

Heart Before Pocket Book. The Truth Behind Post-COVID Generational Activism

CORPORATE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT MONITOR

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Prior to the onslaught of COVID-19, the conventional wisdom was that Millennials and Gen Z were the generations to watch. As the story goes, these younger generations are more inclined to authentically support social justice causes, so they are far more likely to do business with companies that share their values. But then COVID-19 and the resurgence of the racial social justice movement happened. “We are living in an urgent moment. It seems like every other day another crisis happens that tugs at the heart strings. Every day regular

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folks are being called upon to become more civically engaged. Interestingly, how we respond to this call, has a lot to do with what generation we are from. Based on our generation, we have different expectations for civic engagement. Moreover, in as much as we are responding to the call, we expect the corporations we do business with to do the same.” said Ashref Hashim, president and CEO of [The Blackstone Group](#).

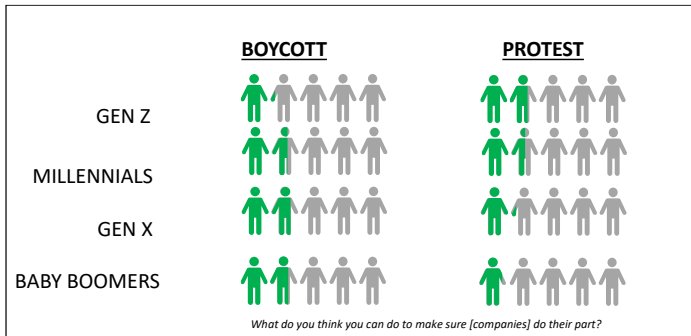
Hashim’s observation is a direct result of new data just in from Blackstone Group’s quarterly [Corporate Civic Engagement Monitor](#) (CCE). The study provides a deep dive on consumer expectations about how corporations address health justice related to COVID-19 and social justice issues. One report from [CCE, Generations](#), also reveals how each generation views the response of specific companies to these issues.

Further, and more to Hashim’s point, there is an underlying generational profile to civic engagement especially when companies do not meet these expectations. It’s not just younger generations who have high expectations of corporations and their response to COVID-19 and to racial civil justice issues. Of the 2,000 consumers surveyed, 79% said companies should adjust working conditions in response to COVID-19, with the older generations being the most fervent in their beliefs. Interestingly, the study also shows that members of Gen Z are less likely than other generations to say they will boycott businesses that they believe are not living up to their social responsibility. Only 23% of Gen Z said they would boycott businesses versus 35% of Gen X and 58% of the oldest generation, the Silents.

“Companies that are hesitant about becoming too civically engaged could easily look at these numbers, take them at face value and breathe a sigh of relief, but that would be wrong,” said Mark Stephens, Founder and Managing Partner of [THINK Justice](#). “Here at THINK Justice, we have delved into the [CCE](#) numbers revealing some key insights about generational activism. What we see emerging is a kind of tactile activism amongst the young. They are more likely to engage in forms of activism that necessitate reaching out to others, including sharing their opinions in very public ways.” As consumers are being constantly called upon to become more civically engaged, they expect companies to do the same and will spend their dollars and their influence with those that meet their expectations.

Per Mr. Stephens’ observations, 40% and 43% of Gen Z and Millennials favor sharing their concerns on social media posts. Gen Z are also far more likely to corral

friends and family to support companies and causes they believe in.



“So, for companies that might think that Gen Z are not willing to put their money where their mouth is, THINK again. This generation is willing to put your company at the center of a pocketbook boycott or a Twitter storm” says Stephens. “The bottom line is that companies that fail to understand the different expectations of the different generations do so at their own peril.”

mention major companies as helping with COVID-19 and social justice efforts, 42% said they believed that major companies were “part of the problem, not the solution.”

Underscoring this need for authenticity, we looked at how consumers perceive the difference between how companies respond to COVID-19 versus their response to racial social justice and other social justice issues. The data show that companies from the retail and technology sectors are perceived as performing better in civic engagement than banking and utility companies. For COVID-19 response and engagement, Target (57%), Amazon (57%), and Walmart (56%) are perceived as leading the pack. Overall, however, companies are perceived as doing better with their COVID-19 recovery efforts versus their social justice engagement leaving opportunity for improvement across the board.

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By Tammy Gray. Tammy is Vice President at the Blackstone Group. She is a leading analyst with extensive experience advising Fortune 500 companies on business strategy.

It is also important to understand a company must come from an authentic place. Skepticism about company’s commitment to civic engagement is high, especially among the young. Of those in Gen Z who did not

To learn more, check out [Corporate Civic Engagement Monitor](#), a quarterly syndicated study by The Blackstone Group.

