

FILIPINO CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION TOWARD
GENTLEWOMAN THAI FASHION BRAND

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An Independent Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements
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การรับรู้ของผู้บริโภคชาวฟิลิปปินส์ที่มีต่อตราสินค้าแฟชั่นไทย GENTLEWOMAN



นายกาเรียด โลเรนโซ เดล คาร์เมน

สารนิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาโทสาขาสถาปัตยกรรมมหาบัณฑิต
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GENTLEWOMAN THAI FASHION BRAND
By Mr. Gabriel Lorenzo Del Carmen
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Thesis Advisor Assistant Professor Dr. Jessada Salathong, Ph.D.

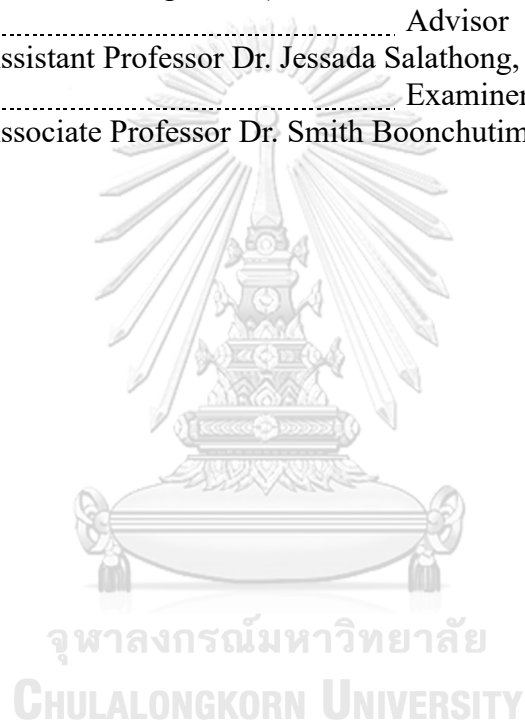
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งานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพนี้ศึกษาการรับรู้ของผู้บริโภคชาวฟิลิปปินส์ต่อแบรนด์ GENTLEWOMAN และคุณภาพของข้อความการเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคมของแบรนด์ผ่านสื่ออิเล็กทรอนิกส์ ผู้วิจัยได้เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลโดยใช้การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก จากกลุ่มตัวอย่างเพศหญิงชาวฟิลิปปินส์จำนวน 10 คน อายุระหว่าง 20 ถึง 35 ปี ซึ่งถือเป็นกลุ่มลูกค้าเป้าหมายของแบรนด์ GENTLEWOMAN จากผลการวิจัยพบว่า ผู้บริโภคชาวฟิลิปปินส์มีการรับรู้ที่ดีมากต่อแบรนด์ พวกเขายังพบว่าราคาเป็นที่น่าพึงพอใจ แม้ว่าจะซื้อผ่านช่องทางจัดจำหน่ายอย่างไม่ทางการหรือทางการก็ตาม นอกจากนี้ กลุ่มตัวอย่างมีการรับรู้ต่อคุณภาพสินค้าที่ค่อนข้างสูง เนื่องจากพวกเขาเห็นว่าสินค้ามีความหลากหลายและผลิตออกมาได้อย่างมีคุณภาพสุดท้านี้ แม้ว่าประโยชน์ในเชิงอารมณ์จะมีข้อก้ำกัในผลวิจัยอยู่บ้าง แต่ผู้บริโภคพบว่าการใช้สินค้าของแบรนด์สะท้อนตัวตนของพวกเขาที่มีต่อแบรนด์ และเป็นประโยชน์แก่พวกเขาในเชิงอารมณ์ นอกเหนือจากนี้ ในแง่ของการเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคมของแบรนด์ ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่า การรับรู้คุณภาพของข้อมูล การรับรู้ความถูกต้อง และแรงจูงใจที่รับรู้ มีคุณภาพต่ำและไม่ชัดเจน เป็นผลให้กลุ่มตัวอย่างบางส่วนไม่สนใจภาพโดยรวม อย่างไรก็ตาม กลุ่มตัวอย่างโดยส่วนใหญ่มองว่าแบรนด์นี้เป็นแบรนด์ที่ดี พวกเขายังมีการให้ข้อเสนอเพิ่มเติมในฐานะลูกค้า โดยการถามหาช่องทางการจัดจำหน่ายอย่างเป็นทางการในประเทศฟิลิปปินส์ ซึ่งสิ่งนี้แสดงให้เห็นถึงความต้องการของผู้บริโภคต่อสินค้าที่มีความเรียบง่าย แบรนด์ที่มีความพยายามในการร่วมมือที่ชัดเจนกับองค์กรที่ไม่แสวงหาผลกำไร (NGOs) และแบรนด์ที่มีการขยายประเด็นต่อกลุ่มคนที่มีความหลากหลายทางเพศ (LGBTQIA+) ดังนั้น งานวิจัยนี้จึงสามารถสรุปได้ว่าแบรนด์ GENTLEWOMAN รวมถึงแบรนด์ไทยอื่นๆ สามารถนำผลงานวิจัยนี้มาพิจารณา เพื่อเข้าถึงตลาดของผู้บริโภคชาวฟิลิปปินส์ในอนาคตได้



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Gabriel Lorenzo Del Carmen : FILIPINO CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION
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This individual study explores the Filipino Consumer Perceptions of Thai Fashion Brand GENTLEWOMAN and the quality of the brand's activism messaging through social media. The data was collected using in-depth interviews on 10 respondents, Filipino females, aged between 20 to 35, the average target consumer of GENTLEWOMAN products. The findings suggest that Filipino Consumers have a very positive perception of GENTLEWOMAN. They find the price to be good, regardless of whether it was purchased through the gray market or through official distribution. Quality is also perceived highly as consumers find the products to be well-constructed and very versatile. Lastly, consumers find themselves represented in the brand and as it provides them with emotional benefits. Although, they still have some reservations. Regarding their brand activism, the study suggests that the brand's activism (Perceived Argument Quality, Perceived Authenticity, and Perceived Motivations) is thought to be of lower quality and doubtful leading to some respondents disregarding it overall. Fortunately, the consensus is that the brand is still seen as a brand for "good". Respondents also provided the study with consumer feedback like asking for official distribution within the Philippines, showing a preference for understated and simpler pieces, more tangible work with NGOs and activism efforts, and expanding the causes to include LGBTQIA+ issues. The research also outlines recommendations that the GENTLEWOMAN brand or other Thai brands can take into consideration when pursuing Filipino Consumers.

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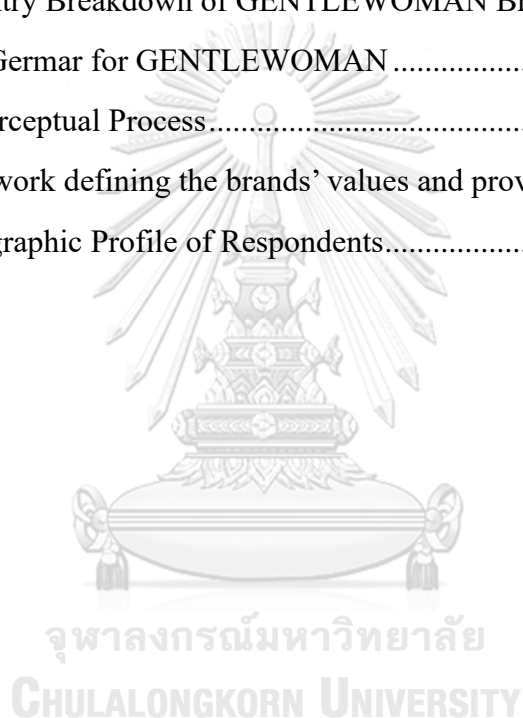
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale of the Study

Over time, Thailand's textile and garment sector has achieved significant success, primarily due to its competitive advantages in labor and affordable real estate, coupled with the Asian economic crisis of the 1990s, which boosted the appeal of Thai products to global consumers. The Thai industry has particularly excelled in manufacturing various products, including fabric, children's clothing, sportswear, casual attire, and women's fashion. The industry's structure has evolved to integrate both downstream and midstream manufacturing facilities, forming a cluster located on the outskirts of Bangkok, as well as in the Nonthaburi and Samutsakorn provinces in central Thailand. A report from Thailand Textile Institute (2009) indicates that the country hosts more than 3,500 textile mills and apparel manufacturers, with the majority being small and medium-sized enterprises (Thailand Textile Institute, 2009).

The textile and apparel industry stands as one of Thailand's primary contributors to GDP, exports, and job creation (Supachalasai, 1998). According to a report by the Thailand Textile Institute (2009), overall textile and apparel exports have shown moderate growth, ranging from 2 percent to 6 percent annually between 2005 and 2007. Similarly, positive growth was observed in various categories of woven fabrics, including cotton, man-made fibers, silk, silk waste, and other textile materials.

Fast-forward to the 2020's, we see the emergence of multiple Thai brands with global appeal. Though some have made active efforts to expand to other countries, such as the case of popular Thai fashion brand - Jaspal (Jitpleecheep, 2022), there are still many Thai fashion brands that only rely on word-of-mouth and the occasional tourist to spread the word about their brand.

Also most of these brands arguably “follow trends that are popular in the West” (Bastin, 2017) and therefore are a rehash of western views on fashion. In his opinion piece, Bastin posits that local Thai fashion brands are actively contemplating international expansion. He emphasizes that the success of this expansion depends on the choice of brand strategy, particularly the brand image and associations. Thai brands are at a crossroads, debating whether to maintain their local Thai image with cultural associations or adopt a new image for the international market.

His article highlights the strength of Thailand's country image as a popular and exotic holiday destination with attributes like "tropical," "colorful," and "paradise." These positive perceptions are seen as advantageous for Thai fashion brands seeking to enter overseas markets. The author's research aligns with this image, suggesting that maintaining this country's image is crucial for Thai brands as they go global.

Furthermore, the article underscores the importance of Thai fashion brands preserving their ties to local culture and national identity, even as they expand internationally. It suggests that Bangkok's emergence as a major fashion hub with its unique blend of culture and exoticism can contribute to the success of Thai fashion on the global stage. Although he also cautions and advises when considering Western influences on younger Thai fashion consumers, emphasizing the importance of maintaining traditional values and cultural identity. He stresses the significance of leveraging Thailand's exotic image and cultural associations for the success of Thai fashion brands in international markets.

Figure 1.1.1: GENTLEWOMAN Brand Logo

GENTLE WOMAN

Source: GENTLEWOMAN Website (2023)

Enter, the Thai brand GENTLEWOMAN, an entirely homegrown brand popular amongst younger Thai women and a rapidly growing international audience despite not making any active efforts in advertising across the pond. While not actively expanding to other markets, they arguably hit all of Bastin's marks for properly expanding and appealing to global consumers.



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Figure 1.1.2: Raya Pang showcasing GENTLEWOMAN x DHL Collaboration



Source: DHL Website (2023)

Thai brand GENTLEWOMAN was first established in 2018. With its trendy and fast-fashion nature, it was able to create a name for itself in its home country, Thailand. (GENTLEWOMAN, n.d.) The idea of GENTLEWOMAN was conceived because the founder, Raya “Pang” Wannapinyo found it hard to find clothes that would fit her petite frame. Fast forward to the present, GENTLEWOMAN is a proud woman-owned brand that seeks to “empower women to assert themselves in a confident and stylish way” (Prestige Thailand, 2022) paving the way for women empowerment in an otherwise conservative Thailand. Now, with more than 15 stores and a flagship store in central Bangkok, the brand is experiencing significant growth. (Yahoo!, 2023).

Figure 1.1.3 Figure 1.1.3: GENTLEWOMAN Tote Bag Promotional Material

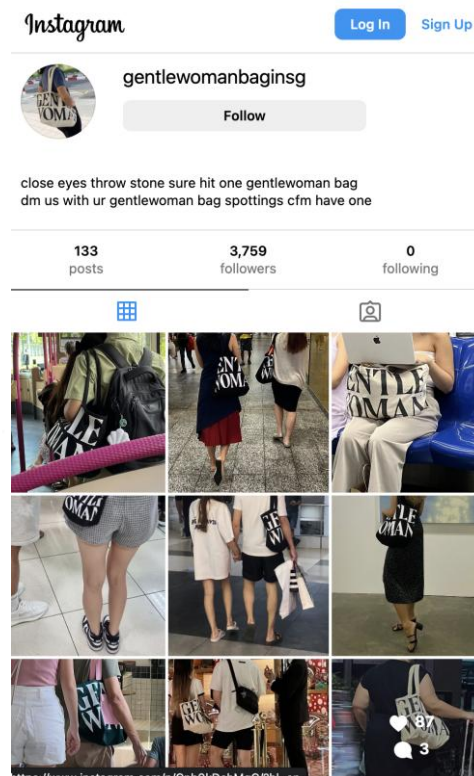


Source: Facebook (2022)

Although, it's not the clothes that are at the forefront of their rise, it's their tote bags. Many female college students and young adult workers go about their day around Thailand in a trendy GENTLEWOMAN bag. Touting it as Thailand's current Must Have "It-Brand" (Pigabyte, 2023).

Thanks to Social Media and the internet, the brand's presence outside Thailand is also growing with interest from other countries like Singapore where the trendy tote bag is said "to be everywhere" (Yahoo!, 2023) and a growing following from Chinese consumers. Reports have mentioned Chinese women waiting in line in front of the flagship store in Bangkok and "buying everything off the shelves" (环球博讯, 2023), further solidifying the brand's popularity.

Figure 1.1.4: Singaporean Social Media Accounts featuring GENTLEWOMAN

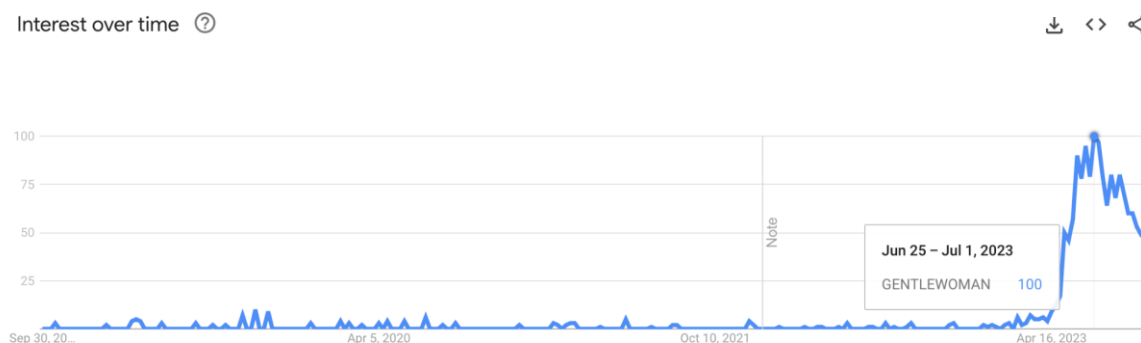


Source: @gentlewomanbagsing, Instagram (2023)

The Philippines, where arguably the brand is the most popular outside of Thailand, many women clamor to buy from the gray or reseller market. Most Filipino women engage in “Pasabuy” because there is no retail presence in the country. “Pasabuy” is the Filipino version of “Pre-ordering” in Thai colloquialism. Multiple “Personal Shopper” Instagram accounts are also popping up with some of them having thousands of followers. Further noting the lengths Filipina women go through to get their hands on a GENTLEWOMAN bag.

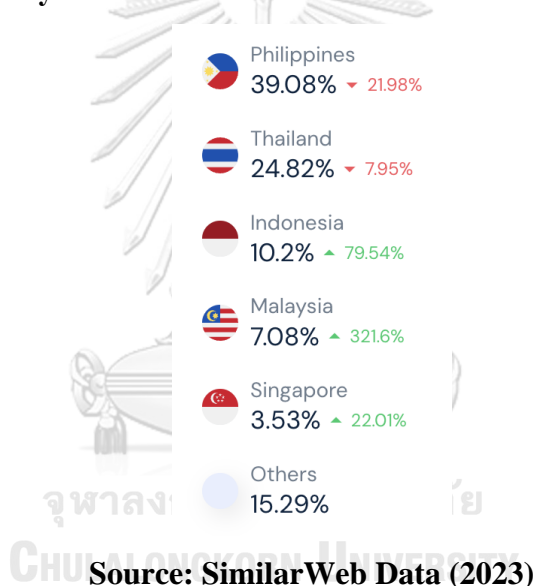
Interestingly, the interest for GENTLEWOMAN has boomed starting 2023 as outlined in the following Google Trends report. Reaching peak interest in June 2023. It is important to know that Google Trends reports are based on Google Searches. The following report was generated on the “GENTLEWOMAN” keyword.

Figure 1.1.5: Interest for GENTLEWOMAN in The Philippines



Source: Google Trends Dashboard (2023)

Figure 1.1.6: Country Breakdown of GENTLEWOMAN Brand Site Traffic



Why Filipino Consumers?

Philippine consumers are chosen as the subject of the study because the Philippines is regarded as one of the, if not the, fastest growing economy in Asia. The Philippine economy grew at a pace of 7.6% in 2022, the fastest rate of economic growth recorded by the Philippines since 1976 and it is on-track to be a \$1 Trillion Dollar economy by 2033. (Biswas, 2023)

It is implied that GENTLEWOMAN is starting to explore the Filipino consumer by actively recruiting popular Filipino YouTuber Rei Germar in their most recent brand campaign.

Figure 1.1.7: Rei Germar for GENTLEWOMAN



Source: GENTLEWOMAN (2023)

Thailand and the Philippines share some cultural similarities, such as a love for vibrant colors, tropical aesthetics, and a sense of hospitality. GENTLEWOMAN and other Thai brands can leverage this as low-hanging fruit when planning their expansion strategies. (Bohwongprasert, 2013).

This is an opportunity for the brand to further understand and strengthen its proposition to an audience that already is infatuated with the brand. This may also help other Thai brands build their credibility and expand their business amongst Filipino consumers.

In summary, this study will focus on exploring the Filipino consumers' perceptions on GENTLEWOMAN and their thoughts on the brand activism of the brand. The concept of consumer perceptions will be used in this study to gather a deeper understanding of what consumers feel and perceive about the brand. While the concept of Brand Communications and Activism will be used to see if Filipino consumers actually see and understand the brand as intended.

1.2 Research Objective

1. To explore the perceptions of Filipino consumers on the brand GENTLEWOMAN through social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X - *formerly Twitter*).
2. To explore Filipino Consumers' thoughts on GENTLEWOMAN's brand communication and activism through social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X - *formerly Twitter*).

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of Filipino consumers on the brand GENTLEWOMAN through social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X - *formerly Twitter*)?
2. What are the Filipino Consumers thoughts on GENTLEWOMAN's brand communication and activism through social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X - *formerly Twitter*)?

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study will employ a qualitative research approach to delve into the perceptions of female Filipino consumers and their thoughts on the Brand Communications of the Thai brand GENTLEWOMAN. A total of 20 carefully chosen participants will partake in a focus-group discussion, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of their viewpoints, experiences, emotions, and outlooks. These participants will be divided into two

distinct focus groups. The criteria for inclusion entail being Filipino women aged 20 to 35, have engaged with GENTLEWOMAN on social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X - formerly Twitter) within the last year, and have purchased a GENTLEWOMAN bag at least once in the last year.

Group 1 will comprise Filipino females living in Thailand, while Group 2 will encompass Filipino females residing in the Philippines. Employing a non-probability sampling method, the researcher will select units for sampling based on specific criteria and personal judgment. Conducting the focus group discussions on Zoom is a strategic choice, as the researcher is currently not situated in the study's country of focus.

1.5 Operational Definitions

Social Media Marketing encompasses the strategic use of social media platforms and technologies by organizations to create, distribute, and engage with content tailored to their target audience. This dynamic field combines marketing principles with digital communication strategies to build brand awareness, foster customer engagement, and achieve marketing objectives. For this study, the concerned platforms include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X - *formerly Twitter*. This is the primary way for the brand to communicate to its consumers.

Consumer Value Perception is the process in which individuals select, organize and interpret stimuli that are gaged via the five human senses, which consist of sight, taste, smell, sound, and touch (Solomon, 2019). In this study, perceptions towards GENTLEWOMAN refer to how consumers interpret and give meaning to GENTLEWOMAN as a brand.

Brand Communication constitutes the strategic dissemination of a brand's identity, values, and messages to its target audience through various channels and mediums. This multifaceted process aims to establish a distinctive brand image, foster consumer engagement, and convey brand promises effectively (Keller, 1993).

Brand Activism as defined by Sarkar and Kotler (2018) consists of business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to promote or impede improvements in society. Brand activism has played a vital role in brand preferences and purchase decisions, buying a product has become a way of having a voice, making a statement and exercising power. Consumers consider the products they buy as an extension of their view, values, beliefs, and lifestyles, considering it a form of political and social act, and an opportunity to make an impact. In GENTLEWOMAN's case, they advocate for Women Empowerment. Specifically quoting that they aim to “empower women to assert themselves in a confident and stylish way” (*Prestige Thailand, 2022*).

1.6 Expected Benefits from the Study

The findings from this study will uncover insights that may prove to be useful for fashion brands that wish to target Female Filipino consumers. By getting a deeper understanding of what appeals to them, other brands may be able to replicate what GENTLEWOMAN is doing right and what it is doing wrong.

It will also confirm if GENTLEWOMAN's brand communications and activism is what they intend in the first place. Should the findings of the study not confirm their original intentions then it may be used as a way to re-strategize their communications.

Lastly, it may be an interesting read for those who are particularly engrossed in Fashion-related topics.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to explore the perceptions of Filipino Consumers on GENTLEWOMAN and their thoughts on their Brand Communications and Activism via Social Media Marketing, we will discuss concepts that may explain the phenomenon. This second chapter will attempt to provide a better understanding of what constitutes the concepts discussed. This literature review is reviewed and obtained from previous research, journals and related articles.

2.1 Related Theories and Concepts

2.1.1 Social Media Marketing (SMM)

Many would say that we live in the age of Social Media Marketing but what does really entail? First we must understand what Social Media is. Boyd and Ellison (2008) define Social Media as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Social Media also allows the electronic exchange of thoughts and communication between users and in the world of Fashion Brands, marketing on Social Media is of utmost paramount as it affects multiple brand attributes.

In a study conducted by Dewi et al. in 2022, their findings strongly suggest that social media marketing has a significant positive influence on both brand awareness and purchase intention in the fashion industry. The utilization of social media as a marketing tool increases brand awareness, which in turn influences consumers' purchase intention.

Godey et al, 2016 posits that Social Media Marketing can be expressed in 5 dimensions:

2.1.1.1 Entertainment

The experience of entertainment on social media arises from the enjoyment and playfulness it offers (Agichtein et al., 2008). From a hedonic perspective, social media users are seen as individuals seeking pleasure, finding entertainment, and deriving enjoyment from the experience (Manthiou, Chiang, & Tang, 2013). Numerous studies underscore entertainment as a significant motivator for engaging with social media (Kaye, 2007; Muntinga et al., 2011; Park et al., 2009). For instance, Shao (2009) highlights entertainment as a potent driver behind the consumption of user-generated content (UGC). Park et al. (2009) also note that entertainment plays a role in encouraging participation in social networks. Muntinga et al. (2011) discover that social media users engage with brand-related content for the sake of enjoyment, relaxation, and pastime. Courtois, Mechant, De Marez, and Verleye (2009) argue that relaxation and the desire for escapism, elements associated with entertainment, motivate the sharing of content on social media.

2.1.1.2 Interaction

The dynamics of social media are reshaping the way brands engage with their customers (Gallagher and Ransbotham, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008) emphasize that social interaction plays a pivotal role in motivating the creation of user-generated content. Social media platforms serve as spaces for consumer assistance, discussion, and the exchange of ideas. Muntinga et al. (2011) highlight how social interaction describes users who actively contribute to brand-related social media platforms, seeking to connect with like-minded individuals and engage in discussions about specific products or brands.

Zhu and Chen (2015) categorize social media into two distinct groups: profile-based and content-based, depending on the nature of connection and interaction. Profile-based social media primarily focus on individual members, with content related to the members themselves, aiming to encourage users to connect based on shared interests. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp exemplify profile-based social media as they emphasize the user behind the profile.

Conversely, content-based social media place their primary emphasis on the content, discussions, and comments surrounding the content provided by a particular profile. Platforms such as Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube fall into this category, as users connect based on their affinity for the content itself.

To foster meaningful interaction, brands must share unique content, reflect their members' profiles, actively engage in discussions, and provide practical assistance. Establishing this rapport can enhance credibility and build affinity (Manthiou et al., 2013). In this study, interaction is defined as the exchange of information and opinions with others.

2.1.1.3 Trendiness

Social media platforms serve as sources for the latest news and trending discussions (Naaman, Becker, & Gravano, 2011) and are integral channels for product searches. Consumers increasingly rely on various social media types to access information, as they consider them to be more trustworthy compared to conventional corporate-sponsored promotional efforts (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Vollmer and Precourt, 2008).

As outlined by Muntinga et al. (2011), trendy content on social media encompasses four distinct sub-motivations: surveillance, knowledge-

seeking, pre-purchase research, and inspiration. Surveillance involves keeping an eye on and staying updated about one's social environment. Knowledge-seeking pertains to consumers seeking brand-related information to benefit from others' insights and expertise, enhancing their understanding of products or brands. Pre-purchase research involves reading product reviews or engaging in discussions within brand communities to make well-informed purchasing decisions. Lastly, inspiration involves consumers finding new ideas by engaging with brand-related content, serving as a source of creative inspiration. For instance, consumers may explore images of others' clothing to gather ideas for their own fashion choices. Based on the aforementioned discussion, this study defines trendiness as the dissemination of the most current and fashionable information about luxury brands.

2.1.1.4 Customization

The concept of customization refers to the extent to which a service can be tailored to meet an individual's specific preferences (Schmenner, 1986). Through personalizing their online platforms, brands can effectively customize their image and express uniqueness, fostering stronger brand affinity and loyalty among their audience (Martin & Todorov, 2010). In the realm of social media, customization pertains to the intended target audience for posted messages.

As outlined by Zhu and Chen (2015), there are two distinct types of posts based on the level of message customization: customized messages and broadcasts. Customized messages are directed at specific individuals or a small audience (e.g., Facebook posts), while broadcasts consist of messages aimed at anyone with an interest (e.g., Twitter tweets).

2.1.1.5 Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

Social media connects electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) with online interactions among consumers discussing brands (Muntinga et al.,

2011). Research suggests that eWOM holds greater credibility, empathy, and relevance for consumers compared to information created by marketers on the internet (Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006). Social media platforms are particularly suited for facilitating eWOM because consumers freely share brand-related information with their friends, peers, and others (Kim and Ko, 2012; Vollmer and Precourt, 2008). Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury (2009) conducted a study on WOM activity related to brands on Twitter, revealing that consumer posts trigger information dissemination processes that encompass branding comments, sentiments, and opinions.

As outlined by Chu and Kim (2011), researchers can explore eWOM on social media from three angles: seeking opinions, offering opinions, and forwarding opinions. Consumers with a strong tendency to seek opinions typically search for information and advice from fellow consumers when making purchase decisions. Those with a propensity for giving opinions, often referred to as opinion leaders, wield significant influence over the attitudes and behaviors of other consumers.

Lastly, online forwarding is a specific aspect of eWOM that facilitates the flow of information. In the context of this paper, WOM pertains to the extent to which consumers of fashion brands share information and post content on social media.

2.1.2 Brand Communication (in Social Media)

It is a multifaceted process encompassing the strategic dissemination of brand messages and the management of brand perception among target audiences. It serves as a vital component of marketing and brand management, contributing significantly to a brand's identity, reputation, and overall success in the market.

Brand communication within the realm of social media can be defined as any form of brand-related communication that is disseminated through social media platforms, providing internet users with the means to access, share, engage with, contribute to, and collaboratively shape (Alhabash, Mundel, and Hussain, 2017). This expansive definition distinguishes itself from recent articles that have delved into reviews and research agendas concerning social media.

On one hand, certain articles have embraced a somewhat narrow perspective, construing advertising as "persuasive and deliberate communication orchestrated by advertising professionals, strategically placed on third-party websites" (Knoll, 2016). This viewpoint, however, tends to overlook various forms of brand communication inherent to social media, including brand-owned pages and interactions that either initiate or respond to user-generated content (UGC).

On the other hand, some articles have embraced an all-encompassing approach, exploring the domains of digital media, social media, and mobile marketing collectively (e.g., Lamberton and Stephen, 2016). Nevertheless, these articles lack the specificity required to provide clear directives for future research dedicated to brand communication within the context of social media. Consequently, there exists a need for a more refined and precise understanding of brand communication within the unique landscape of social media, one that acknowledges its distinct forms and nuances while offering concrete guidance for future research endeavors.

2.1.3 Perception

Solomon (2019) posits that perception is a constantly evolving and complex phenomenon that motivates marketers and researchers to delve into the psychological processes guiding consumer responses to a wide array of stimuli, including marketing strategies and sensory cues. The idea of perception enables us to comprehend the swift process of how consumers perceive things from their point of view. In today's society, we find ourselves in a sensory-driven marketplace where new marketing strategies and campaigns are devised regularly to boost sales and foster connections between brands and consumers. Therefore, it becomes crucial to grasp the foundational principles of perception and the cognitive processes associated with it. Theoretical experts, scholars, and psychologists have identified numerous concepts intertwined with consumer perception, and over time, these concepts have significantly influenced contemporary marketing practices.

Definition

Perception is the cognitive process through which individuals interpret and make sense of sensory information received from their environment. It involves the brain's ability to organize, process, and assign meaning to sensory inputs, including visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory stimuli. It is a complex and dynamic process influenced by an individual's previous experiences, cultural background, emotions, and cognitive biases.

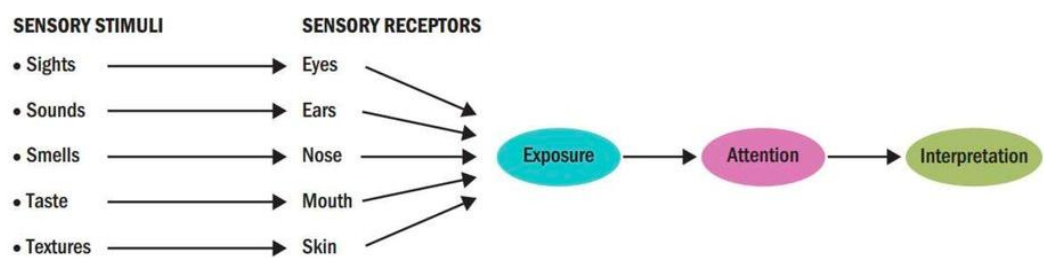
In the context of marketing and consumer behavior, perception plays a critical role. It determines how consumers perceive and evaluate products, brands, advertisements, and other marketing stimuli. Marketers aim to shape consumer perceptions through various strategies, such as branding, product design, advertising, and sensory cues, to influence consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions. (Solomon, 2019)

Perception encompasses several key components, including sensory processing, attention, interpretation, and evaluation. It is a fundamental concept in understanding how consumers interact with and respond to the marketing efforts of businesses and brands.

Extensive research conducted by communication experts has revealed that sensory marketing represents a strategic approach to shaping consumers' interactions with brands, products, and services. Sensory marketing revolves around the utilization of stimuli that activate consumers' sensory receptors. These sensory strategies are designed to elevate the overall customer experience and cultivate favorable brand perceptions.

The Perceptual Process

Figure 2.1: The Perceptual Process



Source: Solomon, M. (2019)

According to Solomon, 2019, the perceptual process is a fundamental cognitive mechanism that underlies human beings' ability to make sense of their surrounding environment and interpret sensory input. It is a multifaceted process deeply ingrained in the field of psychology, cognitive science, and neurobiology, and it plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' perception of the world.

The perceptual process commences with the reception of sensory information through specialized sensory receptors, including but not limited to the eyes, ears, skin, nose, and tongue.

This is also the first stage, or simply called **Exposure**. These receptors are finely attuned to specific types of sensory stimuli, such as light, sound waves, touch, odorants, and tastants. They transform these external stimuli into electrochemical signals, which are then transmitted to the brain through the nervous system.

Upon reaching the brain, the sensory information is subjected to a sequence of intricate operations. The second stage involves **Attention**, where the brain initially extracts basic sensory features from the incoming data. For instance, in the visual domain, this might encompass recognizing colors, shapes, or movement patterns. In the auditory domain, it might involve identifying pitch, loudness, or sound direction. It acts as a selective filter, determining which aspects of the sensory input are prioritized for further processing. Attention guides an individual's focus and dictates what is ultimately perceived and remembered.

Subsequently, the perceptual process proceeds to perceptual organization, where the brain endeavors to integrate these basic sensory features into coherent perceptual experiences. This involves tasks such as grouping similar objects together, segregating objects from their backgrounds, and identifying patterns and forms within the sensory input.

Interpretation constitutes the next stage of the perceptual process. It is at this juncture that the brain assigns meaning to the sensory input by drawing upon past experiences, contextual information, and learned associations. Interpretation is inherently subjective, as it is influenced by an individual's unique background, culture, and prior encounters.

Ultimately, the perceptual process culminates in evaluation and response. At this stage, individuals form judgments, make decisions, and take actions based on their interpretation of the sensory input. These actions may range from

recognizing objects and people to assessing the desirability or threat of a situation.

In conclusion, the perceptual process is a complex and dynamic sequence of cognitive operations that enable individuals to comprehend and navigate their environment. It involves sensory reception, processing, organization, interpretation, attention, and evaluation. Understanding the intricacies of the perceptual process is essential not only in psychology but also in fields such as marketing, design, and human-computer interaction, where it holds significant implications for shaping user experiences and influencing behavior.

2.1.4 Consumer Value Perception

According to Diaz (2022), Consumer Value Perception delineates the extent to which a consumer is willing to invest in a particular product or service. It hinges upon the capacity of said product or service to fulfill consumer needs and evoke desire, particularly when contrasted with rival offerings.

Comprehending the customer's perception of value, gleaned through meticulous market research, serves as a strategic compass for businesses. It aids in precise positioning within the market landscape and enables targeted marketing efforts aimed at accentuating the most valued benefits by customers. These desirable aspects span a spectrum, encompassing factors such as convenience, affordability, aesthetic appeal, and the innovative nature of the design. Exploiting these attributes can significantly influence consumer attraction and purchasing decisions.

In their seminal article, "The Elements of Value," featured in the Harvard Business Review, Eric Almquist, John Senior, and Nicolas Bloch (2016) presented a comprehensive study that delineated 30 distinct elements contributing to perceived value. Their research acknowledged the elusive nature of consumer value, transcending mere price comparison to comprehend the multifaceted facets that consumers genuinely appreciate. This approach to the

elements of value expands upon Abraham Maslow's renowned "hierarchy of needs" by delving into the profound motivations that prompt customers to categorize specific products or services as convenient, superior in quality, or possessing other valued attributes.

Sweeney and Soutar (2001) developed a scale that measures Consumer Value Perception and posits that is expressed in 4 dimensions as follows.

Functional Dimension

Refers to the core benefit and basic utilities that drive the consumer based luxury value such as the quality, uniqueness, usability, reliability, and durability of the product (Sheth et al. 1991).

Financial Dimension

This pertains to the monetary worth of a product, quantified in terms of dollars and cents. It encapsulates the trade-off or relinquishment of resources or other products to acquire a specific item (Ahtola, 1984; Chapman, 1986; Mazumdar, 1986; Monroe & Krishnan, 1985).

Emotional Dimension

The Emotional dimension delves into a customer's personalized inclination towards consumption and encompasses subjective aspects such as materialism (Richins & Dawson, 1992), hedonistic indulgence, and self-identity value (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). This dimension captures the individual's subjective perceptions, desires, and the symbolic meanings associated with their consumption choices, exploring their relationship with possessions and the gratification derived from these items based on personal identity and enjoyment.

Social Dimension

The social dimension encapsulates the perceived utility that individuals derive from consuming products or services within their distinct social circles,

emphasizing factors like conspicuousness and prestige value. These aspects play a pivotal role in influencing how brands are evaluated and the likelihood of consumer brand engagement (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999, 2004; Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Brinberg & Plimpton, 1986; Kim, 1998). This dimension explores the significance of products or services in shaping social identity, status symbols, and the inherent value attributed to brands within specific social groups, ultimately impacting consumer behavior and purchase decisions.

2.1.5 Brand Activism

Brand activism represents a progression of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), wherein brands make decisions and produce content that benefits the communities and individuals impacted by their products. Going beyond CSR, brands actively take on visible roles in advocating for specific causes, typically centered around social, environmental, economic, or political issues. As target audiences often have varying interests, income levels, and demographics, they tend to prioritize certain issues over others. While some brands are concerned about potential backlash or alienation of a portion of their audience due to taking polarizing stances on political or social matters, others have recognized several advantages in adopting brand activism.

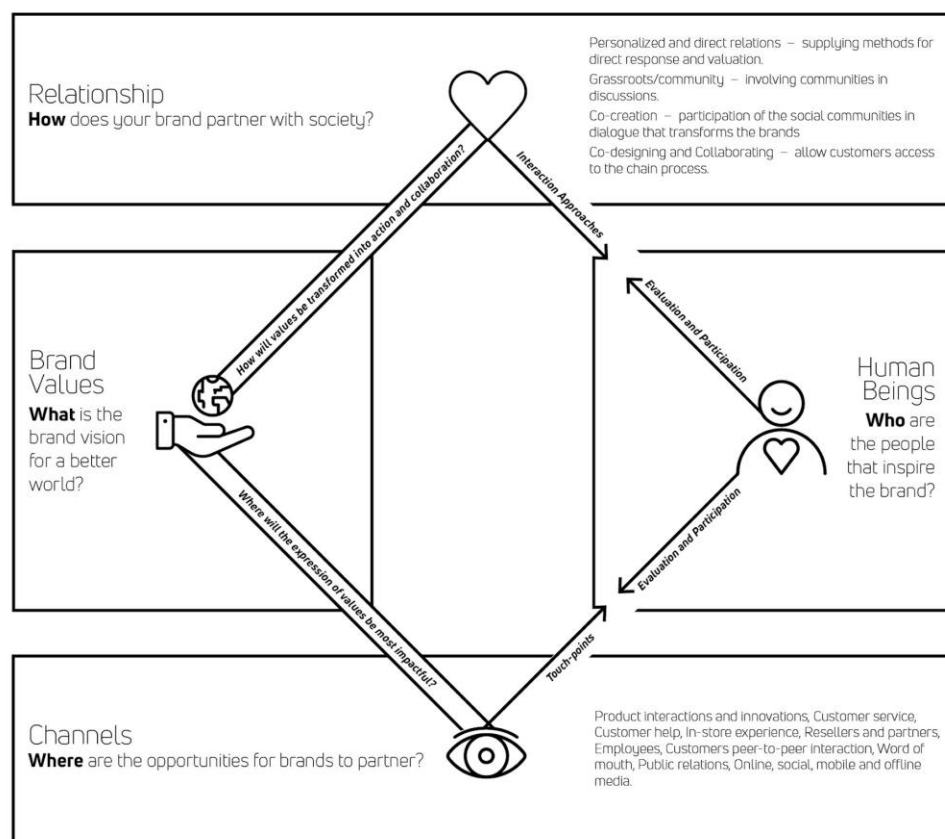
These advantages include setting the brand apart from competitors, gaining exposure through third-party blogs and influencers, fostering customer loyalty by aligning with their values, creating opportunities for consumers to become brand advocates by sharing advertisements and social media content to raise awareness and support shared values, and expanding the pool of potential hires due to increased awareness of the brand's values.

Sarkar and Kotler (2018) define brand activism as businesses' efforts to support or hinder social, political, economic, or environmental reform or the status quo, aiming to promote or oppose societal improvements. They categorize brand activism into six broad areas: Social activism (e.g., gender equality, education,

healthcare), Political activism (e.g., lobbying, voting, policy influence), Economic activism (e.g., tax policies, income equality), Workplace activism (e.g., labor and organizational issues), Environmental activism (e.g., pollution, emission control), and Legal activism (e.g., citizenship and employment laws).

Brand activism significantly influences consumer preferences and purchase decisions, with buying a product becoming a way to express one's voice, values, beliefs, and lifestyle. Consumers view their purchases as a form of political and social action, an opportunity to make a meaningful impact on the world.

Figure 2.2: Framework defining the brands' values and proving them into action



Source: Gurkov, I. (2020)

Figure 2.4 illustrates the interaction between brand values and individuals. Brands adopt specific values and address societal issues, which they translate into action and collaboration with society. This involves personalized

messaging, engaging the audience in discussions, co-creating content, and collaborating with the community. The choice of advertising methods and media selection enables brands to connect with their audience, allowing them to evaluate and actively participate in sharing values that resonate with their core beliefs.

To understand Brand Activism is to understand the progression from CSR. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is commonly understood as "the managerial duty to actively safeguard and enhance both the well-being of society as a whole and the interests of organizations" (Blomstrom and Davis, 1975). It signifies a company's commitment to minimizing or eradicating any harmful impacts while maximizing its long-term positive influence on society (Mohr et al., 2001). Previous research has shown a positive, albeit sometimes modest, link between CSR and the financial performance of corporations (Du et al. 2007; Lichtenstein et al. 2004; Stanwick and Stanwick, 1998). CSR has been found to elicit favorable responses, including improved positive attitudes and increased intentions to purchase or invest among key stakeholders such as employees, investors, and consumers (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Diehl et al., 2016; Wang and Anderson, 2011).

A study involving 1066 American participants revealed that 87% of them would switch from one brand to another (assuming equal price and quality) if the latter supported a good cause. Conversely, 85% would contemplate switching to another company's products or services if the original company exhibited negative CSR practices (Cone, 2007). Therefore, corporations can attain commercial success while upholding ethical values and showing respect for people, communities, and the natural environment (Porter and Kramer, 2006). As a company's reputation is a vital component of marketing strategies and competitive advantages (Fombrun and Shanley 1990; Porter and Kramer 2006; Weigelt and Camerer 1988), it has become not just a moral obligation but also an economic necessity for companies to take stances on political and social issues (Du et al. 2010).

To project an image of social responsibility, companies align themselves with social causes by engaging in activities such as supporting communities (e.g., donating money to non-profit organizations), backing their employees (e.g., implementing fair employment policies), and safeguarding the environment (e.g., producing environmentally friendly products). Creyer (1997) suggested that "if consumers anticipate firms to act ethically, then ethical behavior becomes a benchmark against which perceived firm behavior is evaluated."

In fact, according to an online survey of 628 women conducted by the women's lifestyle media platform SheKnows Media in 2014, 71% of women believe that companies should be responsible for using their advertising to promote positive messages to women and girls.

Given that messaging promoting women's empowerment explicitly conveys a company's support for gender equality, it is likely that such advertising can communicate CSR, subsequently eliciting positive consumer reactions, including favorable attitudes toward the advertisement and increased intentions to make purchases. Therefore, we hypothesized that advertising aimed at empowering women would be perceived as more empowering, leading to the perception of CSR and resulting in improved attitudes toward the ad and increased purchase intentions

2.1.6 Women Empowerment (in Advertising)

Women Empowerment in Advertising or Femvertising represents a concerted effort to challenge and break free from stereotypical depictions of women. In stark contrast to gendered advertisements that often feature conventional female roles in conjunction with commercial brands, femvertising campaigns explicitly convey empowering messages, inspiring women to assertively take charge of their lives (Alcoff, 1988). One compelling example is the widely recognized "Always like a girl" advertisement, which encourages girls and women to shatter limitations and embrace their potential. Similarly, Dove's "Real Beauty"

Campaign boldly challenges the stereotypical beauty standards imposed on women, promoting the celebration of natural beauty. These empowering messages directly confront female stereotypes and societal stigmas, aligning perfectly with Becker-Herby's (2016) characterization of femvertising as empowering, inspirational, and inclusive, ultimately aiming to provide consumers with feelings of affirmation, self-confidence, and motivation.

Empirical evidence, as well as public surveys, consistently highlight the effectiveness of femvertising. In an online survey, 92% of 628 women surveyed could recall at least one campaign that portrayed women positively, and more than half reported purchasing a specific product because they appreciated the way women were depicted in the advertisements (SheKnows Media, 2016). Furthermore, research has shown that female participants exposed to advertisements featuring empowering messages, in contrast to traditional gender role portrayals, reported significantly more favorable attitudes towards both the advertised product and the brand (Akestam et al., 2017). A more recent study indicated that women's self-awareness and emotional needs positively correlated with their attitudes towards and intentions to share women-empowering advertisements (Kapoor and Munjal, 2019). Even men have responded positively to brands that they perceived as genuinely supporting gender equality, as revealed in a qualitative study conducted through semi-structured interviews (Jacobson et al., 2018).

Despite the well-documented positive impact of femvertising on consumer responses, our understanding of why it is effective remains limited. A recent study discovered that women-empowering advertising can reduce consumers' resistance to advertisements by presenting more complex and diverse portrayals of females, relieving the pressure on women to conform to a narrow range of role models, in contrast to traditional gendered advertising (Akestam et al. 2017). Another study, focusing on consumers' self-awareness, found that both private and public self-awareness can positively predict favorable attitudes towards femvertisements. However, these studies, while enlightening, did not

directly investigate the effect of women's empowerment on consumer responses.

Since GENTLEWOMAN openly advertises that they are a fashion brand that openly supports Women Empowerment, it is also important to conduct the study within this lens.

2.1.7 Perceived Argument Quality

The notion of "argument quality" relates to the strength of persuasion found within a message (Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2006). Prior to shaping their opinions and judgments, consumers assess the strengths and relevance of arguments concerning a brand's message on a specific issue. Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2006) illustrate that the perceived argument quality involves the coherence and logical arrangement of a brand's message communicated through a brand activism campaign. When perceived as robust and persuasive, it leads consumers to form favorable judgments. Conversely, when perceived as weak, it generates negative perceptions and judgments about the message. Research suggests that activists' arguments should use concrete language to ensure clarity and prevent misinterpretation (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Moreover, Lin et al. (2017) stress the importance of substantive arguments in advertising, especially for Generation Z, favoring them over subjective and emotional appeals. Additionally, the impact of argument quality on brand attitude perceptions is influenced by the credibility of bloggers (Chu and Kamal, 2008).

While Chu and Kamal's (2008) findings are specific to blog readers' interpretation of brand-related messages and may not universally apply, they offer evidence of the link between perceived argument quality and brand attitude in brand activism. Scholars have shown that stronger perceived argument quality positively affects young consumers' brand attitude and trust.

Perceived argument quality is crucial in the context of environmental brand activism in advertisements. Berger et al. (1999) argued that how people process

advertisements is closely tied to the arguments presented. They explored the role of argument quality in cause-related advertising and found its influence on shaping attitudes and trust. Poorly considered activist messages and actions in brand activism can provoke backlash (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Hence, consumers' perception of argument quality is vital in predicting their brand attitudes and trust. Therefore, examining argument quality is pivotal in the realm of brand activism in advertising.

2.1.8 Perceived Authenticity

Authenticity delineates the objective existence of a concept, indicating its genuineness, reality, and validation through unequivocal and verified evidence (Keller et al., 2008). Thus, "authenticity" signifies the authoritative verification of an object's presence. As highlighted by Chu and Kamal (2008), consumer-perceived authenticity concerning a brand functions as a foundation of credibility for both the brand activism message and the underlying intentions behind the brand's communication.

Authentic brand activism emerges as a preeminent factor surpassing other forms of brand activism (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Mirzaei et al., 2022). Vredenburg et al. (2020) underscored that perceived authenticity stands as a crucial attribute of brand activism, not only contributing to a brand's success but also driving potential societal change. Authentic brand activism pivots on aligning the brand's characteristics, encompassing its core mission, fundamental values, and messaging, as a manifestation of its activism. Alhouti et al. (2016) outlined CSR authenticity as the "perception of sincerity and honesty reflected in corporate trust, coupled with CSR activities surpassing legal obligations." Their research delved into authenticity's role in CSR, revealing its substantial impact on consumer perceptions.

Their hypothesis posited that consumers would favor brands practicing authentic CSR. Prior CSR studies convincingly demonstrate the pivotal role of

perceived authenticity in shaping attitudes toward a brand within brand activism contexts.

Coary (2013) indicated that, from a fundamental measurement standpoint, brand trust functions as an intermediary in the authenticity effects. The findings suggest that individuals perceiving a brand as highly authentic exhibit notably higher levels of brand trust compared to those perceiving it with less authenticity. In this study's context, when a brand and its advocacy project authenticity and authority in environmental issues, it suggests an inclination for consumers to harbor positive brand trust and attitudes.

2.1.9 Perceived Motivations

According to Yuksel et al. (2016), the perceived motivations driving cause-related marketing (CRM) campaigns are intricately linked to ethical considerations and a brand's dedication to societal welfare. For a CRM campaign to succeed, the brand's motivations must be perceived as altruistic, genuinely reflecting concern for society (Yuksel et al., 2016). In the realm of CRM, Foreh and Grier (2003) distinguish between two types of incentives attributed to a brand by consumers. On one hand, consumers assess a company or brand's intentions based on its potential contributions to a social cause, reflecting altruistic motives. Simultaneously, they scrutinize the benefits accrued by the brand itself, categorized as egoistic motives (Foreh and Grier, 2003). Foreh and Grier (2003) also found that consumers tend to respond unfavorably to a brand's CSR initiatives if they detect egoistic motives, not inherently assuming egoism, but perceiving deception. Several researchers suggest that consumers often harbor skepticism about a brand's true intentions behind social efforts, often suspecting profit-driven motives (Webb and Mohr, 1998; Rifon et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2010). According to Kim et al. (2010), CRM campaigns aim for mutual benefits to both business and society. However, if a brand's motives are perceived as solely profit-oriented, it could undermine the intended positive effects of the advertising campaign on the brand. Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) argued that when a brand's motives are purely profit-driven,

it significantly influences consumer responses, irrespective of whether the brand-cause alignment is strong or weak. Consequently, a company's motives hold significant sway over the effectiveness of a CRM campaign (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Moosmayer and Fuljahn, 2013; Samu and Wymer, 2014) and should thus be meticulously contemplated by brands.

Within the sphere of corporate social responsibility (CSR), Ellen et al. (2006) identified four types of CSR motivations by employing hypothetical radio scripts to solicit charity donations from listeners: value-driven, strategic-driven, egoistic-driven, and stakeholder-driven motives. Groza et al. (2011) found that value-driven and strategic-driven motives positively impact consumer attitudes toward a firm, while stakeholder-driven motives exert a negative influence. Similarly, Wongpitch et al. (2016) proposed two CSR motivations: altruistic and self-interest. The self-interest motives align with strategic-driven and egoistic-driven motives in Groza et al.'s (2011) research and the firm-serving motive in Lee et al.'s (2009) study. Conversely, altruistic motives correspond to the value-driven motive in Groza et al.'s (2011) research and the public-serving motive in Lee et al.'s (2009) investigation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study follows an exploratory research design and is classified as qualitative. The study aims to explore female Filipino consumers' perceptions and their thoughts on GENTLEWOMAN's Brand Activism on Women Empowerment. Data will be collected using an in-depth interview as it allows for deeper information extraction from participants in a one-on-one situation.

This section will discuss the different aspects of the methodology proper, including the research sample and sampling approach, the research tool employed, the procedures implemented at each stage, the methodology used for data collection and analysis, as well as the assessment of the study's validity and reliability.

3.1 Research Sample and Sampling Method

The sampling method that was used in this study will be the Purposive method. The sample size consisted of 10 Female Filipino participants. Before selecting participants, a preliminary screening process was conducted. For this research, individuals eligible to participate needed to have purchased 2 GENTLEWOMAN products within the last year, have engaged with GENTLEWOMAN on social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X - formerly Twitter) within the last year, and fall within the age range of 20 to 35 years old amongst other criteria listed in the following list.

Selection Criteria

1. Participants must be between the ages of 20 - 35 years old.
2. Participants must have engaged (liked, commented, shared, or followed) with GENTLEWOMAN on social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X - formerly Twitter) within the last year.
3. Participants must have bought 2 GENTLEWOMAN products within the last year.

4. Participants must have created or posted at least 1 piece of content featuring GENTLEWOMAN products on social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X - formerly Twitter) within the last year.
5. May have an exceptional history and relationship with the brand. Exceptions may include being a gray market reseller, a pre-order facilitator, brand collector, bulk buyer, or other similar exceptional attributes.

Participants who met the requirements were added to the pool of potential candidates. The researcher then used their professional judgment to select individuals who suit the topic of study (Dilshad & Latif, 2013).

3.2 Research Instrument

The study used a discussion guideline as the research instrument. The discussion guideline is composed of questions that will delve into the dimensions of Consumer Value Perception and Brand Activism. Specific questions used for this section have been adapted from a scale developed to measure Consumer Value Perception conducted by Sweeney and Soutar (2001), a study on perceived argument quality developed by Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2006), perceived authenticity developed by Alhouthi et al. (2016), and perceived altruistic and self-interest motives developed by Wongpitch et al. (2016).

3.2.1 Discussion Guideline

1. Section 1: Opener
 - a. Introduction (Name, Age, Gender, Occupation)
 - b. Background of the Study.
 - c. What products do you own from GENTLEWOMAN?
2. Section 2: Consumer Value Perception
 - a. How do you perceive the price of GENTLEWOMAN products?
 - i. Follow-Up: Price and Finances.
 - b. How do you perceive the function of GENTLEWOMAN products?
 - i. Follow-Up: Usable, Quality, and Uniqueness.
 - c. How do you feel when you use GENTLEWOMAN products?

- i. Follow-Up: Self-identity, Hedonic Desires, and Materialistic.
 - d. How do GENTLEWOMAN products contribute to your social status?
 - i. Follow-Up: Conspicuous, Prestige.
- 3. Section 3: Perceived Argument Quality (PAQ)
 - a. PAQ1: Do you think that GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment Activism is persuasive?
 - b. PAQ2: Do you think that GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment Activism is informative?
 - c. PAQ3: Do you think that GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment Activism is helpful?
- 4. Section 4: Perceived Authenticity (PA)
 - a. PA1: Do you think that GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment Brand Activism is genuine?
 - b. PA2: Do you think that GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment Brand Activism is what makes the company unique to you?
 - c. PA3: Do you think that GENTLEWOMAN is standing up for what it believes in?
 - d. PA4: Do you think that GENTLEWOMAN is a socially responsible company?
- 5. Section 5: Perceived Motivations (Altruistic [AM] & Self-Interest [SM])
 - a. AM1: Do you think that the motive of GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment Brand Activism in helping improve society is very pure?
 - b. AM2: Do you think that GENTLEWOMAN's does not expect anything in return for its Women Empowerment Brand Activism?
 - c. SM1: Do you think that the objective of GENTLEWOMAN in helping improve society with Women Empowerment Brand Activism is to benefit itself only?
 - d. SM2: Do you think that GENTLEWOMAN launched its Women Empowerment Brand Activism efforts only to increase its sales and profit?

3.3 Research Procedure

Before conducting the in-depth interviews, the researcher's initial contact with the respondents was made electronically. As an added bonus to join the study, a GENTLEWOMAN bag will be raffled off to a respondent who has completed the full interview.

During this initial contact, the researcher used a Google Form to provide comprehensive information about the study process and do an initial screening based on the aforementioned Selection Criteria. This information will include details about the researcher's background, the research's objectives, and the expected duration of the interview. Once the participants have acknowledged and consented to the interview, the researcher will proceed to schedule a suitable date and time based on the participants' preferences. In preparation for the interview, the researcher has thoroughly reviewed all the interview questions and ensured that essential pieces of equipment are functional. Since the interview will be done over Google Meet, participants did not have to download any application prior to the call.

During the in-depth interview, the researcher had commenced by outlining the research's objectives and requesting consent to record the entire session on Google Meets. Subsequently, the researcher will adhere to the structured discussion guideline, beginning with the primary question and then delving into sub-questions. In instances where additional details are needed, the researcher will explore the topic further via probing. Throughout the interview, the researcher had made observations, taking note of nonverbal cues from the respondents, such as changes in tone of voice and facial expressions. It's important to note that each participant's interview will not exceed one hour in duration.

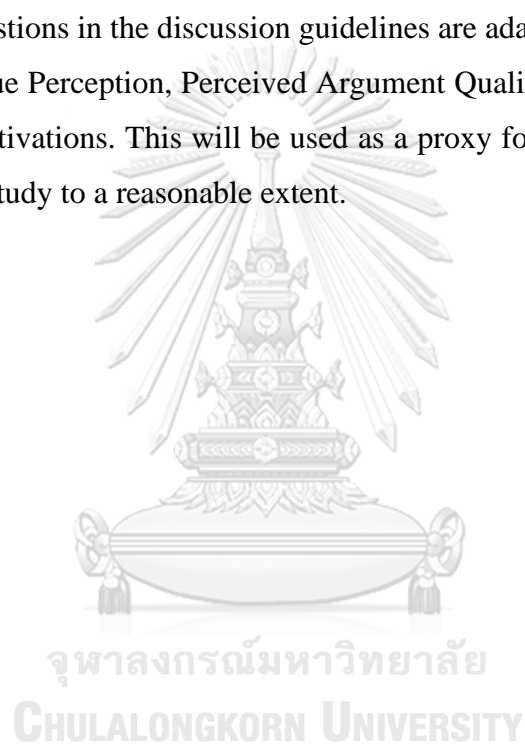
Post the interview, the researcher had ensured that the Google Meet session was properly recorded and transcribed, and had reviewed the contents. The researcher then analyzed the recording to uncover insights, themes, and deeper data using the Thematic Analysis method. It is a technique for examining qualitative data, often employed with textual materials like interviews or transcripts. Researchers meticulously scrutinize the

data to pinpoint recurring themes, encompassing subjects, concepts, and recurring patterns of significance.

The process of conducting thematic analysis typically involves six key steps: getting acquainted with the data, coding, formulating themes, reviewing those themes, establishing and labeling them, and finally, documenting the findings.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

The interview questions in the discussion guidelines are adapted from previous studies on Consumer Value Perception, Perceived Argument Quality, Perceived Authenticity, and Perceived Motivations. This will be used as a proxy for ensuring the validity and reliability of this study to a reasonable extent.



CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this chapter we will explore the results of the study gathered by way of in-depth interview. The interview was performed on 10 Female Filipino interviewees. The first section outlines the demographic profile of the respondents, followed by a thematic analysis on their answers based on the variables that were presented during the earlier chapters.

The following table provides the respondent's demographic profile. It outlines their first name, age, and their occupation. Only their first name is mentioned to conceal their identity.

Figure 4.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Respondent	Name	Age / Sex	Occupation
1	Withheld	25	Visual & Information Designer
2	Withheld	30	PR Manager
3	Withheld	28	E-Commerce Account Manager
4	Withheld	26	E-Commerce Specialist
5	Withheld	29	Content Editor
6	Withheld	30	Dentist
7	Withheld	28	Business Development Manager
8	Withheld	24	Marketing Coordinator
9	Withheld	26	HR & Admin Manager
10	Withheld	34	Doctor

10 profiles were chosen from a pool of 23 applicants who had been shortlisted and screened. These selections were made based on the researcher's discretion, aiming for diversity in both occupation and age. The chosen profiles encompass a range of fields, including the creative, medical, and BPO industries, spanning various roles within each sector.

This deliberate selection process aims to provide the study with a diverse array of perspectives, reducing potential biases associated with specific industries or affiliations.

All of the profiles selected are well inside the 20-35 age range, all Female, and all Filipino. Naturally, all profiles consider themselves to be a supporter of the GENTLEWOMAN brand in varying levels.

4.2 Consumer Value Perception

This section delves into the study's findings regarding the Consumer Value Perception variable, exploring its four key dimensions: Price, Quality, Emotional, and Social dimensions. The Financial component elucidates the cost dynamics of GENTLEWOMAN products and their price variations based on the sales origin. Furthermore, the Functional component scrutinizes product quality, durability, and uniqueness. The Emotional component explores the emotional response evoked by using GENTLEWOMAN products, while the Social component analyzes the brand's influence on consumers' social status. These discussions provide comprehensive insights into how various facets of Consumer Value Perception intersect with the brand's offerings and market presence.

Price Dimension

The examination of Consumer Value Perception's financial dimension focused on the direct monetary implications associated with GENTLEWOMAN. This analysis evaluated the products' value in terms of currency, delved into the concept of exchanged value for acquiring a product, and the changes they've noticed when purchasing from different sources. Participants were queried about their overall perception of

GENTLEWOMAN as a brand entity, specifically concerning its product connotations. The outcomes pertaining to the financial aspect are categorized into three distinct themes.

Theme 1: Worth The Cost

The consensus among participants regarding GENTLEWOMAN products, whether bags or apparel, is a unanimous agreement on the perceived value aligning with the cost. This sentiment is echoed by an E-Commerce Account Manager, aged 28, who commented, *"I'm not shocked with the pricing of the products, I would say the cost is justified."* Additionally, a PR Manager, aged 30, emphasized the fairness of the cost, particularly when purchasing directly from the website, stating, *"If you buy from the website, especially in bulk, I think the cost is fair. If you buy from a reseller, even if it is more expensive, I still think it is fair."* Further support for the perceived worth of the products' pricing was expressed by an HR & Admin Manager, aged 26, affirming, *"For what you are getting I think the price is worth it."* These remarks collectively underscore the general consensus that the pricing of GENTLEWOMAN products is commensurate with their perceived value, whether obtained from the brand's outlets or through resellers.

Theme 2: On The Pricier End

Despite the prevailing agreement on the justified cost of GENTLEWOMAN products, a discernible trend among the majority of respondents points towards their positioning as relatively pricier within the spectrum, notably in comparison to other fast-fashion brands. This sentiment is succinctly captured by an E-Commerce Specialist, aged 26, who remarked, *"It's on the pricier end, especially if you compare it to other fast-fashion brands."* Echoing a similar view, a Content Editor, aged 29, noted, *"It's still affordable but more expensive than normal,"* signifying a notable deviation from the pricing norms observed in fast-fashion markets. Moreover, a Doctor, aged 34, who held elevated expectations for the brand, expressed, *"My expectations of the brand were already high, so I know the price is on the higher end,"* indicating an alignment of the brand's quality with its higher price positioning. These collective viewpoints illuminate an emerging trend suggesting that while perceived as justifiable, GENTLEWOMAN products are

perceived as relatively pricier compared to the usual offerings within the fast-fashion landscape.

Theme 3: Buying Direct vs. Buying Through A Reseller

The unavailability of GENTLEWOMAN products in the Philippines prompted a notable discourse among participants concerning the associated costs linked to the purchasing channels. Many respondents deliberated on factors such as additional expenses when procuring items from resellers or considering shipping costs when opting for direct purchases from the brand's website. These resellers, commonly found on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and various e-commerce platforms, serve as alternative avenues for procurement.

Expressing a preference for reseller channels, a 30-year-old Dentist shared, *"I buy exclusively from resellers on Instagram. I don't like to buy from overseas because of shipping costs."* This sentiment aligns with the pragmatic approach of considering cost implications, particularly related to shipping fees. Additionally, a 28-year-old Business Development Manager highlighted a cost-efficient strategy by utilizing acquaintances traveling to Thailand, stating, *"I ask my friends to 'Pasabuy' when they go to Thailand for a vacation because it's cheaper,"* reflecting an approach to circumvent extra expenses.

The consideration of bulk purchases to economize on shipping expenses emerged from a 34-year-old Doctor's statement: *"I buy plenty of bags at the same time when I buy from the website so I can save on shipping."* This strategy aligns with the intention to optimize shipping costs, indicating a conscious effort to minimize additional expenditures. Conversely, a 29-year-old Content Editor acknowledged the cost variance when acquiring products from a reseller, stating, *"I bought my bag from a reseller on Shopee. It was a bit more expensive,"* emphasizing the trade-off between convenience and potential increased costs associated with reseller platforms. These narratives collectively underscore the diverse strategies adopted by individuals to navigate the associated costs when acquiring GENTLEWOMAN products, whether through resellers or via the brand's official channels.

Quality Dimension

The investigation into the functional aspect centered on the fundamental utility and core advantages that drive Consumer Value Perception. These encompass the quality, durability, usability, reliability, and distinctiveness of GENTLEWOMAN products. The outcomes related to the functional dimension are categorized into 4 distinct themes.

Theme 1: High-Quality and Durable

The prevailing sentiment among participants unequivocally affirms the superior quality of GENTLEWOMAN products, largely attributed to their utilization of premium materials in construction. This consensus is underscored by the assertion of a 25-year-old Visual & Information Designer who stated, *"I think it is very high quality,"* reflecting a collective recognition of the brand's commitment to excellence.

Moreover, the perceived durability of these products emerged as a prominent theme, with respondents highlighting their robustness despite regular usage. A 26-year-old HR & Admin Manager remarked, *"I don't worry if my bag keeps getting scuffed because I know the fabric won't get torn,"* emphasizing the confidence in the product's resilience against wear and tear. Similarly, a 29-year-old Content Editor noted the durable nature of the canvas used in their micro-tote bag, stating, *"Even with my micro-tote bag, the canvas they use is thicker so I know that it is more durable,"* further corroborating the consensus on the enduring quality of GENTLEWOMAN products. These testimonials collectively reinforce the unanimous perception of the brand's products as not only high-quality but also exceptionally durable, capable of withstanding the rigors of frequent use while maintaining their structural integrity.

Theme 2: My Daily Driver

The evolving pattern observed among respondents accentuates a prevalent inclination toward the frequent and versatile utilization of GENTLEWOMAN bags, shaping daily routines with their practicality and adaptability. Larger tote bags emerged as a preferred choice, catering to the demands of daily life by accommodating a myriad of essentials. A 30-year-old PR Manager exemplified this, stating, *"I'm a big bag kind of girl and with my GENTLEWOMAN tote bag, I can fit a lot of things inside it. My laptop,*

documents, phones, and essentials. I even used it on a trip abroad," highlighting the bag's functionality in various settings, including travel and professional contexts.

Conversely, smaller tote bags emerged as equally indispensable due to their compact yet efficient design. A 26-year-old HR & Admin Manager expressed satisfaction with their micro-tote, stating, *"I use my micro-tote every day because it is the perfect size to fit my phone and wallet,"* indicating the practicality of a smaller bag for daily essentials. Additionally, a 25-year-old Visual & Information Designer highlighted the multi-functional aspect of their GENTLEWOMAN bag, affirming, *"I use it almost every day to work and to go out with friends,"* underscoring the bag's adaptability across various social and professional settings.

This emerging trend portrays a diverse spectrum of preferences, where larger tote bags accommodate numerous essentials for comprehensive use, while smaller variants offer convenience and functionality for daily essentials, thereby catering to the varied needs of individuals across different contexts and routines.

Theme 3: Versatility

The adaptability and versatility of GENTLEWOMAN products emerge as noteworthy attributes endorsed by respondents, affirming their multifunctional utility across diverse settings and occasions. Participants express a consensus that these products seamlessly integrate into various contexts, showcasing both practicality and style.

An E-Commerce Account Manager, aged 28, highlighted the intentional design of GENTLEWOMAN products, stating, *"I think they were designed to be very functional apart from being fashionable... you're going to want to use it again and again because it suits more than 1 outfit."* This acknowledgment of both functionality and style indicates a deliberate effort in the design process to ensure versatility across different fashion ensembles.

Similarly, a 28-year-old Business Development Manager emphasized the adaptability of the product by sharing their diverse usage scenarios: *"I used it on many occasions, I*

wore the bag when I went to the river, when I was at the beach, or when going around the city. I think it is very versatile." This testimony underscores the bag's ability to seamlessly transition across varied environments, from casual outings to more adventurous settings, highlighting its suitability across diverse occasions.

Theme 4: Comparisons to Other Fast-Fashion Brands

Respondents frequently referenced global Fast-Fashion Brands like ZARA, Love Bonito, and Cotton-On when discussing GENTLEWOMAN, drawing parallels and distinctions in product offerings, brand image, and quality.

A 28-year-old Business Development Manager drew a comparison to ZARA, likening GENTLEWOMAN to a more affordable alternative, hinting at similarities in style and possibly pricing. Meanwhile, a 30-year-old PR Manager juxtaposed their GENTLEWOMAN tote bag with a similar purchase from Cotton-On, affirming the superior quality of GENTLEWOMAN products. Additionally, a 26-year-old E-Commerce Specialist associated GENTLEWOMAN's clothing and branding with Love Bonito, noting resemblances in femininity and design choices, highlighting shared characteristics between the brands. These comparisons underscore both the similarities and distinctive attributes of GENTLEWOMAN concerning renowned Fast-Fashion Brands, offering insights into the perceived value, quality, and stylistic nuances within the market landscape.

Emotional Dimension

The assessment of the individual aspect in Consumer Value Perception revolved around participants' personal inclinations in consuming GENTLEWOMAN. They elaborated on matters pertaining to self-identity, hedonistic tendencies, and materialistic values observed in their usage of GENTLEWOMAN products. The outcomes related to the individual dimension are categorized into 2 distinct themes.

Theme 1: Makes Me Feel Special

The scarcity of GENTLEWOMAN products in the Philippines cultivates a prevailing sentiment among consumers—a profound sense of exclusivity and sophistication in owning and using these items. The brand's limited distribution significantly enhances the perceived value attached to possessing GENTLEWOMAN products, fostering a distinct feeling of uniqueness and prestige among owners.

A 26-year-old E-Commerce Specialist articulated this sentiment, expressing, *"Since it's not readily available in the Philippines, I feel special when I use my bag. Like no one else has it."* This rarity amplifies the sense of individuality associated with owning GENTLEWOMAN products.

Similarly, a 24-year-old Marketing Coordinator echoed this sentiment, remarking, *"Since everybody buys clothes from Zara or Uniqlo, it makes me feel like I stand out from the crowd when I use GENTLEWOMAN."* This feeling of standing apart from ubiquitous brands contributes to a distinct sense of pride.

Moreover, a 30-year-old Dentist highlighted the sense of pride and distinction experienced when others inquire about their GENTLEWOMAN attire, stating, *"I like it when people ask me where my pants are from and I tell them I bought it from GENTLEWOMAN."* This interaction fosters a sense of uniqueness and exclusivity, affirming the distinctiveness of owning GENTLEWOMAN products in a market dominated by more widely available brands.

Theme 2: "I am the Brand"

A recurring theme among respondents is the alignment between GENTLEWOMAN and their personal style and identity. Many expressed that the brand's style and branding serve as an extension of their individuality, seamlessly complementing their unique fashion preferences. This resonance between the brand's offerings and their personal aesthetic allows for enhanced self-expression and a sense of authenticity.

A 30-year-old Dentist highlighted this connection, stating, *"It's an extension of my personal style, and their designs reflect how I want to dress."* This sentiment underscores the brand's ability to mirror and cater to individual fashion sensibilities. Similarly, a 24-year-old Marketing Coordinator emphasized the brand's appeal by offering both comfort and fashion, stating, *"I'm all for comfort but if there is an opportunity to be both comfortable and fashionable, I take it. GENTLEWOMAN clothes and products allow me to be both comfortable and fashionable."* This acknowledgment of the brand's ability to merge comfort and style resonates with their personal ethos.

Furthermore, a 30-year-old PR Manager expressed alignment with the brand's aesthetic, stating, *"I am a very kikay girl and GENTLEWOMAN clothes are very kikay. It represents my style."* The term "kikay" refers to someone who is into feminine, stylish, and fashionable things, emphasizing the brand's ability to capture and reflect their personal style preferences.

Social Dimension

The examination of the social aspect of Consumer Value Perception revolved around the perceived benefits participants gain by using products and services from GENTLEWOMAN. These perceptions might have been shaped by the participants' social groups, touching upon conspicuousness and the perceived value of the brand. Under this, there are 2 themes.

Theme 1: One with The Trend

The perception of being part of a trend with GENTLEWOMAN in the Philippines emerges as a significant theme, sparking diverse opinions regarding the brand's current trendiness. While some debate its ongoing prominence, a considerable number of individuals perceive themselves as inadvertently or consciously contributing to a prevailing trend by supporting or purchasing GENTLEWOMAN products.

A 29-year-old Content Editor expressed a sense of belonging to a larger trend, stating, *"I feel like I am part of the hype, or part of the trend when I use my GENTLEWOMAN bag. Like I'm part of a bigger group of people,"* reflecting the sense of inclusion associated with the brand's popularity.

Conversely, a 34-year-old Doctor acknowledged feeling trendy while using GENTLEWOMAN but held reservations about the trend's longevity, stating, *"Although I don't really use GENTLEWOMAN for this purpose, I feel trendy when I use my bag. I feel like the trend will die soon anyway."* This perspective suggests a contemplation of the brand's trendiness within a larger temporal context.

Additionally, a 24-year-old Marketing Coordinator embraced the trend but sought differentiation within it, expressing, *"I definitely feel like I'm part of the bandwagon when I use my bag. So I make sure to buy the not-so-common designs so I can still stand out from the rest,"* highlighting a conscious effort to maintain individuality within a trendy space.

Theme 2: Don't Really Think About It

A notable theme emerging from respondents is the minimal emphasis placed on the Social Aspect associated with owning GENTLEWOMAN products. Their primary considerations predominantly revolve around the alignment of the products with their personal style and functional requirements.

A 26-year-old E-Commerce Specialist highlighted this by stating, *"I didn't buy it for the trend, I bought it because it's my style."* This assertion underscores the prioritization of personal style over following trends or social considerations.

Similarly, a 30-year-old PR Manager expressed minimal concern about the brand's popularity, stating, *"I don't really like that so many people have the brand. I bought it because I thought it looks nice and that it fits my personality and it goes well with my other outfits."* This sentiment emphasizes the importance of personal preferences and individual style rather than the social aspect of brand ownership.

Moreover, a 28-year-old Business Development Manager echoed these sentiments by mentioning, *"I bought it because the design looked cute and it is a big bag. I need a big bag,"* highlighting a functional requirement as the driving force behind their purchase decision.

These perspectives collectively signify a trend where respondents prioritize personal style, functionality, and individual preferences over the brand's social aspect or trendiness when purchasing GENTLEWOMAN products. The focus remains on how the product aligns with their unique style and practical needs rather than its popularity or social connotations.

Table 4.1 Consumer Value Perception Thematic Analysis

Dimension	Theme	Codes & Phrases
Price	Worth The Cost	"Worth it", "The Price is good for what you receive", "Fairly Priced", "The Price is Justified".
	On The Pricier End	"Cost a bit higher than normal", "Not cheap but not too expensive", "A bit more compared to other fast-fashion brands".
	Buying Direct vs. Buying Through A Reseller	"The price is more expensive with Resellers", "More affordable if you buy directly on the website", "Cheaper when you buy in the store".
Quality	High-Quality and Durable	"Material is OK", "They use a thicker canvas", "The quality is really good".
		"I can use it again and again", "I don't mind if it gets scratched", "Sturdy and I don't see any tears".
	My Daily Driver	"I use it every day", "Even use it as my main bag", "I've brought it on the airplane".

Dimension	Theme	Codes & Phrases
	Versatility	"Use it on a Weekday or a Sunday", "It goes with any outfit". "It matches my simple outfits or my dressier ones".
	Comparisons to Other Fast-Fashion Brands	"It reminds me of ZARA", "I feel like it is Love Bonito", "It's not like my bag from Cotton-On".
Emotional	Makes Me Feel Special	"Since it isn't available here, it makes me feel special", "I like the feeling of having something not everyone can have", "I like it when people ask where I bought it".
	I am the Brand	"It's an extension of my personal style", "It fits my style", "I am a girly girl and it is similar".
Social	One with the Trend	"It makes me feel I'm part of the hype", "I am on trend", "It makes me feel relevant".
	Don't Really Think About It	"I don't really think about it", "I don't care".

4.3 Perceived Argument Quality

This section delves into the study's findings regarding the Perceived Argument Quality of GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment Activism. Respondents assess the validity and significance of arguments addressing an issue in a brand's message before shaping opinions and forming judgments.

Theme 1: Exists in Lower Quality

The perception of GENTLEWOMAN's stance on Women Empowerment varies among respondents, with a majority acknowledging its presence but expressing reservations about its consistency and impact. Some respondents exhibit strong beliefs in the brand's support for Women Empowerment, while others find the messaging subtle or forgettable, impacting its overall resonance.

A 29-year-old Content Editor affirmed, *"Of course, I definitely think they support Women Empowerment,"* reflecting a firm belief in the brand's alignment with this cause. Conversely, a 26-year-old E-Commerce Specialist perceived the support as subtle, stating, *"Yes, I think it is there but it is very subtle,"* suggesting a less overt manifestation of the brand's stance.

Furthermore, a 30-year-old PR Manager humorously remarked, *"If I squint my eyes, yes, I see it. Haha,"* indicating a perception of the brand's messaging being less conspicuous or requiring deliberate attention to notice. Moreover, a 24-year-old Marketing Coordinator acknowledged the brand's association with Women Empowerment but expressed forgetfulness about this aspect due to its less pronounced presentation, stating, *"I already know this about the brand. I mean it's in their name already but I actually forgot because they're not very in-your-face about it."*

These diverse perspectives collectively convey a spectrum of opinions regarding GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment messaging. While some respondents strongly believe in the brand's support for this cause, others find the messaging subtle or forgettable, impacting the perceived consistency and impact of this aspect of the brand's identity.

Theme 2: Felt on Social Content

Among those who recognize GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment activism, varying observations exist regarding the quality and portrayal of this activism across campaign images, social media, and influencer collaborations. Respondents appreciate the brand's efforts in inclusivity, particularly in featuring female models from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, influencer Rei Germar's content has been highlighted as a tangible reflection of the brand's activism, resonating strongly with some respondents.

A 30-year-old PR Manager noted the brand's portrayal of Women Empowerment in campaign images and influencer collaborations, stating, *"I see it in their campaign*

images and photos and the influencers they use," recognizing the brand's efforts across multiple platforms.

Similarly, a 25-year-old Visual & Information Designer observed, *"I do see it in their posts on Instagram and on the photos on the websites. They use models from around the world,"* indicating appreciation for the brand's diverse representation in their visual content.

Moreover, a 29-year-old Content Editor expressed strong sentiments regarding Rei Germar's collaboration with GENTLEWOMAN, affirming, *"Yes, I really feel like they promote it because they used Rei Germar. I really felt empowered when I saw her video about it. I know her to be a big Women Empowerment advocate and I believe it,"* highlighting the influential impact of specific collaborations in embodying Women Empowerment values.

Theme 3: Unnoticeable

Some respondents show a lack of awareness or recognition regarding GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment argument, indicating the argument's inconsistency in visibility across the brand's marketing efforts. This inconsistency might lead some individuals, particularly those not involved in marketing, to overlook or disregard any aspect related to Women Empowerment within the brand.

A 34-year-old Doctor admitted, *"I didn't really notice until you asked me about it,"* suggesting a lack of prior awareness or attention to this aspect of the brand's messaging. Similarly, a 26-year-old HR & Admin Manager expressed surprise at the mention of Women Empowerment within GENTLEWOMAN's marketing, stating, *"Oh really? I didn't really get that from their marketing. It looks like normal fashion photos,"* indicating a lack of distinctiveness or prominence in the brand's presentation of this argument.

These responses indicate a potential inconsistency in the visibility or portrayal of GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment argument within their marketing

strategies. This inconsistency might contribute to some individuals, particularly those outside the marketing sphere, not registering or acknowledging any aspect related to Women Empowerment within the brand.

Table 4.2 Perceived Argument Quality Thematic Analysis

Dimension	Theme	Codes & Phrases
Perceived Argument Quality	Exists in Lower Quality	"It's there but it is not screaming", "Yes, I can see it", "Only when I squint my eyes".
	Felt on Social Content	"I can kind of see it in their photos", "I think I see it on their Instagram". "I feel it in Rei Germar's Video".
	Unnoticeable	"This is the first time I heard about it", "It doesn't come off".

4.7 Perceived Authenticity

This section examines the authenticity embedded within GENTLEWOMAN's brand activism. We look at the inherent genuineness and verifiable nature of a concept, indicating its validity backed by compelling and verified evidence. It represents the authoritative substantiation of an object's existence.

Theme 1: Authentic but Not Unique

Respondents who acknowledge GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment activism also emphasize the perceived authenticity behind the brand's commitment to this cause. This authenticity is rooted in the brand's core identity, branding strategies, and social

media content, reinforcing their genuine dedication. However, respondents note that while GENTLEWOMAN stands out for its authenticity, similar initiatives are prevalent among other brands like Love Bonito, lessening its distinctiveness.

An E-Commerce Account Manager, 28, acknowledges GENTLEWOMAN's authenticity in supporting Women Empowerment but notes the prevalence of similar initiatives across various brands, stating, *"I can see that they are really authentic in wanting to support Women Empowerment, but a lot of brands are already doing so, so they are not that different."*

Likewise, a 30-year-old Content Editor appreciates the brand's authenticity, particularly in collaborations with influencers like Rei Germar, known for their strong advocacy of Women Empowerment, stating, *"I think because they work with influencers, like Rei Germar, that are strong advocates of Women Empowerment, I think it is really genuine."* However, a 24-year-old Marketing Coordinator acknowledges GENTLEWOMAN's authenticity in its advocacy for Women Empowerment while pointing out the prevalence of similar initiatives in brands like Love Bonito, stating, *"I do think they are authentic in their advocacy, but other brands are doing it already, like Love Bonito."*

These perspectives collectively highlight respondents' recognition of GENTLEWOMAN's genuine commitment to Women Empowerment. Still, they also note the prevalence of similar initiatives in the industry, emphasizing the brand's authenticity while also acknowledging the presence of similar strategies in other brands, limiting its uniqueness in this aspect.

Theme 2: Skeptical

Some respondents harbor skepticism regarding GENTLEWOMAN's support for Women Empowerment activism, perceiving it as a strategic effort aimed primarily at gaining consumer favor or for marketing purposes on social media rather than reflecting genuine commitment to the cause. This skepticism leads to questioning the brand's underlying motives behind their advocacy for Women Empowerment.

A 30-year-old PR Manager expresses doubt about the genuineness of the brand's support, stating, *"I get the intention but it doesn't really come off as genuine just because you still have to buy from the brand. They still want something out of it,"* implying skepticism about the brand's intentions behind their activism. Similarly, a 26-year-old E-Commerce Specialist perceives the brand's support for Women Empowerment as a marketing ploy rather than genuine advocacy, stating, *"Not really, because I still think it's just a brand doing marketing and trying to sell. It's a good one but it's still a marketing ploy,"* suggesting a perception of the brand's activism as primarily a marketing strategy.

These perspectives highlight a level of skepticism among respondents regarding the authenticity of GENTLEWOMAN's support for Women Empowerment. They question whether the brand's advocacy is driven by genuine commitment to the cause or if it's primarily a strategic maneuver aimed at consumer engagement and marketing objectives.

Table 4.3 Perceived Authenticity Thematic Analysis

Dimension	Theme	Codes & Phrases
Perceived Authenticity	Authentic but Not Unique	"Yes, I think it is real", "I can see it", "I think they are authentic".
	Not Authentic	"They want something out of it", "Doing it for marketing".

4.5 Perceived Motivations

The last section explores the perceived motivations of GENTLEWOMAN's brand activism. Its ethical considerations and their commitment to helping society and intrinsic altruistic or self-interest motivations.

Theme 1: A Brand for Good

Despite varied opinions regarding the motivations behind GENTLEWOMAN's activism, a prevailing sentiment emerges among respondents portraying the brand as inherently good and genuinely committed to societal betterment through its activism. This overarching consensus suggests that GENTLEWOMAN's brand activism endeavors primarily aim to benefit society rather than solely serving the brand's self-interest.

A 26-year-old E-Commerce Specialist, while acknowledging potential marketing motivations, still regards GENTLEWOMAN positively, stating, *"Even if I think that they are doing their Women Empowerment activism for marketing, I still think they are a good company, and they still want to help,"* emphasizing the brand's intention to contribute positively to societal causes. Similarly, a 28-year-old E-Commerce Account Manager expresses belief in the brand's sincere efforts, stating, *"I definitely think they are a company trying to make a difference. It would be sad to think that they aren't,"* reflecting a positive perception of the brand's motivations.

Moreover, a 29-year-old Content Editor views GENTLEWOMAN as socially responsible and inherently good, suggesting that any negative actions would have surfaced in social media, stating, *"I think they are a socially-responsible and a good company. If they weren't, we would have heard about them doing bad things already on social media,"* indicating confidence in the brand's ethical conduct.

These diverse but collectively positive viewpoints highlight the prevailing belief among respondents that GENTLEWOMAN, despite potential skepticism, is fundamentally a good brand committed to societal betterment through its activism, portraying a positive image in the eyes of consumers.

Theme 2: It's Still a Business

Some respondents express a viewpoint that GENTLEWOMAN's support for Women Empowerment might be partially motivated by self-interest, aimed at generating increased revenue, boosting product sales, and ultimately driving profits for the brand. This perception suggests that the brand's activism might, to some extent, align with profit-driven motives despite its positive brand image.

A 26-year-old E-Commerce Specialist acknowledges the brand's profit-oriented nature, stating, "*...but It's still a business and a business needs to make money,*" indicating that while the brand may support Women Empowerment, its primary goal remains generating revenue. Similarly, a 24-year-old Marketing Coordinator echoes this sentiment, suggesting that supporting Women Empowerment could align with the brand's profit motives due to its popularity, stating, "*Of course, they still need to make money. They are a business. It's possible they support Women Empowerment because it's a popular cause.*"

Moreover, a 26-year-old HR & Admin Manager reaffirms the business imperative of making profits, indicating a potential correlation between the brand's support for Women Empowerment and its financial interests, stating, "*Yes, they still need to make profit.*"

These perspectives highlight a belief among some respondents that while GENTLEWOMAN's support for Women Empowerment is positive, it might also serve the brand's self-interests in generating revenue and ensuring profitability, aligning the activism with the brand's overall profit-driven objectives as a business.

4.9 Recommendations to the GENTLEWOMAN Brand from Participants

Participants of the study were also asked to provide general feedback to the brand and their brand activism. They were asked what they liked and did not like about the brand and how to improve their support of brand activism.

Feedback 1: Official Distribution

As GENTLEWOMAN lacks official distribution in the Philippines, several respondents express a desire for an official store or periodic pop-up events in the country. They also emphasize the need for authorized resellers or distributors, citing their reliance on online purchases or secondary markets (on social media or ecommerce platforms) for GENTLEWOMAN products, which often involves added expenses and uncertainties regarding authenticity. However, a few respondents raise concerns that increased availability might diminish the brand's exclusivity and novelty within the Philippines.

Feedback 2: Preference for Understated Pieces

Some respondents mention procuring GENTLEWOMAN products due to their collection of understated pieces. They appreciate the brand's high-quality materials and durable construction, stating that these qualities allow for versatile pairing with various styles or outfits. Expressing their preference, they convey a desire to see an expanded range of similar styles and pieces from the brand.

Feedback 3: More Work with NGOs and Activism Efforts to Increase Visibility

Unanimously, all respondents advocate for heightened engagement by GENTLEWOMAN with NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) to further their Women Empowerment Causes. Specific NGOs like Gabriela (Gabriela Alliance, 2023) in the Philippines and global entities such as EmpowerWomen (EmpowerWomen, 2023) were highlighted for potential collaboration. Additionally, respondents expressed a desire for increased visibility and promotion of these partnerships. Some noted that, should the brand engage in more of these partnerships and talk about on social media, it will only be more enticing for consumers to buy into GENTLEWOMAN.

Feedback 4: Expand to LGBTQIA+ Causes

Some respondents proposed that GENTLEWOMAN broaden their scope within the Women Empowerment cause to encompass female or female-identifying members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Some respondents wanted to see representation in their marketing campaigns, content on social media, and influencers. They noted that such

inclusivity could enhance the brand's authenticity and enable it to reach a more extensive and diverse audience.

In summary, female Filipino consumers generally hold a positive perception of the GENTLEWOMAN brand, primarily praising its high-quality construction and durability. Its versatility and utility make it a popular choice for everyday use, reflecting the product's commendable quality. Despite being considered relatively pricier by some, most respondents justify the cost based on the brand's alignment with their personal style, indicating the brand's compelling narrative. However, there's a prevailing sentiment that the brand leans towards trendiness, potentially posing long-term challenges.

Regarding GENTLEWOMAN's brand activism, the study findings reveal a disparity in the perceived strength of its Women Empowerment advocacy, which is fundamental to the brand's identity. While acknowledged by most respondents, this advocacy is viewed as lacking in robustness, leading some to disregard it entirely. Notably, those in marketing roles tend to recognize the argument more than those in non-marketing positions. Those acknowledging the brand's activism perceive it as genuine but not entirely distinctive, citing similar advocacies from other brands. Despite some skepticism, the brand is generally regarded as a force for positive change, a notable attribute.

Overall, the brand enjoys positive reception among female Filipino consumers, predominantly due to its product quality and alignment with personal style. However, it faces challenges in balancing its perceived trendiness and sustaining a stronger, more distinct brand activism narrative.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter we will summarize the findings of the study, discuss the implications of the findings, and establish a basis for future study. It will also attempt to answer the research questions presented in the first chapter. The limitations, directions for future study, and practical implications will also be explained.

5.1 Summary

The data collection for this qualitative research spanned a 3-week period involving ten specifically chosen participants. These individuals were selected from a pool gathered through a Google Form, which utilized pre-screened questions based on the established Selection Criteria. Throughout the interviews, a Discussion Guideline structured into five distinct sections was employed to facilitate the conversation and ensure comprehensive qualitative data extraction. The initial section focused on participants' demographic attributes, followed by inquiries regarding their consumer perception of GENTLEWOMAN in the second section. Subsequently, the third, fourth, and fifth sections probed the participants' perspectives on the qualities of GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment Activism. Each section is succinctly summarized below.

Consumer Value Perception Towards GENTLEWOMAN

Employing the concept of Consumer Value Perception enables the assessment of how consumers view brands and retailers, encompassing four distinct dimensions. These dimensions include the Financial Dimension, which pertains to the cost implications associated with acquiring specific products; the Quality Dimension, reflecting the utility derived from products through the reduction of perceived short-term and long-term costs; the Emotional Dimension, which accounts for the utility derived from the product's ability to evoke feelings or affective states; and the Social Dimension, representing the utility derived from the product's capacity to augment one's social self-concept.

Financial Dimension

The evaluation of GENTLEWOMAN's financial dimension within Consumer Value Perception centered on the direct monetary implications associated with the brand. Respondents uniformly express the brand's products as being significantly valuable for the cost incurred. They emphasize the fairness of the pricing concerning the product's quality, whether purchased from official channels like GENTLEWOMAN boutiques or online stores, or through resellers on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or e-commerce platforms like Shopee. Moreover, respondents keenly observe the variations in pricing when procuring directly from the brand's website, retail outlets, or the secondary market. However, a subset of respondents does perceive GENTLEWOMAN's pricing as relatively higher within the retail landscape, particularly in comparison to other fast-fashion brands.

Functional Dimension

The exploration of GENTLEWOMAN's functional aspect in Consumer Value Perception focused on its core advantages like quality, durability, usability, reliability, and distinctiveness. Respondents unanimously lauded the brand's high-quality products constructed from premium materials, showcasing remarkable durability even with frequent use, particularly in bags. An emerging trend highlights the daily use of their bags, favoring larger totes for accommodating essentials, while smaller totes offer enhanced utility. Respondents praised the versatility of GENTLEWOMAN products, using them across various settings, noting their adaptability to different outfits and styles. Additionally, respondents drew comparisons between GENTLEWOMAN and global fast-fashion brands like ZARA, Love Bonito, and Cotton-On, noting similarities and differences in products and branding.

Emotional Dimension

In this dimension under Consumer Value Perception, individuals' preferences in using GENTLEWOMAN were explored, focusing on self-identity, hedonism, and materialism. Limited availability in the Philippines leads to a sense of exclusivity and sophistication, elevating the value of GENTLEWOMAN items. Users feel pride in owning and integrating these products into their lifestyle. Respondents also choose

GENTLEWOMAN because it resonates with their style and identity, acting as an extension that complements their individuality. This bond between brand and personal aesthetic mirrors their distinct personalities and aids in self-expression.

Social Dimension

The exploration of the social aspect in Consumer Value Perception focused on the perceived advantages individuals derive from using GENTLEWOMAN products. These perceptions are influenced by social circles, reflecting aspects like conspicuousness and brand value. Despite diverse views on GENTLEWOMAN's trend status in the Philippines, a notable number perceive themselves as part of its trend, either consciously or inadvertently. However, some respondents prioritize the product's alignment with their personal style and functionality over its social connotations, showing less concern for the social aspect of owning GENTLEWOMAN products.

Perceived Argument Quality of GENTLEWOMAN's Brand Activism

Respondents evaluate the consistency and impact of arguments presented in GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment messaging, observing varying quality levels. While most acknowledge its presence, they highlight inconsistent quality, affecting its overall resonance. Some strongly engage with this activism, while others admit fleeting attention or complete disregard. Those recognizing the activism note fluctuating portrayals across visuals and social media, valuing diverse representations but emphasizing influencer Rei Germar's tangible advocacy. However, a faction disregards this argument, citing its lack of visibility, potentially linked to its inconsistent quality. Interestingly, this inconsistency resonates more among non-marketing respondents than marketing-related individuals.

Perceived Authenticity of GENTLEWOMAN's Brand Activism

In this concept, we explore the authenticity in GENTLEWOMAN's brand activism, delving into its genuineness supported by substantial evidence. Respondents recognize the perceived authenticity of the brand's Women Empowerment activism, attributing it to GENTLEWOMAN's sincere commitment visible in its core identity, branding, and online content, including influencer collaborations. However, respondents note this

authenticity isn't unique, drawing parallels with Love Bonito's marketing strategies. Moreover, a contrasting theme surfaces, suggesting skepticism among some respondents regarding GENTLEWOMAN's activism. They question whether the brand's support is a strategic move for consumer favor or mere marketing tactics rather than genuine dedication to the cause.

Perceived Motivations of GENTLEWOMAN's Brand Activism

Respondents present varied opinions on GENTLEWOMAN's brand activism motivations, but the general consensus portrays the brand positively, seen as genuinely dedicated to societal betterment. This commitment is perceived to prioritize societal benefits over the brand's self-interest. However, some respondents express skepticism, suggesting that GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment support might partly serve profit-driven motives, potentially overshadowing its positive brand image.

5.2 Discussions

In this section, we aim to address the research questions posed. Regarding the first question—*“What are the perceptions of Filipino consumers regarding the brand GENTLEWOMAN through social media?”*—it appears that the overall perceptions are favorable and the brand enjoys a positive reception among respondents.

Many consider the product's pricing justified, emphasizing its high-quality construction and materials. Respondents also strongly relate to the brand's identity, finding it reflective of their personal style. Additionally, some perceive their purchase or support of GENTLEWOMAN as part of a trend, while others simply favor the brand for personal preferences.

Consumer Value Perception, in line with Sweeney and Soutar's perspective (2001), is prominently at play here. Brands prioritizing value tend to succeed, and it can be argued that GENTLEWOMAN effectively embodies this value for the respondents.

However, alongside the positive aspects, the findings reveal areas of concern that warrant attention. Non-official distribution and Comparisons to Similar Brands may be a point of contention. Notably, when customer needs are unaddressed, the perceived value created might diminish. To sustain a competitive advantage and win over consumers in the long term, it's crucial for the brand to comprehend and fulfill customer expectations effectively.

On the second question—“*What are the Filipino Consumers' thoughts on GENTLEWOMAN's brand communication and activism through social media?*”, the study highlights that GENTLEWOMAN's Women Empowerment Brand Activism is perceived at varying degrees, often appearing subtle or even negligible. This inconsistency impacts the overall assessment of the argument's quality, authenticity, and the brand's underlying motivations. Strong argument quality typically elicits favorable consumer judgments, while perceived weakness leads to negative perceptions (Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2006). In this case, the GENTLEWOMAN Brand Activism argument tends towards feebleness, adversely affecting other facets of the brand's activism.

Authenticity in a brand's perceived commitment influences the credibility of its activism message and the intentions behind it (Chu and Kamal, 2008). Although GENTLEWOMAN's activism is seen as authentic, the underlying intentions might not be entirely perceived as altruistic, as noted in emerging themes. Consumers gauge a brand's intentions based on its contributions to a social cause (altruistic motives) and how the brand itself benefits (egoistic motives) (Foreh and Grier, 2003). Respondents suggest that GENTLEWOMAN's motives may lean more towards egoistic rather than wholly altruistic ones.

Surprisingly, respondents with marketing-related backgrounds comprehended GENTLEWOMAN's brand activism more than those not involved in marketing. Individuals outside marketing circles failed to acknowledge the activism argument, contributing to the perceived fragility of the brand's activism argument.

Nevertheless, as the GENTLEWOMAN brand already enjoys a positive perception among Filipino consumers, enhancing the messaging of its Women Empowerment Brand Activism could further fortify the brand's reputation and foster enduring consumer relationships in the long term.

5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Study

This study has several limitations that need consideration for future research endeavors:

- Firstly, the gathered data might not fully encompass the viewpoints of the entire spectrum of Female Filipino Consumers of GENTLEWOMAN, as certain industries like retail and clothing, pivotal in influencing brand perceptions, weren't represented.
- While GENTLEWOMAN's perceived target audience is from 20 to 35 years old, not all ages were captured for questioning. This was due to the screening process, possibly leading to some bias in data extraction.
- The study screened respondents based on their income or financial status, considering that GENTLEWOMAN products are utilized across diverse income levels.
- The respondents are limited to female respondents even if there are men who are observed to patronize and use GENTLEWOMAN products.
- The questions in the Question Guideline, derived from Quantitative Scales, could be perceived as a limitation in terms of adapting them to suit this qualitative study.
- While the use of social media platforms was used as a prerequisite for the study, the differences in brand perceptions and brand activism per social media platform is not explored in this study. This may be explored in further study.

For future research, researchers may use this as a foundation for those who wish to study the perception of up and coming brands that have a strong brand activism message.

5.4 Recommendations to the GENTLEWOMAN Brand

- Filipino respondents generally hold a favorable view of the GENTLEWOMAN brand, yet it is perceived as a transient or trendy phenomenon. While this initial reception is promising, for sustained success, the brand must undergo a repositioning to establish itself as a lasting and foundational presence in the market, particularly to resonate with Filipino consumers.
- To cultivate a lasting bond with Filipino consumers, GENTLEWOMAN might consider establishing official distribution channels in the Philippines. This could be achieved through partnerships with authorized distributors, strategic pop-up ventures, or engaging authorized resellers.
- As indicated in the study, reinforcing GENTLEWOMAN's brand activism for women's empowerment by forging partnerships, implementing tangible initiatives, and actively engaging will foster deeper and enduring connections. This strategy won't solely benefit Filipino consumers but potentially attract consumers from diverse national backgrounds.
- Furthermore, broadening the scope of Women Empowerment brand activism to encompass members of the LGBTQIA+ community could strengthen the brand's advocacy and broaden its reach to a more extensive customer base.

5.5 Recommendations to Other Thai and International Brands

- For any Thai or international brand aiming to captivate Filipino consumers, prioritizing the creation of high-quality and enduring products coupled with a compelling brand narrative is crucial. Similar to the success witnessed by GENTLEWOMAN, the fusion of superior products with a narrative resonating with Filipino women contributed significantly. However, the brand's evolution should involve actively engaging and listening to consumers to fortify this relationship.
- The study suggests that, to engage female Filipino consumers effectively, leveraging influencers and local key opinion leaders whom they recognize and admire is essential. Departing from prominent international celebrities and focusing on grassroots personalities holds potential in connecting with this audience.

- Striking a balance between exclusivity and accessibility is paramount. The research indicates that female Filipino consumers appreciate feeling unique by owning items that aren't ubiquitous, thereby enhancing the novelty and demand for the product overall.
- Finally, advocating for a compelling and fully developed cause can significantly aid the brand in further engaging Filipino consumers, fostering a deeper connection with the brand.



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