

# Brands that take a stand

Marketers who match consumers' desire for purpose and honesty come out on top



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# Welcome

National and international discourse has drifted towards corporate and personal responsibility over the last two years.

Stark warnings about climate change, unfairness in society as exposed by movements including #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, and a sharper focus on responsibility generally, have raised questions and produced column inches on our collective place in the world.

In response, brands have adopted stances on ethical, sustainable, or political questions. Is this a trend that resonates with consumers?

Meanwhile, honesty and straightforwardness have emerged as key attributes of good citizenship as people confront widespread mistruths and misinformation. To what extent should brands follow an unequivocally honest agenda? How much does honesty feed into brand perceptions?

Moreover, how does an ethical stance combine with an honest approach to marketing?

We spoke to 7,000 consumers from seven countries about their attitudes to taking an ethical stance and being honest in brand marketing campaigns in September 2021, the research published in our ['Brand integrity: the new frontier for marketing'](#) report.<sup>1</sup>

We then spoke to 600 CMOs and marketing leaders in those same eight territories in December 2021 and January 2022 to compare and contrast findings.

The results show that adopting a stance not only meets consumer expectations, but fulfills marketers' wider strategic goals. And consumers value brands that take an ethical stance and are honest and transparent in their marketing.

But there remain significant barriers and risks to brands adopting a stance, which emerge from how honest companies are about their output.

Those found to dishonestly adopt an ethical stance risk running the gauntlet of public opinion.

A stance works when it is integrated into a brand, so that the business is not just honest about its stance, but lives that stance. Transparency or honesty only works for a brand when it shows good behavior.

Review platforms like Trustpilot try to help consumers find what they are looking for by tapping into the opinions of real people who share their own experiences. With this research, we wanted to better understand what approaches CMOs take in relation to brand purpose, and what consumers look for in brands. Taken together, we hope this research will help marketers better resonate with customers through their stance.



**Alicia Skubick,**  
Chief Marketing Officer,  
Trustpilot

<sup>1</sup> <https://uk.business.trustpilot.com/guides-reports/build-trusted-brand/brand-integrity-the-new-frontier-for-marketing>

# Contributors

We interviewed 600 CMOs (50% CMOs, 50% other senior eCommerce decision makers) at eCommerce businesses in eight countries in December 2021 and January 2022. In addition, we interviewed five leading marketers:



**Marina Carbone,**  
Head of Brand &  
Marketing,  
Sanctus



**Matt Day,**  
Founder,  
Brand Ambition



**Kyle Rao,**  
Founder and President,  
Secure Medical



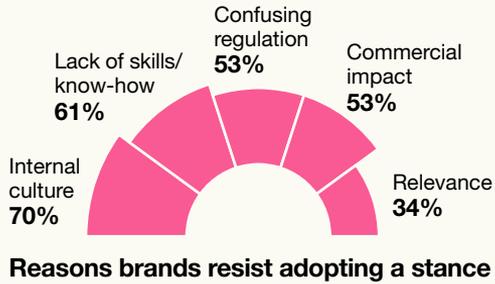
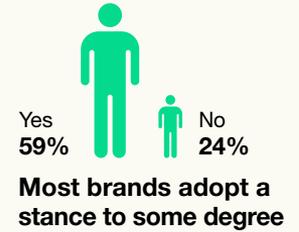
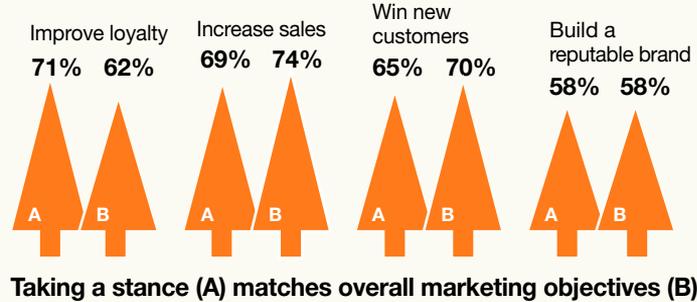
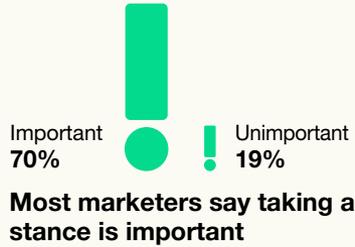
**Mike Cederberg,**  
Director of Professional  
Services,  
Reachdesk



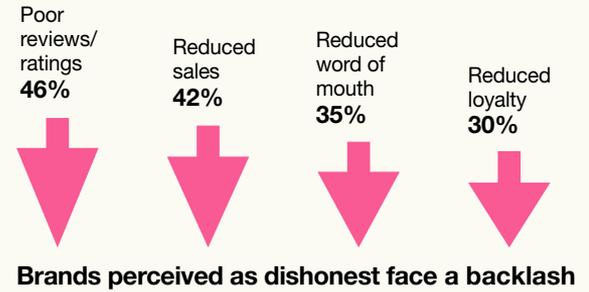
**Martina Göransson,**  
Chief Operating Officer,  
Blocket,  
Schibsted

# Key findings

Consumers and CMOs agree that it's increasingly important for brands to adopt an ethical stance, but there are risks if that stance is not thought authentic.



NB: Throughout, totals may not equal 100% due to rounding



# Key findings

**We have identified six points for brands to follow in order to successfully use brand purpose, with more detail in [Chapter 4](#).**

- 1 Treat your employees well
- 2 Employ the right people
- 3 Get internal buy-in
- 4 Ensure clarity of purpose
- 5 Embed purpose into operations
- 6 Think about business opportunity rather than business impact

Chapter 1

# CMOs believe in taking a stance

## Taking an ethical stance aligns with marketers' overall marketing objectives, but surprisingly few brands choose to do so.

Do consumers expect more from brands, beyond the product or service they buy? The received wisdom is that adopting some sort of stance is not just smart marketing but gives something back to consumers, helping them identify with that brand.

But is this assumption true?



When asked what the benefits might be for a brand if their customers identify with its chosen purpose, four responses stood out: improving loyalty (71%), increasing sales (69%), winning new customers (65%), and building a reputable brand (58%).

These are all primary concerns for marketers to increase long-term value and increase revenue.

## Marketers see ‘purpose’ as a way to increase loyalty and sales, win customers, and build a reputable brand (Fig. 1)

According to **Director of Professional Services at Reachdesk Michael Cederberg**, loyalty is a key benefit.

*“From a marketer’s perspective, loyalty is one of the key attributes of tuning into purpose. Here in the USA, you have to be outspoken as a company and take a stance because if you’re silent you’re adding to whatever is happening that is negative.”*

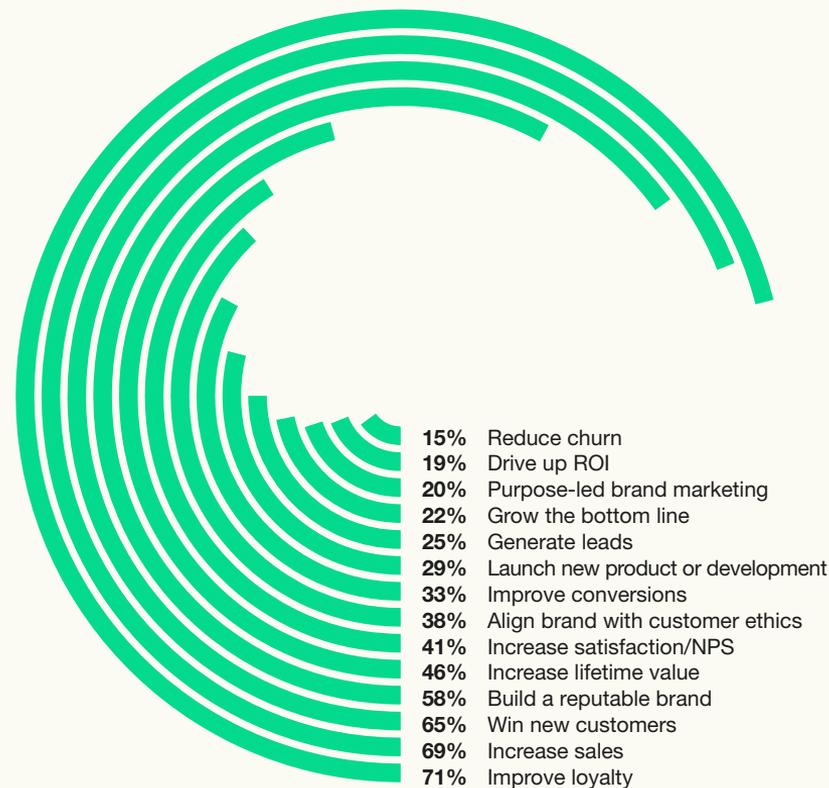


Fig. 1 What are the benefits if customers identify positively with your brand’s ethical, sustainable, or political stance?

When we compare these responses to the marketing ambitions of senior marketers, there is a striking overlap.

The top four marketing objectives picked by marketers are the same four choices those same marketers say are fulfilled by adopting an ethical, sustainable, or political stance: increase sales (74%), win new customers (70%), improve loyalty (62%), and build a reputable brand (58%).

Subconsciously or not, taking a stance fulfills the main objectives of marketers with surprising accuracy, according to that same group.

## Marketers want the same things (Fig. 2)

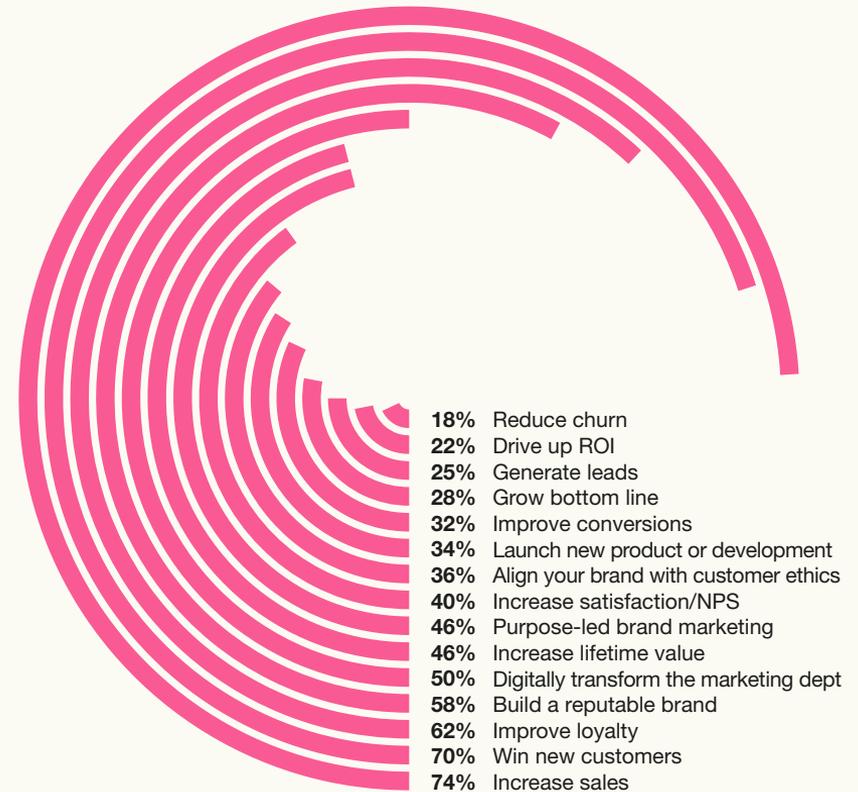


Fig. 2 What are your current strategic marketing priorities?

When we look at what marketers think of consumer opinion, we begin to see a mismatch between the desires of customers and the approaches taken by marketers in relation to taking a stance.

Seven in ten CMOs say taking a stance is important for their customers, against 19% who say

that this isn't an issue. Those who believe a stance to be important outnumber those who do not by three and a half times.

Yet fewer marketers adopt purpose in their campaigns than see benefit from purpose.

### Three in five CMOs adopt some form of purpose in their marketing (Fig. 3)

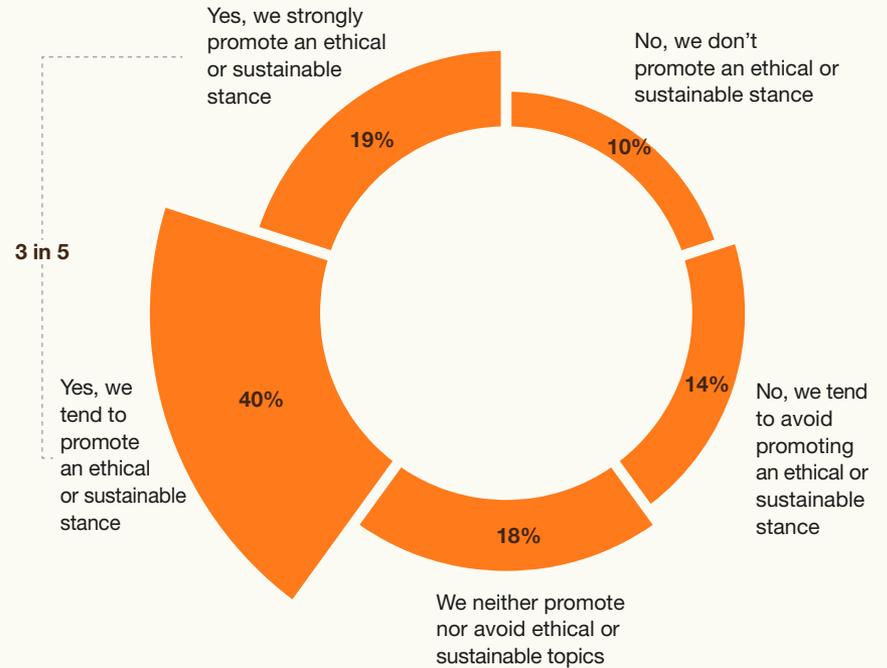


Fig. 3 Does your brand take and promote an ethical, sustainable, or political stance to its customers or consumers?

To a greater or lesser extent, 59% of CMOs adopt a stance in their marketing, with 24% not promoting a stance. This is a narrowing of the difference that marketers perceive in Fig. 1, where 69% believe it can increase sales (which 74% of CMOs say is a primary marketing objective).

Here, taking a stance could be limited to active support for a charity, right the way up to integrating a purpose or cause into a brand's identity. We would expect responses to shift on this graph over time, with more brands adopting a stance or adopting a stance more strongly.

Of the four sectors we examined, home or electronic brands were slightly more likely to promote a stance (61%), while fashion and financial brands were both slightly less likely to promote a stance (57%).

Similarly, fashion brands were the most likely to avoid promoting a stance, with 28% choosing not to. Of the four sectors, home and electronic brands were the least likely to avoid promoting a stance, at just 19%.

## 70% of CMOs believe a stance is important for customers (Fig. 4)

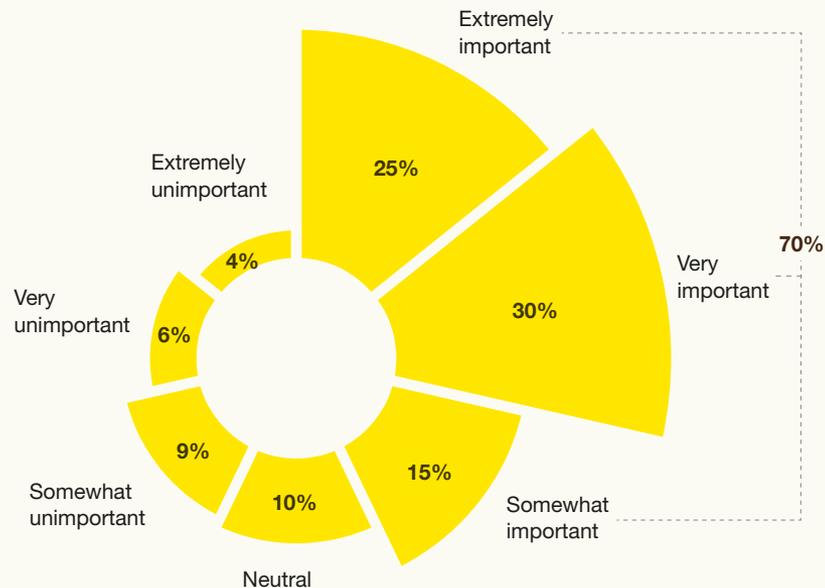


Fig. 4 How important is it that customers identify positively with your brand's ethical, sustainable, or political stance?

We can see in Fig. 4 that CMOs overwhelmingly believe that taking a stance is important to their customers, with 70% saying important and 19% saying unimportant, a 51% variance.

Why fewer CMOs adopt a stance in their brand marketing compared to their perception of their customers could be down to what CMOs think of their customers' priorities. Being 'honest and transparent about business activities and the impact on the planet and society' is very important, but not the overriding consideration, which is the product or service itself (Fig. 5).

**Head of Brand & Marketing at Sanctus Marina Carbone** believes it's a mistake to think of adopting a stance in the same way as price or place.

*"Purpose is the why behind why you exist, beyond profit. It should be deeply embedded in your brand/ company DNA. It should serve as a moral compass and a backbone. What problem are you trying to solve and how are you choosing to go about that? What do you stand for? And how do all these things come together to guide how you choose to fulfill your brand or product promise?"*

## Marketers believe consumers put a premium on product, honesty, and customer options (Fig. 5)

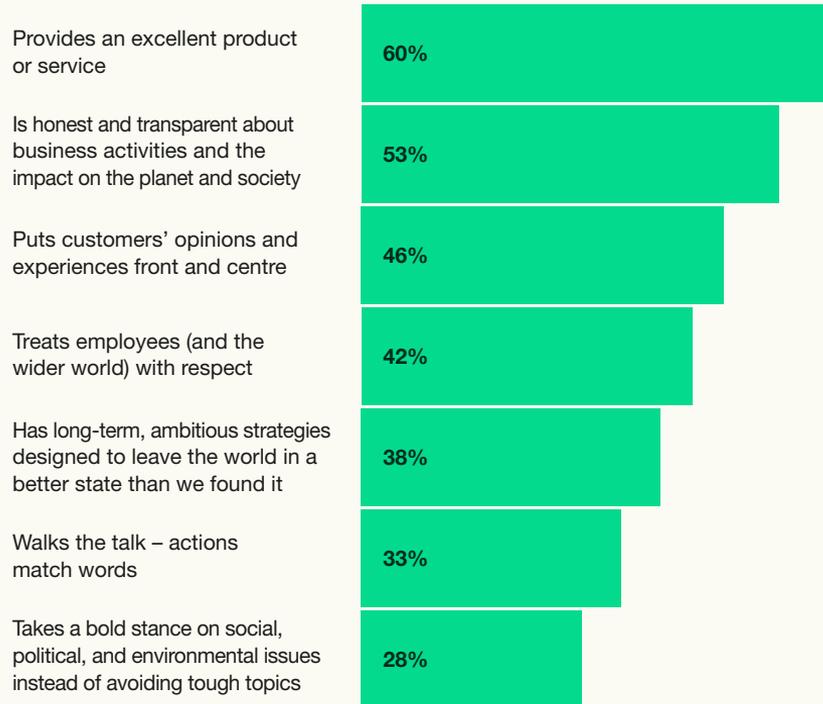


Fig. 5 From the following statements, which three would you expect to make customers more likely to buy from your company or brand?

Chapter 2

# Consumers agree, but...



## **CMOs are good at anticipating their customers' preferences, but there are some important differences which have implications for brand marketing.**

In parallel to this CMO questionnaire, we surveyed consumers about these same themes.

By comparing the opinions and attitudes of marketers to comparable responses from a consumer survey, we can see how the opinions of marketers and consumers diverge.

Looking at the consumer research from September 2021, consumers are generally supportive of the idea of a brand taking a stance, with nearly half (48%) saying a brand's stance is important to them (Fig. 6).

Just 31% say taking a stance is unimportant to them. Or to put it another way, there are more than 50% more consumers to whom brand purpose is important, compared to consumers to whom brand purpose is unimportant.

For example, **Michael Cederberg** says he sees a clear consumer demand for diversity at **Reachdesk**.

## Half of consumers say it's important for brands to take a stance (Fig. 6)

*"Having access to minority-owned businesses or those that have sustainability initiatives or diversity in the workplace has been important. All those things have definitely swayed customers who want to work with us or chose us over a competitor," he says.*

CMOs seem to overestimate the importance of taking a stance for their customers, believing it would be important to 70% of them (Fig. 4), compared to 48% of customers declaring taking a stance is important to them (Fig. 6).

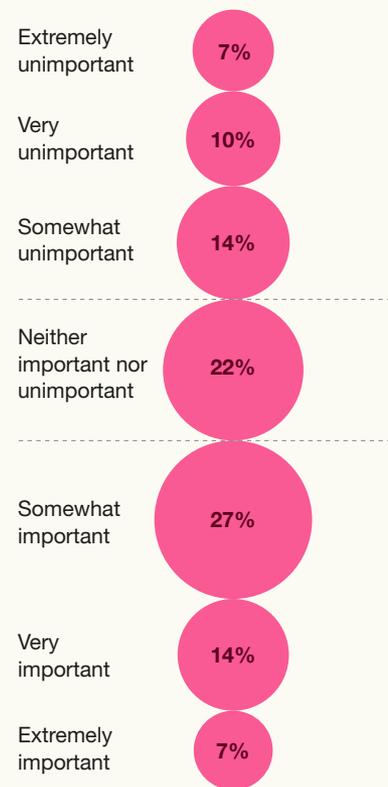


Fig. 6 How important is it to you that a brand takes an ethical, sustainable, or political stance?

However, it's worth remembering that CMOs look at ways to increase preference for their brand. In this way, a stronger ethical, sustainable, or political stance may be decisive in a choice between otherwise comparable choices.

We also know that while taking a stance is important for consumers, convenience is not far behind. As the popularity of companies like Amazon, which has a strong reputation for customer service, shows, companies that do not embrace any kind of ethical stance but deliver rock solid service can still be successful.

## Consumers want purpose, good products/ services, and businesses to treat employees well (Fig. 7)

For consumers, this is a delicate balance between three competing qualities: purpose, good products, and the fair treatment of employees. By comparison, marketers believe the product, the responsibility of the company, and the opinions of customers are most important to consumers (Fig. 7).

This shows that there is a clear gap between the opinions of consumers and what marketers believe those opinions to be.

### Customers want their brands to:

1. Be honest and transparent about their activities and impact they have on the planet and society 46%
2. Have an excellent product or service 46%
3. Treat their employees (and the world around them) with respect 45%

### Brands think consumers want:

1. An excellent product or service 60%
2. Honesty and transparency about their activities and the impact they have on the planet and society 53%
3. Customer opinions to be put front and center 46%

Fig. 7 What would make you more likely to buy?

Close to half (45%) of consumers said 'treats their employees (and the world around them) with respect', and this focus on how companies treat their staff crops up more than once in our research. The treatment of employees seems to be an effective proxy for consumers to better understand brands.

Companies that treat their employees well are perceived as ethically sound companies.

## Consumers actively look at websites and social channels for brand information (Fig. 8)

Another area where marketers and consumers diverge is in their use of media (Fig. 8). Consumers actively use brand websites primarily (62%), then social channels (48%), and then indicate more passive forms of media: digital advertising for 40%, with non-digital media like press, TV, or outdoor ads for 29%.

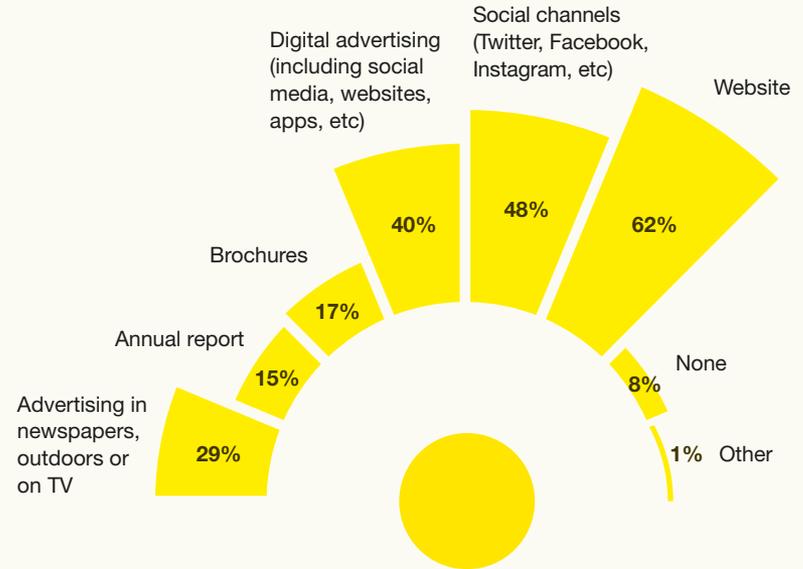


Fig. 8 Which brand sources do you consult to help inform you about a brand's stance?

However, marketers rely on social channels much more, with paid social being the top choice and organic social being the fourth choice. Non-digital media sources are a much lower priority. On average, marketers use four channels in their marketing.

Websites, which are the top choice for consumers, are relegated to second by marketers. This indicates two things. First, that a website should not be neglected in favor of other media, and second, that the website should convey the right information, so consumers can find it easily.

## Marketers favor social channels (Fig. 9)

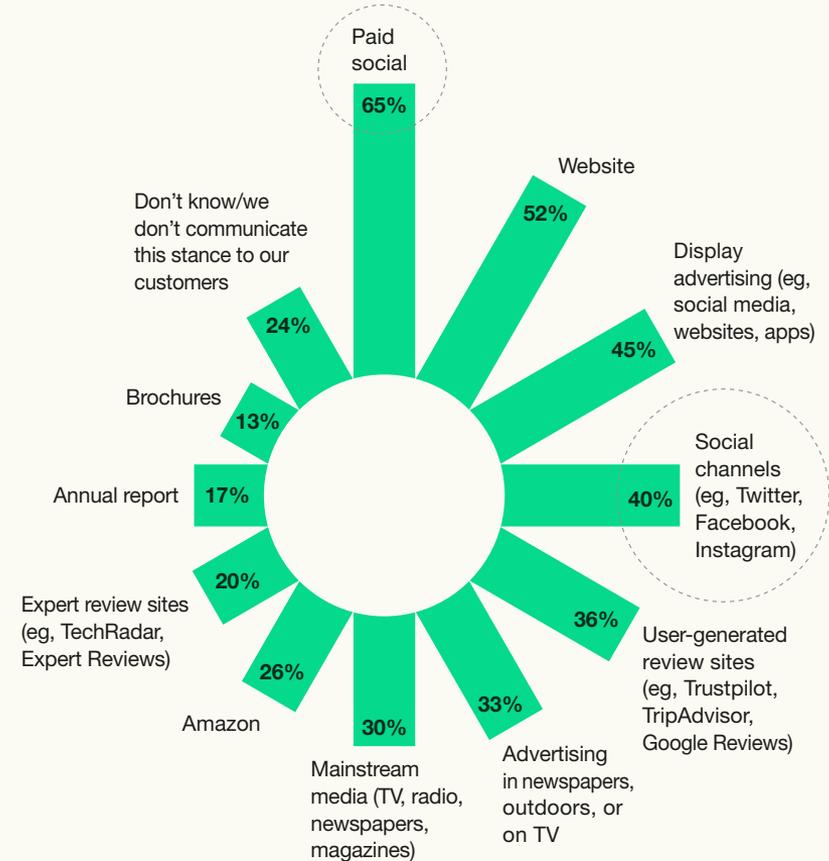


Fig. 9 Which channels do you use to demonstrate your ethical, sustainable, or political stance?

Finally, there's a disparity between the causes that consumers believe are important compared to the causes CMOs think are important to consumers (Fig. 10).

CMOs believe that their customers are interested in the environment (70%), human and worker rights (61%), fair trade (56%), and data protection (52%).

These top responses are all 'hot button' topics that are frequently covered in the news. The lowest response, 'not evading tax' (20%) is often cited as a way to avoid corporate responsibilities, which is damaging to society. However, it has not been covered in the news media recently, perhaps explaining its low ranking.

## CMOs believe that the environment and human rights are important to consumers (Fig. 10)

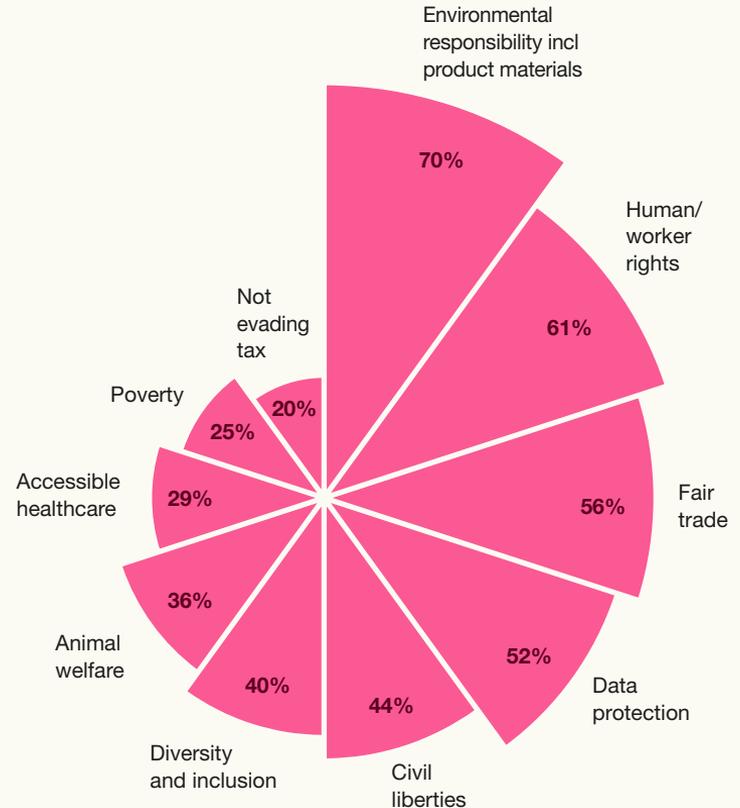


Fig. 10 Which of these ethical, sustainable, and political issues do your customers care most about?

When we asked consumers to indicate which topics they might like to comment on (Fig. 11) as a proxy for their interest, human and worker rights were at the top with 78% (again, confirming that worker rights acts as a proxy for overall brand behavior), followed by environmental responsibility (76%), animal welfare (73%), and data protection (72%).

There's a clear difference here. CMOs have a brand-centric view, taking their supply chains and hot topics into consideration. Consumers have more general concerns about people, animals, and the environment. The two groups agree that data protection, which is of course now more tightly regulated than in the past, is significant.

## Consumers are concerned about people, the environment, animals, and data (Fig. 11)

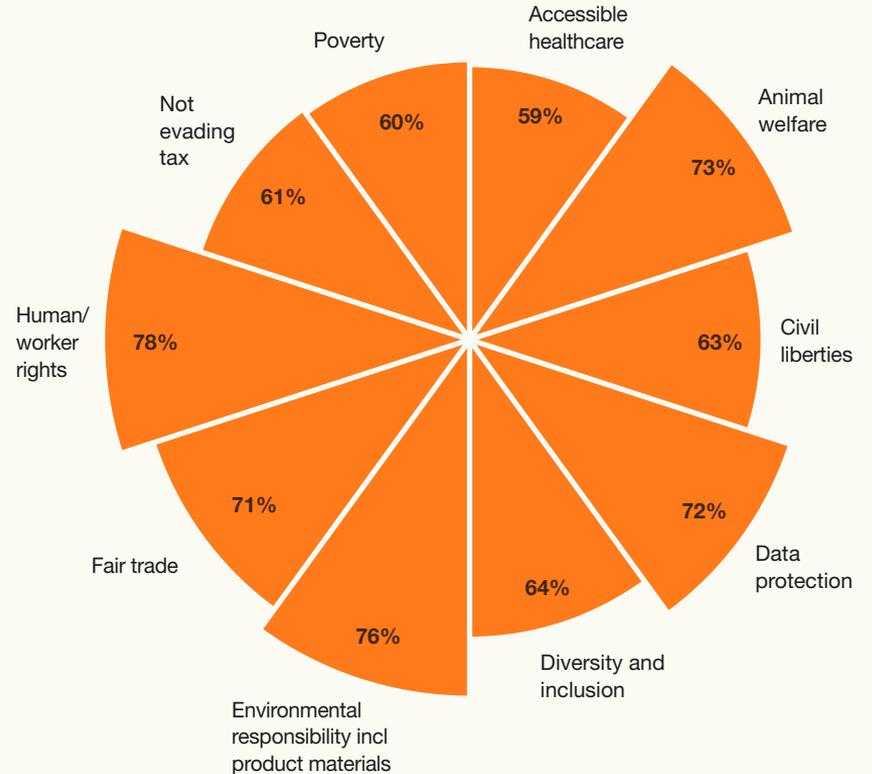


Fig. 11 Would you be interested in rating brands on the following topics?

## The majority believe in honesty, but...

**While CMOs seem to be interested in working to benefit society, a stubborn 9-10% seem uninterested.**

Our research shows a persistent 9-10% of CMOs who don't see value in purpose, don't believe honesty is important in marketing, and don't even see any risks to dishonesty in marketing.

It seems worthwhile to look at this segment in a little more detail.

## Some are not concerned about a stance or honesty (Fig. 12)

According to our research, one in ten marketers do not promote an ethical, sustainable, or political stance to their customers (Fig. 12). This may make sense for many businesses but it does not mean the brand is indifferent to social, political, or environmental concerns. It may also be that a brand does not want to be perceived as 'political' and potentially lose the customers that fall on the other side of that stance.

How important or unimportant do you think your company's ethical, sustainable, or political stance is for your customers?



Very unimportant



Extremely unimportant

Does your brand take and promote an ethical, sustainable, or political stance to its consumers or customers?



Don't promote an ethical, sustainable, or political stance

How important do you think your brand's honesty and transparency are to your customers?

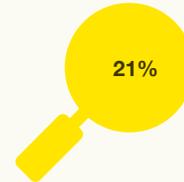


Somewhat unimportant



Very unimportant

What are the risks of dishonesty in your brand marketing?



Risks are negligible



No risks

Fig. 12 A closer look at those for whom honesty and taking a stance isn't a priority

These CMOs either see no risks to dishonesty, or perhaps see their competitors acting in a dishonest manner and getting away with it, but as Fig. 14 shows, there are real risks to a dishonest strategy.

**Marina Carbone** says marketers are now held to higher ethical standards than in the past.

*“Marketing has always had a bit of a bad rep, and often for good reason. It’s about time we looked at marketing impact beyond ROI. Perhaps a better lens in the attention economy is considering the value exchange objectively: brands are vying for consumers’*

*time and attention – two of the most precious things. In return, what are we giving back? Are we contributing positively or adding to the noise and the overwhelm?”*

**Michael Cederberg** says the speed of the modern world means brands can be exposed in an instant.

*“Information is shared so quickly. It can make customers not want to choose your product or service. Negative stories can make investors jump off or drop out of your company entirely. Integrity is the one thing companies need to go for right now.”*





However, **Chief Operating Officer (COO) at online marketplace Blocket Martina Göransson** says this startling finding may be a comment on bad behavior that goes unchallenged.

*“It could be that this is less about them and their beliefs, but more about what others do without any consequences.”*

One additional insight comes from this group of 47 respondents (8% of the total), who:

- don’t promote an ethical stance in their marketing (see Fig. 3),
- believe that their customers are not interested in this anyway (see Fig. 4),
- but believe honesty and transparency are important to their customers (see Fig. 5)

This group, which markets mostly fashion and garden products, have missed an opportunity to be more honest and transparent.

But this transparency only works when it reveals good practice. If, for the sake of argument, a brand falls into this group and uses sweatshop workers, being transparent about this would open them up to more risk.

Chapter 3

# Adopting honesty and a stance needs authentic commitment

## Taking a principled stance and being honest are most powerful when combined, because authentic commitment ensures credibility.

According to our research, close to two-thirds (63%) of marketers believe their brand is more trusted than average. This is a problem because it cannot possibly be true. Statistically speaking, half of brands should be more trusted than average, and the other half less trusted than average.

Our research shows that marketers also overestimate the degree to which their customers buy into a political, environmental, or ethical stance.



While 70% (see Fig. 4) say it's important to convey an ethical, sustainable, or political stance to their customers, in line with their marketing objectives, only 59% do so (see Fig. 3), an 11% variance.

We also know that almost half (48%) of consumers believe a stance is important to them, but for this segment, it seems to be a crucial component of their brand choice (Fig. 6).

## Internal factors and skills are the biggest challenges to adopting a stance (Fig. 13)

There are very good reasons why brands do not adopt a stance, from internal culture through lack of skills to uncertainties over regulation and commercial impact, and one-third (34%) say a stance is not relevant to their business (Fig. 13).

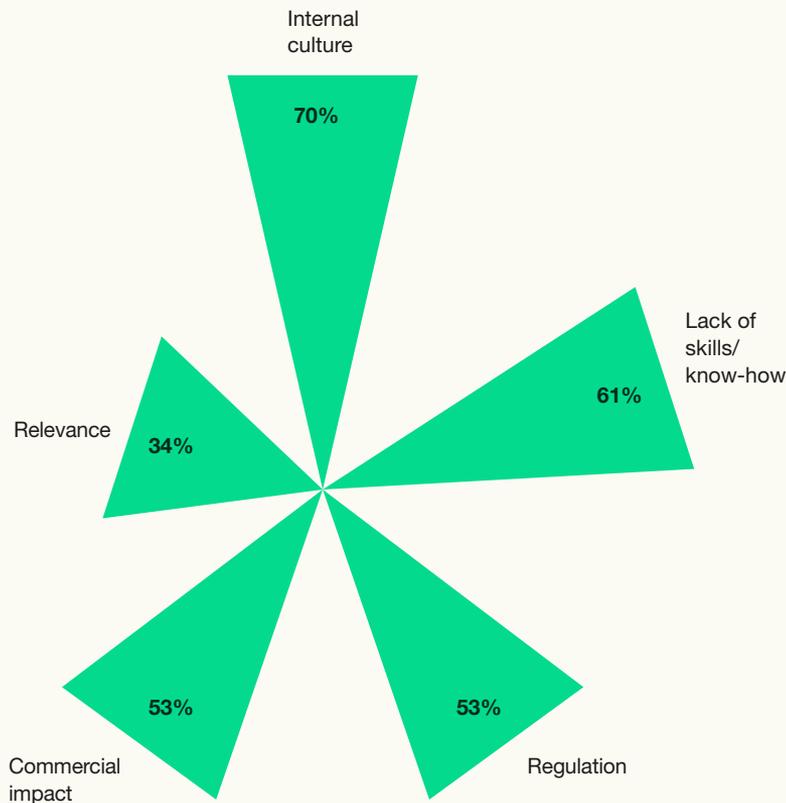


Fig. 13 What barriers does your business face when trying to adopt an ethical, sustainable, or political stance?

On regulation and supply chains, **Göransson** has some sympathy.

*“You have to own the whole supply chain and not many brands are able to do that today. It’s really hard. You can make requirements and demands from your partners or suppliers, but you can’t control it the whole way.”*

She mentions one global clothing manufacturer that tried to eliminate bad practices from its supply chain, but problems keep emerging. *“It’s out of their control because they’re too big,”* she says.

## Risks to brand dishonesty are significant and varied (Fig. 14)

There is a second problem for marketers, which is that for some adopting a stance means taking a risk. That risk is to not adopt a stance fully authentically.

This is because there’s an added complication, which is that marketers see the risk of being perceived as dishonest (Fig. 14). Dishonesty can actively damage a brand, regardless of how well-intentioned that purpose is, but authentic pursuit of that purpose will minimize possible risks.

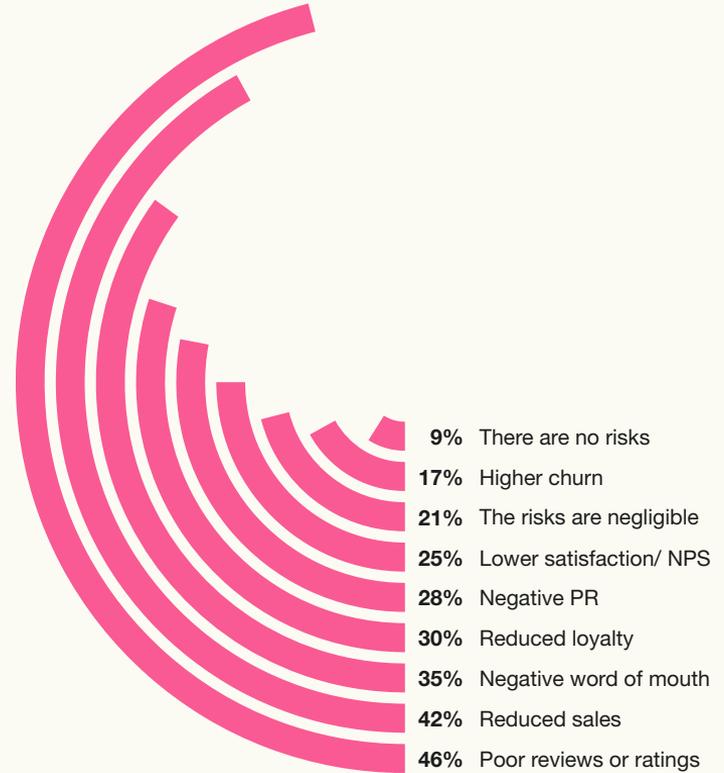


Fig. 14 What are the risks of dishonesty in your brand marketing?

**Matt Day, the founder of Brand Ambition,** says this risk is real.

*“The inherent risk of taking a very public position on an issue or a set of issues or proclaiming your virtue as a brand, is that you set yourself up on a pedestal to be shot down.”*

**Martina Göransson** agrees.

*“People are quite skeptical as to whether particular stances are really true and honest. Brands need to make sure that they are true to the purpose and really can stand for it in all aspects. Otherwise it will backfire.”*

The overwhelming majority of marketers (91%) see risks to dishonesty and it's worth looking more closely at the top risks.

- Almost half (46%) say the perception of dishonesty can damage ratings, which is the top choice for marketers to track their brand.
- More than two in five (42%) marketers say that dishonesty will damage their top strategic marketing priority, which is sales.
- More than one-third (35%) say dishonesty could damage word-of-mouth recommendations, which is the second most important reason to buy for consumers.

- Furthermore, 30% say the perception of dishonesty will hit loyalty, which is the third most important strategic marketing priority for respondents.

## Chapter 4

# Advice on honesty and purpose



## Some advice for brands looking to adopt a stance: make sure it's authentic.

- 1 Treat your employees well
- 2 Employ the right people
- 3 Get internal buy-in
- 4 Ensure clarity of purpose
- 5 Embed purpose into operations
- 6 Think about business opportunity rather than business impact

## 1 Treat your employees well

The consumer research that we ran in parallel to this report shows that how a company treats its employees is an excellent indicator of the overall quality of the company.

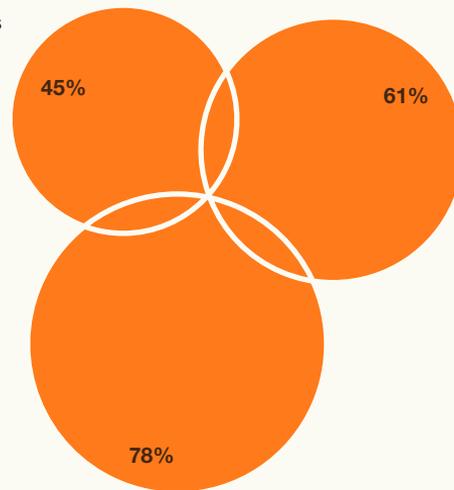
According to **Carbone**, “people today want different things from their workplaces and from the brands they engage with – it’s a relationship, not just a transaction, and people look to businesses to act responsibly and be agents of positive change. The good news is any business – big or small – can play a part in driving forward positive change. Like most things in life (and work), it comes down to what you chose to prioritize.”

She goes on to explain that companies are now rated on how they treat employees, and ignoring this is another risk. “Anyone can run a ‘conscious’ campaign or change their Twitter logo but people see through such tokenism. If your messages don’t align to your internal practices or purpose, people will see right through that. One critical ‘signal’ is internal culture and how companies choose to treat their employees – a mismatch between what’s happening internally and what’s projected externally is a great red flag.”

There are two effects here. A poor or toxic work culture can not only affect sales but also persuade promising or valuable candidates to work elsewhere.

## Treatment of employees is a workable proxy for brand transparency and behavior (Fig. 15)

of consumers surveyed said ‘treats employees well’ would make them more likely to buy a product or service



of CMOs believe their own customers care about human and worker rights

of consumers would comment on a brand's human and worker rights record, indicating a strong preference for this issue

Fig. 15 Consumers care about employee rights

## 2 Employ the right people

We know that 61% of respondents say they lack the skills or know-how to adopt a stance, with 53% citing the burden of regulations and standards (see Fig. 13).

Several of these issues reflect confusion over international standards or regulations, with 16% citing a lack of universal benchmarking and 20% saying there is a lack of agreement on best practice or what ‘good’ looks like.

Two in five (40%) say there is a lack of data to understand their starting position and to review and measure against targets. These are significant barriers to overcome because progress has to be meaningful and measurable, while 10% say there is a lack of in-house talent or skills.

But if you look more closely, all the other problems cited above could be solved by having the right people in place who would understand regulations and standards, grasp the data, and understand what good really looks like.

**Göransson** says the right internal culture is essential to hiring the right people, and one affects the other in a virtuous circle.

*“If you are a purpose-driven company internally, then you will attract talent whose purpose matches yours. This has the effect of strengthening the brand further,” she says.*



### 3 Get internal buy-in

Adopting a specific issue could be difficult. It is significantly easier if staff are on board.

70% of CMO respondents say that the internal culture is a problem for their brand (see Fig. 13). There could be a culture which is resistant to change (cited by half), a lack of employee engagement (cited by one-third), or a lack of senior buy-in (cited by 15%).

Addressing all these scenarios requires work, and there are two questions to ask:

- Which issues reflect or relate to your brand?
- How well do you know your staff and the issues that are important to them?

The first question will help you arrive at a stance that is appropriate to your brand. The second question may override responses to the first question and will help you find a way to talk to your staff and develop a way to properly engage them and bring them with you.

Just over one-third (34%) of respondents cited relevance as a reason for not adopting a stance. Such responses indicate a risky strategy because public opinion is moving towards more, not less, corporate responsibility.

According to **Matt Day**, this is because ‘purpose’ is a hot talking point.

*“You can see how brands might cynically decide to use purpose inauthentically and use purpose as a vehicle to achieve various goals. To be taken seriously, this absolutely has to be evidenced by what you do as a brand.”*

For **Carbone**, it’s crucial to embed purpose into the brand to be successful.

*“If you were starting from scratch, purpose would be baked into your brand’s DNA, and guide everything you do, like a moral compass.”*

## 4 Ensure clarity of purpose

If the brand stance is less of an add-on, and more of an intrinsic part of the brand, then the possibility of errors or the perception of dishonesty is significantly reduced because the brand and the stance align.

**Carbone** explains.

*“What is the guiding insight? What is the problem that we’re trying to solve for people? How can we do that in a way that builds on our strengths and makes a real, positive impact? At the intersection of all these questions is often where you’ll find your purpose.”*

**Matt Day** cites smoothie and juice brand Innocent, and baby food producer Ella’s Kitchen, as good examples of using transparency to convey purpose.

*“The brands use tone to always focus on what they are about. Copy on products explains ‘this is where we are. This is not yet fixed, but we’re working on it’ and this could be in relation to say, recycled packaging.”*

Another approach is to be open to new ideas. According to **Kyle Rao, founder and president of Secure Medical**, this approach feeds back into his company’s logo design.

*“It shows open minds, so we keep an open mind here. It means we respect everybody’s opinion whatever that is. And we can learn from that. Which has actually helped a lot, particularly as the workplace opened back up after Covid and getting back to work in person.”*

For Rao’s business this means working closely with many minority and underrepresented groups in the community, including war veterans, autism groups, and the LGBTQ+ community, and also making time to contact customers and where possible make communication personal and meaningful.

## 5 Embed purpose into operations

If the brand has embraced a stance, then it will follow through in many ways the brand expresses itself.

**Carbone** comments, *“I don’t like the phrase ‘adopting a purpose’. It needs to be baked into the foundations: the absolute best version of your brand, your business’s backbone. Not something you pick up this quarter and put down the next. Your purpose should be in alignment with your mission and your values and reflected*

*in how your business chooses to operate on a day-to-day basis, how it treats its customers, its employees, the community, and the planet.*

*“Once it’s baked into your foundations you should be able to sense-check almost anything and ask yourself, for example: how does our purpose manifest itself at a campaign level? In the content we produce? In the things we choose to prioritize? Your purpose is the moral compass that influences how you go about making the choices that you make and the actions you take.”*

**Göransson** agrees.

*“I think it has to start internally and it has to be incorporated in the entire company, in all employees. But also to make sure it matters to the many, or to your target audiences. For instance, Sweden is really climate-friendly, and we talk a lot about climate. So that’s a really hot topic for us. But then again, when a consumer has to decide whether to choose one T-shirt over another, price and convenience often win before sustainability.*

*“As a marketer I think you always have a responsibility to drive the market, drive trends, and drive behavior into being more purpose-driven.”*



## 6 Think about business opportunity rather than business impact

A little over half (53%) say adopting a stance could risk commercial or reputational impact (see Fig. 13).

Here, the issue is that commercial impact and commercial opportunity can be two perspectives on the same

problem. For example, if the issue at play is sustainability, it's difficult to imagine a downside to adopting a more sustainable approach to business in the long term.

The risk may well be to not adopt a stance.

# Conclusion

Brands taking a stance have attracted acolytes and detractors, but it remains a relatively novel approach to marketing, and the ways in which said stance could be deployed in campaigns have not always been successful.

Worse, some brands use the language or imagery of a stance, without anything to back up these sentiments in an attempt to 'greenwash' their brand. This approach would carry significant risks.

While taking a stance has perceived value, honesty has real value. Authenticity, where a stance is adopted honestly, has both perceived and real value. Those brands that adopt an authentic stance will see the greatest benefits and lowest risks in their marketing.

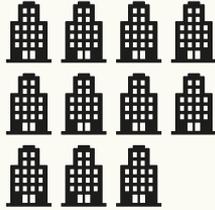
Only those that really take their stance seriously can expect to reap dividends because those will be the brands that have covered potential problems from within.

*As Matt Day says, "A lot of purpose used in advertising is dreadful and seems to be a kind of virtue-signaling arms race. It's all very serious and earnest, moving advertising a long way from the humorous, memorable, quasi entertainment place it was. This does need to be worked out for more successful brand campaigns."*



# Methodology

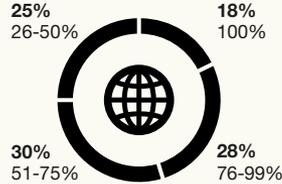
600 CMOs (50% CMOs, 50% other senior eCommerce decision makers) at eCommerce businesses in eight countries interviewed in December 2021 and January 2022.



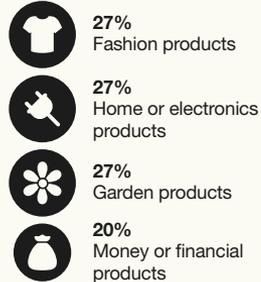
**Companies represented** have on average 2,226 employees, with an annual revenue of \$927m and a marketing spend of \$9m.

11 each from

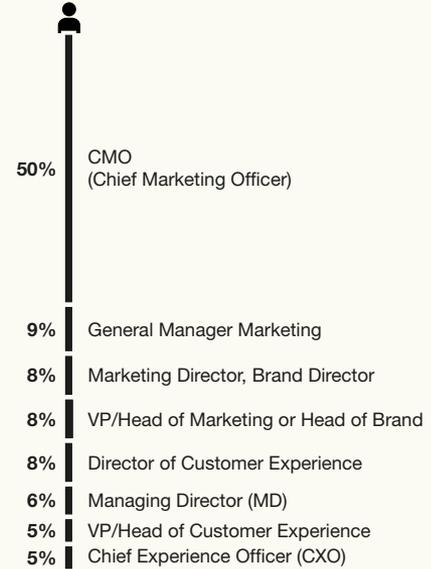
- US
- UK
- Italy
- Netherlands
- France
- Sweden
- Germany
- Australia



## Proportion of sales online



## Product categories



## Job titles

# About Trustpilot

Trustpilot was founded in 2007 with a vision to create an independent currency of trust.

A digital platform that brings businesses and consumers together to foster trust and inspire collaboration, we are free to use, open to everybody, and built on transparency.

Trustpilot hosts reviews to help consumers shop with confidence and deliver rich insights to help businesses improve the experience they offer. The more consumers use our platform and share their own opinions, the richer the insights we offer businesses, and the more opportunities they have to earn the trust of consumers, from all around the world.

Over 144 million consumer reviews of businesses and products from over 626,000 domains have been posted on Trustpilot, and those numbers are growing by more than one review per second.

Trustpilot has over 750 employees and is headquartered in Copenhagen, with operations in London, Edinburgh, New York, Denver, Melbourne, Berlin, Vilnius, Milan, and Amsterdam.

**[Trustpilot.com](https://www.trustpilot.com)**

# About Grist

Grist is a thought leadership agency.

We work with some of the world's leading B2B brands (including PwC, DLA Piper, Mercer, Virgin Money, Cisco, and Google), to fuel our clients' sales pipeline by creating research-driven thought leadership programs that add to the conversation rather than to the noise.

We believe in the power of thought leadership. When it's done well, thought leadership is original, authoritative, and insightful. It differentiates your brand and helps your clients, leading to mutually beneficial commercial opportunities.

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