Developing Authentic Corporate Activism Initiatives

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to answer the following question: What factors are most important to consider when creating a corporate stance on **social justice movements**? Studies have found that consumers are increasingly keeping an eye on what statements companies put out on hot-button socio-political issues such as racial injustice, sexual harrasment and violence, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, and queer (LGBTQ+) issues. In addition, the rise of **cancel culture** and increasing ability of social media to disseminate backlash for certain **corporate activism** efforts has produced public relations crises for some companies and their leadership. At the same time, companies that have engaged in corporate activism have seen minimal impact (positive or negative) financially to this point. The impacts of corporate activism on a company have so far produced mixed results, so how these impacts are weighed within corporations becomes a particularly peculiar question, especially with more and more companies engaging in such practices. Research for this paper includes defining key terms such as corporate activism, cancel culture, and **corporate values**. In addition, research includes the evaluation of case studies and research about corporate activism and its impacts on companies, as well as an interview with a public relations professional who has a variety of experience with corporate activism. The paper will conclude with an attempt to identify and understand key themes in business thought processes regarding corporate activism. After evaluating the facts and making a series of inferences based on these facts, the expected conclusion is that companies should take into account cancel culture and consumer beliefs when creating social justice messaging, but that the company should ultimately come up with a statement that matches the company's values and practices.

Background:

Corporate activism intiatives and corporate social justice messaging are becoming musts for organizations looking to stand out and make a difference. Consumers want to see organizations taking stands on issues that are important to them. In addition, consumers want organizations to engage in efforts to improve the communities that they operate in through corporate activism and corporate social responsibility initiatives. There are a number of factors that companies must consider when creating corporate activism initiatives and corporate social justice messaging, but which are most important?
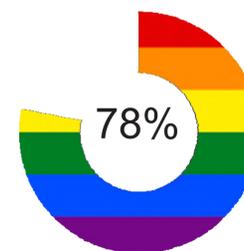
Case Studies:

A Professional's Take:

Who are you as an organization?
Can you commit to practicing what you preach?
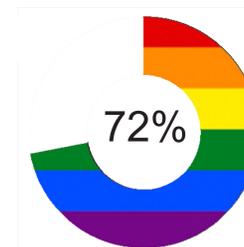
Key Findings from Research:

78%

Businesses should take stances on issues facing their industry [1]

1   McCarthy, M. (2013). Americans conflicted about corporate involvement in political and social issues, new study reveals. Global Strategy Group. Retrieved 9/20/20, from http://globalstrategygroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/3-27-13-Release_GSG-Study_Business-and-Politics_Do-They-Mix.pdf

8%

Would make decisions based on a businesses views compared to their own [1]

1   Data Freaks (2015, May 12). Brands take a stand: When speaking up about controversial issues hurts or helps business. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/datafreaks/2015/03/12/brands-take-a-stand-when-speaking-up-about-controversial-issues-hurts-or-helps-business/#5c26f86a352d

72%

Businesses should take stances on sociopolitical issues facing society [1]

1   McCarthy, M. (2013). Americans conflicted about corporate involvement in political and social issues, new study reveals. Global Strategy Group. Retrieved 9/20/20, from http://globalstrategygroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/3-27-13-Release_GSG-Study_Business-and-Politics_Do-They-Mix.pdf

41%

Millenial/Gen-Z consumer confidence in businesses to be a force for good, down from 76% three years ago [1]

1   Deloitte. (2020). The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2020. https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html#insight

When creating authentic corporate activism initiatives and corporate social justice messaging, organizations should:

 1 Draw from their corporate values

 2 Determine if their actions match the message

 3 Understand their consumer base