

Exploring Brand Activism Through Psychometric and Demographic Lenses in Emerging Markets

Exploring Brand
Activism Through
Psychometric

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ABSTRACT

In the evolving global marketplace, brands are increasingly evaluated based on their social and environmental contributions, particularly in emerging economies like Indonesia. This study explores how Indonesian consumers perceive brand activism, philanthropy, emotional connection, authenticity, purchase intention, and brand social activity using Rasch Model Analysis. Based on responses from 617 participants, the Wright maps reveal nuanced patterns in item-person alignment across six brand-related constructs. While most respondents demonstrate high support for brand activism and philanthropy, item-level analysis indicates cautious endorsement, reflecting skepticism about the sincerity of brand initiatives. Emotional connection and perceived authenticity emerged as key mediators in driving purchase intention, yet their depth varies by item. Differential Item Functioning analysis highlights significant perception differences based on age, occupation, gender, education, and region. Older participants and those outside the urban Jabodetabek region show stronger reactions to boycott-related messaging, while younger and student respondents report higher emotional brand identification. The findings underscore the importance of culturally resonant and demographically sensitive branding strategies, offering empirical insights into how social initiatives influence consumer behavior in emerging markets.

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Keywords: Brand Activism, Brand Philanthropy, Emotional Brand Connection, Emerging Markets, Perceived Authenticity, Purchase Intention.

ABSTRAK

Di pasar global yang terus berkembang, merek semakin dievaluasi berdasarkan kontribusi sosial dan lingkungannya, terutama di negara berkembang seperti Indonesia. Studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana konsumen Indonesia memandang aktivisme merek, filantropi, koneksi emosional, keaslian, niat beli, dan aktivitas sosial merek menggunakan Analisis Model Rasch. Berdasarkan respons dari 617 partisipan, peta Wright mengungkapkan pola-pola bernuansa dalam keselarasan barang-orang di enam konstruk terkait merek. Meskipun sebagian besar responden menunjukkan dukungan tinggi terhadap aktivisme merek dan filantropi, analisis tingkat barang menunjukkan dukungan yang hati-hati, mencerminkan skeptisisme tentang ketulusan inisiatif merek. Koneksi emosional dan keaslian yang dirasakan muncul sebagai mediator utama dalam mendorong niat beli, namun kedalamannya bervariasi berdasarkan barang. Analisis Fungsi Item Diferensial menyoroti perbedaan persepsi yang signifikan berdasarkan usia, pekerjaan, jenis kelamin, pendidikan, dan wilayah. Partisipan yang lebih tua dan mereka yang berada di luar wilayah perkotaan Jabodetabek menunjukkan reaksi yang lebih kuat terhadap pesan terkait boikot, sementara responden yang lebih muda dan mahasiswa melaporkan identifikasi merek emosional yang lebih tinggi. Temuan ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya strategi merek yang beresonansi secara budaya dan peka terhadap demografi, menawarkan wawasan empiris tentang bagaimana inisiatif sosial memengaruhi perilaku konsumen di pasar negara berkembang.

Kata kunci: Aktivisme Merek, Filantropi Merek, Niat Pembelian Konsumen, Koneksi Merek Emosional, Keaslian yang Dirasakan, Pasar Berkembang.

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global marketplace, brands are no longer solely evaluated based on product quality or service excellence. Instead, they are increasingly assessed by their contributions to societal and environmental issues (Yuan et al., 2023). Brands encompass more than only displaying the brand name, emblem, or logo of a product. Brands serve as a means of identity to differentiate products (Maulidya et al., 2025; Mulyana et al., 2025). An affirmative brand image enhances consumer perception and, as a result, fosters loyalty (Ghorbanzadeh & Rahehagh, 2020; Ghorbanzadeh, 2021; Parasari et al., 2025). The growing awareness among socially conscious consumers has led brands to engage in brand philanthropy through charitable efforts and in brand activism by addressing social and political issues (Idrees et al., 2021; Nickerson et al., 2021; Qiuping & Fronda, 2023; Adenola et al., 2025). These strategies aim not only to enhance brand image but also to forge stronger emotional connections with consumers, ultimately influencing their purchase decisions.

Emerging markets, such as Indonesia, provide a compelling context for examining the effectiveness of these strategies. With a population exceeding 270 million and a strong cultural inclination toward philanthropy, Indonesia presents unique opportunities for global brands seeking to establish a deeper connection with consumers. The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer confirms that over 70% of consumers in such markets prefer brands that align with their values and contribute to societal well-being. However, despite the potential advantages of brand activism and philanthropy, their effectiveness is highly contingent on consumer perceptions of authenticity (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Brands that are perceived as engaging in virtue signaling (superficial or insincere activism) risk alienating consumers and damaging their reputation (Cambier & Poncin, 2020; Berthon et al., 2023).

Furthermore, emotional brand connection was found to play a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes toward both brand activism and philanthropy. When consumers feel a strong emotional bond or identification with a brand, they tend to respond more favorably to the brand's sociopolitical stands and cause-related initiatives. For instance, a study by Wannow et al. (2024) demonstrates that high consumer-brand identification can buffer against negative reactions to brand activism by dampening adverse moral emotions even when consumers disagree with the brand's stance. Similarly, Rim and Kim (2016) and Hur et al. (2020) show that emotional brand attachment mediates the impact of perceived corporate social responsibility (philanthropic initiatives) on consumer engagement, indicating that CSR efforts elicit more positive attitudes and behaviors when they cultivate genuine emotional bonds with customers. These findings are supported by global studies indicating that brand activism enhances self-brand connection, which in turn drives favorable attitudes and behavioral intentions (Murtonen et al., 2017; Obiegbu & Larsen, 2024; Shukla et al., 2024). Although research focusing specifically on Indonesia is still limited, emerging evidence suggests comparable dynamics. Indonesian consumers have demonstrated strong support for brands that actively engage in social causes, highlighting the importance of emotional resonance in shaping brand perception within this local context (Gumulya, 2022). A study by Rahimah et al. (2025) examined the impact of emotional and narrative-driven video advertisements on consumer attitudes and found that such content significantly enhances emotional brand attachment among Indonesian consumers. This attachment, in turn, positively influences their attitudes toward the brand's social initiatives. These suggest that, similar to global trends, emotional brand connections in Indonesia are pivotal in shaping consumer attitudes toward brand activism and philanthropy.

Despite the growing body of literature on brand activism and philanthropy, research in the context of emerging markets remains limited. Current literature on brand activism and related consumer-brand relationships remains heavily Western-centric, with most empirical evidence drawn from Western contexts or domestic brands (Shukla et al., 2024). This has led scholars to caution that Western frameworks often fail to capture the socio-cultural nuances of Asian markets, resulting in an incomplete understanding of these

phenomena in regions like Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia. For instance, Işıksal et al. (2023) characterize brand activism in emerging economies as an under-researched area. Similarly, a recent study from Vietnam highlights the limited research available on how consumers respond to brand activism, emphasizing that this area remains largely underexplored (Nguyen et al., 2022). Thus, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring how brand philanthropy and activism influence purchase intentions among Indonesian consumers, with a particular focus on the mediating role of emotional brand connection. Understanding these dynamics in the Southeast Asian context, particularly Indonesia, will enrich theory and ensure that strategic brand engagements in social issues are culturally resonant and effective. The objective of this study is to examine the extent to which consumers perceive five key brand-related constructs: activism, philanthropy, emotional connection, authenticity, and purchase intention. Additionally, the study seeks to determine whether these perceptions differ significantly based on participants' demographic characteristics, including age, occupation, gender, education level, and region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Activism and Philanthropy: Strategic Opportunities and Cultural Risks

Brand activism has evolved from a niche marketing tactic to a central strategic concern (Sarkar & Kotler, 2021). It involves companies taking visible stances on sociopolitical issues. While traditional marketing focused on neutrality, today's consumers especially Millennials and Gen Z, expect brands to speak up (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Cammarota & Branca, 2025). Despite growing popularity, brand activism can backfire if not aligned with core values or if perceived as opportunistic (Moorman, 2020). The risk is greater in emerging markets, where social values are more heterogeneous and political sensitivities more volatile. Brands may struggle to balance activism with inclusivity in such contexts.

Brand philanthropy, a form of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), emphasizes donation and community engagement. It often plays a reputational role rather than aiming for direct profit (Porter & Kramer, 2002). A major limitation is the ambiguity between genuine altruism and strategic image management. Consumers are becoming more skilled at detecting performative philanthropy (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). In emerging markets, where institutional trust is often low, this skepticism can be heightened. Research consistently shows a positive correlation between a brand's perceived social responsibility and consumer purchase intention (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Lee & Shin, 2010). Activism can enhance trust and motivate loyalty (Chon & Kim, 2021). However, causality is not always clear. Purchase intent may be influenced more by price and quality than activism, especially in emerging markets where economic factors dominate decision-making (Sheth, 2011). Additionally, cultural norms influence how activism is interpreted; what resonates in the West may be irrelevant or even offensive elsewhere.

The Role of Emotional Connection and Authenticity in Brand Trust

Emotional brand connection refers to the psychological bond between consumers and brands (Thomson et al., 2005). Activism and philanthropy often aim to strengthen this emotional bond. While studies confirm EBC can mediate the relationship between brand values and consumer behavior, emotional bonds require consistency and authenticity over time. A one-time campaign is insufficient (Langner et al., 2013). Moreover, emotions vary culturally; what evokes emotional resonance in Brazil might not work in India.

Authenticity, the perception that a brand is genuine in its purpose, is vital for the success of brand activism and philanthropy (Napoli et al., 2014). Consumers judge authenticity by consistency, transparency, and historical behavior. Authenticity is fragile. Once broken, trust is hard to rebuild. Brands in emerging markets may face extra hurdles, especially multinational corporations that are seen as outsiders. Ironically, local brands often enjoy greater perceived authenticity due to cultural embeddedness, even if they lack resources for large campaigns.

Emerging markets are characterized by rapid economic development, young populations, and cultural diversity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). They offer immense opportunities but also complex challenges for socially active branding. Can hinder brand-led social initiatives due to lack of infrastructure. Trust deficits in government and corporations mean consumers are cautious about brand motives. There's a diverse value system religion, collectivism, and nationalism may complicate activist messaging (Khanna & Palepu, 2010). However, the youth demographic is increasingly globalized, connected, and values-driven providing fertile ground for future activism. Activism, philanthropy, and emotional branding are powerful tools but their effectiveness depends on perceived authenticity and cultural relevance. In emerging markets, the stakes are higher: trust is harder to gain, backlash risk is greater, but so is the potential for meaningful connection and impact. Brands must walk a tightrope, but those who succeed may build not just market share but movements.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative research design to investigate the interplay between Brand Activism, Brand Philanthropy, Emotional Connection, Perceived Authenticity, Purchase Intention, and Brand Social Activity among Indonesian consumers. Data were collected through a cross-sectional survey using an online questionnaire distributed via social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. A convenience sampling method was employed to recruit participants from diverse demographic backgrounds, ensuring a broad representation of age, gender, occupation, education level, and region. Respondents were required to provide demographic details before completing the survey, which facilitated the analysis of differential perceptions across these characteristics. Initially, 728 responses were gathered, but after data cleaning and outlier detection using WINSTEP software (version 5.2.5.1), 111 responses were removed, resulting in a final dataset of 617 valid responses for analysis.

The questionnaire was structured to measure six key constructs: Brand Activism, Brand Philanthropy, Emotional Connection, Perceived Authenticity, and Purchase Intention, each assessed with three items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Additionally, Brand Social Activity was evaluated using six items on a four-point scale from Not my preference (1) to Strongly reflecting my preference (4). To ensure clarity and accessibility, the questionnaire was translated into Indonesian, enhancing respondent comprehension and data quality. The items were carefully designed to capture nuanced consumer perceptions, with the translation process rigorously reviewed to maintain conceptual accuracy across languages.

Data analysis was conducted using the Rasch Model through the WINSTEP application, enabling a detailed examination of item-person alignment and differential item functioning across demographic groups. The Rasch Model was chosen for its ability to provide precise measurements of latent traits, ensuring robust differentiation between varying levels of consumer perceptions and item difficulty. The analysis process involved two stages: first, identifying and removing outliers based on the Outfit MNSQ score (-2 to 2), which ensured data integrity; second, assessing the instrument's internal consistency and reliability, which yielded high global reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92). Each construct demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.75 to 0.79, confirming the instrument's effectiveness in capturing consumer attitudes toward brand-related constructs in the Indonesian context.

RESULTS

This study investigates Indonesian consumers' perceptions of Brand Activism (BA), Brand Philanthropy (BP), Emotional Connection (EC), Perceived Authenticity (PA), Purchase Intention (PI), and Brand Social Activity (BSA) using Rasch Model Analysis, with a focus on aligning findings with the research objective of examining these constructs and their demographic variations. Based on responses from 617 participants, the analysis

leverages Wright maps and Differential Item Functioning (DIF) to reveal nuanced patterns in consumer perceptions and their alignment with brand-related constructs. The results, supported by robust reliability indices (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92 globally, with construct-specific values ranging from 0.75 to 0.79), highlight the mediating roles of emotional connection and authenticity in driving purchase intention, alongside the influence of demographics on consumer attitudes.

Table 1. Demographic Information

Demographic information	Responses	Total
Age	11-26 y. o	340
	27-42 y. o	172
	43-58 y. o	90
	>59	15
Job	Student	251
	University Student	24
	Private Sector Employee	173
	Entrepreneur	128
	Retired	30
	Government Employee	2
	Healthcare Professional	1
	Unemployed	8
Gender	Male	242
	Female	375
Last Education	Highschool	347
	Bachelor's Degree	229
	Master's Degree	30
	Doctoral Degree	11
Region	Jabodetabek	300
	West Java	134
	Java (non-Jabodetabek)	95
	Sumatra	62
	Bali, NTB, NTT	6
	Sulawesi and the surrounding areas	17
	Maluku, Papua, and surrounding areas	3

The demographic composition of the 617 respondents, as shown in Table 1, reflects diversity across age, occupation, gender, education, and region. The majority were young (340 aged 11–26 years), with significant representation from older groups (172 aged 27–42, 90 aged 43–58, and 15 aged over 59). Occupationally, students (251) and private-sector employees (173) dominated, followed by entrepreneurs (128), with smaller groups like retirees (30) and unemployed individuals (8). Gender distribution leaned female (375 vs. 242 males), and education levels ranged from high school (347) to doctoral degrees (11). Regionally, Jabodetabek (300) and West Java (134) were most represented, with smaller samples from Sumatra (62), Java (non-Jabodetabek, 95), and other areas. This diversity enabled robust analysis of demographic influences on perceptions. Table 2 summarizes the instrument's psychometric properties, showing a person mean logit value of 1.11 (SD = 1.10) and an item mean of 0.00 (SD = 1.52). Person separation (3.03) and item separation (24.26) exceeded recommended thresholds (2 and 3, respectively), with reliability indices of 0.90 for persons and 1.00 for items, confirming the instrument's ability to differentiate consumer perceptions effectively.

Table 2. Summary Statistics of Person and Item

Model	Person	Item
Mean	1.11	0.00
Standard deviation	1.10	1.52
Separation	3.03	24.26
Reliability	0.90	1.00

Table 2 descriptive statistics revealed that the measured persons had a mean logit value of 1.11 with a standard deviation of 1.10, while the items exhibited a mean of 0.00 with a standard deviation of 1.52. Additionally, the person separation was 3.03, surpassing the recommended criterion of 2. The item separation was an impressive 24.26, well above the criterion of 3. The reliability indices for persons and items were .90 and 1.00, respectively. These statistics underscore the instrument's robust capability to effectively differentiate between varying levels of person ability and item difficulty.

Table 3. Internal Consistency of the Instrument

Variable	Items	Mean (Logit Value)	Cronbach's Alpha
Global reliability		1.11	0.92
Brand Activism (BA)	Q1-3	2.99	0.76
Brand Philanthropy (BP)	Q4-6	3.16	0.75
Emotional Connection (EC)	Q7-9	3.17	0.78
Perceived Authenticity (PA)	Q10-12	4.26	0.79
Purchase Intention (PI)	Q13-15	3.11	0.79
Brand Social Activity (BSA)	Q16-Q21	-0.10	0.78

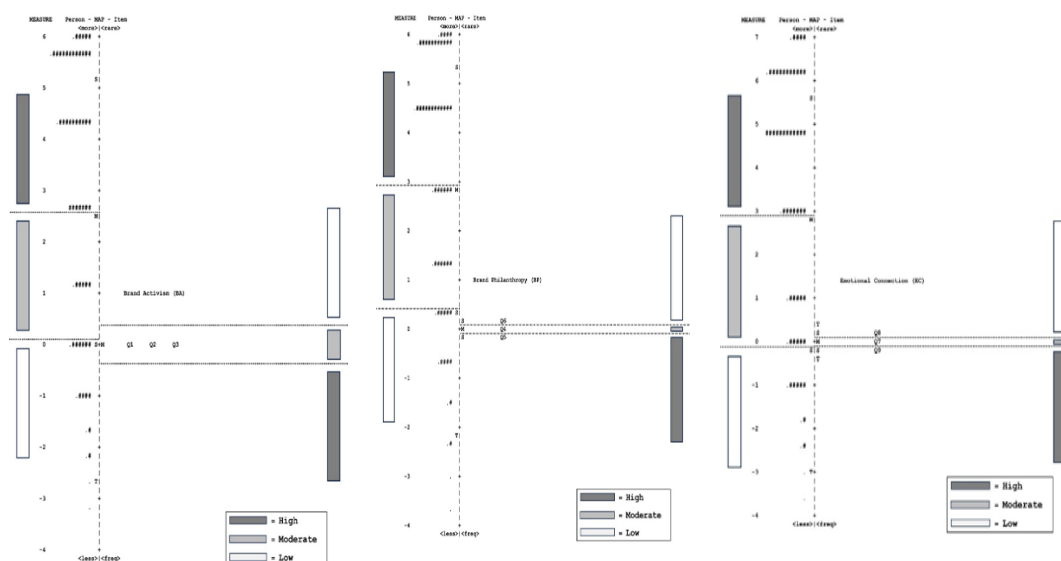
Table 3 details the internal consistency of the instrument, reporting a global reliability of Cronbach's alpha = 0.92. Construct-specific reliabilities were also high: Brand Activism ($\alpha = 0.76$, mean logit = 2.99), Brand Philanthropy ($\alpha = 0.75$, mean logit = 3.16), Emotional Connection ($\alpha = 0.78$, mean logit = 3.17), Perceived Authenticity ($\alpha = 0.79$, mean logit = 4.26), Purchase Intention ($\alpha = 0.79$, mean logit = 3.11), and Brand Social Activity ($\alpha = 0.78$, mean logit = -0.10). These metrics affirm the instrument's reliability in capturing consumer attitudes, supporting the study's objective to assess these constructs accurately.

Table 4. The Wright Map of Participant

Level	Person (N)	Item
High	391 (63.37%)	-
Moderate	59 (9.56%)	Q1; Q2; Q3
Low	167 (27.06%)	-
High	317 (51.38%)	Q5
Moderate	146 (23.66%)	Q4
Low	154 (24.96%)	Q6
High	391 (63.37%)	Q9
Moderate	119 (19.29%)	Q7
Low	107 (17.34%)	Q8
High	307 (49.76%)	-
Moderate	154 (24.96%)	Q10. Q11. Q12
Low	156 (25.28%)	-
High	374 (60.62%)	Q13
Moderate	138 (22.37%)	Q14
Low	105 (17.02%)	Q15
High	280	Q16. Q17. Q19. Q20
Moderate	237	Q18
Low	100	Q21

Table 4 provides Wright Map data for participant perceptions across constructs. For Brand Activism, 63.37% (n = 391) showed high support, 9.56% (n = 59) moderate, and 27.06% (n = 167) low, with items Q1–Q3 at the moderate level, indicating general acknowledgment but scepticism about execution (Vredenburg et al., 2020). For Brand Philanthropy, 51.38% (n = 317) rated high, 23.66% (n = 146) moderate, and 24.96% (n = 154) low, with Q5 high, Q4 moderate, and Q6 low, suggesting varied conviction. Emotional Connection showed 63.37% (n = 391) high, 19.29% (n = 119) moderate, and 17.34% (n = 107) low, with Q9 high, Q7 moderate, and Q8 low. Perceived Authenticity had 49.76% (n = 307) high, 24.96% (n = 154) moderate, and 25.28% (n = 156) low, with

Q10–Q12 below the mean. Purchase Intention showed 60.62% (n = 374) high, 22.37% (n = 138) moderate, and 17.02% (n = 105) low, with Q13 high, Q14–Q15 moderate. Brand Social Activity had 280 high, 237 moderate, and 100 low, with Q16, Q19, and Q20 high, Q18 moderate, and Q21 low, reflecting positive but varied perceptions.



(a) (b) (c)
Figure 1. Item-person Wright mapping of BA (a), BP (b), and EC (c) scale logit value

Figure 1 (a) shows the Wright Map for Brand Activism (BA), which shows that most respondents fall within the moderate-level category, indicating a neutral to moderately positive perception of the brand's activism efforts. Items Q1, Q2, and Q3 are clustered at the mean level, suggesting that while respondents generally acknowledge the brand's social and political engagement, it does not evoke strong emotional or cognitive reactions. This may imply limited impact on deeper brand loyalty or differentiation.

The Wright Map for Brand Philanthropy (BP) presented in Figure 1 (b) shows that most respondents ranked at a high to moderate level in their perception of brand philanthropy. Items Q5, Q4, and Q6 fall around the midpoint, indicating that respondents found these three statements to be fairly easy to agree with. This reflects that brand philanthropy is perceived positively, but does not significantly differentiate the brand in the minds of consumers.

The Wright Map for Emotional Connection (EC) on Figure 1 (c) indicates that most respondents fall into the moderate and low categories, with fewer individuals in the high group. Items Q17, Q16, and Q18 are positioned around the mean line, showing that participants moderately agree with statements related to emotional connection. This suggests that while some emotional attachment exists, the brand may need to strengthen its emotional appeal to build deeper customer relationships.

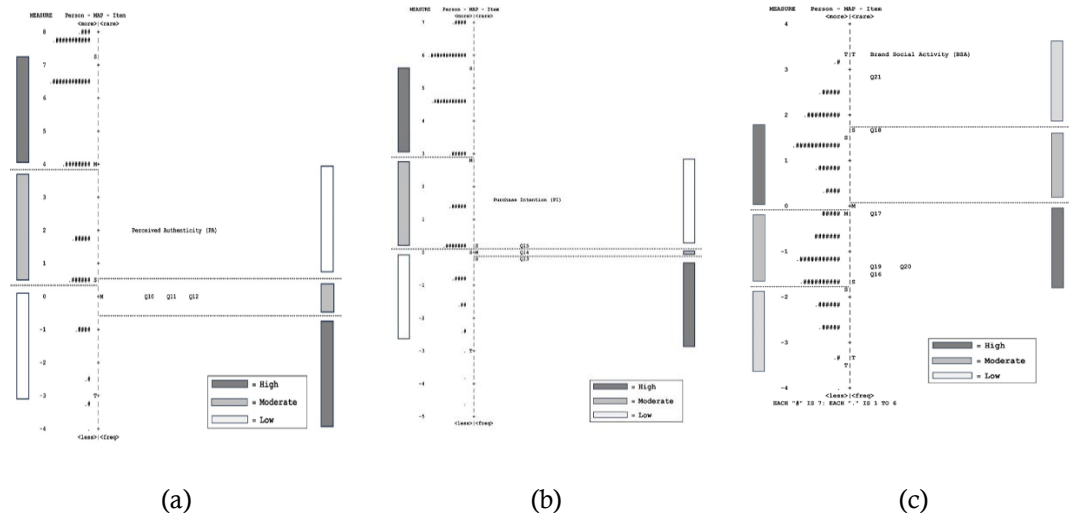


Figure 2. Item-person Wright mapping of PA (a), PI (b), and BSA (c) scale logit value

The Wright Map presented in Figure 2 (a) for Perceived Authenticity (PA) shows that most respondents are at a medium to high level of perception, with only a few at a low level. Items Q10, Q11, and Q12 are below the average line. This indicates that the perception of authenticity is relatively easy for respondents to agree with. This shows that the brand is considered quite authentic by most respondents, but further strengthening is still needed to achieve a deeper perception of authenticity.

The Wright map of the Purchase Intention indicator presented in Figure 2 (b) shows that 60.62% of respondents had high purchase intentions, 22.37% had moderate intentions, and 17.02% had low intentions. A high Q13 score indicates strong purchase intention, but Q14 and Q15 indicate that CSR is not yet a primary driver of consumer purchases.

Figure 2 (c) shows that the Wright map for the Brand Social Activity (BSA) indicator indicates that the majority of respondents are at the medium (48.94%) and low (34.04%) levels, while only 17.02% are at the high level. Item Q21 is at the highest level, indicating that respondents find this brand's social activity difficult to achieve.

Table 5. Differential Item Functioning

Demographic information	Item	Responses	DIF Measure	DIF Contrast	t	Prob.
Age	Q6	43 - 58 y.o	-0.59	0.53	2.68	0.0079
		27 - 42 y.o	-1.12			
	Q21	43 - 58 y.o	4.56	0.65	3.16	0.0019
		11 - 26 y.o	3.90			
	Q21	27 - 42 y.o	4.39	0.49	3.10	0.0021
		11 - 26 y.o	3.90			
Job	Q7	University Student	0.23	1.14	3.64	0.0010
		Priv. Sec. Employee	-0.90			
	Q7	University Student	0.23	1.14	3.56	0.0011
		Entrepreneur	-0.91			
	Q7	University Student	0.23	1.37	3.38	0.0014
		Retired	-1.14			
	Q8	University Student	-0.11	1.20	2.91	0.0054
		Retired	-1.31			
	Q13	University Student	-0.45	2.15	2.83	0.0198
		Unemployed	-2.60			
	Q13	Student	-0.79	1.82	2.57	0.0368
		Unemployed	-2.60			
	Q13	Priv. Sec. Employee	-0.88	1.73	2.43	0.0451
		Unemployed	-2.60			
	Q16	Unemployed	1.91	1.52	2.68	0.0200
		University Student	0.40			

Demographic information	Item	Responses	DIF Measure	DIF Contrast	t	Prob.
	Q18	Student	3.43	1.18	3.82	0.0007
		University Student	2.26			
	Q18	Priv. Sec. Employee	3.39	1.14	3.63	0.0010
		University Student	2.26			
	Q18	Entrepreneur	3.40	1.15	3.57	0.0011
		University Student	2.26			
	Q18	Retired	3.41	1.15	2.87	0.0060
		University Student	2.26			
	Q19	Retired	1.75	1.11	2.91	0.0054
		University Student	0.64			
	Q20	Priv. Sec. Employee	1.34	1.19	3.87	0.0006
		University Student	.15			
	Q20	Student	1.25	1.10	3.64	0.0011
		University Student	0.15			
	Q20	Entrepreneur	1.22	1.08	3.43	0.0017
		University Student	0.15			
	Q20	Retired	1.36	1.21	3.15	0.0028
		University Student	.15			
	Q21	Retired	4.64	2.03	4.53	0.0000
		University Student	2.61			
Gender	Q21	Male	4.51	0.58	4.14	.0000
		Female	3.93			
Education	Q5	Doctoral Degree	0.25	1.55	2.95	0.0078
		Master's Degree	-1.30			
	Q5	Doctoral Degree	0.25	1.36	3.07	0.0106
		Bachelor's Degree	-1.11			
	Q5	Doctoral Degree	0.25	1.18	2.68	0.0232
		Highschool	-0.92			
	Q19	Master's Degree	1.82	0.62	2.27	0.0291
		Bachelor's Degree	1.20			
Region	Q19	Master's Degree	1.82	0.55	2.04	0.0493
		Highschool	1.28			
	Q21	West Java	4.46	0.52	2.97	0.0032
		Jabodetabek	3.93			
	Q18	Java (non-Jabodetabek)	3.74	0.60	2.98	0.0033
		West Java	3.14			
	Q21	Java (non-jabodetabek)	4.45	0.52	2.57	0.0110
		Jabodetabek	3.93			
	Q10	West Java	-0.74	0.55	2.24	0.0274
		Sumatra	-1.29			
	Q18	Java (non-Jabodetabek)	3.74	0.91	2.35	0.0282
		Sulawesi and the nearby	2.83			
	Q11	Sulawesi and the nearby	-0.29	0.91	2.31	0.0301
		Java (non-Jabodetabek)	-1.20			

Table 5 presents DIF analysis, revealing demographic influences. For age, older respondents (43–58 years) scored higher on boycott-related items (Q6, DIF contrast = 0.53, $p = 0.0079$; Q21, DIF contrast = 0.65, $p = 0.0019$), indicating stronger socio-political engagement. Occupationally, university students showed stronger emotional bonds (Q7, DIF contrast = 1.14, $p = 0.0010$) and purchase intention (Q13, DIF contrast = 2.15, $p = 0.0198$) than others. Gender differences showed males were more responsive to boycott appeals (Q21, DIF contrast = 0.58, $p = 0.0000$). Educationally, doctoral degree holders

rated philanthropy higher (Q5, DIF contrast = 1.55, $p = 0.0078$). Regionally, Java (non-Jabodetabek) and West Java respondents rated boycott appeals higher (Q21, DIF contrast = 0.52, $p = 0.0110$), while Sulawesi respondents viewed authenticity positively (Q11, DIF contrast = 0.91, $p = 0.0301$).

The results confirm strong support for brand activism and philanthropy, with emotional connection and authenticity as key mediators of purchase intention, fulfilling the study's objectives. Demographic variations, particularly in age, occupation, gender, education, and region, highlight the need for tailored strategies to enhance resonance and reduce scepticism in Indonesia's diverse market.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illuminate the intricate interplay between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), brand activism, and consumer behavior in Indonesia, with significant variations driven by demographic factors. Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis reveals that age influences perceptions of CSR messaging, with older consumers (aged 43–58) exhibiting stronger responses to boycott-related items, as noted by Mas-Manchón et al. (2024), who highlight heightened socio-political engagement among older generations. This aligns with Thomson et al. (2005) and Azoev et al. (2021), who argue that emotional bonds with brands are influenced by life stage and social priorities. Conversely, middle-aged respondents (27–42) displayed less enthusiasm for philanthropy (e.g., Q6), supporting Titko et al. (2021), who found older consumers in European contexts respond more favorably to CSR. These generational differences underscore the need for brands to tailor activism strategies to align with diverse values, as suggested by Sheth (2011), who highlights the dominance of economic factors in emerging markets like Indonesia.

Occupationally, university students exhibited stronger emotional connections (Q7) and value alignment (Q8) compared to private-sector employees or retirees, consistent with Melovic et al. (2019) and Muniz and Guzman (2021), who emphasize that younger, educated groups prioritize emotional resonance in brand interactions. Retired respondents, however, showed greater responsiveness to CSR's influence on purchase decisions (Q19), reflecting differing life priorities, as noted by Arnould and Thompson (2005) in their exploration of consumer culture in emerging markets. Gender-based DIF indicates males responded more strongly to boycott appeals (Q21), contrasting with Titko et al. (2021) and Mas-Manchón et al. (2024), who suggest females typically favor ethical brand behavior. This divergence, supported by Moorman (2020), suggests that specific political stances may resonate more with males in Indonesia, necessitating nuanced campaign designs.

Educational background influenced perceptions, with doctoral degree holders rating philanthropy (Q5) more favorably, aligning with Napoli et al. (2014), who argue that authenticity perceptions are stronger among critically evaluative consumers. Master's degree holders showed the strongest CSR-driven purchase intentions (Q19), reinforcing Portal et al. (2019) and Lim and Jiang (2023), who emphasize authenticity's role in fostering trust. Regionally, respondents from Java (non-Jabodetabek) and West Java rated boycott appeals higher (Q21), possibly due to varied media exposure, as Khanna and Palepu (2010) note in their analysis of emerging market dynamics. Sulawesi respondents perceived greater brand authenticity (Q11), supporting Becker-Olsen et al. (2006), who link localized trust to CSR effectiveness.

These findings confirm that brand activism and CSR enhance emotional connection and purchase intention when perceived as authentic, echoing Vredenburg et al. (2020) and Al Adenola et al. (2025), who highlight authenticity's mediating role. The varied DIF responses underscore that a uniform approach is inadequate in Indonesia's heterogeneous market, as cautioned by İşıksal et al. (2023). Practically, brands should tailor their CSR campaigns to specific demographic segments. Older consumers may respond to long-term social commitments, while youth-targeted campaigns should emphasize emotional alignment, as suggested by Rahimah et al. (2025). Transparent communication across

diverse media, as recommended by Cambier and Poncin (2020), can reduce skepticism and enhance engagement. This study enriches CSR literature by demonstrating demographic moderators' impact on emotional and behavioral responses, offering insights for culturally resonant marketing strategies in emerging markets. For practitioners, these findings suggest the need for segmented CSR strategies, utilizing emotional narratives for younger audiences and maintaining consistent, authentic messaging for older or rural consumers to effectively build trust and loyalty.

CONCLUSION

This study offers key insights into how Indonesian consumers perceive brand activism, philanthropy, emotional connection, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention in the context of corporate social initiatives. The Rasch Model Analysis, including Wright maps and Differential Item Functioning (DIF), revealed that while overall support for brand social activity is high, specific items elicited cautious responses. This suggests a notable degree of consumer skepticism, particularly regarding the sincerity and impact of brand-led social actions. Emotional connection and perceived authenticity were identified as central mediators influencing purchase intention, though their effects were not uniform across demographic segments. The findings underscore the importance of developing demographically segmented and culturally contextualized branding strategies. Older consumers and respondents from non-metropolitan areas showed heightened responsiveness to boycott-related messaging and philanthropic efforts. In contrast, younger respondents and university students reported stronger emotional identification with brands. This suggests that brands must carefully tailor their messaging based on age, region, education, and occupation to enhance resonance and minimize skepticism.

Theoretically, this study contributes to branding and CSR literature by demonstrating the role of authenticity and emotional connection as mediators between social initiatives and consumer behavior. It highlights the importance of considering demographic moderators when examining the effectiveness of brand activism and CSR, particularly in emerging markets with heterogeneous values and sensitivities. This research has limitations, notably the use of convenience sampling and online distribution. This may exclude populations with limited digital access. The cross-sectional design also prevents examination of temporal shifts in perception. Future studies should adopt longitudinal approaches and incorporate additional variables such as media influence, political orientation and direct consumer-brand interactions to provide a more holistic understanding of evolving consumer attitudes toward socially active brands.

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