

Consumers Want Brands to Take a Stand

A fraught political and social climate may mean an end to the era of the apolitical company

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Conventional wisdom has long dictated that companies avoid taking a political stance on issues for risk of alienating—or outright angering—potential customers.

But new research suggests that, in a polarized political climate, at least some consumers want the firms they buy from to reflect their own values.

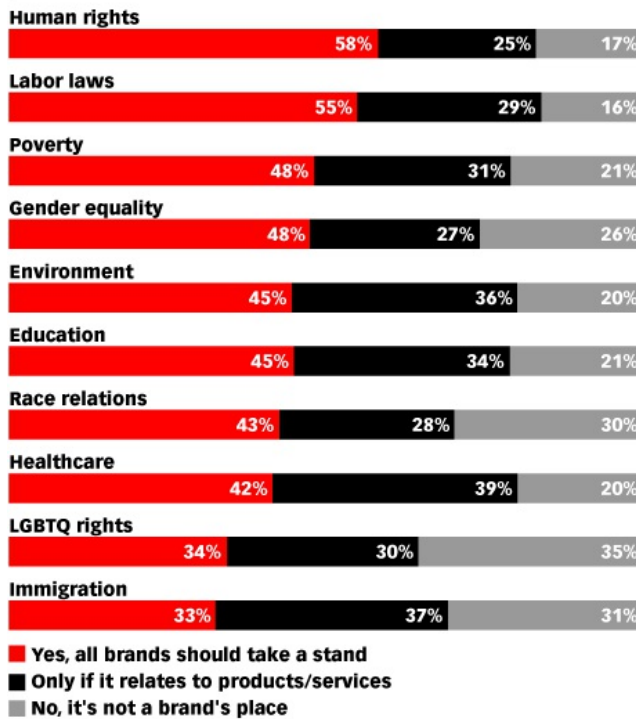
Sprout Social surveyed some 1,000 US internet users last September to find that two-thirds want brands to take a stand on social and political issues.

"Respondents said that brands are more credible when taking this kind of public stand when they have a history of speaking out on that topic," said Andrew Caravella, vice president of strategy and brand engagement at Sprout Social. "We can apply the same bar to assessing CEO credibility. While executives have a unique opportunity to generate goodwill by tackling social issues, they're also subject to the same level of scrutiny as their company. That is why it's imperative that the brand and its executives align on their values, organizational commitment and public stances."

Respondents to Sprout Social's poll felt most strongly about human rights: Nearly six in 10 (58%) of those polled thought brands should take a position on the issue no matter what. That figure rose to 83% when combined with those who wanted companies to take a stance only if it related to their products or services.

Social/Political Issues on Which US Internet Users Believe Brands Should Take a Stand, Sep 2017

% of respondents



Note: ages 18+; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
 Source: Sprout Social, "Championing Change in the Age of Social Media," Jan 9, 2018

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A majority of respondents also wanted companies to speak up on the issue of labor laws all the time.

Those surveyed had firm ideas about where they wanted brands to express these sorts of positions. More of them, 58%, were receptive to political or social stances from brands on social media than any other platform. "Television or radio" took second place, at 47%, followed by websites and blogs.

Interestingly, only about one-fifth of respondents were receptive to political or social positioning in digital display ads, fewer than said they were comfortable with such content appearing in print ads or newspapers.

But companies—and their marketing departments—still need to tread carefully when staking out a position on hot-button issues. While 44% of respondents said they would purchase more from a brand when they agreed with the company's social or political views, 53% also said they'd reduce purchases from brands they disagreed with.

