

Consumer identity, brand reputation and cancel culture

Brands can better navigate cancel culture with a comprehensive understanding of their role in society and in the lives of their consumer base.



Lisa Dubina

Senior Culture and Identity Analyst

March 2021

What is cancel culture and what are the motivations behind it?

In the first report in this series, [Breaking down the cancel culture paradox](#), Mintel establishes the perspective of **cancel culture as the marketplace's consumer-led system of checks and balances** between the entities that have power (ie brands) and those who perceive themselves to not hold power (ie consumers).

Using Mintel's Consumer Trend Drivers, this preceding piece helps explain the motivators and influences behind the phenomenon of cancel culture. This subsequent piece continues Mintel's analysis of cancel culture by looking at the practical impacts for brands and companies.



Mintel thought-piece: [Breaking down the Cancel Culture paradox](#)

For many, shopping with values is here to stay

A driving force behind cancel culture is the growing belief that "you are what you buy." Many consumers have come to see their own buying decisions as representative of their personal ethics and identity. Due to this belief, some consumers seek to hold brands accountable to their values and commitments through cancel culture.

While some consumers are not able or interested in buying according to brands' values, more than half of the population wants to know they are financially supporting brands with values that align with their own. Mintel data shows that **the desire to shop with values is more likely to gain traction** rather than dissipate any time soon, making this an urgent consideration. Understanding the values and expectations of their core audience is a brand's first step in avoiding cancel culture.

Through consumer identity, brands can form a more meaningful, values-based relationship with their consumer

Consumers want brands to behave ethically so they don't need to change their buying behaviors; they want to shop their preferred brands and feel good about it.

ETHICS

69%

of [US consumers](#) say it's important that the brands they buy are ethical

VALUES

61%

of [US consumers](#) say they prefer to be associated with brands and companies that align with their own values

POV

79%

of [US consumers](#) who follow influencers feel it's important the influencers they choose to follow "represent my point of view"

Base: 2,000 internet users aged 18+; 1,000 internet users aged 18+; 1,143 internet users aged 18+ who follow influencers

Source: Lightspeed/Mintel



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Social consciousness is on the rise

In the past year, there has been a notable shift among consumers towards altruism and activism propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic and attention it brought to social justice and pay equity movements.

Ways to demonstrate brand values: supporting employees

Companywide initiatives to promote employee equality, fair treatment and support can help brands substantiate an ethical position.

80%

of [US consumers](#) believe essential workers* are underpaid and underappreciated

71%

of [US consumers](#) agree they would stop buying a brand that does not treat their essential employees fairly

66%

of [US consumers](#) say it's important the brands they buy maintain diversity and inclusion strategies for their employees

Base: 2,000 internet users aged 18+

Source: Lightspeed/Mintel



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Ways to demonstrate brand values: supporting local communities

By supporting local community causes rather than generalized global philanthropic efforts, brands can readily demonstrate the direct impact and benefit to their consumers.

COMMUNITY

43%

of [US consumers](#) are interested in supporting ongoing aid/support to local community (eg local shelter, food bank)

COVID-19 RELIEF

41%

of [US consumers](#) are interested in supporting COVID-19 pandemic relief efforts

ENVIRONMENT

34%

of [US consumers](#) are interested in supporting sustainability efforts

Base: 1,074 internet users aged 18+ who actively support mission-driven brands

Source: Lightspeed/Mintel



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Ways to demonstrate brand values: supporting social justice

BLM SUPPORT

60%

[of Americans](#) say they are more likely to shop a brand that supports the Black Lives Matter movement, than less likely

On May 28, The Black Lives Matter movement [took center stage](#), surpassing social media mentions of COVID-19. Now, **more than half of US adults believe that Black Americans face discrimination and are more likely to be killed by the police than other Americans.** The percentage of Americans who believe racism is a "big problem" has risen 26 points since 2015, as reported by [The New York Times](#).

Understanding the social issues most important and impactful to their consumer base can help brands navigate when it's appropriate, or even expected, for them to speak up or respond to controversial topics or current events.

Base: 2,000 internet users aged 18+

Source: Lightspeed/Mintel; [The New York Times](#), 06/05/2020



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

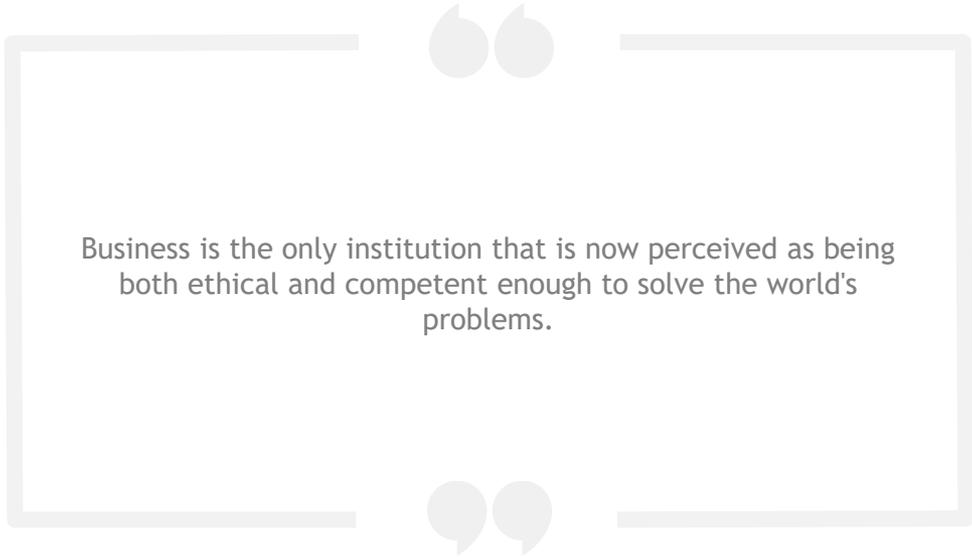
BRAND REPUTATION

By maintaining consistent brand values as part of managing brand reputation, brands can better navigate controversial issues and events in a way that is authentic and appropriate for the brand persona, particularly as brand leadership is increasingly the face of brand values.



The high expectations of businesses to address and solve today's challenges have never been more apparent

Across every type of institution, consumers' trust has fallen to historic lows, and that trust deficit has real-world consequences. Due to the lack of trust in government entities, consumers are now looking to brands to step in and help solve the world's problems. The perceived role brands play in society is growing, and brands can stand out from the pack by meeting these elevated expectations.



Business is the only institution that is now perceived as being both ethical and competent enough to solve the world's problems.

21st annual [Edelman Trust Barometer](#)

With great power comes great responsibility

The majority of consumers not only believe brands *can* solve the world's problems, more than half also feel brands have a *responsibility* to do so.

63%

of [US consumers](#) believe that brands can change society for the better

54%

of [US consumers](#) say companies should clearly define their stance on important matters and issues*

52%

of [Gen Z adults](#) want the brands they use to be involved in **activism**, compared to only 17% of Baby Boomers

Base: 2,000 internet users aged 18+; 268 Gen Z internet users aged 18+; 546 Baby Boomer internet users

Source: Lightspeed/Mintel



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Growing expectation for brand honesty and authenticity

Brand transparency and authenticity are becoming more important. Choosing to downplay or conceal a misstep could hurt a brand more than the mistake itself.

63%

of [US consumers](#) believe brands have a responsibility to be honest about business practices

52%

of [US consumers](#) would stop buying a brand that tried to cover up a scandal

90%

of [US consumers](#) who follow online influencers feel it's important the influencers they follow are authentic

Base: 2,000 internet users aged 18+; 1,143 internet users aged 18+ who follow influencers

Source: Lightspeed/Mintel



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Brand leadership is the face of company values

Consumers are increasingly coming to view brand leadership as an extension of the brand, and will hold brands accountable for their personal actions.

72%

of [US consumers](#) agree that executives' words and actions reflect on the company/brand

60%

of [US consumers](#) feel leaders of companies should publicly demonstrate how they personally support their company's mission

36%

of [LGBTQ+ adults](#) rank "demonstrate a CEO's LGBTQ support" as 1 of the top 3 things brands must do for Pride marketing to be genuine

Base: 2,000 internet users aged 18+; 500 internet users aged 18+ who identify as LGBTQ+

Source: Lightspeed/Mintel



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Navigating consumers' expectations

A divided society demands transparency

America is possibly more divided than ever before, and this ideological division is only amplified by the onslaught of often-conflicting news coverage. Losing faith in political leaders and government institutions, consumers now look to brands with heightened expectations of authenticity and transparency.

Proof is in the pudding

Company leadership and representatives have become evidence of a brand's values and morals. When a CEO or brand representative's words or actions do not align, it renders the brand's altruistic efforts inauthentic. Brands must establish definitive brand principles that can act as a guiding light and a set of guardrails for brand strategies, leadership and representatives.



NAVIGATING CANCEL CULTURE

Mintel believes that brands can take a proactive approach towards accountability culture by deeply understanding their consumers and leveraging their own brand values and ethical positions.



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Leaning into consumer identity and brand reputation is the best way forward

MINIMAL THREAT OF BOYCOTTING

19%

of [US consumers](#) say they actively boycott brands whose purpose does not align with their own values and morals

Committing to a brand position, whether speaking up or staying silent, comes with the risk of alienating some people.

Not all consumers shop by values. There remains a segment of the population who shop only by the utilitarian basics of convenience, price and accessibility. But, when those basics become table stakes, brand values and mission-driven initiatives could help set a brand apart.

Furthermore, Mintel data shows that when consumers do engage with brands, it's more likely to be from a place of positivity rather than negativity. Less than two in 10 consumers say they actively boycott a brand whose values differ from their own, compared to over half who actively support brands with similar values and ethics.

By using consumer identity and an established brand reputation to guide strategy, brands can minimize the risk of backlash while ensuring the support of their primary base.

MINTEL

Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)