



Sustainable Swells

Exploring the impact of collaborative partnerships
between sportswear (surf) brands and environmental
athlete activists on consumer valuations

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Title: Sustainable Swells
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Abstract

The present research investigates the impact of brand-athlete activism on consumer valuations of sportswear (surf) brands engaging in collaborative partnerships to promote an environmental cause. Utilizing existing academic literature on activism, the role of endorsers (e.g., athletes) and different types of environmental initiatives, an experimental study was conducted. A pilot and a main study tested how different types of athlete activism initiatives (product-based versus education-based) influences consumer perceived ethicality, trust perceptions and purchase intentions. Furthermore, it tested for the moderating role of pro-environmental behavior (pro-environmental expertise) on the relationship between the type of athlete activism and consumer valuations. Findings suggest that communicating a collaborative partnership with an environmental athlete activist, is positively valued when compared with a brand communication strategy without it. Also, the nature of environmental athlete activism initiative (product-based vs. education-based) is equally relevant on consumer valuations. Further, when consumers possess pro-environmental expertise regarding the surf industry, the partnership influences their brand valuation, particularly with education-based athlete activism. Mediation analysis suggests that environmental athlete activist beliefs impact the relationship between consumers' activism levels and their valuations of the sportswear (surf) brand. These results contribute to existing literature on athlete activism and provide insights into the unexplored domain of environmental athlete activism. They also deepen the understanding of consumers' pro-environmental behavior, offering managers valuable insights for effectively communicating collaborative partnerships. The research emphasizes the significance of partnerships for sportswear (surf) brands, as they enable them to reach a wider audience and limit environmental pressure in the outdoor sports industry.

Keywords: Collaborative Partnerships, Sportswear Brands; Surf Industry; Consumer Valuations, Consumer Perceived Ethicality, Trust Perceptions, Purchase Intentions, Pro-Environmental Behavior, Environmental Athlete Activism

Título: Ondas Sustentáveis
Explorando o impacto das parcerias colaborativas entre marcas de vestuário desportivo (surf) e ativistas ambientais atletas nas avaliações dos consumidores

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Resumo

A presente pesquisa examina o impacto do ativismo de marcas-atletas nas valorações dos consumidores de marcas de artigos desportivos (surf) que estabelecem parcerias colaborativas para promover causas ambientais. Utilizando a literatura académica sobre ativismo, o papel dos endossantes (atletas) e diferentes tipos de iniciativas ambientais, foi conduzido um estudo experimental. O estudo testou como diferentes tipos de iniciativas de ativismo desportivo (baseadas em produtos versus educação) influenciam a ética percebida, confiança e intenções de compra do consumidor. Também foi examinado o papel moderador do comportamento pró-ambiental na relação entre o tipo de ativismo desportivo e as valorações dos consumidores. Os resultados mostram que comunicar uma parceria colaborativa com um ativista desportivo ambiental é valorizado positivamente em comparação com uma estratégia de comunicação da marca sem essa parceria. A natureza das iniciativas de ativismo desportivo ambiental (baseadas em produtos versus educação) também é relevante para as valorações dos consumidores. Quando os consumidores possuem expertise pró-ambiental na indústria do surf, a parceria influencia a valoração da marca, especialmente com ativismo desportivo baseado em educação. A análise sugere que as crenças do ativista desportivo ambiental impactam a relação entre o nível de ativismo dos consumidores e suas valorações da marca de artigos desportivos (surf). Esses resultados contribuem para a literatura existente sobre ativismo desportivo e fornecem insights sobre o ativismo desportivo ambiental. A pesquisa enfatiza a importância dessas parcerias para marcas de artigos desportivos (surf), permitindo alcançar um público amplo e reduzir a pressão ambiental na indústria dos desportos ao ar livre.

Palavras-chave: Parcerias Colaborativas, Marcas de Artigos Desportivos, Indústria do Surf, Sustentabilidade, Ativismo Ambiental dos Atletas, Valorações dos Consumidores, Percepção Ética do Consumidor, Percepção de Confiança, Intenções de Compra, Comportamento Pró-Ambiental, Ativismo Desportivo Ambiental

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Definition and Relevance

Water and food shortages, an increase in diseases and deaths, and the threatened survival of species are just some of the detrimental consequences of climate change. While climate change has been a constant threat, the current rapid increase in global mean temperatures is a severe concern (Heshmati, 2021). Over the next two decades, the latest numbers predict an increase of 0.2°C in global average temperature per decade. Resulting in a 1.8°C to 4°C increase by the year 2100 (Assan D. K., 2020). According to United Nations Water, climate change is primarily a water crisis, meaning it affects the world's oceans and those dependent on it (UN-Water, n.d.). For instance, with a temperature increase of 1.5°C, experts estimate 70% to 90% of coral reefs will die off, while a 2°C increase will cause a near total loss of coral reefs (United Nations, n.d.). The world's coral reefs provide the habitat for a quarter of all existing marine life. More specifically, the loss of coral reefs will result in over one million species losing their habitat and end in many fish, turtles, and other creatures disappearing (The Reef-World Foundation, 2021). Furthermore, if the melting of glaciers, flooding, and warming of water bodies continues, about 200 million people living along low-level coastlines will be threatened by 2100 (Broom, 2021). Even the slightest of temperature changes can alter the metabolism and physiology of marine life (Assan, et al., 2020).

One of the most well-known causes of climate change is greenhouse gas emissions. Greenhouse gases include nitrous oxide, methane, and carbon dioxide (United Nations, 2023). These gases trap heat within the atmosphere, causing the Earth's mean surface temperature to rise (Heshmati, 2021). Due to its global size and production methods, the fashion industry is considered to be one of the biggest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions on the planet (Hiller Connell & LeHew, 2020). Statistics from The World Bank (2019) show that 10% of the yearly worldwide carbon emissions originate in the fashion industry. That is more than international air travel and sea transport combined. One of the industries that suffer these consequences is the surf industry. As one of the most popular marine recreational activities, it was estimated by the International Surfing Association in 2012 that there are 35 million surfers globally with a global industry value of around \$22 billion (Román, et al., 2022). Those numbers were expected to rise to about 50 million by 2020 (Ross, 2019). While the manufacturing of sportswear, namely surf wear is a small

subset of the fashion industry, it contributes to carbon emissions through the utilization of unsustainable materials (Gibson & Warren, 2017). Surfboards are often constructed from harmful petrochemicals, while surf wax is mostly derived from crude oil. This opposes the foundation of the surf culture – being perceived as environmental consciousness (Hill & Abbott, 2009). Surfboard makers and surf clothing manufacturers, such as Quiksilver or Billabong, have been critiqued in the past by environmental activists for portraying surfing as aligned with the natural world while lacking environmental responsibility (Hill & Abbott, 2009).

Research from Uppsala University contribute to the so-called attitude-behavior gap which acknowledges that good intentions do not always translate into actual sustainable consumption decisions. The study advances research in this domain and suggest that several underlying factors, which are often traced back to individual-level factors, such as insufficient trust, knowledge, and information on the demand side affect sustainable consumption (Sjölander & Norstedt, 2021). A different study by Uppsala University investigated exactly this matter further and across other sectors, namely tourism (Mihala, 2019). More specifically, it tested how the Protect Our Winter (POW) organization would help achieve more sustainable winter tourism. POW is an organization founded by pro-snowboarder and environmental activist Jeremy Jones, who supports policies and solutions to protect the environment (Protect Our Winters, n.d.). Their study revealed that there are groups of people who can make the planet more environmentally friendly when they partner and engage with sponsors and brands (Mihala, 2019). Such developments of partnerships to foster sustainable behavior are in line with the United Nations' SDG 17 "Partnerships for the Goals". This approach encourages partnership between stakeholders, leveraging the competencies and resources of each to advance the UN's SDGs. (United Nations Global Compact, 2018).

Collaborative partnerships between stakeholders, such as athletes and brands, have been a well-established part of the marketing landscape for years (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). Athletes are considered celebrities and possess the ability to connect with potential customers on a different level, allowing them to leverage their image and influence (Lesaulle & Bouvier, 2017). While the role of environmental athlete activism is relatively unexplored in terms of academic literature, literature on social activism exists, and received increasing attention over the last few years (Dunn & Nisbett, 2023). Dunn and Nisbett's (2023) research demonstrated that when athlete activists endorsed a specific social position, consumers associated that position with the brands they

endorsed. When a brand advocates for a societal issue that the consumers care about brand perception increases, reinforcing that, statements made by athletes, representing consumer beliefs and values, have a much greater positive impact on brand perception compared to statements solely made by the brand. Consequently, Dunn and Nisbett (2023) suggest that brands should partner with social athlete activists if they seek to amplify attention towards a particular positioning. Considering the growing climate crisis and the demand for more environmentally friendly strategies by brands, the question is whether the findings from social activism also apply to the activism of environmental athletes.

1.2 Objectives and Research Questions

Depending heavily on the survival of the natural world, the surf industry's existence is facing significant threats from the repercussions of climate change (Mortlock, 2022). This thesis aims to investigate the impact of a collaborative partnership between athlete activists and sportswear (surf) brands. More specifically, what effect do such collaborative partnerships have on consumer valuations? Based on the challenges faced by the surf industry, the first research question is formulated as follows:

RQ1: Does a collaborative partnership between a sportswear (surf) brand and an athlete activist impact consumers' perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, and purchase intentions?

As stakeholder demand for greater sustainability increases, brands are increasingly implementing corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies, and transitioning towards eco-friendly products (Netto et al., 2020). Responding to these new demands in the market, brands need to ensure that their efforts are accurately perceived and interpreted by their stakeholders as well as have a real impact. Otherwise, they may risk being accused of greenwashing (Vollero, Palazzo, & Siano, 2016). A suggested solution may be through the brand's communication, as it transfers the ideas and thoughts from the brand to the consumer (Genç, 2017). Accordingly, the present research investigates the impact of brand-athlete activism collaborative partnerships on consumer valuations of sportswear (surf) brands. Thus, the second research question is as follows:

RQ2: How can athlete activism be effectively communicated by a sportswear (surf) brand to indicate their environmental efforts while enhancing consumer valuations of the sportswear (surf) brand?

As the apparel industry is increasingly scrutinized for its detrimental impact on the environment, pro-environmental initiatives are being embraced by brands. However, consumers' lack of knowledge as well as their perceived lack of shared values, may lead to skepticism concerning these initiatives (Bhaduri & Copeland, 2019). Research executed by Saari *et al.* (2020) further reviewed how pro-environmental attitudes of consumers may affect their interpretation of a brand's claimed eco-friendliness. Stating that a higher degree of respect for nature impacts how consumers experience a brand's eco-friendliness and thus, impacts their general experience of the brand (Saari, et al., 2020). Thus, the final research question is:

RQ3: Does the consumer's pro-environmental behavior affect their evaluation of the collaborative partnership between the brand and the athlete activist?

This thesis consists of seven chapters. While the first chapter introduces the research topic, its relevance as well as the research questions, the second chapter focuses on the review of the academic literature. Chapter 3 presents the conceptual model and hypotheses. Further, Chapter 4 outlines the methodology used to test the hypotheses and provides a detailed description of the data collection process. The results and reporting of the data are then presented in Chapter 5. Next, Chapter 6 presents the study's conclusion and implications. Finally, Chapter 7 provides the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

2. Academic Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Development

While various definitions for sustainable development exist, the most commonly accepted one was established during the 1987 United Nations' Brundtland Commission "the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Report, 1987).

In 2015, the United Nations established the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. At its core stands the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), which were formed to improve the lives of people everywhere by collaboration between nations (Kakar, et al., 2021). As a global collection of goals, objectives, and indicators, the UN members use the SDGs to shape their agendas and policies over the next fifteen years (Hák, et al., 2016). Considering the topic at hand, the most relevant in descending order are SDG 17 - Partnership for the Goals, SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production, and SDG 14 - Life below Water.

SDG 17 – Partnership for the Goals is particularly relevant, as it focuses on shared-value creation, including sharing knowledge and mobilizing resources to foster sustainable practices through partnerships between governments, businesses, and civil society (Maltais, et al., 2018). The collaboration of a brand with an athlete activist would be an example of such shared value creation, as it is a partnership between stakeholders aiming at fostering the SDGs whereby all benefit from such a collaboration. Owing to their large audience and consumer influence, brands have relied on celebrity endorsers for years to enhance positive associations with their products, services, or brands (Schmidt, et al., 2018). According to research, the world of celebrity endorsements and sponsorships is shifting towards an increasingly collaborative nature, known as partnerships (Venturoli, 2018). Partnerships are viewed as a new level of sponsorships, where brands ensure an even greater fit between the collaborating brand and athlete (Venturoli, 2018). Collaborative partnerships aim at sharing knowledge, resources, or skills to accomplish a common goal between two or more parties. Such partnerships may take place between any kind of stakeholders, such as NGOs and local governments, between two companies (MasterClass, 2022), or, regarding the study at hand, brands, and athletes.

While SDGs 12, and SDG 14 are important in the context of the present research are less related to the topic at hand. For instance, SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production, acknowledges the need for a transition to a circular economy, where resource and energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure, and responsible consumption are fostered. SDG 12 aims at decreasing waste and environmental damage (Bárcena, et al., 2018). SDG 14 - Life below water, is related to the health of the oceans and the protection of marine biodiversity looking into waste and pollution as sources of major concern (Bárcena, et al., 2018).

2.2 Athlete Activism

Throughout the years, an increasing number of athletes engaged in athlete activism and have leveraged their position to speak out against social injustice, such as police brutality, to draw attention to societal issues and promote change (Kluch, 2020). Colin Kaepernick, for football; Aryiana Smith, for basketball, and Muhammad Ali, for boxing. While their sports could not be any different, they all have one thing in common, their social activism.

Agyemang et al. (2010) viewed activism in sports, as a coordinated method for conflict and protest. Moreover, Cunningham et al. (2019) define the activism of athletes in a social justice setting as advocating for people, who cannot speak up for themselves, while recognizing a feeling of duty to confront society's issues and injustices. While contributing positively to societal issues over the last years, athlete activism is assumed to play a similarly impactful role, when it comes to environmental issues. While exploring the importance of climate change to sports, Deloitte (2021) has identified athletes and players as stakeholders demanding change, while also being a key tool to implementing said change. This is owing to their ability to be more authentic and have a greater influence to instill a durable mentality in consumers and impact their behavior (Deloitte Sports Business Group, 2021).

A 2021 survey executed by World Athletics showed that 77 % of athletes are highly concerned with climate change, with 71 % stating that it has already impacted their sport (World Athletics, 2021). Research suggests that athletes' interest in climate change and nature is influenced by their connection to nature through sports (Lawrence, 2022) elevating the discourse on environmental activism. According to Dono *et al.* (2009), in sociology and political science, environmental activism relates to the process of united efforts aimed at preserving the environment.

Within environmental activism, different types of initiatives are used to advocate pro-environmental behavior, such as being part of an environmental group, partaking in behavior that protects the natural world, or influencing policymakers or companies (Dono, et al., 2009).

Colin Kaepernick partnered with Nike to foster societal change. By endorsing current social issues in a national ad campaign, the partnership increased awareness of social injustice (Everett, 2018). Similar initiatives can be found in environmental activism. Environmental athlete activism enhances environmental literacy (Earth Day, 2023) and fosters change within the general population in terms of nature preservation (Francia, 2019). One example is Outerknown, a sustainable clothing brand co-founded by professional surfer Kelly Slater in 2015. The brand aims at providing high-quality, sustainable, and ethical apparel, which people feel good about wearing and thus, fostering pro-environmental behavior through increased awareness (Rella, 2021). Similarly, Patagonia is known for linking sports with activism. The brand partners with professional athletes, who use their position to drive pro-environmental behavior through educating about the risks associated with climate change (Patagonia, nD).

Some environmental activism partnerships aim to foster pro-environmental behavior through increased environmental literacy, such as the Outerknown brand example mentioned above. Other initiatives foster change through more eco-friendly alternatives and responsible consumption via promoting initiatives more aligned with their core business (e.g., product-based). The present research differentiates between these types of activism: education-based athlete activism and product-based athlete activism. Literature concerning the latter is presented next and after, literature focusing on the former.

2.2.1 Brand-Cause Fit

According to Pracejus and Olsen (2004), the success of collaborative partnerships depends on the fit with the brand or product. Brand-cause fit is defined by Nan and Heo (2007) as “the overall perceived relatedness of the brand and the cause with multiple cognitive bases.” It refers to the alignment of values and sometimes purpose between a brand and a social or environmental cause to form positive attitudes towards the brand (2017, p.7). According to existing research, a high brand-cause fit in a company’s marketing strategy, in particular cause-related marketing, leads to more positive consumer responses. In contrast, a low brand-cause fit may lead to skepticism

(Bui, 2017). An example of brand-cause fit is the partnership between Johnson & Johnson's first aid products and the American Red Cross. According to cause-related marketing (CRM) literature, campaigns that align social causes with a brand's core business are likely to be well-perceived by consumers since the nature or type of cause fits the sponsoring firm (Pracejus & Olsen, 2004). In contrast less fit between the cause and the sponsoring firm is more likely to cause distrust from consumers (Bodur, et al., 2023).

2.2.2 Environmental Education

Existing research by Varela-Candamio *et al.* (2017) suggests that to achieve pro-environmental behavior of consumers, education is vital. Moreover, Colom and Sureda believe that environmental education is about reshaping the connection with the environment and viewing it as a tool to foster sustainable development (Colom & Sureda, 1981; Varela-Candamio, et al., 2017). The goal of environmental education is the increasing of knowledge, generate awareness and facilitate a feeling of connection to nature and consequently, a concern for the environment within people. All in the hopes of achieving a shared desire for preservation and conservation of the environment. Environmental education entails both personal as well as social initiatives to foster sustainable development (Dr. Ganesan & Dr. Magalingam, 2016).

2.3 Sustainable Actions in the Surf Industry

According to the International Surfing Association, short ISA, surfing is one of the fastest-growing sports in the world (CBI Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). The expansion of surf schools and the lifestyle associated with surfing have converted surfing into a multibillion-dollar industry (Bosquetti, n.D.; Global Industry Analysts Inc., 2011). According to Global Industry Analysts, the surf market was valued at US\$4.1 billion in 2022, expecting to grow to US\$5.5 billion in 2023 (Global Industry Analysts, 2023). Multiple segments make up the surf industry. First, the production of equipment such as surfboards, wetsuits, fins, leashes, and wax. Next, the industry's lifestyle aspects, such as apparel or footwear. Also, surf tourism, which uses services such as travel, accommodation, and entertainment (Bosquetti, n.D.) Each of these segments acts as a contributor to environmental issues, as they promote air and water pollution, use toxic chemicals and non-biodegradable materials during the manufacturing process. With an expected increase in surfers

worldwide, the consumption of surf equipment and surf-related products is growing (Bosquetti, n.D.).

Recognizing their impact on the environment, the surf industry calls its stakeholders to action, to transition to a more sustainable surf (Borne & Ponting, 2015) and find alternatives for existing materials and processes (Plummer, 2019). Companies such as Ertha Surf and Polyola Surf are leading examples. They are creating some of the least environmentally harmful surfboards in the industry, by solely using renewable or recycled material in the production process (Ertha Surf, n.D.; Polyola, n.d.). Similarly, Wildsuits creates sustainable wetsuits, using for instance recycled tires or plastic bottles, in their production process. Thus, minimizing their dependency on harmful materials.

A multitude of players exist, but the market is dominated by a few major players. Some of the most well-known surf brands globally are Quiksilver, Billabong, Hurley, O'Neill, Volcom, and Patagonia (Verified Market Research, 2021). Each year the Baptist World Aid Organization (BWAO), publishes an ethical fashion guide including surf brands, where brands are ranked in 6 categories. For instance, material origin, payment of living wages, usage of sustainable material, or their commitment to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 (Baptist World Aid, 2022). One of the highest-ranking sportswear and outdoor clothing brands, and the leading brand in sustainable surf clothing, is Patagonia. Patagonia supports and funds various NGOs and foundations. With an education-based initiative called "Patagonia Action Work", the company educates people around the globe and raised awareness on the most pressing issues of society in the areas of land, water, climate, communities, and biodiversity (Patagonia Action Works, 2023). In comparison, one of the lowest-ranking brands is Quiksilver with a 5 out of 100. It is criticized for not sufficiently addressing labor rights concerns in its supply chain and for not being sufficiently open about its environmental efforts. As a result, Quiksilver is in the bottom 20% of brands with regard to ethicality (Baptist World Aid, 2022). However, also Quiksilver shifted its efforts in 2020 and introduced a product-based initiative, named "Made Better". A sustainable apparel collection made from eco-friendly materials, such as recycled polyester and organic cotton.

As aforementioned many companies and associated brands have understood their environmental responsibility, and changes are being made. Also, the marketing and CSR literature

acknowledges the importance of collaborative partnerships, social and environmental activism, and the different types of marketing initiatives to promote their cause. The extent to which the type of environmental athlete activism initiative that is education-based versus product-based is more efficacious is still being determined since both seem well-supported by prior research. Environmental athlete activism initiatives that are education-based versus product-based are both suited to test the impact of collaborative partnerships involving an athlete activist in an empirical setting involving consumer valuations.

2.4 Sustainable Consumption Behaviors

According to the literature examining sustainable consumption, sustainable behaviors seek to meet current needs while benefiting the environment and limiting its negative impact on it (Trudel, 2018). Also, it can be explained by the degree to which decisions can be made to improve or reduce environmental impact (Stern, 2000). These decisions are shaped by pro-environmental conservation attitudes, cognition (e.g., knowledge) as well as how an individual engages with nature in the first place (Paswan, et al., 2017). For instance, consumers are increasingly more linked to climate change, also owing to their level of nature connectedness (Trudel, 2018).

2.4.1 Nature Connectedness

In literature, nature connectedness is often referenced together with the biophilia hypothesis. Termed by Keller and Wilson (1993), it suggests that people have an inherited connection to the natural world and other forms of life. The theory behind nature connectedness can be traced back to evolutionary history, as people went through urbanization and experienced the need to remain connected to nature after long cohabitation with the natural world over centuries (Capaldi, et al., 2014). In addition, modern literature connects the theory of nature connectedness to pro-environmental attitudes and an increased willingness to act sustainably (Berman, 2017) as well as overall well-being and pro-environmental behaviors (Liu, et al., 2022). Researchers state that an increased nature connectedness can be achieved, through mere time spent in nature through outdoor activities and sports, as well as learning about nature (Sheffield et al., 2022; Brymer & Oades, 2009).

2.4.2 Nature-Based Outdoor Sports

In recent decades, nature-based outdoor sports have emerged as a new phenomenon in the sports industry. The term comprises a set of sporting activities practiced in nature, which have the potential to contribute to sustainable local development (Van Rheenen & Melo, 2021). These activities often involve a degree of risk, such as mountain climbing, hang-gliding, or surfing, and can provide opportunities for improving health, well-being, and fostering a deeper connection to nature (Melo, et al., 2020). Both Melo (2013) and Gomes (2009) suggest that outdoor sports, owing to their undeniable connection to nature and thus sustainability, align with the trend towards ecological consumption. Therefore, they are often referred to as “green activities”. With the increasing climate crisis, outdoor activities, such as surfing, and their ability to sustain themselves into the future are being threatened. As a result, the affected industries need to adapt to sustainable development and embrace its meaning beyond simple attitudes.

Further, as the preservation of the environment is the subject of heightened monitoring, businesses must understand consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward the environment (Paswan, et al., 2017).

2.4.3 Pro-Environmental Behavior and Expertise

In academic literature, pro-environmental behavior is often referred to, when talking about individuals engaging in acts that benefit the natural world (e.g., beach clean-ups) and avoiding any acts that may harm the natural world (e.g., dumping plastic trash on the beach) (Lange & Dewitte, 2019). Moreover, research suggests that pro-environmental behavior is a key factor in combating climate change and promoting sustainable development (Paillé & Boiral, 2013). This is critical, as pro-environmental attitudes and pro-environmental behaviors are two linked but separate ideas. Research by Agyeman and Kollmuss (2002) suggests that an individual's willingness to act pro-environmentally does not always translate into actual behavior. Causes of this include the lack of motivation to act pro-environmentally or insufficient knowledge (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Existing knowledge on a topic that may affect, for instance how a product is perceived, is referred to as consumer expertise (Herédia-Colaço, et al., 2019). Consequently, the consumers' pro-environmental expertise may influence both their pro-environmental behavior and their perception of a brand's sustainability initiatives. To overcome these barriers, brands should undertake

activities that promote the desired behavior and focus on empowering individuals to act in an environmentally conscious way (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

Research shows that the importance of understanding pro-environmental behavior or expertise reaches even deeper, as consumers' awareness of environmental issues and the degree to which they concern themselves with it impacts their perceived ethicality of brands (Cespedes-Dominguez, et al., 2021).

2.4.4 Consumer Perceived Ethicality

Consumer Perceived Ethicality (CPE) is grounded on morals and ethics. Ethics comprises rules, values, and moral norms, which shape and guide people's behavior. A person's ethicality enables them to make moral judgments of right or wrong (Brunk K., 2012). CPE refers to the subjective evaluation made by consumers regarding the morality of a particular entity such as a company, brand, product, or service. This evaluation is based on the consumer's perception and is subject to individual differences and biases (Brunk & Bluemelhuber, 2011). CPE does not necessarily relate to the consumers' actual behavior, as the impression itself is subjective (Brunk K., 2012).

When judging ethicality, brands are often assessed on different pillars, such as honesty, quality, respect, and accountability (Fan, 2005). Stakeholders today demand more ethical behavior from companies and expect them to mirror their ethical views when producing products or services. Therefore, brands must find a coherent and transparent way to communicate their values and norms to their target audience to avoid loss of integrity (Singh, et al., 2012). However, according to Hatch (2010), consumer perception also relies on the opinions of other stakeholders, for instance, other consumers, employees, or athletes. Essential here is trust, as it plays a pivotal role in shaping CPE and creating confidence in a brand's actions.

2.4.5 Trust Perceptions

According to Morgan and Hunt (Morgan & Hunt, 1994): "Trust is defined as confidence in the reliability and integrity of an exchange partner." In other words, the trust one human being shows to someone or something else is directly related to their own belief of good intentions with

regard to welfare and thus, related to authenticity (Neumann, et al., 2020). Studies have shown that people tend to trust the opinions of the people close to them, such as family and friends. Solely 32 % of consumers trust international companies and only 13 % believe in advertising (Halliburton & Poenaru, 2010). For businesses to sustain themselves into the future, consumer trust is imperative, as it is needed to build meaningful and lasting customer relationships as well as higher advocacy (Halliburton & Poenaru, 2010). Furthermore, the interpretation of marketing activities is primarily based on the consumer's perception of trustworthiness (Martinez 2020).

In light of the growing concern for environmental issues, research increasingly acknowledges the need for corporations, governments, and consumers to modify their behavior appropriately (Shrivastava, 1995). Influences for consumer trust include but are not limited to previous experiences with a brand or product, brand reputation, and experience of oneself or others (Halliburton & Poenaru, 2010). Building trust will inherently improve the way marketing activities are interpreted and is also a direct predictor of purchase intention (Martinez 2020).

2.4.6 Purchase Intentions

The need for a more environmentally conscious society also mirrors in the purchase intention of consumers, as they are increasingly faced with climate change, threatening the survival of the natural world and humankind (Shah, et al., 2012). Thus, environmental issues are considered when forming purchase intentions. Measuring those intentions is a commonly applied practice in business, to tailor current and new products or services to market needs, as well as to indicate future sales. However, limitations to this have to be considered as both personal as well as situational factors may alter the purchase intentions when translating to actual purchase (Morwitz, 2012).

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

3.1 Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review, this chapter presents the conceptual framework and related hypotheses to be tested throughout the study. The following conceptual framework aims at examining the effect of the type of environmental athlete activism: education-based vs. product-based, (independent variable), on consumer valuations, such as the consumer perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, and purchase intentions of brand (dependent variable). Additionally, it tests the moderating effect of the consumers' pro-environmental behavior between the type of athlete activism and consumer valuations.

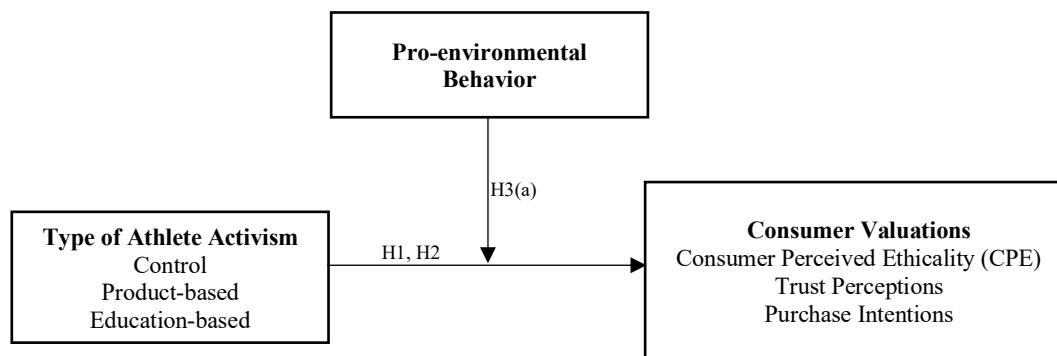


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.2 Hypotheses

Existing studies suggest that brands can influence consumers' perception of sustainability and thus shift their purchasing behavior by demonstrating commitment to a sustainable business strategy (Adamkiewicz, et al., 2022). However, consumers often doubt the intentions behind the brands' sustainable commitments, which causes distrust and skepticism toward the brand (Szabo & Webster, 2020). Studies show that consumers exhibit greater trust for athletes compared to brands, perceiving the former as more believable. Athletes' broad audience and reach, make them highly desirable partners for firms to enhance consumer's perception of them and increase brand awareness (Brown, et al., 2022). Thus, the first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: *Communicating a brand's collaborative partnership with an environmental athlete activist will strengthen consumers' perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, and purchase intentions*

toward the sportswear (surf) brand compared to communication without such a partnership collaboration.

Whether societal or environmental, cause-related marketing strategies gain increasing significance as part of corporate social responsibility. This emphasizes the importance of collaborative partnerships between a brand and a sponsoring cause. As referred previously in the literature review, different studies in this area suggest that initiatives involving product-based and education-based activism are a means forward to promote environmental responsibility (Chéron, et al., 2012). Consequently, the present research hypothesizes that initiatives that are product-based and education-based are both suited to test the premises of the current work as they will show an equally relevant effect for both types of athlete activism. Therefore, the second proposed hypothesis is suggested as follows:

H2: *The type of athlete activism (product-based vs. education-based) employed by the sportswear brand will have an equal effect on consumer valuations (consumer perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, purchase intention).*

With the increased awareness of environmental issues, consumers are becoming more interested in sustainability and demand brands to reflect their values and norms with regards to sustainability (Khandelwal, et al., 2019). Additionally, research has found that high levels of environmental concern among outdoor athletes impact purchase intentions (Tekin & Çoknaz, 2022) and that green consumers tend to trust environmental actions taken by companies less (Szabo & Webster, 2020). As pro-environmental behavior is an important factor to evaluate consumers' valuations of a brand that is more versus less engaged in sustainability, it is hypothesized that pro-environmental behavior will moderate the relationship between type of athlete activism and consumer valuations. More formally, the third hypothesis is as follows:

H3: *The impact of the type of athlete activism on consumer valuations of the sportswear brand will be moderated by the level of consumers' pro-environmental behavior, so that:*

H3a: *The higher (vs. the lower) consumers' pro-environmental behavior, the higher (vs. the lower) their valuations of a brand partnering with an athlete activist.*

4. Methodology and Data Collection

4.1 Research Methodology

After careful consideration of existing secondary data, primary data was obtained through the execution of quantitative research, namely, an online survey. For this, the research platform Qualtrics has been used, as it enables the user to tailor the survey structure and question types to their needs. Moreover, Qualtrics allows to distribute the questionnaire easily and reach a large number of potential participants. As it is entirely online, the location of participants is irrelevant, and the survey can be carried out anywhere. This flexibility ensures a better concentration from the participants, more reliable data, and more useful results. Moreover, attention check questions were included in the main study and a pilot study has been executed beforehand, to ensure the understanding of the manipulations. Within this survey, four manipulations were created and allocated to the participants at random. The data collection took place over 8 days.

4.2 Sampling

For this study, the target group is any potential consumers of a sportswear (surf) brand without limitation to a specific country. To reach a sufficiently large number of people, non-probability convenience sampling has been chosen. This sampling type allows for an efficient, quick, and cost-effective way to reach participants (Sedgwick, 2013). The survey was distributed solely online through Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and other platforms available to the researcher.

4.3 Research Instruments

Both experimental studies, namely the pilot and the main study, have been carried out using the online survey platform Qualtrics.

4.3.1 Pilot Study

In preparation for the main study, two pilot studies have been launched. During the first pilot, it became evident that respondents were unable to extract significant information from the manipulations. Thus, adaptations were made to the manipulations. The final pilot study was

launched before the main study on the 26th of April. The goal was to test participants' understanding of the experimental conditions for the main study, namely the type of athlete activism (control, product-based, education-based) (see Appendix 1). The final pilot survey was completed by 10 participants, while the first one was executed by 27. The pilot study consisted of the 3 manipulations as well as 2 manipulation check questions.

The first manipulation check question focused on whether the participants could differentiate between the different manipulations correctly, namely the control scenario, which did not include an athlete activist, or the product- or education-based scenario, which both included an environmental athlete activist. Results show statistically significant differences between the three conditions: control condition: $M_{\text{product}} = 1.50$ vs. $M_{\text{control}} = 5.75$; $t(1,7) = 7.60$, $p < .001$); product-based condition: $M_{\text{control}} = 3.25$ vs. $M_{\text{product}} = 6.50$; $t(1,7) = -3.04$, $p < .05$); education-based condition: $M_{\text{control}} = 3.25$ vs. $M_{\text{education}} = 6.75$; $t(1,7) = -3.30$, $p < .05$).

Concerning the second manipulation check, which tested respondents' perceptions concerning the type of athlete activism employed, t-test analyses showed that results were also in line with predictions showing significant differences across conditions: control condition: $M_{\text{product}} = 1.00$ vs. $M_{\text{control}} = 5.00$; $t(1,7) = 3.27$, $p < .05$); product-based condition: $M_{\text{control}} = 2.50$ vs. $M_{\text{product}} = 5.25$; $t(1,7) = -2.04$, $p = .10$); education-based condition: $M_{\text{control}} = 2.00$ vs. $M_{\text{education}} = 6.75$; $t(1,7) = -6.33$, $p < .01$).

4.3.2 Main Study

The main survey was distributed via social media, such as LinkedIn or Instagram, direct messaging on the 27th of April and ran until the 6th of May. A total number of 310 responses were collected of which 185 were viable answers. Unfinished surveys or those who failed the attention check question were considered non-viable. An attention check was included to ensure the attentiveness of participants and increase the value of data. When people fail the attention check, they typically take less time to fill out the survey, are more likely to report non-attitudes, and have a lower level of consistency (Alvarez, et al., 2019). Approximately 60 participants were exposed to one of the three conditions, which means it achieved validity when undertaking an experimental study (Maxwell, et al., 2018).

4.4 Research Design and Procedure

The main study began with a declaration of anonymity to the participants and a waiver to brand-related content explaining that the mentioned brand is in no way involved in the research study and that the inclusion was purely for academic and research-related purposes. The study design followed a 3 (type of athlete activism: control, product-based, education-based) between-within-subjects design with pro-environmental behavior as a measured variable. All participants were briefly introduced to the Quiksilver brand and asked to answer three scales (1) CPE (2) trust perceptions and (3) purchase intentions. Next, they were randomly allocated to one of three conditions such as a Quiksilver (1) control (2) product-based, or (3) education-based communication announcement. Afterward, they were once again asked to answer the same three initial scales to see if their opinions might have been changed by the information provided. Finally, all participants were asked to rate their level of involvement with the surf industry such as their outdoor activity, their pro-environmental behavior level, and their environmental athlete activism beliefs. Finally, demographics were collected, and the participants were thanked for their time.

4.5 Stimuli Development

For this study, three different manipulations also referred to as stimuli, were created, all using Quiksilver as the reference brand. Quiksilver was chosen, as it is one of the most well-known mainstream sportswear (surf) brands in the industry, as well as also worn by non-surfers, owing to its street style clothing. All three stimuli were designed according to existing marketing material of Quiksilver, such as newsletters. The three stimuli were a control scenario (Stimuli A), a product-based scenario (Stimuli B), and an educational-based scenario (Stimuli C). The stimuli were introduced under the umbrella of Quiksilver's new fictitious sustainability strategy called "The Wave". All three scenarios included Quiksilver's commitment to launching a large-scale transformation of all business lines to foster sustainability. To understand whether or not the inclusion of athlete activism in a brand's activities has an impact on brand perceptions, a control scenario (Stimuli A) was utilized, where no athlete activism was mentioned. In the product-based versus education-based manipulations, Quiksilver communicated that the "The Wave" program would be a collaborative partnership between the brand and the professional surfer and athlete activist David Richardson. A fictitious surfer to avoid bias. In addition, stimuli B and stimuli C

differed in the primary activity undertaken by the environmental athlete activist. In stimuli B, the collaborative partnership was product-based, where they developed an eco-friendly surf and clothing line. In stimuli C, the collaborative partnership focused on educational programs on sustainability and beach clean-ups (see Appendix 1).

4.6 Variable Descriptions

4.6.1 Manipulation Check

After the stimuli, two manipulation check questions were placed. All participants had to answer the same two manipulation check questions, assessing whether they could recall the essential information of the stimuli.

Firstly, participants were asked if Quiksilver's "The Wave" program was part of a collaborative partnership or if it was executed by the brand alone. The answers were evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale (1- Strongly disagree, 7- Strongly agree). Secondly, respondents were asked what their perceived result of the program was so far. If a respondent was exposed to stimuli A, no results were named. The three statements, which were evaluated using a 7-point Likert scale (1- *Strongly disagree*, 7- *Strongly agree*) were: (1) "Quiksilver has partnered with an athlete activist to launch an eco-friendly surf gear and clothing line." (2) "Quiksilver has partnered with an athlete activist to launch an eco-school program and beach clean-ups." (3) "Quiksilver has not partnered with an athlete activist."

4.6.2 Independent Variable

Type of athlete activism – was manipulated. Participants were exposed to one of three different scenarios: control, product-based and education-based (see Chapter 4.5 Stimuli Development).

4.6.3 Dependent Variable

All the dependent variables were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, adapted from existing scales from the academic literature. A detailed overview of the scale's application can be found in Appendix 2 – Survey Questionnaire.

Consumer Perceived Ethicality (CPE) – To assess consumer perceived ethicality, the 6-item CPE scale (Brunk, 2012) was used and evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale (1- *Strongly disagree*, 7- *Strongly agree*). The CPE scale has been applied many times in existing literature and was adapted for the current study purpose (“Quiksilver respects moral norms.”; “Quiksilver always adheres to the law.”; “Quiksilver avoids damaging behavior at all costs“;..).

Trust Perceptions – To assess the perceived trustworthiness of the brand, the trust scale by Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) was adapted and measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1- *Strongly disagree*, 7- *Strongly agree*), namely: “I trust Quiksilver” and “Quiksilver delivers what it promises.”.

Purchase Intentions – To assess respondents' intentions to purchase a good before and after stimuli introduction the purchase intention scales after Lee and Shin (Lee & Shin, 2010) as well as Loebnitz and Grunert (Loebnitz, et al., 2015) were adapted (“I would purchase a product by Quiksilver in the future.”) and measured using 7-point Likert scale (1- *Strongly disagree*, 7- *Strongly agree*).

4.6.4 Moderator

Pro-environmental behavior – The degree to which respondents include eco-friendliness and sustainability in their own life was assessed by combining two existing scales. Firstly, the Nature Relatedness scale was adopted and three items of the 21-item scale were included in the study (Nisbet, et al., 2009) (“I am concerned about the environment and worry about climate change.“; ...) Secondly, 4-items of the 18-item EAAS scale were adapted (“I participate in nature conservation efforts (e.g., planting trees, beach clean-up).“; ...). Moreover, two statements of the 10-item scale have been added by the researcher herself testing for environmental expertise in the surf industry (“I am educated when it comes to environmental issues in the surf industry.“; “I am educated when it comes to the impact surfing has on the environment.”). All items were evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale (1- *Strongly disagree*, 7- *Strongly agree*).

4.6.5 Additional Measured Variables (Mediator)

Please note that while initially not considered in the presented conceptual framework, measures were assessed further throughout the creation of this study and additional research was

executed. The exact derivation of the additional research on mediation is accounted for in Chapter 5.4.

Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs – The area of athlete activism, while becoming increasingly popular, is rather untested. Thus, scales testing for the perception and beliefs of athlete activism, specifically with regard to sustainability do not exist. For the 5-item scale utilized in this survey, the ATAAQ, short for Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire, has been considered (Sappington, et al., 2019). Please note, that the scale was solely used as a wording reference and the statements were adapted more intensely in comparison to prior scales, due to the nature of the topic at hand, namely (“When athlete activists engage in sustainable actions, I think they are more believable than those of brands.“; When athlete activists speak out on environmental issues, I believe it is genuine.“; ...). All items were evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale (1- *Strongly disagree*, 7- *Strongly agree*).

5. Analysis and Results

5.1 Sample Characterization

After cleaning the data set, the study gathered a total of 185 viable answers. The majority of participants were female (51.9%), while men made up 47%. The three largest groups, in terms of countries, were Germany (48.1%), Portugal (13.5%), and Brazil (6.5%). The remaining 31.9% of respondents came from 20 different countries, such as Ecuador, Uruguay, or South Africa. The participants ranged in age from 17 to 64 years old. 49.2% of respondents were between the ages of 25 to 28. The majority of participants come from an academic background, where 40% have completed a bachelor's degree, 35.7% have a master's degree, and 2.7% with a doctoral degree. Furthermore, the majority has an annual income of €10,000 to €19,999 (19.5%). The second highest represented income group earns between €50,000 to €74,999 annually (16.2%). The sample was made up of both surfers and non-surfers. 61.6% consider themselves part of the surf community. Of those, 15.1% have been part of it for 4-6 years, while 12.4% for more than 10 years. 38.4% did not consider themselves part of the surf community.

5.2 Factor Analysis and Scale Reliability

While the applied scales have been tested in existing literature, it is vital to evaluate their reliability in this context, to ensure the accuracy of the data collected and provide insightful results. For all scales with 3 items or more, factor analysis was conducted followed by reliability analysis. For 2-item scales, Pearson correlation was applied first. The *consumer perceived ethicality* scale, which was measured before and after the manipulation, the *pro-environmental behavior scale*, and the *environmental athlete activism beliefs* scale had more than 2 items, and thus, were considered for the factor analysis. For all scales, except pro-environmental behavior, only one item was extracted, indicating a reliable measure for the examined construct. The pro-environmental behavior scale was broken down into three new variables, which were then computed into three distinct constructs named as follows: *pro-environmental expertise*, *environmental consciousness*, and *consumer activism*. For research focus purposes the analysis solely proceeded with the newly created pro-environmental expertise as moderator (H3), while the consumer activism scale was tested in the further analysis section. According to prior research in pro-environmental behavior, pro-environmental expertise has been a relevant moderator when examining the impact of social

and environmental causes on consumer valuations (Herédia-Colaço & Coelho do Vale, 2019). That is the extent to which participants' level of perceived knowledge concerning the interplay between sustainability and the field under study (surf industry) is likely to interfere with their ethicality, trust, and purchase intention valuations. Likewise, individual characteristics such as consumers' activism level are likely to impact the valuations of a brand partnering with an activist (Francia, 2019), as reported further.

Table 1: New Variable Creation

Variable	Expression
Pro-environmental Expertise	Self-perception of educational knowledge on sustainability in the surf industry
Consumer Activism	The degree to which an individual engages in activities creating a sustainable awareness
CPE Before	Consumer perceived ethicality before manipulation
CPE After	Consumer perceived ethicality after manipulation
Trust Perceptions Before	Trust perceptions before manipulation
Trust Perceptions After	Trust perceptions after manipulation
Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs	The beliefs consumers hold with regard to athlete activism overall.

Correlation analysis was conducted for the scales measured on two items only, namely: on trust perceptions measured before and after the manipulation, as well as the newly computed pro-environmental expertise variable. While purchase intent before the manipulation is a two-item scale, the second item was disregarded throughout the analysis process as purchase history was not asked again after the manipulation. Utilizing a Pearson correlation statistic, it can be concluded that all three have a strong positive correlation.

Reliability analyses are usually applied to evaluate the stability of data in research studies (Creswell, 2015). Within this analysis, Cronbach's Alpha (α) is reviewed, as it represents the

degree of reliability. A score above .6 is considered to indicate high reliability and is acceptable (Daud, et al., 2018). Seven scales were tested for reliability in this context: *consumer perceived ethicality (CPE)* before and after the manipulations, *trust perceptions before and after the manipulations*, the two newly created variables pro-environmental expertise and consumer activism as well as the environmental athlete activism beliefs. After running the reliability analyses in SPSS, the alpha value for each scale is higher than the established minimum of .6 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Results Reliability Analyses of Scales

Scale	Initial number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha if deleted	Items deleted	Final number of items
CPE Before	6	.863	-	-	6
CPE After	6	.910	-	-	6
Trust Perceptions Before	2	.838			2
Trust Perceptions After	2	.866			2
Pro-environmental Expertise	2	.910	-	-	2
Consumer Activism	4	.716	-	-	4
Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs	5	.782	-	-	5

After assessing all scales, it can be concluded that the items are statistically significant as well as reliable.

5.3 Results Manipulation Check

To identify whether the participant could extract the key information out of each scenario and thus correctly respond to the manipulation check questions, four independent-samples *t-tests* at a 95% confidence interval were conducted.

The results of the first two independent-samples *t*-tests show that participants, in general, were able to correctly identify the conditions on which they were assigned to. That is, results show statistically significant differences between the control (Quiksilver's "The Wave" program without collaborative partnership) and the athlete activist partnership (Quiksilver's "The Wave" program with collaborative partnership): control condition: $M_{\text{product}} = 2.69$ vs. $M_{\text{control}} = 5.80$; $t(123) = 9.80$, $p < .001$); product-based condition: $M_{\text{control}} = 2.31$ vs. $M_{\text{product}} = 6.18$; $t(123) = -15.72$, $p < .001$) education-based condition: $M_{\text{control}} = 2.31$ vs. $M_{\text{education}} = 6.10$; $t(123) = -14.75$ $p < .001$) (see Appendix 3).

The second set of independent-samples *t*-tests displays that the collaborative partnership results were correctly identified by the participants for each stimulus respectively. Meaning, again the results show statistically significant differences between the control scenario and the athlete activist partnership: $M_{\text{product}} = 1.90$ vs. $M_{\text{control}} = 5.75$; $t(123) = 15.46$, $p < .001$); product-based condition: $M_{\text{control}} = 2.51$ vs. $M_{\text{product}} = 6.24$; $t(123) = -15.22$, $p < .001$); education-based condition: $M_{\text{control}} = 2.48$ vs. $M_{\text{education}} = 6.24$; $t(123) = -15.20$ $p < .001$) (see Appendix 4).

5.4 Main Results

5.4.1 Hypothesis 1

H1: Communicating a brand's collaborative partnership with an environmental athlete activist will strengthen consumers' perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, and purchase intentions toward the sportswear (surf) brand compared to a communication without such a partnership collaboration.

To examine the communication impact of providing information about the athlete activism collaboration with the brand, a *paired samples t*-test was run to analyze the difference between moment 1 and moment 2 (before and after applying the manipulation). To do this, the database was split according to the conditions. The results of the *paired samples t*-test show that after providing the manipulations, results increased, providing statistical significance for all three dependent variables.

Specifically, the results show a significant mean difference for the product-based activism type before versus after applying the manipulation: Pair 1_{Product} ($M_{CPE\ Before} = 4.50$ vs. $M_{CPE\ After} = 5.24$; $t(124) = -8.51, p < .001$), Pair 2_{Product} ($M_{Trust\ Perceptions\ Before} = 4.81$ vs. $M_{Trust\ Perceptions\ After} = 5.30$; $t(124) = -4.25, p < .001$), and Pair 3_{Product} ($M_{Purchase\ Intentions\ Before} = 4.69$ vs. $M_{Purchase\ Intentions\ After} = 5.42$; $t(124) = -4.46, p < .001$); and the education-based activism type: Pair 1_{Education} ($M_{CPE\ Before} = 4.70$ vs. $M_{CPE\ After} = 5.31$; $t(124) = -7.64, p < .001$), Pair 2_{Education} ($M_{Trust\ Perceptions\ Before} = 4.93$ vs. $M_{Trust\ Perceptions\ After} = 5.56$; $t(124) = -4.68, p < .001$), and Pair 3_{Education} ($M_{Purchase\ Intentions\ Before} = 5.35$ vs. $M_{Purchase\ Intentions\ After} = 5.82$; $t(124) = -3.80, p < .001$). Statistical differences were only observed for the control scenario on consumer perceived ethicality: $M_{CPE\ Before} = 4.57$ vs. $M_{CPE\ After} = 4.29$; $t(122) = -4.31, p < .001$ (see Table 3).

Table 3: Results Paired Samples T-Tests for Product versus Education-based Activism

		Type of Athlete Activism					
		Product-based			Education-based		
		Mean	SD	t-Test	Mean	SD	t-Test
Pair 1	CPE Before	4.50	1.10	-8.51***	4.70	.75	-7.64***
	CPE After	5.24	1.01		5.31	.95	
Pair 2	Trust Perceptions Before	4.81	1.25	-4.25***	4.93	1.09	-4.68***
	Trust Perceptions After	5.30	1.14		5.56	1.12	
Pair 3	Purchase Intentions Before	4.69	1.88	-4.46***	5.35	1.56	-3.80***
	Purchase Intentions After	5.42	1.48		5.82	1.42	

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq 1$

Findings show that providing more detailed information about the type of athlete activism, that is either product or education-based, is impactful and positively enhances consumer valuations of the (surf) brand, fully supporting H1.

5.4.2 Hypothesis 2

H2: *The type of athlete activism (product-based vs. education-based) employed by the sportswear brand will have an equal effect on consumer valuations (consumer perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, purchase intention).*

The second hypothesis aims at understanding whether the specific type of athlete activism, namely product-based or education-based, has an impact on consumer valuations (consumer perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, purchase intentions). Before testing the second hypothesis, 3 new Δ variables were computed, reflecting the difference between moment 1, pre-stimulus, and moment 2, post-stimulus (see Table 4):

Table 4: Δ Variable Creation

Variable	Expression
Δ CPE	$CPE_{\text{Moment 2}} - CPE_{\text{Moment 1}}$
Δ trust perceptions	$Trust_{\text{Moment 2}} - Trust_{\text{Moment 1}}$
Δ purchase intentions	$PI_{\text{Moment 2}} - PI_{\text{Moment 1}}$

To examine the differences between the types of activism on consumer valuations, an independent samples t-test was performed using the 3 Δ dependent variables. Results show that providing detailed information on the types of athlete has no statistically significant effect for any of the three Δ dependent variables: Δ CPE ($M_{\text{Product}} = .74$, $SD = .68$ vs. $M_{\text{Education}} = .61$, $SD = .63$; $F(183) = 5.68$, $p = .29$), Δ trust perceptions ($M_{\text{Product}} = .48$, $SD = .90$ vs. $M_{\text{Education}} = .63$, $SD = 1.06$; $F(1,184) = 4.78$, $p = .41$), and Δ purchase intentions ($M_{\text{Product}} = .73$, $SD = 1.28$ vs. $M_{\text{Education}} = .47$, $SD = .97$; $F(183) = 3.99$, $p = .21$) (see Table 5).

Table 5: Independent Samples T-Test for Type of Athlete Activism on ΔDV

	Type of Athlete Activism				<i>t-test</i>
	Product-based		Education-based		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Δ CPE	.74	.68	.61	.63	.29
Δ trust perceptions	.48	.90	.63	1.06	.41
Δ purchase intentions	.73	1.28	.47	.97	.21

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq 1$

The research results show no statistically significant difference between the product-based and education-based scenario when placed into direct comparison. Thus, findings suggest that the effect on consumer valuations (consumer perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, and purchase intentions), fully supporting H2.

5.4.3 Hypothesis 3

H3: *The impact of the type of athlete activism on consumer valuations of the sportswear brand will be moderated by the level of consumers' pro-environmental behavior, so that:*

H3a: *The higher (vs. the lower) consumers' pro-environmental behavior, the higher (vs. the lower) their valuations of a brand partnering with an athlete activist.*

The third hypothesis assesses the moderating effect of pro-environmental behavior, using the newly created pro-environmental expertise variable as explained during the factor analysis, on the relationship between the type of athlete activism (control, product-based, or education-based) and the consumers' valuations of the Sportswear brand. Hayes' Process macro (Model 1; Hayes, 2013) was used to test for moderation. This procedure was used for Bootstrap resampling and to compute the 95% confidence intervals (CIs) of the moderating effect of the newly created moderator variable resultant from the factor analysis assessing pro-environmental behavior - pro-environmental expertise on consumer valuations (Δ CPE, Δ trust perceptions & Δ purchase intentions). A multicategorical analysis was run considering the type of athlete activism condition considering the following combinations: Control (0) vs. Product (1), Control (0) vs. Education (2),

and Product (1) vs. Education (2) while pro-environmental expertise, was tested as a continuous (mean-centered) variable.

Control vs. product-based athlete activism: No significant type of athlete activism x pro-environmental expertise interaction effects were obtained on Δ CPE ($b=.04, SE=.06, p=.53, 95\% CI = [-.09, .16]$), Δ trust perceptions ($b=.07, SE=.08, p=.39, 95\% CI = [-.09, .23]$), or on Δ purchase intentions ($b=.18, SE=.12, p=.12, 95\% CI = [-.05, .41]$).

Control vs. education-based athlete activism: A positive and marginally significant type of athlete activism x pro-environmental expertise interaction effects on Δ CPE ($b=.05, SE=.03, p \leq .1, 95\% CI = [-.0091, .12]$) and significant type of athlete activism x pro-environmental expertise interaction effect was obtained on Δ trust perceptions ($b=.12, SE=.05, p < .01, 95\% CI = [.03, .21]$). Additionally, a marginally significant type of athlete activism x pro-environmental expertise interaction effects on Δ purchase intentions ($b=.09, SE=.05, p \leq .1, 95\% CI = [-.01, .20]$). To analyze the nature of the relationships in more detail, the effects at different values of the moderator (± 1 SD from the mean) were probed.

Slope analysis revealed that differences between the control and education-based activism emerged at high (+1SD) ($b=.22, SE=.08, p < .01, 95\% CI = [.07, .38]$) and medium ($b=.13, SE=.06, p < .05, 95\% CI = [.02, .24]$) levels of pro-environmental expertise on Δ CPE. Furthermore, differences emerged at high (+1SD) ($b=.46, SE=.12, p < .001, 95\% CI = [.23, .69]$) and medium ($b=.24, SE=.08, p < .01, 95\% CI = [.08, .40]$) levels of pro-environmental expertise on Δ trust perceptions. Similarly, findings showed differences at high (+1SD) ($b=.33, SE=.13, p < .05, 95\% CI = [.06, .59]$) levels of pro-environmental expertise when considering Δ purchase intentions. Overall, the slope analysis shows that as pro-environmental expertise increases, differences between control vs. education-based type of athlete activism, in favor of education-based, can be observed (see Figures 2,3,4).

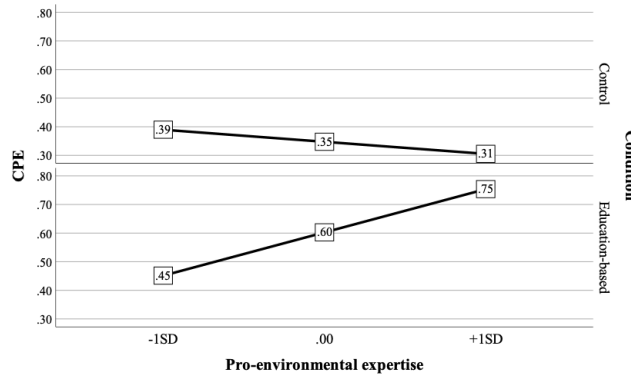


Figure 2: Pro-environmental expertise as a moderator on the effect of the type of athlete activism on Δ CPE (Control vs. Education-based)

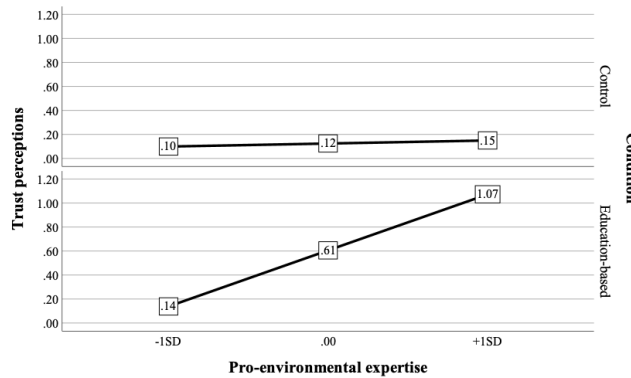


Figure 3: Pro-environmental expertise as a moderator on the effect of the type of athlete activism on Δ trust perceptions (Control vs. Education-based)

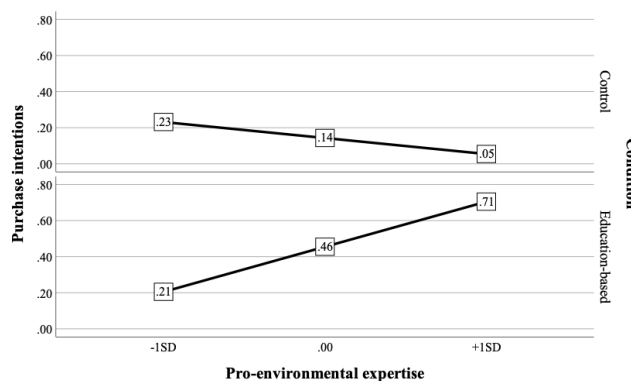


Figure 4: Pro-environmental expertise as a moderator on the effect of the type of athlete activism on Δ purchase intentions (Control vs. Education-based)

Product vs. education-based athlete activism: No significant type of athlete activism x pro-environmental expertise interaction effects were obtained on Δ CPE ($b=.07$, $SE=.07$, $p=.31$, 95% CI = $[-.06, .20]$) or on Δ purchase intentions ($b=.01$, $SE=.11$, $p=.94$, 95% CI = $[-.21, .23]$). However, a positive and marginally significant type of athlete activism x pro-environmental expertise interaction effect was obtained on Δ trust perceptions ($b=.17$, $SE=.09$, $p \leq .1$, 95% CI = $[-.01, .36]$). Slope analysis revealed that differences between the product and education-based activism emerged at high (+1SD) ($b=.51$, $SE=.24$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = $[.03, .98]$) levels of pro-environmental expertise on Δ trust perceptions. Similarly, to prior findings, the slopes analysis revealed that with an increase in pro-environmental expertise, differences arise between product vs. education-based type of athlete activism (see Figure 5).

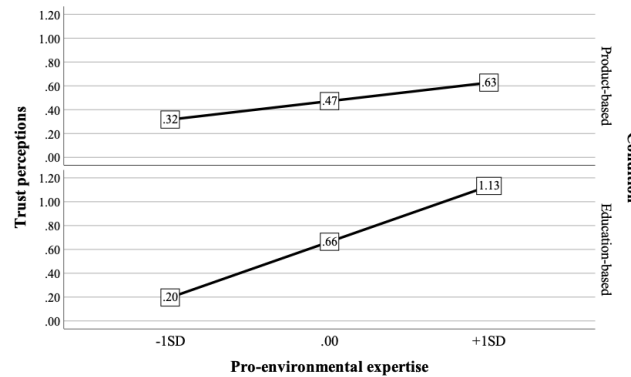


Figure 5: Pro-environmental expertise as a moderator on the effect of the type of athlete activism on Δ trust perceptions (Product vs. Education-based)

Findings suggest that with increased levels of pro-environmental expertise, the trust perceptions, purchase intentions, and consumer perceived ethicality of the sportswear (surf) brand increased depending on the condition that they were exposed to. The results show that the main differences emerge when consumers are exposed to the education-based athlete activism initiative when compared to the control condition.

Overall, findings suggest that environmental activism that is education-based or product-based is generally more valued than when there is no communication about the brand collaboration with an athlete activist. Nevertheless, since the findings were not fully corroborated, H3 is partially validated.

5.5 Further Research

Over an extended period of time, climate change did not directly touch people, who lived in urban areas and seemed a distant issue (Kraus, 2023) Nevertheless, for people, who engage in outdoor activities, the environmental crisis quickly transformed into an alarming reality, significantly affecting their everyday lives. For outdoor athletes this transformed in changes in their ability to perform sports, prompting various athletes to begin advocating for the conservation of nature (Kraus, 2023). However, not just athletes have undergone a transformation in their approach to engaging with nature and advocating for minimalizing intervention with nature. The increasing environmental issues also reflect in consumers’ own lifestyle choices and ethical perceptions (Deloitte, 2020). Consequently, it becomes important to analyze how one’s activism level impacts the valuations of brands engaged in environmental advocacy initiatives. Moreover, how this effect may be indirectly driven by one’s beliefs about the (athlete) activist engaged with the brand’s cause. Beliefs are relevant to analyze in more detail since, with the spread of digital media and growing skepticism toward political institutions, consumers are beginning to act and demand change for current and future generations (Horst, 2019).

A study conducted by Flores (2022) identifies the influence of attitudes toward (social) athlete activism. Findings suggest that an individual’s beliefs for social justice and political engagement are impacted by their beliefs of athlete activism and the athletes themselves (Flores, 2022). Thus, highlighting the need for further exploration and understanding of the mediating effect of environmental athlete activism beliefs on consumer valuations.

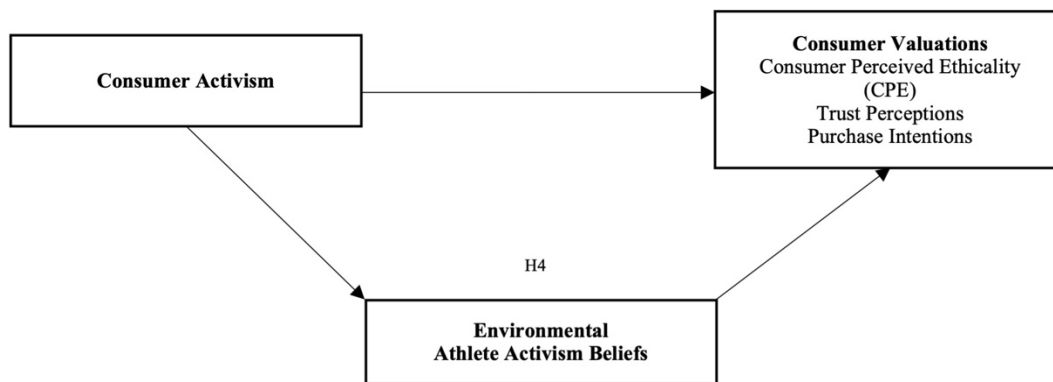


Figure 6: Conceptual Framework 2

It is, therefore, hypothesized that consumers' environmental athlete activism beliefs (e.g., perceived athlete engagement in beach clean-ups, climate change education via informational social media posts), will mediate the relationship between consumer activism and consumer valuations of sportswear (surf) brands. More formally, the fourth hypothesis is suggested as follows:

H4: *Environmental athlete activism beliefs will mediate the relationship between consumer activism and consumer valuations of the sportswear (surf) brands.*

To test H4, a mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4; Hayes, 2013). Findings are considered statistically significant if the confidence intervals do not comprise zero. Moreover, analysis differentiates between partial and full mediation. Full mediation refers to a significant indirect effect, where the direct effect becomes non-significant. Suggesting, that the introduced mediator explains the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable. With partial mediation, the indirect effect is significant and so is the direct effect even after the introduction of the mediator (Rucker, et al., 2011).

In the model, consumer activism, environmental athlete activism beliefs, and consumer valuations (consumer perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, purchase intentions), are included as the predictor variable, mediator, and outcome variable, respectively. Bootstrapping results (based on 5,000 samples) confirmed a significant and positive indirect effect of consumer activism through environmental athlete activism beliefs on the Δ CPE dependent variable ethicality (*indirect effect* = .03, *SE* = .01, *p* < .05, 95%, *CI* = [.00, .05]). However, when both consumer activism and environmental athlete activism beliefs were entered into the regression, the conditional direct effect of consumer activism on Δ CPE was still significant (*direct effect* = -.07, *SE* = .04, *p* < .05, 95%, *CI* = [-.14, -.00]), indicating partial mediation (see Table 6).

Table 6: *Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs as a Mediator on the Relationship Between Consumer Activism (CA) and Δ Consumer Perceived Ethicality (CPE)*

Outcome	Indirect Effect Paths	Indirect Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
1	Consumer Activism --> Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs	.13*	.03	.24
2	Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs --> Δ CPE	.19**	.09	.29
3	Consumer Activism --> Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs --> Δ CPE	.03*	.00	.05
	Direct Effect Paths	Direct Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
4	Consumer Activism --> Δ CPE	-.07*	-.14	-.00

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq 1$

Next, the bootstrapping results confirmed a significant and positive indirect effect of consumer activism through environmental athlete activism beliefs on both Δ trust perceptions trust (*indirect effect* = .05, *SE* = .02, $p < .05$, 95%, CI = [.01, .09]) and Δ purchase intentions (*indirect effect* = .03, *SE* = .02, $p < .05$, 95%, CI = [.01, .08]). The conditional direct effect of consumer activism on Δ trust perceptions and Δ purchase intentions were not significant when both consumer activism and environmental athlete activism beliefs were entered into the regression (*direct effect*_{Trust Perceptions} = -.06, *SE* = .05, $p = \text{NS}$, 95%, CI = [-.16, .04]; *direct effect*_{Purchase Intentions} = -.02, *SE* = .06, $p = \text{NS}$, 95%, CI = [-.15, .10]) (see Table 7 for Trust Perceptions & Table 8 for Purchase Intentions), suggesting full mediation.

Table 7: *Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs as a Mediator on the Relationship Between Consumer Activism (CA) and Δ Trust Perceptions*

Outcome	Indirect Effect Paths	Indirect Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
1	Consumer Activism --> Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs	.13*	.03	.24
2	Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs --> Δ Trust Perceptions	.35***	.21	.48
3	Consumer Activism --> Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs --> Δ Trust Perceptions	.05*	.01	.09
Direct Effect Paths		Direct Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
4	Consumer Activism --> Δ Trust Perceptions	-.06	-.16	.04

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq 1$

Table 8: *Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs as a Mediator on the Relationship Between Consumer Activism (CA) and Δ Purchase Intentions*

Outcome	Indirect Effect Paths	Indirect Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
1	Consumer Activism --> Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs	.13*	.03	.24
2	Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs --> Δ Purchase Intentions	.26**	.08	.43
3	Consumer Activism --> Environmental Athlete Activism Beliefs --> Δ Purchase Intentions	.03*	.01	.08
Direct Effect Paths		Direct Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
4	Consumer Activism --> Δ Purchase Intentions	-.02	-.15	.10

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq 1$

Concluding, the findings suggest that the environmental athlete activist beliefs do mediate the relationship between consumer activism and consumer valuations, namely consumer perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, and purchase intentions. Therefore, H4 is accepted.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of this thesis was to investigate the influence of disclosing a collaborative partnership between an athlete activist and a sportswear (surf) brand on consumer perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, and purchase intentions (RQ1). In addition, the study sought to explore how athlete activism can be effectively communicated by a sportswear (surf) brand to indicate their environmental efforts while enhancing consumer valuations of the surf brand (RQ2). Finally, the study aimed at understanding whether consumer's pro-environmental behavior would affect their valuation of a collaborative partnership between a surf brand and an environmental athlete activist (RQ3). To address the three research questions and their underlying hypothesis, an experimental study design was employed.

In the following, a discussion takes place, where the findings from the hypotheses are connected to existing literature to establish relationships based on the above presented research questions. Additionally, the conclusions are provided in each section respectfully, providing clear answers to the research questions, allowing for a greater understanding of the study's implications (see Chapter 7 – Implications).

With regards to the first research question, findings suggest that the use of a collaborative partnership indeed impacts consumer valuations of the sportswear (surf) brand. More specifically, it shows that providing additional information on the collaboration between the brand and environmental athlete activists as well as highlighting the outcomes of the collaborative partnership, positively influences consumer perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, and purchase intentions of a sportswear (surf) brand. These findings support H1 and build upon, similar research executed by years Dunn & Nisbett, who researched the difference in impact of communication coming from an athlete activist versus an established brand (2023). This became apparent through the positive increase in mean difference between the control and product-based or control and education-based scenario. This emphasizes the relevance of SDG 17, showing the indispensability of partnerships to foster sustainability agendas (RQ1).

With regards to the second research question, it was investigated how the sportswear (surf) brand's environmental effort, utilizing athlete activism, could be effectively communicated to

enhance consumer valuations. Existing literature has shown, how athlete activists' activities, both with and without brands, can impact consumer behavior. While some investigated how events or educational programs can influence consumer behavior sustainably (Mihala, 2019), others focused on the effect of sustainable product development in the surf industry on consumers' perceptions (Prigge, 2021). Accordingly, this study hypothesized that the type of athlete activism (product-based or education-based) would not have differing impacts on consumer valuations (H2). After carefully analyzing the collected data, the output can support this hypothesis. Although communicating the presence of a collaborative partnership influenced consumer valuations of the sportswear (surf) brand, no statistically significant differences were observed between the two types of athlete activism. In other words, how the brand chooses to partner with an environmental athlete activist, whether through educational events or with the co-creation of a product line, and the way it is communicated, does not significantly impact the consumers' valuation beyond their initial assessment (RQ2).

Finally, the third research question regarding the moderation of consumers' pro-environmental behavior and its impact on the evaluation of the collaborative partnership was addressed (RQ3). Changing environmental pressure results in changing consumer needs and beliefs, which in turn leads to changing consumer demands (Khandelwal, Kulshreshtha, & Tripathi, 2019). Studies have also shown that consumers' environmental concerns and beliefs influence their product purchasing behavior and trust in brands (Szabo & Webster, 2020). These studies could be partially validated. As explained throughout the main results chapter, the research was refocused on pro-environmental expertise in the surf industry. The research findings suggest that consumers' pro-environmental expertise only partially moderates the relationship between the type of athlete activism and consumer valuations. The results suggest that when consumers possess a higher level of pro-environmental expertise within the surf industry, they tend to evaluate a surf brand's collaboration with an athlete activist more positively (H3). A slight difference was observed when consumers were exposed to the education-based stimuli compared to the product-based stimuli, suggesting that consumers with pro-environmental expertise are more receptive to education-based partnerships (e.g., beach clean-ups). As four out of nine tests had statistically insignificant results, it suggests that the consumer's pro-environmental expertise only partially moderated the valuation of a sportswear (surf) brand's collaborative partnership with an athlete activist. Based on these findings, data exploration, and further research into the topic, an additional hypothesis was created,

suggesting that consumer activism on consumer valuation is mediated by consumers' environmental athlete activist beliefs. Findings indicate that consumers are more likely to trust a sportswear (surf) brand, purchase it as well as perceive it as ethical when they hold positive beliefs regarding environmental athlete activists.

Summarizing, the findings emphasize the changing consumer needs presumably driven by the environmental crisis and highlights the indispensability of industries, such as the surf industry, to make lasting changes. Collaborative partnerships with environmental athlete activists have proven to be a powerful tool to effectively reach consumers and potentially promote nature conservation. Moreover, the findings confirm that consumers have an increased perception of ethicality, trust and purchase intent when collaborative partnerships take place with an environmental athlete activist rather than a sportswear (surf) brand alone. Interestingly, the specific type of the collaborative partnerships (product-based versus education-based) has no substantial impact on consumer valuations. However, consumers' pro-environmental expertise on the surf industry does play a role in shaping their valuations, highlighting the importance of considering knowledge and beliefs. In general, these findings highlight the potential in collaborative partnerships to create meaningful change and convey the indispensability of sustainability in the surf industry. What the concrete theoretical and practical implications of the findings are will be presented in more depth up next.

7. Implications

7.1 Theoretical Implications

Overall, this research contributed to the existing literature on athlete activism (Kluch, 2020; Agyemang et al., 2010; Lee W. & Cunningham B., 2019; Deloitte Sports Business Group, 2021; Dono, et al., 2009; Everett, 2018), collaborative partnerships (Maltais, et al., 2018; Schmidt, et al., 2018; Venturoli, 2018; MasterClass, 2022) and consumer behavior particularly with regards to sustainability (Trudel, 2018; Paswan, et al., 2017; Berman, 2017; Tian & Liu, 2022), cause-related marketing (Pracejus & Olsen, 2004).

The concept of employing celebrity endorsements to improve brand image is a concept that has been well-researched in existing literature (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). In addition, considering heightened media coverage of societal issues, an increasing amount of literature focused on the assessment of utilizing social athlete activists to reposition brands in the minds of consumers. However, this research builds on prior literature examining activism that goes beyond social issues. More specifically, it provides a deeper understanding of the causal relationship between collaborative partnerships between brands and (athlete) activists and consumers' valuations of the types of initiatives used to communicate them. This research paved the way to know more about the role of environmental athlete activism and its findings provided a new perspective on its application in an environmental context.

Moreover, the present research generated additional insights into existing literary knowledge of consumer perceived ethicality, trust perceptions, purchase intentions, and their influencing factors. More specifically, it added to prior research investigating how consumer valuations of brands were improved through the utilization of athlete activists, rather than through the brand making the same statement (Dunn & Nisbett, 2023). The role of collaborative partnerships is important and builds on past research that assessed how consumers' societal activism, impact their view of brands (Dunn & Nisbett, 2023). The research hereby presented enhances how consumers view athletes' engagement in brand-led activities to promote pro-environmental behaviors. Namely, how consumers' pro-environmental expertise, in this case within the surf industry, can be a significant stimulus and moderator to consumer valuations of sportswear brands.

7.2 Practical Implications

The present research suggests that sportswear (surf) brands should prioritize establishing collaborative partnerships with professional athlete activists, such as surfers, who are addressing the environmental concerns of their consumers and who align with their consumers' values. Also, this finding emphasizes the true importance of following the SDGs, such as SDG 17 – Partnerships for the goals, with regards to changing consumer behavior and tackling environmental challenges through close collaboration with stakeholders. When sportswear (surf) brands partner with environmental athlete activists, who use their platform to advocate for global issues and embody the desired brand image, the surf brand can demonstrate their commitment to addressing these consumer concerns and better align with their values.

Additionally, the research highlights the importance of sportswear (surf) brands reviewing their target audience and their level of interest in sustainability and activism. While overall interest in sustainability does not necessarily moderate consumer perceptions of the collaborative partnership, the results show perceptual differences among consumers who have a higher degree of expertise in the surf industry as well as engage in activism.

Furthermore, the results indicate that brands have flexibility in deciding how they wish to collaborate with an environmental athlete activist. The study found no significant differences between partnerships that focused on the creation of a product, such as a sustainable surf gear line, and partnerships centered around education, such as education programs or beach clean-ups. This flexibility enables sportswear (surf) brands to implement collaborative partnerships, how they see fit and more efficiently based on their existing strategies.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into how consumer valuations are affected by athlete activism in the context of sustainability. It shows the importance of aligning with consumer values and beliefs to bridge gaps in their purchase intentions as well as trust perceptions. By generating awareness and reaching a larger target audience, sportswear (surf) brands and athlete activists can contribute to long-term sustainable changes in the surf industry by fostering a consumer-driven demand for change.

8. Limitations and Future Research

While the topic has been well researched and contributes to the overall understanding of how athlete activism within a surf brand's sustainability strategy can impact consumer valuations and thus, drive meaningful change in bridging the attitude-behavior gap, certain limitations need to be considered.

First, while the survey being distributed online allows for it to reach a large number of people, it also means that there is no control over where or when the participants fill out the survey. The surroundings that they choose, or the time of day may impact their answers. Moreover, if questions arise throughout the survey, they cannot be answered. Also, participants have more time to fill out the survey, which means people tend to think much longer about their answers instead of going with their initial gut feeling. This may lead to them providing an answer that they perceive as the "ideal" perspective or that puts them in a good light (Cornell, 2023).

Second, while the sample size was statistically sufficient for this study, a slightly larger sample size might have increased the reliability of the results further. Also, as there were no geographical limitations to the study, most people participated from Germany or Portugal. This may create a bias, as different countries might have different levels of interest in sustainability or would view athlete activism differently.

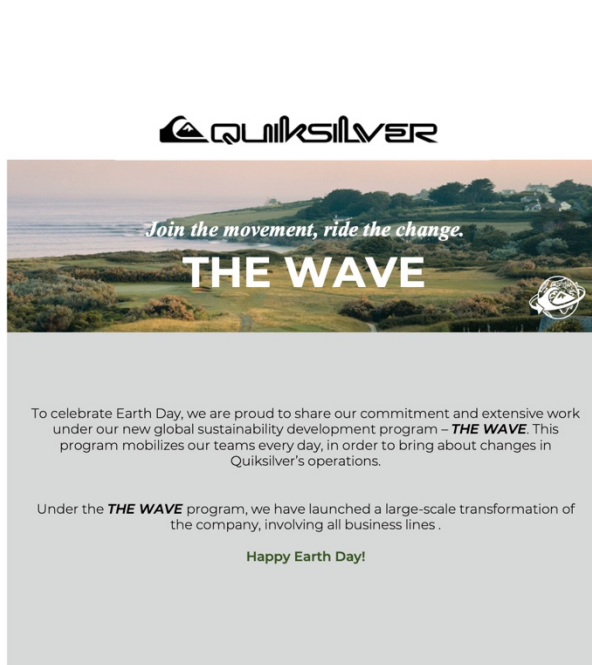
Thirdly, throughout the manipulations the surf brand Quiksilver was mentioned. While both surfers and non-surfers were questioned, particularly surfers, who are exposed to the brand regularly might have had an existing pre-disposition toward the brand. This might have created either a positive inclination to certain questions or a negative one. Regardless of the information that was presented to them.

To extend the current research, several areas for future research are recommended. First, future research should move beyond the general perspective provided in the current study and focus on specific geographic locations to identify potential variations in values and attitudes towards a collaborative partnership between brands and athlete activists. This will allow for a more comprehensive understanding across different regions and enable firms to target specific groups more precisely. Also, based on existing literature the study at hand focused on the changes in

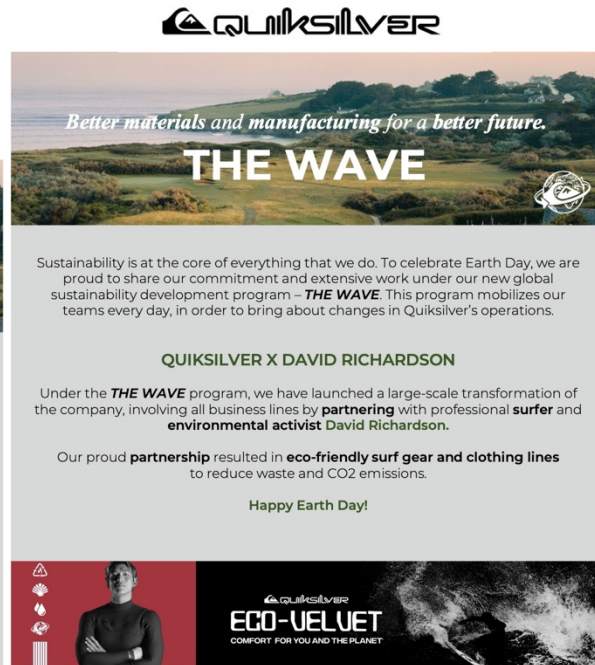
consumers' valuations of the sportswear (surf) brand through the partnership. Future research should focus on exploring the reciprocal perception and evaluate if consumers' perception of the athlete activists is negatively impacted by partnering with brands that are presently considered unsustainable. Finally, future research could focus solely on surfers as a target audience. Surfers may have different values and behaviors compared to the general population and thus, react differently to collaborative partnerships.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Stimuli



Stimuli A: Control Scenario



Stimuli B: Product-Based



Stimuli C: Education-based

Appendix 2: Survey Questionnaire

“Hey there, master thesis survey participants!

We are thrilled to have you here and cannot wait to hear your thoughts and opinions on surfing and the industry!

Do not worry about hurting anyone's feelings, this survey is 100% anonymous, so feel free to let loose and tell us everything. And remember your voice matters, so please finish the entire survey to make sure your opinions are heard loud and clear! Also, participating in this survey is 100% voluntary. You may withdraw from this survey at any time without any consequences.

IMPORTANT: The brand referenced in this questionnaire is in no way involved in this research study. They are solely used as references. The study is intended for academic and research purposes only. It is not meant to promote or endorse a mentioned brand.

The survey should take approximately 8 minutes. Thank you for joining us on this adventure!

If you have any questions or are interested in the results of the survey, please contact: [s-
vkaufels@ucp.pt](mailto:s-
vkaufels@ucp.pt)

Viktoria”

Introduction of brand



Quiksilver is a surf brand, which was founded in 1969 in Australia. Quiksilver is known for producing high-quality and trendy surf apparel (e.g., wetsuits, boardshorts, etc.) and accessories. Using cutting-edge technology in the manufacturing process, they are the top choice for surfers of all levels.

Q1: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements:
(1 - Strongly Disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree)

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
Quiksilver respects moral norms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quiksilver always adheres to the law.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quiksilver avoids damaging behavior at all costs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quiksilver is a responsible brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quiksilver is a good brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quiksilver will make a decision only after careful consideration of the potential positive or negative consequences for all those involved.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q2: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding trust:
(1 - Strongly Disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree)

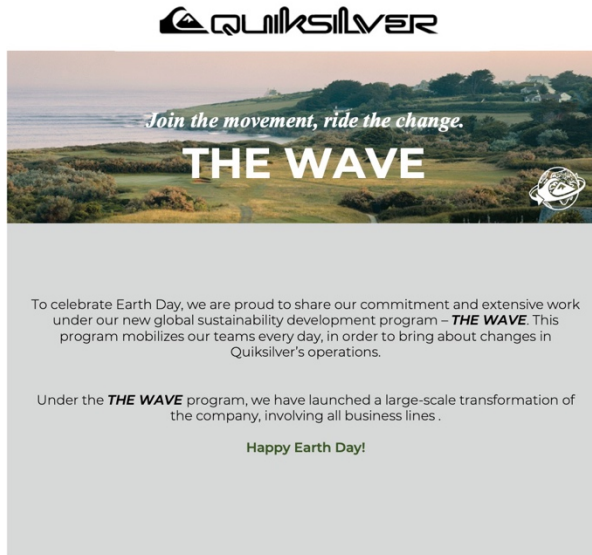
	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
I trust Quiksilver.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
Quiksilver delivers what it promises.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Q3: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding purchase intent:
(1 - Strongly Disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree)

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
I have purchased a product by Quiksilver in the past.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
I would purchase a product by Quiksilver in the future.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

On the next page, you will be presented with **an announcement of Quiksilver regarding their sustainability program**. Please take your time and review the announcement carefully **before** answering the questions.

(Example Used: Control Scenario)



Q4: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements concerning possible collaborations in Quiksilver's THE WAVE program: (1 - Strongly Disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree)

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
It is a global sustainability development program by Quiksilver alone.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
It is a global sustainability development program by Quiksilver partnering with an athlete activist.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Q5: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements concerning Quiksilver's THE WAVE program: (1 - Strongly Disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree)

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
Quiksilver has partnered with an athlete activist to launch an eco-friendly surf gear and clothing line	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Quiksilver has partnered with an athlete activist to launch an eco-school program and beach clean-ups.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Quiksilver has not partnered with an athlete activist							

Read the announcement by Quiksilver **again** to ensure that you understood all the information **before** proceeding to the next page. You will not be able to go back. Under consideration of the announcement, please answer the next questions.

Q6: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements under consideration of the THE WAVE program: (1 - Strongly Disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree)

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
Quiksilver respects moral norms.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
Quiksilver always adheres to the law.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
Quiksilver avoids damaging behavior at all costs.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
Quiksilver is a responsible brand.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
Quiksilver is a good brand.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
Quiksilver will make a decision only after careful consideration of the potential positive or negative consequences for all those involved.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Q7: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding trust under consideration of the THE WAVE program: (1 - Strongly Disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree)

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
I trust Quiksilver.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Quiksilver delivers what it promises.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Q8: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding purchase intent under consideration of the THE WAVE program: (1 - Strongly Disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree)

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
I would purchase a product by Quiksilver in the future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q9: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements: (1 - Strongly Disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree)

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
I am educated when it comes to environmental issues in the surf industry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am educated when it comes to the impact surfing has on the environment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am concerned about the environment and worry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

about climate change.							
I consider how my day-to-day actions affect the environment.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
I feel a connectedness to nature and it is part of my personality.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
I participate in nature conservation efforts (e.g., planting trees, beach clean-up).	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
I talk with others about environmental issues (e.g., partner, friends)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
I use online tools (e.g., Instagram, Tiktok) to raise awareness about environmental issues.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
I participate in community / educational events, which focus on environmental awareness.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Q10: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding athlete activism*: (1 - Strongly Disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree)

*Athlete activism refers to the use of an athlete's platform, influence, and public voice to bring attention and create change around social, political, and environmental issues.

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
When athlete activists speak out on environmental issues, I pay more attention to it.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
When athlete activists speak out on environmental issues, I believe it is genuine.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
When athlete activists speak out on environmental issues, I believe it creates greater awareness among the community.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
When athlete activists speak out on environmental issues, I believe they possess the necessary expertise to speak out on it.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

When athlete activists engage in sustainable actions, I think they are more believable than those of brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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You almost made it! Yeah! Only some demographics left:

Q11: What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary
- Prefer not to say

Q12: What is your age?

Q13: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than High School
- High School
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Professional Degree
- Others
- Prefer not to say.

Q14: What is your occupation?

- Student (High School)
- Student (University)
- Full-time employment
- Part-time employment
- Seasonal worker
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Prefer not to say.

Q15: Where do you come from?

Q16: What is your current annual income?

- Under €10,000
- €10,000 - €19,999
- €20,000 - €29,999
- €30,000 - €39,999
- €40,000 - €49,999
- €50,000 - €74,999
- €75,000 - €99,999
- €100,000 - €150,000
- Over €150,000
- Do not want to disclose

Appendix 3: Manipulation Check 1

	Type of Athlete Activism				<i>t-Test</i>
	Control		Product		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
It is a global sustainability development program by Quiksilver alone.	5.80	1.48	2.69	2.01	9.80***
It is a global sustainability development program by Quiksilver partnering with an athlete activist	2.31	1.05	6.18	1.21	-15.72***
	Control		Education		<i>t-Test</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
	It is a global sustainability development program by Quiksilver alone.	5.80	1.48	2.44	
It is a global sustainability development program by Quiksilver partnering with an athlete activist.	2.31	1.51	6.10	1.33	-14.75***

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq 1$

Appendix 4: Manipulation Check 2

	Type of Athlete Activism				<i>t-Test</i>
	Control		Product		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Quiksilver has partnered with an athlete activist to launch an eco-friendly surf gear and clothing.	2.51	1.60	6.24	1.07	-15.22***
Quiksilver has partnered with an athlete activist to launch an eco-school program and beach clean-ups.	2.48	1.67	2.24	1.58	0.80
Quiksilver has not partnered with an athlete activist.	5.75	1.34	1.90	1.42	15.46***

	Control		Education		<i>t-Test</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
	Quiksilver has partnered with an athlete activist to launch an eco-friendly surf gear and clothing.	2.51	1.60	2.65	
Quiksilver has partnered with an athlete activist to launch an eco-school program and beach clean-ups.	2.48	1.67	6.24	.99	-15.20***

Quiksilver has not partnered with an athlete activist.	5.75	1.34	1.87	1.35	16.03***
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Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq 1$

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