

How social issues are sparking action among brands

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Today's sociopolitical events have lit a fire under brands to address social injustice and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in deeper ways than they have in the past. Companies are using marketing and advertising to respond to and support discussions about systemic racism and the Black Lives Matter protests, the fight for LGBTQ rights, the #MeToo movement, the COVID-19 pandemic, and issues of immigration reform, to name a few.

A majority of consumers now expect brands to take a stand on social issues and work to effect positive change—though their sentiments are sometimes complicated. A June 2020 survey by [Mindshare](#) found that more than two-thirds of US adults said brands should play an important role when it comes to speaking out against racial inequality and injustice. However, six in 10 believed brands that spoke out were being opportunistic.

US Adults' Attitudes Toward Brands Who Speak Out Against Racial Inequality, by Race/Ethnicity, June 2020

% of respondents

	White	Multicultural*	Black	Hispanic	Total
Brands have an important role to play to speak out against racial inequality and injustice	65%	76%	81%	79%	68%
More likely to support brands who take meaningful action around racial inequality and Black Lives Matter rather than making posts and statements	65%	73%	78%	78%	67%
Don't think brands who speak out are genuine about the cause but are being opportunistic	62%	59%	63%	56%	60%
More conscious of where I'm spending my money in order to support more Black-owned businesses and creators	55%	67%	74%	65%	58%

Note: ages 18+; *all ethnicities excluding White
Source: Mindshare, "Coronavirus: US Insights," June 12, 2020

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Many brands see speaking out as the right thing to do. After George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, died in Minneapolis police custody in May, Nike was among the first to release an appeal to end systemic racism, in the form of a 60-second TV ad featuring a twist on its famous "Just Do It" tagline: "For Once, Don't Do It." The ad was posted on social media with the hashtag #UntilWeAllWin. The company also announced it would commit \$40 million over four years to support organizations promoting social justice and racial equality. Other early movers—including The Walt Disney Co., Google, Netflix, Procter & Gamble, and Unilever—also ran ads, made statements, and/or donated resources in support of these causes.

Other brands have faced pressure to be more inclusive after public outcry, boycotts, or negative social media attention. In December 2019, the Hallmark Channel came under fire when it pulled commercials for wedding planning company Zola that featured a same-sex couple. While the initial pressure to stop airing the ads came from a conservative group, Hallmark faced a bigger backlash from viewers and customers who saw the move as anti-LGBTQ. It was then forced to reverse course and commit to more inclusion.

Increasingly, marketers see social injustice and inequity as catalysts for introspection and change. "As marketers, our systems and processes are, in part, maintaining some of those inequities in our work," said Carlos Santiago, co-founder of the ANA's Alliance for

Inclusive and Multicultural Marketing and president of Santiago Solutions Group. “We have a role to play in addressing these issues. And this is the time to ask ourselves how we can do it.”

“It’s forced brands and marketers to look inward and say, ‘I can no longer say this isn’t a problem over here,’” said Sadé Muhammad, director of representation and inclusion partnerships at Forbes. “They’re now asking themselves, ‘What am I doing as a marketer that is either contributing to or dismantling this sort of system of oppression?’”

For example, Disney has deployed a companywide strategy to accelerate inclusive marketing initiatives and align its internal culture with target customers. Meanwhile, IBM is “spending a lot of time listening right now,” according to Randi Stipes, CMO of Watson Advertising, The Weather Company, and developer marketing.

Veronika Sonsev, co-founder of CommerceNext (a conference, community, and event series for retail and direct-to-consumer [D2C] marketers), said her organization has always aimed to feature a mix of event participants—including female speakers and speakers of color. But after being “very moved by the discourse on racial inequality,” Sonsev and her team became more proactive about seeking diverse voices. “We realized we needed to cast a wider net to identify more Black executives in our industry,” she said. As a result, the company launched a Black speaker database and asked the broader retail and D2C brand communities to nominate Black executives.

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Report by Victoria Petrock Nov 05, 2020

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