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Chelsey Watts  
314-982-7705  
Chelsey.Watts@fleishman.com



## **Agree or Disagree, Consumers Expect Organizations to Speak Out On Issues that Matter to Them**

*Report from FleishmanHillard Uncovers it's How Companies Take a Stand  
That Determines Their Success*

ST. LOUIS, October 3, 2018 – Corporate values are on trial every day with calls for brands to take a stand on everything from racism to immigrant rights to the MeToo movement. Determining when to stay silent and when to act has become key to a brand's reputation. In a new report issued today, [FleishmanHillard](#) examines consumer sentiment and provides companies with guidance for navigating the current issues-laden environment, finding that even if consumers disagree with you, you can still keep their loyalty.

"Knowing when to speak up requires a real examination of how your values relate to today's issues," said [Kristin Hollins](#), FleishmanHillard's corporate reputation practice group lead for the Americas. "Our research found that you can maintain loyalty from consumers who might disagree with your position, as long as you explain why you're doing what you're doing and how it relates to your company values."

The study, *Navigating Zero Gravity*, surveyed 1,000 engaged consumers in the United States spanning four generations – Millennials, Gen X, Boomers and the Silent Generation. Those surveyed came from a variety of political, racial and sexual orientations and were probed on 51 current issues spanning cultural, economic, political and societal interests. Select insights include:

### **Taking a stand and explaining your position will take you far**

- 66% of U.S. consumers surveyed have stopped using the products and services of a company because the company's response to an issue does not support their personal views.
- However, if a company can explain why it has taken a particular position, 43% of consumers said they are extremely or very likely to continue to support them, even if they disagree with the position.
- And 61% surveyed said that even if they disagree with a company's position, they believe it is important for companies to express their views. Amongst just U.S. millennials, that number increases to 75%.

### **Be aware, consumers can smell self-interest**

- 90% of those surveyed said companies often/sometimes take advantage of issues for their own benefit. As a result, 55% of engaged consumers felt less favorable towards the company. Companies must stake positions that are an extension of their values and reflect what their organization is willing to commit to address over time.
- This is especially true of women and Boomers. 61% of women felt less favorable when they perceived a company was taking advantage of issues for their own benefit. 74% of Boomers and 76% of the Silent Generation felt less favorable. This data shows that taking a stand, or claiming a new position, needs to be in service of a larger purpose.
- The key is active listening and communicating. 79% of consumers indicate a high likelihood to continue using products/services from companies who are anticipating the culture, social or economic impact of their products and services, and are actively evaluating and communicating changes in policies and evolving company values.

**Not every issue of importance to consumers carries with it expectations for companies to take a stand. The top 10 issues consumers feel are important and have expectations of companies to act on, are:**

- Sexual harassment
- Acceptance of diverse ethnic customs and traditions
- Data security
- Unemployment
- Impact of outsourcing jobs to other countries
- Gender pay gap
- Acceptance of diverse religious beliefs
- Racism
- Gender discrimination and equality
- Data privacy

“It’s critical for organizations to have a firm grasp on the issues that matter most to its stakeholders, and understand how those issues intersect with its own values and business,” Hollins said. “While it’s impossible to please everyone, it is possible to understand your audiences and their point of view. Companies will benefit from doing their research early and often, knowing this zeitgeist isn’t shifting anytime soon.”

FleishmanHillard’s Authentic Insights study was conducted by its TRUE Global Intelligence practice, and is a starting point for modern issues management and corporate leadership positions that help companies stand apart for their values.

FleishmanHillard TRUE Global Intelligence collected responses in July 2018. The margin of error is estimated at +/- 3%, given the size of the sample and the relative size of the population.

#### **About FleishmanHillard**

[FleishmanHillard](#) specializes in public relations, reputation management, public affairs, brand marketing, digital strategy, social engagement and content strategy. FleishmanHillard was named Agency of the Year at the 2017 North American Excellence Awards; 2017 ICCO Network of the Year for the Americas and EMEA; PRWeek’s Best Places to Work 2017; PR News’ Best Places to Work in PR 2016-2017; Human Rights Campaign Best Places to Work for LGBTQ Equality for 2018; PR Awards Asia 2017 Greater China Agency of the Year; and NAFE’s “Top 50 Companies for Executive Women” for 2010-2018. The firm’s award-winning work is widely heralded, including at the Cannes International Festival of Creativity. FleishmanHillard is part of Omnicom Public Relations Group, and has more than 80 offices in 30 countries, plus affiliates in 43 countries.

#### **About Omnicom Public Relations Group**

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