



CAUSE IS WORKING, YOUR MARKETING ISN'T

A Report on Brands Taking Stands 2019

DoSomething **Strategic**

A SOCIAL IMPACT CONSULTANCY

About DoSomething Strategic

DoSomething Strategic is the social impact consulting arm of **DoSomething.org**, the largest global organization for young people and social impact. DoSomething Strategic uses data-driven insights from DoSomething's 5+ million members—ages 13-25 in every area code in the United States and in 131 countries worldwide—to help brands build relationships with and strengthen affinity among young consumers by driving purpose forward.

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Methodology

This survey recruited young people aged 13-25 living in the United States from the DoSomething membership. Data were collected between January 14, 2019 and February 10, 2019. The median time to complete the survey was 11 minutes. Prior to analyses, the data were cleaned and weighted as follows:

- Individuals with completion times under one-third the median time to complete were excluded from the results.
- Individuals younger than 13 years of age or older than 25 years of age were excluded from the results.
- Individuals living outside of the United States were excluded from the results.
- Survey responses were weighted based on general population breakdowns of gender and race to help ensure a nationally representative sample with respect to core socio-demographic variables.

The final sample is composed of 1,908 observations from current DoSomething members. Results presented here are reported post-weighting. Assuming a population size of approximately 56,000,000 13–25 year olds nationwide¹, a sample size of 1,908 at a 95% confidence level allows for a 2.24% margin of error (based on the assumption that data are normally distributed).

¹Annual Estimates of the Resident Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division



THERE HAVE BEEN A LOT OF STUDIES THAT SPEAK TO BRANDS + PURPOSE
and brands taking a stand (including our own!).

And we're all drawing the same conclusion—purpose matters more than ever, it's important for brands to actively take a stand around the important issues of our time, and young consumers are the vanguard of this shift.

MANY BRANDS ARE STEPPING UP—using above the line dollars to support a social issue or advance a cause platform.

BUT IS IT WORKING? Are young people even taking notice of brands' cause initiatives? And is it really impacting their likelihood to purchase a brand?

DoSomething Strategic asked 1,908 DoSomething.org members 13-25 about their awareness of 88 retail and consumer brands' support of social causes/issues/platforms, how they know this, and whether brands' support for a cause motivates them to purchase from these brands.

FUTURE-PROOFING YOUR BUSINESS

Part One



According to a recent survey of CEOs, American business leaders feel increasing pressure to speak out on social issues from gun control to gender and racial equality. But most have little interest in doing so, with 60% saying they are unlikely to speak to any social issue in 2019. Instead, they simply want to focus on the business of selling their products and services (as if speaking out and closing sales are necessarily at odds!).

Less than 40% of the CEOs surveyed understand the value of communicating brand differentiation (yes — you read that correctly!). Worse yet, most CEOs still don't appreciate the value and power of leveraging social impact for that purpose.

CMOs—the leaders meant to be the voice of and advocate for their consumers—tend to see things the same way. The 2018 [annual CMO Survey](#) reported that 81% of marketing leaders surveyed believe it's inappropriate for companies to take a stance on politically-charged issues, despite numerous surveys and reports (including [our own](#)) showing that a large majority of consumers today want brands to stand up for what they believe in, even if it is controversial.

Sure, getting involved in some of the more politically-charged issues or issues that don't seem as aligned to your brand's products or services can be unnerving for the executives in charge. You risk alienating shareholders, customers, or both! But not doing anything doesn't make you safe either.

AS MARKETERS, IT'S OUR JOB TO RESPOND TO SHIFT CHANGES IN CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS. And in today's climate, that means proactively helping our company find their core principles. For the growth and future of their business, companies must re-evaluate their strategy, from the inside out to identify how taking a political stance or supporting a social issue can be less risky.

Take for example



They understood that not everyone was on their side when they took a very public stance on the Trump administration's plans to open Bears Ears National Monument to oil and other mining interests. However, Alex Thompson, REI's VP of brand stewardship and impact [said](#), even with such risk

“we think it’s appropriate to follow through on our values.”

To some degree this is about taking the long view; “future-proofing” the business. It’s about thinking of your consumer 30 years from now and aligning with their values and needs versus focusing squarely on the consumer of today, or worse, yesterday.

Imagine if [Netflix](#) had stayed true to its core offering that was driving the entirety of its business—the mail-order DVD service—rather than respond to the trends at the time that were pointing to opportunities around streaming video. While it’s easy to dismiss that as a service innovation versus taking a stand on social issues—what they have in common are the core questions behind any smart business strategy: what trends are we seeing and what value are we providing in response?

NETFLIX

SIMPLY PUT, THE PURPOSE TREND IS ONLY GROWING STRONGER (and as such is becoming less of a trend and more of a new norm) — young consumers are demanding that brands add value beyond the products and services they sell; and they expect brands to step up on the important social issues of our time.

All of this is to say “we’re not a political organization” is no longer an excuse for not taking a stand on issues, particularly as young people today don’t view these issues as political or divisive anyway. As we called out in our [2018 report](#), brands that do nothing not only will miss the chance to more deeply connect with their customers; or worse, they’ll be seen as complicit in defending the status quo. Inaction is a type of action. The failure to do what’s right is how bias, division, exclusion, and harassment becomes normalized or swept under the rug. And young people are watching.

Use these new consumer expectations as an opportunity to look ahead, build more differentiated brand, and drive to a deeper (read: profitable) relationship with your consumers based on shared values.

**USE IT TO DO PRECISELY WHAT CEOS NEED YOU TO DO:
BUILD THE BUSINESS.**

SOCIAL IMPACT DRIVES BUSINESS, BUT IS IT DRIVING YOURS?

Part Two

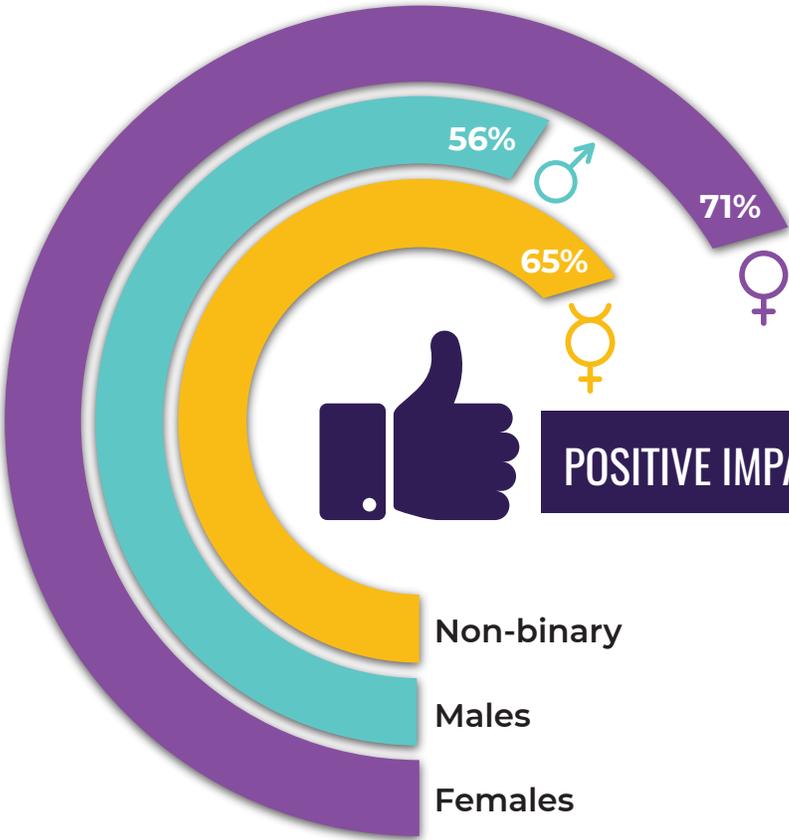


MAKE NO MISTAKE, brand purpose and social impact helps drive sales.

Kantar's [Purpose 2020](#) study showed how brands that consumers see as having a positive impact grow at 2x the rate of other brands. And perhaps even more valuable, brand purpose creates a consumer loyalty based on shared values—something a competitor's hot new product or lower price point simply can't overcome. (That's not to say we can't be swayed by a cheaper option from time to time, but smart brands have always built loyalty based on a deeper understanding of and connection with a consumer.)

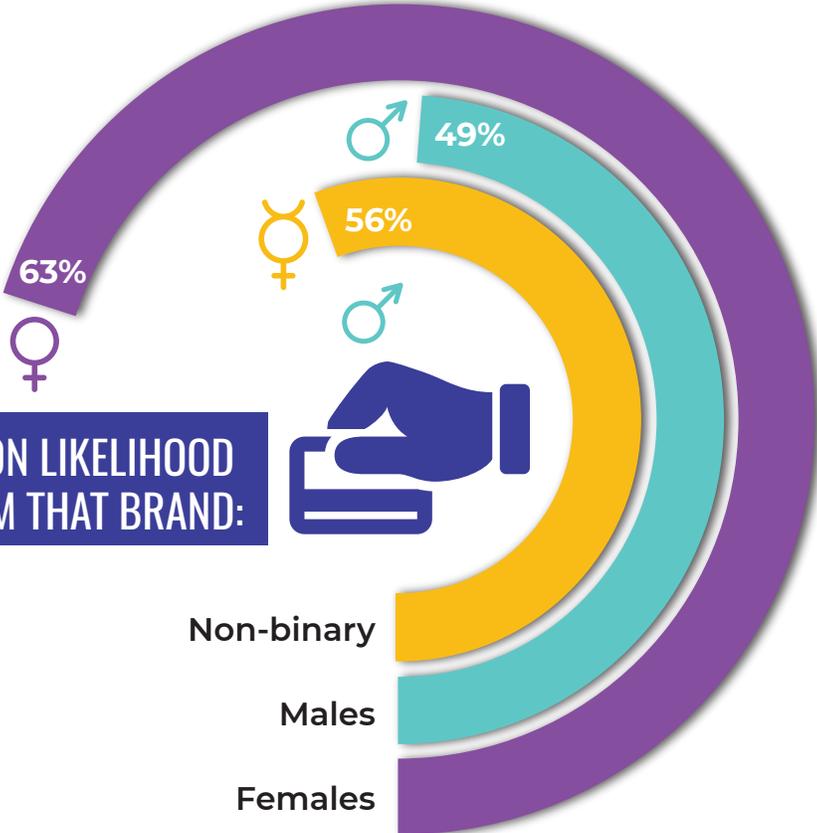
Results from our Brands Taking Stands 2019 survey show that 66% of young consumers say that a brand's association with a social cause or platform positively impacts their overall impression of a brand; and 58% say this association is also a positive driver of their likelihood to purchase that brand. In fact, 77% say that they at least sometimes purchase products or services from a brand solely because they believe in the brand's values/reputation and want to support them. And roughly 2 out of 5 young people do this regularly.

GENDER DIFFERENCES RELATED TO A BRAND'S ASSOCIATION WITH A SOCIAL CAUSE OR PLATFORM



POSITIVE IMPACT ON OVERALL BRAND IMPRESSION:

Non-binary
Males
Females



POSITIVE IMPACT ON LIKELIHOOD TO PURCHASE FROM THAT BRAND:

Non-binary
Males
Females

However, only 12% had “top of mind” associations (aka “unaided awareness”) between the listed brand with which they were familiar and that brand’s social cause platform. This is a surprisingly low number given that many brands are creating more campaigns than ever that tout some kind of association with a cause or social issue. We then provided a list of social causes or platforms and asked our respondents of any association between the brand and listed causes (aka “aided awareness”). Here still, association only reached 24%. Worse, 52% of respondents said that they “Don’t Know” of any association, and 24% stated that the listed brands didn’t associate with a cause at all.

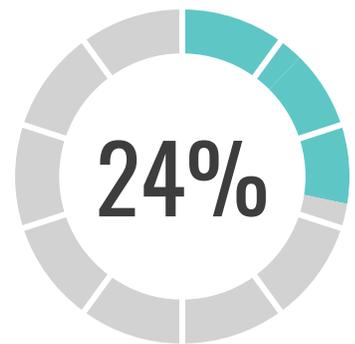
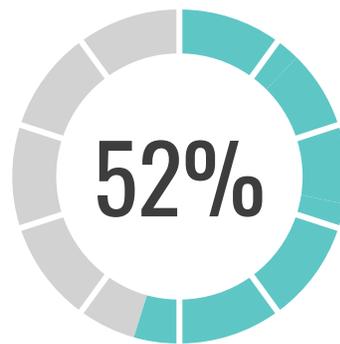
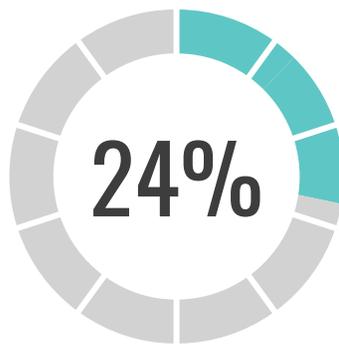
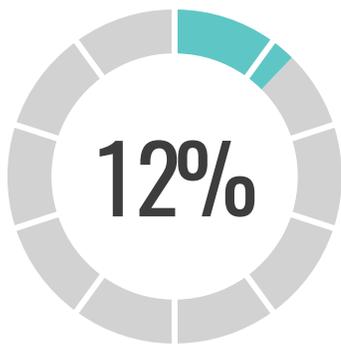
Our take—this doesn’t mean that cause isn’t working, but rather the marketing isn’t.

[NOTE: Respondents had to at least be familiar with the brands before they could comment on whether they knew of a brand-cause association; and this varies widely across the brands.]

AWARENESS OF BRANDS & SOCIAL CAUSE

**UNAIDED AWARENESS
OF AN ASSOCIATION
BETWEEN BRANDS
& SOCIAL CAUSE
OR PLATFORM**

**AIDED AWARENESS
OF AN ASSOCIATION
BETWEEN BRANDS
& SOCIAL CAUSE
OR PLATFORM**



DON'T KNOW

**BRANDS DO
NOT HAVE ANY
ASSOCIATION WITH
A SOCIAL CAUSE OR
PLATFORM**

SHOUT IT LOUD & PROUD

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE HEAR ABOUT BRANDS' ASSOCIATIONS WITH CAUSE OR SOCIAL IMPACT

Don't think just because it seems obvious to you what your brand is about, consumers will also know what it stands for. Even when young people feel they are familiar with a brand, it's no guarantee that their understanding of that brand extends beyond the brand's products.

Take the outdoor category, for example. One might assume that young people would readily associate brands such as Patagonia, Dick's Sporting Goods, The North Face, or United By Blue with social cause platforms related to the environment, but in fact only 9% associated **The North Face** and **United By Blue** and 2% associated **Dick's Sporting Goods** with the environment; even Patagonia—with its high profile "The President Stole Your Land" campaign—was associated with the environment by just 29% of young people familiar with the brand.

The low awareness/recognition among young people is showing that even brands that have social cause baked into their mission cannot really "ride" on that history or assume it is well known when it comes to young people. The story will have to be told to each new generation and told at the touchpoints where young people interact with the brand. Otherwise, young people see the product first and become affiliated with the product and not so much with the social cause story.

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE HEAR ABOUT BRANDS' ASSOCIATIONS WITH CAUSE

BASE*	AGE 13-17	AGE 8-25
Advertising	45%	40%
Online community forum	27%	22%
Brand's social media	26%	25%
"Just a guess"	22%	18%
Blogger, Influencer, YouTuber, celebrity, etc.)	22%	14%
Friends told me about it	20%	16%
Search/Google results	17%	10%
Signs at or inside the store	16%	13%
In the news	15%	16%
Brand's website	15%	18%
Family told me about it	9%	8%
Organizations that are involved in this social cause/platform	9%	7%
Don't know	6%	7%
A sports team/club/group I am involved in	5%	4%
Other	3%	2%
Attended an event	2%	2%
Total respondents	576	1389

 = significantly higher @ 95%

DON'T FORGET WORD-OF-MOUTH

WHEN YOU HEAR SOMETHING POSITIVE ABOUT A BRAND YOU TELL OTHERS ABOUT IT:



30%

HISPANIC



28%

BLACK



22%

WHITE



STANDING UP AND STANDING OUT

Even though a brand's purpose-driven ethos matters, it's not easy to break through and create belief among consumers. **Nike** earned significant media attention in 2018 with its Colin Kaepernick campaign that showed support for his protest movement against racism and social injustice—[4C Insights](#) data showed that mentions of and comments about Nike on social media rose 1,678% immediately following the campaign launch; and mentions of Kaepernick spiked 362,280%. And yet, in our survey Nike still only secured a 60% aided awareness of an association with any cause at all; and only 27% with racial justice. Even only 33% of those familiar with the hair & body brand, **Love Beauty & Planet**, associate it with...the planet.

Of the 88 brands we asked about, only about one-third (27 brands) even broke the 25% mark of being associated with any single cause platform.

CAUSE PLATFORM MOST ASSOCIATED WITH BRAND

COSMETICS

BRAND	BASE*	CAUSE
Colour Pop	60	—
Cover Girl	204	—
Drunk Elephant	55	—
e.l.f.	53	—
Estée Lauder	52	—
Fenty Beauty	56	—
Glam Glow	55	—
Glossier	55	—
MAC	52	—
Maybelline	194	—
Milk	52	—
Revlon	204	—
Sephora	49	—
Tarte	57	—
The Crayon Case	50	—
Ulta	53	—
Urban Decay	219	—

LUXURY

BRAND	BASE*	CAUSE
Calvin Klein		—
Coach		—
Gucci		—
Kate Spade		—
Michael Kors		—

HAIR & BODY

BRAND	BASE*	CAUSE
Aveda	53	—
Bath & Body Works	42	—
Dove	45	—
Eos	56	—
Love Beauty & Planet	205	—
LUSH	50	—
Neutrogena	42	—
The Body Shop	50	—

OTHER BEAUTY

BRAND	BASE*	CAUSE
Axe	60	—
Harry's	60	—
Proctor & Gamble	60	—
Unilever	60	—

OUTDOOR

BRAND	BASE*	CAUSE
Dick's Sporting Goods	60	—
Patagonia	60	—
The North Face	60	—
United By Blue	57	—

CLOTHING

BRAND	BASE*	CAUSE
American Eagle	61	Income Inequality
Ann Taylor	60	Other
Banana Republic	60	Income Inequality
Everlane	58	The Environment
Fashion Nova	60	Income Inequality
Forever21	60	Income Inequality
H&M	60	Racial Justice
J. Crew	60	Animal Welfare, Financial Skills, Gun Violence
Kith	57	Income Inequality
Kohl's	251	Income Inequality, Education
Levi's	60	Income Inequality, LGBTQ+ Rights
LOFT	60	Bullying
Macy's	252	Income Inequality
Madewell	258	Income Inequality
Nordstrom	60	Animal Welfare
Old Navy	61	Income Inequality
Supreme	60	Health Care, Criminal Justice System, Education, Military/Veterans
The Gap	252	Income Inequality
Target	61	LGBTQ+ Rights
Tommy Hilfiger	61	Income Inequality
Urban Outfitters	60	Income Inequality, Women's Rights/Equality
Walmart	61	Income Inequality
Zara	60	Other

UNDERGARMENTS

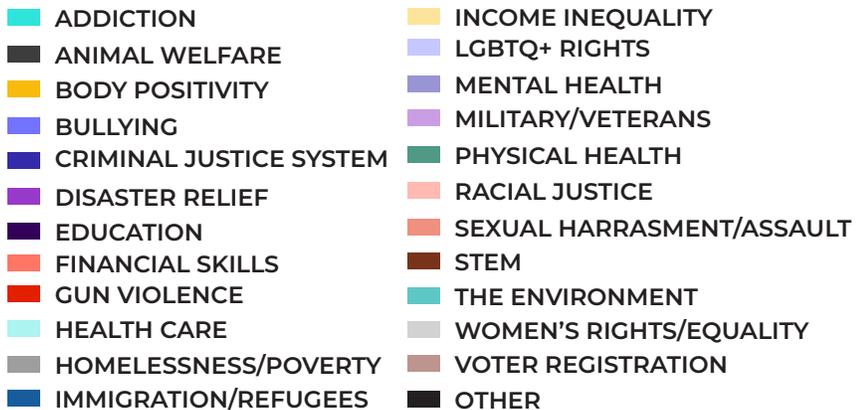
BRAND	BASE*	CAUSE
Aerie	55	Income Inequality
Bombas Sock	57	Other
Savage x Fenty	54	Income Inequality
Spanx	53	Income Inequality
Thinkx	51	Income Inequality
Victoria's Secret	55	Income Inequality

SHOES & ATHLETIC

BRAND	BASE*	CAUSE
Adidas	252	Physical Health
Allbirds	131	The Environment
Athleta	307	Income Inequality
Converse	61	Bullying
DSW	60	LGBTQ+ Rights, Financial Skills, Gun Violence
Fabletics	241	Income Inequality
Keds	61	Animal Welfare
Lululemon	241	Income Inequality
Nike	251	Racial Justice
Puma	60	Physical Health
Steve Madden	60	Other
Sweatty Betty	57	Income Inequality
TOMS	60	Other
Under Armour	251	Physical Health
Vans	61	Other

RETAIL CLUBS

BRAND	BASE*	CAUSE
Le Tote	49	Income Inequality
Rent the Runway	51	The Environment
Stitch Fix	51	Income Inequality
Thread Up	53	The Environment
Trunk Club	47	Income Inequality
Wantable	44	Income Inequality



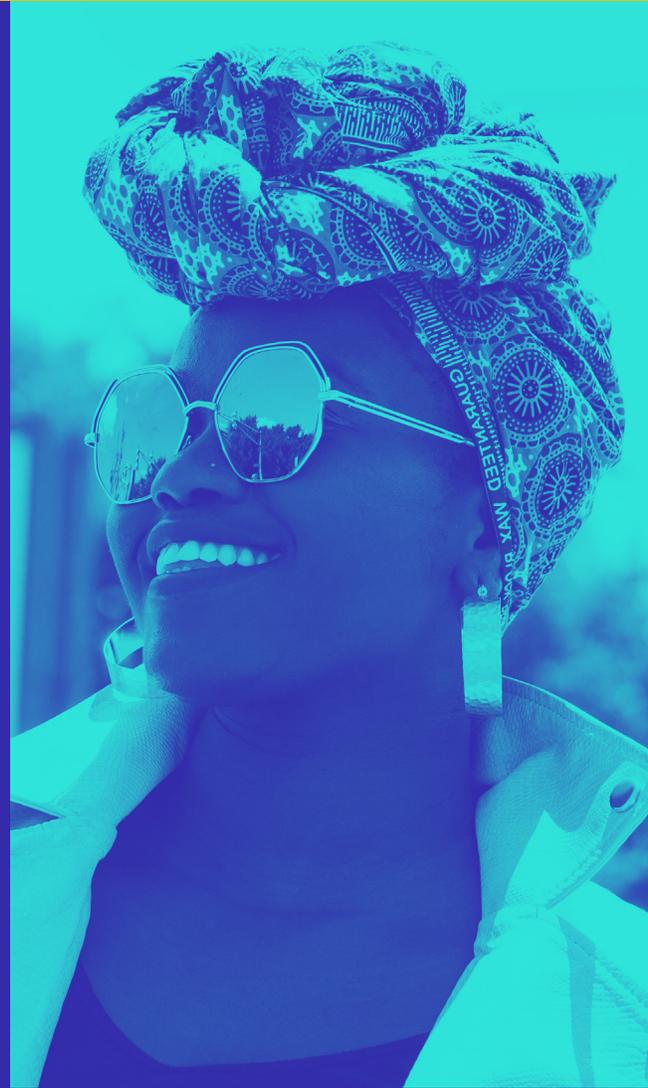
* Unweighted base (Females and Non-Binary)

That said, we are seeing some brands making headway relative to the other brands in their category by successfully leveraging social impact with young consumers. **HERE'S WHAT THEY'RE DOING RIGHT.**

BE UNIQUE.

One way to stand out among the noise is to use the issue itself as a brand differentiation and leverage an angle that is unique in the category.

- While most undergarment brands are celebrating the more obvious association with body positivity (and rightly so!), Savage x Fenty has taken that inclusivity platform even farther by making a powerful statement about racial equality—promoting diverse models and products that appeal to women of different shades (and sizes!). And consumers are noticing: 33% of respondents associate **Savage x Fenty** with racial justice and equality, locking it in as the only brand in this category representing this cause platform. Of course, this is as much about Rihanna herself and her very public stances on these matters, including her decision to not perform at the 2019 Super Bowl halftime show due to the kneeling controversy. But she's not shy about using her highly successful brands as a way to push these issues, too.
- Outdoor brands from **Patagonia** to **REI** have gone all in on protecting the environment, which is a clear alignment with who they are and what they sell. But in the wake of the Parkland school shooting, **Dick's Sporting Goods**—the biggest sporting goods retailer in the country with a subsidiary dedicated to hunting and fishing—plunged itself into activism by restricting gun sales in its stores. In a highly publicized (and criticized!) move, Dick's no longer sells certain types of semiautomatic rifles and no longer sells any firearms to people under 21. And while not a huge association—11% among respondents—there certainly is some recognition of Dick's position on gun violence prevention, particularly when compared to the other outdoor retailers who stand from 0 to 1% on this issue.
- Hair & Body brands have some recognition as being associated with positive body/self image, which—again—makes sense. But two brands stand for something else: the environment. **LUSH** and **Love Beauty & Planet** both enjoy a 43% and 33%, respectively, association with the environment. Over one-third of LUSH's products are package-free (also known by LUSH lovers as “naked”), and the brand has begun opening completely Naked shops where all products are plastic packaging-free. Love Beauty & Planet launched in 2017 with a goal to capture the “sustainable living” market and already has a relatively high association with its cause platform of choice thanks, in part, to its name. As our previous study noted, price, value, and convenience still matter to young consumers. But all things being perceived as equal among the huge array of shampoo brands, having its purpose right in the name certainly helps this brand stand out. And standing for something less common in the category, like sustainability and the environment via ethically sourced ingredients, can help, too. It's important to note that both LUSH and Love Beauty & Planet show how incorporating its cause platform right on packaging helps to put the issue literally right in front of/in the hands of consumers, which also drives awareness.



BE FOCUSED.

It's tempting to want to follow the hot trend and jump on a popular wave. Or to simply spread your goodness across a multitude of cause platforms. But having a singular focus can provide clarity to consumers amidst the ever-increasing marketing noise.

- **Dove** has stayed laser-focused on its commitment to raise self-esteem and body confidence, from its 2004 “Real Beauty” campaign to its latest “#ShowUs” effort to build the world’s largest stock photo library that shatters beauty stereotypes. And young consumers have taken note—an impressive 53% of respondents associate Dove with body positivity, which is among the highest associations with a single cause area across all the brands we surveyed.
- We’re seeing a similar focus with the brand **Bombas**, a socially-minded sock brand that leverages the one-for-one giving model popularized by TOMS. Despite being new and with only 13% of respondents being familiar with brand, of those familiar, 37% identify Bombas with the right cause space: homelessness and poverty. When we compare this to **TOMS**, which has been around since 2006 and enjoys a 73% brand familiarity, only 36% of respondents associate them with poverty (its original cause space). Its cause space is less known despite its longevity due in large part to its expansion to social causes related to eyeglasses, clean water, safe birthing, and now gun violence prevention. Additionally, TOMS’ message got lost when it started selling in places like Amazon and Nordstrom where TOMS can’t control and push its core one-to-one giveback message.
- **Everlane** has also remained singularly focused on sustainability and was one of the few clothing brands with clear top of mind issue recall of “sustainable fashion,” “eco-friendly,” and “ethical manufacturing” among our respondents. Similarly, **Allbirds**, with its sharp focus on sustainable shoes made from plant material rather than plastics, saw strong top of mind recall of the sustainability cause. Whereas **Levi’s**, a long-standing American brand, had only 3 top of mind comments and they all dealt with something different—“environment,” “gun control,” and “LGBTQ”—all issues on which they have taken a stance. Or **adidas**, another strong brand, that received lots of top of mind comments, but they were all over the place—from “LGBTQ” to “youth sports” to a generic “equal rights.” True, adidas is getting credit for being a “good” brand, which you might say is better than nothing, but it doesn’t carve out a unique and memorable space in the mind of the consumer and so it’s easy for an Allbirds to come in and steal market share with its clearer positioning.
- Among cosmetics, the clear stand out—**Fenty Beauty**—also has a single story: inclusivity. Launching in September 2017 with a very clear (and sadly novel) position of Beauty for All, the brand created The Fenty 40: a line of foundation in an impressive 40 shades, including for those with traditionally hard-to-match skin tones, and it has since added 10 more shades. The brand, and Rihanna as its founder, launched a beauty revolution known as The Fenty Effect, spurring other cosmetic brands to expand their own shade offerings. Young consumers are not only flocking to Fenty Beauty for their cosmetic needs, but they have a clear understanding of their fave brand’s ethos: 50% associate the brand with body positivity, 42% with racial equality/justice, 27% with women’s equality/rights, and 22% with LGBTQ+ equality/rights—all representative of its core pillar of inclusivity.

BE PROVOCATIVE.

Those willing to put themselves out there on more so-called “controversial” issues may benefit from the attention. The issue must still connect with the brand’s core principles and operational philosophy; controversy for controversy’s sake doesn’t work. But if the brand lives the stance, young consumers will take note.

- As we mentioned, **Nike** courted controversy with its Colin Kaepernick campaign and it paid off—not only did the brand see a [spike in sales](#), it has the highest overall cause association (60%) relative to the other brands we surveyed. And no doubt, **Dick’s Sporting Goods’** very public and very controversial stance on gun sales helped to create the spike in its association with gun violence prevention.
- We’ve also seen the attention benefit **Target**. In the last 5+ years, Target has stepped up its support for the LGBTQ+ community by publicly endorsing marriage equality, expanding its array of gender-neutral signage and products, and celebrating Pride Month with a robust line of rainbow-inspired products. But, in 2016, when it welcomed transgender team members and guests to use the restroom or fitting room facility that corresponds with their gender identity, the brand saw significant [backlash](#) (a short-lived loss for a long-term gain!). However, that stand by Target created a clear association in the minds of young consumers: 24% of respondents associate Target with LGBTQ+ equality and rights, the highest association with this important issue among the clothing category.
- While **Patagonia** has been an active supporter of environmental causes for decades, giving 1% of its annual sales and 100% of its 2017 Black Friday sales to grassroots environmental groups, it was Patagonia’s bold stance in support of Bears Ears National Monument in Utah that created significant visibility for the brand’s social impact work. In response to the largest-ever reduction of a national monument, Patagonia turned its homepage into a political statement reading “The President Stole Your Land.” The site attracted so much attention, Patagonia struggled to handle the traffic. That stance, along with its other historical activism, contributed to Patagonia’s position as the outdoor brand most strongly associated with the environment. And, among our respondents, the brand received the most consistent unaided association with a cause space, the environment.

[NEED LINK TO INTERACTIVE DATA VISUALIZATION]:

Top social cause platform as identified by young people is body positivity, driven by strong association with beauty and fashion brands. The environment and women’s and LGBTQ+ rights were also more common associations with the brands tested. Areas where the majority of young people have no brand associations are: Voter registration, Criminal justice system, Gun violence, STEM, and Addiction.

RE-DEFINING “AUTHENTICITY” AND CHOOSING THE RIGHT CAUSE SPACE

Part Three



So what social impact platform or cause should a brand support? While many marketing and strategy experts have weighed in on this, they’re all essentially saying the same thing: it’s all about “authenticity.” Traditionally, this is interpreted to mean that authenticity is about aligning the platform to your brand’s services or products (e.g., a food brand can only have a voice in food-related issues).

We, however, take a more nuanced position. We believe no cause is off limits for any brand. For young people, “authenticity” doesn’t mean the cause has to be in lock-step with what your brand sells. Rather, authenticity simply means you’re walking the walk; living the values you’re espousing and wholly supporting the issues from the inside out.

Chik-Fil-A is a great example. Rather than stand for something like food access or ethical farming, they stand for “traditional Christian family values.” And their internal and external initiatives—from closing on Sundays to supporting certain nonprofits that perpetuate anti-LGBTQ messaging—clearly communicates that position. This is how young people have redefined “authenticity”. They don’t necessarily agree with Chik-Fil-A ([almost 60%](#) of Gen Z believe gender is a spectrum), but it’s an authentic expression of the brand’s values nonetheless.

SOCIAL CAUSE SELECTION SPECTRUM

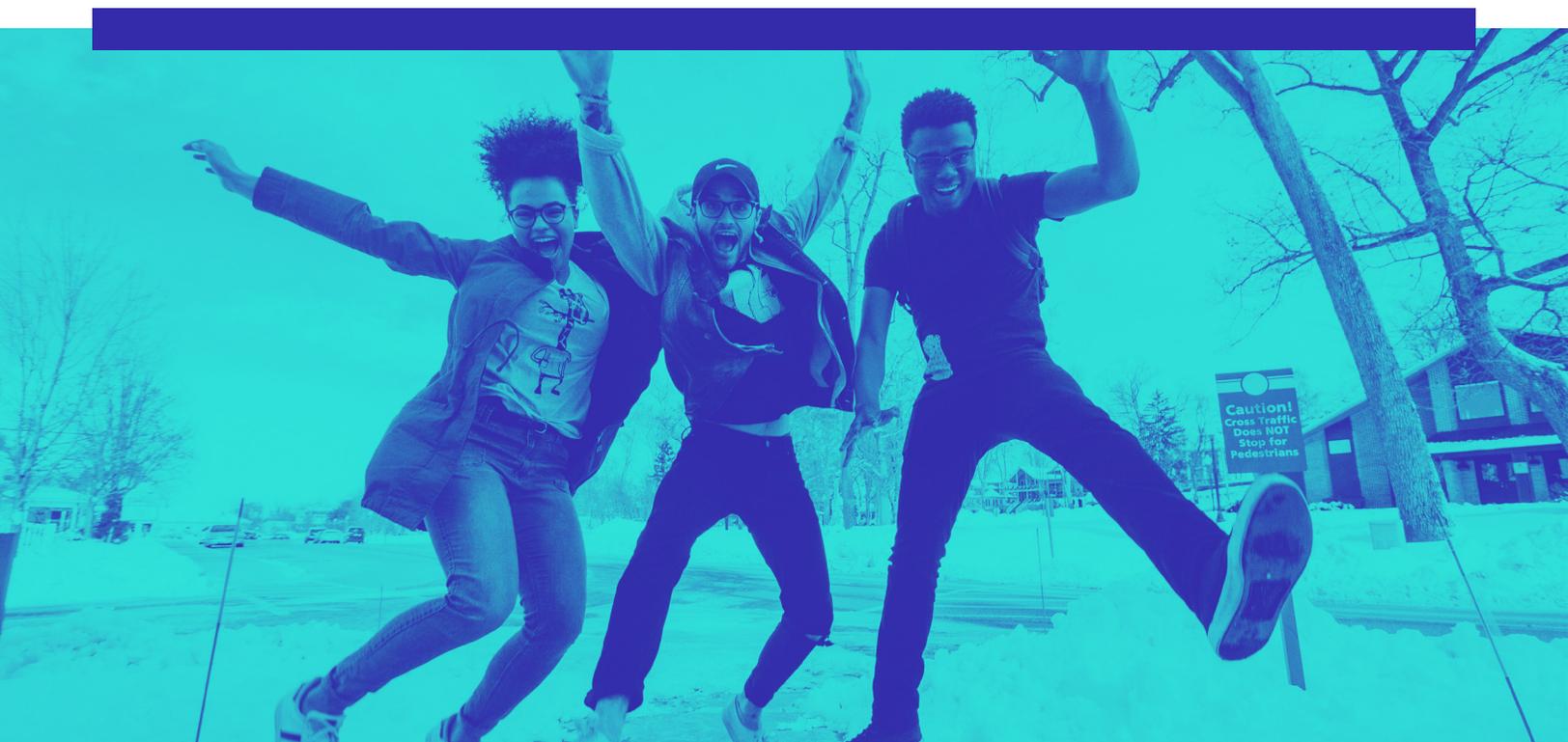


Wherever you decide to plant yourself on this spectrum, just make sure you plant yourself somewhere. Because, as we've said before, not taking a stand isn't an option.

So choosing a cause platform is as simple as deciding what issue you're ready implement from the inside out, from internal policy to marketing. Looking at a spectrum from clear brand product/service alignment to clearly not, we would say there are three core categories in which you could plot your brand:

- On one end of the spectrum you have what we'll call "SAFE & EASY." Think environment for **Patagonia**; body positivity for **Aerie**; animal welfare for **LUSH**. "Safe & easy" is the most popular angle to take, for obvious reasons. However, it also generally means it's the most crowded place for like brands. If you're looking to leverage your cause platform as a differentiator (which you should!) then "safe & easy" is going to end up looking more like table stakes than it is a unique positioning. That said, there is still room to find white space. Brands in the shoes and athletics category, for instance, could venture beyond the obvious and crowded spaces of body positivity and physical health and take on issues like the environment. **Allbirds** is wisely carving out space within this cause platform, with 17% of consumers associating it with the environment, but from sustainable manufacturing to using plastic-free fabrics, there is a lot of room for others. Along with occupying a crowded marketing space, the "safe & easy" angle can be perceived as more self-serving - pure marketing rather than a principled stand. For instance, for beauty brands, body positivity, inclusivity...even animal welfare...plays right into a marketing message. Take **Maybelline**—there were several respondents who said things like "I feel like Maybelline supports some generic women's causes" or "body positivity (lol)" signaling that there is some belief that brands are just paying lip service to some causes simply to progress their own sales. The flip-side of "safe & easy" can be "disingenuous & easily ignored."

- On the opposite end of the spectrum you have what some might consider risky...although we don't necessarily think so. Sure, a brand that comes out in support of an issue with deep political divisions can find itself in a more perilous situation—earning strong support from some and backlash from others; but, remember, many of these issues [aren't as polarizing](#) to young people. It's about future-proofing your brand! So, we'll call this end of the spectrum "BOLD & BULLISH" where brands like **Levi's** and **TOMS**—who have both come out in support of gun violence prevention laws, despite the fact that this issue is not one that is directly tied to the sales of jeans or shoes—proudly live. This is where **Nike** placed themselves when they decided to showcase their support of Colin Kaepernick's racial justice movement. For brands that are bold enough to jump into a what might be considered a more treacherous space—and smart enough to do it right (more on that in Part Four)—they can reap the transaction reward that can come with great attention. But more importantly, these brands can attract a loyal customer driven by true marriage of shared values.
- But what about brands who aren't ready to take that bold leap...but are willing to step out of their safe lane. Don't worry—there's a place for them. We call this "FIGHT FOR THE USER" and we would place it squarely in the middle of the spectrum. It's here where brands put less of a focus on themselves and their products/services, and more of it on their consumer. **Cover Girl** starts to inch closer to this category with its support of the LGBTQ community and tapping its first "Cover Boy." They certainly went out on more of a limb than the other cosmetic brands and received lots of top of mind credit for it. But brands can go farther and align with a cause platform that reflects genuine care about the consumers themselves. In the beauty brand category specifically, there exists white space beyond the "everyone is beautiful" message that connects to body image/positivity as a platform. For example, pushing into [mental health](#) (beyond superficial self-care); advocating for victim support and recovery; and supporting minority students, entrepreneurs, and businesses. Telling consumers "I care about you and am willing to use our brand's resources and voice to help you live your best life" may not receive the same kind of media attention as those who live in the "bold & bullish" world, but it would speak volumes to your consumers. And, as an added bonus, it gives you more of an opportunity to stand out among other brands in your category. For instance, mental health is a major problem among young people right now, some have called it a true [crisis](#)...and yet few, if any, brands are taking a concerted and holistic stand on this issue. Why? Because it's hard to link mental health with a clothing or cosmetic brand? So what! It connects with your young consumer, and that matters. Without a doubt, these are important cause platforms that could be strengthened by having big successful brands be a part of normalizing and furthering the conversation. And while it's not something to jump into lightly, it's certainly a leap worth making.



DOIN' IT WELL

Part Four



Even a perfect synergy between cause and company can fail without proper implementation. We believe there are two principles critical to delivering on the promise of your platform.

1. CAUSE IS SUSTAINABLE, MARKETING CAMPAIGNS ARE NOT.

You need to talk about your cause association often and everywhere in order to break through the marketing noise and have a real impact on your brand's value. "But we don't want to be boastful"—we hear this a lot.

Consistently talking about what you stand for (education) is not the same as constantly talking about what you have done (boasting).

Reaffirming the mission at all touchpoints (like Love Beauty & Planet seems to do, for example) helps bring the mission off the obscure company home page into the hands, eyes, and mind of the consumer. The most exciting brands in the cause marketing space are the ones doing more than just raising awareness (we like to say we're "allergic to awareness without action!"); they're the ones looking to have real positive influence and impact on the cause space. YES! And consumers are raising their hands saying I want to be a part. In fact, as [previously reported](#), nearly 50% of respondents say it's important for a brand to have social change initiatives that consumers can be a part of. What an opportunity to create a community, not just a transaction!

It's why you see the brand **LUSH**, which was among the top unaided association with cause in our survey, consistently cited as a favorite brand among Gen Z. They infuse purpose into everything they do, including funding consumers' own social cause initiatives. And why **The Body Shop** is looking to get back to its own [activist roots](#). They are looking to build a community of new consumers who are as passionate about the issues it champions—ethical sourcing and fair trade.

2. BUT FIRST: TAKE A HOLISTIC APPROACH.

The surefire way to build a credible association with the cause platform (aka being authentic) is to make sure your internal policies and practices match your external efforts/campaigns. A recent Deloitte study on young people's opinions about business' motivations and ethics highlights the importance of a holistic approach. The millennial and Gen Z respondents see a significant and growing gap between a business that says its purpose-driven and how they are in fact operating.

48% Believe businesses behave ethically
(vs. 65% in 2017)

47% Believe business leaders are committed to helping improve society (vs. 62% in 2017)

75% Believe leaders/business focus on their own agendas rather than considering the wider society

72% Think leaders/business have no ambition beyond wanting to make money

Brands must show that they are truly invested in the cause platform they're supporting. And that starts by putting their attention, energy, and resources on first addressing issues from within. This is how young people have redefined "authenticity." And make no mistake—young people are paying attention. For instance, while respondents noted that **Walmart** did a mix of good things for local communities, over half of the respondents who rated Walmart had heard something negative about the brand, including mentions of "news articles about child labor and abusive labor being used in their production chain." This kind of press can invalidate the impactful work Walmart is doing for local communities. Similarly, **Target** gets credit for its support of the LGBTQ+ community, but some respondents questioned the sincerity of it: "[Target's stands for] outspoken support of trans folks using their bathrooms. But also their owner(s) donate a lot of money to anti-LGBTQ causes so I don't trust that this isn't a marketing gimmick." And when young people hear something negative about a brand, not only does it impact their own purchase behavior, but a quarter of the respondents also told us they tell others about the negative thing they heard.

CONCLUSION: IT'S WORK, BUT IT WORKS.



“Cause marketing” is more than just an ad or even a product line. It’s a way of doing business. Brand values can’t just be in your handbook. They need to be in all you do.

It’s why you have disruptors like **Fenty x Savage**, **Bombas**, and **Allbirds** looking to do it right from the start. And legacy brands can also make it work for them. In a July 2018 media call following Unilever’s quarterly results that showed the purpose-driven lines of business as the most successful brands in its portfolio, Unilever CEO at the time, Paul Polman, [said](#) that

businesses would be “stupid” not to lead on purpose-driven products and campaigns, and those who don’t “won’t make it.” 🙌

Cause platforms are no substitute for quality products and effective marketing. Consumers will always look for value—the sweet spot of price and quality. But now it makes just as much sense to leverage stewardship as a definable difference maker for the health of your brand.

**YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE DEMANDING MORE.
THEY WANT TO KNOW THAT THEIR DOLLARS AREN'T
JUST BUYING GOODS, BUT ALSO DOING GOOD.**