What are the effects of socio-political stances marketed through social media?

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What are the effects of socio-political stances marketed through social media?

Brianna Trierweiler
Agenda

- Background Info
- Secondary Research
- Qualitative Research
- Discussion/Conclusion/Implications
- Q & A
My inspiration for this thesis stems from previous research in MKTG 3710 with my mentor, Dr. JoAnn Atkin. I am driven to delve deeper into this subject because it offers valuable insights into consumer social media habits and the impact of socio-political stances.

As a marketing student, I recognize the significance of understanding how socio-political views intersect with social media, shaping people’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In today’s digital age, this topic greatly influences marketing strategies, public discourse, and societal values. I’m intrigued by how brands utilize these views to engage with audiences and impact consumer behavior, making this research valuable for my academic pursuits and the evolving marketing landscape. This thesis offers a chance to explore the complex dynamics of this connection and its wider implications.

**MKTG 3710:**

**Secondary Research on Topic:** Created memos outlining diverse information sources to contextualize the interplay and effects of consumer social media habits and socio-political stances on company performance.

**Qualitative Research on Topic:** Utilized in-depth interviews with probing questions to gather data, employing convenience sampling to select participants for an unbiased analysis.
My Research Questions:

• How do people engage with and react to socio-political content on social media, and to what extent does it impact their attitudes and behaviors?

• What are the pros and cons of encountering socio-political views on social media, like effects on political engagement, polarization, and the spread of misinformation?

• What are the ethical and regulatory issues tied to marketing socio-political views on social media, and how can these challenges be addressed to minimize potential harm?

• Are certain individuals more influenced by socio-political content on social media due to demographic or psychographic factors, and how does this relate to online echo chambers?

• How has socio-political communication on social media evolved over time, and what trends can be seen in its marketing and consumption?
Purpose:

To comprehensively analyze and synthesize existing scholarly knowledge and empirical evidence, providing a robust foundation for understanding the multifaceted impacts of these stances on individuals and society.

Sampling Method:

Purposive or non-probability sampling. In this approach, I focused on the most pertinent literature with an emphasis on selecting a diverse and representative sample of relevant content to ensure the study's findings can be generalized to the broader population or context of interest.
“A Tale of Two "Ideologies": Differences in Consumer Response to Brand Activism

Secondary Source: ABI/INFORM Complete

Rationale: This report discusses how political ideology has been shown to influence consumer behavior across various domains such as recycling intentions, message appeals, brand attachment, and willingness to pay. In a series of three studies, it examines whether consumers’ brand attitudes and willingness to pay for the brand are influenced by brand activism and whether this effect is moderated by consumers’ political ideology.
Secondary Source: ABI/INFORM Complete

Rationale: This report aims at understanding the perception and reactions of consumers towards brand activism campaigns through a dual perspective - cognitive and affective. First, it contributes to better delineating the construct of brand activism from closely related constructs. From a cognitive perspective, this study displays dual incentives for brands to adopt brand activism as a strategy and the likely role of brand activism as a starting point for political changes.
Rationale: This report analyzes how social activism in the US has been rapidly increasing and the role of multicultural young adults in the growing social movements is undeniable. Brands looking to engage multicultural young adults must understand their audience’s outlook on social activism as participation in activism and top social issues of concern vary by racial/ethnic identity. Many multicultural young adults are also skeptical of brand activism, meaning brands must demonstrate the authenticity of their initiatives and be prepared to be held accountable if missteps are made.
Secondary Source: Statista

Rationale: This report focuses on social media activity on protests and other political issues that have skyrocketed as more Americans are using social media to express their opinions on important cultural and social issues, whether by liking, sharing, or posting content. A new survey shows, however, that those who use social media for political issues vary by demographic.
Brand activism: Does courting controversy help or hurt a brand?

Secondary Source: PsycINFO

Rationale: This report details how the asymmetric effect of brand activism holds not only for brand attitude but also for consumers' behavioral intentions and actual choices. When consumers perceived the relationship between the brand and the source of the stand to be more distant, the negative effect of brand activism was weaker because it allowed consumers to morally decouple the brand from the stand.
Secondary Source: Pew Research Center

Rationale: This report details how digital news has become an important part of Americans’ news media diets, with social media playing a crucial role in news consumption. Today, half of U.S. adults get news at least sometimes from social media. In many cases, there are demographic differences between the people who turn to each social media site regularly for news.
Secondary Source: The American Marketing Association

Rationale: This report acknowledges the role that marketing does and can play in addressing political activities with articles that explore key topics like elections, voting, corporate political advocacy, and consumer political identities. It provides theories explaining firm, consumer, agency, and other stakeholder behaviors along with strategic implications.
Political beliefs significantly influence consumer behavior in areas like recycling, brand attachment, and willingness to pay.

Brand activism has a dual impact, affecting both consumer attitudes and potentially serving as a catalyst for political change.

Multicultural young adults play a crucial role in social activism, but they are often skeptical of brand activism, necessitating authentic and accountable brand initiatives.

These findings highlight the intricate nature of the link between political ideology, consumer behavior, and brand activism, potentially reshaping conventional wisdom in marketing and politics.
Method: In-depth interview sessions using qualitative data analysis techniques

Questions Asked: Five main questions with probing

Sampling Method: Convenience sampling

Basic Sample Descriptive Stats:

- Interview Amount: 15
- Gender Split: 9 Female & 6 Male
- Age Range: 18-49 Years Old
- Length of Interview: 32-155 Minutes
Q1: We are trying to understand people’s social media behavior and brand activism activities. So, first, can you describe to me the various social media platforms that you use daily (or what’s your daily ‘social media routine’)?

Theme 1: The social media platforms Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok are the most frequently used as a daily routine.

Description: Each of these platforms has its own unique features and user base, which can influence the type of content shared and the ways people engage with it. Instagram is often used for sharing visual content, Snapchat is known for its personal communication, and TikTok is famous for its viral videos. Brands often use these platforms for marketing and brand activism activities to engage with their target audience and promote social causes.

“I use Instagram um basically all day and I also use TikTok all day. I have an addiction to TikTok and use Snapchat um throughout the day too” (F, 22).

“So, I use Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok. In the morning is when I usually go on all these apps and then I will use Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok throughout the day too” (F, 22).

“I use TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram on a daily basis. Usually when I wake up in the morning, I will check Snapchat, and then quickly go on the other two apps, and I will continue checking them throughout the day” (F, 20).

“Normally I will wake up, I’ll check my Snapchat, I’ll check my Instagram, and then I will go through my TikTok and just pass time using TikTok” (M, 20).
Q1: We are trying to understand people’s social media behavior and brand activism activities. So, first, can you describe to me the various social media platforms that you use daily (or what’s your daily ‘social media routine’)?

Theme 2: The media shared and discussed most frequently tends to be humorous, interesting, or entertaining

Description: The information strongly recalled and conveyed most is amusing and comical media. For those to share messages, images, and videos with an individual that reminds them of it.

“I think I use Instagram the most because there are numerous forms of entertainment on Instagram such as video posts and threads and I can also keep in contact with my friends via message by sending them messages and videos that remind me of them” (F, 20).

“I feel that these apps are used to talk to my friends and send them funny things and to share information that we find that we think we would find interesting” (F, 25).

“I definitely like to use Snapchat the most because that’s one of my main ways to communicate with a lot of people and that’s how I talk to my brother” (F, 19).

“Snapchat, I use the most, because it’s the most commonly used communication platform, that’s how I get ahold of people, and they get ahold of me. Instagram you can contact people, reach out to people, and send them pictures as well” (M, 20).

“Uhh, Twitter is probably my favorite uhh because it’s so funny and uhh I know some people can have a bad experience with it, but I think the stuff I see on there is all really funny and kinda puts me in a good mood” (M, 23).
Q2: What do the words “brand activism” mean to you? How would you define it?

Theme 1: The words and meanings to define brand activism are challenging to depict

Description: When asked what brand activism means to them, the interviewees had a hard time giving either a genuine or descriptive answer. A couple even stated their lack of meaning in opinions out loud.

“Uhmm Hm, the words don’t have a whole lot of meaning to me” (M, 23).

“I have no idea what that would mean” (M, 27).

“It could just be like the different designs they have” (M, 27).

“So, when you take a brand activism like a like a company for example that I think it’s like Ben and Jerry’s” (M, 25).
Q2: What do the words “brand activism” mean to you? How would you define it?

**Theme 2: Brands take stances on important issues**

**Description:** Brand activism typically means taking a stance on an important social or political issue. Often, it goes together with a social impact or benefits for a brand.

“But I guess I would define it as brands taking defined stances on socially important issues” (M, 23).

“I would define that as when a brand takes a stance on a political issue” (F, 49).

“An example would be when a certain company promotes a politician for political office such as president” (F, 49).

“So, for me, I would define brand activism is when similar to how like when a person believes in a in a political or social issue and they you know put themselves behind that issue its kind of the same thing just using the brand as an entity instead of like an individual person” (M, 25).

“It means the stance companies take on issues going on in the world today” (F, 21).
**Q3**: What do the words “brand activism” mean to you? How would you define it?

**Theme 1**: Everyone has their take on important issues

**Description**: Among the interviewees, all of them suggested different social or political issues they were passionate about. Occasionally, they had like-minded opinions or issues.

“Some important issues to me, man, it’s hard to limit it to just two or three, but id say easily some of the ones that are up there for me would have to be what I previously mentioned like racism, and sexual discrimination, which can also, kinda just taking rights away from people in general and not letting people have control over their lives” (M, 23).

“I feel like gas prices is the biggest one I can think of” (M, 27).

“Two of the top of probably the economy and abortion” (F, 49).

“I think, I’m not like the most, I don’t think the climate is the most important thing, but I think there are things that are related to that so as far as like renewable energy being like the kind independent is a big deal to me, I think pretty sure on energy and not being caught up in a lot of other foreign disputes and stuff regarding that is kind of a big deal to me more nuclear power” (M, 25).

“Abortion and racism” (F, 21).
Q4: When we talk about brands taking a stand, are there any specific brand examples that come to mind?

**Theme 1:** Sports and ice cream brands are widely known for taking influential stances

**Description:** Nike, Adidas, Colin Kaepernick, and Ben and Jerry’s come to mind immediately for most interviewees. Three interviewees listed either of the brands depicted.

“In one of my classes actually, we recently were watching some commercials in my advertising class and I saw an example of an advertisement, I’m not sure if it was a Superbowl ad or just a normal commercial that was on ESPN or something, but Beats by Dre had a commercial with Colin Kaepernick and uhm I think it was aired around 2015 when there was lots of stuff going on about racial inequality in the news and lots of terrible stuff happening and he was taking a stand” (M, 23).

“Yeah, I mean I like I got mentioned a couple before injuries are really big in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict they come to mind like you obviously had the whole Colin Kaepernick situation and everything so that’s a big one that comes to mind I don’t really want to include like Adidas in this whole thing is just more of a PR thing not really a political stan” (M, 25).

Trying to think if there’s something I mean you mentioned Nike Ben and Jerry’s yeah there was another big one in three earlier” (M, 25).

We give a tangible example like with the stuff going on about Colin Kaepernick with racial equality and from that kind of stuff that was divisive” (M, 25).

“Fenti Beauty and Nike” (F, 21).
Q5: Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven’t discussed that you feel is important for me to know about what you think about people’s social media habits and brand activism?

**Theme 1: Companies are either massive, unchangeable, or concerned with gaining wealth**

**Description**: All interviewees depicted the importance and honest motives of companies. While some suggested proper practices for portraying brand stances, others gave truthful insight into the immutable.

“There are massive companies that make phones, and clothes, deliver packages, and do other things that we use every single day they run large spotlight charities that end up giving just enough for the maximum amount of tax breaks and get attention all while underpaying workers in foreign countries and terrible conditions all while maximizing authorized levels of pollution” (M, 23).

“I think a lot of what is addressed with brand activism is really whatever is kind of in the limelight, whatever is profitable, its whatever people are gonna agree with not necessarily what the brand might even agree with. And a brand will rarely hold a stance on something for longer than that thing is in the limelight” (M, 23).

“There’s nothing you can do to change it, so keep buying it. There’s nothing you’re gonna do, you can’t. They are too big… invested in everything. We’ve got billions of dollars going into lobbying, companies that are basically monopolies, but nothing can be changed, so…” (M, 27).

“You’re in you’re running business to make money to make profit people react to social issues so I think that if people didn’t care about a lot of these issues or if they didn’t you know kind of consumed on the businesses would kind of care, yes because it doesn’t really cause it doesn’t have as much impact on their bottle” (M, 25).

“Take into account every bit of detail when taking a side especially when it a good brand and you like it don’t just automatically not buy from them anymore because of one thing they may not agree with” (F, 21).
Q5: Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven’t discussed that you feel is important for me to know about what you think about people’s social media habits and brand activism?

Theme 2: The influence of socio-political stances marketed through social media on individuals’ awareness, calls for reform, the need for transparency, and the potential for the spread of misinformation

Description: Interviewees collectively highlight they are becoming more aware of social media’s role in promoting socio-political stances, advocating for transparency and open-mindedness, while also expressing concerns about the spread of false information to influence opinions.

“I think now I will be more aware and looking for instances where companies use their brands to take a stance on issues and try to promote change in society” (F, 20).

“I definitely think that there needs to be more of a reform when it comes to speaking out. Whether this is companies itself or the representatives” (M, 22).

“People should be transparent on social media and kind of hear other people out. A lot of people are very close-minded on social media I feel, and they should be willing to listen to other people’s opinions and not just be so set on their own” (M, 20).

“Some people will put out whatever they want. Yeah, whatever they will do, whatever it takes for someone to have the same opinion and views as them, even if it um requires giving false information” (F, 22).
The definition of brand activism can be challenging, and people often have different opinions on important social or political issues.

Social media plays a significant role in political activism, enabling like-minded individuals to connect and drive social and political change. It fosters online communities, empowers people to voice their views, and influences public opinion, which can impact voting behavior and societal norms.

Brands taking socio-political stances can build strong connections with socially conscious consumers but face the risk of backlash if their actions seem insincere.
Did your primary research align with your secondary research?
My primary research findings largely aligned with the trends and insights I uncovered in my secondary research.

What was the most interesting thing you discovered?
Studying the behavior of social media users as they engage with socio-political content offers insights into cognitive biases, emotional responses, and the factors that influence users' decision-making processes.

What was the most surprising thing you discovered?
I was most surprised by how social media algorithms and echo chambers seem to reinforce people's existing beliefs, making them less likely to encounter different viewpoints.

Was there anything that confirmed what you already thought about the topic?
While social media can connect people with similar beliefs, it can also lead to echo chambers and polarization. Users may primarily engage with content that reinforces their existing views, further dividing society along ideological lines.

What kind of marketing strategy implications are there?
Taking a stand on a social or political issue can be a powerful way to connect with your audience, but it should be done authentically and strategically. Consider your audience, research the issue, and ensure that your stance aligns with your brand’s values and long-term goals.
References


US Multicultural Young Adults and Social Activism Market Report. Mintel, 2021. https://reports.mintel.com/display/1044567/?fromSearch=%3FcontentType%3DReport%26freetext%3Ds%2520social%2520activist%2520issue%26view%3Dgrid%26resultPosition%3D3#

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE
MKTG 3710 – MARKETING RESEARCH
Fall 2022

Be sure to record the following categorical information about your interviewee:

First Name ONLY: __________________________ Age: __________________________
Interview Start Time: __________________________ Interview End Time: __________________________

We are trying to understand people’s social media behavior and brand activism activities. So, first, can you describe to me the various social media platforms that you use on a daily basis (or what’s your daily ‘social media routine’)?

- Probe – for specific platforms of Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, TikTok; What others are mentioned?
- Probe – for which ones are used most, which is the favorite/feast favorite and why?
- Probe – for why each platform is used – what motive (news, entertainment, boredom, networking).

What do the words “brand activism” mean to you? How would you define it?

- Probe – Can you provide me an example of what you mean?
- Probe – Why do you think brands or companies are starting to publicly announce their support for certain social or political issues, either with advertising, news stories, or social media conversations? (Motives)

What are two or three of the social or political issues that are important to you or that you are passionate about?

- Probe – What is it about these issues that make them so important? Or, why do you care so much about them?
- Or, how did these issues become important to you?
- Probe – Are there any other issues that you feel strongly about? See if they mention: Abortion, social justice/living wages/unemployment/poverty/homelessness, health care reform, environment/sustainability, terrorism, firearms, immigration, animal rights, LGBT issues/rights, free speech issues.

When we talk about brands taking a stand, are there any specific brand examples that come to mind?

- Probe – Can you provide me a “Best” example or one that impressed you? How about a “Worst” example, or one that disappointed you? What was it about these examples that made you feel that way?
- Probe – How do you evaluate a brand’s stance on an issue? Do you do any research, if so what?
- Probe – How do brands taking a stand impact your purchase behavior? Do you think better of a brand/company when they do or don’t take a stand, and why? How important is it to you, personally, that brands take a stand?
- Probe – What would happen if you favorited brand took a stand on an issue that conflicts with your opinion of that issue?

Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven’t discussed that you feel is important for me to know about what you think about people’s social media habits and brand activism?