibility of the brand, and ultimately their purchase behavior. To address this objective, two hypotheses were designed. Then, a survey-based approach was adopted to collect data from participants. The following sections provide an in-depth description of the research design, sampling strategy, data collection process, and data analysis methods utilized in this study.

#### 3.1 Research design

The present study utilized a descriptive research design to investigate whether the consumers' attitudes towards a brand is affected negatively when the brand has communicated a certain message regarding a socio-political issue, but then also received negative feedback concerning their practices and claims of woke washing. The descriptive design allowed for the systematic collection and analysis of data to provide an accurate and comprehensive portrayal of the research topic (Gripsrud, Olsson & Silkoset, 2016). By utilizing a survey instrument, it was possible to gather a wide range of quantitative data from a diverse group of participants (Gripsrud et al., 2016; Grennes, 2020). The survey-based approach facilitated the examination of various factors related to the consumers' change in perception of, and attitude towards, a brand, which in this example was H&M, after being exposed to both a positive socio-political commercial and then negative headlines and claims. It also enabled the researchers to establish associations and identify patterns among the variables of interest. Furthermore, the data collection process was grounded in three underlying hypotheses, which are presented in the following section. Full

overview of the survey, including both the commercial and the negative headlines, see appendix 8.1-8.6.

### 3.2 Hypotheses

Prior to initiating the data collection process, two hypotheses were formulated to guide the investigation and determine the focus of the survey. The formulated hypotheses are outlined below:

#### 3.2.1 Hypothesis 1

Null Hypothesis (H1<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant difference in consumers' attitudes towards a brand before and after exposure to negative feedback concerning their practices and claims of woke washing.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1<sub>A</sub>): There is a significant difference in consumers' attitudes towards a brand before and after exposure to negative feedback concerning their practices and claims of woke washing.

#### 3.2.2 Hypothesis 2

Null Hypothesis (H2<sub>0</sub>): Consumers' perception of the credibility of a brand is not significantly affected when the brand communicates a certain message regarding a socio-political issue and receives negative feedback concerning their practices and claims of woke washing.

Alternative Hypothesis (H2<sub>A</sub>): Consumer's perception of the credibility of a brand is significantly affected when the brand communicates a certain message regarding a socio-political issue and receives negative feedback concerning their practices and claims of woke washing.

#### 3.2.3 Hypothesis 3

Null Hypothesis (H3<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant difference in consumers' purchase intention before and after exposure to negative feedback concerning a brand's practices and claims of woke washing.

Alternative Hypothesis (H3<sub>A</sub>): There is a significant difference in consumers' purchase intention before and after exposure to negative feedback concerning a brand's practices and claims of woke washing.

The intention behind these hypotheses is to examine the potential effects of exposure to woke washing on attitudes towards the brand, the perceived credibility of the brand accused for using this technique, and the purchase intention of the consumer. By formulating these hypotheses, we aimed to provide a framework for the survey design that would enable us to investigate the relationships between exposure, attitudes, perceived credibility, and intention in a systematic manner.

### 3.3 Data Collection and Sampling

The present study employed a survey-based data collection approach, administered through the online platform Qualtrics. The survey was distributed through social media channels to acquire voluntary participation from individuals. The survey received responses from a sample of 117 participants over a designated time period of one work week, spanning five consecutive days. The survey instruments, such as questions, scales, and measures, were carefully designed to capture relevant information related to the research objective and the hypotheses. In order to capture the true emotions about woke washing, we included a 7-point Likert-scale in the survey (Gripsrud et al., 2016).

The survey starts by introducing respondents to a video commercial featuring H&M, which focuses on honoring International Women's Day by showcasing various leadership positions held by women inside of the H&M corporation. Subsequently, a matrix table (See Table 1 in appendix) is presented to the participants, containing a range of statements that assess their perceptions of the video's truthfulness, and attitudes towards H&M. The following stage of the survey involves presenting respondents with different news article headlines that shed light on unfavorable work environments and conditions experienced by female employees within H&M. Following this, additional statements are provided to gauge whether this information influences their perception of H&M as a brand and the previously watched video commercial and its authenticity. The survey concludes by inquiring about participants' general opinions regarding

social responsibility, their understanding of the term "woke," and their perspectives on the significance of brands adopting a proactive stance and implementing socially responsible actions.

### *3.3.1 Sampling Strategy*

The objective of this study was to gain comprehensive insights into the general perspectives and perceptions regarding the impact of woke washing from the general consumer. To ensure a significant and diverse sample, a convenience sampling technique (Yilmaz, 2022) was employed, and the online survey was distributed through our social media platforms, namely Facebook and Instagram, as well as shared by family and friends. This approach was chosen based on the belief that it would enable efficient access to a large and varied audience. Due to the extensive scope of the research, it was challenging to determine the exact population size. However, the aim was to collect a minimum of  $n > 100$  respondents to ensure data representativeness for the intended purpose. The gender distribution (See Table 2 in appendix) of the respondents consisted of 39 (34.8%) males, 72 (64.3%) females, and 1 (0.9%) non-binary respondents. This distribution reveals a slight gender bias.

In terms of age distribution, the largest group of respondents fell within the 25-27 age range, accounting for a total of 48 (42.8%) respondents. The youngest participant was 17 years old, while the oldest recorded age was 68 years old. Six (5.4%) respondents did not provide an answer, and their responses are considered as missing values, but still included as age is not of significance for the main purpose of this study. See appendix Figure 2 for the full overview of the respondent's distribution.

This data provides strong evidence of high representativeness in the sample and the relation to the population. According to Similarweb.com (2023), the gender distribution on hm.com as of May 2023 implies 67.63% of users are female, while 32.37% are male. Notably, these proportions align closely with the gender distribution observed in our sample. Additionally, the age distribution among the website's users mirrors the distribution observed within our sample. Detailed information and a visual representation of these findings can be found in the appendix Figure 1-3.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were subjected to thorough analysis using the SPSS Statistics software. The data analysis process involved several relevant methods to derive meaningful insights and address the research objective and hypotheses.

First, a factor analysis was conducted to measure the validity and reliability of the survey. This is further explained in chapter 3.5 *Validity and Reliability*.

Secondly, descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and standard deviations were conducted to calculate participants' characteristics and provide an overview of their responses.

Lastly, the inferential statistical technique of a paired samples t-test was employed to examine the relationships, associations, and differences between variables of interest. This technique was used as this was a within-subject design, where the same group were examined before and after exposure that would potentially affect their initial reactions.

These statistical methods allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the data and enabled the identification of significant findings and patterns. The results will be presented in the following chapter.

#### 3.4.1 Data cleaning

After consultation with our supervisor, a collective decision was reached to exclude any subsequent analysis pertaining to missing values, outliers, and extreme values. Our reasoning behind this choice was to maintain the integrity and authenticity of the survey dataset unaltered. Additionally, given that we employed a Likert scale encompassing values ranging from 1 to 7, the likelihood of encountering extreme values and outliers that could potentially skew our analysis results was deemed minimal. Hence, we adhered to our supervisor's advice to refrain from any form of dataset manipulation or tampering, opting instead to utilize the dataset in its original form.

Regardless, we have taken the initiative to rename variables in the Variable View in SPSS, providing them with more precise and concise names and labels inside

the dataset. By modifying both the "name" and "label" variables, we were able to enhance the efficiency of our analysis procedure.

Furthermore, we diligently identified and resolved duplicate records to prevent data duplication. Upon importing the raw data obtained from Qualtrics into SPSS, it was observed that the number of respondents had inexplicably multiplied and created blank responses. Consequently, these duplicative columns were deliberately eliminated from the dataset to ensure data integrity.

Lastly, considerable attention was devoted to addressing formatting issues to ensure accurate assignment of the appropriate measurement scales, namely scale, ordinal, or nominal, to all variables.

By persistently executing these steps, we have ensured an accurately cleaned dataset, which serves as a foundation for our subsequent analyses, guaranteeing the reliability and validity of our findings.

### 3.5 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the reliability of the data, internal consistency checks were implemented, and the survey underwent a pilot testing phase to assess the clarity and comprehensibility (Grenness, 2020). The pilot test/pretest received a total of 10 voluntary participants.

Furthermore, we have validated the questionnaire through the application of factor analysis in SPSS (Grenness, 2020 p. 44). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy showed a score of .792, which is above the benchmark value of .5 and thereby is considered acceptable for additional analysis. To further ensure this consideration, Bartlett's test of sphericity showed to be significant with a p-value  $<.001$ . The findings are presented in the appendix Table 3.

In addition, all variables (questions) displayed values exceeding the threshold of .4 in the communalities table, indicating their suitability for inclusion in the factor analysis (See Table 4 in appendix). The criterion of values above .4 is considered significant in determining the usefulness of the factor analysis (Grande, 2014).

Additionally, we have conducted a correlation analysis, wherein the scores derived from Cronbach's alpha provided evidence of strong internal consistency (Gripsrud et al., 2016; Grenness, 2020). As  $\alpha$  proved to be .813 (See Table 3), we find it well inside Gripsrud et al. 's (2016) rule-of-thumb interval and consider the reliability to be adequate. See Appendix table 3 to see the full overview of the numbers.

### 3.6 Ethical approach

Ethical considerations were of utmost importance throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their participation, outlining the purpose of the study, data confidentiality, and voluntary nature of their involvement. Participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

## 4.0 Findings and analysis

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

Upon exposure to the video, a significant majority of respondents, ranging between "somewhat agree" and "completely agree," expressed that the message appeared genuine (77.8%) (Table 5) and left them with a positive impression (71.4%)(Table 6). These findings suggest that H&M's strategy of showcasing women in leadership roles and highlighting their opportunities within the company effectively generates a positive initial impression among consumers. Moreover, 72.2% (Table 7) of respondents fell within the same interval of agreement when asked whether they considered it favorable that H&M demonstrated a form of political engagement towards women in business.

However, when respondents were questioned about their overall impression of H&M and the alignment between the message and the messenger, the responses were more evenly distributed. 29.5% of respondents opted for one of the three "disagree" alternatives, while 42.6% leaned towards the "agree" section regarding their general impression of the brand (Table 8). Regarding the correlation between the message and the messenger, 35.7% of respondents expressed some level of disagreement, whereas 32.1% agreed that the two were aligned (Table 9). Furthermore, when asked whether the video enhanced H&M's chances of making a sale, 43% of respondents indicated that the video had no

positive impact on sales prospects, and 40.2% believed that the video had no effect at all (Table 10).

Subsequently, respondents were presented with news headlines shedding light on the actual working conditions experienced by a majority of female H&M workers. The initial question aimed to determine whether the criticism had altered their initial impression. A substantial majority (78.6%) of respondents acknowledged that their initial impression had somewhat changed following the criticism (Table 11). A similar pattern emerged concerning the perception of genuineness, with 79.8% of respondents indicating that the advertisement appeared somewhat less genuine after reading the criticism (Table 12). This negative trend continued in later questions regarding the authenticity of political engagement and the credibility of the messenger (Figure 4&5). These findings suggest that customer behavior towards a brand, store, or business can be adversely affected upon learning that they engage in woke washing.

Regarding the assessment of respondents' attitudes towards H&M and the potential impact of criticism on their future purchasing intention and behavior, it was observed that a significant portion of respondents reported their attitude and intentions remaining unaffected by the criticism. Specifically, 24.1% (Table 13) of respondents stated that their attitude did not undergo any change, while 26.8% respondents indicated that the criticism did not influence their shopping intentions concerning H&M (Table 14). This finding suggests that many respondents already held pre-existing perceptions of H&M's values and true intentions, due to the relatively high response rate on the "neither" alternative. Rendering them resistant to the presented criticism. It is worth noting that this aspect could be considered a limitation of the study, as the choice of a well-known brand may have influenced respondents' preconceived views. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents (67.9%) experienced a negative shift in their attitudes, and 52.7% agreed that the criticism had diminished their intentions to purchase products from H&M in the future (Figure 6&7).

The final section of the questionnaire encompassed broader inquiries to respondents' attitudes towards societal issues, the term "woke," and the significance of businesses adopting stances on various societal matters. Notably,

when questioned about their attitudes towards social issues, the importance of staying informed, and the significance of having opinions, over 88% of respondents expressed some degree of agreement with these statements (Table 15&16).

In relation to the term "woke," it was found that a significant majority of respondents (83.9%) possessed prior knowledge about this term (Table 17). Among the respondents, 18.8% did not express a specific opinion regarding the positivity of being woke, while a substantial proportion (61.6%) regarded it as a positive attribute (Table 18).

To conclude the questionnaire, respondents were prompted to express their perspectives on business engagement in societal matters. The findings indicate that a substantial portion (47.3%) of respondents firmly agreed that businesses bear a responsibility regarding societal issues (Table 19). Additionally, a majority (54.5%) of respondents expressed complete agreement regarding the positive impact generated when businesses demonstrate commitment to various societal concerns (Table 20).

Moreover, in instances where a business adopts a distinct position on societal matters, a considerable proportion (41.1%) of respondents expressed complete agreement that such a stance contributes to enhancing their perception of the business (Table 21). Furthermore, when customers are aware of a business's active involvement in societal affairs, the likelihood of their making a purchase from said business increases significantly (Figure 8). Indicating the importance of marketing their stances to the consumer.

The final question investigated whether respondents found it straightforward or difficult to identify whether a business genuinely supports a societal cause or merely does so for self-serving motives. The outcomes of this question demonstrated the complexity faced by respondents, as the answers displayed substantial variation. A significant proportion of respondents (19.6%) either expressed uncertainty or lacked knowledge regarding the genuineness of a business's commitment (answered "verken eller"). The remaining respondents were almost evenly divided, with each group (somewhat agree or somewhat disagree) accounting for approximately 40% of the total (Table 22). This

distribution suggests that the task of distinguishing whether a business genuinely supports their commitment or exploits it for personal gain is challenging for the typical consumer. The diverse distribution is visualized in Figure 9 in the appendix. This supports Arnould & Price's (2000) theory that consumers find it difficult to tell what is "real" and what is "fake" in post-modern marketplaces.

The survey also included demographic examination, addressing age and gender, with the aim of gaining insights into the perspectives of different generations. The examination of gender distribution revealed a moderate gender bias, as 64.3% of respondents identified as female, while 34.8% identified as male. A minority of 0.9% identified with a non-binary gender (Figure 1/Table 2). Regarding age distribution, the largest contingent, covering 42.8% of respondents, fell within the 25-27 age range (Figure 2). The dataset exhibited a mean age of 33.6 years, with a median age of 27 years. Upon conducting the Kurtosis measure in SPSS, it was observed that the age distribution displayed a negative value of  $-.564$ , indicating a flatter distribution in comparison to a normal distribution. This observation is further documented in figure 2, visually representing the distribution. Additionally, the skewness value of  $.897$  indicated a right-skewed distribution, where the tail of the distribution extended towards the right. This skewness can be recognized by the dataset's concentration of lower age values. This occurrence is also viable in figure 2 and may be explained by the fact that the mean age is significantly closer to the minimum value than the maximum value. All values are documented in Table 23.

#### 4.2 Paired Samples T-Test

The study employed a within-subjects design by administering a questionnaire to the same sample group before and after an intervention. First, a showing of a video commercial from H&M was presented to the respondents before they got presented information regarding woke washing claims and critique against the business. To analyze the collected data, a paired samples t-test was conducted in SPSS. The criteria for a paired samples t-test to be significant is as follows;

1. t-value greater than the critical value
2. p-value less than the significance level
3. 95% confidence interval does not cross zero

#### *4.2.1 Main results*

In the paired samples t-test, the variables “Jeg har en positiv holdning til H&M” and “Holdningen min til H&M endres negativt” were examined to determine whether there was a significant change in respondents’ attitudes before and after exposure to negative headlines about H&M. With 110 degrees of freedom, the critical value was determined to be 1.984 (Student’s *t* table, table 24). The t-value between these two variables was 3.846, yielding a p-value of .001, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from -1.351 to -.432. These results are meeting the criteria for significance, as the t-value (3.846) exceeded the critical value (1.984), the p-value (.001) was less than the significance level of .05, and the 95% confidence interval did not span zero. Similarly, the variables “Jeg har en positiv holdning til H&M” and “Kritikken endrer det innledende inntrykket jeg satt med etter reklamen» were also investigated to see if there was a significant change in the respondents’ attitudes toward the commercial and the brand. The t-value (4.661) exceeded the critical value (1.984), the p-value (.001) was less than .05, and the 95% confidence interval which ranged from -1.400 and -.564 did not cross zero, indicating statistical significance (See Table 25 in appendix). These findings support H1<sub>A</sub>, stating that there is a significant difference in consumers’ attitudes towards a brand before and after exposure to negative feedback concerning their practices and claims of woke washing, and thus we can reject the null hypothesis H1<sub>0</sub>.

Conducting a paired samples t-test on the variables “Jeg syntes denne reklamen fremstår som oppriktig” and “Avsenderen av reklamen mister troverdigheten etter kritikken ble presentert», it was assessed whether the credibility of the commercial’s message and its sender were affected. The t-value (2.263) exceeded the critical value (1.984), the p-value (.026) was less than .05, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from -.896 and -.059, meaning it did not cross zero, suggesting statistical significance (See Table 25 in appendix). We find support for H2<sub>A</sub> in these results, suggesting that consumer’s perception of the credibility of a brand is significantly affected when the brand communicates a certain message regarding a socio-political issue and receives negative feedback concerning their practices and claims of woke washing. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis H2<sub>0</sub>.

Likewise, significant changes in purchase intention and behavior were explored for the variables “Reklamen øker sannsynligheten for at jeg handler hos H&M” and “Kritikken minsker sannsynligheten for at jeg handler hos H&M». The t-value (5.994) exceeded the critical value (1.984), the p-value (.001) was less than .05, and the 95% confidence interval which ranged from -1.754 and -.882 did not cross zero, indicating statistical significance (See Table 25 in appendix). As these observations indicate that there is a significant difference in consumers’ purchase intention before and after exposure to negative feedback concerning a brand’s practices and claims of woke washing, they corroborate the alternative hypothesis H3<sub>A</sub>, and we can reject the null hypothesis H3<sub>0</sub>.

Finally, the variables “Jeg syntes budskapet samsvarer med avsender (H&M)» and «Kritikken endrer det innledende inntrykket jeg satt med etter reklamen» were analyzed to determine if respondents’ initial perception of the message’s alignment with the sender and their subsequent impression change after exposure to critique. The t-value (7.576) exceeded the critical value (1.984), the p-value (.001) was less than .05, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from -1.887 and -1.104, meaning it did not cross zero, suggesting statistical significance (See Table 25 in appendix). These findings align with the evidence supporting both H1<sub>A</sub> and H2<sub>A</sub>.

## 5.0 Research Limitations

It is important to note that this study has some limitations that should be considered when conducting an analysis of consumer perceptions. First, there is a potential for response bias. The study relied on self-reported measures, as well as respondents may already hold strong opinions about and attitudes towards H&M. As a globally recognized brand, H&M has garnered significant attention in relation to issues such as fast fashion, environmental impact, and workers conditions in their production sites. Consequently, some respondents may possess preconceived judgments, potentially influencing their responses and compromising the objectivity of the data collected.

Another limitation concerns the understanding of the terms "woke" and "woke washing," which may not be widely understood by all respondents. This lack of familiarity can lead to respondents providing answers that they are uncertain

about, resulting in potentially invalid or inaccurate responses. The diverse age range of the respondents further increases the likelihood of varying levels of awareness and knowledge regarding these terms.

Furthermore, there is a concern that respondents have prior knowledge about H&M's woke washing claims and negative feedback, and thereby could have influenced their responses. This would make the first set of questions less representative. As respondents might already be acquainted with H&M's actions and controversies related to woke washing, their perceptions might not capture the true initial first impressions that the study aimed to explore.

It is also important to remember that Norway, and the world in general, experiences some tough economic times. With high inflation and price growth, the payment ability and willingness to pay among consumers changes. Many are being forced to prioritize. As environmentally friendly and ecological products for instance often are valued at a higher price, it raises the question whether consumers actually have the ability to live by their own standards, or are being forced to look the other way.

Additionally, while efforts were made to ensure a representative sample, it is important to acknowledge that the respondents may not fully represent the entire population of H&M's customers. However, it is worth noting that the likelihood of respondents falling outside the targeted population is minimal, given the similarities between the sample and the overall customer base. The findings are based on a specific sample and context, limiting the generalizability of the results to other populations or industries.

Taken together, these limitations underscore the need for careful interpretation and generalization of the study's findings. It remains important to keep in mind the potential response bias, lack of understanding of the terminology, prior knowledge influencing responses, and the representativeness of the sample in order to derive meaningful and accurate insights regarding consumer perceptions of H&M and the woke washing claims and negative feedback on their practices.

## 6.0 Discussion

The objective of this thesis was to investigate and identify the effect of the emerging phenomena of woke washing on consumers' attitudes, perception of credibility, and behavior. When looking at previous literature on the topic and this study, woke washing has a significant impact on both consumers' attitudes towards a brand, their perception of credibility, and their behavior. Building from theory on brand authenticity, social activism, and woke washing advertising, we developed hypotheses on if exposure to new information that is contradictory to what the consumer first believed would influence their attitude towards the brand, the perception of the brand's credibility, and the consumer's behavior. The findings of this study have important theoretical and practical implications for understanding the impact of brand communication, negative feedback, and woke washing claims on consumers' attitudes, perception of credibility, and purchase intention and behavior. The results provide empirical evidence supporting the notion that these factors can significantly influence consumer responses and have implications for brand management and marketing strategies.

### 6.1 Theoretical implications

The findings of this study contributes to the previous literature showing that there is a growing demand from customers for companies to actively participate in social movements, dialogues, and act as citizen-activists (Shetty et al., 2019; Koch, 2020), as having a purpose in branding is not enough; firms must also put their words into reality and match their business practices with societal goals (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018, cited in Vredenburg et al., 2020). Our findings support these arguments, as the majority of the respondents agreed that participating in social activism is important for businesses, and their initial reaction to, before exposure to the criticism, H&M's women's day commercial was positive. People are always building their identity projects, and as consumers, they want businesses to share their values so they may stay true to who they are and what they believe (Grant, 2018; Castells, 2010). These statements are also shown in our study, whereas the respondents had a shift in attitude, perception of credibility, and purchase intention when H&M's actions no longer appeared to align with the message they were sending out. The concept of citizen-consumers has emerged as a reaction to socio-political issues coming forward, where people

see their purchase decisions as a way to support or oppose organizations or social-political stances (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013), as well as the concept of woke consumers who base their purchases on their convictions, actively support and promote businesses that share their values, and support brands that show concern for socially divisive and contentious subjects that they are passionate about (Amed et al., 2019). These previous findings are supported in our results, as there was a significant change in purchase intention for the consumer before and after being exposed to the critique of H&M. The cognitive dissonance theory by Leon Festinger (1957) is also confirmed in these results. The significant changes in attitudes observed in this study align with the theory's proposition that individuals experience discomfort when faced with conflicting information. In this case, consumers' initial positive attitudes towards H&M were challenged by the negative feedback, leading to a significant shift in their attitudes. This highlights the importance of considering the potential cognitive dissonance that may arise when brands engage in socio-political messaging and face subsequent negative criticism if the engagement is perceived as inauthentic.

## 6.2 Managerial implications

Moreover, the findings contribute to the understanding of the credibility construct in the context of brand communication. As brands may use woke advertising as a marketing tool, skepticism arises amongst consumers regarding the brand's underlying intentions or motives (Riley, 2020; Bae, 2018), which then might be perceived as woke washing from the consumer's point of view. Two common characteristics of woke washing stand out: the absence of sincere intentions and authenticity, as well as lack of coherence (Vredenburg et al., 2020). It is crucial for brands to understand these dimensions if they choose to engage in socio-political matters, as consumers may form an unfavorable opinion of the advertisement as a result of dishonest, self-serving, or opportunistic disconnect (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Previous research suggests that negative feedback can undermine brand credibility (Brown et al., 2018). Our findings endorse all this research, by witnessing the significant impact on consumers' perception of the brand's credibility. This emphasizes the vulnerability of brands in maintaining credibility when facing negative criticism. This also highlights that brands should develop their strategies and

communication to align with the brands ethics and values (Becker et al., 2019) to maintain their credibility and gain trust within consumers. There is a need for coherence between the message that the brand is displaying, and the actions that they are taking. Managers should be aware of the potential consequences of controversial communication strategies and the subsequent negative feedback they may receive, as it can have a detrimental effect on the brand's credibility in the eyes of consumers, and overall brand equity. Brands should proactively address any potential criticism or negative feedback to maintain trustworthiness and minimize the risk of consumer backlash.

### 6.3 Social implications

The consumer demand for brand social activism will likely continue to increase, and thereby woke advertising and woke washing, from our perspective. Woke advertising, as the findings in this thesis show, is in theory a good marketing practice. Consumers show that they do appreciate brands taking a stand and promoting a cause, suggested by the findings. However, the problem occurs when a brand's actions are contradictory to the message they are promoting, and they come across as inauthentic. It is also important to note that it does not have to be "all in or all out" in these scenarios, and it is a tightrope to navigate this landscape. In this instance, it does not necessarily mean that H&M is actively and consciously woke washing with their advertisements. On the other hand, it is essential for a brand to be able to match all their actions with the message they are sending out. It is crucial to remember that consumers evaluate coherence based on relevance and expectations, and it is perceived differently by different people depending on their knowledge, mental modes, and norms, making it somewhat fragile and open to reevaluation (Maille & Fleck, 2011). In other words, it will be difficult for brands to align their actions with everyone's opinions, as these will vary from individual to individual. The results presented in this paper contribute to and emphasize the importance of transparency, authenticity, and responsible communication practices to maintain consumer trust and mitigate potential negative outcomes.

## 7.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has revealed the significant impact of woke washing on consumers' attitudes, perception of credibility, and behavior. The findings emphasize the importance of coherence and authenticity in brand communication, as consumers value brands that align their actions with their promoted message. Maintaining brand credibility is crucial, as negative feedback and inauthenticity can undermine consumer trust. The study also highlights the increasing demand for brand social activism, but emphasizes the need for transparency, authenticity, and responsible communication practices to mitigate potential negative outcomes. Overall, this research provides valuable insights for brand management and marketing strategies, emphasizing the importance of aligning brand actions with consumer expectations and values.

## 8.0 Future research proposal

This study has the potential to provide understanding into the psychological, cognitive, and behavioral effects of contradictory information from businesses and the impact on consumers' perceptions, emotions, and actions related to “woke washing”. Furthermore, it contributes to the research paradigm of marketing and the promotion of ethical behaviors by shedding light on the phenomenon of woke washing. However, there are several future research directions that can be explored.

Future research should aim to evaluate the authenticity of companies in their social activism efforts. This could involve examining a range of factors, such as the alignment between corporate values and actions over a specific period of time. Other factors to include in this research are the extent of diversity and inclusion within the company, the company's track record of social impact, and the transparency of their supply chain and labor practices. Comparative studies across different industries and regions would provide valuable insight into variations of company authenticity. In order to assess which companies are genuine and which are engaging in “woke washing”, comprehensive case studies and industry analysis are essential. These studies should delve into specific instances of “woke washing” and identify key indicators that can help

distinguish between authentic and non-authentic efforts. By examining real-world examples across different sectors, industries and geographics, researchers can identify patterns and trends.

Another crucial area of future research involves developing tools and framework that empower consumers to evaluate whether they are being exposed to woke washing or a genuine advertisement. These tools could include guidelines, checklists, or online resources that provide consumers with a systematic approach to critically assess brands social activism claims. This could involve examining factors such as visual cues, language cues or the consistency between brand values and actions.

As this study mainly focuses on the negative effects of “woke washing” towards H&M, the last area of future research is investigating how consumers respond to genuine brands that engage in meaningful social activism. This can further the understanding of the potential benefits for companies. Research could examine consumer trust, loyalty and purchasing intentions towards brands that are perceived and maybe confirmed as genuinely committed to social progress. Additionally, exploring the role of communication strategies and effective storytelling in building consumer trust would be valuable.

Future studies could employ mixed methods approaches or experimental designs to further validate the findings and provide a deeper understanding of the underlying methods. By addressing these research areas, scholars and researchers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of “woke washing”, empower consumers with tools to differentiate between genuine and inauthentic efforts, and provide valuable insight for companies striving to engage in meaningful social activism.

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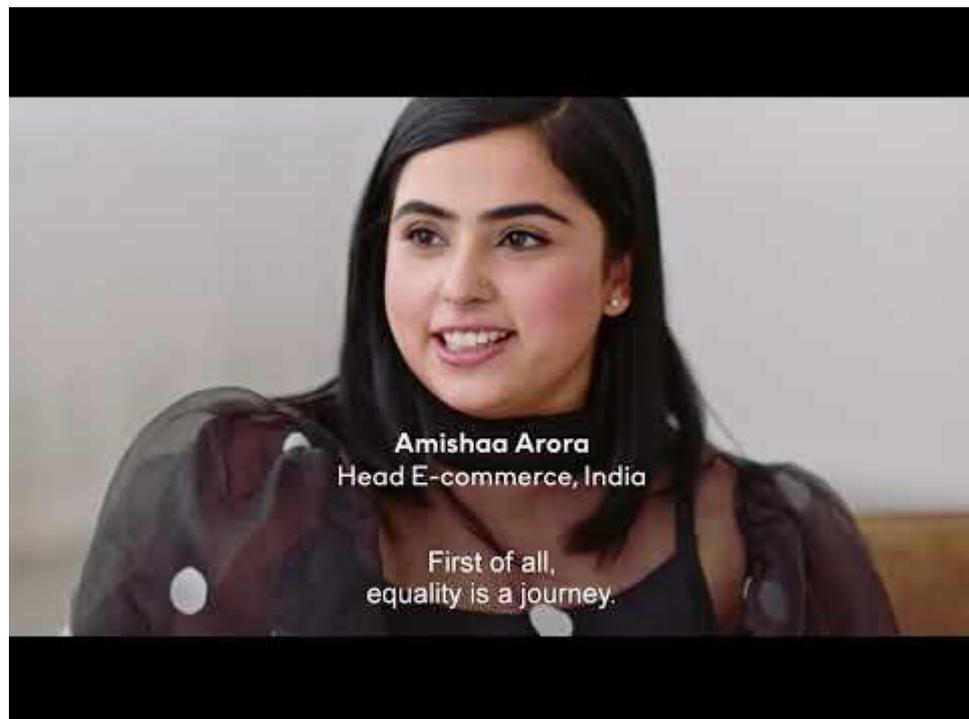
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## 8.0 Appendix

### 8.1 H&M YouTube Video



<https://youtu.be/vaDn7LihCkc>

## 8.2 Pretest questions

Q6

Svar på følgende utsagn om filmen du nettopp så:

	Helt uenig	Ganske uenig	Litt uenig	Verken eller	Litt enig	Ganske enig	Helt enig
Jeg likte denne reklamen	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg syntes denne reklamen fremstår som oppriktig	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg sitter igjen med et positivt inntrykk etter å ha sett denne reklamen	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg syntes budskapet samsvarer med avsender (H&M)	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg syntes det er bra at H&M viser politisk engasjement gjennom denne reklamen	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg har en positiv holdning til H&M	<input type="radio"/>						
Reklamen øker sannsynligheten for at jeg handler hos H&M	<input type="radio"/>						

## 8.3 Criticism towards H&M

# H&M accused of failing to ensure fair wages for global factory workers

Employees forced to work excessive hours in order to survive, Clean Clothes Campaign says

Samuel Osborne • Monday 24 September 2018 18:39 • [Comments](#)



LET'S GET ETHICAL | DEC. 18, 2018

## H&M Still Isn't Paying Workers a Living Wage

By Sarah Spellings

## Abuse is daily reality for female garment workers for Gap and H&M, says report

Clothing companies to investigate allegations that fast fashion deadlines create climate of harassment and violence in Asian factories



© Bangladesh's workers at a garment factory on the outskirts of Dhaka. Gap and H&M both told the Guardian they welcomed initiatives to tackle violence. Photograph: NurPhoto via Getty Images

NEWS DEMAND EQUITY

## Hundreds of H&M and Gap Factory Workers Abused Daily: Report

Fast fashion leads to sexual assault — and the world's biggest fashion companies are to blame.



## Female workers at H&M supplier in India allege widespread sexual violence

Multiple women at Natchi Apparels have reported abuse weeks after 21-year-old worker was allegedly killed by her supervisor



© Workers at Natchi Apparels allege that women were sexually and verbally abused while making clothes for H&M and other brands. Photograph: Michaela Reha/Routary

## 8.4 Post test questions

Svar på følgende utsagn:

	Helt uenig	Ganske uenig	Litt uenig	Verken eller	Litt enig	Ganske enig	Helt enig
Kritikken endrer det innledende inntrykket jeg satt med etter reklamen	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg syntes reklamen jeg så virker mindre oppriktig etter kritikken ble presentert	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg syntes det politiske engasjementet i reklamen ikke virker genuint etter kritikken ble presentert	<input type="radio"/>						
Avsenderen av reklamen mister troverdigheten etter kritikken ble presentert	<input type="radio"/>						
Holdningen min til H&M endres negativt	<input type="radio"/>						
Kritikken minsker sannsynligheten for at jeg handler hos H&M	<input type="radio"/>						

## 8.5 Attitude questions

Vennligst svar på følgende utsagn.

	Helt uenig	Ganske uenig	Litt uenig	Verken eller	Litt enig	Ganske enig	Helt enig
Jeg bryr meg om ulike samfunnsproblemer	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg holder meg oppdatert angående ulike samfunnsproblemer	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg mener det er viktig å ha en mening om ulike samfunnsproblemer	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg har kjennskap til begrepet "Woke" og hva det innebærer	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg anser det som positivt å være "Woke"	<input type="radio"/>						

Vennligst svar på følgende utsagn.

	Helt uenig	Ganske uenig	Litt uenig	Verken eller	Litt enig	Ganske enig	Helt enig
Jeg mener bedrifter har et ansvar når det gjelder ulike samfunnsproblemer	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg mener det er positivt at bedrifter viser engasjement angående ulike samfunnsproblemer	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg får et bedre inntrykk av bedrifter som tar standpunkt angående ulike samfunnsproblemer	<input type="radio"/>						
Det er mer sannsynlig at jeg kjøper et produkt fra en bedrift jeg vet støtter en sak jeg syntes er viktig	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg syntes det er enkelt å skille mellom en bedrift som aktivt støtter en sak og en bedrift som gjør det for egen vinning	<input type="radio"/>						

## 8.6 Demographic questions

Demografi

Q1

Kjønn

- Mann
- Kvinne
- Ikke-binær
- Annet

Q4

Alder

## 9.0 Table and figure overview

Table 1- Matrix table

Q6

Svar på følgende utsagn om filmen du nettopp så:

	Helt uenig	Ganske uenig	Litt uenig	Verken eller	Litt enig	Ganske enig	Helt enig
Jeg likte denne reklamen	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg syntes denne reklamen fremstår som oppriktig	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg sitter igjen med et positivt inntrykk etter å ha sett denne reklamen	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg syntes budskapet samsvarer med avsender (H&M)	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg syntes det er bra at H&M viser politisk engasjement gjennom denne reklamen	<input type="radio"/>						
Jeg har en positiv holdning til H&M	<input type="radio"/>						
Reklamen øker sannsynligheten for at jeg handler hos H&M	<input type="radio"/>						

Table 1- Matrix table

Table 2- Gender distribution

Gender distribution		
	N	%
Male	39	34.8
Female	72	64.3
Non-binary	1	0.9

Table 2- Gender distribution

Table 3- KMO, Bartlett's & Cronbachs Alpha

KMO and Bartlett's Test & Cronbach's Alpha	
Keiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sample Adequacy	.792
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	<.001
Sig.	
Cronbach's Alpha	.813

Table 3- KMO, Bartlett's & Cronbachs Alpha

Table 4- Communalities

Communalities		
	Extraction	
Jeg likte denne reklamen	0,792	Holdningen min til H&M endres negativt
Jeg syntes denne reklamen fremstår som oppriktig	0,792	Kritikken minsker sannsynligheten for at jeg handler hos H&M
Jeg sitter igjen med et positivt inntrykk etter å ha sett denne reklamen	0,845	Jeg bryr meg om ulike samfunnsproblemer
Jeg syntes budskapet samsvarer med avsender (H&M)	0,652	Jeg holder meg oppdatert angående ulike samfunnsproblemer
Jeg syntes det er bra at H&M viser politisk engasjement gjennom denne reklamen	0,725	Jeg mener det er viktig å ha en mening om ulike samfunnsproblemer
Jeg har en positiv holdning til H&M	0,503	Jeg har kjennskap til begrepet "Woke" og hva det innebærer
Reklamen øker sannsynligheten for at jeg handler hos H&M	0,530	Jeg anser det som positivt å være "Woke"
Kritikken endrer det innledende inntrykket jeg satt med etter reklamen	0,572	Jeg mener bedrifter har et ansvar når det gjelder ulike samfunnsproblemer
Jeg syntes reklamen jeg så virker mindre oppriktig etter kritikken ble presentert	0,725	Jeg mener det er positivt at bedrifter viser engasjement angående ulike samfunnsproblemer
Jeg syntes det politiske engasjementet i reklamen ikke virker genuint etter kritikken ble presentert	0,768	Jeg får et bedre inntrykk av bedrifter som tar standpunkt angående ulike samfunnsproblemer
Avsenderen av reklamen mister troverdigheten etter kritikken ble presentert	0,783	Det er mer sannsynlig at jeg kjøper et produkt fra en bedrift jeg vet støtter en sak jeg syntes er viktig
		Jeg syntes det er enkelt å skille mellom en bedrift som aktivt støtter en sak og en bedrift som gjør det for egen vinning
		0,630
		0,798
		0,647
		0,763
		0,805
		0,725
		0,414
		0,509
		0,783
		0,744
		0,791
		0,599
		0,630

Extraction Method: Principal Component

Table 4- Communalities

Table 5- Genuineness

Jeg syntes denne reklamen fremstår som oppriktig

	N	%
Litt enig	35	31.3
Ganske enig	33	29.5
Helt enig	19	17.0
Totalt	87	77.8

Table 5- Genuineness

Table 6- Positive impression

Jeg sitter igjen med et positivt inntrykk etter å ha sett denne reklamen

Litt enig	24	21.4
Ganske enig	30	26.8
Helt enig	26	23.2
Totalt	80	71.4

Table 6- Positive impression

Table 7- Political engagement

Jeg syntes det er bra at H&M viser politisk engasjement gjennom denne reklamen

	N	%
Litt enig	22	19.6
Ganske enig	36	32.1
Helt enig	23	20.5
Total	81	72.2

Table 7- Political engagement

Table 8- Impression of H&M

Jeg har en positiv holdning til H&M

	N	%
Helt uenig	4	3.6
Ganske uenig	13	11.6
Litt uenig	16	14.3
Verken eller	29	25.9
Litt enig	23	20.5
Ganske enig	19	17.0
Helt enig	8	7.1

Table 8- Impression of H&M

Table 9- Message and messenger

Jeg syntes budskapet samsvarer med avsender (H&M)

	N	%
Helt uenig	11	3.6
Ganske uenig	13	11.6
Litt uenig	16	14.3
Verken eller	36	32.1
Litt enig	25	22.3
Ganske enig	10	8.9
Helt enig	1	0.9

Table 9- Message and messenger

Table 10- H&M's enhanced chances for sale

Reklamen øker sannsynligheten for at jeg handler hos H&M

	N	%
Helt uenig	20	17.9
Ganske uenig	21	18.8
Litt uenig	7	6.3
Verken eller	45	40.2
Litt enig	12	10.7
Ganske enig	4	3.6
Helt enig	3	2.7

Table 10- H&M's enhanced chances for sale

Table 11- Change in initial impression

Kritikken endrer det innledende inntrykket jeg satt med etter reklamen

	N	%
Litt enig	32	28.6
Ganske enig	29	25.9
Helt enig	27	24.1
Total	88	78.6

Table 11- Change in initial impression

Table 12- Perception of genuineness

Jeg syntes reklamen jeg så virker mindre oppriktig etter kritikken ble presentert

	N	%
Litt enig	26	23.2
Ganske enig	32	28.6
Helt enig	32	28.6
Total	90	79.8

Table 12- Perception of genuineness

Table 13- Change in attitude towards H&M

Holdningen min til H&M endres negativt

	N	%
Helt uenig	3	2.7
Ganske uenig	3	2.7
Litt uenig	2	1.8
Verken eller	27	24.1
Litt enig	30	26.8
Ganske enig	21	18.8
Helt enig	25	22.3

Table 13- Change in attitude towards H&M

Table 14- Shopping intentions

Kritikken minsker sannsynligheten for at jeg handler hos H&M		
	N	%
Helt uenig	5	4.5
Ganske uenig	5	4.5
Litt uenig	11	9.8
Verken eller	30	26.8
Litt enig	29	25.9
Ganske enig	15	13.4
Helt enig	15	13.4

Table 14- Shopping intentions

Table 15- Attitude towards social issues

Jeg bryr meg om ulike samfunnsproblemer		
	N	%
Litt enig	29	25.9
Ganske enig	49	43.8
Helt enig	27	24.1
Total	105	93.6

Table 15- Attitude towards social issues

Table 16- Importance of staying informed

Jeg holder meg oppdatert angående ulike samfunnsproblemer		
	N	%
Litt enig	34	30.4
Ganske enig	45	40.2
Helt enig	20	17.9
Total	99	88.5

Table 16- Importance of staying informed

Table 17- The term “woke”

Jeg har kjennskap til begrepet «Woke» og hva det innebærer

	N	%
Litt enig	22	19.6
Ganske enig	34	30.4
Helt enig	38	33.9
Total	94	83.9

Table 17- The term "woke"

Table 18- Attitude towards being “woke”

Jeg anser det som positivt å være «Woke»

	N	%
Verken eller	21	18.8
Litt enig	28	25.0
Ganske enig	28	25.0
Helt enig	13	11.6

Table 18- Attitude towards being "woke"

Table 19- Business’ responsibility

Jeg mener bedrifter har et ansvar når det gjelder ulike samfunnsproblemer

	N	%
Helt enig	53	47.3

Table 19- Business' responsibility

Table 20- Positive engagement of business involvement

Jeg mener det er positivt at bedrifter viser engasjement angående ulike samfunnsproblemer

	N	%
Helt enig	61	54.5

Table 20- Positive engagement of business involvement

Table 21- Importance of taking a stand

Jeg får et bedre inntrykk av bedrifter som tar standpunkt angående ulike samfunnsproblemer

	N	%
Helt uenig	2	1,8
Ganske uenig	3	2.7
Litt uenig	2	1.8
Verken eller	7	6.3
Litt enig	22	19.6
Ganske enig	29	25.9
Helt enig	46	41.1

Table 21- Importance of taking a stand

Table 22- Identification of “woke washing”

Jeg synes det er enkelt å skille mellom en bedrift som aktivt støtter en sak og en bedrift som gjør det for egen vinning

	N	%
Helt uenig	15	13.4
Ganske uenig	19	17.0
Litt uenig	12	10.7
Verken eller	22	19.6
Litt enig	16	14.3
Ganske enig	16	14.3
Helt enig	11	9.8

Table 22- Identification of "woke washing"

Table 23- Age statistics

Age statistics	
Kurtosis	-.564
Skewness	.897
Median	27
Mean	33.64

Table 23- Age statistics

Table 24- Critical values of  $t$  for two-tailed tests

## Critical values of $t$ for two-tailed tests

Significance level ( $\alpha$ )

Degrees of freedom ( $df$ )	.2	.15	.1	.05	.025	.01	.005	.001
1	3.078	4.165	6.314	12.706	25.452	63.657	127.321	636.619
2	1.886	2.282	2.920	4.303	6.205	9.925	14.089	31.599
3	1.638	1.924	2.353	3.182	4.177	5.841	7.453	12.924
4	1.533	1.778	2.132	2.776	3.495	4.604	5.598	8.610
5	1.476	1.699	2.015	2.571	3.163	4.032	4.773	6.869
6	1.440	1.650	1.943	2.447	2.969	3.707	4.317	5.959
7	1.415	1.617	1.895	2.365	2.841	3.499	4.029	5.408
8	1.397	1.592	1.860	2.306	2.752	3.355	3.833	5.041
9	1.383	1.574	1.833	2.262	2.685	3.250	3.690	4.781
10	1.372	1.559	1.812	2.228	2.634	3.169	3.581	4.587
11	1.363	1.548	1.796	2.201	2.593	3.106	3.497	4.437
12	1.356	1.538	1.782	2.179	2.560	3.055	3.428	4.318
13	1.350	1.530	1.771	2.160	2.533	3.012	3.372	4.221
14	1.345	1.523	1.761	2.145	2.510	2.977	3.326	4.140
15	1.341	1.517	1.753	2.131	2.490	2.947	3.286	4.073
16	1.337	1.512	1.746	2.120	2.473	2.921	3.252	4.015
17	1.333	1.508	1.740	2.110	2.458	2.898	3.222	3.965
18	1.330	1.504	1.734	2.101	2.445	2.878	3.197	3.922
19	1.328	1.500	1.729	2.093	2.433	2.861	3.174	3.883
20	1.325	1.497	1.725	2.086	2.423	2.845	3.153	3.850
21	1.323	1.494	1.721	2.080	2.414	2.831	3.135	3.819
22	1.321	1.492	1.717	2.074	2.405	2.819	3.119	3.792
23	1.319	1.489	1.714	2.069	2.398	2.807	3.104	3.768
24	1.318	1.487	1.711	2.064	2.391	2.797	3.091	3.745
25	1.316	1.485	1.708	2.060	2.385	2.787	3.078	3.725
26	1.315	1.483	1.706	2.056	2.379	2.779	3.067	3.707
27	1.314	1.482	1.703	2.052	2.373	2.771	3.057	3.690
28	1.313	1.480	1.701	2.048	2.368	2.763	3.047	3.674
29	1.311	1.479	1.699	2.045	2.364	2.756	3.038	3.659
30	1.310	1.477	1.697	2.042	2.360	2.750	3.030	3.646
40	1.303	1.468	1.684	2.021	2.329	2.704	2.971	3.551
50	1.299	1.462	1.676	2.009	2.311	2.678	2.937	3.496
60	1.296	1.458	1.671	2.000	2.299	2.660	2.915	3.460
70	1.294	1.456	1.667	1.994	2.291	2.648	2.899	3.435
80	1.292	1.453	1.664	1.990	2.284	2.639	2.887	3.416
100	1.290	1.451	1.660	1.984	2.276	2.626	2.871	3.390
1000	1.282	1.441	1.646	1.962	2.245	2.581	2.813	3.300
Infinite	1.282	1.440	1.645	1.960	2.241	2.576	2.807	3.291



Table 24- Critical values of  $t$  for two-tailed tests

Table 25- Paired Samples T-Test

Table 25- Paired samples t-test

95% confidence interval

	Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	sig. (2-tailed)	Critical value
«Jeg likte denne reklamen» vs. «Kritikken endrer det innledende inntrykket jeg satt med etter reklamen»	.009	-.342	.361	.051	109	.959	1.984
«Jeg syntes denne reklamen fremstår som oppriktig» vs. «Jeg syntes reklamen jeg så virker mindre oppriktig etter kritikken ble presentert»	-.306	-.711	.099	-1.499	110	.137	1.984
«Jeg har en positiv holdning til H&M» vs. «Holdningen min til H&M endres negativt»	-.892	-1.351	-.432	-3.846	110	.001	1.984
«Reklamen øker sannsynligheten for at jeg handler hos H&M» vs. «Kritikken minsker sannsynligheten for at jeg handler hos H&M»	-1.318	-1.754	-.882	-5.994	109	.002	1.984
«Jeg sitter igjen med et positivt inntrykk etter å ha sett denne reklamen» vs. «Jeg syntes reklamen jeg så virker mindre oppriktig etter kritikken ble presentert»	-.288	-.694	.117	-1.410	110	.162	1.984
«Jeg sitter igjen med et positivt inntrykk etter å ha sett denne reklamen» vs. «Holdningen min til H&M endres negativt»	.036	-.339	.411	.190	110	.849	1.984
«Jeg syntes det er bra at H&M viser politisk engasjement gjennom denne reklamen» vs. «Jeg syntes det politiske engasjementet i reklamen ikke virker genuint etter kritikken ble presentert»	-.360	-.803	.082	-1.613	110	.110	1.984
«Jeg syntes denne reklamen fremstår som oppriktig» vs. «Avsenderen av reklamen mister troverdigheten etter kritikken ble presentert»	-.477	-.896	-.059	-2.263	110	.026	1.984
«Jeg har en positiv holdning til H&M» vs. «Kritikken endrer det innledende inntrykket jeg satt med etter reklamen»	-.982	-1.400	-.564	-4.661	110	.001	1.984
«Jeg syntes budskapet samsvarer med avsender (H&M)» vs. «Kritikken endrer det innledende inntrykket jeg satt med etter reklamen»	-1.495	-1.887	-1.104	-7.576	110	.001	1.984

Figure 1- Gender distribution

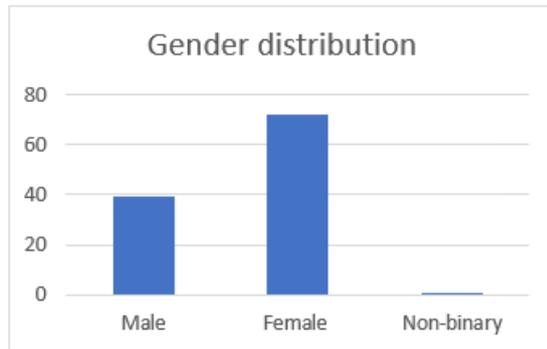


Figure 1- Gender distribution

Figure 2- Age distribution

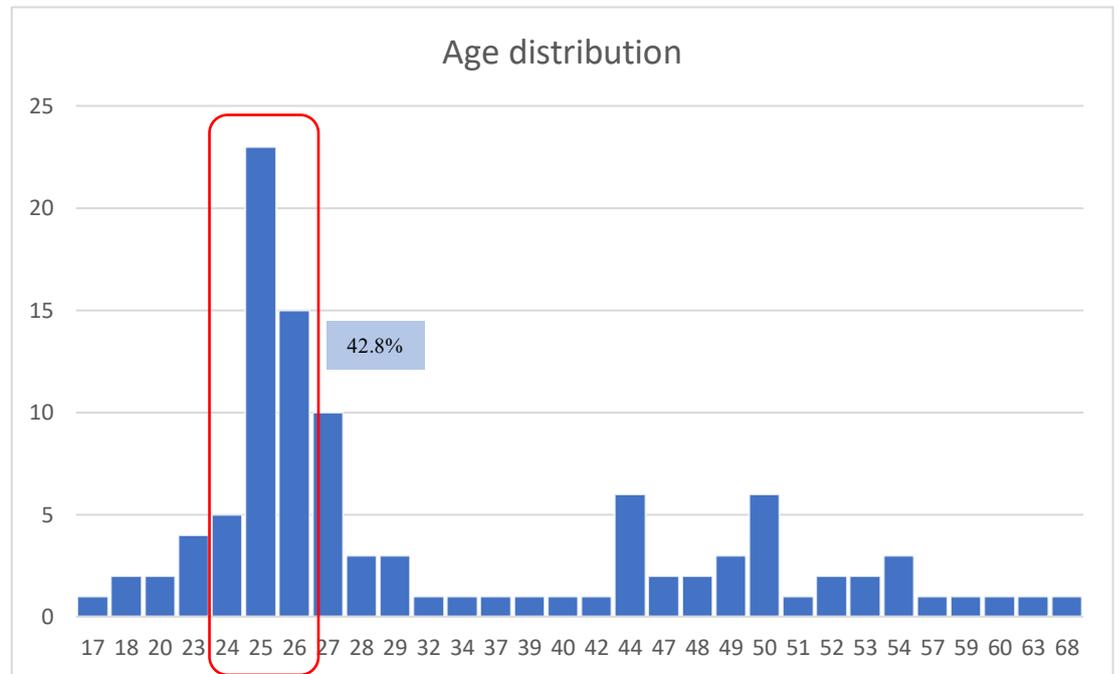


Figure 2- Age distribution

Figure 3 – Gender and age distribution from SimilarWeb

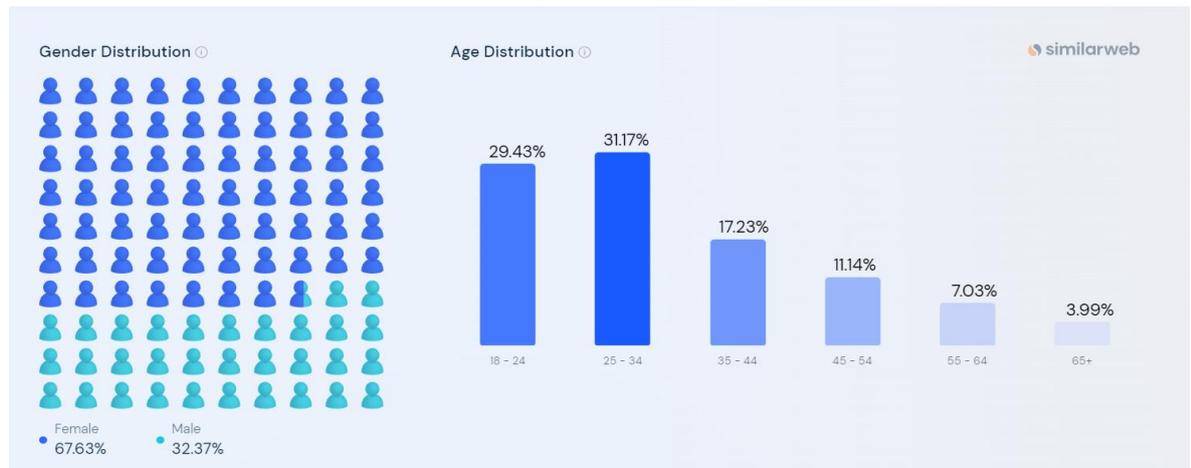


Figure 3- Gender and age distribution from SimilarWeb

Figure 4- Authenticity of political engagement

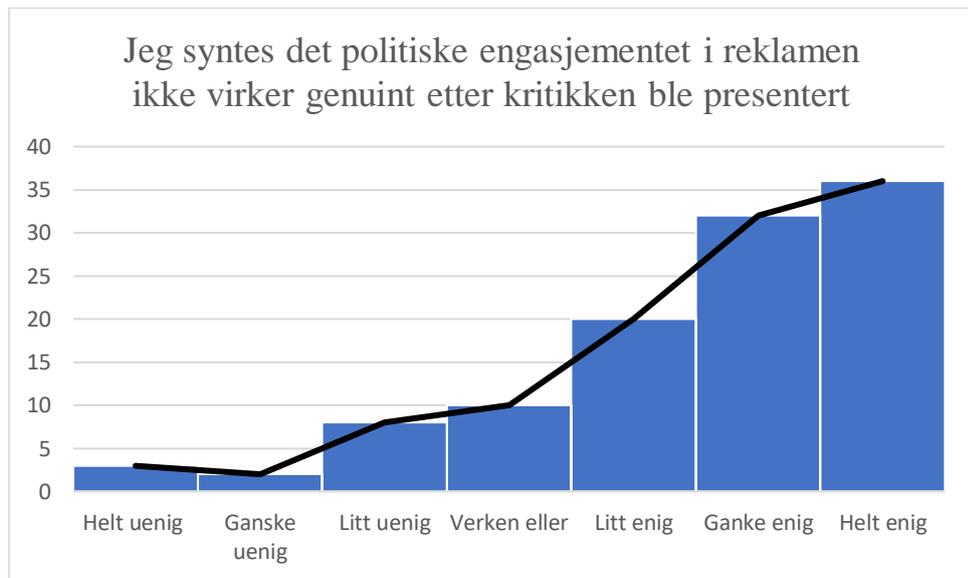


Figure 4- Authenticity of political engagement

Figure 5- Credibility of the messenger

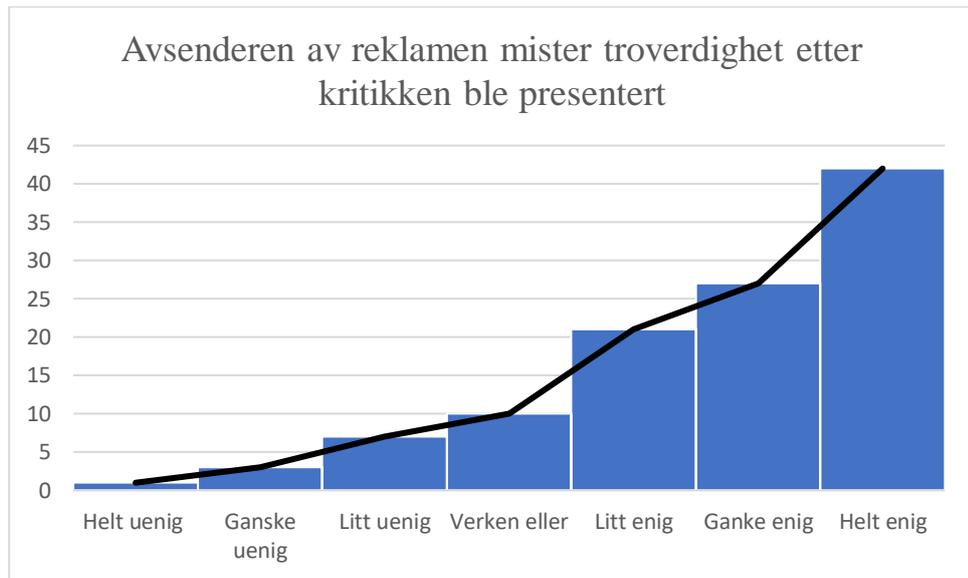


Figure 5- Credibility of the messenger

Figure 6- Shift in attitude

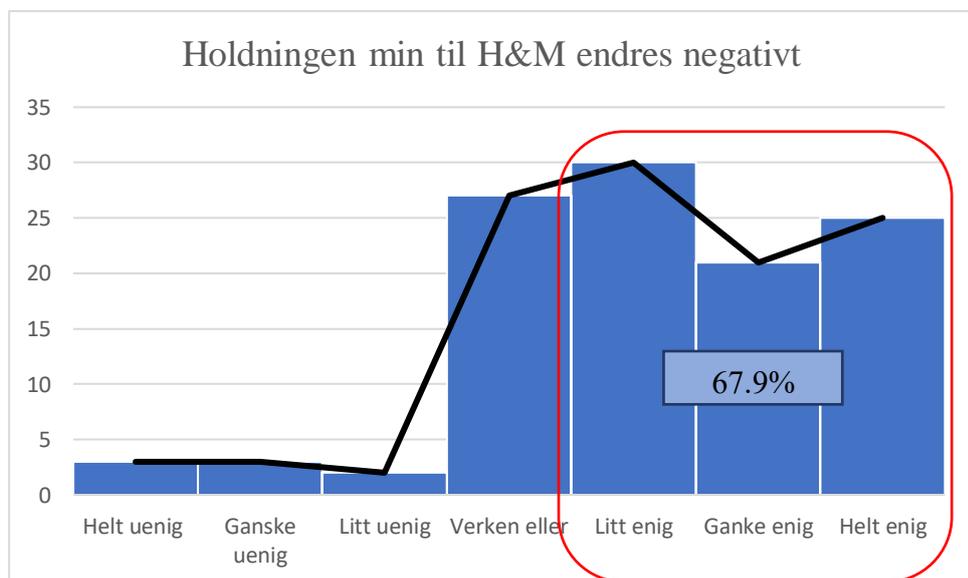


Figure 6- Shift in attitude

Figure 7- Intentions of purchase

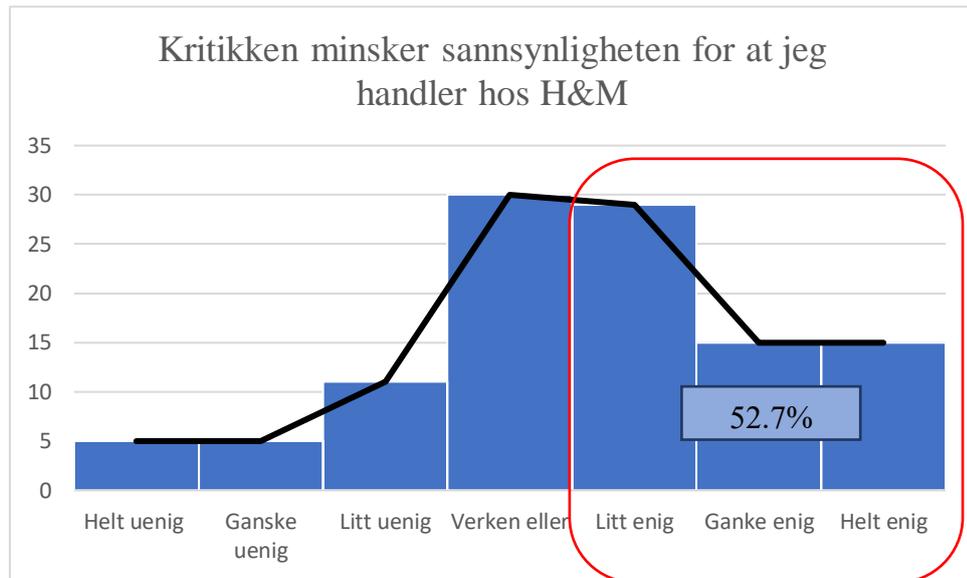


Figure 7- Intentions of purchase

Figure 8- Likelihood of purchase

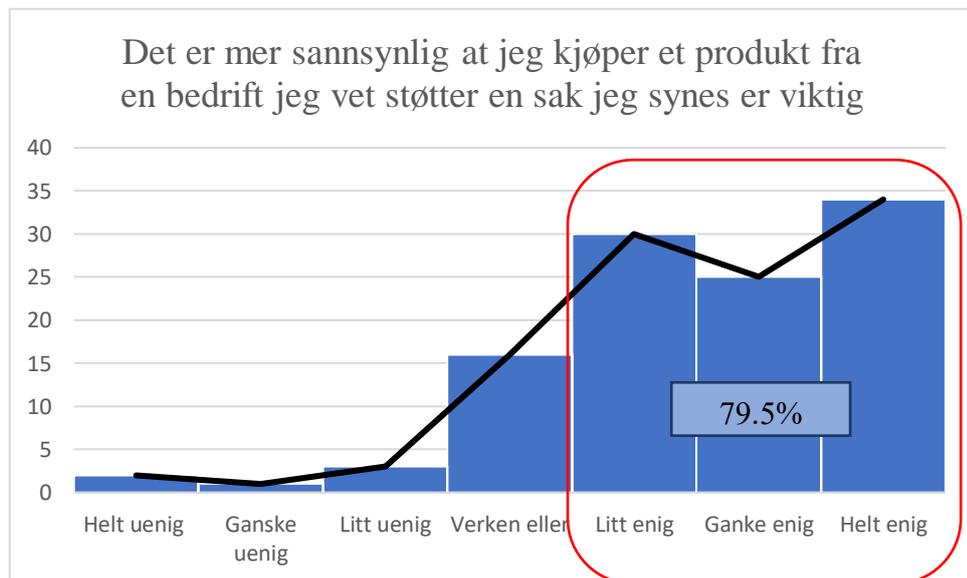


Figure 8- Likelihood of purchase

Figure 9- Identification of “woke washing”

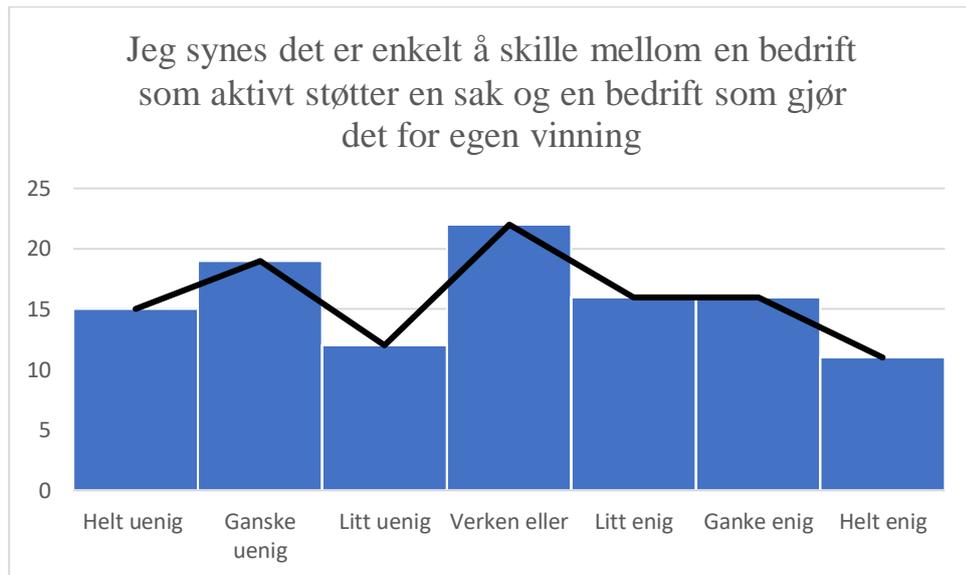


Figure 9- Identification of "woke washing"