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Research Paper

Brand Activism and Consumer Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Value Alignment in the UAE Consumer Market Context.

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how brand activism (BA) affects consumer loyalty (CL) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), including the mediating effect of value alignment (VA). The study examines the effects of consumers' alignment with brand values on shaping their loyalty behaviors in a culturally diverse, rapidly digitalized, and increasingly consumer-conscious market. We sampled 612 consumers in the UAE retail and service sector, such as fashion, technology, and food and beverage industries. The hypotheses and the test of the direct and indirect effects have been tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). The findings are solid evidence on the research model. BA improved CL to a great extent when consumers felt that their personal values and the position adopted by the brand aligned. VA played the role of a holy broker and turned BA into increased trust, emotional attachment, and returning customers. On the other hand, the weak alignment of activism minimized the positive effect on loyalty, which raised concerns about the possible dangers of misplaced or hollow initiatives. The research is among the first to conduct empirical research on the mediating role of VA between VA and CL in the UAE market setting. The results can benefit brand management literature because they accentuate the necessity of strategic alignment of activism with consumer values as the key to obtaining loyalty in culturally diversified and rapidly changing markets.

Keywords: Brand activism, consumer loyalty, value alignment, UAE market, consumer behavior

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1. INTRODUCTION

The world business landscape has experienced a radical change over the past few years, and consumers are also demanding that the brands participate in the solving of social, environmental, political problems. This trend, which can be widely defined as BA, means a public activity of a firm, which goes beyond its economic operations and, which appeals to the values of stakeholders (Farooq, 2024; Antwi-Boateng & Al Harasi, 2025). In comparison to a classical form of corporate social responsibility (CSR) that in most cases is philanthropic and marginal, BA is strategic, visible, and integrated into consumer-facing brand stories. Recent studies indicate that close to 64% of all consumers around the world use the position of a brand on social and political matters to make their purchasing choices (Kiran et al., 2024), and 77% mention that they are more inclined to stick to a brand that shares their values (Zaki et al, 2025). The trend is enhanced in the Middle East and especially the UAE due to the fact that the nation and its population consist of young, digitally integrated, and multicultural consumers who are becoming more active in their opinions regarding corporate integrity and value congruence (Tahat et al, 2026; Rivaroli et al, 2022). In a unique context to analyse BA, the UAE consumer market is valued at more than USD 261 billion in 2023 and is expected to increase at a rate of 5.1% CAGR by 2030 (Wicaksono et al, 2025; Hyun & Chakraborty, 2025). Expatriates make up more than 88% of the population, and Gen Z and millennials are a significant portion of the population, which makes consumer expectations not only influenced by global social movements but also by local cultural sensitivities (Ismail, 2026; Khan, 2023). There is an increasing demand in the fashion, food and beverage, as well as technology industries to act sustainably, inclusively, and ethically. As an illustration, the surveys in the UAE retail market indicate that 7 out of 10 millennials would choose a brand that is concerned with the environmental responsibility, and 63 out of 100 Gen Z-shoppers would switch the brand in case a company does not demonstrate inclusivity (Hyun & Chakraborty, 2025; Kalogeras & Mejri, 2025). This explains the growing applicability of VA as the determinant of CL. To define the variables, BA is theorised as a brand's intentional and apparent involvement in socio-political causes and creating change and indicating values to its stakeholders (Kalogeras &

Mejri, 2025). Instead, CL is a measure of attitudinal commitment and behavioral results such as trust, repeat purchase, and advocacy (Antwi-Boateng & Al Harasi, 2025). VA is a perceived fit between personal beliefs and the position that the brand takes against the issues issued by a company that forms an emotional and cognitive screen through which activism is perceived (Mann, 2023). It has been found that activism that is not aligns with alignment may result in consumer distrust or backlash, but genuine alignment leads to trust and long-term loyalty (Sim & Kim, 2025). The available literature gives valuable but partial ideas about these dynamics. In this case, Zaman, (2024) and (Jiang et al, (2025) emphasised such an opportunity as BA, but it is also associated with the danger of the backlash caused by consumers. Authentic activism has been discovered by Gani et al, (2025) to reinforce the brand-consumer relationship, whereas opportunistic activism harms credibility. Research in Western settings continues to find that value congruence mediates the interaction between activism and loyalty, Bany Mohammed, (2025), and research in emerging markets (Amani, 2024). Tahat et al, (2026) emphasises cultural moderating roles. But there is little empirical data on Middle Eastern markets. Regarding the UAE setting, current work is mainly related to the topics of CSR and sustainability, Zaman (2024), and the interplay between activism, VA and loyalty is not discussed extensively. In addition, most of the previous research uses a single-sector or Western consumer sample, making it difficult to generalise to a culturally diverse marketplace, such as the UAE. The knowledge gap can be viewed clearly, as the global scholarship proves that VA is the mediating factor of the activism-loyalty relationship, yet has limited empirical data on the culturally hybrid markets where the consumer identity is determined by the global ideals but anchored in local sensitivities. The contribution of VA in enhancing or limiting CL is not researched in the UAE where BA has to strike a balance between inclusiveness and cultural appropriateness. This gap is of importance both to theory and practice because it provides a broader comprehension of BA beyond Western-centric settings and a provision of managerial implications to firms in the competitive and multicultural consumer UAE market.

RO1: To examine the impact of BA on CL.

RO2: To assess the influence of BA on VA.

RO3: To analyze the effect of VA on CL.

RO4: To evaluate the mediating role of VA between BA and CL.

The growing saliency of BA is indicative of a paradigm shift in the relationship between consumers and the brands with transactional relationships being supplanted with value associations. In international markets, there is accumulating literature that has affirmed the fact that CL ceases to be based on the quality or price of products but rather on the perceived genuine-ness and compatibility of brand values with those of the consumers. Notwithstanding this development, previous research is still focused on a Western scenario neglecting the unique socio-cultural and economic relationships in the Middle East, and specifically UAE. This paper fills that gap by researching on how BA affects CL in the UAE via the mediating action of VA. This study is important because it has a contextual novelty. The UAE is one of the most active and multicultural consumer markets in the world, where more than 88% of the population is an expatriate, and the millennial and Generation Z population, which is digitally empowered and socially aware, is rapidly growing. Whereas studies in the Western market have emphasised the force of activism in the creation of loyalty, the UAE market is a distinct market that requires the brands to walk the fine line between progressive attitudes towards sustainability, diversity, and social justice and the local culture and religious considerations. The twofold aspect of VA highlights the value of VA as a mediating factor, and the UAE is a perfect lab to experiment and optimize theoretical models of BA and loyalty. This research area has expanded to various consumer-facing sectors in the UAE such as fashion, food and beverage sectors and technology sectors where sustainability campaigns, inclusivity campaigns and ethical sourcing approaches are becoming more pronounced in activism. Following this multi-industry prism, the study circumvents the drawbacks of single-sector research and increases the generalizability of results in the heterogeneous market environment in the UAE. The originality of the research is a clear intention to study VA as a mediator that has been considered, but underutilised in the past literature. Although previous studies have established the direct implications of activism on loyalty, little has empirically determined the relationship between congruence between consumer and brand values converting activism to the achievement of the long-term loyalty consequences, particularly in culturally hybrid markets like the UAE. The study hence not only bridges geographical and contextual research gap but it also contributes to theory building by incorporating VA into the activism-loyalty paradigm. The rationale behind the conduct of this study in the UAE is two-fold, the first is that, the strategic location of the country as a global business centre where both local and expatriate consumer preferences converge offers a viable platform of testing cross-

cultural applicability of marketing theories, and the second, the increasing consumer demand of ethical, transparent, and socially responsible business practises in the UAE is indicator of a shift which brands should strategically navigate to remain loyal. Organizations doing business in the UAE are coming to the realization that activism is no longer a choice but a competitive advantage, and this research presents empirical evidence to inform such strategic choices. This study is methodologically based on the quantitative hypothesis-testing methodology, which utilises survey data obtained on a wide sample of consumers in the UAE in the main industries. SEM is used to prove the suggested relations and test in a rigorous way the mediating role of VA. Such a methodological rigour guarantees strong results, which are capable of standing the test of time in academic circles as well as providing practical managerial implications. The work of this paper is theoretical and practical. In theory, it builds upon the body of the literature on BA by empirically validating the mediation of VA in a Middle Eastern scenario, thus moving the body of knowledge past the Western-centric paradigms. In practice, it gives brand managers evidence-based information on how the authentically designed and communicated activism can appeal to the UAE consumers to reduce the risk of misalignment and backlash. In a larger scope, it enlightens the corporate strategies in the multicultural markets whereby the identities of the consumers are influenced by global trends yet are still underpinned by the local values.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several factors have sparked scholarly research to explore the effects of corporate involvement in social, political, and environmental issues on consumer behavior, due to the increasing relevance of BA in modern marketing. The current research is based on three complementary theories: Stakeholder Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Congruity (Value–Belief) Theory to offer a sound theoretical background. Taken together, these views depict how activism is transformed into consumer loyalty (CL), the pivotal role played by value alignment (VA), and that of cultural setting, specifically in the UAE. Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) is based on the assumption that firms can earn legitimacy through various means other than shareholders in terms of fulfilling the expectations of the wider category of stakeholders such as customers, communities, and society in general. This means, in the case of BA, that the more consumer-oriented companies practice socially desirable and meaningful causes, the more consumers reward them, thus enhancing loyalty. This is supported by empirical evidence. According to Farooq (2024), activism has a

considerable positive effect on consumer trust as far as it is consistent with the interests of stakeholders, but intentional or artificial strategies are likely to produce a mistrustful reaction. On the same note, Antwi-Boateng & Al Harasi (2025) believe that activism that comes across as a tokenistic form of CSR is not well received by the stakeholders and is prone to criticism. This information is directly related to the first goal of this paper, which is to study the effect of BA on CL in the UAE. Although the Stakeholder Theory is used to explain why companies should be involved in activism, the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1979) can be used to explain how such involvement affects the reaction of consumers psychologically. This theory postulates that people derive a portion of their self-concept through the affiliations they have to groups. Brands, which promote causes oriented to the personal values of consumers, can thus be symbolic identities to them. This is supported by previous research. Hyun & Chakraborty (2025) and Tahat et al. (2026) prove that genuine activism improves brand awareness and creates more emotional attachment. Similarly, Wicaksono et al. (2025) also emphasise that in the context of younger consumers within emerging markets, activism is a social signifier that helps in identity building and fosters repeat purchase behaviour. This indicates that these findings are in line with the second and third objectives of the study, which observe the associations between BA, VA, and CL. The analysis is further explained by the Congruity (Value-Belief) Theory which deals with the mental processes of consumer judgement (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955; Rosenberg, 1956). According to the theory, people attempt to achieve consistency between their beliefs and external stimuli. Cognitive harmony is achieved when brand activism is in line with personal values of consumers, which translate to positive attitudes and loyalty. Misalignment on the other hand creates psychological tension which may lead to disengagement or even boycotting intentions. Sim & Kim (2025) underline the fact that congruity mediates the association between activism and loyalty because the consumers perceive activism in terms of their value systems. Jiang et al. (2025) also discover in the Middle Eastern setting that even the best-laid sustainability projects may fail under the pressure of value misalignment, which is why perceived authenticity is important. This offers solid theoretical reasoning as to why VA should be used as an important mediating variable in the present study. Further empirical data also supports the centrality of VA. According to Mann (2023), brand value positions are the basis of the purchasing decision in 64% of consumers worldwide, which means that there is a direct correlation between activism and loyalty. Nonetheless, Zaman (2024) concludes that in the UAE, the trust-enhancing effect of CSR

initiatives is not turned into loyalty without being culturally sensitive, which implies that alignment could also be a moderator. According to Farooq (2024), 70% of the UAE millennials are more inclined to use a brand that has sustainability-related initiatives, even though they are required to align with their expectations. Wicaksono et al. (2025) note that the important psychological mediator is congruence, whereas Rivaroli et al. (2022) focus on authenticity as the means of transforming activism to loyalty. Meanwhile, critical boundary conditions are discussed in the literature. Kalogeras and Mejri (2025) show that in a politically polarised environment, activism can make some segments of consumers alien. There are generational differences in Bany Mohammed (2025), where Gen Z is especially sensitive to value congruence. In addition, Farooq (2024) and Hussain et al. (2025) characterize cultural tensions in emerging markets where the perceived activism as Western can be opposed. Despite the growing need to use ethical and inclusive branding, its application is not consistent across the industries (Kalogeras & Mejri, 2025). All these findings are indicative of the idea that VA is not a marginal variable, but a core psychological process that may stimulate or inhibit the process of the translation of activism into loyalty. The combination of these three theoretical approaches allows the current paper to create an inclusive and unified structure. The Stakeholder Theory sets out the strategic rationale of corporate activism, Social Identity Theory clarifies the rationale of activism in promoting consumer identification, and Congruity Theory explains the mental processes by which value identification leads to loyalty results. Instead of seeking to compare them as parallel descriptions, this paper combines the two theories and proposes that successful brand activism should seek to meet the expectations of the stakeholders, meet consumer identities, and be cognitively consistent to create loyalty. The case of the UAE offers a rather specific setting to the study because of its culturally diverse background and the cultural sensibilities. Success of the brand activism in such a setting depends on whether value alignment mediates the relationship between the brand activism and consumer reaction. Thus, this paper makes VA the key tool of how BA shapes CL, providing both theoretical development and context-related information.

2.1 Brand activism and consumer loyalty

The connection between BA and CL has become a primary issue in the marketing literature. Previous research always highlights that activism, seen as genuine and socially responsible, enhances the brand loyalty of consumers. (Antwi-Boateng & Al Harasi, (2025) argued that activism is a strategic development of CSR as brands who make visible stands on societal issues

are rewarded with greater trust and attachment from consumers. Gani et al, (2025) also showed that the lead to repurchase intentions and advocacy behaviours are more important through activation initiatives, as long as the consumer accepts the legitimacy (credibility) of the brand's stand. Similarly, Kiran et al, (2024) found that brands with authentic activism efforts build long-term loyalty from the social purpose that is part of their identity; however, the use of merely opportunistic efforts are at risk for backlash. Regarding consumer behavior, Jiang et al, (2025) survey conducted worldwide found that 64% of consumers follow loyalty behaviors such as repurchase and advocacy depending on the social or political position of a brand, which supports the fact that activism has a significant impact on the result of loyalty behaviors. In the Middle Eastern context, Wicaksono et al, (2025) noted that socially responsible efforts in the UAE were effective in improving customer satisfaction and repeat patronage-chances were especially high if initiatives were felt by the community to resonate with community expectations. Similarly, Wicaksono et al, (2025) highlighted how millennial and Gen Z consumers in the UAE showed a higher level of trust and loyalty towards brands that are demonstrating commitment to sustainability and inclusivity, making a case for activism as a motivation for brand loyalty in culturally diverse markets. Kalogeras and Mejri, (2025) further emphasised that activism should not only be determined as peripheral action, but as a strategic driver for loyalty when integrated as part of a brand's core. Taken together, these findings underscore the idea that, when effectively and naturally implemented, BA plays a major positive role in influencing CL in different markets. When applied to the UAE context, where consumers are becoming significantly more demanding with regards to ethical and socially conscious branding, it can be anticipated that activism positively correlate with loyalty directly.

H1: BA has a positive impact on CL.

2.2 Brand activism and value alignment

BA functions under no vacuum; its efficacy lies in the interpretations and internalizations of consumers about a brands position. At the heart of this process lies the idea of VA or what is perceived to be congruence between what an individual consumer believes in and the values that a brand is proclaiming. Researchers insist that the only way activism campaigns can be taken seriously is when consumers believe that the brand is promoting causes they have a personal belief in. Hyun and Chakraborty, (2025) observed that consumers judge activism based on their values and a brand or company is rewarded if it shares the same values as their social prioritizes and

punished if the brand appears to hold contrary perspectives. This was empirically validated (Rivaroli et al, (2022)) as the perception of value congruence explained why consumers had strong reactions to the activism campaigns. Farooq, (2024) further worsened the case that authenticity in activism was not separate from being aligned – brands misaligned with consumer values were at risk for manipulating consumers as opportunities for profit and exploitation, accused of being opportunists. Al Chami, (2025) went on to outline alignment as a cognitive filter, influencing how activism initiatives are interpreted and trusted or distrusted: In emerging market contexts, Hussain & Khan, (2024) found similarly positive responses from young consumers in India towards activism based on values which were similar and activation campaigns that violated cultural/social values. Similarly, (Liu & Li, 2024) emphasized that campaigns for sustainability in Asia did not always succeed because consumers viewed these campaigns as being imposed from above rather than being aligned with Asian values. In the UAE, Mann, (2023) found that 70% of millennials and Gen Z consumers said they felt more connected to the brand if the company's activism efforts were aligned with issues of concern such as sustainability and inclusivity. Combined, all of these studies suggest that BA has a strong influence on perceptions about VA which in turn serves as a psychological process where consumers assess brand authenticity. With different value systems coexisting in the multicultural UAE, activism with commonality or predominance value systems is likely to create stronger impressions of compatibility.

H2: BA has a positive impact on VA.

2.3 Value alignment and consumer loyalty

CL is not merely about transactional satisfaction; rather it is entrenched in psychological relationships between customers and brands. An important factor in this relationship is VA; the degree to which consumers think a brand has similar values to them. Studies have continually shown that consumers tend to develop attitudinal and behavioral loyalty when they develop such alignment. Having presented the position that congruence between consumers beliefs and brand values gives rise to cognitive consistency which minimizes dissonance and create trust which is converted into loyalty behaviors, Antwi-Boateng and Al Harasi, (2025) argued the position. Like (Rivaroli et al, (2022)) ; (Zaki et al, (2025)), they concluded that the more consumers agree that their identities are represented in brand values, the more they would seek to continue having long-term relationships with the brand. Trust Barometer revealed that 77% of consumers worldwide are increasingly convinced to remain loyal to a brand that aligns with their values. From consumers,

Liu & Li, (2024) were found to be less sensitive to substitute products and the congruence of the values is stronger towards the success that increases the degree of emotional commitment. Wicaksono et al, (2025) pointed out that loyalty is produced not only from activism in and of itself, but rather from the alignment between activism and consumer priorities. They did find that in culturally diverse environments, Hyun and Chakraborty, (2025) perceived value fit strongly determined young CL towards activist brands. As Kalogeras and Mejri, (2025) pointed out, in new markets, loyalty was compromised when activism was not aligned with the local ideology, despite campaigns being socially progressive. In the UAE, initial Hussain et al, (2025) reaffirmed some findings from their study showing that millennials and Gen Z consumers exhibited repeat patronage and advocacy based primarily on an assessment that activism initiatives had a degree of cultural and social expectations of the brand. Synthesizing these findings, it is clear that VA works as an important driver of CL, to ensure that activism occurs in a fashion that results in sustained relationships, as opposed to consumerism that lasts only for temporary interest. With consumers in the UAE being influenced by both international and regional cultural sensitivities to drive trust and commitment, the need to align becomes inevitable.

H3: VA has a positive impact on CL.

2.4 Mediating role of value alignment

Despite the positive description of the impact of BA on CL, researchers are starting to point out that the two are not always directly related but in the majority of cases, an additional psychological process is involved. One of the most significant mediators in this process is VA since it influences the perceptions of consumers of the activism as a thing real or unreal. As Bany Mohammed, (2025) explains, activism outcomes are less about taking a positive position and more about the extent to which consumers are aware that they share values with the brand. Similarly, (Farooq, 2024) demonstrated that activism influences loyalty through congruence; therefore, that the direct effects of activism are reduced when congruence is absent. In line with this Liu and Li, (2024) supported the view, that the authenticity or the level to which activism correlates with consumer and brand identities is what makes activism a long-term commitment. In an Gani et al, (2025) survey of the world community, it was also observed that attracting attention is not the only loyalty behavior that activism may be involved in, other forms of loyalty behavior, such as brand repurchase, and brand advocacy, are largely determined by whether the consumers feel that the brand does share their values. Taking this into account, the phenomenon of Tahat et al, (2026) concluded that

awareness was created by the activism campaigns, while the generation of any loyalty did not exist, the role of alignment in this case was mediating. Similarly, Sim and Kim, (2025) stated that while these established sustainability projects have never worked in Asian markets if they were not homogenous with the values and cultural standards of consumers. In the UAE, Wicaksono et al, (2025) pointed out that CSR campaigns could only translate into loyalty if the consumers felt that they were culturally and ethically aligned. The combination of all of these highlights the conclusion that VA is the psychological compromise of activism and loyalty. Activism can be seen as shallow or opportunistic without alignment, and as fostering trust, identification, and commitment, and increasing the returns on loyalty with it. The mediating aspect of VA is specifically applicable to the multicultural market in UAE where customers find a compromise between global and local values and sensibilities.

H4: VA mediates the relationship between BA and CL.

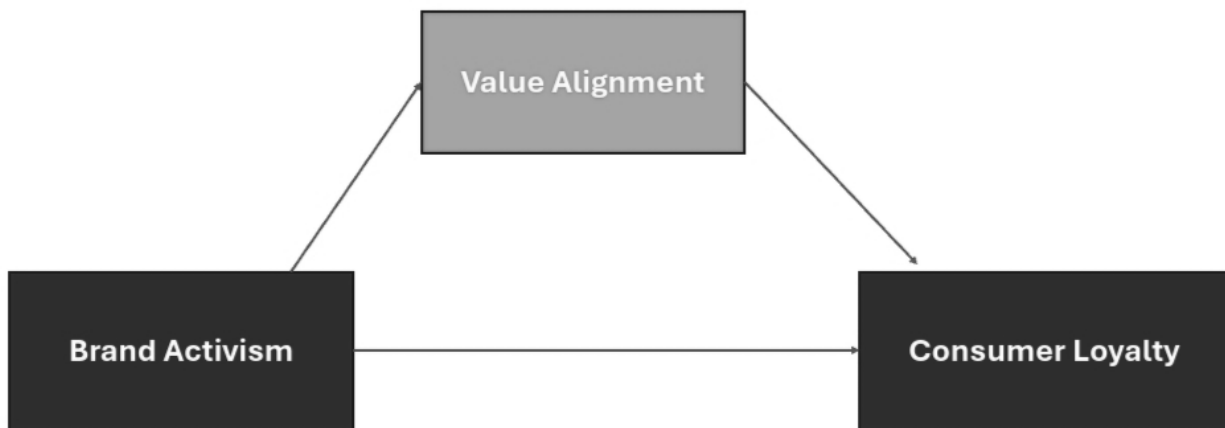


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

3. METHODS

3.1 Sample and data collection procedure

This study used a purposive convenience sampling method to gather samples of consumers spread across the UAE and such a strategy is deemed suitable when conducting exploratory studies in a diverse market (Kalogeras & Mejri, 2025). Data were selected to provide representation across major consumer-facing industries in which BA is most evident: the retail sector, the fashion sector, the technology sector, and the food and beverage sector. The selection of these industries was

based on the fact that they have been at the vanguard of sustainability, inclusiveness, and ethical responsibility efforts in the UAE. They were recruited by means of professional and social networks, through outreach via consumer groups, community organizations, and online mediums. After the consumers accepted to take part on a voluntary basis, an online questionnaire was offered to them through SurveyMonkey, intended to collect perceptions regarding brand activism, value congruence and loyalty. No cash rewards were provided and participants knew they could pull out any time they wanted. Eight hundred and fifty consumers were called upon to participate. Out of these 678 responses were returned (79.7% response rate). Following data screening operations, such as the elimination of unfinished responses and insincere responding patterns (i.e., the same answer on all items), 612 valid responses remained to be analysed. This was larger than the minimum sample size that is required to conduct structural equation modelling, as suggested by (Farooq, 2024). Data screening were carried out according to the related regulations on the screening of univariate and multivariate outliers, normality, and multicollinearity (Liu & Li, 2024; Hyun & Chakraborty, 2025). The age of the respondents was representative of the multicultural UAE consumer market. There was a fair gender representation with a slight female majority, and respondents represented various age groups, educational levels and occupational groups. They were mostly millennials and Gen Z consumers, which aligns with the description of the most digitally active and socially mindful people most impacted by BA.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 612)

Characteristics	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	280	45.8
	Female	332	54.2
Age Group	18–24 years	112	18.3
	25–34 years	214	35.0
	35–44 years	167	27.3
	45 years and above	119	19.4
Education	High school or equivalent	98	16.0
	Bachelor's degree	338	55.2

Characteristics	Category	N	%
Occupation	Master's degree or higher	176	28.8
	Student	88	14.4
	Professional/Employee	305	49.8
	Manager/Senior Manager	132	21.6
	Entrepreneur/Business Owner	87	14.2
Industry	Fashion & Retail	146	23.9
	Food & Beverage	124	20.3
	Technology & Electronics	176	28.8
	Other Services (hospitality, finance)	166	27.1

3.2 Measures

Due to the initial creation of the measures in English, a forward-backward translation process was utilised to design the measures to be culturally and linguistically accurate to the UAE setting (Lee et al., 2018). First, two bilingual professionals translated the instruments into Arabic (A1) as per English (E1). Then two bilingual professionals conversant with the cultural peculiarities of both English and Arabic languages separately back-translated the Arabic variant into English (E2). Comparisons were done between the original English (E1), back-translated English (E2) and Arabic (A1) versions to cheque for consistency. Any differences were checked, revised and solved by repeating the translation steps. To determine the clarity, cultural appropriateness, and understanding of items, the final version (A2) was pre-tested on a small group of UAE consumers ($n = 40$). The measures were valid and reliable as confirmed by this pilot test. All latent constructs were measured using a five point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

3.2.1 Brand activism

The six-dimensional scale of Antwi-Boateng and Al Harasi, (2025) with refinements introduced by (Kalogeras & Mejri, (2025) was used to measure BA. This tool embodies activism in major areas such as environmental, social, political, economic, legal and cultural. The scale has shown good psychometric properties in several situations, and Cronbach alpha coefficients have been above 0.80 in previous research. In the UAE case, products were adjusted a bit to capture local consumer-specific concerns, like sustainability efforts, inclusion, and responsible conduct of

business. One of the examples is the following: “This brand takes a proactive position around significant social or environmental matters.

3.2.2 Value alignment

Unlike previous studies in which researchers assessed congruence with beliefs and brand values, VA was measured with the Perceived Consumer-Brand Value Congruence Scale, Mann, (2023), which has been used extensively to evaluate both congruity and beliefs and brand values. There are five items in the scale which are intended to measure cognitive and emotional perceptions of alignment. Previous research has found that it is highly reliable with a Cronbach alpha of 0.82 to 0.89. The piloted test has shown a high internal consistency ($B = 0.87$). One such question is: The values of this brand are aligned with my personal values.

3.2.3 Consumer loyalty

The three-dimensional loyalty scale created by Wicaksono et al, (2025) was evaluated with the extension to CL. This tool quantifies attitudinal loyalty (emotion attachment and trust), behavioural loyalty (repeating purchases) and advocacy loyalty (positive word of mouth and recommendation). Coefficients of reliability of previous studies are greater than 0.85 across dimensions. In this case study, nine items were used. One of them is: I keep buying this brand instead of moving to competitors.

3.2.4 Control variables

Adding a few demographic factors as controls (gender, age, education, occupation, and industry sector) boosted the reliability of results. Previous studies have demonstrated that these variables affect consumer attitude towards activism and loyalty (Sim & Kim, 2025; Jiang et al, 2025).

3.2.5. Data analysis

The results have been analysed with SPSS version 29 and AMOS to structure equation modelling (SEM). They initially produced descriptive statistics to profile the demographical characteristics of the respondents. The main analytical method chosen is SEM due to the ability to examine multiple complex relationships between latent constructs simultaneously and mediate effects (Hair et al., 2019).

Measurement model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) measured and evaluated the reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the constructs. Recommended fit indices have been used such as the chi-square statistic (χ^2/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root

Mean Square error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Standardized root mean square Residual (SRMR) (Farooq, 2024). Cronbachs alpha and composite reliability (CR) was used to investigate reliability, and convergent validity was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE) as its measure. Fornell-Larker criteria and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios were used to determine the discriminant validity. Once the measurement model was found to be sufficient, the structural model was tested to determine the same hypothesised relationships between BA, VA and CL. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was utilized to estimate direct, indirect and mediating effects and enables strong confidence intervals when performing mediation analysis (Jiang et al, 2025; Tahat et al, 2026). Since all constructs were assessed by self-reported data, common method bias (CMB) was thoroughly considered. Procedural solutions involved promising participants anonymity, explaining that, there were no correct and not correct answers and adding page breaks between scales. The single factor test proposed by Harman was carried out statistically by using exploratory factor analysis. Only 38% of the variance was explained by the first factor which is significantly lower than the 50% mark and it is not the case that CMB was a big concern. Moreover, in AMOS, a common latent factor test was run, which again confirmed the absence of bias. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, the correlation, and the reliability coefficients. The alpha values of all Cronbach exceeded 0.70, which is the recommended value for high internal consistency (Wicaksono et al, 2025; Kalogeras & Mejri, 2025).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliabilities

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	α
BA	3.92	0.68	(0.94)			0.94
VA	4.07	0.74	0.63**	(0.91)		0.91
CL	3.81	0.71	0.59**	0.66**	(0.93)	0.93

Notes: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; α = Cronbach's Alpha (reported in diagonal).

4. RESULTS

The values of Cronbach alpha were also obtained to test the reliability of three major constructs BA, VA and CL. The internal consistency was proved to be high with all the constructs passing the minimum threshold of 0.70 (see Table 2). Measurement model was then defined; this consisted of three latent variables and the observed indicators to the variables. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed excellent fit of the model: $\chi^2 = 0.01$; CFI = 0.97; GFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.05; SRMR = 0.03. The loadings of all factors were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), and the standardized estimates were from 0.65 to 0.88, meaning each item sufficiently captured its underlying construct. All construct CR values fell within 0.83 and 0.94 which is higher than the recommended cut off of 0.70 hence construct reliability was established. Also convergent validity was achieved where the AVE scores were between 0.52 and 0.72 with a higher value of 0.50, the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. This shows that a significant percentage of the variance in each construct was explained by its indicators and not measurement error. The discriminant validity was verified on the basis of the square root of each AVE of construct and the inter-constructs. In all constructs, the square root of AVE was greater than those of the variables, indicating that constructs were different and had different theoretical dimensions. Inter-construct correlation was best with BA and VA ($r = 0.63$) but discriminant validity still held.

Structural model

The analysis of the structural model is found in Table 3 and Figure 2. The overall fit indices showed that the proposed model was able to offer a satisfactory fit with the data: $\chi^2 = 901.37$, degree of freedom = 318, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.96; NFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.05; SRMR = 0.04. This model had a strong explanatory power and explained 47.2% of the variance in VA and 56.4% of the variance in CL. The standardised path coefficients showed strong indicators of all the hypothesised relationships. First, H1 was supported, with the positive and significant influence of VA by BA ($B = 0.67$, $t = 15.42$, $p = 0.001$). This means that in situations where the brands engage in activism that they are seen as credible and relevant, people report that their personal values and brand values are more aligned. Second, H2 was also supported because BA directly positively affected CL ($\beta = 0.44$, $t = 10.87$, $p < 0.001$). This result proposes that activism, itself, enhances loyalty, but the strength of the association is contingent on the extent to which activism appeals to consumer values. Third, VA contributed to CL to a significant extent ($B = 0.32$, $t = 8.91$, $p < 0.001$) in favour of H3. When consumers feel that they share common values with a

brand, they tend to be more likely to remain loyal by purchasing it repeatedly, recommending it to friends and colleagues and becoming emotionally attached. Lastly, the mediating effect of VA in the correlation between BA and CL was bootstrapped with 5,000 resamples. H4 was accepted as the indirect path between BA and VA, through CL ($B = 0.21$, $t = 7.14$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that CL is not necessarily a direct consequence of activism, but is enhanced when consumers experience high levels of conformity between their values and those of the brand.

Table 3. Structural Path Estimates and Hypothesis Testing

Path	Estimate (t-value)	Result
(H1) BA → VA	0.67 (15.42)	Supported
(H2) BA → CL	0.44 (10.87)	Supported
(H3) VA → CL	0.32 (8.91)	Supported
(H4) BA → VA → CL (Mediation)	0.21 (7.14)	Supported

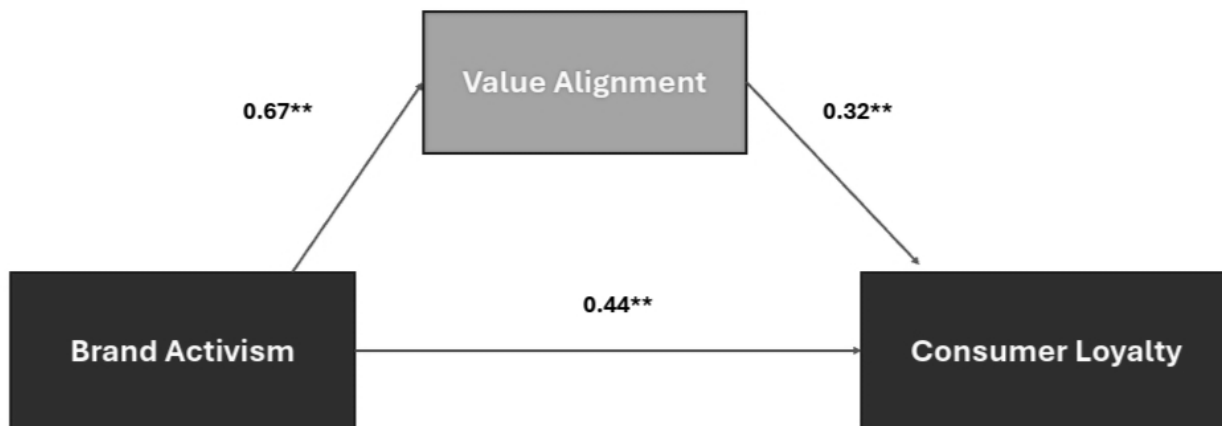


Figure 2. Mediation Analysis Results

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this paper represent a strong support that BA has a massive impact on CL in the UAE direct and indirectly, in terms of value alignment. It is here that one can note the key role of shared values in making activism an integral part of brand communication strategy rather than a brand-consumer relationship engine. Our direct correlation between BA and CL corresponds with the findings of Liu and Li (2024), who discovered that activism increased loyalty when the consumer believes it to be plausible and applicable. Likewise, Wicaksono et al, (2025) and Tahat et al, (2026) highlighted that activism creates a signal of brand authenticity that customers would pay loyalty behavior. These assertions are supported by the present findings, but are now generalised to encompass the multicultural consumer market in the UAE, which exists in parallel with various value orientations. In contrast to the situation in the West, wherein activism is frequently associated with political partisanship, consumers in the UAE seem to have a broader understanding of the concept of activism, including sustainability, ethical business practices, and inclusiveness. Resonance to consumer beliefs is further substantiated by the mediating role of VA in terms of the effectiveness of activism. This aligns with Sim and Kim (2025), who showed in emerging markets that activism without alignment produced consumer awareness but did not lead to loyalty. Liu and Li (2024) and Rivaroli et al, (2022) also found that desirable impacts of activism campaigns is the creation of awareness but the final loyalty outcome is only achieved when consumers think that brand values are the same as their own. The present research therefore contributes empirical evidence to the centrality of congruence, demonstrating that value congruence describes a significant part of loyalty in the UAE setting. Outcomes regarding cross-cultural scholarship are also that the institutional and cultural state of affairs influences the reactions of consumers to activism. Congruent with cultural norms, Amani, (2024) and Ismail, (2026) observed that activism only resonate in South Asian markets. This is complemented by our findings that in the UAE, a global centre with multicultural expatriates, the issue of value alignment becomes even more critical since the consumer values are heterogeneous. This implies that brands should tread carefully on both global and local sensitivities so as to avoid being seen as opportunistic. Although these findings substantiate much of the available literature, it adds a twist to it. As an example, Farooq, (2024) discovered that CSR in the UAE had a congruent effect on loyalty. We believe our findings can be extended to a more general activism beyond CSR, and that value congruence is not only desirable but a precondition of loyalty outcomes. Nonetheless,

as other Western works have reported, our sample did not identify any polarized effects of activism Farooq, (2024), and no consumer backlash was identified in the UAE sample. This can be an indication of rather moderate and non-antagonistic types of activism that brand in the UAE engage themselves with, not because they have political views, but because such views are usually focused on sustainability, education, and social development. Meanwhile, care should be taken when interpreting such findings. The use of a purposive convenience sample in UAE limits generalisation especially when the sample is confined to industries where activism is not so prevalent or pertinent. This cross-section design also prevents causal inference as it is always possible that loyal consumers just perceive higher VA rather than alignment generating loyalty. Additionally self-reports of loyalty could exaggerate behavioral commitment, so future research using real purchase or advocacy information is necessary. Overall, this paper reaffirms the emerging view that activism has the potential to create loyalty, however consumers have to feel that there is a common value set between them and the brand. It adds to theory through its empirical validation of VA as a psychological process, and to practise by highlighting authenticity and cultural sensitivity in activation approaches in the UAE. However, the results must be subjected to the limitations of the cultural diversity condition, sector diversities, and methodological constraints. Future studies can elaborate this question by using longitudinal study design, comparing sectors across several regions, and international studies to investigate the nature of these relationships in the long run.

5.1 Theoretical implications

This research contributes in a number of ways to the theoretical comprehension of consumer-brand relationships in terms of activism. First, empirically validating the mediating action of VA as part of stakeholder and congruence theory, the study shows that the effects of activism are not linear but rather mediated by psychological mechanisms of congruence (Hyun & Chakraborty, 2025 ; Wicaksono et al, 2025). Second, it gives BA scholarship a wider scope than is found in Western markets and much of the current evidence has been focused on, as the UAE presents evidence in a multicultural and institutionally unique environment. This develops the cross-cultural marketing theory by illustrating the interpretation and reception of activism by different consumer groups with different sensitivities to local and global exposures. Lastly, the findings incorporate BA into the concept of loyalty because this study postulates it as the source of attitudinal and behavioral

loyalty as well, thereby filling the gap between research on activism and the existing models of loyalty (Liu & Li, 2024).

5.2 Practical implications

What practitioners need to consider is that as a form of activism, it should be not merely emblematic or tactical; it should be judged successful, in a way that could motivate loyalty, but only where consumers perceive they are attuning to actual value. International brands cannot use global activism templates exclusively to find a way to thrive in the UAE, but instead they need to tailor their efforts to match the local cultures, including aspects like community development, sustainability, and inclusivity. Notably, the study also shows that activism can become a powerful tool of increasing loyalty in markets where competitors are exceptionally high, as it must be implemented in an authentic environment and clearly expressed. Companies that do not pay attention to value alignment risk being looked at with scepticism, being damaged, or at the best.

Managerial Implications

This research presents practical information to managers on how to plan and implement activism. To start with, the managers must engage in a thorough research of the consumer insight to trace the values of their target markets so that they can be aligns with them and hence make a public position. Second, internal consistency is essential as well; managers need to make certain that organizational actions and behaviours are aligned with activist messaging in order to be credible. Third, consider a localized-globalized approach which means creating global reasons like climate action or gender equality but framing them in the context of the UAE culture and society. Lastly, activism as a loyalty-building strategy must be evaluated not within short-term engagement scales, but by managers monitoring repeat purchases, advocacy, and brand trust as long-term indicators of authentic activism.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed at exploring how BA influences CL in the UAE, and VA was one of the mediating factors. The research framework was built based on the theories of Social Identity, Stakeholder Signalling, and Self-Determination; it was used to examine consumer behaviour in an attempt to understand the reaction of consumers to activism in a culturally diverse market. The findings proved that BA has a strong and positive effect upon VA and loyalty. Besides, VA was detected to have a significant mediating effect, highlighting the impact of activism on consumers

that creates loyalty and is based on how much consumers believe that their own values are apparent in brand initiatives. The study contributes to theoretical knowledge on the elucidation of how and why BA induces loyalty, with the key factor being alignment between consumer and brand values. In practical terms, the results can be used by managers as actionable information that requires an authentic and culturally aware approach to activism and alignment of cultural strategies to ensure sustained consumer confidence and support. Simultaneously, the research also recognizes its limitations due to the sampling design, self-reported data, and cross-sectional nature, which limit the ability to make generalizations and inferences. Such limitations nevertheless offer fruitful research prospects in longitudinal, experimental, cross-national designs and by focusing on particular areas of activism. Finally, this research adds importance to theory and practice as it shows that BA is not only a marketing fad but a potent relationship strategy that can empower CL when affected by shared values. The findings present new opportunities to scholars to fine-tune conceptualizations of activism and consumer behavior under varied contexts. To practitioners, it seems more than obvious, in a time where consumers are raising their expectations of meaningful interaction, brands who genuinely represent the values of the society not only stand out but they gain more robust and lasting loyalty.

6.1 Limitations

This research has its limitations, although it makes valuable contributions to the research, which can present open possibilities in the future. To begin with, the use of purposive convenience sample limits the extrapolation of results. The sample is representative of a wide range of consumers in the UAE, but might not necessarily encompass different industries or expatriate-nation differences that influence perceptions of activism. Probability sampling or multi-sector comparative research designs should be embraced in future studies to improve on external validity. Second, this study is cross-sectional, which limits inferences of causation. Even though the hypothesized mediation model was statistically significant, longitudinal or experimental research should be conducted to document the sequential nature of relationships and whether activism initiatives result in sustained loyalty in time. The causal mechanisms could be more strongly confirmed in future studies using panel data or field experiments. Third, the research uses self-reported measures, which are prone to social desirability and common method errors even after controlling procedures and statistics. The use of behavioral data (e.g., real purchase track record, advocacy behavior on social media, consumer engagement analytics, etc.) would give a clearer view of the loyalty results. Fourth, the

study is carried out in the specific cultural and institutional environment of the UAE that is characterized by global consumerism and local cultural values developed under the influence of tradition and control. On the one hand, this provides new insights, but it also makes it difficult to transfer to other markets. A cross-national study comparing across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and emerging and developed markets would help ascertain the prevalence or cultural specificity of VA as a mediator. Lastly, the study did not specify the type of BA in particular (e.g., environmental, political, social justice). According to previous research (Kalogeras & Mejri, 2025; Farooq, 2024), depending on the nature of a cause, consumers respond differently.

6.2 Future research directions

Further investigation must break down activism into its underlying dimensions and determine whether some areas of activism are more effective at creating alignment and loyalty within culturally diverse markets. Overall, these limitations make the findings less generalizable but point to fruitful avenues for future research. These methodological, contextual, and conceptual gaps will help better understand how BA can become long-lasting CL in varied global contexts.

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