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Aysar YAHYA

ayahya1@tennessee.edu

University of Tennessee at Knoxville https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2341-7406

Sevil Bayçu

Anadolu University

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Corporate Social Advocacy on Visible Service Automation: The Impact of Advocacy Stance, Reactance, and Consumer Perceptions of Corporate Reputation

Aysar YAHYA[ab]* & [b]Sevil BAYÇU[a]

[a] Tombras school of Advertising and Public Relations, College of Communications & Information, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, USA. [b] Department of Public Relations and Advertising, Anadolu University, Eskişehir, Türkiye.

ABSTRACT

As artificial intelligence reshapes labor markets, companies increasingly face pressure to take public stances on automation and its societal implications. This study examines visible service automation, referring to situations in which robots replace human labor in consumer service contexts such as coffee shops, rather than the adoption of artificial intelligence in general. Using an experimental design with 187 Instagram users in Türkiye, participants were randomly assigned to view a neutral, conservative, or progressive advocacy message from a real brand. The results show that conservative messages opposing visible automation generated the most favorable reputational outcomes, whereas progressive messages supporting automation elicited higher psychological reactance and a decline in perceived corporate reputation. Psychological reactance significantly mediated the relationship between advocacy stance and corporate reputation. Brand attitude and issue involvement also moderated these effects. The findings demonstrate that consumer responses to service automation differ from reactions to broader debates about artificial intelligence because the replacement of human service workers is perceived as particularly sensitive. This study contributes to the corporate social advocacy literature by highlighting the roles of service visibility, issue involvement, and emotional resistance in shaping consumer evaluations. The findings also demonstrate the reputational risks associated with advocacy messages that are perceived as misaligned with consumer values in ethically sensitive service contexts.

Keywords: Corporate social advocacy**,** Visible service automation**,** Corporate reputation**,** Psychological reactance**,** and Brand attitude.

CONTACT Aysar Yahya ayahya1@tennessee.edu, University of Tennessee, College of Communications & Information, Tombras school of Advertising and Public Relations.

Aysar Yahya is a PhD student in Advertising at the Tombras School of Advertising and Public Relations, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA, and a PhD candidate in Public Relations and Advertising at the Department of Public Relations and Advertising, Faculty of Communication Sciences, Anadolu University, Türkiye.

Sevil Bayçu (PhD, Anadolu University) is a professor in the Department of Public Relations and Advertising, Faculty of Communication Sciences, Anadolu University.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed industries, reshaped labor markets, and redefined corporate responsibilities (Nyoto *et al.,* 2024). As automation becomes increasingly prevalent, companies are no longer judged solely on their products, services, or financial performance; they are also scrutinized for their positions on emerging societal issues (Wettstein *et al.,* 2019; Dodd and Supa, 2014). Among these, AI-driven automation has emerged as a contentious topic, sparking debates about job displacement (Frank *et al.,* 2019), ethical responsibility (Hallamaa and Kalliokoski, 2020), and the broader implications of machine intelligence on human agency (Arkin 2016; Heer, 2019). In this landscape, corporations find themselves in a delicate position, either as advocates for technological progress or as cautious actors addressing public concerns about the socioeconomic disruptions automation may bring.

Yet, not all forms of automation are perceived equally. This study focuses on visible service automation - nstances where robots or machines replace human labor in direct consumer interactions (e.g., robot baristas) - a context that raises stronger emotional reactions than back-end AI applications such as analytics or algorithmic decision-making. Visible service automation touches on the symbolic and experiential dimensions of consumption (e.g., the coffeehouse experience), where consumers expect human service as part of brand value. Thus, corporate advocacy on visible automation may provoke reputational consequences distinct from those of broader AI adoption.

Corporate social advocacy (CSA), defined as a company's willingness to take a stance on divisive social and political issues, has become a crucial strategy for shaping corporate reputation (Marschlich and Bernet, 2024; Waymer and Vanslette, 2021). Unlike traditional corporate social responsibility (CSR), which emphasizes general goodwill and sustainability, CSA entails a more explicit, sometimes polarizing, engagement with societal debates (Dodd and Supa, 2014). With AI and automation emerging as one of the most polarizing technological developments of the modern era, corporate stances on this issue are poised to influence consumer perceptions significantly. While some firms champion AI as an innovation that enhances efficiency and competitiveness (Modhoriye *et al.,* 2023), others adopt a more cautious approach, highlighting concerns over job losses, algorithmic bias, and ethical governance (Chhatre and Singh, 2024; Frank *et al.,* 2019). However, much of the existing CSA literature has focused on causes such as LGBTQ+ rights

(Troy *et al.,* 2025), climate change, or racial justice, leaving service automation underexplored as a uniquely sensitive domain of advocacy. By examining consumer reactions to visible service automation, this study addresses that gap.

Consumers are increasingly attuned to the values and ethical commitments of the brands they support (Bhattacharya and Sen 2004). The rise of conscious consumerism has amplified the reputational stakes for companies engaging in AI-related advocacy. Firms that align their automation policies with societal expectations may strengthen trust and brand loyalty, whereas those perceived as indifferent to ethical concerns risk reputational damage. At the same time, consumers differ in how personally relevant they perceive automation to be. This concept - known as *issue involvement* - captures the degree to which individuals see an issue as significant to their values, needs, or interests (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Highly involved consumers may react more strongly, either positively or negatively, to corporate stances on visible automation. Therefore, issue involvement is expected to moderate the reputational effects of CSA in this domain.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to investigate how corporate stances on visible service automation - neutral, conservative (opposing replacement), or progressive (supporting replacement) - shape consumer perceptions of corporate reputation. Specifically, we (1) assess the direct impact of stance direction, (2) examine psychological reactance as a mediating mechanism, and (3) test brand attitude and issue involvement as moderators that condition these effects. By integrating Reactance Theory with consumer research on involvement, the study advances CSA literature into a novel technological domain while clarifying the reputational risks of misaligned advocacy.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

CSR, CSA and Corporate Reputation

CSR and CSA both influence corporate reputation, though in different ways. CSR encompasses various dimensions, including employee relations, diversity, product responsibility, community engagement, and environmental concerns, all of which significantly shape corporate reputation across industries (Melo and Álvaro Garrido-Morgado, 2012). Research indicates that CSR initiatives enhance corporate reputation by improving stakeholder perceptions (Vlastelica *et al.,* 2018; Esen, 2013) and fostering positive sentiment on social media (Weber *et al.,* 2022).

Companies that actively engage in CSR tend to be viewed more favorably, increasing their perceived value and stakeholder confidence (Gazzola, 2014). However, CSR research has also identified important boundary conditions—such as demographics, political ideology, and cultural context—that limit its positive effects (Sánchez-Torné *et al.,* 2020). Thus, CSR outcomes cannot be assumed to be universally positive, which makes CSA an important extension of this work.

While CSR generally fosters a positive corporate image, CSA - where companies take explicit stances on socio-political issues - can have a more polarized impact on corporate reputation (Park, 2022). CSA has been shown to reduce public skepticism and build trust and loyalty more effectively than generic CSR efforts (Park, 2022). At the same time, CSA can also provoke reactance and reputational decline when advocacy is perceived as insincere, coercive, or misaligned with consumer values (Marschlich and Bernet, 2024). Unlike CSR, which typically addresses non-controversial domains such as sustainability or community service, CSA directly engages contested public debates. This distinction underscores the reputational risks of CSA, especially when consumers perceive advocacy as a threat to their autonomy or values.

Corporate political advocacy (CPA) is a related but more explicitly political form of corporate engagement. Unlike CSR, which tends to generate broad positive sentiment, and CSA, which can generate both positive and negative outcomes depending on value alignment, CPA often triggers stronger backlash and polarization (Weber *et al.,* 2022). By clarifying these distinctions, we position CSA as uniquely relevant for understanding how corporate stances on visible service automation shape reputation.

AI and Automation as a Societal Issue in Corporate Advocacy

The rapid advancement of AI and automation has introduced profound economic and social transformations, raising critical ethical and strategic challenges for businesses. Automation technologies have significantly enhanced efficiency and productivity across industries, yet they have also fueled concerns regarding job displacement, economic inequality, and the evolving role of human labor (Acemoglu and Restrepo, 2020; Khogali and Mekid, 2023; Hallamaa and Kalliokoski ,2020). However, not all automation is perceived equally. Much prior research on automation has focused on industrial or back-end processes, whereas this study highlights *visible service automation*—instances where automation replaces human interaction in customer-facing

settings. Such contexts are symbolically rich, as the perceived "loss of human touch" can intensify consumer resistance (Chatterji and Toffel, 2019).

CSA occurs when firms take explicit positions on controversial societal issues (Dodd and Supa 2014). Unlike traditional CSR, which primarily focuses on broad commitments to sustainability, ethics, and philanthropy, CSA involves companies making deliberate statements on divisive topics that elicit strong public opinions (Chatterji and Toffel, 2019). In the context of visible service automation, CSA is particularly risky because consumer evaluations are tied not only to abstract issues of technological progress but also to tangible changes in service experiences. For instance, a robot serving coffee may trigger stronger resistance than a robot used in car manufacturing, due to differences in symbolic meaning, expectations of hospitality, and consumer–brand interactions. This distinction is made with the objective of framing the study as an examination of service automation rather than as an advocacy for artificial intelligence in general.

Based on this literature, we expect that corporate stances on visible automation—whether progressive (supporting replacement), conservative (opposing replacement), or neutral—will differentially affect consumer perceptions of corporate reputation.

H1: Evaluations of a company's reputation will differ depending on the type of advocacy presented (conservative, progressive, neutral), with conservative stances perceived most favorably.

Reactance Theory and Psychological Resistance

In the context of corporate social advocacy (CSA), consumer responses are not always positive, especially when the company's position on a controversial issue is perceived as an imposition. Previous studies have indicated the significant role of CSA in shaping consumer perception (Marschlich and Bernet, 2024), particularly when issues like automation are involved. Reactance theory (Brehm, 1966) offers a robust explanation for this resistance. The theory posits that individuals experience psychological discomfort when they believe their autonomy or freedom of choice is being threatened by external influences (Brehm, 1966). In response, they may engage in behavior that counteracts the perceived restriction, such as rejecting, opposing, or distancing themselves from the source of the advocacy.

In the context of visible service automation, brand attitude becomes particularly critical. Service encounters such as coffee shops are not just transactional but experiential, with human interaction forming part of the brand promise. When a brand endorses automation in such a context (progressive stance), consumers with negative brand attitudes may feel confirmed in their distrust, interpreting the move as evidence of insensitivity to human labor or customer experience. Conversely, those with strong positive attitudes may give the brand the benefit of the doubt, softening their resistance even if they dislike the idea of automation. Similarly, when a brand takes a conservative stance (opposing automation), consumers with positive brand attitudes may reward the advocacy with heightened loyalty, seeing it as consistent with the brand's values of human-centered service.

Prior studies suggest that brand attitude moderates not only direct consumer evaluations but also the psychological processes through which CSA affects reputation. For example, consumers with favorable brand attitudes may experience reduced psychological reactance, as they perceive advocacy messages as less threatening and more aligned with the brand's identity (Atanga *et al.,* 2022). In contrast, negative brand attitudes can intensify reactance, as consumers interpret CSA as an unwanted imposition by a distrusted source (Marschlich and Bernet 2024).

H2: Psychological reactance will mediate the relationship between advocacy stance and corporate reputation. Progressive stances will trigger higher reactance and more negative reputational outcomes, while conservative stances will reduce reactance and enhance reputation.

Moderating Role of Issue Involvement

While reactance explains why advocacy may backfire, it does not explain when such effects are stronger or weaker. One critical factor is issue involvement, defined as the degree to which individuals perceive an issue as personally relevant, based on their values, needs, or interests (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Issue involvement captures how important the automation issue is to the consumer, independent of whether they agree with a company's specific position. In visible service automation contexts (e.g., robots replacing frontline service employees), higher issue involvement is likely to amplify consumer responses because the issue is experienced as more personally consequential and motivates deeper cognitive processing. Highly involved consumers are therefore more likely to engage in counter-arguing and experience stronger psychological

reactance when a company's advocacy stance is perceived as threatening or inappropriate, whereas consumers with low involvement are less motivated to elaborate on the message, resulting in attenuated reactions.

Building on this reasoning, we argue that issue involvement moderates the effect of advocacy stance on psychological reactance and, consequently, the indirect effect of advocacy stance on corporate reputation through reactance.

H3: Issue involvement will moderate the indirect effect of advocacy stance on corporate reputation through psychological reactance. High involvement will amplify consumer responses (both positive and negative), while low involvement will attenuate them.

Moderating Role of Brand Attitude

Brand attitude, defined as the overall positive or negative evaluation of a brand, reflects both affective and cognitive responses shaped through personal experiences, advertising, and corporate communication (Shimp, 1981; Rossiter, 2014). A favorable brand attitude can act as a psychological buffer, prompting consumers to interpret corporate advocacy efforts more charitably and attribute them to authentic values rather than opportunistic signaling (Li *et al.,* 2022). By contrast, unfavorable brand attitudes predispose consumers to skepticism, making them more likely to question the sincerity of corporate stances and to perceive advocacy as manipulative.

In the context of visible service automation, brand attitude plays a particularly critical role. Service encounters such as coffee shops are not merely transactional but experiential, with human interaction forming part of the core brand promise. When a brand endorses automation in this setting (progressive stance), consumers holding negative brand attitudes may see their distrust confirmed, interpreting the move as evidence of insensitivity to both labor concerns and customer experience. Conversely, those with strong positive attitudes may extend goodwill toward the brand, softening their resistance even if they are skeptical about automation. Similarly, when a brand takes a conservative stance (opposing automation), favorable brand attitudes may amplify reputational rewards by framing the stance as consistent with human-centered service values.

Prior research indicates that brand attitude shapes both evaluations of advocacy and the psychological processes through which CSA influences reputation. Consumers with favorable brand attitudes may experience reduced psychological reactance, perceiving advocacy messages

as less threatening and more congruent with brand identity (Atanga *et al.,* 2022). In contrast, unfavorable brand attitudes can intensify reactance, as advocacy is interpreted as an unwanted imposition from a distrusted source (Marschlich and Bernet, 2024).

On this basis, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4: Brand attitude will moderate the indirect effect of advocacy stance on corporate reputation through psychological reactance. Positive brand attitudes will reduce reactance and buffer reputational risks, while negative brand attitudes will amplify reactance and reputational decline.

All hypotheses are summarized in our model (see Figure 1).

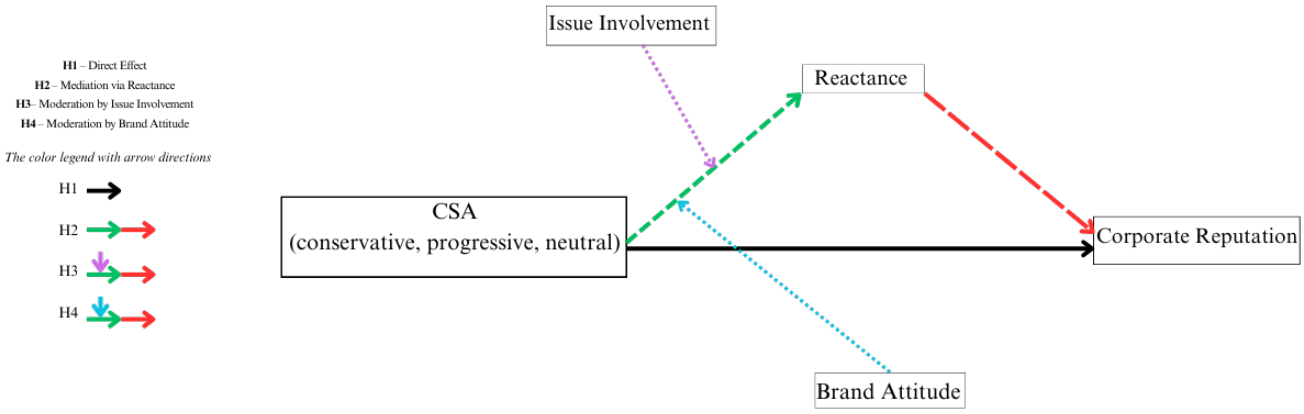


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study. The model illustrates the indirect effect of advocacy stance on corporate reputation through psychological reactance, with issue involvement and brand attitude moderating the path from advocacy stance to reactance. A direct effect of advocacy stance on corporate reputation is also included.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a one-factor between-subjects experimental design administered through an anonymous online survey using Google Forms. The target population consisted of adult residents of Türkiye, with all participants required to be at least 18 years old. Because the research was conducted in Türkiye, the final survey instrument was presented in Turkish. To ensure linguistic

accuracy, the items were first developed in English, translated into Turkish by bilingual experts, and then back-translated into English. A panel of four scholars specializing in public relations and communication reviewed the translations, and a small pilot test confirmed clarity and comprehensibility.

The independent variable was the type of corporate social advocacy stance, with three experimental conditions: neutral, conservative, and progressive. The dependent variable was corporate reputation, with psychological reactance as a mediator and issue involvement and brand attitude as moderators. The use of an experimental design enables causal inferences about the relationship between advocacy stance and consumer evaluations, while allowing for the testing of indirect and conditional effects. This approach is consistent with previous CSA research that has employed experimental manipulations to assess consumer responses (Dodd and Supa, 2014; Chatterji and Toffel, 2019).

Instagram was selected as the experimental platform because of its centrality to brand communication in Türkiye (Statista 2024; Yahya and Çınar 2024) and its strong visual orientation, which makes it particularly suitable for testing the impact of CSA messages. Participants were required to be active Instagram users to ensure ecological validity.

Stimulus Development and Brand Selection

The experimental stimuli consisted of three mock Instagram posts attributed to Coffy, a coffee chain operating in Türkiye whose market presence is moderate compared to global brands such as Starbucks. The brand was selected for three main reasons. First, its relative familiarity provided realism and ecological validity, allowing participants to engage with the stimuli as they would with genuine corporate communications. Second, unlike internationally dominant brands, Coffy does not carry strong, widely shared reputational associations that could overwhelm or bias participants' responses. This balance of recognition without saturation ensured that the advocacy messages remained the primary drivers of evaluation. Third, choosing an active brand in the coffee sector—an industry where service interactions are central—allowed us to anchor the advocacy manipulation in a context where human–automation debates are both symbolically and practically salient. To account for variability in prior brand perceptions, participants' awareness of and attitudes toward Coffy were measured before exposure to the stimuli and modeled in the analyses.

This approach safeguarded the internal validity of the design by ensuring that observed effects could be attributed to the advocacy stance manipulations rather than pre-existing brand biases.

- Stimulus 1: Neutral (Control Condition): The message acknowledged the public debate about automation but refrained from taking a clear stance, instead encouraging dialogue and reflection. "Yapay zekânın insanların yerini alıp alamayacağı tartışılıyor. Sizce insan işgücü yerine yapay zekâ kullanılmalı mı, kullanılmamalı mı? #insanlaryerineyapayzekâkullanımı" (There is a debate about whether artificial intelligence can replace humans. Do you think artificial intelligence should or should not be used instead of human labor? #usingartificialintelligenceinsteadofhumans) (see Figure 2).
- Stimulus 2: Conservative condition: The message opposed the replacement of human service by robots, emphasizing the importance of human-centered experiences, tradition, and employment. "Yapay zekânın insanların yerini alıp alamayacağı tartışılıyor. Coffy olarak yapay zekânın insan işgücü yerine kullanımına HAYIR diyoruz. #insanlaryerineyapayzekâkullanımınaHAYIR" (There is a debate on whether artificial intelligence can replace humans. As Coffy, we say NO to the use of artificial intelligence instead of human labor. #NO_to_the_use_of_artificial_intelligence_instead_of_humans) (see Figure 3).
- Stimulus 3: Progressive condition: The message emphasized the benefits of service automation, highlighting efficiency, innovation, and the company's belief that robotic service is part of the future of coffee retailing. "Yapay zekânın insanların yerini alıp alamayacağı tartışılıyor. Coffy olarak yapay zekânın insan işgücü yerine kullanımına EVET diyoruz. #insanlaryerineyapayzekâkullanımınaEVET" (There is a debate on whether artificial intelligence can replace humans. As Coffy, we say YES to the use of artificial intelligence instead of human labor. #YES_to_the_use_of_artificial_intelligence_instead_of_humans) (see Figure 4).

The neutral condition was carefully constructed to serve as a baseline. While CSA is often defined as taking an explicit position, neutrality here represents a minimally engaged stance that acknowledges controversy without committing to a side. This provides a meaningful comparison to explicit conservative and progressive stances. Care was taken in wording to avoid nudging

participants toward either side, addressing concerns that a “neutral” stance may otherwise appear biased. Similar approaches have been used in prior research (Sauter and Jungblut, 2024), where a neutral position was carefully crafted to avoid bias while still engaging participants in meaningful discourse about the issue at hand.

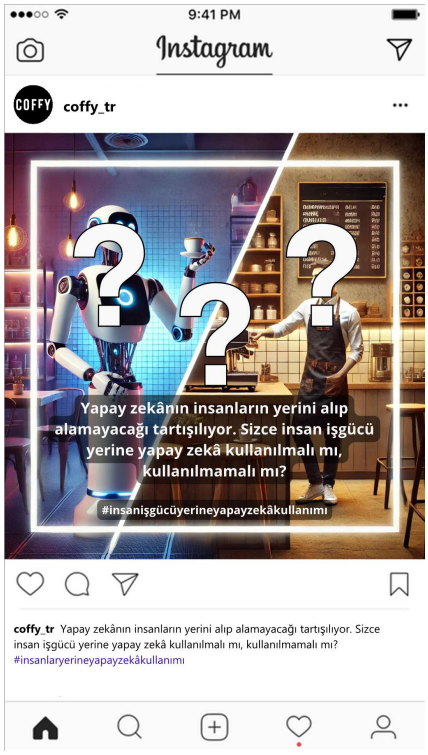


Figure 2: Control = Neutral

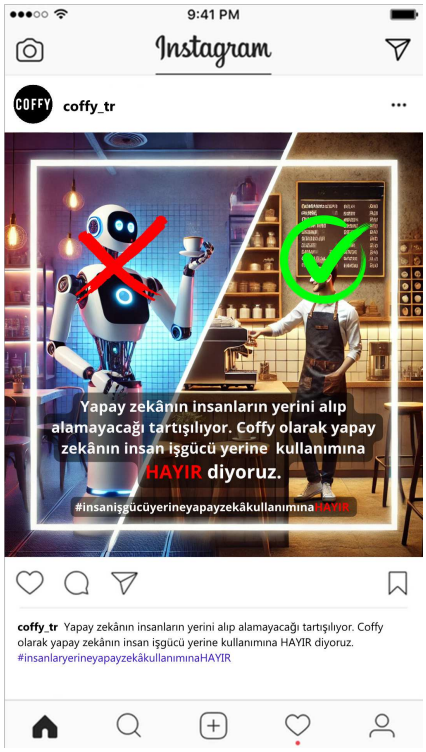


Figure 3: Conservative

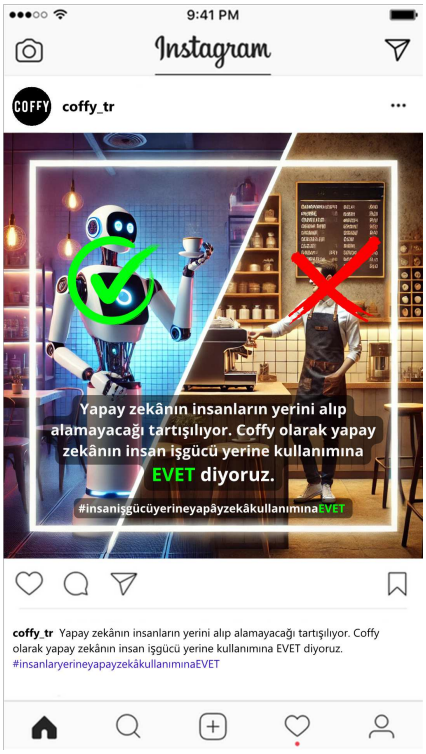


Figure 4: Progressive

Pretest and Manipulation Check

Prior to the main experiment, a pretest (n = 32) was conducted to assess whether the three advocacy messages were perceived as intended. After viewing one of the mock Instagram posts, participants were asked to indicate whether the brand’s stance toward automation was supportive, opposing, or neutral. The results showed a high level of agreement between the intended and perceived message positions. Specifically, 87.5% of participants correctly classified the progressive message as supportive of automation, 81.8% correctly identified the conservative message as opposing automation, and 75.0% correctly classified the neutral message as neutral, reflecting that it was perceived as a discussion-eliciting message without explicit endorsement or opposition.

To further validate the manipulation, participants also rated the extent to which the message supported the use of automation instead of human labor (1 = strongly opposes, 7 = strongly

supports). A one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences across conditions, $F(2, 29) = 18.42$, $p < .001$. As expected, the progressive condition received the highest ratings ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 0.91$), followed by the neutral condition ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.88$), and the conservative condition ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 0.95$), confirming successful differentiation among the stimuli. The pretest results indicate that participants nevertheless interpreted the message as neutral rather than as an implicit call to endorse automation.

In the main study, no explicit stance-classification manipulation check was administered in order to minimize potential priming or demand effects. Instead, stimulus validity was established through the pretest, while data quality in the main experiment was ensured via attention checks and procedural controls, including instructions prompting participants to carefully review the stimulus before responding.

Participants

According to Statista (2021), coffee shop visitors in Türkiye are predominantly adults aged 18–45, with younger cohorts also strongly represented. In alignment with this demographic profile, the present study targeted Instagram users aged 18 and above.

Eligibility criteria included: (1) being at least 18 years old, (2) having an active Instagram account, and (3) being proficient in Turkish.

To determine the optimal research sample size with precision, we conducted a power analysis using G-Power (Erdfelder *et al.,* 2009). Assuming an effect size of $f2=0.15$, an α error probability of 0.05, a power $(1-\beta)$ of 0.95, and three predictors, G-Power suggested a minimum required sample size of 127. To ensure robustness and account for potential exclusions, a more conservative approach was adopted, setting the target sample size at 200.

A total of 200 individuals initially participated. Thirteen were excluded during data cleaning due to incomplete responses or failure to pass the attention check (participants were instructed to select a specific value on a control item). The final analytic sample consisted of 187 respondents: 60 in the neutral condition, 61 in the conservative condition, and 63 in the progressive condition.

The sample was gender-balanced (53.7% female, 46.3% male) and covered a wide age range, distributed across five categories (18–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46–60, and 60+). Participants were residents of 15 different cities in Türkiye, contributing to a diverse geographic distribution.

Before participation, respondents received an informed consent form detailing the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality protections. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were free to withdraw at any time. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection.

Measures

The translation from English to Turkish was conducted by the authors in collaboration with two independent translators. To ensure accuracy, a back-translation was performed. A panel of four experts specializing in Public Relations reviewed and refined the translation, resulting in a pre-final version. The clarity and comprehensibility of the translated items were tested through a preliminary evaluation with 45 students, leading to minor revisions. All items were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Brand attitude

To measure participants' perceptions, we utilized a five-item, 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) (Spears and Singh 2004). This scale included five 7-point semantic differential items: Unappealing/Appealing, Bad/Good, Unpleasant/Pleasant, Unfavorable/Favorable, and Unlikable/Likable (M = 4.02, SD = 0.42, Cronbach's Alpha .891).

Reactance

This study conceptualizes reactance as resistance to perceived persuasion intent. To assess individuals' reactance, we employed a three-item measure adapted from prior research (Akestam *et al.,* 2017; Marschlich and Bernet 2024). The items included: "The statement of the company annoys me," "I am very annoyed by the fact that the company has commented on a social issue," and "I find the company's statement extremely manipulative." All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) (M = 2.5, SD = .802 , Cronbach'sAlpha .822).

Issue Involvement

issue involvement was assessed using a five-item scale adapted from Zaichkowsky (1985). Participants rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree) (M = 3.284, SD = 0,41, Cronbach'sAlpha .831). The specific items used in the measurement can be found in Table 1.

Corporate reputation

Corporate reputation was assessed using a six-item scale adapted from Marschlich and Bernet (2024), Lim and Young (2021) and Walsh and Beatty (2007). This scale captures participants' perceptions of the company's trustworthiness, overall satisfaction, and willingness to recommend it to others, as well as their general attitude toward the brand. Participants rated each statement on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (M = 3.779, SD = 1.048, Cronbach'sAlpha .854). A detailed overview of the items included in this measurement is presented in Table 1. Alternative scales, such as Fombrun's Reputation Quotient (RQ) or RepTrak, provide broader multidimensional assessments of corporate reputation (e.g., governance, workplace quality, financial performance). While these measures are widely established, they are less directly suited to the present study's design, which examines short-term shifts in consumer perceptions following exposure to advocacy messages. A comprehensive corporate reputation index would likely require respondents to have prior familiarity with the company across multiple domains — something not feasible here, since the experimental design deliberately used a relatively unfamiliar brand (Coffy) to avoid confounding pre-existing reputational associations. Accordingly, the chosen scale focuses on consumer perceptions that can be meaningfully formed during the experiment, without requiring extensive prior brand knowledge. This makes it both conceptually and methodologically appropriate for isolating the reputational impact of CSA messages.

Translation procedures: The scales were translated into Turkish, back-translated into English, and reviewed by a panel of four experts in communication studies. A pilot test with 32 students confirmed clarity. Minor refinements were made before full-scale administration.

Table 1: Items for measuring study variables.

Variables	Items	Reference
Attitude toward the brand (BA)*	BA1: Unappealing/Appealing	**Based on** Spears and Singh, (2004).
	BA2: Unpleasant/Pleasant	
	BA3: Unlikable/ likable	
	BA4: Unfavorable /favorable	
	BA5: Bad/Good	
Reactance (RE)**	RE1: The statement of the cafe annoys me	**Based on** Akestam *et al.,* (2017) and Marschlich and Bernet, (2024).
	RE2: amvery annoyed by the fact that the company has commented on a issue.	
	RE3: I find the cafe's statement extremely manipulative	
Issue involvement (II)**	II1: The issue of "Replacing human labor with AI" is very important to me.	**Based on** Zaichkowsky, (1985) and Marschlich and Bernet, (2024).
	II2: The issue of "Replacing human labor with AI" is very boring for me. [reverse]	
	II3: The issue of "Replacing human labor with AI" means nothing to me. [reverse]	
	II4: "Replacing human labor with AI" is extremely desirable to me.	
	II5: The topic of "Replacing human labor with AI" is very useless to me.	
Corporate reputation (CR)**	CR1: The cafe is very trustworthy	**Based on** Marschlich and Bernet, 2024; Lim and Young, (2021); and Walsh and Beatty, (2007).
	CR2: I am generally very satisfied with the cafe.	
	CR3: I would recommend this cafe to my friends and family.	
	CR4: I have a very positive attitude towards the cafe.	
	CR5: I am very critical of the cafe. [reverse]	
	CR6: I feel that the cafe is particularly self-serving. [reverse]	

Note(s): All items were asked in Turkish language.

*** These items were judged on a Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) "strongly agree" (7).**

****These items were judged on a Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) "strongly agree" (5).**

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS and the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2021). Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients were first calculated. All hypotheses were tested using PROCESS Model 7, which allows for the examination of direct effects, mediation, and moderated mediation. In addition, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess the direct effect of advocacy stance on corporate reputation (H1).

Preliminary analysis

Randomization checks

To verify successful randomization across experimental conditions, Chi-square tests of independence were conducted for gender, age group, and city of residence. No significant associations were found between condition and gender ($\chi^2(2) = 1.03$, $p = .598$), age group ($\chi^2(4) = 4.89$, $p = .298$), or city ($\chi^2(14) = 13.62$, $p = .479$). These results indicate that demographic characteristics were evenly distributed across the three groups, supporting the internal validity of the experimental design.

Method-induced bias

Given the reliance on self-reported survey data, the study took steps to assess the risk of common method bias, which can arise from respondents' tendency to answer consistently across items regardless of content (Podsakoff *et al.,* 2003). To evaluate this, Harman's one-factor test was conducted using both principal axis factoring and principal component analysis. In both analyses, multiple factors emerged, suggesting that a single factor did not account for the majority of the variance. Specifically, the largest factor extracted via principal axis factoring explained 21.367% of the total variance (Initial Eigenvalue = 0.684), while the principal component analysis revealed that the first component accounted for only 12.295% of the variance (Initial Eigenvalue = 0.392). Both values fall well below the commonly accepted threshold of 50% (Podsakoff *et al.,* 2003), indicating that common method bias is unlikely to pose a significant threat to the validity of the findings.

Normality test

To evaluate whether the data met the assumptions of normal distribution, skewness and kurtosis values were examined for each primary variable. According to the guidelines proposed by Tabachnick *et al.,* (2013), values falling within the range of −1.5 to +1.5 are considered acceptable indicators of normality. As shown in Table 2, all variables—Corporate Reputation, Reactance, Brand Attitude, and issue involvement—exhibited skewness and kurtosis values within this recommended range. These results confirm that the distributions do not significantly deviate from normality and thus justify the application of parametric statistical procedures in the subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Normality Indicators for Key Variables.

Variable	Median	Mean	S.D.	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis
Corporate Reputation (CR)	3.85	3.78	1.05	1.1	-0.28	-0.55
Reactance (RE)	2.4	2.5	0.75	0.56	0.22	-0.4
Brand Attitude (BA)	4.95	4.98	0.84	0.71	0.15	-0.45
Issue involvement (II)	3.9	4.28	1	1	0.68	-0.38

Results

To examine how different types of corporate advocacy on visible service automation influence consumer perceptions, a series of statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS and the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2021), specifically PROCESS Model 7. The primary outcome variable was corporate reputation (CR), with psychological reactance (RE) as the mediator and both brand attitude (BA) and issue involvement (II) as moderators. The advocacy condition was manipulated across three groups: neutral, conservative, and progressive. An integrated overview of the tested direct, indirect, and conditional effects is presented in Figure 5.

Effect of Advocacy Stance on Corporate Reputation

H1 predicted that perceptions of corporate reputation would vary depending on advocacy stance, with conservative messaging evaluated most positively. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant overall effect of advocacy stance on corporate reputation, $F(2, 185) = 3.068$, $p = .049$ (Table 3). Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons indicated that the conservative stance was evaluated more positively than the neutral stance (mean difference = 0.351, SE = 0.144, $p = .046$) (Table 4), whereas the progressive stance did not differ significantly from the neutral stance (mean difference

= 0.088, SE = 0.144, p = .867) or the conservative stance (mean difference = 0.263, SE = 0.144, p = .221). Table 4 provides a detailed summary of these pairwise comparisons, showing the mean differences and corresponding p-values for each comparison.

Table 3. ANOVA Results for Corporate Reputation by Advocacy Type.

ANOVA					
	SS	df	MS	F	*p*
Between Groups	8.058	2	4.029	3.068	.049
Within Groups	243.008	185	1.314		
Total	251.066	187			

Table 4. Post-Hoc Comparisons (Bonferroni)

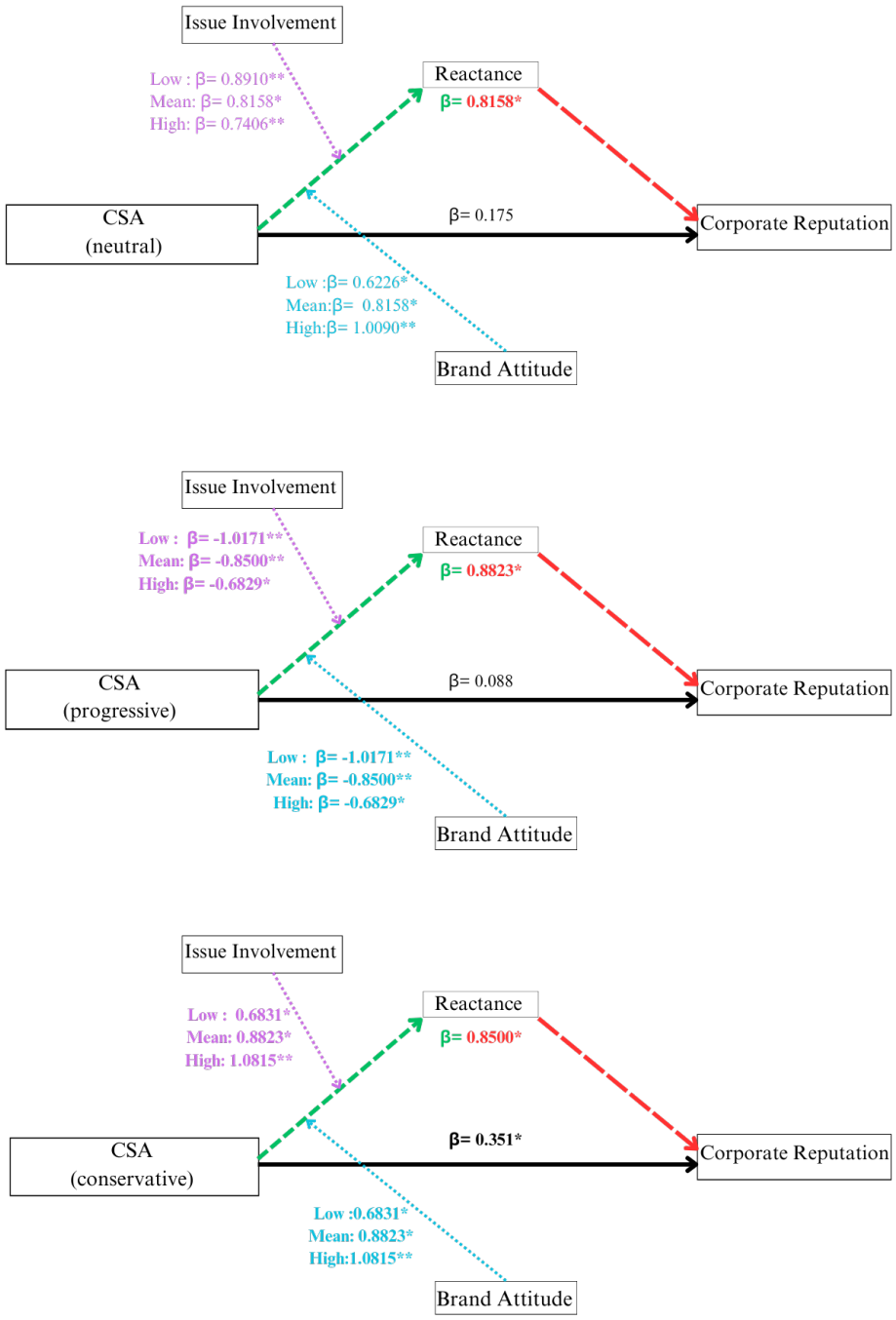
Group Comparison	Mean Difference	SE	*P*
Conservative vs. Neutral	0.351	0.144	.046*
Progressive vs. Neutral	0.088	0.144	.867
Conservative vs. Progressive	0.263	0.144	.221

**** = p < .05***

Consistent with these pairwise results, the direct-effect estimates (with neutral as the reference category) showed a significant positive effect for the conservative condition (β = 0.351, SE = 0.144, 95% CI [0.065, 0.637], p = .032), while the progressive condition was non-significant (β = 0.088, SE = 0.144, 95% CI [−0.195, 0.371], p = .867) and the neutral reference effect was not significant (β = 0.175, SE = 0.120, 95% CI [−0.060, 0.410], p = .190) (see Table 5). Thus, H1 received partial support: conservative advocacy enhanced reputation relative to neutrality, whereas progressive advocacy did not generate reputational benefits.

Table 5 . Direct Effects of Advocacy Stance on Corporate Reputation

Group	**β (Direct Effect)**	**SE**	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	**p-value**
Neutral → CR	0.175	0.120	−0.060	0.410	0.190
Conservative → CR	0.351	0.144	0.065	0.637	0.032
Progressive → CR	0.088	0.144	−0.195	0.371	0.867



*** = p < .05***
**** = p < .01***

Figure 5. Summary of the direct, indirect, and moderated effects tested in the study.

These findings are consistent with prior research suggesting that advocacy stances framed as preserving established social arrangements are often perceived as more authentic and less threatening when technological change is salient and contested (Marschlich and Bernet, 2024). In the present context, the neutral message—while intentionally designed as a non-advocacy baseline—may have been interpreted as less committed or less informative, which could help explain why it did not outperform the conservative condition in reputational evaluations. Given that the study was conducted in Türkiye, it is also plausible that contextual sensitivities related to job security and interpersonal service shaped responses to automation-related advocacy. Some cultural frameworks characterize (e.g., Hofstede et *al.,* 2010) Türkiye as relatively high in uncertainty avoidance, which may intensify concern about disruptive technological change and increase receptiveness to cautious, human-labor–supportive positions.

Indirect Effect of Advocacy Type on Corporate Reputation via Reactance (Mediation) (H3)

H2 proposed that psychological reactance would mediate the relationship between advocacy stance and corporate reputation. Mediation analyses using PROCESS Model 7 (Hayes, 2021) provided robust support for this hypothesis (Table 6). In the neutral advocacy condition, the indirect effect was positive and significant (β = 0.8158, SE = 0.1483, 95% CI [0.5277, 1.1116]). Neutral messaging reduced psychological resistance, which in turn enhanced perceptions of corporate reputation. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that avoiding polarizing stances can prevent backlash and sustain favorable perceptions, particularly in contexts where public opinion remains unsettled (Bhagwat *et al.,* 2020).

Table 6. Indirect Effects of Advocacy Type on Corporate Reputation via Reactance

Advocacy Group	β	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	*P* value
Neutral ➔ Reactance ➔ CR	0.8158	0.1483	0.5277	1.1116	P <0.05
Conservative ➔ Reactance ➔ CR	0.8823	0.1413	0.6051	1.1205	P <0.05
Progressive ➔ Reactance ➔ CR	-0.8500	0.1236	-1.106	-0.6193	P <0.01

In the conservative advocacy condition, the indirect effect was also positive and significant (β = 0.8823, SE = 0.1413, 95% CI [0.6051, 1.1205]). This suggests that conservative or cautious messaging—especially on sensitive topics like automation and job security—resonates with consumers by lowering reactance. By contrast, the progressive advocacy condition produced a

negative and significant indirect effect (β = −0.8500, SE = 0.1236, 95% CI [−1.1060, −0.6193]). Messages explicitly endorsing automation heightened psychological reactance, which subsequently undermined corporate reputation. This outcome is consistent with Reactance Theory (Brehm, 1966), which predicts resistance when persuasive attempts are perceived as threatening autonomy or contradicting deeply held values. It also reflects the "betrayal effect" described by Marschlich and Bernet (2024), whereby consumers react negatively when a brand appears to violate core social expectations.

Collectively, these results provide strong support for H2. Neutral and conservative stances improved reputation indirectly by reducing reactance, while progressive advocacy backfired by intensifying resistance and damaging reputation. The findings underscore that reputational consequences depend not only on the stance itself but also on the psychological processes it activates. From a cultural perspective, the results are also consistent with Türkiye's relatively high uncertainty avoidance: in such contexts, progressive advocacy in favor of disruptive technological change may be more likely to trigger resistance, whereas conservative or neutral stances offer stability that aligns with consumer expectations.

Moderating Role of Issue Involvement

H3 predicted that issue involvement would moderate the indirect effect of advocacy stance on corporate reputation through psychological reactance. Results supported this hypothesis. For the neutral advocacy condition, the indirect effect through reactance was positive across all levels of issue involvement. At low involvement, the effect was β = 0.891, SE = 0.2107, 95% CI [0.4816, 1.3066], $p < .01$ (Table 7). At moderate involvement, the effect was β = 0.8158, SE = 0.1483, 95% CI [0.5277, 1.1116], $p < .05$. At high involvement, the effect remained positive but slightly weaker, β = 0.7406, SE = 0.1578, 95% CI [0.4399, 1.0654], $p < .01$. This pattern suggests that neutral messages generally reduced reactance and improved corporate reputation, but the benefit was greatest among participants with low involvement, who may have perceived neutrality as non-threatening, while highly involved participants viewed it as somewhat less satisfying.

Table 7. Conditional Indirect Effects of Advocacy Type on Corporate Reputation via Reactance at Three Levels of Issue Involvement.

Advocacy Group	Issue Involvement Level	β	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	*P* value
Neutral ➔ Reactance ➔ CR	Low (-1 SD)	0.8910	0.2107	0.4816	1.3066	P <0.01
	Moderate (Mean)	0.8158	0.1483	0.5277	1.1116	P <0.05
	High (+1 SD)	0.7406	0.1578	0.4399	1.0654	P <0.01
Conservative ➔ Reactance ➔ CR	Low (-1 SD)	0.7882	0.1782	0.4653	1.115	P <0.05
	Moderate (Mean)	0.8823	0.1413	0.6051	1.1205	P <0.01
	High (+1 SD)	0.9765	0.1819	0.652	1.3204	P <0.05
Progressive ➔ Reactance ➔ CR	Low (-1 SD)	-0.6978	0.1764	-1.059	-0.4047	P <0.01
	Moderate (Mean)	-0.8500	0.1236	-1.106	-0.6193	P <0.01
	High (+1 SD)	-1.0022	0.1738	-1.3624	-0.6778	P <0.01

For the conservative advocacy condition, the indirect effect became stronger as involvement increased. At low involvement, the effect was $\beta = 0.7882$, SE = 0.1782, 95% CI [0.4653, 1.1150], $p < .05$. At moderate involvement, the effect was $\beta = 0.8823$, SE = 0.1413, 95% CI [0.6051, 1.1205], $p < .05$. At high involvement, the effect reached $\beta = 0.9765$, SE = 0.1819, 95% CI [0.6520, 1.3204], $p < .05$. This indicates that conservative stances, which emphasize protecting human labor, resonated most strongly with highly involved consumers who cared deeply about the issue of automation.

By contrast, the progressive advocacy condition produced negative and increasingly stronger indirect effects as involvement rose. At low involvement, the effect was $\beta = –0.6978$, SE = 0.1764, 95% CI [–1.0590, –0.4047], $p < .01$. At moderate involvement, the effect was $\beta = –0.8500$, SE = 0.1236, 95% CI [–1.1060, –0.6193], $p < .01$. At high involvement, the effect was most negative, $\beta = –1.0022$, SE = 0.1738, 95% CI [–1.3624, –0.6778], $p < .01$. These results suggest that participants highly involved with the issue of automation were especially resistant to progressive advocacy, perceiving it as threatening to values related to job security and human service traditions.

Taken together, these findings confirm that issue involvement amplifies the reputational consequences of corporate advocacy. Consumers who care deeply about automation are more responsive—positively when the stance aligns with their concerns (conservative), and negatively when it challenges them (progressive). By contrast, those with low involvement show weaker reactions overall, consistent with research that links involvement to systematic message processing

and stronger affective responses (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). From a managerial perspective, this highlights the need for audience segmentation. Firms engaging in advocacy on controversial issues should recognize that highly involved audiences will scrutinize messages closely and react strongly, making the reputational risks and benefits of advocacy much greater.

Moderating Role of Brand Attitude

Analysis of the conditional indirect effects (Table 8) revealed that the influence of advocacy stance on corporate reputation through psychological reactance varied systematically with brand attitude. For neutral advocacy, the indirect effect strengthened as brand attitude increased: low ($\beta = 0.6226$, SE = 0.1781, 95% CI [0.3121, 0.9779], $p < .05$), moderate ($\beta = 0.8158$, SE = 0.1483, 95% CI [0.5277, 1.1116], $p < .05$), and high ($\beta = 1.0090$, SE = 0.1792, 95% CI [0.6765, 1.3575], $p < .01$). A similar pattern was observed for conservative advocacy, where the indirect effect rose from $\beta = 0.6831$ (SE = 0.1690, 95% CI [0.3652, 1.0219], $p < .05$) at low brand attitude, to $\beta = 0.8823$ (SE = 0.1413, 95% CI [0.6051, 1.1205], $p < .05$) at moderate, and $\beta = 1.0815$ (SE = 0.1775, 95% CI [0.7467, 1.4239], $p < .01$) at high.

By contrast, progressive advocacy produced negative indirect effects at all levels of brand attitude, but the magnitude of this negativity diminished as attitudes improved. At low brand attitude, the effect was strongly negative ($\beta = –1.0171$, SE = 0.1914, 95% CI [–1.4181, –0.6924], $p < .01$). At moderate brand attitude, the effect was $\beta = –0.8500$ (SE = 0.1236, 95% CI [–1.1060, –0.6193], $p < .01$). At high brand attitude, the effect remained negative but weaker ($\beta = –0.6829$, SE = 0.1925, 95% CI [–1.0931, –0.3510], $p < .05$).

These findings demonstrate that brand attitude conditions how consumers interpret advocacy stances. Strong positive attitudes toward the brand amplify reputational gains when messages are neutral or conservative, while also cushioning the reputational losses triggered by progressive advocacy. In contrast, weak or negative brand attitudes intensify reactance and deepen reputational harm. This interaction underscores the buffering role of brand equity: well-regarded brands can take greater risks in contentious debates, whereas brands with limited goodwill face amplified reputational threats.

Table 8. Conditional Indirect Effects of Advocacy Type on Corporate Reputation via Reactance at Three Levels of Brand Attitude.

Group	Brand Attitude Level	β	SE	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)	*P* value
Neutral ➔ Reactance ➔ CR	Low (-1 SD)	0.6226	0.1781	0.3121	0.9779	P<0.05
	Moderate (Mean)	0.8158	0.1483	0.5277	1.1116	P<0.05
	High (+1 SD)	1.0090	0.1792	0.6765	1.3575	P<0.01
Conservative ➔ Reactance ➔ CR	Low (-1 SD)	0.6831	0.1690	0.3652	1.0219	P<0.05
	Moderate (Mean)	0.8823	0.1413	0.6051	1.1205	P<0.05
	High (+1 SD)	1.0815	0.1775	0.7467	1.4239	P<0.01
Progressive ➔ Reactance ➔ CR	Low (-1 SD)	-1.0171	0.1914	-1.4181	-0.6924	P<0.01
	Moderate (Mean)	-0.8500	0.1236	-1.1060	-0.6193	P<0.01
	High (+1 SD)	-0.6829	0.1925	-1.0931	-0.3510	P<0.05

Discussion

This study contributes to the growing literature on corporate social advocacy by exploring how different stances on automation and artificial intelligence influence consumer perceptions of corporate reputation. The findings reveal that advocacy positions—especially those aligned with perceived public concerns—significantly shape consumer responses, with emotional and cognitive mechanisms such as psychological reactance and issue involvement playing crucial mediating and moderating roles.

Specifically, conservative advocacy (opposing the replacement of human labor with AI) elicited the most favorable evaluations of corporate reputation. This suggests that companies adopting cautious positions on automation may benefit from public perceptions of ethical responsibility and social consciousness, particularly in contexts where job security and human agency are salient concerns (Frank *et al.,* 2019; Chhatre and Singh, 2024). Conversely, progressive advocacy stances appeared to provoke greater psychological reactance, especially among consumers with strong brand attitudes or high issue involvement, supporting Reactance Theory's proposition that

perceived threats to autonomy or misalignment with values can diminish trust and brand credibility (Brehm 1966; Marschlich and Bernet, 2024).

The study also highlights the nuanced role of issue involvement. While alignment generally strengthened positive responses to conservative messaging, it amplified negative reactions to progressive advocacy, pointing to a potential "betrayal effect" when a company's stance fails to meet the heightened expectations of its value-aligned audience (Marschlich and Bernet, 2024). Moreover, brand attitude moderated these effects in complex ways, suggesting that loyal customers may respond more sensitively to advocacy messages that diverge from their perceived brand values.

Implications

The findings of this study carry timely and realistic implications for corporate communication professionals, especially as automation continues to disrupt global labor markets. Compared to more culturally normalized advocacy topics such as gender equality or environmental sustainability, corporate stances on AI replacing human labor are uniquely volatile. This volatility stems from both the issue's immediate economic consequences and its moral ambiguity—two factors that our results suggest amplify psychological reactance and reputational risk when mishandled.

First, the results confirm that the reputational stakes of CSA depend on the specific issue at hand. While gender equality advocacy often aligns with widely accepted social norms and typically elicits supportive reactions (Marschlich and Bernet, 2024), automation and AI invoke existential concerns about job security and human obsolescence, issues that are less ideologically settled and more personally threatening. Consequently, advocacy in this domain - especially progressive stances that support automation - can trigger disproportionate backlash even among consumers who are generally brand-loyal or socially progressive. This indicates that CSA messaging about AI-driven visible service automation is not just another cause to signal virtue; rather, it constitutes a reputational minefield that requires careful calibration of tone, framing, and authenticity.

Second, companies must recognize that advocacy related to AI-driven visible service automation activates consumer emotions differently than many other corporate social issues. The study showed that even participants with strong brand loyalty reacted negatively when confronted with

a progressive message endorsing the replacement of human labor in customer-facing services. This points to a broader communication dilemma: the more a consumer cares about a brand or about service automation as an issue, the greater the potential for reputational damage when advocacy is misaligned or perceived as insincere. When consumers experience concern or uncertainty about a brand's stance and these concerns are not effectively addressed, perceived credibility and advocacy power may weaken. In such cases, consumer trust is undermined, brand loyalty declines, and overall brand equity can suffer. Brands therefore risk alienating their core audiences by appearing tone-deaf or opportunistic, particularly on contentious and rapidly evolving issues such as visible service automation.

While our study provides valuable insights into consumer perceptions of corporate social advocacy on visible service automation, the implications of these findings could extend beyond the context of coffee service and the service industry. Automation is increasingly affecting a wide range of industries, including healthcare, logistics, manufacturing, and retail. Each of these sectors presents unique challenges and consumer expectations regarding the automation of human labor. For instance, the impact of automation in healthcare may be perceived differently due to its direct implications for human well-being, whereas automation in logistics might be less emotionally charged but more focused on efficiency and cost reduction. Therefore, future research should consider examining these industries to explore how corporate stances on automation influence consumer perceptions in diverse sectors. This would expand the generalizability of the current study's findings and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the broader reputational consequences of corporate social advocacy across various industries affected by automation.

Third, in real-world applications, these findings suggest that CSA related to AI-driven visible service automation requires a different strategic playbook. Traditional CSA campaigns often rely on clear moral framing and calls to action—approaches that may backfire when applied to nuanced technological issues involving the replacement of human labor in customer-facing services. Companies should therefore consider alternative communication strategies that emphasize dialogue over declaration, such as facilitating public forums, engaging in employee-driven campaigns, or collaborating with labor and ethics organizations. Such approaches can convey a more reflective, inclusive, and socially responsible image while reducing the risk of polarizing stakeholders.

Finally, the implications extend to policy-facing industries and employer branding. In an environment where workers express concerns about automation and public debates increasingly focus on the societal implications of AI-driven service automation, a company's advocacy stance can influence not only consumer behavior but also employee morale, regulatory relationships, and investor confidence. A poorly framed progressive stance endorsing the replacement of human labor in customer-facing services may be interpreted as disregard for labor ethics, whereas a cautious or conservative stance may enhance perceptions of social responsibility and long-term thinking. In this context, CSA initiatives contribute not only to a brand's identity as a provider of products and services, but also help position it as a value-driven and socially responsive actor. Accordingly, CSA related to visible service automation should be understood not merely as a branding tactic, but as part of a company's broader positioning within an uncertain and contested technological landscape.

Limitations and future directions

Despite the contributions of our study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted with a sample of Instagram users residing in Türkiye, which may constrain the generalizability of our findings to other cultural, linguistic, or socio-political contexts. Consumer responses to corporate advocacy on AI-driven visible service automation may be shaped by regional labor market conditions, media discourse, and cultural norms surrounding technology and service work. Future research would therefore benefit from cross-national comparative studies or replications in culturally distinct settings to assess the external validity of our results.

Second, although we sought to enhance ecological validity by employing a real brand (Coffy) and platform-specific stimuli, our experimental design centered on a single company and a single advocacy issue—namely, the replacement of human labor through visible service automation. While this narrow focus allowed for greater control and internal consistency, it limits the breadth of inferences that can be drawn. Subsequent studies might examine other advocacy domains (e.g., climate change, gender rights, data privacy) or incorporate brands with varying levels of public trust and familiarity to determine whether the observed patterns extend across different reputational baselines and issue contexts.

Third, while the experimental manipulation supports causal inference regarding the effects of advocacy stance, the mediational and conditional processes were assessed using cross-sectional

self-reports collected in a single session. Longitudinal, repeated-measures, or field-based designs could provide stronger evidence regarding the temporal stability and directionality of psychological reactance and its interaction with audience characteristics over time. As consumer responses to corporate advocacy may evolve as they become more familiar with automation or as societal attitudes change, future research should consider tracking these effects over extended periods to understand how reputational outcomes may shift over time. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive view of the long-term impact of corporate stances on automation.

Additionally, although the sample was demographically diverse in terms of age, gender, and geographic location, it may still be subject to self-selection bias, as participation required active Instagram use and prior familiarity with the brand. This could skew the data toward more digitally engaged or brand-aware individuals, limiting representativeness. Future studies may consider stratified sampling or the inclusion of less brand-familiar populations to mitigate such biases.

Finally, our conceptual framework did not account for potentially important moderators such as political ideology, perceived message authenticity, or emotional tone. These factors have been shown to influence consumer responses to corporate advocacy (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Marschlich and Bernet, 2024). Integrating these dimensions in future work could enrich understanding of the psychological and communicative dynamics underlying stakeholder evaluations, particularly in complex and evolving issue spaces related to visible service automation and labor concerns. In light of these limitations, future research adopting broader methodological and conceptual approaches could build on the insights presented here and provide more context-sensitive guidance for practitioners operating in polarized and ethically ambiguous environments.

Conclusion

As AI-driven automation increasingly enters customer-facing service settings, companies are under growing pressure to adopt visible and ethically legible positions on the replacement of human labor. This study shows that the stance a company communicates (neutral, conservative, or progressive) can significantly shape perceived corporate reputation, with psychological reactance operating as a key mechanism and brand attitude and issue involvement conditioning these effects.

Conservative stances opposing the replacement of human service tended to enhance reputation, whereas progressive stances endorsing such replacement risked backlash when perceived as

misaligned or inauthentic. These findings offer strategic insights for organizations navigating the reputational risks and rewards of corporate social advocacy in contested service contexts. They also extend CSA scholarship by demonstrating that, in visible service automation, stakeholder evaluations are shaped not only by stance direction but by emotional resistance and audience predispositions.

More broadly, CSA related to AI-driven visible service automation should be understood not merely as a technological preference, but as an expression of a brand's ethical identity and corporate citizenship. Accordingly, organizations pursuing service automation should communicate with value-based sensitivity - explicitly acknowledging human labor concerns and adopting messaging that reduces perceived coercion - to protect and strengthen corporate reputation.

Consent to participate

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee and conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the beginning of the experiments. Participants were informed that their data could be used for publication purposes and agreed to the publication of their anonymized data.

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ORCID

Aysar Yahya: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2341-7406

Sevil Bayçu: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0865-6007

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