Corporate Social Advocacy in 2020: A Call to the Black Lives Matter Movement

APRD Undergraduate Honors Thesis

Juliana Curtin

College of Media, Communication, and Information

University of Colorado Boulder

Defense Committee:

Dr. Burton St. John III, Primary Advisor

Dr. Colette Perold, Secondary Advisor

Dr. Kelty Logan, Associate Chair

April 5, 2022

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction
Introduction…….. 4

Chapter 2: Literature Review
What is Corporate Social Advocacy?.....6
Corporate Social Advocacy & Intentionality.....8
Background on the Black Lives Matter Movement.....10
George Floyd & his Legacy in the Black Lives Matter Movement.....12
Black Lives Matter in Corporate Social Advocacy..……..14
Authentic Support through Corporate Social Advocacy.…….. 15
Generation Z and Consumer Values..…….…… 16
Positioning…… 17

Chapter 3: Methods & Creative Project Overview
Creative Project Overview……17

Chapter 4: Case Studies: Corporations' Social Advocacy Efforts amid the BLM Movement in 2020
"Soxessful" CSA: A Live Case Study on the Boston Red Sox……... 20
- The Early Stages.....…… 21
- The Next Step: Being Loud, Clear, & Transparent……..…… 24
- Sox It To Me: A Wake-up Call on Social Media……. 30
- Fenway Feedback: Measuring the Outcomes & Perception…… 36
- Moving Forward…….. 40

Negative CSA: Popeyes……41
- CSA Efforts……..……41
- How did Popeyes follow through?...……..…45
- Takeaways & Assessment…… 46

Controversial CSA: Nike……..47
- Early CSA Efforts: Nike's 30th Anniversary Campaign……..48
- Continuing Controversial Campaigns: Nike's "Don't Do It" Campaign...……..52
- Takeaways & Assessment……54

Positive CSA: Ben & Jerry's……..……. 55
- I(ce) (S)cream, You Scream, We (should) All Scream Racial Equality ..…… 57
- When Actions Speak Louder than Words: The Social Justice Legacy of Ben & Jerry's.58
- Takeaways & Assessment…….....61

Chapter 5: Navigating Best Practices
CSA Best Practices..…… 61

Chapter 6: Reflection & Conclusion
Lessons Learned..……..... 64
Conclusion..……. 66

References..……..... 67

Corporate Social Advocacy in 2020: A Call to the Black Lives Matter Movement

Chapter 1: Introduction

For my honors thesis project, I have chosen to study how major corporations have implemented the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement into its corporate social advocacy (CSA) strategies within the past year. In efforts to "do the right thing," corporate social advocacy has become a crucial component of many businesses' public relations tactics in order to appear ethical and "woke." However, sometimes these efforts are insincere and are solely performative activism. With further research on CSA tactics and public perception, this work provides insights on how brands and the public relations industry should address social issues from a place of authenticity.

I find this topic significant today since corporations are starting to appear more "politicized," especially with BLM, Stop Asian Hate, women's rights, LGBTQ+ pride, and climate movements in action. The attention to these movements rose significantly in the past year, and are often the root of corporations' social advocacy missions (Miller et al., 2021). Many corporations have taken these movements as an opportunity to vocalize a political statement, often to be perceived as "woke," which is a "byword for social awareness," stemming from African-American culture (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Some of the most common advocacy tactics I have observed are blanket statement social media posts that vocalize "support" for such movements, but often fail to explain how it supports the cause, as seen in Figure 1a[1].

[1] Source: The Sustainable Fashion Guru. (2020, December 22). *Op-ed: How brands lie to us through performative activism*. Fashion Roundtable. Retrieved December 14, 2021, from https://www.fashionroundtable.co.uk/news/2020/12/22/how-brands-lie-to-us-fashion-brands-and-performative-activism

Figure 1a: Brands' Corporate Social Advocacy via BLM Posts (Credit: The Sustainable Fashion Guru)



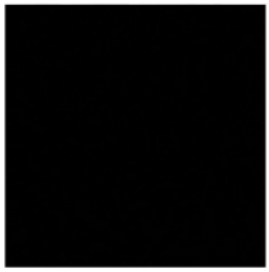
GAP



Urban Outfitters



Topshop


New Look



Princess Polly



Boohoo



Zara



Forever 21

Are these social media posts just a facade for corporations to appear as if they care? Unless corporations are taking direct action to support these movements or implementing internal business policies that align with the values of its "supported" cause, then it is likely difficult to believe that brands genuinely care about those marginalized. For my honors project, this work specifically focuses on the BLM movement during the summer of 2020 as I have found this to be an extremely important and relevant movement that has heavily influenced the trend in CSA efforts that year.

Since the basis of public relations is to build "mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics," it is important to execute strategies and tactics in a way that is actually relevant and true to the mission of a client (PRSA, n.d.). According to the study conducted by Opinium Research, *US Brand and Marketing Study: Responding to Black Lives*

Matter, "71% of Americans think brands have a role in responding to the issue of police violence" after the murder of George Floyd in 2020 (Opinium, 2021). Keeping this widely-shared thought in mind, brands have felt called to address such issues through the effort of CSA strategies. In my early research, I observed how some corporations' CSA efforts are making a positive impact on their reputation, consumers, and a specific social cause. I have also seen the opposite, which has led to mistrust, decline in sales, and disappointment towards the brand from those who have been affected by these pressing societal issues. As a public relations student soon to enter the professional world, I feel obligated to do the right thing and learn how to properly advocate for social movements and ethical businesses, especially when both justice and reputations are on the line. By conducting research on various corporations' social advocacy efforts in the past year, I have created a "best practices" guide for public relations professionals on how to effectively implement political and social justice movements, specifically BLM and racial equality, into the internal and external advocacy strategies of corporations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

What is Corporate Social Advocacy?

Similar to corporate social responsibility, corporate social advocacy (CSA) goes beyond the aspect of corporations' basic efforts of bettering humanity. CSA "represents corporate engagement in controversial social or political issues that often lack direct relevance to the company" (Austin et al., 2019). Since this concept has the capacity to enter a realm of controversy, the general public can either support the corporation for using its voice for an important cause, or chastise it for going against a belief or being ignorant in its approach to an actual social issue at hand.

Along with the general understanding of CSA mentioned above, it also "represents a unique business-society relationship that moves beyond corporate citizenship and CSR—strategies that usually involve philanthropic efforts in support of a cause—into a public stance on a controversial issue or public comments on the ways the company is working to further address that issue" (Austin et al., 2019). It is important to note that CSA also has the power to provide:

> a potentially veritable medium for a firm to convey its distinctiveness in terms of how it views specific social issues, relative to other firms. From this perspective, the firm's public stance on an issue can be a salient signal of what the firm values and believes to benefit the greater good. This signal could then be used by individuals who are seeking to form impressions about the firm's values, identity and character (Jones and Murrell, 2001), which in turn can facilitate their decisions about whether they want to invest in the firm. (Afego et al., 2021)

One of the corporations I have been researching, Ben & Jerry's, has used CSA in such a way that has positively impacted its business, consumers, and social causes, specifically in its mission to end white supremacy that is often seen in the United States criminal justice system:

> Ben & Jerry's lends its voice and assets to support causes that employees and leaders deem important. Fair trade, workers' rights, sustainable sourcing, transparent food labeling, campaign finance reform, and paying above the minimum wage are among Ben & Jerry's social and environmental priorities. In 2015, racial justice joined the company's list of priority issues. (Ciszek et al., 2018)

When Ben & Jerry's took a political stance, both applause and backlash were inevitable outcomes. However, this is a prime example of what effective CSA is; "it is possible for public

relations to begin to be ethical and socially responsible only if it acknowledges the diversity of publics that corporations may have… and break down the hierarchy of publics and take into account the resistance of marginalized publics" (Munshi et al., 2005). For some corporations, like Ben & Jerry's, the backlash is worth the applause, as business values should align with its consumer values (Ciszek et al., 2018).

Corporate Social Advocacy & Intentionality

Since CSA has been brought to attention in a new political age, corporations often voice such efforts through social media. However, social media usage questions the integrity of corporations' reputations, motives, and actions. As a convenient communications channel for its publics, brands can rapidly release statements on social media that don't necessarily require formal structure– as opposed to press releases, conferences, and other "traditional" communications methods. This can result in hasty posts or engaging in current trends that may not be relevant or authentic to the brand, implicating the intentions a brand may have– such as staying relevant, driving profits, or showing its "advocacy." Authenticity can be measured when:

> An organization's behavior is perceived by the public as transparent and reliable, consistent with the organization's aims, and broadly congruent with public attitudes and beliefs (Gilpin et al., 2010). For social advocacy interventions to be seen as authentic, a corporation's claims and promises must be consistent with its organizational philosophy. (Myungok, 2021)

Furthermore, assessing authenticity requires a brand to be consistent with its values and advocacy efforts, or else this validity of "doing the right thing" diminishes into a sense of performative activism. Authenticity can be seen when support is backed up by action– which is something many brands did not consider in their CSA efforts, especially on social media.

Research has shown that “the increase in popularity of social media has made it easier than ever for current issues to receive extensive media coverage while also allowing activists and corporations to release public statements on current events and express their views to their publics” (Austin et al. 2019). Due to its easy accessibility and its ability to exert social pressure, social media channels, such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tik Tok, etc., have become the main platforms for corporations to share their advocacy efforts on various social movements. With just one simple post, a corporation can easily vocalize its “support,” which can be purely performative.

Corporations may certainly use CSA as a pawn to be perceived as ethical and gain more consumers and followers. This can be considered “woke-washing,” which is defined as “inauthentic brand activism in which activist marketing messaging about the focal sociopolitical issue is not aligned with a brand’s purpose, values, and corporate practice” (Vredenburg et al. 2020). Woke-washing is often seen through social media posts, as corporations will link “their products to a potentially polemic message that will draw fire from political opposition. That overt messaging is intended to trigger a reaction from the consumers it intends to attract” (Dooley, 2021). This practice raises ethical concerns as the actions can merely be performative and superficial.

Figure 1b[2]*: Pretty Little Thing Woke-Washed Post*



Figure 1b demonstrates woke-washing as Pretty Little Thing, a fast-fashion clothing brand, acknowledged the importance of solidarity in a "fashionable aesthetic" social media post, but initially did not go on to have these developed into conversations about the matter until it received mass backlash from the public (Dahir, 2020). It is also interesting to note the post's design, as one hand and nail bed appears to represent a Black person with jetblack pigment as opposed to natural skin tones, such as the brown hues found in a dark complexion. The other hand is assumed to represent a white person, as the peachy pigment aligns with a realistic, fair skin tone. While the post was a weak "attempt" of support, the design captures how socially oblivious brands can be, as it further divides race in an overt manner with something as simple as its color choices.

Background on the Black Lives Matter Movement

[2] Source: Dahir, I. (2020, December 3). *Black influencers are calling out popular brands for failing to address the deaths of unarmed black people at the hands of the police*. BuzzFeed News. Retrieved December 15, 2021, from https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ikrd/black-influencers-are-calling-out-popular-brands-for

As “#BlackLivesMatter” heavily surfaced on social media and was the root of many CSA efforts in 2020, it is important to understand the origins of this social movement. The BLM movement dates back to 2012 in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin, an innocent black teenager who was shot to death by a local citizen, George Zimmerman. Martin was walking back home from a general store on a rainy day while on a phone call with his girlfriend, covering his head with the hood of his sweatshirt to protect himself from getting wet. Zimmerman was a member of a neighborhood watchgroup, and followed Martin around for appearing “suspicious” and being a “black male” (Hillstrom, 2018). In return, Martin felt uncomfortable and suspicious of Zimmerman’s actions, and started running while on the phone. Zimmerman eventually caught up to Martin and confronted him with violence, leading to the murder of Martin, inflicted by fatal gunshot wounds from Zimmerman’s gun (Hillstrom, 2018). Zimmerman justified his actions as self-defense, and initially did not face any charges.

This ruling “ignited a polarizing national debate about racial profiling and civil rights and spurred the creation of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter” (Hillstrom, 2018). The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was used on various social media platforms to discuss racism that Black lives, especially in the United States, have faced for centuries, resulting in the BLM movement. To this day, the hashtag continues to spark discussions about race, organizes protests, and raises awareness about victims of racism– especially through police brutality.

While BLM has been an extremely powerful and historic movement, unfortunately it has not ended racism, racially-charged mistreatment and violence, and the wrongful deaths of Black people. However, it has brought significant attention to the issues of race, especially systematic racism, which has changed the way our society operates in more recent years. The hashtag

repeatedly resurfaced on social media after the tragic murder of George Floyd in the late spring of 2020.

George Floyd & his Legacy in the Black Lives Matter Movement

A few months into the COVID-19 pandemic, the event of George Floyd's death altered the course of history, social justice, and American politics. George Floyd was a 46-year-old African-American male who was strangled to death by a Caucasian police officer, Derek Chauvin, in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020. Moments before his murder, Floyd purchased cigarettes with a $20 bill that the cashier believed to be counterfeit. After accepting the money, the cashier then realized the money was fake and proceeded to ask for the cigarettes back. Floyd refused, so the cashier called the police in compliance with store policies. When the police showed up, Floyd complied with the officers but "stated that he had recently recovered from the coronavirus and did not want to enter the confined space of the squad car, also informing them that he suffered from claustrophobia" ("George Floyd," 2020). Disregarding his plea, Floyd was forced into the squad car by Chauvin, then fell out onto the street ground. Chauvin pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds, "while another officer pressed with force on Floyd's back torso and legs" ("George Floyd," 2020).

Floyd and many other victims of police brutality cried the chilling last words, "I can't breathe." Footage of the event circulated globally through various media channels, including news networks, social media, websites, and beyond. After Chauvin's fatal strangulation, Floyd's death was ruled a homicide. Almost a year after Floyd's death, Chauvin was finally found guilty of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter in April 2021 (Holt et al., 2021). Floyd's death became the last straw when it came to unjust racist murders; "the knee on Floyd's neck was not only a physical attack; it was a symbolic assault. It

personified ‘the man trying to keep us down’—the pressing weight of America's history of discrimination and racism felt by the black community” (Gillion, 2020). As a result, this murder became one of the most notorious cases of hate crime and police brutality in American history and social movements. Floyd’s legacy raised awareness of the BLM movement on a global level.

Floyd’s murder catalyzed the events of the BLM movement in 2020 as people demanded justice, demonstrated anger and empathy, and vocalized change. His legacy acted as a butterfly effect as social media was solely focused on the “#BlackLivesMatter” hashtag and general BLM discourse. The butterfly effect phenomena is “viewed as small changes could lead to large differences in driving business at the global scale,” (Rajagopal, 2015). On June 2, 2020, around a week after Floyd’s passing, people participated in the social media trend, “Blackout Tuesday,” to honor his legacy along with other victims of police brutality and racism, including Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. The purpose of Blackout Tuesday was:

> to fill Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with black squares, freeing up the time usually dedicated to social media for people to educate themselves on the Black Lives Matter movement. Organizers said they wanted Tuesday to be a “a day to disconnect from work and reconnect with our community” through “an urgent step of action to provoke accountability and change.” (Davies, 2020)

Blackout Tuesday drew participation from all sorts of people, as my social media feeds, among millions of others’, were flooded with black squares. Since so many people participated, social media users felt the pressure to become involved– even if it did not align with their values or if they were ignorant as to its origin– to avoid being perceived as racist by others. Following the trend, many corporations decided to participate in this action to display social advocacy for the

movement, which led to public debate on intentionality, authenticity, criticism, and performative activism.

Black Lives Matter in Corporate Social Advocacy

As a result of Floyd's death, Blackout Tuesday, and pressing conversations on racism, the BLM movement was the root of most CSA efforts during the summer of 2020:

> For the 30 days following the death of George Floyd, #BlackLivesMatter was a trending topic and had been mentioned more than 80 million times on Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and blogs, according to data collected by the Social Media Analytics Center at the University of Connecticut. The outrage was not limited to social media. BLM protests were the most searched item in the United States in Google history and commanded an immense amount of news coverage in early June. (Patnaude et al. 2021)

The murder of George Floyd ignited an intense and necessary discourse on police brutality and racial injustice across various social media platforms, and corporations saw this as an opportunity to either a) grow as a company and make genuine efforts to support the BLM movement, b) engage in performative activism, c) not participate in conversations, or d) outwardly not support the movement. During these summer months, the BLM movement became a historical turning point, and it was up to these corporations to assess how they wanted to be involved. With the pressure of social media, several corporations appeared to address the movement in a timely manner, but their execution of authentically supporting the movement seemed to be undermined in some cases by a sense of expediency.

In this work, I conducted case studies on various corporations and how they vocalized the issue of racial inequality amid the BLM movement. I studied Ben & Jerry's, Nike, Popeyes, and the Boston Red Sox to qualitatively gauge public perception on the matter. By studying positive,

negative, and controversial public perceptions of these businesses in regards to their responses to the movement, this study assesses what worked, what didn't, and how to apply these lessons for addressing the BLM movement in future CSA tactics utilized by public relations professionals. It is important to understand how corporations' Blackout Tuesday posts, implementation of #BlackLivesMatter in captions, and other efforts to show advocacy and allyship may be understood as surface-level support for the movement– revealing how some brands fail to use their power to foster change in their business policies, social influences, philanthropy, and more. Research has found that:

> brands, including creative and cultural industry organizations, (mis)use (re)presentations of Black people as part of their digital presence to create the illusion that they are connected to and supportive of Black communities. Bobino discussed examples of institutions using images of Black lives to superficially "diversify" their marketing campaigns, position themselves as being adjacent to the "coolness" that may be associated with certain Black identities and aesthetics. (Sobande, 2021)

This "effort" to connect to Black communities often fail to bring the pressing issues of racism to light, but offer, instead, an engagement of performative activism and exploiting race as an "aesthetic" or "trend."

Authentic Support through Corporate Social Advocacy

When its executions are done "right," a corporation can be perceived as an ethical, supportive ally for the BLM movement. It is critical that a corporation supports the movement beyond its marketing, advertising, and public relations efforts that are strategically crafted for the garnering of public support. Corporations must factor the values of the BLM movement into their internal strategies and policies, which, in turn, demonstrates authenticity. For a corporation

to be deemed authentic, it should be "perceived by the public as transparent and reliable, consistent with the organization's aims, and broadly congruent with public attitudes and beliefs" (Myungok, 2021). An ethical company will be transparent and highlight its efforts and contributions, specifically in its annual reports and stated values. Even if a corporation was once "unethical," it can change its values by addressing its history and strategizing core values and tactics to do better; "it needs to identify and correct any such misalignments between what it says and what it does" (Myungok, 2021).

Such genuine corporations use their power for bettering the communities and movements supported, which can bode well for a mutually beneficial, positive impact for both the corporation and the movement. According to a study on CSA and attitudes towards controversial social issues, "corporations are now influencing many aspects of society, becoming a 'moral voice' (Gelles, 2017) for society, and the current study reveals that this voice is at least somewhat effective in changing attitudes toward controversial social issues" (Parcha et al., 2020). Since corporations have this influence, some take this matter and movement seriously, while others' prerogative is to capitalize on their corporate voice without putting in the work. Without authenticity, CSA efforts can come off as specious.

Generation Z and Consumer Values

Since Generation Z "is the most racially diverse generation in the history of the U.S., and its members value social justice, equity, and societal change" (Miller et al., 2021), it is important to note how influential this cohort is in determining the ways business and society operate. Members of Generation Z were born between the years 1997 to 2012, growing up in the new age of technology and social media (Meola, n.d.). As social media has drastically altered society, from the way we communicate with others to how we retrieve information and news, it was

inevitable that business practices would become accustomed to this digital age. In order to maintain and achieve "success," a business has to keep up with its consumers. As Generation Z heavily values technology, progressive social change, and diversity, businesses should appeal to these consumer values to reach such success. A study revealed that:

> 66% of Gen Z says that how businesses react and express themselves with regard to Black Lives Matter will permanently affect their decision to buy from them in the future; the extent to which companies actually deliver on the statements, promises and commitments made today will play a significant role in those purchasing decisions for 67 percent. (Sakal, 2020)

With this wide-spread consumer value in mind, it is apparent that:

> Generation Z trends will affect global consumption of goods and services in the near future. The level of socially conscious consumption will increase. Those companies that are able to flexibly adapt to new consumer requirements, adapt to new trends in consumption, will be able to withstand the struggle for the consumer. (Kirnosova, 2021)

This generational appeal towards socially-conscious consumption should not be ignored when strategizing communications and business tactics. Businesses are being held to a higher standard of accountability by Generation Z, so it is important to implement progressive business initiatives beyond extrinsic efforts, but also intrinsically in its values, missions, ethics, and overall organizational culture.

Positioning

Pursuant to this work's literature review of CSA, the BLM movement, consumer values, and our evolving society, this work researches and builds on such topics with the intent to offer strategic and moral insights about the role of CSA. When life and death are on the line, basic

human morality points towards helping others when you can. As brands are typically run by multiple teams and professionals, I believe that they should make professional decisions with this sense of morality. A CEO should not just watch an act of racism unfold in front of their own eyes, whether it's inside their office culture or out on the streets, viewed from their conference room window. The people behind these corporations need to use their position of power to vocalize and demonstrate justice, not just for their own good, but for the good of all. Accordingly, this work evaluates some corporations and what they have done with their positionality to address (or not) social issues, observes if the corporation's actions meet society's expectations, and apply these findings in a public relations best practices guide that will benefit both the BLM movement and businesses through practicing authentic CSA.

Chapter 3: Methods & Creative Project Overview

Creative Project Overview

From this research and conducted case studies, I created a "best practices" guide for public relations professionals to refer to when addressing BLM through CSA efforts. I formulated this guide by applying findings from case studies so that the guide is fact-based, research-supported, and effective for businesses and communications professionals to use. The corporation case studies were selected based on their notable reputations, both positive and negative, observed during the summer of 2020 when addressing BLM and racial inequality. Ben & Jerry's represents "positive" CSA, Nike represents "controversial" CSA, and Popeyes' represents "negative" CSA. In addition to these case studies, I've included a "live" case study on the Boston Red Sox and its CSA journey through an interview with Bekah Salwasser, the Executive Vice President, Social Impact of the Red Sox, and Executive Director of the Red Sox

Foundation. As an advocate for BLM and social responsibility, she serves many roles that regard CSA, one of them being chair of the Social Justice Equity and Inclusion Committee. This committee was formed as a result of the BLM protests in 2020, "to use the Red Sox platform to promote and amplify racial and social justice causes that align with the organization's core values, and to develop sustainable initiatives that promote social justice, equity and inclusion" (Red Sox Foundation, 2022). With her work in this committee, she was promoted to Executive Vice President, Social Impact for the Red Sox. This goes without saying she has executed successful advocacy tactics regarding social justice on a corporate level during 2020's intense political climate. Due to the depth of the original research I conducted with the Red Sox, this study begins with that case study, which is then followed by the other three corporations.

This guide serves as a framework that explores CSA strategies that have pointed towards success, practices and weaknesses that should be avoided, assesses what determines brand authenticity, offers examples of authentic CSA tactics, and provides learning lessons, all supported by research that led to these conclusions.

Reiterated in the project introduction, some CSA efforts often appear as performative, forced, problematic, and subject to criticism. Often, these "phony" public relations practices have a negative effect on business and its sales, reputation, stakeholders, and consumers. Under these circumstances, it is easy to be "canceled," which "is an expression of agency, a choice to withdraw one's attention from someone or something whose values, (in)action, or speech are so offensive, one no longer wishes to grace them with their presence, time, and money" (Clark, 2020).

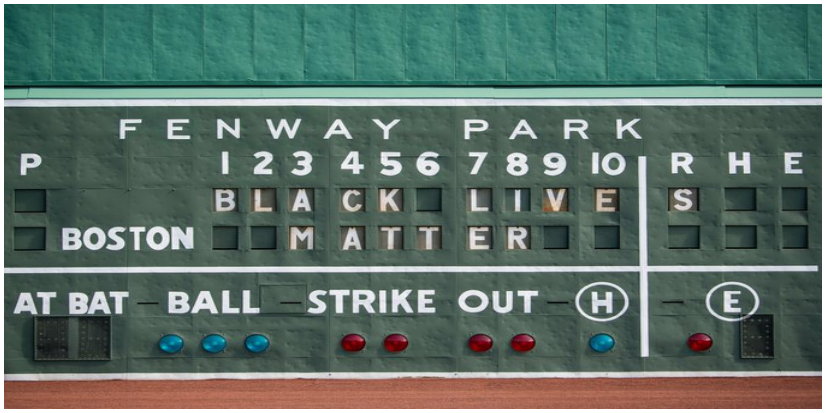
To avoid being another victim of Generation Z's "cancel culture," or the mass phenomenon of people, businesses, and organizations being canceled, this guide will steer

professionals towards authentic efforts that actually align with both the values of its clients and the BLM movement. This also feeds into the basis of public relations– when a business is exercising authentic support for BLM through both intrinsic and extrinsic efforts, it should benefit all involved parties. These parties include the business (employees, stakeholders, and consumers) and most importantly, those directly affected by the movement (BIPOC identities and BLM members/allies). In an attempt to practice authentic CSA, this guide highlights the best practices to handle important matters that are essential to both society and today's business practices.

Chapter 4: Case Studies: Corporations' Social Advocacy Efforts amid the BLM Movement in 2020

"Soxessful" CSA: A Live Case Study on the Boston Red Sox

Figure 4a[3]*: BLM signage at Fenway Park, Home of the Boston Red Sox*



Going back to my roots, I thought it would be interesting to take a close look at one of America's most coveted sports teams: the Boston Red Sox. Living near Beantown during 2020, I easily recall my first-hand accounts of the BLM movement in full swing during that summer–

[3] Source: Red Sox Foundation. (2022, February 18). *Social Justice, Equity & Inclusion*. Red Sox Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.redsoxfoundation.org/socialjustice/

with Fenway Park's hometeam playing a large role in the local community and activism efforts. I discussed the Sox's CSA efforts amid the BLM movement with Bekah Salwasser, Executive Vice President, Social Impact for the Red Sox.

In an interview with Salwasser, I learned more about the process of the Red Sox's social advocacy efforts that were catalyzed by the heightened attention towards the BLM movement after the murder of George Floyd. During an emotional turning point in the United States, it was key for Salwasser and Sox employees to take action and be on the right side of history:

> Internally, it was this authentic moment that was like "we've got to do something." This is completely unacceptable, as it always has been, but I think it was just this undeniable moment of we've got to leverage the brand to push forward *this moment* and *this movement.* (B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

The Early Stages

Under no advisory nor pressure from the Major League Baseball (MLB) organization, the Red Sox Foundation took initiative in progressive social justice efforts in June 2020 by forming its Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee. This multifaceted committee consists of 10 subcommittee teams that "aims to use the Red Sox platform to promote and amplify racial and social justice causes that align with the organization's core values, and to develop sustainable initiatives that promote social justice, equity and inclusion" (Red Sox Foundation, 2022). As committee chair, Salwasser ensured that the team practices what it preaches both inside and outside of Fenway Park: that Black lives **do** matter. During this significant turning point in history, Salwasser determined that these social advocacy efforts authentically aligned with the values of both the Red Sox and the BLM movement:

> We should think about **internally** what we need to do to make sure we're on the right side of this; supporting our people. This is an incredibly emotional time, especially for employees of color, particularly for our Black employees. We've got to make space for both them and us to process what's happening culturally and nationally, and we've got to figure out how to **leverage our brand in a way that's going to benefit everyone**; most importantly our own people. That mindset and conversation(s) led to the creation of "we need a dedicated cohort of people that are thinking of this continuously." So that's ultimately what the abstract of the Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee is. (B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

As brands and corporations often have some sense of organizational culture consisting of values, principles, ethics, and practices, not every approach to addressing such matters can be universally applicable. This notion was reflected in Salwasser's experience during the initial stages of forming the committee and its methodology:

> This work needs to be so reflective of your most vulnerable population, so for us, we started off on a listening tour. I think before you build anything, you need to have the building blocks, and the building blocks reflective of those people who make the community. So, we embarked on a long, meticulously organized listening tour where we convened groups of employees to really hear from them; from their unhonored experiences, opinions, and feelings. We actually enlisted and employed an external agency to help moderate and mediate those conversations to make sure there was an unbiased space. Because, it wouldn't feel safe in my opinion– like with your CEO– you wouldn't want to say what you had to say. So we had this external organization who are experts at asking these kinds of questions and responding in the right way, because

> these conversations can be very difficult and emotional. We had this external group moderate these conversations, compile all of the outtakes, information, and outcomes from those conversations to help sort of formulate the plan for what the abstract was going 'to do' in terms of making our communities better, more inclusive, and more diverse. That was how it all started, and for us that was the right way to do it. From the get-go, we had *the opinion*, *the experience*, *the reflection* of our people, dipped into the creation and foundation of the plan, which inherently I think builds more buy-in for those folks to be part of the process. (B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

With the feedback provided by this external agency, the committee divided into ten different goal-based cohorts, as it "recognized that so much of our initial work needed to be focused internally," according to Salwasser (B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022). In efforts to implement successful social advocacy tactics, the Red Sox took its own internal culture largely into account when navigating this journey towards equity. Using the data and feedback from the listening tour, the committee ensured a plethora of accessible resources, assistance, activism efforts, and more that authentically support each the brand, its stakeholders, and BLM movement. These strategic subcommittees target different areas of importance that are custom to the Red Sox:

Red Sox Social Justice Equity and Inclusion Committee: Subcommittees[4]

1. Launching employee resource groups and race-based roundtables.
2. Creating support systems for employees who are the victims of racial or hate speech incidents.
3. Conducting a bias audit on our human resources policies and practices.

[4] Source: Red Sox Foundation. (2022, February 18). *Social Justice, Equity & Inclusion*. Red Sox Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.redsoxfoundation.org/socialjustice/

4. Enhanced education and training for employees, players and coaching staff related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
5. Mentorship programs for employees of color.
6. Enhancing ballpark messaging related to racial and social justice causes.
7. Integrating more people of color into existing in-game activations.
8. Expanding opportunities to work with minority businesses.
9. Expanding opportunities for public policy advocacy.
10. Further expanding our marketing efforts into more diverse communities.

By incorporating a range of support systems in accordance with the internal culture of the Red Sox and its employees, the Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee demonstrated care for its people– not solely for performance. As a result, Salwasser stated "that the feedback that we got has been great. But the feedback has mainly been internal because so much of the work has been internally facing to support our people– to ensure our houses are in order if you will– before we went external with all of these community programs," (B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022).

The Next Step: Being Loud, Clear, & Transparent

Preparing to vocalize support for the BLM movement with efforts that walk the talk, the committee felt ready to take on external CSA tactics after a month of strategizing internally. For Salwasser, it was a frictionless operation to get the advocacy messages widespread to the public, as the committee installed a 250-foot long billboard along the Massachusetts Turnpike outside of the ballpark, reading "Black Lives Matter," accompanied by the Sox logo (Red Sox Foundation, 2022).

Figure 4b[5]*: Boston Red Sox BLM Billboard Installed July 2020*

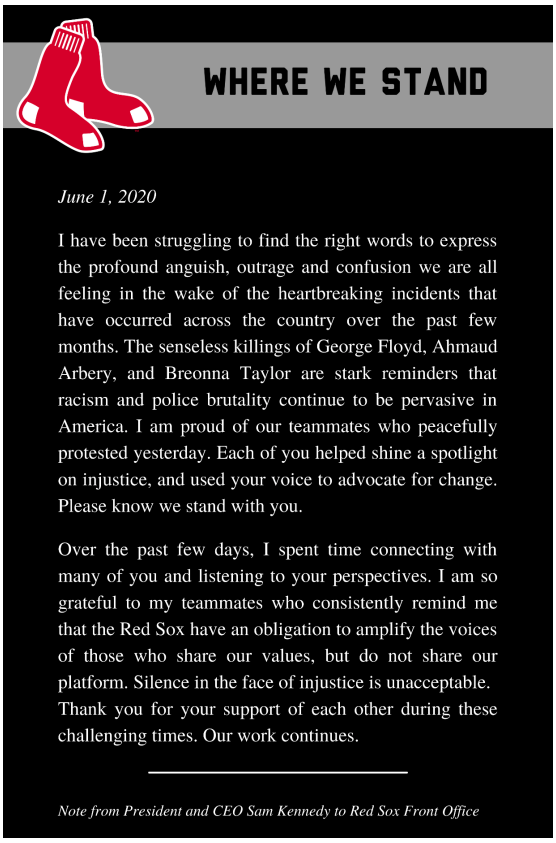


> The best part of the process was that there was no pushback anywhere along the way. I didn't have to fight to get that put up. It was like, "yeah let's do it." Internally, everyone was on board– my board of directors, CEO, everybody– was like, "yeah. Do it." So that I think speaks volumes of the culture here; they unabashedly understand what's right and what's wrong. (B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

In addition to the powerful banner, the Red Sox's solidarity has enacted community programs, partnerships, public resources, information, and beyond to continue the pursuit of social justice, equity, and inclusion for Red Sox Nation, especially for its Black community. After one week of mourning George Floyd's premature death, Red Sox President and CEO Sam Kennedy released a statement in support of the movement as seen in Figure 4c[6]:

[5] Source: Brito, C. (2020, July 23). *Boston Red Sox put up massive Black Lives matter billboard outside Fenway Park*. CBS News.
[6] Source: Red Sox Foundation. (2022, February 18). *Social Justice, Equity & Inclusion*. Red Sox Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.redsoxfoundation.org/socialjustice/

Figure 4c: Red Sox President's Official Statement on BLM



WHERE WE STAND

June 1, 2020

I have been struggling to find the right words to express the profound anguish, outrage and confusion we are all feeling in the wake of the heartbreaking incidents that have occurred across the country over the past few months. The senseless killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor are stark reminders that racism and police brutality continue to be pervasive in America. I am proud of our teammates who peacefully protested yesterday. Each of you helped shine a spotlight on injustice, and used your voice to advocate for change. Please know we stand with you.

Over the past few days, I spent time connecting with many of you and listening to your perspectives. I am so grateful to my teammates who consistently remind me that the Red Sox have an obligation to amplify the voices of those who share our values, but do not share our platform. Silence in the face of injustice is unacceptable. Thank you for your support of each other during these challenging times. Our work continues.

Note from President and CEO Sam Kennedy to Red Sox Front Office

As observed throughout my early research and personal observations living through this moment in history, many corporations, brands, and organizations felt pressure from the public to address the movement. This often resulted in superficial, hypocritical press statements filled with empty promises. What makes the Red Sox different from other organizations that I have studied is its abundance of resources, implementation of equity and inclusion internal policies specific to its organizational culture, and successful initiatives that address and support those marginalized.

The committee and its work can be easily accessed and seen on the Red Sox Foundation's website, harmoniously displaying its ethos, pathos, and logos rhetoric. In four sections, the Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion page is categorized by "where we stand," "resources to learn and take action," "resources to support AAPI communities," and "resources for self care," (Red Sox Foundation, 2022). In a brief synopsis of the committee and its mission, the "where we

stand" section features the committee members, emphasis on social justice, inclusion, and equity-oriented values reflected in its internal policies and culture, subcommittees, and a personal call to responsibility through using its platform to stand up for those oppressed. The second section, "resources to learn and take action"[7] is an extensive page of resources broken down into the following sections:

- Ask Yourself
- Take Action
- Donate
- Follow and Learn From
- Advocate for Change
- Sign Petitions
- Honor Black Lives
- Resources for Self Care
- Educate Yourself
    - Books
        - Black-owned bookstore references
    - Film and TV Series
    - Podcasts
    - Articles & Other Resources to Learn More
- Take To Your Kids
    - Books
    - Podcasts

[7] Source: Red Sox Foundation. (2022, February 18). *Social Justice, Equity & Inclusion*. Red Sox Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.redsoxfoundation.org/socialjustice/

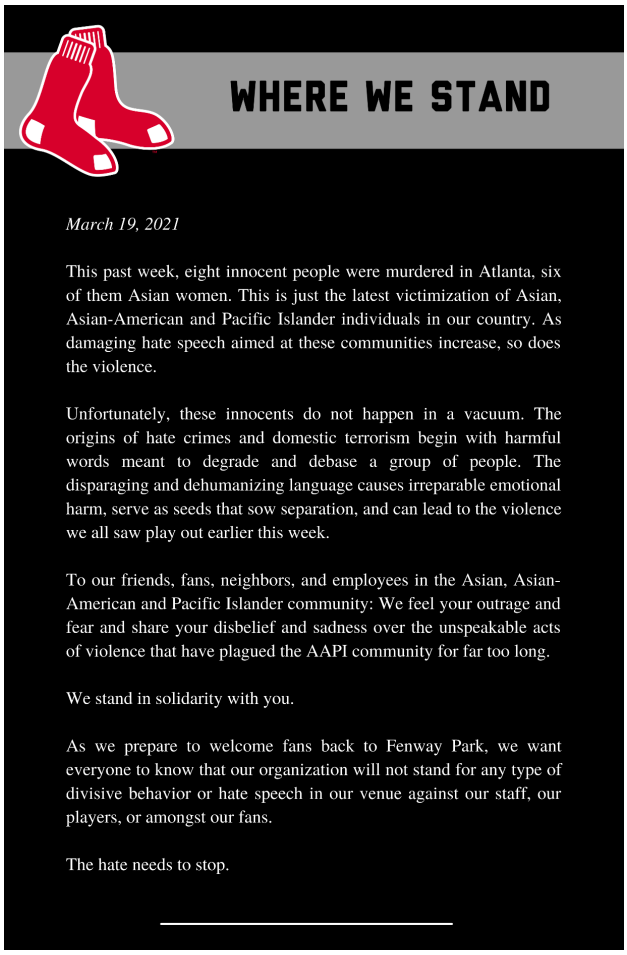
    - Articles & Other Resources
    - By Age Group Resources
- Support Students

With numerous links and resources under each one of these subsections, the committee used its voice and following to spread the message and credible information of the BLM movement to the public. The heightened awareness around the movement evoked a call to action for social justice that did not stop after the Black community called for due process for all mistreated minorities.

By continuing its social justice initiatives, the committee addressed the widespread hate crime targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). In the Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion tab, the "resources to support AAPI communities" navigates the rising issue of racism towards these groups by providing statistics, informational background, and resources in advocacy efforts for the Stop Asian Hate movement that was initiated in 2021. The page includes an official statement on behalf of the Red Sox and its initiatives on the matter, seen in Figure 4d[8].

[8] Source: Red Sox Foundation. (2022, February 18). *Social Justice, Equity & Inclusion*. Red Sox Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.redsoxfoundation.org/socialjustice/

Figure 4d: Red Sox's Statement on Hate Crimes Targeting AAPI Communities



WHERE WE STAND

March 19, 2021

This past week, eight innocent people were murdered in Atlanta, six of them Asian women. This is just the latest victimization of Asian, Asian-American and Pacific Islander individuals in our country. As damaging hate speech aimed at these communities increase, so does the violence.

Unfortunately, these innocents do not happen in a vacuum. The origins of hate crimes and domestic terrorism begin with harmful words meant to degrade and debase a group of people. The disparaging and dehumanizing language causes irreparable emotional harm, serve as seeds that sow separation, and can lead to the violence we all saw play out earlier this week.

To our friends, fans, neighbors, and employees in the Asian, Asian-American and Pacific Islander community: We feel your outrage and fear and share your disbelief and sadness over the unspeakable acts of violence that have plagued the AAPI community for far too long.

We stand in solidarity with you.

As we prepare to welcome fans back to Fenway Park, we want everyone to know that our organization will not stand for any type of divisive behavior or hate speech in our venue against our staff, our players, or amongst our fans.

The hate needs to stop.

Similar to the prior subsection, a list of informational and educational resources are listed, including: links to "support, follow, and learn from," "take action," "educate yourself," and "resources for self care," specific to supporting AAPI communities. As Salwasser emphasized the hardships and emotional turmoil that many people of color experience everyday, especially during this time of rising tensions, it was crucial for the committee to instill a safe space for those directly and indirectly affected by these injustices.

The committee's last subsection on the website is "resources for self care,"[9] addressing this urgent need for empathy and compassion with various mental health resources and

[9] Source: Red Sox Foundation. (2022, February 18). *Social Justice, Equity & Inclusion*. Red Sox Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.redsoxfoundation.org/socialjustice/

organizations. It is broken down into the following: “prioritize yourself & your mental health,” “resources to honor Black Lives,” and “self care resources for our AAPI communities.” Like the other sections, each category has a plethora of linked resources that are accessible to the public. The purpose of these resources is acknowledging how, “prioritizing self care and mental health for individuals of color, underrepresented populations and underserved communities is critical,” especially after the COVID-19 pandemic (Red Sox Foundation, 2022).

In addition to information and initiatives listed on the Red Sox Foundation’s website, the committee continued to spread support through its owned social media platforms. Both the Red Sox’s official Instagram account (@redsox) and the Red Sox Foundation’s Instagram account (@redsoxfoundation) have honored Black lives in ways that are personal to the team as well as these marginalized communities through consistent messaging and communication. With advocacy efforts and initiatives implemented by the Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee, the Red Sox have remained successful in supporting the BLM movement from a place of authenticity and deliberate strategy and executions beyond many corporations’ standard performative activism.

Sox it To Me: A Wake-up Call on Social Media

As Salwasser and the committee persisted in speaking out on racial injustices and police brutality in this country towards Black communities, there was inevitable backlash as some view this human rights issue as some type of anarchist agenda. In a general consensus among the committee, the goal is to defend and support these lives with actions as a call to equity:

> One of my favorite quotes is, “When you’re used to privilege, inequality feels like oppression.” There’s a whole millions of people out there that are so used to getting

more– being first, being recognized, and having privilege– so that when anybody else comes and says, “we deserve the same.” Right! We should be treated the same, get the same access. What does that mean for me though? It’s one of those things that I keep reminding myself of; that's the mentality I think unfortunately a lot of people have. They just don’t want to make space for the change necessary for equality and equity.

(B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

In addition to the internal efforts as well as the ample resources and information accessible through its website and community outreach, the Red Sox franchise shared its action-based contribution to the movement with its followers and publics via social media. Figure 4e[10] displays just some of the Red Sox’s support through Instagram posts via @redsoxfoundation.

Figure 4e: Various BLM-Focused Posts in Chronological Order, June 2020-Present



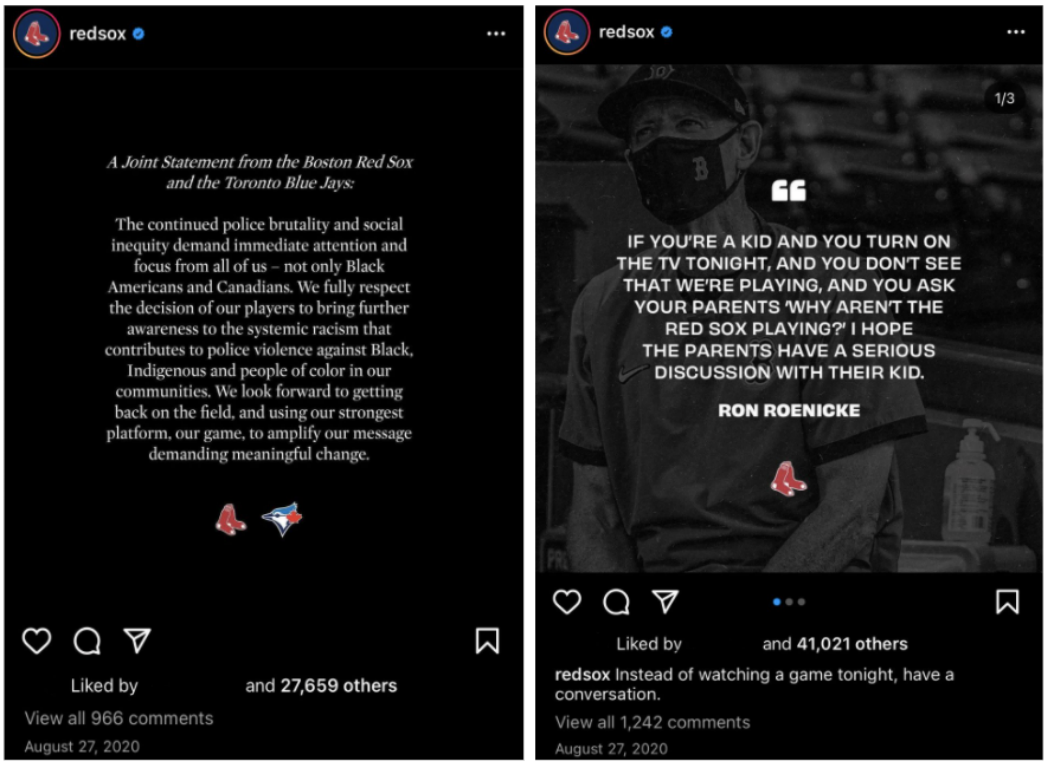
[10] Source: @redsoxfoundation via Instagram.

With both actions and words, these social media posts contribute to the support of Black lives beyond just saying the three words "Black Lives Matter." So many corporations, as seen in Figure 1a, offered surface-level "support" through social media posts, from posting black squares, graphics, tweeting #BLM, and other "efforts" that reflected some hasty, scrambled PR attempts to avoid the wrath of a pressuring cancel culture. The Red Sox's authentic support continues to circulate nearly two years after this call to action.

The committee's efforts demonstrate this authentic dedication to social equity and vocalizing support for its players who also feel this personal obligation. Months after implementing its early CSA initiatives, the Red Sox continue to support protests, actions, and conversations for social change in its own organizational culture and publics as racial tensions and police brutality disturbingly persist in our society. Scheduled to play on August 27, 2020, both the Boston Red Sox and Toronto Blue Jays decided to cancel the game in response to Jacob Blake's victimization of police brutality earlier that week. Along with the same copy for its Twitter page, the Red Sox's Instagram released multiple statements on the matter, as seen in Figure 4f[11].

[11] Source: @redsox via Instagram, 2020.

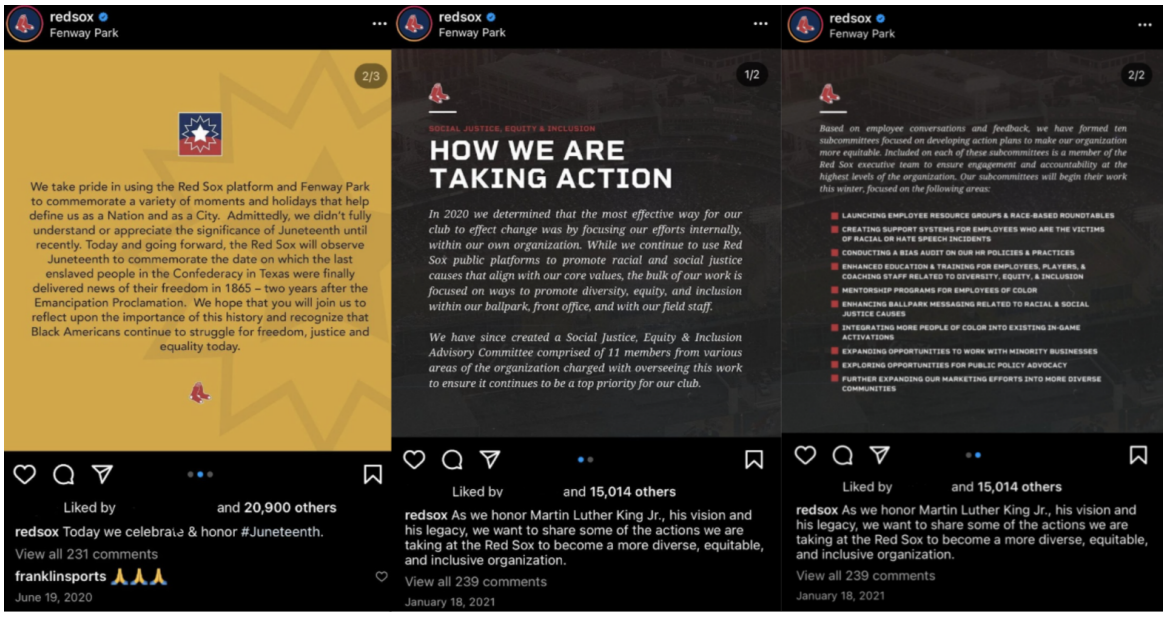
Figure 4f: Red Sox Statement on Canceling 8/27/20 Game due to Police Brutality



Furthermore, as events of police brutality, racial injustices, and a visible lack of equity in America persists, the Red Sox continue to acknowledge these current events as well as historic moments that commemorate Black history. Recognizing and honoring the holidays of Juneteenth and Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the Red Sox posted the following statements on its social media accounts, as seen in Figure 4g[12].

[12] Source: @redsox via Instagram.

Figure 4g: Red Sox's Recognition of Holidays Commemorating Black Lives



The Red Sox Foundation also established a series on its Instagram page for Black History Month throughout the past couple of years. As an established platform, the organization highlights the work and voices of Black lives in the local community– from Red Sox team players, to executives, to Red Sox Student Scholars. Figure 5h[13] displays some of these efforts working towards this mission of CSA in its Black History Month Speaker Series in 2021.

Figure 5h: Red Sox's Black History Month Speaker Series (2021)



[13] Source: @redsoxfoundation via Instagram.

Accompanying this series was the foundation's Black History Month Spotlight series, featuring various community partners and their success stories in working toward social equity in the Boston area. Through this tactic, the Red Sox utilized its platform to bring further attention and awareness to its equity and inclusion efforts by sharing these powerful voices throughout February 2021. Featuring the biographies, works, and words of local Black leaders, Figure 5i[14] highlights this spotlight series, accessed through the Red Sox Foundation's Instagram page.

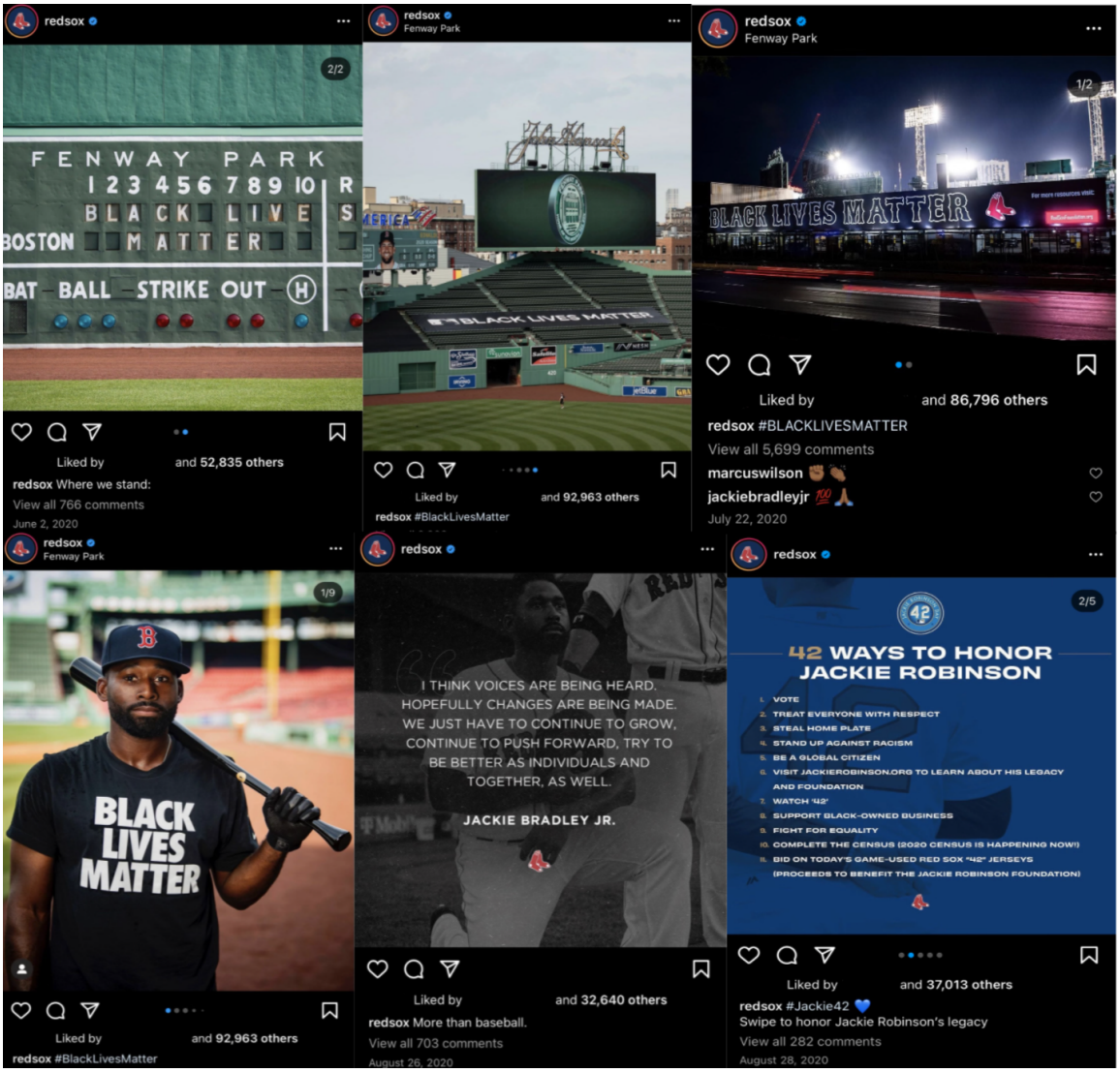
Figure 5i: Red Sox Black History Month Spotlight in 2021



As the Red Sox has an ample amount of resources, posts, and activism tactics displaying authentic support for the BLM movement, we can assess these efforts reflecting authentic CSA. With a heightened focus on implementing internal change using the feedback of its employees, the Red Sox effectively and strategically executed a genuine call to action for its team, stakeholders, and publics. Figure 5j[15] highlights some more of the franchise's BLM advocacy efforts over the past couple of years.

[14] Source: @redsoxfoundation via Instagram.
[15] Source: @redsox via Instagram.

Figure 5j: Red Sox Additional BLM Support



Fenway Feedback: Measuring the Outcomes & Perception

Some were opposed to the team's support for Black lives, sharing derogatory remarks on social media, but Salwasser remains confident in the franchise's initiatives:

> We always said that it's not a political statement by no means; this is a human rights issue, and standing on the right side of this was imperative for us– to support the statement that Black lives do matter. We're not saying anything matters less, we're saying that Black lives matter. (B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

Measuring feedback, Salwasser noted that much of it has been internal, from employees, as most of its initiatives have been implemented internally. In response to the Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee formation, Salwasser shares her insights on its impact:

> I think it's been good. I will say this has always been and everybody's always recognized that this is sort of evolution work, and you'll never get everything right, but the goal is to always be moving forward and making progress, and learning from the past and the journey. I think we've done a great job at that. Obviously, when we put the BLM billboard on the Mass Pike, that created a lot of negative response from certain people that didn't want to see us align with this movement of BLM. (B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

As these initiatives have been mostly internal, Salwasser proceeded to share her gauge for measuring progress:

> In terms of measurement, I'd say this is an inherently challenging area of work to measure because, first off, there's a thousand moving parts and pieces and thousands of ways to measure this. So, we tried to do break down measurement across each subcommittee to look at how we can measure the moving of the needle in the right direction, to say that the work is actually happening. A lot of the measurements have been output based as opposed to outcome based… So, it's been hard to say the least. But like I said, we're going a lot based on outputs, when we look sort of at the pipelines of work that's happening. Internally though, we are looking at some sort of survey measurement of staff happiness, if you will, and feeling like they now have more

representation– a community, a safe space, and just comfort level being an employee here– being seen, being valued, being heard, to measure that.

(B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

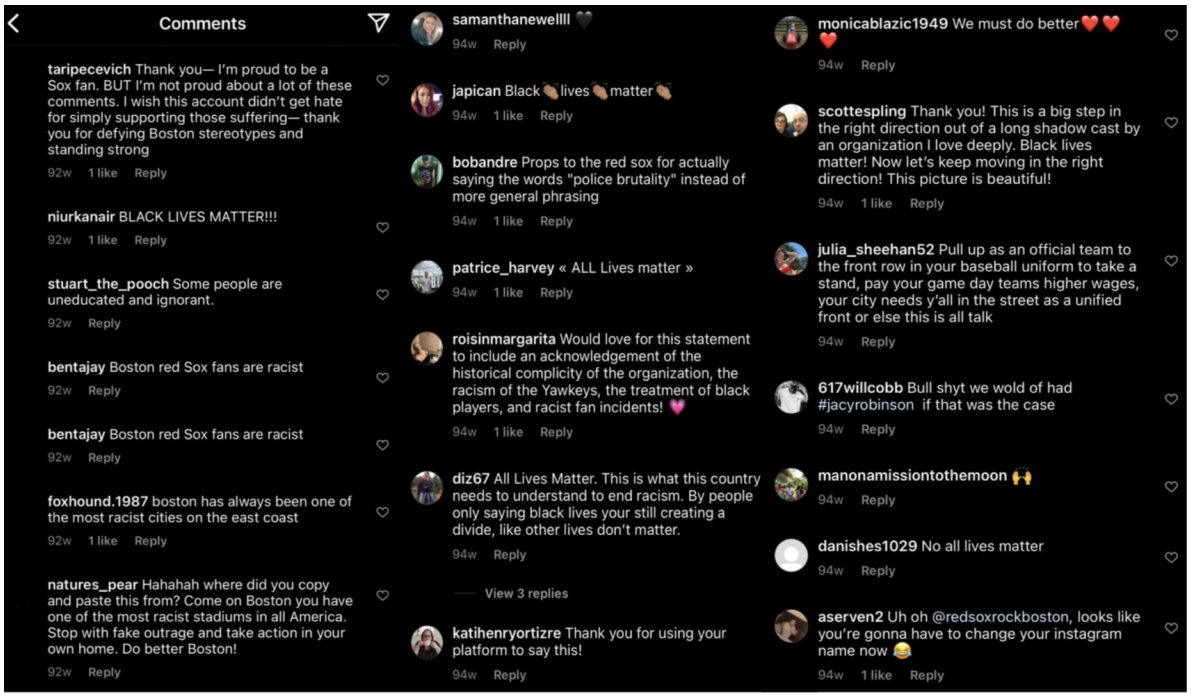
Still, some negative feedback was to be expected from the public. Looking at the comments of Instagram posts, Tweets, and overall online and in-person discourse, there was controversy for some fans when the support was overlaid in the large BLM billboard. Figure 5k[16] and Figure 5l[17] display some feedback regarding the team's various BLM posts and efforts, especially on the billboard.

Figure 5k: Feedback to External BLM Efforts via Twitter



[16] Source: Tweet replies via @RedSox Twitter.
[17] Source: Comments via @redsox on Instagram.

Figure 5l: Feedback to External BLM Efforts via Instagram



In baseball, the rules are three strikes and you're out. But in this case, three words were just as effective for some angry fans. With mixed responses and heated discourse, Salwasser shared her stance on this uproar provoked by the words "Black Lives Matter":

> That was a really hard response to live through, because the vitriol that sort of rose in the ranks of social media were so terribly vile. Awful. Hurtful. And for me, I think the hardest thing to do was separate out the fact that the angriest people often get the most attention. So I had to remind myself that the people causing this horrific reaction were the ones actually taking the time to go out and express that hate. A lot of people that loved it might've not gone online to say, "we love this, thank you so much." I hope that they were the minority of people who took their time to put up these horrific statements and sort of say that this is not the general public's opinion. I've got to believe that the majority of people saw that this felt like it was the right thing to do, and were happy that we did it.

> Certainly those people did speak up to share their appreciation and love of that statement and act. (B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

However, this backlash and expressions of hate didn't discourage the franchise in the slightest. As a result of following protocol established by one of the subcommittees of the Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, the chair herself acknowledged its impact:

> One of the subcommittees focused on creating structured process and policy for any sort of hate speech in our ballpark (for employees, for fans, for players), just so we can have the same practice done for anybody put in that position of being on the receiving end of hate speech or racially directed comments. It happened the other day in Jet Blue Ball Park, and we swiftly followed this process that the subcommittee made, and it was handled in the best way possible. It was so unfortunate that it happened, but the fact that we had a resolution– an agreeable resolution– that we could sort of look to for process, was amazing. I think it made the person that was on the receiving end of it feel that much better supported. (B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

Moving Forward

After hearing Salwasser's experiences in her position as Executive Vice President, Social Impact for the Red Sox, I was able to get a glimpse into the inner workings of authentic CSA at play. As she and the rest of the Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee continue to work towards social justice and supporting the BLM movement, I have evaluated this corporation as one that genuinely cares about Black lives, especially during a time of hardship. While some of the feedback was profane and bigoted, the Red Sox measured that as some indication of progress towards positive social impact:

> Oftentimes you can recognize progress by making waves. To know, it was validating in some ways to say it was the right thing to do, because clearly it made some people upset. You don't get change without upsetting some people, because people can be adverse to change. (B. Salwasser, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

Negative CSA: Popeyes

As corporations rushed to post their support for Black lives in a timely manner, some brands learned a lesson by taking wrong approaches towards advocacy. From #BlackoutTuesday posts with no further acknowledgement of the movement, and/or making matters worse with rash crisis communications efforts, there's a countless number of problematic "advocacy efforts" from the summer months of 2020. One of many corporations that notably tarnished its reputation is the Louisiana-based fast-food chain, Popeyes Chicken.

CSA Efforts

On June 6th, 2020, Popeyes tweeted the following statement (Figure 6a), which was taken down by the brand almost immediately.

Figure 6a[18]: Popeyes' Initial Statement on BLM (2020)



[18] Source: @popeyes via Twitter.

This statement received rapid backlash from Twitter users and publics, as users called out the statement as thoughtless and for feeding into racist stereotypes towards the Black community, especially during this already-prejudiced historic moment. In addition to the issues of stereotyping, many found the statement and brand to be problematic as the founder and a majority of leadership positions identify as White. Figure 6b highlights some responses to Popeyes' initial words that reflect disapproval of the brand's CSA.

Figure 6b[19]: Tweets responding to Popeyes' Deleted Initial Statement on BLM (2020)



Shortly after deleting its tweet, Popeyes released a new statement on Twitter, without acknowledging the one prior. Figure 6c displays its revised statement, which still remains present on the company's Twitter [20] today.

[19] Source: Tweet replies via @popeyes Twitter.
[20] Important to note that Popeyes' Twitter handle changed from (@popeyeschicken) to (@popeyes), hence the different handles in Figure 6a and 6c.

Figure 6c[21]: Popeyes' Revised Statement on BLM (2020)



The new Tweet includes further commentary on supporting Black lives, by recognizing the issue of injustice, offering a vague commitment of "efforts" that'll work towards change, and using its following to bring more awareness to the BLM movement. It can also be seen that the word "Popeyes" was exchanged for "We" in its new statement, possibly to foster a sense of community.

Most of the responses were addressing the chain's prior, jarring Tweet, including screenshots of the post, elaborating on the issue of Black stereotypes, and general distaste and shock. Some users were so dumbfounded by the major corporation's glib statement, expressed through Tweeted memes, seen in Figure 6d.

[21] Source: @popeyes via Twitter.

Figure 6d[22]: Public Perception on the Tweet channeled through Memes



The Tweets in Figure 6d were responses to Popeyes' multi-faceted statement, as the initial one was deleted with no access to its initial direct responses.

In addition, the public called out Popeyes for its business practices, pressuring the brand to do more than just make a statement. Many felt there was a lack of authentic support and vague demonstration of implementing initiatives for the movement. Figure 6e shows more Twitter feedback calling out performative activism, as many other brands fell victim to profit-driven, ingenuine efforts.

Figure 6e[23]: Calling for Internal CSA Efforts



[22] Source: Tweet replies via @popeyes Twitter.
[23] Source: Tweet replies via @popeyes on Twitter.

How did Popeyes follow through?

Popeyes released a "Popeyes Diversity Scorecard" in May 2021, in an effort to show more transparency regarding its CSA messaging (Popeyes, n.d.). The first section on Popeyes diversity page on its website reads:

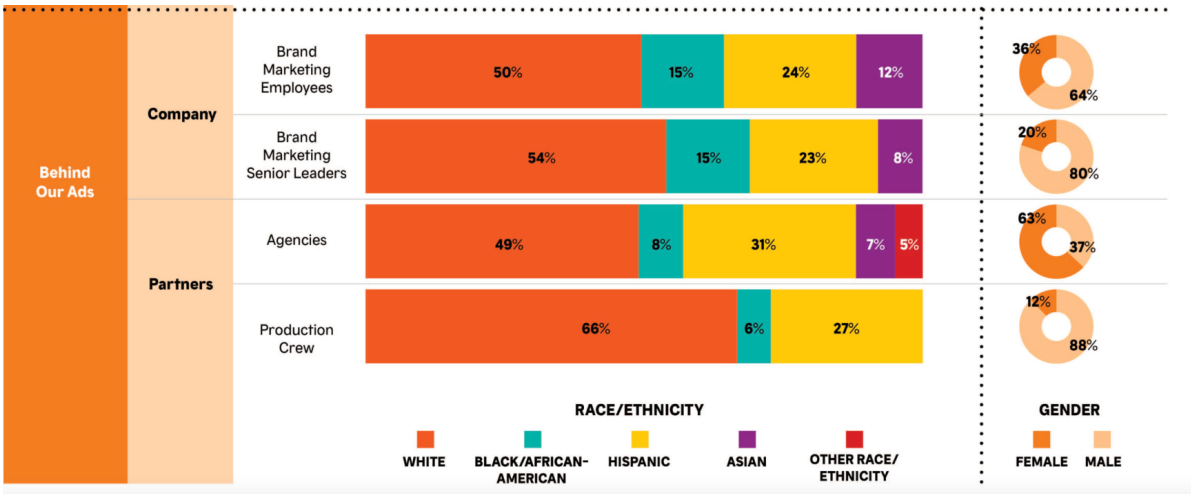
> At Popeyes we are committed not only to portraying diversity in our advertising and media, but most importantly, to walking the talk and having a diverse team of people creating our content every day. This starts with our own Popeyes brand marketing team and extends to our agencies, social influencers, and our creative production teams. (Popeyes, n.d.)

This mission to diversity has long ways to go, as the scorecard reveals the following statistics, also seen in Figure 6f[24]:

- Popeyes' agency partners: "49% White, 31% Hispanic, 8% Black, and 7% Asian."
- Popeye's production crew partners: "66% White, 27% Hispanic, and 6% Black."
- Popeyes' in-house brand marketing employees: "50% White, 24% Hispanic, 15% Black, and 12% Asian."
- Popeyes' in-house brand marketing senior leaders: "54% White, 23% Hispanic, 15% Black, and 8% Asian." (Popeyes, 2021)

[24] Source: Popeyes. (n.d.). *Diversity in marketing & advertising*. Popeyes. Retrieved from https://diversity.popeyes.com/

Figure 6f: Popeyes Diversity Scorecard: Advertisement Production Demographics (2020)



With these statistics, it is clear that the brand's latest diversity report does not reflect its diverse narrative. While the corporation acknowledges its lack of diversity more subtly than its commitment to it, Popeyes felt the external pressure during the summer of 2020, demonstrating some initiatives that share similar ideologies to its publics' (seen in Figure 6e). In May 2021, the brand released a set of mandates for diversity– almost a year after Floyd's passing and early CSA Tweets– consisting of six aspects: reporting, recruitment, production, creative, media alignment, and minority-owned media.

Takeaways and Assessment: Popeyes

As it took a few attempts to get on the right track towards authentic CSA, Popeyes' record of problematic Tweets and slow-paced initiatives initially received a negative reaction from many of its stakeholders and followers. While every corporation uses a different approach in its CSA efforts, Popeyes could be more transparent and make stronger strides to support the Black community as the franchise once said it is "nothing" without Black lives– even though there is a lack of representation among its workforce.

Controversial CSA: Nike

Standing his ground, both literally and metaphorically, former NFL San Francisco 49ers' quarterback Colin Kaepernick provoked national attention in the pursuit of addressing racial injustices and police brutality in the United States. His ongoing peaceful protesting efforts weren't recognized widely until media coverage publicized Kaepernick's kneeling during the national anthem performance in a home game against the Green Bay Packers in late August 2016 (Wyche, 2020). After the game, Kaepernick stated, "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color," (Wyche, 2020). While it wasn't his first time sitting out and kneeling during this "ode" to American patriotism, his quiet, fateful action caused an uproar for the NFL, Nike, and its publics.

Kaepernick, could not pledge allegiance to a country where equality is not realized for many African Americans and POC. His silent actions proved quite loud, as many NFL fans expressed disapproval and viewed it as traitorous to the nation– especially the military, veterans, and law enforcement (Li et al., 2021). Many also viewed his act as an attempt to garner attention, which, in a sense is true. He used his platform to bring attention to these pressing issues. Kaepernick affirmed:

> This stand wasn't for me. This stand wasn't because I feel like I'm being put down in any kind of way. This is because I'm seeing things happen to people that don't have a voice, people that don't have a platform to talk and have their voices heard, and affect change. So I'm in the position where I can do that, and I'm going to do that for people that can't. (Wagoner, 2016)

While there was an array of anger and contempt, there was also support from fans, social justice advocates, and other various communities outside of the sports world. By March 2017,

Kaepernick made the decision to resign from his contract with the team and continued to advocate for social justice and denounce police brutality and racism in the United States (Haislop, 2020). Now more recognized for his advocacy efforts than his six-year run in the NFL, Kaepernick has become the face of many social justice initiatives and campaigns, most notably with Nike.

Early CSA Efforts: Nike's 30th Anniversary Campaign

In September 2018, Kaepernick was the face of Nike's 30th anniversary campaign, as seen in Figure 7a[25]. In reference to his kneel and the resulting discourse, the advertisement features a headshot of Kaepernick with an overlaid text, "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything," followed by the brand's iconic swoosh logo and slogan, "Just do it" (Creswell et al., 2018). The advertisement was also featured on a billboard in New York City, stirring conversations for city dwellers on the sidewalks to opinion pieces on various media channels, including major news outlets such as the *New York Times*, and social media platforms (Creswell et al., 2018).

Figure 7a: Nike's 30th Anniversary Campaign with Colin Kaepernick (2018)



[25] Source: Creswell, J., Draper, K., & Maheshwari, S. (2018, September 26). *Nike nearly dropped Colin Kaepernick before embracing him*. The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/26/sports/nike-colin-kaepernick.html

This campaign commemorated the former football player's initiatives and tenacity, but at the cost of his reputation, career, wellbeing, fans, and more.

As his simple act of kneeling caused national controversy, it was inevitable that this CSA-driven campaign would run the risk of amplifying more negative reactions. Those opposed to the campaign boycotted Nike, and destroyed any Nike products they owned. The hashtag, #BoycottNike, was sensationalized by those against the ad on social media, often including images and videos of burning Nike products as a response, as seen in Figure 7b[26].

Figure 7b: #BoycottNike and Disapproval of 2018 Nike Campaign with Kaepernick



Still, advocates of the campaign acknowledged the purpose and significance of Kaepernick's efforts, and applauded the campaign's strategy and execution as an authentic partnership. Figure 7c[27] highlights this support for the ad, and the messages of both Nike and Kaepernick.

[26] Source: Tweet replies via @acu1876 & @_kylerjackson via Twitter.
[27] Sources: @sharvan0555, @txtwostomp, @hagan_higby, @rum4alan, & @SuperiaIntellek via Twitter.

Figure 7c: Public Support for Nike's Campaign with Colin Kaepernick (2018)



As one of the world's most recognizable and largest corporations, Nike used its platform to address racial injustices in a strategic way that would foster these necessary conversations. Of course, these conversations would sometimes turn into a direction of hate, misunderstanding, and/or animosity towards those in support of these social messages. A study on this campaign assessed that:

> Nike's 30th Anniversary campaign very carefully calculated risk and created a campaign targeted to the most appropriate audiences: Gen Z, Millennials, and Gen X generations of consumers who want companies to have a viewpoint and to take a stand on important issues in society. Two-thirds of Nike's customers are under 35 years old and more racially diverse than the baby boomer population (Lofgren, 2019). Therefore, while the ad campaign sparked controversy and outrage from some who do not feel that sports should

> be a politicized event, the company saw a $6 billion increase in sales and an all-time high stock price of $85 per share in mid-September of that year (Abad-Santos, 2018), likely because of its strategic efforts to create and execute a campaign that appealed to its target audiences. (Li et al., 2021)

That being said, Nike's sales and stock value after this campaign reflected successful strides towards its CSA efforts, specifically regarding police brutality and racial injustices that were soon revisited in 2020. Acknowledging more current demographics in the United States, Nike understood its primary target audience as being younger generations. As noted earlier in this work's literature review, Generation Z holds many brands to a high standard to address social issues, and, if a brand fails to do so, cancel culture is often quick to jump in and "cancel" that brand. With this in mind, Nike did its research which reflected its heightened awareness for its key stakeholders and target markets. Wall Street business analyst Camilo Lyon applauded Nike's strategy:

> Nike had been "courageous" in taking a stand "in support of a social issue where few (if any) companies have of late." He added that the campaign "spoke to Nike's core consumers in a very Nike-esque, provocative way that shows it understands them and the issues that matter to them." (Creswell et al., 2018)

Another academic study noted that "the racial divide in public perceptions on various athlete-related issues is that it appears that the non-black respondents tend to have problems with the off-the-field stances that these mainly black athletes take," (Intravia et al., 2020). The Black experience is often undermined by those who aren't in the shoes of someone marginalized. This erosion of the Black experience unfortunately carried over into Nike's next viral CSA-driven campaign.

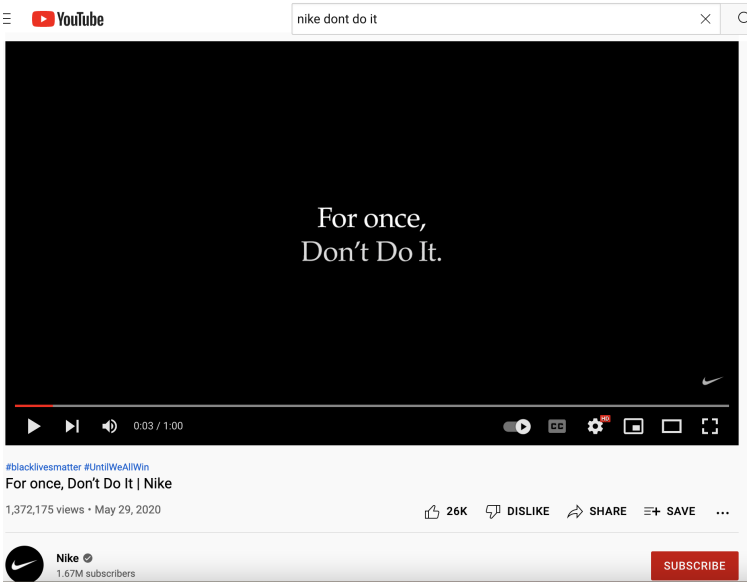
Continuing Controversial Campaigns: Nike's "Don't Do It" Campaign

A few years later, Kaepernick's legacy continued to make headlines and inspire others to advocate for what's "right," especially in correlation to the public perception of Nike as a brand. Launched on May 30, 2020, just five days after George Floyd's passing, Nike continued to bring awareness to this American epidemic of police brutality and racial inequality in its latest campaign (Nike, 2020). In a minute-long video titled, "For once, Don't Do It," Nike said:

> For once, Don't Do It. Don't pretend there's not a problem in America. Don't turn your back on racism. Don't accept innocent lives being taken from us. Don't make any more excuses. Don't think this doesn't affect you. Don't sit back and be silent. Don't think you can't be part of the change. Let's all be part of the change. (Nike, 2020)

The video embodies a serious tone, with simple creative direction– a black background with white text and Nike's logo in the corner, as seen in Figure 7d[28].

Figure 7d: Nike's "For once, Don't Do It" Campaign (2020)



[28] Source: Nike. (2020, May 29). *For once, Don't Do It | Nike* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drcO2V2m7lw

Nike's overt CSA messaging of taking a stand for social change as necessary carried over into this campaign, inevitably getting similar backlash and support. However, research pointed towards a majority of the campaign's feedback being positive, especially more so than the campaign with Kaepernick (Adams, 2020). Gartner research analyst Lindsey Roeschke observed that, "Despite some variation across demographic groups, the net sentiment related to this post was positive. In fact, the sentiment was positive across almost all key demographic groups," including ethnicity, age, and income (Adams, 2020).

In addition to this data, Figure 7e[29] displays some of the social media discourse on the campaign via Twitter.

Figure 7e: Public Perceptions on "Don't Do It" Campaign (2020).



[29] Source: Twitter responses via @Nike Twitter.

One of the tweets called out the brand's sponsorship with the Washington Redskins– with many viewing the name as controversial and demeaning to Native Americans and their culture (Ludwig et al., 2020). However, as Nike among other brands navigate the new world of CSA, there are some results of progressive social changes due to this societal pressure and personal obligation to do the "right" thing. The Redskins were no exception to cancel culture and a rising pressure to take action, resulting in changing its name to the Washington Commanders in 2022 (Ludwig et al., 2020).

As Nike catalyzed and served as an inspiration for other brands to initiate conversations, actions, and social change in the summer of 2020, the efforts paid off. Roeschke made note of this important call to action for businesses in her analysis, deeming authentic CSA to be essential in business strategies and executions; "This really underscores the need for any type of commentary on social issues to be a long-term strategy rooted in brand values rather than a one-off opportunity to capitalize on a trend," she said (Adams, 2020).

Takeaways and Assessment

Nike's CSA efforts, reflected in its campaigns, revealed its vocalized support for social justice, equity, advocacy, and allyship with controversial public figures. While the brand has made a large impact on the BLM movement, athletes, social ideologies, and overall publics, there is still more work to be done regarding its CSA efforts. Nike's 2020 annual report addresses some of the ways it's implementing further advocacy tactics:

> At the same time, as our society continues to reckon with systemic racial injustice, we are committed to standing up for one of NIKE's core values – equality. Our brand would not be what it is today without the powerful contributions of Black athletes and Black

> culture. And our belief in human potential inspires us to lead in addressing equality's most persistent barriers. That's why we're taking meaningful action to support organizations focused on advancing racial equality in the U.S., including a combined $140 million commitment from NIKE, Converse, Jordan Brand, and Michael Jordan. We are also focused on building a diverse, inclusive team and culture, one in which all voices are welcomed and heard. This culture of belonging reflects the diversity of the athletes we honor, the people who love our products, and the communities we serve. (Nike, n.d.)

After analyzing Nike's efforts confronting racial inequality and police brutality in its efforts with Colin Kaepernick in 2018, followed by further advocacy after Floyd's death in 2020, Nike's CSA efforts earned its spot as *somewhat controversial*, but has progressed more towards positive perception in its more recent initiatives.

Positive CSA: Ben & Jerry's

As touched upon earlier in this project, the cult favorite ice cream brand Ben & Jerry's has a long history of social advocacy efforts. The Vermont-based brand lists various social movements it has supported over the years, including but not limited to: racial justice, voting rights, climate rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and campaign finance reform ("Values," n.d.). While many are unaware of the corporations' extensive record of CSA initiatives, the heightened BLM movement in 2020 shed some light on its mission towards a better world. Its website states:

> We love making ice cream—but using our business to make the world a better place gives our work its meaning. Guided by our Core Values, we seek in all we do, at every level of our business, to advance human rights and dignity, support social and economic justice

for historically marginalized communities, and protect and restore the Earth's natural systems. In other words: we use ice cream to change the world. (“Values,” n.d.)

These internal business values are divided into three sections: human rights and dignity, social and economic justice, and environmental protection, restoration, and regeneration. Figure 8a[30] displays further information on these values, directly from Ben & Jerry’s website, which also contains more resources and information on the values.

Figure 8a: Ben & Jerry’s Core Values



Since Ben & Jerry’s bases its business practices and organizational culture on values held to a high standard of reform and morals, it is a purpose-driven brand that *actually* wants to do good for its publics and the world we live in. Its mission statement reads:

Ben & Jerry's is founded on and dedicated to a sustainable corporate concept of linked prosperity. Central to the Mission of Ben & Jerry's is the belief that all three parts of its mission must thrive equally in a manner that commands deep respect for individuals

[30] Source: N.A. *Values*. https://www.benjerry.com. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.benjerry.com/values

inside and outside the Company and supports the communities of which they are a part. ("Values," n.d.)

Figure 8b[31] shares more insights about these parts and how each contributes to the overall identity of Ben & Jerry's mission.

Figure 8b: Ben & Jerry's Multifaceted Mission



I(ce) (S)cream, You Scream, We (should) All Scream Racial Equality

Like Nike, Popeyes, and the Red Sox, no corporation is going to have a flawless business model. Acknowledging its weaknesses as a brand, Ben & Jerry's remains confident in its work towards improvement rooted in these missions. The website addresses its prioritized mission towards equity, especially for the Black community, despite being a predominantly white entity:

> Despite the fact that we have long championed racial equity through our activism, Ben & Jerry's remains an overwhelmingly white company. For too long, the linked prosperity we have aspired to create as a business for our workforce and value chain partners has largely left out Black and Brown people. Ben & Jerry's is committed to becoming a truly

[31] Source: N.A. *Values*. https://www.benjerry.com. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.benjerry.com/values

> antiracist company by eliminating racial disparities within the company and to disproportionately creating Black wealth through our business relationships. ("How we do business," n.d.)

When Actions Speak Louder than Words: The Social Justice Legacy of Ben & Jerry's

The corporation's work for social advocacy, specifically racial justice, is not limited to one campaign or statement. Ben & Jerry's first declared its support for the BLM movement in 2016 in response to the murder of Keith Lamon Scott, an African American man fatally victimized by police brutality (Stewart, 2020). Ever since its public support and acknowledgment of the movement, Ben & Jerry's has shared a plethora of articles on its website that easily breakdown current events, history, ways to support, corporate initiatives, resources, and more on the topic of racial inequality in the United States. Such information on criminal reform, racialized cannabis-related arrests, interviews with powerful Black figures in the community, and many more contribute to some of the information Ben & Jerry's shares to bring more social awareness ("Racial Justice," 2021). Specifically, its website offered petitions to defund the police and enact the George Floyd Policing Act into law, partnerships with Colin Kaepernick, owned podcasts, and social justice-themed ice cream flavors ("Racial Justice," n.d.).

In response to George Floyd's death, Ben & Jerry's amplified its initiatives for the movement on May 27th, 2020, addressing the situation in a long statement that included its next steps towards social equity, seen in Figure 8c[32] ("Silence is not an option," n.d.).

[32] Source: N.A. *Silence is not an option*. https://www.benjerry.com. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.benjerry.com/about-us/media-center/dismantle-white-supremacy

Figure 8c: Ben & Jerry's Statement in Response to George Floyd's Death

Four years ago, we publicly stated our support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Today, we want to be even more clear about the urgent need to take concrete steps to dismantle white supremacy in all its forms. To do that, we are calling for four things:

First, we call upon President Trump, elected officials, and political parties to commit our nation to a formal process of healing and reconciliation. Instead of calling for the use of aggressive tactics on protestors, the President must take the first step by disavowing white supremacists and nationalist groups that overtly support him, and by not using his Twitter feed to promote and normalize their ideas and agendas. The world is watching America's response.

Second, we call upon the Congress to pass H.R. 40, legislation that would create a commission to study the effects of slavery and discrimination from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies. We cannot move forward together as a nation until we begin to grapple with the sins of our past. Slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation were systems of legalized and monetized white supremacy for which generations of Black and Brown people paid an immeasurable price. That cost must be acknowledged and the privilege that accrued to some at the expense of others must be reckoned with and redressed.

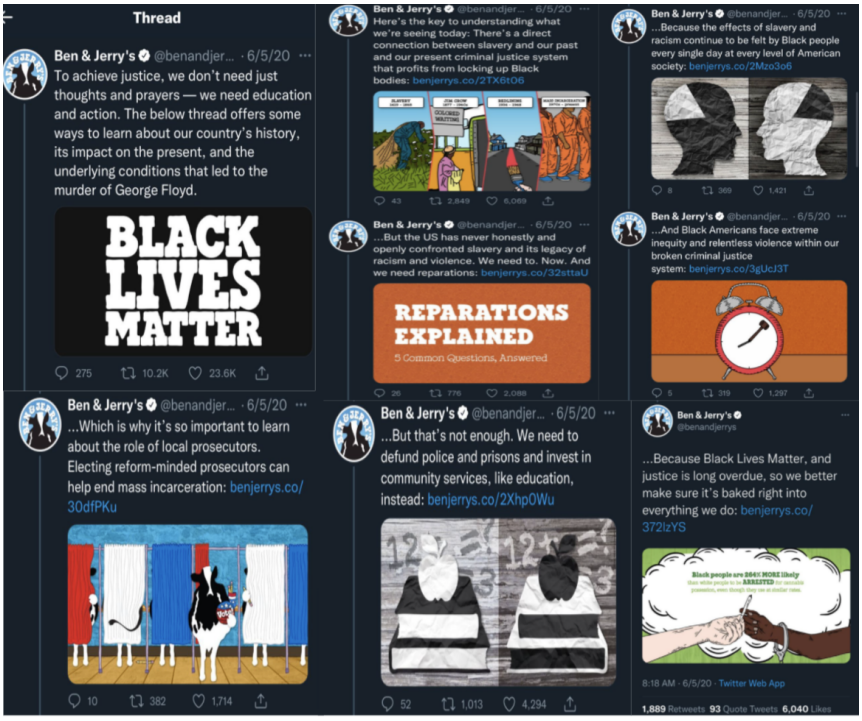
Third, we support Floyd's family's call to create a national task force that would draft bipartisan legislation aimed at ending racial violence and increasing police accountability. We can't continue to fund a criminal justice system that perpetuates mass incarceration while at the same time threatens the lives of a whole segment of the population.

And finally, we call on the Department of Justice to reinvigorate its Civil Rights Division as a staunch defender of the rights of Black and Brown people. The DOJ must also reinstate policies rolled back under the Trump Administration, such as consent decrees to curb police abuses.

Unless and until white America is willing to collectively acknowledge its privilege, take responsibility for its past and the impact it has on the present, and commit to creating a future steeped in justice, the list of names that George Floyd has been added to will never end. We have to use this moment to accelerate our nation's long journey towards justice and a more perfect union.

In addition to this statement, Ben & Jerry's released resources and information on its social media pages, gaining mass circulation and engagement on Twitter. Figure 8d[33] shows the plethora of BLM support resources tweeted by the company (Ben & Jerry's, 2020).

Figure 8d: Ben & Jerry's BLM Twitter Thread (June 2020)



[33] Source: Ben & Jerrys [@benandjerrys]. (2020, June 5). *To achieve justice, we don't need just thoughts and prayers — we need education and action. The below thread offers some ways to learn about our country's history, its impact on the present, and the underlying conditions that led to the murder of George Floyd* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/benandjerrys/status/1268910002238107649

With loud and clear support that spreads awareness of these issues, specifically supporting African Americans, Ben & Jerry's CSA efforts have been consistent over the years. After posting its BLM support and initiatives in May and June 2020, the company "received a massive response– mostly of overwhelming support, but also mixed with misunderstanding, sincere questions and sadly, some hatred. But one thing became clear: it started a conversation," according to its site ("Racial Justice," n.d.). Figure 8e[34] highlights some of the feedback on its Twitter and Instagram pages.

Figure 8e: Social Media Responses to Ben & Jerry's CSA Tactics



In addition to the efforts shown above, the Ben & Jerry's Foundation has made significant contributions to the movement. As a self-titled social justice organization, its mission statement shares the same values and goals of its parent company:

> We support grassroots groups throughout the U.S. and its territories that are led by the people most impacted by the legacies of white supremacy culture as they organize for racial equity, and social and environmental justice. We center the leadership and

[34] Source: Tweets and Instagram comments in response to @benandjerrys via Instagram & Twitter.

> collective action of Black communities, Indigenous communities, and communities of color in their efforts to build movements to dismantle oppressive and discriminatory systems toward a more just and inclusive world. Through our Vermont grant programs, we strive to support and enhance the well-being of Vermont and Vermonters. ("Homepage," 2021)

In 2020, the organization had nearly granted $3.4 million dollars to its United States recipients, with almost $2.9 million dollars going towards social justice grants (Ben & Jerry's Foundation, n.d.).

Takeaways and Assessment: Ben & Jerry's

Ben & Jerry's demonstrates an extensive commitment to *positive CSA*. With transparency in the form of accessible reports, resources, editorial stories, social media posts, non-profit work, calls to action, and more, the public is able to get the inside scoop on the ice cream company's efforts with ease. Ben & Jerry's has expressed immense advocacy efforts that benefit the Black community, consumers, the brand itself, and the BLM movement in its mission to put an end to racial injustices and police brutality in the United States.

Chapter 5: Navigating Best Practices

After reflecting on the outcomes from the Red Sox, Nike, Popeyes, and Ben & Jerry's CSA efforts in the summer of 2020, I have assessed some of the biggest takeaways that pointed towards authentic support towards the BLM movement. Further information can be accessed via my best practices guide creative project. Noted in the guide are my key takeaways from the case studies, as written below.

CSA Best Practices

- Be authentic.
    - Without it, efforts are likely acts of performative activism as there is no foundation for genuine support and/or reasoning. Walk the talk.
- Efforts should be reflective of both your organizational culture & BLM values.
    - Understanding your business internally will allow you to progress in external success in CSA efforts that benefit brand perception, and more importantly, Black lives.
- Listen to what others have to say.
    - Utilizing feedback allows for further insights and ideas that you may not have even realized or thought about. People will also feel part of the process and feel heard. Social change cannot occur without speaking up.
- Think before you speak.
    - Prevent regret and have a logical, well thought-out strategy plan that practices what you preach. Before making a statement that is almost impossible to take back, take the time to reflect on its potential implications that could do more harm than good.
- Stay consistent.
    - Let your publics know that you consistently care about, and advocate for, racial justice and supporting Black lives, especially when others aren't talking about it as much. Generation Z holds many brands to this accountable standard, so stay true to your vow/support, or else get ready to be called out– or even canceled.
- Backlash ≠ Failure.

- Progressive change cannot occur if everyone is on the same page. Conversations, even if controversial, are the building blocks of revolution.

Chapter 6: Reflection & Conclusion

As the United States stands for liberty and justice for all, the country still has a ways to go to actually meet this principle as many of its citizens are marginalized on a daily basis. National attention focused on the BLM movement and discourse regarding police brutality and racial injustices as an immediate response to the murder of George Floyd in May 2020– resulting in an overdue, significant turning point in American history. As police brutality continues to be an unnecessary harm for POC identities, especially within the Black community, necessary conversations were finally being initiated on a wide-scale level. With pressing demands for change, Gen Z held many businesses and organizations accountable to use their platforms to address these difficult, inequitable occurrences that had a serious impact on Black communities in the summer of 2020.

These social forces drove many corporations to take a stand on the BLM movement, resulting in polarized ideologies as their publics' beliefs varied from immense support of the movement to total opposition. As these brands were pushing out messages in a time of crisis, some learned their lessons of CSA and reputation the hard way, like Popeyes negative CSA, whereas Nike's efforts and perceptions positively evolved from controversial CSA to positive CSA over time. Some simply knew that they had a personal duty in this call to action, despite the consequences, as seen through Ben & Jerry's and the Boston Red Sox's positive CSA approaches. By conducting case studies on various CSA efforts resulting in success, failure, and a mix of controversy, I applied my findings and insights to craft a best practices guide for

effective, authentic CSA, especially in the context of addressing the BLM movement. It is crucial to understand that authenticity occurs when a corporation's actions directly reflect the values it has instilled in its organizational culture. Contributing to its legitimacy is the factor of consistency. An authentic brand continues to hold its credibility when its efforts consistently align with its values.

While the journey to finding these answers was an intricate process, effective solutions finally unfolded towards the end of this project. The findings in my research-based guide for public relations professionals is designed to serve as a reference to steer BLM discourse and support through authentic CSA efforts in future communication strategies.

Lessons Learned

After conducting a literature review, examining case studies, and interviewing Bekah Salwasser of the Red Sox, I observed recurring motifs throughout different CSA efforts that, at times, resulted in social change and positive public perception. It is of utmost importance to come from a place of positive intentions, leading to the key insight that CSA is best observed with **authentic** efforts. Along with authenticity, efforts should reflect the entity's organizational culture while also aligning with the BLM movement's values and principles. The voices that make up the organization should be heard and factored in CSA efforts. More broadly, listening to feedback and ideas can help formulate insights that reflect stakeholders that work for, support, and impact the organization. Especially in this digital age dominated by Generation Z, it is important to consider how words and actions can impact public perceptions and attitudes towards the brand. Even if a statement is removed from a brand's owned media, it is not permanently erased and forgotten due to the permanence and unforgiving nature of the Internet and its users. In that vein, a brand has to stay consistent with its pledges to demonstrate authenticity and

genuine, ongoing support. As companies were urged to tackle a new social and cultural shift and standards, many CSA efforts were criticized by the public. However, this does not necessarily mean that the CSA efforts were weak or performative. Rather, it could be a reflection of the fortitude supporting those who are too often at a disadvantage because of bias and discrimination. Progress occurs when change is pushed, so negative feedback and responses can reflect this pivot and the realization of an evolving society, bringing more awareness to the BLM movement.

If corporations take these insights into consideration, they would likely grow ethically as a company with their genuine efforts to support the BLM movement. Ben & Jerry's and the Red Sox represented this type of CSA– with immense efforts that contributed to an evaluation of positive perception. Since CSA studies and PR professionals show no specific, universally applicable advocacy strategy or protocol, efforts can be evaluated and positioned on a wide spectrum of negative, controversial, and positive CSA. As this work positively assessed Ben & Jerry's and the Red Sox's CSA, these corporations would be placed on a high level of authenticity and positivity on this spectrum. While Nike was represented as controversial, its CSA efforts increasingly evolved towards more authenticity, scaling at positive-leaning controversial CSA. If corporations want to further their CSA efforts in a positive way, their public perception would likely become more favorable– moving its placement on the CSA spectrum. Popeyes' CSA was evaluated as weak and poorly perceived, which reflects its negative CSA position on the spectrum. However, when brands acknowledge their shortcomings and demonstrate actions that reflect positive change, it can positively reposition themselves on this spectrum. As many consumers held brands accountable in following through on their CSA pledges during the BLM movement, it can also be expected that a corporation's placement on the

spectrum can drop towards more controversial and negative areas, if in the failure to do so. Hence, consistency and/or increasing authentic efforts should keep such corporations on a level of positive CSA. As brands are learning its successes and shortcomings from their CSA efforts, there is room to move on this scope of CSA.

Conclusion

On a final note, I have come to the conclusion that CSA efforts demonstrating authenticity, transparent action-based pledges, and aligned values with BLM have pointed towards successful audience perception, and a renewed push for social advocacy and change that supports the BLM movement. Corporations' publics responded best to the efforts exercising these takeaways in response to amplified racial injustices and police brutality discourse after the death of George Floyd in 2020. When a corporation's actions reflect its words, all stakeholders, social justice advocates, and BIPOC identities should prosper from such authentic CSA efforts, leading to progressive social change.

References

Adams, P. (2020). 6 months later: Activist marketing takeaways from nike, ben & jerry's calls for racial justice. *Marketing Dive,* Retrieved from https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/trade-journals/6-months-later-activist-marketing-takeaways-nike/docview/2468446494/se-2?accountid=14503

Afego, P. N., & Alagidede, I. P. (2021). What does corporate social advocacy signal? Evidence from boycott participation decisions. *Journal of Capital Markets Studies, 5*(1), 49-68. http://dx.doi.org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1108/JCMS-10-2020-0040

Austin, L., Gaither, B., & Gaither, K. (2019, December). *Corporate Social Advocacy as Public Interest Communications: Exploring Perceptions of Corporate Involvement in Controversial Social-Political Issues*. Journal of Public Interest Communications.

Ben & Jerry's [@benandjerrys]. (2020, June 5). *To achieve justice, we don't need just thoughts and prayers — we need education and action. The below thread offers some ways to learn about our country's history, its impact on the present, and the underlying conditions that led to the murder of George Floyd* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/benandjerrys/status/1268910002238107649

Ben & Jerry's Foundation. (n.d.). (rep.). *Ben & Jerry's Foundation: 2020 Funding Summary*. Retrieved from https://benandjerrysfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/BJF_2020_Funding_Summary.pdf.

Borden, J. (2019). *Consumer Attachment and Corporate Social Advocacy: Leveraging Political Behaviors to Bolster Organization-Public Relationships* (Order No. 27544892). Available from ProQuest Central; Social Science Database. (2348815098). https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/dissertations-theses/consumer-attachment-corporate-social-advocacy/docview/2348815098/se-2?accountid=14503

Brito, C. (2020, July 23). *Boston Red Sox put up massive Black Lives matter billboard outside Fenway Park*. CBS News. Retrieved March 15, 2022, from https://www.cbsnews.com/news/boston-red-sox-black-lives-matter-billboard-massachusetts-turnpike/

Ciszek, E., & Logan, N. (2018) Challenging the dialogic promise: how Ben & Jerry's support for Black Lives Matter fosters dissensus on social media, Journal of Public Relations Research, 30:3, 115-127, DOI: 10.1080/1062726X.2018.1498342

Clark, M. (2020). DRAG THEM: A brief etymology of so-called "cancel culture." Communication and the Public, 5(3–4), 88–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/2057047320961562

Creswell, J., Draper, K., & Maheshwari, S. (2018, September 26). *Nike nearly dropped Colin Kaepernick before embracing him*. The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/26/sports/nike-colin-kaepernick.html

Dahir, I. (2020, December 3). *Black influencers are calling out popular brands for failing to address the deaths of unarmed black people at the hands of the police*. BuzzFeed News. Retrieved December 15, 2021, from https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ikrd/black-influencers-are-calling-out-popular-brands-for

Davies, G. (2020, June 3). *Blackout Tuesday: What is it - and why were people posting black squares on Instagram?* The Telegraph. Retrieved December 15, 2021, from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/06/03/blackout-tuesday-black-squares-instagram/

Dodd, M. & Supa, D. (2015) Testing the Viability of Corporate Social Advocacy as a Predictor of Purchase Intention, Communication Research Reports, 32:4, 287-293, DOI: 10.1080/08824096.2015.1089853

Dooley, B. D., (2021). Woke-washing: The promise and risk of linking branding with politics. In *SAGE Business Cases*. SAGE Publications, Ltd., https://www-doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.4135/9781529752823

Gillion, D. Q. (2020). Will the george floyd protests matter? history says yes. *Barron's (Online),* Retrieved from https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/will-george-floyd-protests-matter-history-says/docview/2409751783/se-2?accountid=14503

Graham, R. (2020, Jun 17). In corporate america, black is the new black: Black lives don't matter as much as public relations that are good for the bottom line. *Boston Globe* Retrieved from https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/corporate-america-black-is-new/docview/2413841926/se-2?accountid=14503

Haislop, T. (2020, September 13). *Colin Kaepernick kneeling timeline: How protests during the National Anthem started a movement in the NFL*. Sporting News. Retrieved from https://www.sportingnews.com/us/nfl/news/colin-kaepernick-kneeling-protest-timeline/xktu6ka4diva1s5jxaylrcsse#:~:text=%22I%20am%20not%20going%20to,to%20look%20the%20other%20way.

Hillstrom, L. (2018). *Black Lives Matter: From a Moment to a Movement.* Retrieved from http://publisher.abc-clio.com/9781440865718

Holt, L., & Gutierrez, G. (2021). *Chauvin convicted of murder, manslaughter in george floyd's death*. New York: CQ Roll Call. Retrieved from

https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/other-sources/chauvin-convicted-murder-manslaughter-george/docview/2537005603/se-2?accountid=14503

Intravia, J., Piquero, A. R., Leeper Piquero, N., & Byers, B. (2020). "just do it? an examination of race on attitudes associated with nike's advertisement featuring colin kaepernick". *Deviant Behavior, 41*(10), 1221-1231. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2019.1604299

Kirnosova, M. (2021). Authenticity of brands in the marketing commodity policy of the enterprise. *VUZF Review, 6*(3), 78-89. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.38188/2534-9228.21.3.09

Li, J., Kim, J. K., & Alharbi, K. (2021). Exploring the role of issue involvement and brand attachment in shaping consumer response toward corporate social advocacy (CSA) initiatives: The case of Nike's colin kaepernick campaign. *International Journal of Advertising,* , 1-25. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1857111

Ludwig, C., & Wallace, K., (2020). The Washington redskins: When public perception challenges a brand. In *SAGE Business Cases*. SAGE Publications, Ltd., https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529780741

Meola, A. (n.d.). *Generation Z news: Latest characteristics, research, and facts*. Insider Intelligence. Retrieved December 15, 2021, from https://www.insiderintelligence.com/insights/generation-z-facts/

Miller, K. K., Shramko, M., Brown, C., & Svetaz, M. V. (2021). The election is over, now what? youth civic engagement as a path to critical consciousness. Journal of Adolescent Health, 68(2), 233-235. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.10.033

Munshi, D. & Kurian, P. (2005). Imperializing spin cycles: A postcolonial look at public relations, greenwashing, and the separation of publics. *Public Relations Review, 31*(4), 513– 520. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2005.08.010

Myungok, C. Y. (2021). Fake, Faulty, and Authentic Stand-Taking: What Determines the Legitimacy of Corporate Social Advocacy? *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 15*(1), 60-76. http://dx.doi.org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/1553118X.2020.1856853

N.A. *George Floyd*. (2020). In *Contemporary Black Biography Online*. Gale. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/K1606008683/BIC?u=coloboulder&sid=summon&xid=935d89aa

N.A. *Homepage*. Ben & Jerry's Foundation. (2021, May 3). Retrieved from https://benandjerrysfoundation.org/

N.A. *How we do business*. https://www.benjerry.com. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.benjerry.com/values/how-we-do-business

N.A. *Racial Justice*. https://www.benjerry.com. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.benjerry.com/values/issues-we-care-about/racial-justice

N.A. *Silence is not an option*. https://www.benjerry.com. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.benjerry.com/about-us/media-center/dismantle-white-supremacy

N.A. *Values*. https://www.benjerry.com. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.benjerry.com/values

Nike. (2020, May 29). *For once, Don't Do It | Nike* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drcO2V2m7lw

Nike. (n.d.). (rep.). *FY20 Nike, Inc. Impact Report | Executive Summary*. Retrieved from https://purpose-cms-preprod01.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/30191535/FY20-NIKE-Inc.-Impact-Report_Executive-Summary1.pdf.

Opinium. (2021, July 29). *US Brand & Marketing Study: Responding to black lives matter*. Opinium. Retrieved December 11, 2021, from https://www.opinium.com/us-brand-marketing-study-responding-to-black-lives-matter/.

Parcha, J. M., & Kingsley Westerman, C. Y. (2020). How corporate social advocacy affects attitude change toward controversial social issues. *Management Communication Quarterly, 34*(3), 350-383. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318920912196

Patnaude, L., Lomakina, C., Patel, A., & Bizel, G. (2021, February 27). Public emotional response on the black lives matter movement in the summer of 2020 as analyzed through Twitter. Retrieved from https://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ijms/article/view/0/44832

Popeyes. (n.d.). *Diversity in marketing & advertising*. Popeyes. Retrieved from https://diversity.popeyes.com/

PRSA. (n.d.). *About public relations*. PRSA. Retrieved December 15, 2021, from https://www.prsa.org/about/all-about-pr

Rajagopal. (2015). *The butterfly effect in competitive markets: Driving small changes for large differences*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Red Sox Foundation. (2022, February 18). *Social Justice, Equity & Inclusion*. Red Sox Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.redsoxfoundation.org/socialjustice/

Sakal, V. (2020, September 23). *Why gen Z isn't interested in your statements, promises and commitments -- yet*. Morning Consult. Retrieved December 11, 2021, from https://morningconsult.com/2020/06/22/why-gen-z-isnt-interested-in-your-statements-promises-and-commitments-yet/.

Sobande, F. (2021). Spectacularized and Branded Digital (Re)presentations of Black People and Blackness. Television & New Media, 22(2), 131–146. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476420983745

Stewart, R. (2020, June 21). *'It's not a marketing exercise': Ben & jerry's on dismantling white supremacy*. The Drum. Retrieved from

https://www.thedrum.com/news/2020/06/23/its-not-marketing-exercise-ben-jerry-s-dismantling-white-supremacy

The Sustainable Fashion Guru. (2020, December 22). *Op-ed: How brands lie to us through performative activism*. Fashion Roundtable. Retrieved December 14, 2021, from https://www.fashionroundtable.co.uk/news/2020/12/22/how-brands-lie-to-us-fashion-brands-and-performative-activism

Vredenburg, J., Kapitan, S., Spry, A., & Kemper, J. A. (2020). Brands Taking a Stand: Authentic Brand Activism or Woke Washing? Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, 39(4), 444–460. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743915620947359

Wagoner, N. (2016, August 29). *Transcript of Colin Kaepernick's comments about sitting during national anthem*. ESPN. Retrieved from https://www.espn.com/blog/san-francisco-49ers/post/_/id/18957/transcript-of-colin-kaepernicks-comments-about-sitting-during-national-anthem

Waymer, D., & Logan, N. (2020, December 10). *Corporate social advocacy AS engagement: NIKE'S social Justice communication*. Public Relations Review. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811120301326?casa_token=HFYFG6iTZuoAAAAA%3Av3XamNiBw6iEpn7rBy7J7IHzIFbesmXV6_JlQYmVjNIGViabIXnTeoJHZQsbSdiuTyy23vleokY.

Weinzimmer, L., & Esken, C. (2016). *Risky business: Taking a stand on social issues*. Science Direct. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2016.01.007.

Wyche, S. (2020, August 26). *Colin Kaepernick explains why he sat during national anthem*. NFL.com. Retrieved from https://www.nfl.com/news/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthem-0ap3000000691077