

# Brand Pressure Index

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The Public Issues Confronting Businesses in 2021

## **Scope**

HLG's Brand Pressure Index monitors the trajectory of public issues that shape corporate reputation, as prioritized by a universe of 3,500 top issue-shaping activists, opinion leaders and policymakers.

## **Approach**

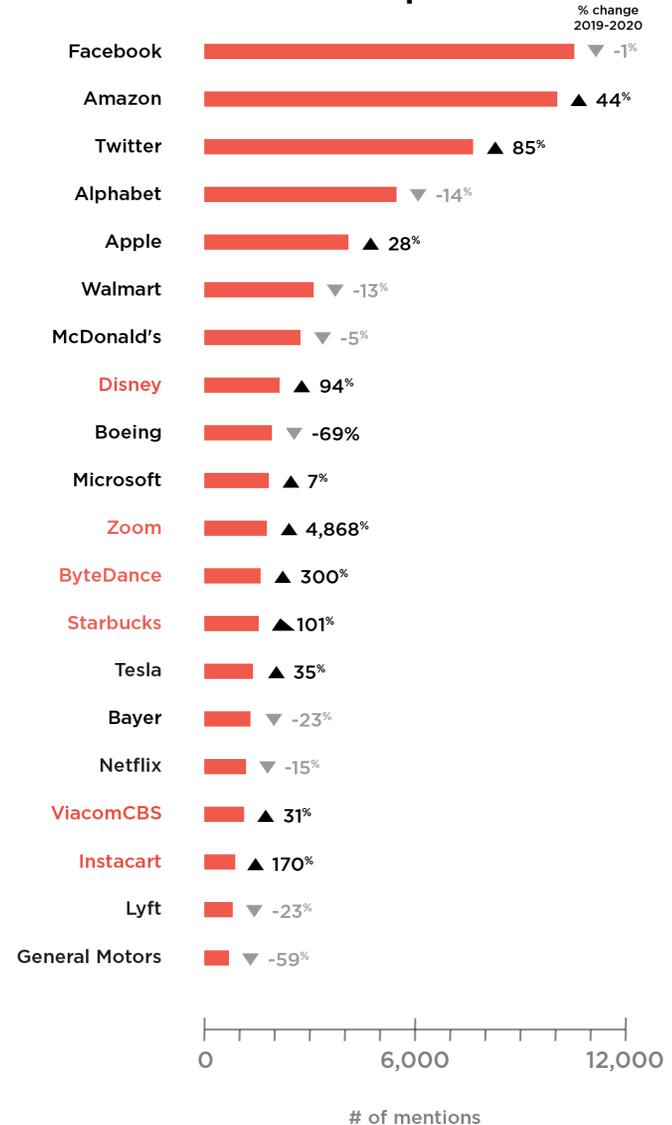
Our proprietary data analytics engine captured and processed 6 million tweets from these stakeholders over 2020, used natural language processing techniques to identify 350 discrete public issues being discussed, and measured the frequency with which 1,000+ top brands across 80+ industry categories were associated with these issues.

## Big Tech's Rising Exposure

The universe of companies most affected by public reputation issues is dominated by Big Tech.

- **Big Tech** brands continue to exert strong gravitational pull on public issues, occupying the top five spots in our rankings, and six of the top ten.
- Non-tech brands in our top ten were **Walmart, Disney, McDonald's** and **Boeing** – largely for workforce and racial equality issues.
- New entrants to the top twenty are labeled in red.

## Exposure of Individual Companies

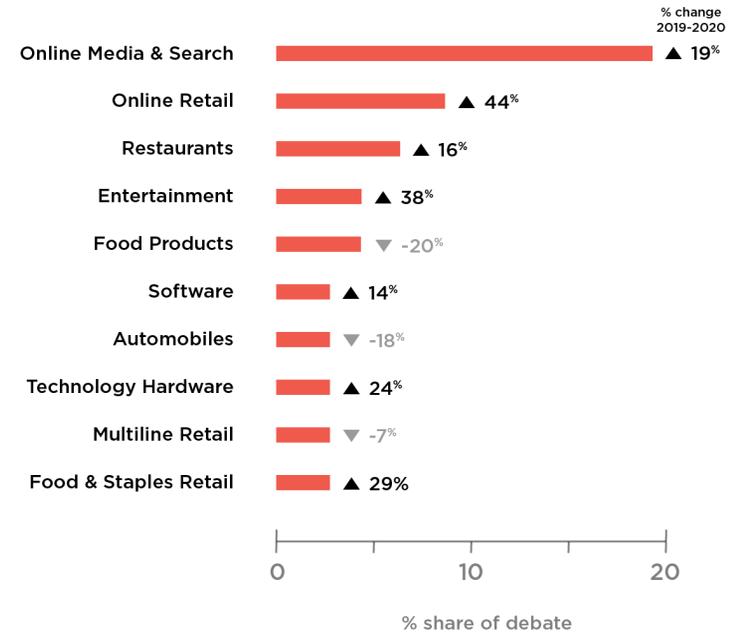


## Industry Rankings

Of the 80+ industry categories we track, Big Tech occupied the top two:

- Online media and online retail were exposed to antitrust, disinformation and consumer privacy debates.
- **Restaurants** and **entertainment** ranked 3 and 4 due to pressure around worker safety and wages during the pandemic, as well as racial and gender equality.

## Industry Exposure

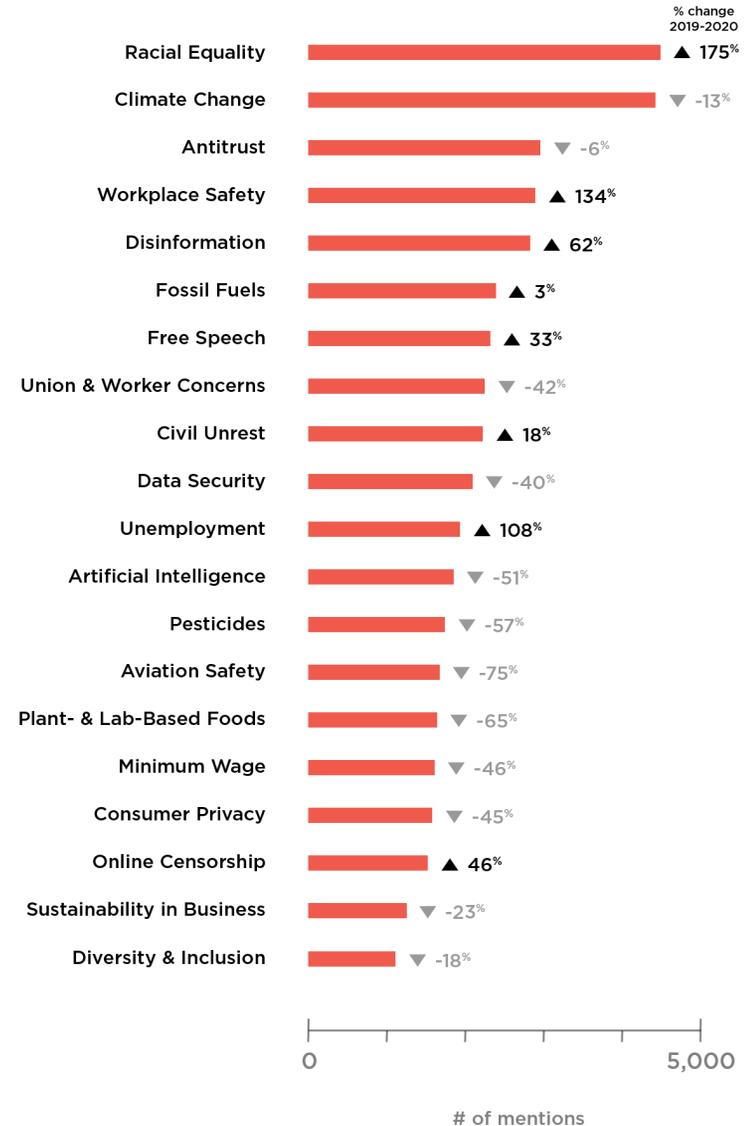


Source: HLG Analytics – a unit of High Lantern Group

## Issue Rankings: Racial Equality #1

- **Racial equality** is the #1 issue impacting corporate reputation, replacing climate change.
- **Climate change** remains a top issue at #2 - a slight decline from 2019.
- **Workplace safety** surged in 2020 due to frontline worker concerns during the pandemic.
- Other notable rising issues include **disinformation, free speech** and **censorship** due to the ongoing debate over Big Tech’s role in information dissemination and regulation of controversial speech and actors on its platforms.

## Top Corporate Issues

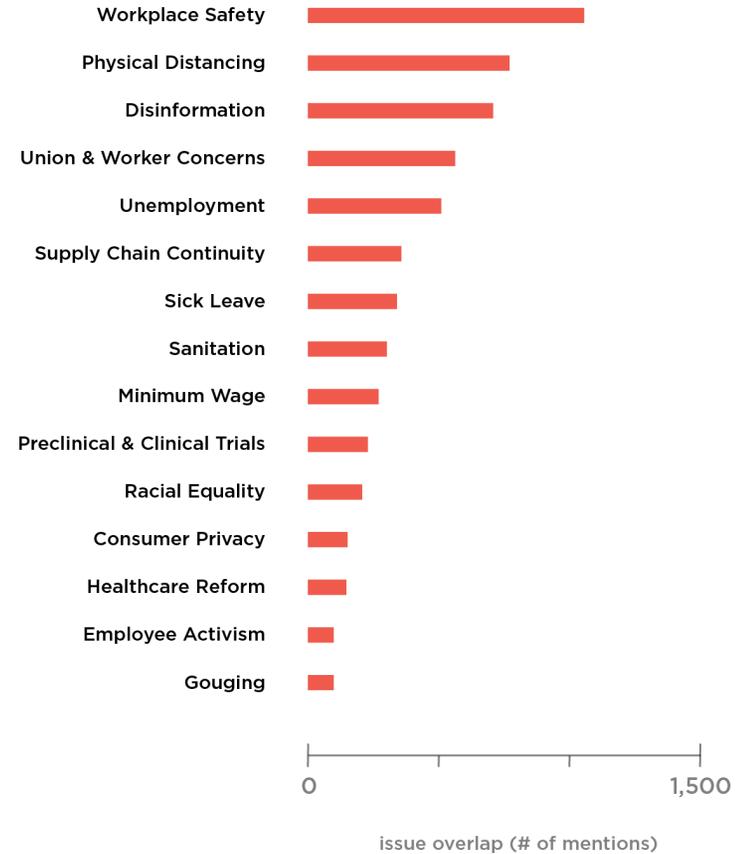


## How COVID Shapes the Issue Landscape

The pandemic was responsible for a re-ordering of top corporate reputation issues. This chart shows issues with the highest overlap with COVID.

- **Labor issues now** account for 8 of the top 15 corporate issues associated with the pandemic.
- **Employee activism** (#14) increased 34% in 2020 as workers call for safety protections, higher wages, leave and the right to unionize.

### Top Issues Associated with the Pandemic

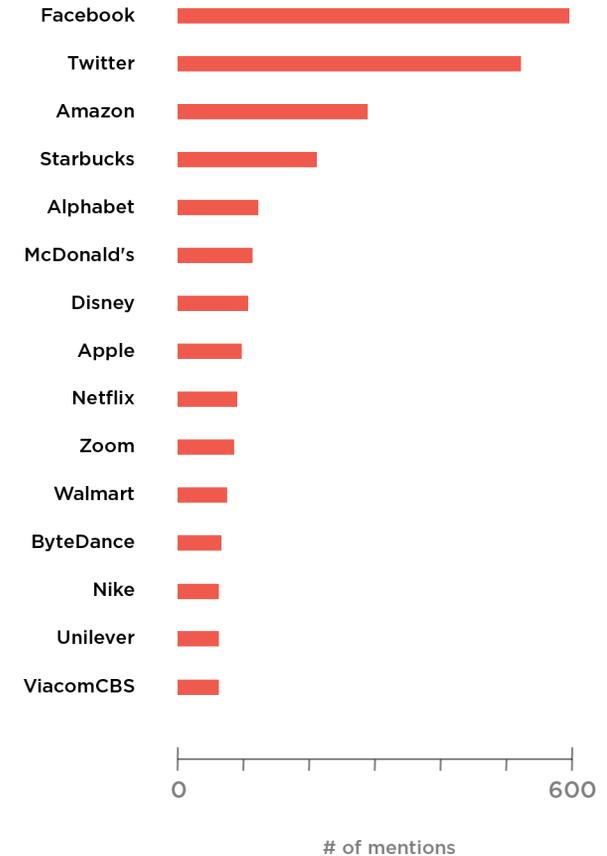


Source: HLG Analytics – a unit of High Lantern Group

## Racial Equality: A Closer Look

- **Facebook** and **Twitter** were the top two targets as platforms for alleged hate speech, with more than 1,000 companies participating in an advertisement boycott.
- **Amazon** and other brands committed millions to advancing racial justice – garnering praise while magnifying pressure to align policies and outcomes with statements and donations.
- The public, employees and other stakeholders continue to call on brands to meaningfully address diversity, equity and inclusion; honestly evaluate appropriation in branding and marketing; and commit to tackling systemic racism internally, in their communities, and as a nation.

## Racial Equality: Corporate Exposure



Source: HLG Analytics – a unit of High Lantern Group



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