

# Reinforce Identity Through Action: The Strategy of University Activism

Francesca Avallone<sup>1</sup>, Antonella Cammarota<sup>2</sup>, Vittoria Marino<sup>1</sup>, Riccardo Resciniti<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This paper provides a detailed analysis of the concrete actions taken by activist universities, also identifying activist strategy as a means to reinforce university identity and strengthen relationships with local communities. To date, the phenomenon of university activism has been poorly researched despite its growing importance in public discourse. A multiple case study approach was adopted, analyzing the institutional websites of 25 top-ranked American universities. The results show, first, that the three activist efforts - *disseminating*, *promoting*, and *pushing* - are highly structured and complex, featuring clear and well-defined actions. Second, universities use activism to emphasize their identity. Third, that these actions are often community-specific and continuous across the three efforts. The well-organized and long-term activities of activist universities suggest that these institutions succeed where corporations often fall short. This study provides valuable insights for practitioners and contributes to the academic debate on a timely and emerging topic.

**Keywords:** University Activism, University Identity, Corporate Activism, Public Engagement, Social Impact

## Introduction

Universities have increasingly become embroiled in public debates concerning their social role in a society marked by growing, complex, and controversial issues. Traditionally seen as beacons of knowledge and catalysts for social welfare (Anggadwita et al., 2024), these institutions are now navigating the fraught arena of political debate, much like corporate brands. Recent controversies, particularly around the Israel-Palestine conflict, have placed some American and European universities at the center of boycotts and public scrutiny.

For instance, some universities in Ireland, Spain, Belgium, and Italy have severed ties with Israeli institutions, responding to student demands in the name of social justice (Li Bartov, 2024). Meanwhile, the *American Association of University Professors* (AAUP) has revised its long-standing opposition to academic boycotts, recognizing them as legitimate under certain circumstances (Quinn, 2024). Furthermore, in the United Kingdom (UK), a parliamentary inquiry has been launched to assess the impact of academic and staff boycotts on students (UK Parliament, 2023).

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Economics, Law, Management and Quantitative Methods (DEMM), University of Sannio, Benevento – Italy

<sup>2</sup> Department of Law and Economics, University of Rome UnitelmaSapienza, Rome, Italy.

However, the Israel-Palestine issue is just one of many that universities are tackling. While this topic has garnered significant public attention, universities also actively address other socio-political challenges, such as climate change, racism, civil rights, mental health, and violence. These higher institutions are increasingly internalizing socio-political issues, making them their own, and taking concrete actions to effect positive change (Lo Presti et al., 2023; Marans & Callewaert, 2017).

However, the scientific literature on university activism remains sparse and underdeveloped. Scholars have predominantly focused on corporate activism, which increasingly reveals its shortcomings.

Companies seek to be perceived as authentic and credible in their activist stances (Walter et al., 2024), even by adapting their activist strategy to the context in which they operate (Avallone et al., 2024). However, they frequently seem to exploit activism to improve their positioning with consumers (Bulmer et al., 2024; Bhagwat et al., 2020) often resulting in woke-washing (Ahmad et al., 2024; Mirzaei et al., 2022).

Among the few studies on university activism, Cammarota et al. (2024) provide its initial identification and conceptualization, laying the groundwork for future research that remains largely unexplored. This work highlights that universities, like brands, place themselves at the center of political debates and engage with social issues traditionally addressed by other social actors such as activists, social movements, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), or politicians (McDonnell et al., 2021; Pattakos, 1989). Corporations have recently monopolized these political debates, often generating criticism and strong consumer disagreements, leading to significant anti-brand actions (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022).

Unlike brands, universities appear to approach these issues differently. Brands often make quick statements on social media, following the lead of other companies, frequently competitors (Guha & Korschun, 2024), and rarely are they involved in heavy-handed activist efforts.

By contrast, this approach does not work for universities which prioritize education, research, stakeholder engagement, and societal impact over using activism primarily as a tool for positioning or influence (Key et al., 2023). This underscores the unique and multifaceted role that universities may play in addressing complex social and political challenges. As shown by Cammarota et al. (2024), universities appear to engage in three different types of activist efforts to inform, inspire, and push their stakeholders on social issues. However, it remains unclear, first, what specific activist actions universities are undertaking; second, whether they are using activism to signal and strengthen their identity; and third, how this can be translated into practical guidance.

To address these goals, the present research analyzes specific activist actions conducted by some American universities and communicated on their institutional websites. The aim is to extract initial insights that could form the foundation of a guide for activism in higher education. The research questions guiding us are:

*RQ1. What are the specific actions of activist universities?*

*RQ2. Do these activist efforts signal and reinforce the university's identity?*

The top 25 universities in the United States, as ranked in the “QS World University Rankings”, were identified for this study. Data were collected and analyzed

thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This work presents in the following sections a theoretical background on the foundational literature of university activism, the data collection and analysis methods, the results, and finally, the implications for scholars, practitioners, and society at large.

## **Theoretical background**

### ***Corporate Activism and University Public Engagement***

Corporate activism involves companies publicly taking a stand on social, political, economic, and environmental issues to drive societal change (Appels et al., 2024; Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020). This strategy is rooted in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and seeks to influence public opinion and policy through visible actions and public statements (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Recently, universities have begun to adopt similar approaches, positioning themselves as active catalysts for change (Heath & Waymer, 2021). By embracing public engagement, universities are leveraging their platforms to implement activist efforts, engaging both internal and external stakeholders to address societal issues. This shift reflects a growing trend in higher education institutions to go beyond traditional roles of education and research, using their influence to foster social good and promote democratic participation (Lo Presti & Marino, 2020; Heath & Waymer, 2021). In doing so, universities are transforming into dynamic entities that not only generate knowledge but also actively contribute to societal discourse and change.

Moreover, just like brands, universities also seek to communicate their activist efforts since the activist strategy is inherently public and should be communicated through every possible visible means (Korschun, 2021). However, while brands declare their commitment primarily on social media platforms, universities appear to use their institutional websites with the ultimate goal of engaging stakeholders (Cammarota et al., 2024).

### ***University Brand Identity***

Identity is fundamental in establishing a strong brand, which is equally essential for universities. Like companies, universities operate as organizations that often adhere to the same principles and strategic logic (Alessandri et al., 2007). Brand identity refers to the set of associations, characteristics, and perceptions stakeholders hold about an institution, encompassing reputation, culture, and personality (Hankinson, 2004; Keller, 2001; Upshaw, 1995).

With competitive pressures, declining financial support, and a changing educational environment, higher education institutions (HEIs) increasingly adopt marketing and branding strategies to differentiate themselves and enhance student–university identification (Balaji, Roy, & Sadeque, 2016). In this regard, activism is a burly shift paradigm in brand management (Andersen & Johansen, 2024), which could be so also for universities.

The growing attention on the university brand identity requires developing a clear and consistent identity that emphasizes brand knowledge, personality, and prestige to

foster stronger connections with students and stakeholders (Hemsley-Brown et al., 2016), and communicate a clear purpose (Calder, 2022).

In this context, university brand identity is shaped through visual and verbal elements, including reputation, culture, and personality, all of which help to create a cohesive public image and align with strategic goals (Bosch et al., 2006; Melewar & Akel, 2005). As universities increasingly recognize the importance of branding, they aim to build strong identification and engagement, driving supportive behaviors and enhancing their role in the broader societal context.

Additionally, in timing characterized by strong social attention, universities may implement in their identity their core social and/or environmental values in line with their target expectations; generally, in recent years, this has been conducted employing the activist strategy (Podnar & Golob, 2024). From this perspective, archetypal branding, rooted in Jungian psychology, helps brands - including universities – to create deeper emotional connections with their audiences by embodying universal characters and narratives, such as the Sage, Citizen, and Rebel (Thompson et al., 2023). These archetypes may offer a compelling way for universities to communicate their values and missions, also aligning their ‘activist’ brand identities with broader societal goals and resonating with the public’s subconscious ideals (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

***The University Activism***

University activism is a new and intricate phenomenon that seems widely practised but is poorly documented in the scientific literature. The first definition of university activism is provided by Cammarota et al. (2024) as “a strategy to take a stand on controversial social, political, economic, and environmental issues through three different efforts, which are classified as disseminating, promoting, and pushing, all communicated in a visible way to engage both internal and external stakeholders to create societal change” (p. 8). These efforts represent the evolving role of universities, from being traditional centers of learning to become active participants in societal discourse and change (Barnett, 2021; Choudry, 2020). Each effort has specific objectives, but more importantly, it involves targeted actions. The main categories of these actions were identified in the work of Cammarota et al. (2024).

**Table 1.** University Activism Efforts

University Activism Efforts		
<i>Disseminating</i>	<i>Promoting</i>	<i>Pushing</i>
Academic courses	Awareness Campaigns and training	Donation request
Seminars	Celebrations	Volunteering program
Conferences	Memorial Days	Protest
Workshops	Honors and awards	Strike
Research and publication		Demonstrations

	Counseling and psychological services	
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Source: Cammarota et al., 2024

Specifically, *Disseminating* involves leveraging educational and research activities to raise awareness about socio-political, environmental, and economic issues among stakeholders. This is often communicated through courses, seminars, and publications on university websites (Lo Presti & Marino, 2020)

*Promoting* focuses on engaging and inspiring the university community by organizing events, training, and providing resources to foster commitment to social causes. These activities are typically communicated via dedicated centers and offices, emphasizing the university’s role in shaping public opinion and fostering a culture of inclusivity and engagement (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Wigmore-Álvarez et al., 2020).

*Pushing* entails encouraging stakeholders to take concrete actions, such as volunteering, donations, or participation in protests, which are communicated through specific programs and partnerships outlined on institutional platforms. This effort illustrates the university’s transition from passive education to active involvement in societal transformation, often influencing policies beyond the campus (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019; Broadhurst & Martin, 2014).

These efforts collectively form the strategy of university activism, engaging various actors in supporting social causes and advancing societal change (Cammarota et al., 2024). Thus, the university emerges as a dynamic entity fostering academic excellence and catalyzing societal transformation, going beyond its conventional social responsibility tasks and becoming an activist institution (Marans & Callewaert, 2017).

**Method**

A multiple case study approach was chosen to gain a detailed understanding of this emerging phenomenon by examining the websites of 25 universities (Yin, 2009; Eisenhardt, 1989). A purposive sampling strategy was used to select high-ranking American universities from the QS World Ranking 2023, particularly those with a history of social activism.

Employing an Abductive Grounded Theory approach, this study iteratively integrates empirical data and existing theories to uncover concrete actions reflecting university activism efforts (Rahmani & Leifels, 2018). For data collection, we explored each university’s website to identify specific actions associated with the three main efforts of university activism—Disseminating, Promoting, and Pushing.

For each activist effort, we searched for concrete actions such as academic courses, seminars, conferences, workshops, research, publications, awareness campaigns, training sessions, celebrations, memorial days, honors, awards programs, counseling services, donations, volunteering programs, and protests.

In each of these sections, we used a comprehensive set of keywords related to activism, including “inclusion,” “diversity,” “advocacy,” “activism,” “equity,” “engagement,” “social commitment,” “voting rights,” “social justice,” “social movement,” “donation,” “volunteering,” “civil rights,” “LGBTQIA+ rights,”

“prevention,” “political action,” “sexual and gender-based misconduct,” “trans-intersex, non-binary (TIN) rights,” “anti-racism,” and “racial justice.”

This targeted search strategy allowed us to identify and categorize the specific activist actions universities systematically undertake to engage with societal issues (Lo Presti & Marino, 2020).

The data were organized into a structured matrix according to the three activist efforts of university activism and analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All data were analyzed by the research team and discussed collectively in light of existing theory to arrive at a final coding (Tuckermann et al., 2023).

## Findings

Delving into the details of the three efforts identified in university activism has allowed us to identify common patterns and distinctive characteristics that define and differentiate activist universities, especially about their identity. **Appendix A** outlines specific actions for each effort – *disseminating*, *promoting*, and *pushing* – highlighting different explanatory archetypes of various possible activist identities.

Thus, we first report briefly some concrete examples for each of the three efforts. Second, we begin to identify the possible different university identities based on their activist efforts. Third, we provide additional elements that help in understanding university activism.

### *The Disseminating Effort*

The disseminating effort aims to spread knowledge about socio-political issues, social movements and activism through educational initiatives and academic research. This effort primarily focuses on integrating activism with academia by leveraging educational content and research outputs to inform and educate both the university community and the broader public.

Universities utilize various channels to disseminate information, such as courses, seminars, and publications. For instance, the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)* offers specific courses on feminist activism and the role of scientists in social movements. These courses provide a comparative perspective on women’s issues, the intersection of multiple identities, and the impact of conflict and state policies on women’s lives. They also examine scientific responsibility, social justice, and the influence of scientists in various social movements. Through syllabi, readings, and assignments, students engage with both theoretical and practical aspects of activism.

Additionally, universities disseminate scientific studies on controversial topics through social media and official pages. An example includes the *University of California, Berkeley*’s study on measuring toxic metals in tampons which is shared widely to raise awareness.

There is also a strong emphasis on portraying an activist image through research on the history of social movements and university protests, often led by students. Most

universities have dedicated archival sections where they share research conducted on these topics. For example, the *University of Wisconsin-Madison* has a longstanding reputation for its civically minded student body. Although student organizations and protests began long before the turbulent 1960s, that era solidified UW-Madison's image as a "protest school."

Another notable example is *Northwestern University*, which focuses on "sexuality" by providing a rich sexuality studies program. The university has a dedicated page titled "The Sexualities Project at Northwestern" (SPAN), promoting sexuality, sexual orientation, and health in social contexts. Northwestern offers specialized courses on complex sexuality issues to undergraduate and graduate students, such as "Beyond Porn: Sexuality, Health, and Pleasure," "Language and Gender," and "Love as a Lens for Social Justice: How and Why We Care." SPAN also promotes activities like reading groups, annual workshops, and funding opportunities.

*Carnegie Mellon University*, instead, offers "Wellness-Themed Academic Courses" such as "Body Politics," "Hack Your Life," and "Health Psychology." Each university appears to specialize in a specific pool of issues; in *Carnegie Mellon's* case, wellness is a key focus.

Activist universities utilize education and research to inform their academic communities and the public on complex issues. From this standpoint, the *University of Texas at Austin*, for instance, participates in the "National Hazing Prevention Week" every September, providing awareness courses on the topic.

### ***The Promoting Effort***

The *Promoting* effort is based on various training opportunities, awareness campaigns, or events on these issues (see **Table 1**). Promotion activities are typically organized by specific centers that host events aiming to engage stakeholders.

The *University of Texas at Austin* offers, for example, several training programs related to hazing prevention, such as the "Hazing Prevention Workshop," "Creating Space for Change," and "Hazing Prevention Consultation." Additionally, training sessions are provided for faculty and staff. Other training initiatives include "BeVocal," aimed at empowering the entire community to recognize, discuss, and report hazing.

Instead, *Johns Hopkins University* organizes "Sexual Assault Awareness Month," while *Princeton University's* "Carl A. Fields Center for Equality and Cultural Understanding" promotes diversity and inclusion through cultural events and support services to enhance understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures and identities. Pride events are also widespread, such as those organized by *Stanford University's* LGBTQ Group, which offers support to the community and organizes panels, meetings, and mentorship programs to promote inclusivity and rights advocacy.

The *Georgia Institute of Technology* participates in "Alcohol Awareness Month", promoting a series of workshops on safe decision-making. Additionally, there are centers like the "Wellness Empowerment Center," which currently focuses on the fight against HIV/AIDS, including free HIV testing as part of its initiatives.

*Carnegie Mellon University* also extensively communicates and promotes wellness-related activities. For example, its institutional website features a "Mental & Emotional

Health Resource” page offering wellness initiatives like individual therapy, consultation, group therapy and workshops, pet therapy, and the option to seek support for someone else. Spaces are another critical element in university activism, beyond branding.

### ***The Pushing Effort***

The pushing effort aims to activate stakeholders from a behavioral perspective, following actions taken to involve them cognitively and emotionally. From this perspective, *pushing* efforts are considered the most challenging to implement as they require active stakeholder commitment, which can only be achieved if dissemination and promotion activities are successful. It encourages stakeholders to engage in concrete actions, such as participating in volunteering programs, donating, or joining protests and demonstrations.

The specificity of the actions and the almost obsessive attention to detail may also be seen in the selection of pushing actions. For example, the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) features several call-to-action activities, like the “LEAD Fellows” program, where LEAD stands for Leaders for Equity Advancement and Diversity. These engagement initiatives are always communicated clearly and concretely. LEAD Fellows must undergo intensive training sessions, including a three-hour orientation and ten two-hour training sessions, commit to the program for at least a year, participate in and promote diversity conversations on campus, and foster diversity opportunities. The LEAD program, launched in 2015, aims to engage community members and lead them to action, and today comprises 70 members.

Moreover, universities encourage students to engage in activism by participating in volunteering programs aimed at community service, such as the “Princeton Service Focus” of Princeton University, or to take part in the Pride Parade. Instead, *Cornell University*’s “Youth Farm Project” leads students to a personal awareness of their relationship with food, the significance of their local food system, and its inequalities, encouraging actions to reduce these disparities. Universities also offer portals that allow students, staff, and faculty to learn about volunteer opportunities with schools, non-profit organizations, and other companies, such as the *University of Michigan*’s “Connect2Community.”

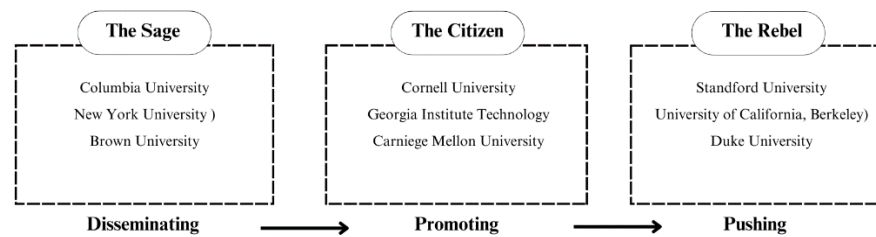
Additionally, pushing efforts are often characterized by a dual action. One push comes from the university, encouraging students, faculty and staff to take action while adhering to the US Constitution’s *First Amendment*, thus not directly on behalf of the university. They do this by providing guidelines and declaring support for free speech. University centers, through promotion and dissemination, also encourage students to protest. By contrast, students, in turn, protest both for external factors and to push the university itself to reach an agreement, such as successfully advocating for divestment from fossil fuels at *Harvard University* or urging the university to take concrete stances on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



### ***Strengthen university brand identity through activism***

Our analysis shows that universities implement various actions for the three types of activist efforts. Indeed, each university carries out certain actions for each effort. However, by analyzing the data, with the most representative examples reported in **Appendix A**, it is possible to observe that some universities focus more on one effort at the expense of the other two. When these data are compared with Jung's archetypes, they allow for identifying different identities and show how activism strengthens and emphasizes the university's specific identity. Specifically, in **Figure 1**, we have highlighted some universities where commitment to a specific effort is clearer and more evident, identifying three distinct archetypes: the Sage, the Citizen, and the Rebel.

**Figure 1.** University activist identity archetypes



Source: Author's elaboration

The first cluster is the archetype of the “Sage”. In this case, universities leverage their identity as disseminators of knowledge by offering academic courses and seminars and publishing research on socio-political issues. This approach positions them as canthers of enlightenment and intellectual leadership, aligning their brand identity with the value of knowledge. For example, if we look at Appendix A, we can see how *Columbia University* invests more in the disseminating effort through various actions (e.g., academic courses, workshops and conferences, resource material, seminar series) and a wealth of initiatives. The same is demonstrated by the profile of *New York University*, which focuses on dissemination activities through courses and informational materials. Similarly, we observe the same pattern when comparing the profile of *Brown University*. These universities carry out actions for each effort but predominantly choose the disseminating effort, reinforcing their identity as scientific and knowledge disseminators.

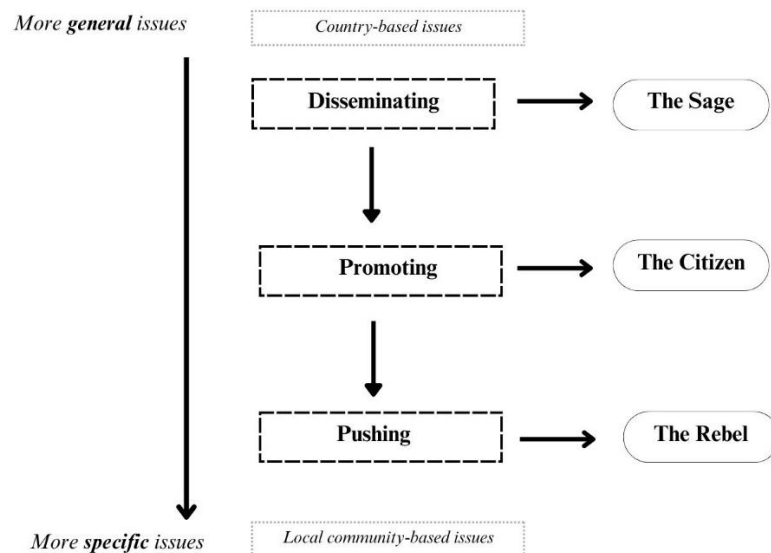
On the other hand, the “Citizen” cluster emphasizes the promotion of efforts to engage the community and become active participants in the society where they operate, thus becoming true citizens. These universities actively seek dialogue with their communities. They encourage participation in community service, organize awareness campaigns, create spaces for open dialogue and inclusivity, promote events on these themes, and offer opportunities for civic engagement. This reflects a brand identity focused on social responsibility, community involvement, and democratic participation. For example, when we look at the profile of *Carnegie Mellon University* (Appendix A), we observe a clear prevalence of actions, and the number of initiatives

related to the promoting effort compared to the other two efforts. Similarly, *Georgia Institute of Technology* and *Cornell University* focus more on promotional efforts.

Finally, following Jung’s archetypes and analyzing the activist efforts of these universities, we identified a third cluster: the “Rebel”. These universities are most actively pushing the action through various volunteer programs, support for social movements, and participation in protests or demonstrations. The rebel universities encourage more radical forms of activism, such as protests, strikes, and advocacy campaigns, aligning with a brand identity characterized by courage, defiance, and the pursuit of social justice. For example, *Stanford University*, with its various volunteer programs, or the *University of California, Berkeley*, which also offers scholarships to incentivize activism, or *Duke University*, which promotes protests, supports social movements and has extensive volunteer programs. Their identity is also clearly reflected in the names of these activities, such as “DukeEngage” which reinforces their brand identity.

Moreover, another interesting element that emerges from the findings is how universities, through their activist efforts, strengthen their identity and connection to the local community. Many social issues addressed are closely linked to the local context, especially evident in their pushing efforts. Specifically, dissemination efforts tend to be more general and abstract, whereas there is greater specificity in promotion efforts, and finally, pushing is the most community-based effort. Most volunteer initiatives are almost employed to help the local community. We report this emerging insight in **Figure 2**, which shows the three different efforts – based on the specificity of issues – related to the three types of university identity.

**Figure 2.** Activist efforts: From general to particular



Source: Author’s elaboration

From this perspective, regarding pushing actions, for instance, Harlem Grown Partnership, which promotes urban agriculture; the Baltimore Urban Debate League, where students support local schools; Yale University's Urban Resource program, which assists local formerly incarcerated individuals; Princeton Students for Immigrants, a program to help local immigrants; the Hyde Park Refugee Project, aiding refugees in the University of Chicago area; or MIT's Together in Service, where students, staff, and faculty collaborate with local non-profit organizations.

Finally, another pattern we have identified in some universities, aimed at consolidating their activist identity, is the consistency of the issue across various efforts.

For example, Cornell University offers academic courses on racism (disseminating), anti-racism training (promoting), and supports the Black Lives Matter movement (pushing). Northwestern University offers academic courses on sexuality (disseminating), training on sexuality, and provides opportunities to report sexual incidents (pushing). Similarly, the Georgia Institute of Technology offers academic courses on student wellness (disseminating), holds events on alcohol awareness and the fight against HIV/AIDS, and also offers free HIV testing (promoting).

## **Conclusion**

First, this study reinforces the understanding of the emerging phenomenon of university activism by highlighting the specific activist actions. Second, it begins to identify how universities leverage activist efforts to signal and strengthen their identity. Third, it identifies elements that suggest how universities reinforce their connection and brand with the local community through activist actions, particularly pushing efforts.

The results demonstrate that university activism is a highly complex phenomenon, not only due to the nature of the issues themselves, as is the case with brand activism (Walter et al., 2024; Mukherjee & Althuisen, 2020), but also in its implementation. This strategy involves precise, concrete, well-studied, strategic, and carefully planned actions, but most importantly, actions with clear objectives. It is a strategy that demands significant commitment from the university, unlike what occurs for activist brands (Podnar & Golob, 2024; Ahmad et al., 2022).

Universities support specific causes and foster linkage with local communities (Heath & Waymer, 2021; Broadhurst & Martin, 2014). This approach reinforces the university's identity, highlighting different archetypes.

The results show how some universities strengthen their role as disseminators of science and knowledge by leveraging disseminating efforts, which we call the "Sage." Others become active "Citizens" by promoting events and awareness campaigns. Finally, some universities strongly emphasize pushing actions, seeking social change and urging their stakeholders to take action, which we have called "Rebel". The specificity of actions, their continuity, and the connection with the community contribute to strengthening these identities.

Moreover, the pushing actions seem to encapsulate the ultimate goal of activism: seeking social change by altering individuals' attitudes and behaviours toward a more inclusive and prosocial direction (D' Arco et al., 2024; Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020).

However, this appears to be a significant challenge in the activist strategy, often resulting in negative consumer responses rather than the desired change (Walter et al., 2024; Ahmad et al., 2024). This is likely due to the lack of a solid and well-structured engagement strategy to complement the activist efforts of brands.

Findings suggest that the pushing efforts are often driven by external pressures from within the university community, including student protests and advocacy that demand more concrete actions from the institution. *Harvard University*, for instance, has faced significant pressure from student-led movements to divest from fossil fuels, highlighting the powerful role of grassroots activism in shaping institutional policies. These instances demonstrate how universities may respond to and harness activism within their communities to drive policy changes and align their actions with the values and demands of their stakeholders. Universities that support such initiatives create an environment where activism is not only tolerated but encouraged, positioning themselves as responsive and socially responsible institutions (Choudry, 2020; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019).

### **Practical Implications and Future Research Directions**

This research reveals how complex and profound the phenomenon of university activism is, which cannot be defined and exhausted by a mere “public declaration” on a socio-political issue. Instead, it is a set of micro-actions aimed at contributing to that cause and engaging stakeholders.

Theoretically, the phenomenon is still largely unexplored and, most importantly, yet to be operationalized, paving the way for a new, timely, and necessary research field. Future studies should conduct qualitative analyses by directly interviewing these universities or, conversely, the students to understand their expectations and perceptions. Furthermore, the same study should be conducted in other countries to understand the phenomenon better and determine whether its implementation and choice of topics are country specific. Additionally, it would be essential to measure it quantitatively to understand its impacts on the internal and external communities.

Lastly, scholars should investigate how universities use activism to signal and reinforce their identity and relationships with local communities.

However, the strength of this paper lies in the insights it provides for practitioners. This study offers valuable implications for universities by carefully outlining possible initiatives they may undertake to assume a social role, contribute to our society’s challenges, reinforce their identity, and foster relationships with local communities.

Moreover, this work categorizes actions based on different types of efforts, highlighting how each objective aligns with a strategic vision focused on public engagement (Lo Presti et al., 2023). The examples gathered serve as important starting points for structuring, planning, and launching initiatives, ranging from simple courses or research aimed at raising community awareness (*disseminating*), to training initiatives, awards, or specific offices (*promoting*), and even actions aimed at behavioral engagement (*pushing*), such as promoting volunteerism, donations, or protests.

Finally, this work also provides social implications for policymakers and society at large, emphasizing the critical role of universities in addressing and contributing

concretely and effectively to social issues that are becoming increasingly problematic and often lack guiding figures. Topics such as mental well-being, health, suicide prevention, and sexual violence are more relevant than ever, and governments or other institutions often struggle to address them effectively (Radanielina Hita & Grégoire, 2023)

This study suggests that universities may play a crucial role, from raising awareness on these issues to offering free resources through their centers of excellence, such as the Georgia Institute of Technology, which provides HIV testing for its students, or Carnegie Mellon University, which offers 24/7 hotlines for students who feel in danger or have experienced some form of violence. These are just a few examples of the small actions adopted by universities that positively impact society and mitigate significant problems.

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## Appendix A

UNIVERSITY	DISSEMINATING	PROMOTING	PUSHING
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	<i>Academic courses:</i> Science Activism (Gender, Race, and Power, Women and Global Activism in Art, Media and Politics)	<i>Training program:</i> Data Activism  <i>Celebration:</i> Day of Action	<i>Volunteering programs:</i> Displacement Action Network (between activists, university and policymakers)  Together in Service (students, staff, and faculty collaborate with local NPO)
Stanford University	<i>Resource material list:</i> Gaza/Israel crisis Scholarship & Activism (social justice)	<i>Events:</i> Gaza/Israel crisis Stanford for LGBTQ	<i>Volunteering programs:</i> The Haas Center for Public Service (to address social issues)  Beyond the Farm (to help the local community)  Stanford Alumni Volunteer Leadership (a collaboration between the university and local community)
Harvard University	<i>Academic courses and research:</i> global human rights	<i>Training programs:</i> LGBTQI + activism summit	<i>Protests:</i> Celebrating Pride



	<i>Podcasts episodes:</i> LGBTQI+	and online advocacy Human Rights Program Funding for Human Rights Project Climate Action Training	<i>Volunteering Program:</i> Global Day of Service
California Institute of Technology (Caltech)	<i>Workshop and Resource Material list:</i> Diversity and Inclusion Features of Visual Activism (understand social topics through arts)	<i>Events</i> Civic engagement (promoting community- oriented training and programmes)  <i>Celebration:</i> Make a Difference Day	<i>Volunteering program:</i> Civic engagement (environmental clean- ups, support for local non-profit organizations, active citizenship)  Rise Tutoring Program (support for high school students)  Environmental Outreach Programs
University of Chicago	<i>Academic courses and seminars:</i> Race, Politics and Culture	<i>Awareness campaigns:</i> social justice issues cultural programs advocacy	<i>Volunteering programs:</i> Neighborhood Schools Program (collaborate with high school students)  Summer Links Internship Program (collaborate with ONG to address local social issues).  Hyde Park Refugee Project (assistance to the city's refugees)
University of Pennsylvania	<i>Research:</i> Activism and Social Justice	<i>Online public events:</i>	<i>Volunteering programs:</i>

		bid data and social justice big data and racial equity  <i>Awareness campaign:</i> Penn Leads the Vote (foster students to vote)	Public service for local community  University-Assisted Community Schools (do activism in local high schools - West Philadelphia)
Princeton University	<i>Academic course:</i> Race, gender, immigration, politics, American culture to understand social issues  <i>Workshop:</i> Diversity and inclusion	<i>Events:</i> Culture and identities Diversity and inclusion  <i>Awareness campaign:</i> Princeton student climate initiative Princeton Indigenous Advocacy Coalition	<i>Volunteering programs:</i> Princeton Service Focus Breakout Princeton Community Action (only for first-year students) Princeton Students for Immigrant Empowerment (help local immigrants)  <i>Protests:</i> Pride parade
Yale University	<i>Academic courses:</i> Race, Inequality and Society	<i>Awards:</i> Annual Working Women Network Recognition  <i>Events:</i> Community breakfast  <i>Opportunities:</i> Social Justice Fellowships (Scholarships for students working on social justice)	<i>Volunteer programs:</i> Yale Affinity groups, Girl's Science Investigations, Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS), Citizens' Climate Lobby  Urban Resource Initiative (help for ex-prisoners)
Cornell University	<i>Academic courses:</i> Racism	<i>Training:</i> Anti-racism	<i>Volunteering program:</i> Youth Farm Project

		<p>Women Leadership</p> <p><i>Awareness campaigns:</i> Cornell Votes Gender equity</p> <p><i>Award:</i> Staff integrity and Inclusion</p>	<p><i>Support for social movement:</i> Cornell students 4 Black Lives</p>
Columbia University	<p><i>Academic courses:</i> Gender, sexuality, queer theory, feminism, transgender non-binary, migration, diversity, inclusion</p> <p><i>Workshops and conferences:</i> Civil and Political rights</p> <p><i>Resource material:</i> Political engagement (CU Engage, ALL IN to Vote)</p> <p><i>Seminars series:</i> Our warming planet's anti-harassment, voting, American politics Democracy series</p>	<p><i>Award:</i> World projects impact</p>	<p><i>Volunteering programs</i> Global brigades (serving community)</p> <p>Columbia Legal services internship (human rights, civil liberties, public interest law)</p> <p>Harlem Grown Partnership (promote urban agriculture)</p>
Johns Hopkins University	<p><i>Seminar:</i> Diversity Leadership</p> <p><i>Academic course:</i> Social Justice in Public Health</p>	<p><i>Awareness program:</i> Sexual Assault Awareness Month</p> <p><i>Memorial day:</i></p>	<p><i>Protest:</i> Pride Parade</p> <p><i>Volunteering program:</i> Baltimore Urban Debate League</p>

	Jericho Reentry Program (education for ex-prisoners)	Henrietta Lacks Memorial Lecture	(students engaging in local high-schools)
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	<p><i>Academic course:</i> LGBTQ studies certificate (sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression)</p> <p><i>Resource material:</i> Voting resource</p>	<p><i>Award:</i> Distinguished diversity leaders</p> <p><i>Training:</i> Sexual assault prevention</p> <p><i>Awareness campaigns:</i> Voting Hubs</p>	<p><i>Volunteering program:</i> Connect2Community Detroit Partnership (volunteerism in the local community of Detroit)</p>
University of California, Berkeley (UCB)	<p><i>Research:</i> Toxic metals in tampons</p> <p><i>Course:</i> Critical Race Theory</p> <p><i>Workshop</i> Social Justice</p>	<p><i>Events:</i> Cal Day Diversity Earth Week</p>	<p><i>Volunteering programs:</i> American Cultures Engaged Scholarship (addressing local social issues and promoting civic responsibility)</p> <p>Alternative Breaks</p> <p>Gil Track Community Farm (foster local sustainable agriculture)</p> <p><i>Support to social movement:</i> Green New Deal Climate Strike Pacific Island Initiatives</p>

Northwestern University	<p><i>Academic courses:</i> Sexuality program studies Justice program Civic engagement certificate</p> <p><i>Resource material:</i> Suicide prevention</p> <p><i>Workshop:</i> Sexuality</p>	<p><i>Training:</i> Sexuality (use of pronouns, gender and sexuality glossary) Suicide prevention</p> <p><i>Counseling and psychological services</i></p> <p><i>Event:</i> Chicago LGBTQIA + Café</p>	<p><i>Bias incident report:</i> Sexual abuse</p> <p><i>Volunteering programs:</i> Engage Chicago Alternative Spring Break Neighbor2Neighbor DeBerry Civic Scholars</p>
New York University (NYU)	<p><i>Academic courses:</i> International Human Rights Activism Advocacy and political action specialization NYU Prison Education program</p> <p><i>Resource material list:</i> Activist NYU Reads (Art and Activism, Slavery, White Supremacy, Colonialism &amp; Capitalism, LGBTQ+ Rights)</p>	<p><i>Training programs:</i> Immigrants defense initiative, LGBTQ Initiatives</p> <p><i>Awareness campaigns:</i> Active Minds (on mental health)</p>	<p><i>Donations:</i> Crowdfunding programs for global inclusion Creating Bridges Campaign</p>
University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)	<p><i>Academic courses:</i> LGBTQ + studies (sexual identity, social control of behavior, family, gender expression)</p>	<p><i>Event:</i> LGBTQ + Welcome event Volunteer Day</p>	<p><i>Volunteering program:</i> UCLA Activist-in-Residence program</p>
Duke University	<p><i>Academic courses:</i> Global human rights issues</p>	<p><i>Events:</i> marginalized sexual</p>	<p><i>Protest:</i> Divesting form fossil fuels</p>

	Focus program (social justice and public health)	<p>orientations, romantic orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions</p> <p><i>Awareness campaigns:</i> Know your status (on HIV awareness)</p>	<p><i>Volunteering programs:</i> DukeEngage Program</p> <p>Duke Global Medical Brigade (foster students in global medical missions)</p> <p>Duke Partnership for Service</p> <p><i>Support to social movements:</i> Black Lives Matter</p>
Carnegie Mellon University	<p><i>Academic courses:</i> Wellness (health psychology, hack your life, body politics)</p> <p><i>Workshop:</i> Mental and emotional health</p>	<p><i>Counseling and psychological services</i> (individual therapy, consultation, group therapy, pet therapy)</p> <p><i>Celebration days:</i> Day of service Season of Giving</p> <p><i>Traning:</i> Wellbeing (conversation about failure, bournout, gratitude practice, healthy habits)</p> <p><i>Events:</i> Voulunteer Day Rise Agains Hunger</p>	<p><i>Volunteering program:</i> Nex.US civic engagement</p> <p>Rise Against Hunger (for local community)</p> <p>Alternative breaks</p>

		<i>Awareness campaigns:</i> Sustainable Earth Tech4Society	
University of California, San Diego (UCSD)	<i>Academic Courses:</i> Critical Gender Studies  <i>Seminars:</i> Tell Us How YC it  <i>Resource material:</i> Activism archive (historical UCSD activism)	<i>Events:</i> 21-Day Anti-racism c21hallenge, Black graduation ceremony, black family orientation  <i>Celebration days:</i> Volunteer day  <i>Awards:</i> Champions of Change	<i>Volunteering programs:</i> LEAD Fellows (for the university community)  UC San Diego Health Volunteer Program
Brown University	<i>Academic courses:</i> Art and Activism, climate change, human rights, policy process, social movement theory Community-Engaged Teaching and Learning  <i>Resource material:</i> Brown Vote  <i>Research:</i> Community-Engaged Research	<i>Tutoring:</i> Brown refugee	<i>Volunteering Programs:</i> BrownEngage  D'Abate Elementary School Partnership (provide assistance to the most disadvantaged students)
University of Texas at Austin	<i>Workshop</i> Safety education	<i>Event:</i> National Hazing Prevention week (each september)  <i>Training:</i> Hazing Prevention	<i>Bias incident report:</i> Report Violence, Misconduct, Harassment, or Discrimination  <i>Volunteering programs:</i>

		Creating Space for Change BeVocal	UT Outpost (Students run a food pantry helping those in need)  Food Recovery Network
University of Washington	<i>Research Group</i> Migration, Refugees and Borderlands	<i>Event:</i> Conversation on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	<i>Volunteering program:</i> UW Farm  UW Food Pantry  TurnUp Youth Activism Program (voting rights)
University of Wisconsin- Madison	<i>Resource material:</i> History of UW- Madison through student activism  <i>Workshop:</i> Crossroads of Ideas (on socio-political issues)	<i>Event:</i> Diversity and Inclusion	<i>Protest:</i> Student activism of UW-Madison  <i>Volunteering program:</i> Badger Volunteer Program
University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign	<i>Academic course:</i> Diversity LGBTQ Social Justice in Activism	<i>Award:</i> Make a difference Awards  <i>Awareness campaign:</i> Illini Volunteers Preparedness Course  <i>Event:</i> Diversity	<i>Volunteering programs:</i> Uniting Pride  Illini Vote (for voting rights)
Georgia Institute of Technology	<i>Academic course:</i> Student Wellness  <i>Conference:</i> Diversity Symposium	<i>Event:</i> Alcohol Awareness month Fight against HIV/AIDS  <i>Memorial Day:</i>	<i>Volunteering program:</i> Mobilizing Opportunities for Volunteer Experiences (MOVE)



		<p>Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Day of Service</p> <p><i>Opportunities:</i> HIV free testing MOVE Service Grant (for students, staff, and faculty engaged in activism)</p>	
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