The Future of Social Justice in Marketing and Branding

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Contents:

The Social Justice Age

Webster defines *social justice* as "a state or doctrine of egalitarianism." Although it has become a buzzword in the 2010s that has carried even stronger into the 2020s, this idea of fighting for human equalities in social, political, and economic affairs is, of course, far from new. Revolutions and movements have followed ideals of social justice throughout history. Still, in a marketing and branding sense, it has only been in the past century or so—since advertising's rise in the mid-1900s and the dawn of the digital age—that the concept has become mainstream in media and company culture.

Trend v. Shift

The interest and importance of social justice in society is evidenced by the number of initiatives people care about today. The world is facing multiple paradigm shifts due to environmental changes, rising awareness of the importance of inclusivity, a growing collective moral compass, and evolving digital norms. Each of these issues, to name a few, comes with a set of social justice initiatives constantly shifting with the times. As these and other issues have only become more relevant and more talked-about in the past century, we can assume they aren't going anywhere and that social justice isn't a trend, but more of a permanent staple in the social, political, and economic affairs it describes. The more visible social justice issues become thanks to media and digital platforms, the more relevant they will remain moving into the mid-2020s and beyond.

The Stigma

We've all heard *social justice warrior* (or SJW) recently thrown about as a derogatory term for a person who would put social justice initiatives above all else, presumably forgoing the freedoms of others in favor of regulations on the issues they feel are worthy of justice. In the US, it has become a political buzzword, usually describing liberals whose beliefs supposedly infringe upon the rights of others even when they are calling for human equality. No matter the stigma that comes with the SJW title or the position that one takes on the issues they fight for, its existence is further proof that people—consumers—care more than ever about the stand that companies and brands take on social issues today.

What This Means for Brands

Be transparent with your stance on social issues if there is a cause that you care about. You can make a difference through your platform, and studies show consumers like and want to see this type of behavior from their favorite brands.

• A 2020 survey by The Corporate Social Mind indicated that 20–30% of consumers research companies to find out their corporate stance on social and racial issues.

• 33% of consumers took action to promote their stance on social/racial issues and COVID-19 after being prompted by a company to do so.

• 57% of consumers expect companies to take a stance on social/racial issues and to involve their employees in doing so.

• The 2021 Global Business Ethics Survey states that in 2020, about 1 in 5 US employees were in workplaces with a strong ethical culture compared with 1 in 10 in 2000.

The Original Warriors: PSAs

Nonprofits and social groups raised the original battle cry for justice, creating ads and other media that called for change that would improve health and human rights. One of the most prominent examples is the anti-smoking movement that emerged and grew through the golden age of 1900s mid-century advertising.

Mid-Century Anti-Smoking Campaigns

Some of the first examples of social justice in mainstream media and advertising can be traced back to anti-smoking information dating as far back as the 1940s. According to an exhibit from Yale University Library, after studies linked smoking to lung cancer in the late 1940s and 1950s, nonprofit organizations such as the American Cancer Society and the American Lung Association began printing media warning consumers about the dangers of smoking tobacco.

"As early as 1961, the president of the American Cancer Society, along with presidents of the National Tuberculosis Association (later the American Lung Association) and others, issued a letter urging President Kennedy to create a commission that would investigate the health hazards of smoking. The 1964 landmark report *Smoking and Health: Report of the Advisory Committee to the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service* was the result. Since the 1970s, anti-smoking groups have targeted smoking in the workplace, in public places, and at home."

The exhibit continues detailing anti-smoking print media such as pamphlets and studies by the American Cancer Society and American Lung Association through the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, particularly those warning expectant mothers and parents of young children about the risks of smoking.

It was determined by a 2009 study by Am J Public Health that "Emotionally evocative ads and ads that contain personalized stories about the effects of smoking and quitting hold promise for efforts to promote smoking cessation and reduce socioeconomic disparities in smoking."

New Players in the Field

One of the biggest social justice campaigns in mainstream media today is the campaign against distracted driving. In the spring of 2014, the U.S. Department of Transportation released its first-ever national ad campaign. Its subject was the danger of texting and driving, and the first 30-second commercial went viral just about a week after its release.

An article by *Time* details the ad, which many of us will remember: "A 30-second PSA depicts a fatal side collision in which three young Americans are in a car, and the driver is killed after she runs a stop sign and fails to see the truck coming from the side because she picked up her phone to answer a text.

The tagline: 'U Drive. U Text. U Pay.'" Similar spots in Belgium and Wales had already raised eyebrows for their in-your-face, gruesome messaging, but the fact remains that the campaigns were important and effective for their time.

Don't Like and Drive Campaign by Responsible Young Drivers Organization based in Belgium

It wasn't long before corporations jumped on this social justice initiative—particularly the mobile carriers whose services were the central subject of discussion when it came to distracted driving. AT&T released its "It Can Wait" campaign against texting and driving in 2013, featuring "victims of crashes caused by drivers who were texting and driving, such as the mother of a child who is now a paraplegic and a woman who is now brain-damaged after being struck while walking her dog," the *Time* article recounts. Other corporate campaigns on the subject came from insurance companies, including Geico and State Farm, offering drivers incentives and savings for safety.

Much like the anti-smoking campaigns, these campaigns against distracted driving play into the power of human emotions and empathy to connect consumers with the dangers of texting and driving.

The Takeaway: Much like any advertising or marketing campaign, connecting with your consumer on an individual, personal level is paramount when creating a social justice-focused campaign or message from your brand. Speak clearly and directly to your audience without using innuendo or confusing language when communicating your stance on social issues. Know your target and the causes they care for and demonstrate your devotion to them.

Social Justice Examples in Marketing

Now that we have established that social justice is not actually a "trend" and is more of a shift toward a more mindful lifestyle that people all over the world are adopting, it is important for brands to be aware of its facets so that they may better connect and communicate with consumers. We will focus on five key areas of social justice that are prevalent today, although there are hundreds of topics that brands could choose to hone in on for their personal missions. As a company, you do not have to take a public stand on every issue. It's all about determining what is most important to your consumers (and employees) and communicating with them. Find out what they need from your brand to trust and engage with those issues through your platforms.

1. Environmental Protection

The movement surrounding environmental protection has never been stronger than it is today. With industry, technology, agriculture, and recreation causing negative global effects on the environment, this is one of the biggest social issues that many brands have chosen to champion in various forms.

Why is it important to consumers? This is an easy one. We all live on the same planet, and we only have one earth. Protecting her and conserving our resources is a movement that every human can relate to and billions are getting behind in one way or another.

Ways Brands Are Making Changes:

⊘ **Growing Consumer Interest in Reducing Their Carbon Footprint**

• Research conducted in 2020 by Getty Images shows that "81% of people polled expect companies to be environmentally conscious in their advertising and communications, and 69% of respondents said they were doing everything possible to minimize their carbon footprint (up from 63% just a year earlier)."

• The 2021 PwC Global Insights Pulse Consumer Survey showed that millennials are the most likely to be thinking about sustainability when shopping, showing a 10% to 15% higher likelihood than Gen Z and Baby Boomers.

• PwC's survey also reveals that consumers in the Asia-Pacific region are more eco-friendly than the global average, and a large majority of respondents report becoming more eco-friendly. In Indonesia, it's 86%, and in Vietnam and the Philippines, it's 74%. The trend is also prevalent in the Middle East. In Egypt, 68% say they're more eco-friendly, and in the United Arab Emirates, it's 67%.

• More than half (56%) of those surveyed who work from home say they've become more eco-friendly, compared with 48% of those who work away from home.

⊘ Planting Microforests

• The selectivity and density of these modern green spaces can benefit the air quality and biodiversity of an area using a petite footprint.

• "A rising focus on urban biodiversity sees communities around the world planting native forests in public spaces, uniting people behind the planet's wellbeing," states an educational article by Wunderman Johnson. "Bringing nature to urban areas, these mini forests are rewilding cities and providing cooperative places for interaction."

• Microforests popped up in L.A.'s urban parks in October 2021 as part of the L.A. Park Forest Initiative by the Los Angeles Parks Foundation.

• The benefits of tree planting have been seen in India, where 250 million saplings were planted in the nation's most populous state last year as part of an annual mass tree planting campaign to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate the effects of global climate change. "India has pledged to keep a third of its total land area under forest and tree cover," says AP News, "but a growing population and increasing demand for industrial projects have placed greater stress on the land."

⊘ Changing the Food and Beverage Industry*

• Many retailers and brands are rethinking packaging design and materials, and delivery systems to be more sustainable.

• Coca-Cola Company has launched a "World Without Waste" initiative, which aims to make its packaging 100% recyclable by 2025, collect and recycle a bottle or can for each one sold, and use 50% recycled material in its bottles and cans by 2030. For Coca-Cola CEO James Quincey, the key is focusing on the parts of the business where, as a corporate leader, he can wield the most control and can have the greatest impact.

• Grupo Éxito, a Colombian food retailer, is incentivizing cattle farmers to reforest recently cleared land. The company uses satellite surveillance and audits to verify that cattle farmers are making progress in planting trees and adhering to other environmental and social equity standards. Those that comply are paid a premium by consumer companies for their meat and earn a "sustainable meat" seal, for which shoppers are then willing to pay extra, according to CEO Carlos Mario Giraldo.

• Another manifestation of sustainable sourcing is the adoption of new kinds of farming, such as vertical farming and indoor and AI-assisted farming. US retailer Kroger has partnered with US company 80 Acres Farms to operate four indoor farms with robots that monitor crops 24 hours a day, seven days a week. 80 Acres Farms says its farms produce 300 times more food than a conventional farm, using 97% less water and 100% renewable energy.

(Source: Strategy+Business: "The rise of the eco-friendly consumer," July 2021)

| Microforest project on a Parisian residential street

| Plenty's Tigris Vertical Farm in South San Francisco

2. Inclusivity

Social justice is about human rights, and that means including all humans. As more people become aware of the importance of inclusivity for all races, cultures, genders, sizes, and health-related differences, so does the need for authentic representation in branding and media.

Why is it important to consumers? Seeing representations of oneself in media is one of the most fulfilling things for audiences. People have a need and a right to be seen and heard and to have their stories told in a true, authentic way without parodies or stereotypes. Audiences are made up of so many different types of people—it's important to be inclusive not only in messaging and branding visuals but also in your workplace. More voices and ideas from different types of people internally will help brands connect externally on a real level.

Ways Brands Are Making Changes:

✅ **Genderless Retail Ventures**

• "The Future of Retail is Genderless," says Vogue. "Beyond a capitalist pursuit, shopping is a means to self-realization and self-expression. From our earliest moments, clothes define us."

• "There are precious few buyers and retailers who are already operating in a genderless space," Vogue continues. "Browns led the way when it opened its Browns East store in Shoreditch in 2017, with the entire space merchandised in a genderless model."

• According to *The Huffington Post* and a survey by Fusion, Fifty percent of millennials believe that gender is a spectrum, showing that younger generations have a less rigid view of gender roles.

• Orbasics genderless children's clothing company says, "The idea behind gender-neutral clothes is to remove the limits of fashion and let children's personalities shine. As a parent, you can make a statement to break with the idea of gender."

• This shift toward inclusive clothing for all genders is particularly relevant in millennial and Gen Z audiences, as evidenced on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram: "TikTok has been a platform that has really grown the inclusivity conversation," said Rachael Robbins Kachko, a merchandising strategist for women's clothing at consumer insights agency Tobe TDG. "We've seen that from Instagram for a while."

Genderless clothing line by the Australian fashion brand Bonds

✅ **Real Models**

• "Real model' casting is hardly a new phenomenon," says fashion magazine *Elle*. "Martin Margiela was famously doing it back in the day. But its use has too often felt stunty—the one beautiful 70-year-old walking a show, the face-tattooed skateboarder making his way from the halfpipe to the runway. At its worst, it has tended to tokenize models who were the one plus-size model or over-50 model on the runway.

• "One of the few upsides of this time of harrowing self-isolation is that we're seeing designers turn to their friends, family, and design teams, as well as other everyday people, and put them in front of the camera, and as a result, seeing a completely new side of humanity that normally goes unremarked on."

• "In a sea of (sponsored posts on social media), there's something about the authenticity of a non-influencer with a real job, a real mission, and something to say, the

same spirit which animates our sudden interest in public sector merch. It's a reminder that you don't need to have millions of followers to have personal style."

• Showcasing his design team in his fall 2020 runway show, Gucci creative director Alessandro Michele went a step further for his Epilogue show this summer, featuring them as models in the lookbook.

• Change-making models Ashley Graham and Colleen Heidemann were a couple of the first nontraditional runway models to champion this movement.

| All Woman Project by Heather Hazzan

⊘ **Inclusion for Health-Related Differences**

• Mainstream media is finally showing more diversity for persons with disabilities, lending a voice and authentic representation and storytelling for a large yet marginalized section of the population.

• "Digital accessibility is a big social justice initiative aiming to provide equal access to online education, healthcare, employment, and business for people living with disabilities," *Medium* writes. "And with so much of our lives happening on social media, it might even mean equal access to friendship and social growth. As COVID-19 has thrust the whole world online including those for whom the internet is poorly adapted, like the elderly and people with disabilities, this will become an even greater priority."

• Popular TV and film in the past couple of years such as ABC's *A Million Little Things*, NBC's *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*, Netflix's *Atypical*, Marvel's *Eternals*, 2021 Oscars Best Picture *CODA*, and many more have depicted main characters with disabilities or neurodivergent conditions in the past couple of years.

• Storm Smith, a deaf producer in advertising, issued a reminder at a panel offering Big Bold Ideas for a More Inclusive World that "The purchasing power of people with disabilities is $8 trillion and increasing every day. Don't leave that money on the table."
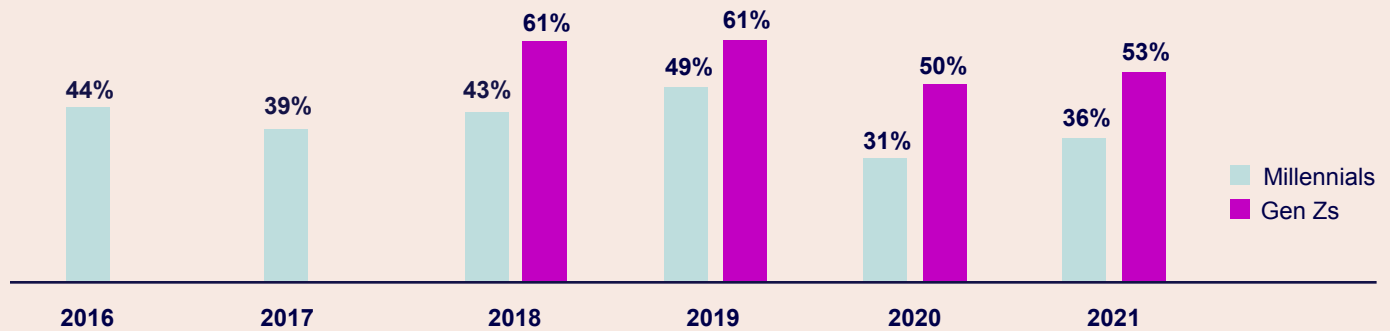

| CODA's Cast. Winners of the Best Picture Award during the 94th Academy Awards. Allen Schaben / Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

⊘ **Recruiting Gen Z**

• Inclusivity in social justice also includes generational inclusion. That means messaging, branding, media, and employment should all be in line with inclusion of various ages to ensure a fresh take on all issues, new ideas, and knowledge of culture from different perspectives.

• "By next year, Gen Z will account for one-third of the national population, which accounts for 40% of US spending power," according to the *LA Times.* "It's time to change with the times and generations because their voice and power are undeniable."

• "Gen-Z has grown up with digital information at their fingertips and access to social media to develop and express their opinions," says Casey Welch, the CEO and cofounder of Tallo employment research company. "This has impacted their expectations of future employers tremendously."

• According to the Deloitte Global 2021 Millennial and Gen Z Survey, "Millennials and Gen Zs, on the whole, seem more persistent, more vocal, and more apt than others to question and even upset the status quo. These generations believe in the power of individuals to create change. Even though they want institutions to do more and aren't hesitant to call for government intervention to fix what they can't, they embrace personal responsibility. It's evident in their approach to everything from the pandemic to social justice—an approach that has real ramifications for employers, retailers, and every other organization and institution."

Job Loyalty Peaked in 2020, Pre-Pandemic - % who expect to leave in the next two years

Q. If you had a choice, how long would you stay with your current employer(s) before leaving to join a new organization or do something different?

Chart — % who expect to leave in the next two years:

Year	Millennials	Gen Zs
2016	44%	
2017	39%	
2018	43%	61%
2019	49%	61%
2020	31%	50%
2021	36%	53%

Legend: Millennials, Gen Zs

• More Gen Z Employees Stats from *Forbes*: This generation wants real connection with their employers, are more likely to take a "dream" position with an unknown brand over a mediocre position with a well-known one, plan to stay at their first job longer than millennials, prefer to work remotely, and want diversity in the workplace.

3. Ethics & Morality

"Ethical issues present dilemmas and opportunities for debate when working with marginalized populations. Social justice demands that we constantly question what is ethical, what is culturally informed, and what is legal." *(Source: Minnesota Psychological Association)*

Why is it important to consumers? Trust goes a long way with people—in fact, it's everything. Would you buy from a brand you don't trust? Or one that does not behave ethically? With more information at their fingertips than ever thanks to technology, people have access to education on so many issues, from the ones mentioned in this report to a whole cornucopia of others. They are equipped to learn and make more informed decisions about what is right and wrong, and they expect the brands they trust to be following suit. Setting ethical practices for your company from the very beginning is crucial for corporate social responsibility, justice, and legality. Do the right thing, and your consumers will appreciate that.

Ways Brands Are Making Changes:

✓ Taking a Stand

• It's important to remember when your brand takes a stand on an issue: you don't have to please everyone. Take a stand on the issues that you are most passionate about, and be clear and direct about them with your consumers. You might lose a few fans, but ultimately, you will be fighting for your beliefs and your real audience will respect that.

• Barbie's goal of closing the "dream gap" between young girls and their male counterparts spurred an ongoing campaign beginning in 2019. The brand donated $250,000 to women-focused nonprofits Step Up, She Should Run, and She's the First, all of which aim to "remove barriers that prevent girls from reaching their limitless potential." According to Statista, the Barbie brand generated gross sales amounting to about $1.16 billion in 2019, up from $1.09 billion the year before.

• When athletics giant Nike featured Kaepernick in its 2018 campaign celebrating its "Just Do It" motto's thirtieth anniversary, the former NFL player's haters revolted against the brand, even going as far as burning its products and posting the videos online. Others applauded Nike for taking a stand as the campaign read "Believe in something even if it means sacrificing everything." Although he has not returned to the NFL since his controversial move, Kaepernick's message echoes throughout the sport and the other major leagues today, and his role as an activist stands firm. Nike's net income saw a 108.4% increase from 2018 to 2019, proving its loyal and new fans far outweighed the naysayers.

Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.

Just do it.

NFL player Kaepernick feautured in the 2018 Nike Campaign "Just Do It"

• From taking big shots like Superbowl commercials to simply letting consumers know what you believe and what you hope to accomplish, the modern world demands more corporate social responsibility from business leaders.

Hiring with Ethics in Mind

• One role we're seeing more and more in corporations is the Chief Impact Officer. "This is an analogous role of a Chief Revenue Officer," says *Medium*. "If a CRO is responsible for every process that generates revenue in a startup, a CIO is responsible for every process that generates any kind of social and environmental impact, defined by their company's mission and values."

• Prince Harry joined US-based coaching and mental health business BetterUp as CIO last year. His role involves advocating on mental health topics, helping to make product strategy decisions, and building communities around mental health.

• CIOs also tend to be the people tasked with gaining—and maintaining—B Corp certification.

• A company's values will directly impact their ability to hire great talent, close deals, keep up with policy do good business, *Medium* continues.

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What is a B Corp certification?

Brandalism

• According to Wikipedia, *brandalism* is "an anti-advertising movement. It is a form of creative activism that uses subvertising to alter and critique corporate advertising by creating parodies or spoofs to replace ads in public areas. The art is typically intended to draw attention to political and social issues such as consumerism and the environment."

• In November 2020, brandalism activists covered more than 250 billboards and bus stop advertising spaces across 10 cities in the United Kingdom with satirical advertisements targeting HSBC, a British multinational investment bank. In response to HSBC's announcement that it would aim to reduce its carbon emissions to zero by 2050, with activists claiming that this target was inadequate. According to Brandalism.ch, campaigners produced satirical advertisements accusing HSBC of "climate colonialism" and protested against its investment in fossil fuels, links to deforestation, and alleged involvement in human rights abuses.

Poster designs by Matt Bonner for Brandalism's mass takeover of public advertising space calling out HSBC's investments in fossil fuels

Corporate Social Responsibility Is Not Optional

• There are four main types of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Environmental, Ethical, Philanthropic, and Financial.

• Defining your brand's mission and purpose and sticking to it is paramount to success. Your brand's CSR should feel naturally in line with your story, offerings, and target audience. You should use it as your north star in all decisions, share that mission with your employees, and hire with ethics in mind so that your team will align with your overall goal.

• This "brand employee activation" means being transparent with your team as well as your consumers—if you stick to certain decisions, they need to know why. Keep them informed and abreast of your social goals.

• In a qualitative research project last year, our agency spoke to Gen Z and Millennial consumers on the effect a company's ethics and behavior have on their willingness to purchase. An overwhelming majority said it did. A large portion actively researched a company's history and mission before purchase, and the remaining would stop giving a company business if they heard about a flagrant violation or bad practice. They also saw social responsibility programs, inclusivity, and a humanity-driven mission statement not as a plus but as a requirement, the norm.

• **Environment example:** Microsoft is promising to become carbon neutral by 2030—but also, by 2050, it aims to remove all the carbon the company has ever emitted since its founding in 1975.

• **Community example:** Capital One expanded its Coders summer program offering by 400% over the course of last summer, shifting to a virtual classroom model to engage primarily low- to moderate-income students in tech by using problem-solving approaches. They also equipped 2,500 families with much-needed digital connectivity at a time when many children without Wi-Fi access have struggled to attend virtual classes.

Capital One Coders program

4. Real v. Virtual

With so much new technology released almost daily and a growing interest in virtual reality, it's difficult to know how the rise of the metaverse and spending much of our lives in a digital world could affect the human psyche in the next several years.

Why is it important to consumers? Social justice movements have certainly targeted the controversy of digital life and the personas, or avatars, that people and

brands are able to project into that sphere. From FOMO (fear of missing out) to the feeling of great inadequacy that spawns from the digitized "perfection" that people see on social media daily, the growing lifestyle of a virtual world raises genuine concerns surrounding mental health, jobs, and more. *Authenticity* has been a growing buzzword surrounding the way people and brands portray themselves online.

Ways Brands Are Making Changes:

✓ Avatars & Virtual Models

• Some brands and influences online are moving toward virtual models—that is, digitally created or enhanced models that can be edited for a certain look or style and seamlessly integrated into any campaign.

• "In the post-coronavirus reality of limited or inaccessible travel, the digital modeling domain is set to expand," writes *Forbes*. "In part, it is a practical question of easier logistics and simpler labor agreements. Avatars are 'available' 24/7 worldwide. Pressed for creativity and efficiency in a time of pandemics, the fashion world is shifting gears online. Recent fashion weeks in Shanghai, Moscow, and Helsinki have experimented with providing an all-digital experience for their audiences and buyers which resulted in record viewership and strong sales. Cameron-James Wilson, the mastermind behind CGI-superstars Shudu and Koffi, has launched the digital-only talent agency. The avatars are here to stay. There is also the power of expressing new ideas in novel ways."
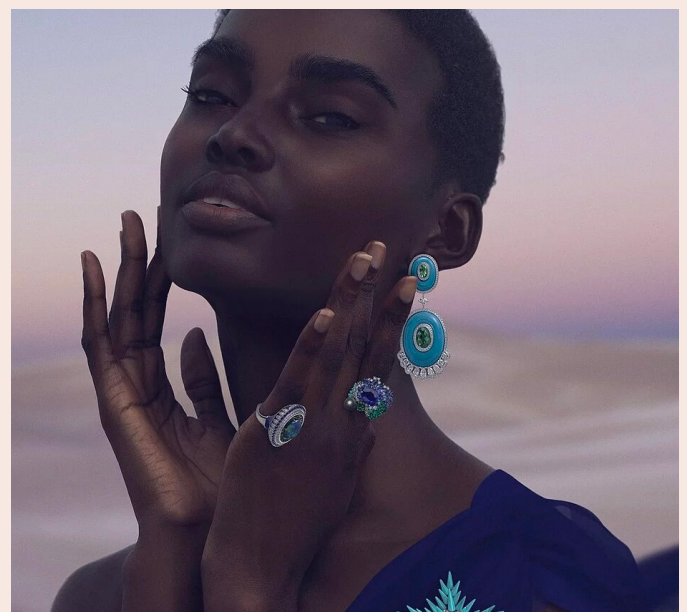
Shudu, a CGI model from Diigitals

• Although there are advantages such as those listed above, the rise of virtual models and avatars is also concerning to some. They could be considered as taking jobs from people who need them. Another concern is the age-old body image debate which has also applied to real-life models; if people are constantly comparing themselves to others (aka models), virtual models set a bar so high—they are literally *unreal*—that the pressure might be too much for some viewers to handle.

• We're also seeing a shift among younger generations toward what's "real." While Millennials and Gen Z appreciate that technology can give rise to further innovation, there is currently a stronger trend among them toward wanting what is nostalgic and tangible.

5. The New Normal

Social justice, like we said in our introduction, is not a trend. It's a shift in mindset toward a more ethical, diverse, inclusive lifestyle for consumers around the world. From spending more time researching ethical practices and brands to taking the time to vocalize their own beliefs and fight for social issues dear to them, people are embracing social justice as a part of everyday life as opposed to an extracurricular.

Why is this important to consumers? They want the brands they know and love to also make that shift by taking a stand on important social issues, being transparent and communicative, and engaging in ethical business practices and responsible policies toward employees and consumers alike.

Ways Brands Are Making Changes:

⊘ **Rebranding for Social Justice**

• Many brands, including several well-known sports teams, have recently undergone rebranding efforts to remove outdated mascots that are considered *cultural appropriation* or offensive today.

• Britannica defines cultural appropriation as "when members of a majority group adopt cultural elements of a minority group in an exploitative, disrespectful, or stereotypical way."

• In February, Washington finally announced the new name of its NFL team, the Commanders, after it removed the Redskins as its mascot 18 months ago without a replacement. This is an example of appropriation of the Native American culture in a way that does not accurately depict its authentic origins.

• Similar changes were made several years ago at the University of Mississippi to remove the Rebels as its mascot, although rather than appropriation, this was an example of an offensive brand image that time and social ethics have outgrown, thus sparking the change.

• Other well-known examples, both appropriating Black culture and enforcing negative stereotypes, are Aunt Jemima maple syrup and Uncle Ben's rice. Both brands formerly depicted elderly Black mascots on their packaging, and both have undergone overhauls in recent years. Aunt Jemima changed to its parent company's name, Pearl Milling Co., and Uncle Ben's made the switch to Ben's Original.

• If you believe your brand or its representations could be ethically and socially outdated or offensive to others, don't dawdle when making these types of changes. Delays in addressing your brand's problematic representations can quickly sour consumers' loyalty. Even if the problem is acknowledged, if action is immediately taken, it can seem disingenuous.

Graffiti calling for DC football team to change the name

⊘ **Going "Clean"**

• Especially among health and beauty brands, we have recently seen a huge shift in creating products free from ingredients such as sulfates, parabens, and fragrances that could potentially harm consumers with allergies or generally be less-than-healthy.

• A 2021 Nielsen consumer survey on clean beauty trends states that consumers also want long-term sustainable solutions that prioritize reducing waste. Plastic-free and zero-waste both saw big jumps in consumer interest over the previous year (online

searches were up 897%). Forward-thinking consumers are looking for ways to reduce the impact they have on the environment and want to buy clean beauty products that align with that mission. They are turning to refillable packaging that won't clog landfills and are doubling down on protecting the oceans with purchases of products like reef-safe sunscreen.

• The major clean beauty trends on the rise are gluten-free (+26%) and organic (+93%), while claims like natural (-25%), hypoallergenic (-61%), and antioxidants (-55%) are trending down.


Jessica Alba's Honest Co. was speculated to be worth $1.7 billion in 2015, but took a huge hit to its credibility when non-organic substances were found in its products, sparking multiple lawsuits

Going Remote

• Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a paradigm shift in the ways companies operate saw many brands switching to a remote workforce. Working from home has many advantages for employees and employers alike, but it is not without drawbacks, as well.

• A major perk for employers of remote teams is the lower overhead cost as opposed to running a traditional office. Rent, utilities, amenities, cleaning, insurance, and so many other factors go into the economics of keeping an office. Brands can save a lot on those costs by switching to a remote model and can allocate those funds elsewhere.

• Employees have also largely reported enjoying the work-from-home model as opposed to a typical office setup, though it can also blur the lines of work-life balance.

• Our Antonio & Paris Millennial Report: COVID Addition in 2021 showed that during the height of COVID-19, only about one-quarter of workers who usually work in an office continued to do so. While some Millennial workers enjoyed skipping their commute and working from the comfort of their home, many find their jobs seeping into every hour of their days. Some 40% reported checking their work email while watching TV or a movie, 35% said they'd check it while in bed, 40% while on the phone, 26% while in the bathroom, 26% during a meal with others, 49% while in a work meeting, and 29% while in a video conversation.

49%	while in a work meeting
40%	while watching TV
40%	while on the phone
35%	while in bed
29%	while in a video conversation
26%	while in the bathroom
26%	during a meal with others
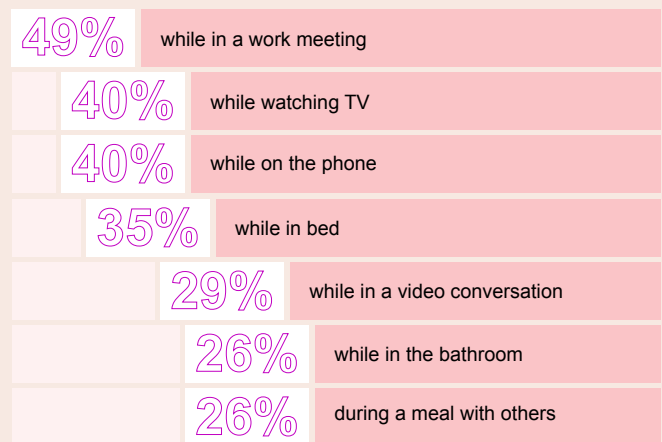
How much Millennial workers check their work email during the day

• Another thing to consider regarding a remote work model is company culture, which a majority of Gen Z and Millennial workers say is important to them. Is your remote team able to share the camaraderie and morale-boosting activities that they would get in-person? If so, it might be a great fit for your brand; if not, it's probably best to have an in-person team working together or adopt a hybrid model of working from home and in the office on occasion.

NFTs in the Marketplace

• Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) are on the rise and many brands are taking advantage by creating these digital assets. These "tokens" function like collector's items or products. It might represent a virtual item such as a video game avatar, weapon, or tool; or the token could be used to represent a real-life piece of property such as real estate, a vehicle, an original artwork, or an exclusive piece of apparel.

• Essentially, collectors can purchase items as NFTs or convert real-life items into NFTs to buy, sell, and trade on a blockchain ledger like Ethereum.

• This virtual marketplace uses secure technology to greatly minimize the chance of hacking, falsifying information, or other digital foul play. But one big question is whether NFTs are bringing artist rights to digital art or bringing the volatile nature of cyber currency into the art world.

• A recent CNBC article weighed some of the pros and cons of the NFT market. Advantages include verifiable ownership and authenticity, a new market for creating wealth and diversifying your portfolio, an empowerment for artists as they can sell direct-to-consumers and receive royalties whenever their NFT is resold, and real-world perks such as access to events, groups, or associations. Meanwhile, disadvantages include the speculative nature of NFTs as illiquid assets, the volatility of their value that can change at any second, environmental concerns, and the potential for fraud, scams, hacks is higher than real-life assets.

• For brands, digital assets could become just as important to consumers as their corporeal ones—no doubt some users already consider this to be the case. Your brand has something unique to offer consumers, so why not translate that to the digital world through an NFT? This could help your brand reach a market you have not yet tapped. A new revenue stream could be at your fingertips, just a keyboard away.

• Nike recently took the virtual plunge when it bought a digital NFT creation studio, RTFKT in late-2021. The studio and brand are now partnering with artists to make and sell digital collectible sneakers and more. Previously, RTFKT collaborated with teenage artist FEWOCiOUS to sell *real* sneakers paired with virtual ones, selling 600 pairs plus NFTs in seven minutes and netting over $3.1 million.

A bundle of NFTs called the Bored Ape Yacht Club - one of the most popular NFT collections

Fighting Injustice: The Russian Invasion of Ukraine

• The 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia has created another shift in the way consumers and brands alike are viewing business from a social justice perspective.

• Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg called the invasion a "massively destabilizing world event" in his first public comments about the war since it began in late February. "It's really tough to find the right words that really mean anything in a situation like this," he said at the SXSW conference, adding that Meta is working to keep its services up and running in the region so Ukrainians can continue using them.

People around the world showing solidarity with Ukraine

• The event, on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, has also prompted brands worldwide to adjust their operations in the name of social justice, condemning Russian officials' actions and seeking to aid Ukraine in its fight against the oppressor.

• According to *Ad Age*, Goldman Sachs Group said that it is closing down its operations in Russia, becoming the first major Wall Street Bank to exit the country since the invasion began, though it wasn't the last.

• McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Starbucks, and Heineken also announced they would be halting business in Russia after mounting pressure to act, *BBC* wrote in mid-March.

• Meanwhile, Airbnb secured housing for more than 21,500 Ukrainian refugees.

• The coming months will show just how other brands will follow suit and how others will take a stand against Russia or in support of Ukrainian refugees as the war unfolds.

Where We Can Go from Here

As a brand with influence, it's your duty to not only use that platform to achieve personal and professional success but also to make a difference to your community, your employees, your consumers, and even the world. Your brand gives you pull, especially with those consumers. Their trust in your product means they'll be more open to hearing what you have to say on worldly matters like the environment, politics, social injustice, disaster relief, animal welfare...

You believe in *something*. Tell your consumers what it is. There are causes worth fighting for that you have an opinion on, and you can make a difference because you already have a platform. The power to affect change starts with building a movement, and movements start with just one voice shouting good into the world.

Key Takeaways

• Align your company's mission with your personal passion and that of your target consumer audience.

• Be transparent and direct about your social stance on issues.

• Share your mission with your employees and keep them informed of the how and why so you can all carry it out together.

• Connect with your consumers on a personal, authentic level.

• Seek new ways to fulfill your social mission through new technology, opportunities, or consumer connections. &

▶ Get in Touch

Reach out to the team at Antonio & Paris to discuss strategies for igniting the love affair between your brand and consumers through promoting a cause.

The Future of Social Justice in Marketing and Branding

Prepared by **Antonio&Paris**

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