



Brands
in *Motion*

The Bravery Mandate:

Fear Less. Do More.

In a fast-changing and fractured world, pleasing everyone isn't possible. **Brands today must have the bravery** to take bold stands and the tenacity to act on those convictions over the long term.

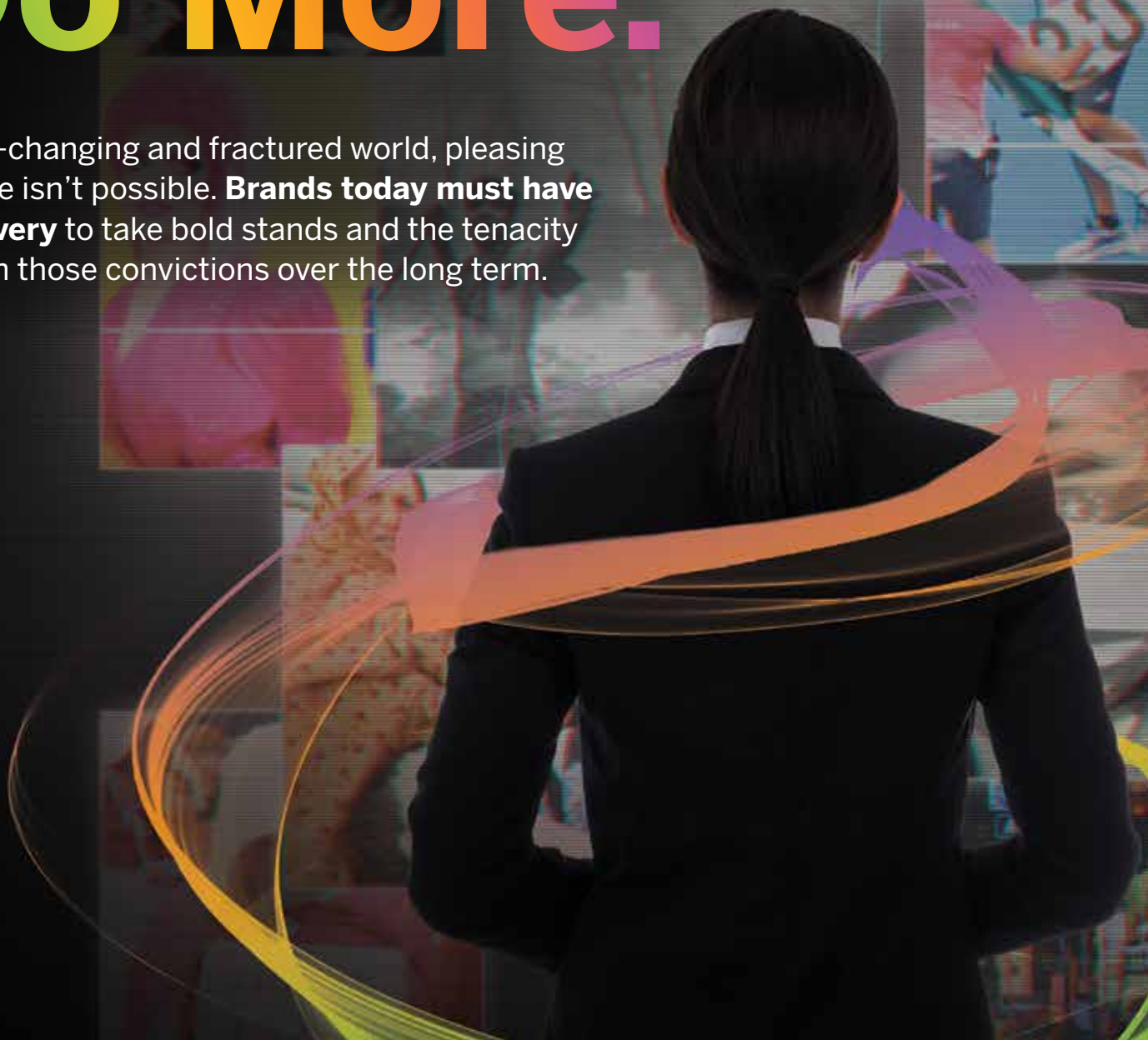


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Executive Summary

We are at an inflection point. The global pandemic, accelerating climate change and social tensions are transforming our lives at warp speed. Yesterday isn't just gone, it's ancient history.

Now more than ever, the times are calling for bold, brave action, and the pressure on brands to deliver is at an all-time high. In the past two years, **the number of people who expect brands to create stability rose by 30%**. At the same time, consumers and B2B decision-makers have grown more skeptical—and even cynical—about purpose-washing than ever. Consumers see through empty statements and expect brands to make committed investments to help a world in crisis.

Managing these conflicting demands takes conviction and courage. Silence isn't an option, and cozy middle ground is shrinking fast. Pleasing everyone isn't possible, but this challenge creates a great opportunity for brands to truly step into their own light and tell the world who they really are.

The Bravery Mandate, a WE Brands in Motion report, finds that the brands that will flourish in 2021 and beyond are the ones with the courage to take bold actions and make strong stances with the full understanding that not everyone will approve. The 2021 study surveyed consumers and B2B decision-makers to develop a data-driven analysis that will help brands tap into that courage and build enduring legacies that can withstand the test of time. It provides the tools to create a purpose platform consistent enough to ground the brand, flexible enough to evolve with the times, and clear enough to navigate the inevitable unknowns.

The clock isn't going to turn back, and difficult issues will keep arising. The way forward is to operate not with fear but curiosity and openness to change. It requires prioritizing employees and local community members and engaging them in deeper and more courageous conversations. These are not times for the timid, but they are a clarion call to those willing to show up with honesty, vulnerability and unblinking authenticity.

Key Stats

30%

The number of consumers and B2B decision-makers expecting brands to **create stability in uncertain times** rose by 30% since 2019—putting them on a par with schools and friend-and-family networks.

Nearly three out of four want brands to make multiyear investments in causes but also reassess their corporate policies at least **every six months**.



52%

Despite rising expectations, brands perceived impact for societal good remains flat, and 52% say that brands that take stances on societal issues are just **trying to sell more products or services**.

Two out of three respondents say they are more likely to purchase or recommend products or services from brands that **address societal issues that matter to them**.



41%

Local leads over global. Forty-one percent expect brands **to focus on making local communities better** versus 5% who prioritize global issues, with 44% saying brands should do both.

Across most sectors, **employee well-being** is the number one issue brands must address to be considered leaders with strong purpose.

#1

A Consumer Revolution

Every year that WE has published a **Brands in Motion report**, consumer expectations of brands have risen. Now in its fifth wave, with over 90,000 collective survey respondents, expectations still increased. Significantly.

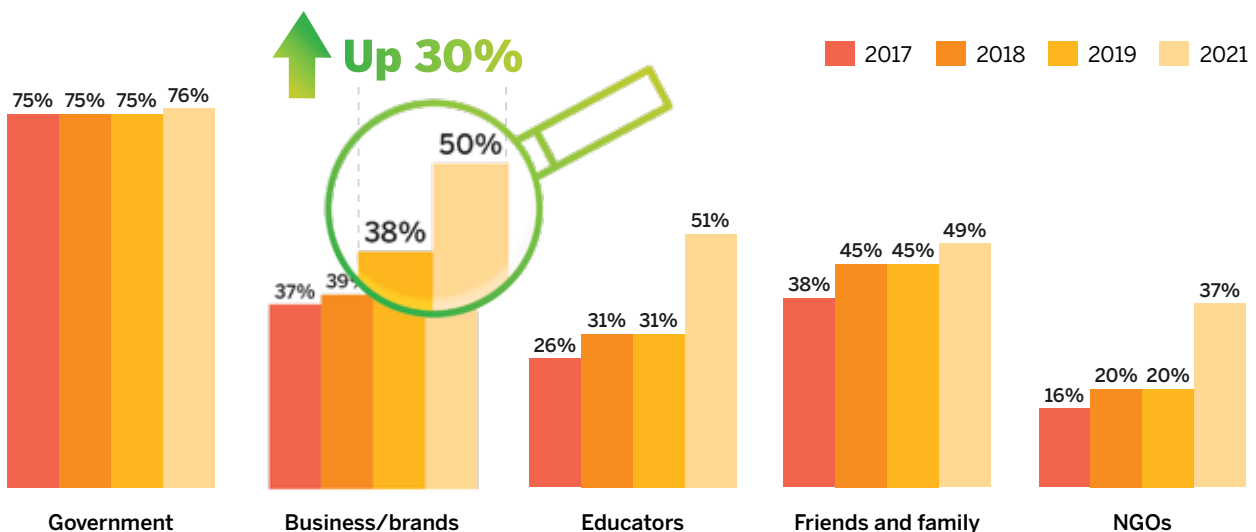
From 2019 to 2021, **the expectation for brands to create stability in uncertain times rose by 30%**. Brands are now as important a pillar of society as educators and friend-and-family networks. That's right: The brands that people purchase their phones and frozen vegetables from now have the same clout as their schools and family members. And every day, consumers and B2B decision-makers vote with their wallets and their budgets. **Two out of three** respondents say they are more likely to purchase or recommend products or services from brands that address societal issues that matter to them.

That's the good news. The tougher news is that **consumer and B2B stakeholders are increasingly skeptical and even cynical**. Despite rising expectations, brands' perceived impact for societal good remains flat, and **52%** say that brands that take stances on societal issues are just trying to sell more products or services.

The audience wants brands to help, but they aren't yet convinced that brands are delivering. The task ahead for brands: Bridge this disconnect.

Expectation for brands to help create stability rose by 30% since 2019.

Entities responsible for stability in uncertain times



Both consumer and B2B audiences are highly attuned to purpose-washing and will call out an insincere or misguided campaign in a heartbeat.

In previous years, **Brands in Motion Global reports** established that consumers expect brands to act with purpose, humanity and authenticity. In 2021, **The Bravery Mandate** provides the current “pulse of purpose” to inform organizations’ decisions on how to speak and act on societal issues and purpose initiatives at a given point.

In some ways, the movement to lead with purpose is a victim of its own success. With more players labeling their work as purposeful, the competition is much stronger, as some brands

...it’s essential that brands are rooted in their own values and are clear about what they stand for

are doing extremely well and setting a high bar. However, many other companies are hopping unthinkingly on the purpose bandwagon, and we are seeing a proliferation of ill-considered campaigns that leave much of the audience feeling jaded and cynical.

Bottom line: Purpose is now a must-have, and it impacts a brand’s immediate commercial outcomes as well as its long-

term legacy. It determines not just which brands will stay viable in the next few years but in the decades to come. That’s why it’s essential that brands are rooted in their own values and are clear about what they stand for—even if part of the audience doesn’t want to hear it. They must then ground those statements in long-term, quantifiable action. General pledges and promises won’t cut it. “In solidarity” social posts won’t help. When you try to please everyone, you satisfy no one.

Case Study: **airbnb**

After U.S. troops withdrew from Afghanistan, Airbnb issued a quick response to the refugee crisis. The home-sharing app partnered with resettlement agencies to fund temporary stays for 20,000 Afghan refugees and waived fees for Airbnb hosts offering refugees their homes for free or at a discount. This speedy response was possible because Airbnb has an established platform that has been providing shelter for people in crisis—from hurricane victims to Covid-19 patients—since 2012.



A Divided Audience

The good news: Two-thirds of stakeholders are open to brands speaking and acting on societal issues. The bad news: One-third think brands should not weigh in.

You will never carry the whole room, a fact clear to anyone who has ever sat in a focus group. That's why **it's critical that brands partner with key stakeholders**—employees, customers, community members—to clarify and develop long-term goals and enduring values. Instead of starting with the expectation of winning 100%, or defaulting to saying nothing, talk to those who want to engage.



Purpose Patrons.

36% Purpose has a high influence on purchase and advocacy.

Matters to Me.

29% Take a passively positive view on purpose overall—except for issues with personal relevance, where they are especially vocal supporters or detractors.

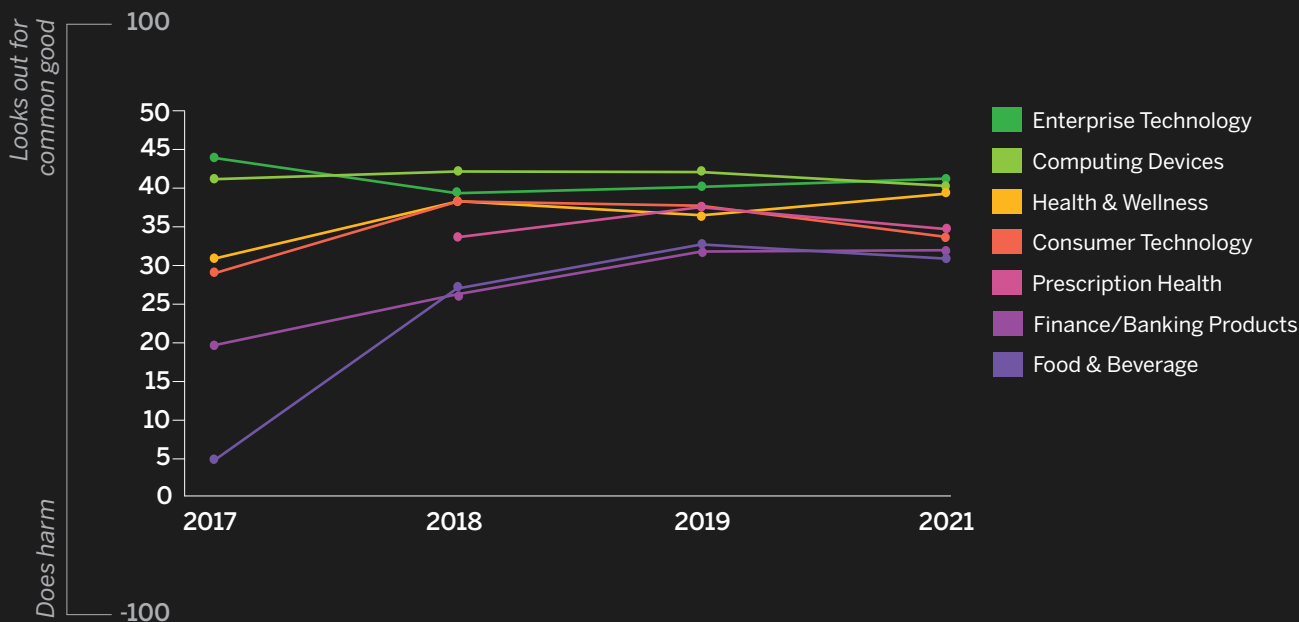


Purpose Cynics.

35% Believe it is not the role of brands to comment or act on societal issues.

Despite rising expectations, brands perceived impact on society remains flat.

Data represents mean scores on a scale of -100 (does harm) to +100 (looks out for common good)



Great Expectations

Expectations for brands' purpose initiatives



Setting the Bearings for Bravery

***Act out, but stay in your lane. Speak out, but don't offend me.
Show us your humanity, but don't make a mistake.***

Today's audience wants it all. In 2021, brands are facing the highest-ever expectations that they do good in the world—and the deepest level ever of cynicism that they're just in it for the money.

In a world where everything is recorded, where the audience has multiple sources of information about how brands are behaving, **the rules have changed**. Organizations can no longer control the message; the only thing they can control is what they say and do.

...it's critical that
brands find their
internal bearings.

That's why it's critical that brands find their internal bearings. This will enable them to both respond in real time when intense issues hit the headlines and maintain the stamina to go the distance.

As the goal posts change and standards mount, many brands feel they're in a continuous cycle of whiplash.



Start on a solid foundation. To withstand the current climate—tumultuous news cycles, rapid-fire social media responses—brands must first ensure their own organizations are in order. Prioritize employee well-being and local community engagement. Working to reduce ocean plastic pollution is important, but it won't mean much if you're not committed to best environmental practices in your backyard.

Don't tell, ask. Your stakeholders expect near constant communication from you, but you can't just point a megaphone in their direction. Your employees and your customers want you to consult them on which societal issues are meaningful to them.

Build on, not away from your core promise. Long-term single-issue investment is the way to build purpose credibility and endurance. Choose projects that extend upon the products or services that your brand offers, programs that build upon your proven authority in the market.

Know when to speak. Understand that the default position for many members of the audience will be skepticism. That's OK, as long as you have the courage of your convictions. You don't have to tweet about every issue that hits the headlines. The world doesn't need another half-formed opinion, but it does need leaders who can bring their expertise to the most pressing issues of the day. Speak on the issues relevant to your sector and your position and show your creds.

Stay the course. Focus your efforts on long-term commitments to initiatives that audiences can see, feel and touch. Present quantifiable impact statements and share this data with stakeholders.

The Celebrity CEO Effect

Now that CEOs like Microsoft's Satya Nadella, Bumble's Whitney Wolfe Herd and DBS Bank's Piyush Gupta are speaking out in a very personal way—and doing so frequently—they have changed the audience's expectations. **Seventy percent of respondents say executives should convey their personal positions to at least one of five different audiences** (employees, social media, customers, shareholders or the media) with very high frequency—from “almost constantly” to every three months.

Many C-suite executives are uncomfortable with this demand, and many brands like Basecamp have announced plans to cease commenting on social issues, calling it a distraction. They have a point. A single social media gaffe can send a communications team into crisis mode for weeks. Can't we just make good shoes ethically and well?

Half of respondents expect senior executives to convey their personal positions with very high frequency.

Delivering quality products and services is absolutely the place where brands must start, but the leaders who believe that communicating on societal issues distracts from the core business are missing a key point: The majority of the audience wants to hear it.

To those CEOs concerned about making a mistake: Don't worry—you will. Whether it's publicly supporting a politician later exposed for unethical conduct, or misunderstanding the perspective of a less privileged group—mistakes happen. Especially in this fast-moving world, you can't know everything all the time. The issue is less about the gaffe than the response. **To maintain long-term trust, executives need to be vulnerable and own their mistakes immediately.** Again, the audience is sophisticated. They know the difference between a sincere apology and corporate damage control and will forgive the former.



C-suite executives who show the courage to communicate frequently and with authenticity—rather than via committee-written platitudes—will stand out as leaders.



Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images

Satya Nadella
Executive Chairman and CEO,
Microsoft

Whitney Wolfe Herd

Founder and CEO, Bumble



Photo by Vivien Killilea/Getty Images for Bumble



REUTERS/Danish Siddiqui

Piyush Gupta
CEO and Director, DBS Group

Strength from Within

Constituents today don't just want to hear about brands' bold purpose initiatives, they want to be part of the conversation. **Eighty-three percent** said brands should listen to stakeholders to decide what issues or impacts to address, and **71%** say brands have an obligation to engage with social/global issues when they impact the business and stakeholders.

Employees can either be a brand's most influential evangelists or devastating critics.

The most important audience: Employees. A brand won't have influence until its employees are on board. If employees don't share a brand's values and interests, they won't give the organization buy in, and the purpose initiatives will fall flat.

Employees can either be a brand's most influential evangelists or devastating critics.

This has always been true, but the pandemic has intensified this principle. Across most sectors, employee well-being and personal needs (physical, mental, financial) rated as the most important issue.

Just as consumers are voting with their wallets, many employees are voting with their feet.

Case Study: LinkedIn

In April 2021 LinkedIn gave all its global employees the week off. Closing the entire company at once meant that employees' breaks wouldn't be interrupted by company emails or project requests. The initiative was a result of LinkedIn's internal infrastructure that keeps the pulse of employee sentiment—surveys revealed that team members were feeling burned out by the stress of the pandemic. Keeping the pulse of internal sentiment meant LinkedIn could listen—and then deliver. Later in 2021, many other brands followed suit.



The Executive Pulse

Ideal frequency of senior executive communications

■ Almost constantly/
Every 1-3 months
 ■ Every
3-6 months
 ■ Yearly or
less often



Senior executives communicate their personal position on societal issues to their **employees**



Senior executives communicate on **social media** about their personal values



Senior executives communicate their personal position on societal issues to their **customers**



Senior executives communicate their personal position on societal issues to their **shareholders**



Senior executives speak with the **media** about their personal values in a business context

Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The pandemic fundamentally changed the relationship many employees—from front-line workers to C-suite working parents—have with their livelihoods, and many are opting not to return to jobs where they felt overworked, underpaid or disrespected.

The task for brands is not simply to attract and maintain talent, but to ensure that the people who work for them feel good about the company, their contributions and the brand's larger purpose—and that they tell their friends. **Respondents rated employees as the group executives need to communicate with the most** (over customers, shareholders and the media). Seventy-four percent said executives should communicate with their employees about their personal position on issues at least every six months.

Senior executives should also look to their staffs when considering which issues to focus on. In addition to the strong majority wanting brands to consult stakeholders before determining what issues to address, 87% said brands have a moral obligation to engage with societal issues when it impacts their employees.

Bottom line: Before brands try to save the world, they must ensure their own organization is in order.

Bottom line: Before brands try to save the world, they must ensure their own organization is in order. You can't run a mental wellness campaign if your managers are sending emails at 3 a.m. You can't fight homelessness or hunger if your front-line workers can't make ends meet. **Purpose starts at home.**

Local Priorities

Respondents expressed a significant interest seeing brands tackle local issues.

Forty-one percent say brands should focus on making their local communities better versus **5%** who say brands should tackle global issues, with **44%** saying brands should do both.

If you want to see the future, look in your own backyard.

People are looking for tailored initiatives that put greater emphasis on local needs that reflect their lived experience. They showed a strong preference for concrete purpose-based initiatives that they can see, feel and touch. When asked the most impactful actions for brands to engage on in the next three to six months, there was a clear preference for concrete actions, such as “investing in technology” or “partnering with educational institutions.” The actions they were least impressed with: “Monetary donations,” “facilitate dialogue across divided groups” and “represent underserved groups in advertising.”

Passive or superficial purpose initiatives won't cut it. Sustainability pledges that won't come due for decades to come aren't nearly enough. The people in your community need to see the impact of your actions with their own eyes.

Case Study: reckitt

Reckitt has engaged in a multi-year mission to improve the health and hygiene of communities in India, where 750 million people live without access to basic sanitation, and more than 120,000 under the age of five die from diarrhea and respiratory infections annually. Reckitt has provided a skill-development training for sanitation workers, and Reckitt brand Dettol launched a hand-washing curriculum for schoolchildren. After the Covid-19 crisis hit, Dettol donated product care packages to 150,000 NHS workers and donated media space to the government to support its vital public health announcements.





The people in your community need to see the impact of your actions with their own eyes.

Expectations for brands to focus on global or local issues in 2021

Tackle Global Issues
Top 2 Box

Make Local Communities Better
Bottom 2 Box



Both
Middle Box

Brands do not need to be involved at all

Case Study: **patagonia**[®]

Patagonia has mastered this complicated dance. The brand is in business to sell outerwear and gear, and it extends its commitment to customers by working to protect our natural world—i.e., the places they will use their products. This long-term commitment gives the brand and its leaders the authority to speak out strongly and quickly when they see threats to the lands and waterways their customers love. They are able to finesse their messaging in accordance with the times. Because the brand is known as a great employer and stellar community citizen, and because it has a long track record as an environmental advocate, it has the power to speak boldly—without hedging or focus-grouping.



Engineering an Enduring Legacy

To be a leading voice on social issues of importance, **58% of respondent say brands must comment very frequently**—at least weekly and in some cases almost constantly.

But wait: Rapid-fire social media responses, tweeted in the moment of hot-button headlines, are exactly what get so many brands into trouble.

Being impulsive isn't brave. Chasing the latest turbocharged news meme isn't brave. Bravery requires determining what you stand for and making deep and sustained investments that back up those values. Stakeholders want constant communication, but they also expect brands to build those purpose platforms on a strong record of focused, long-term investment. Seventy-two percent said they would rather see brands make long-term investments in one issue or cause rather than switch causes each year.

Bravery requires determining what you stand for and making deep and sustained investments...

This does not mean picking a cause and letting it run its course. **Nearly three out of four stakeholders say brands should reassess their communications** in light of social issues at least every six months..



...the audience expects brands to focus on issues relevant to their sector.

Becoming a leader on societal issues is both a marathon and a sprint.

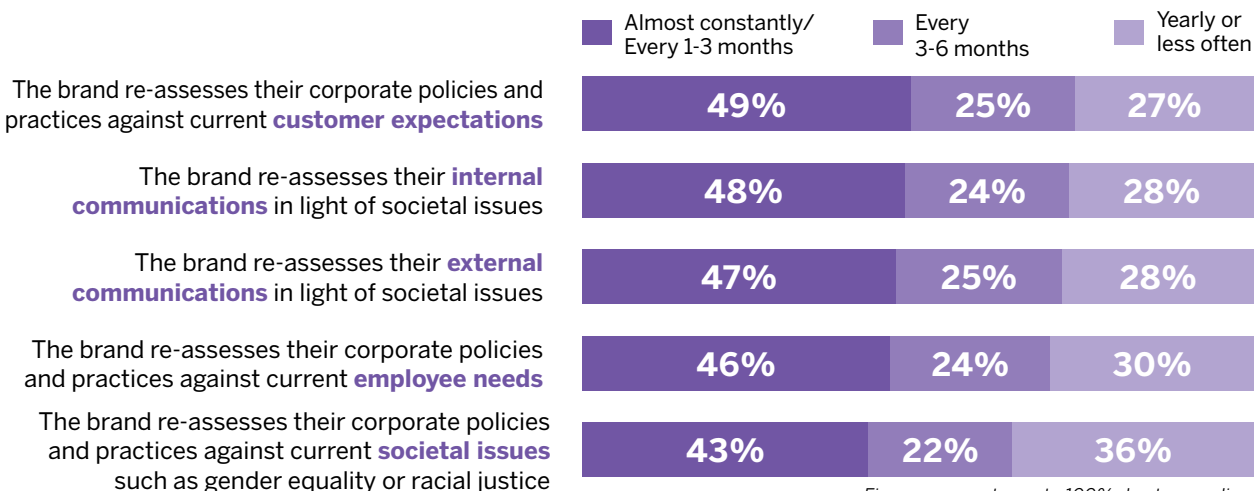
It requires the agility to respond to events in real time, and the endurance to maintain sustained, long-term commitments.

The Brands in Motion data shows that the audience expects brands to focus on issues relevant to their sector. For example, in the health sector, “access to health” and “mental health care” are priorities. Whereas in the tech sector, “digital inequality” rose to the fore. In other words, build on, not away from your core brand promise.

Building an authentic purpose legacy means moving away from instant gratification of a hot take tweet or flash campaign and instead making meaningful long-term investments in the issues stakeholders care about most. Investments that get buy-in from the entire organization are regularly reviewed and measured.

The Pulse of Purpose

Ideal frequency for brands to re-assess purpose policies and communications



Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The Future of Purpose

Gen Z and millennial respondents had a greater desire to hear brands speak out on societal issues than older generations. Re-engineering for the future requires building a purpose platform and being prepared to engage on provocative issues as they arise.

	I am more likely to purchase products or services from a brand if it is a leader on addressing societal issues that are important to me.	I am more likely to recommend products or services from a brand if it is a leader on addressing societal issues that are important to me.
Gen Z	70%	68%
Millennials	70%	71%
Gen X	64%	64%
Baby Boomers	58%	57%
Silent Generation	58%	58%



Gen Z



Millennials



Gen X



Baby Boomers



Silent Generation

A Call to Resolve Deep, Complex Problems

Income inequality and climate change rated as two of the top issues for respondents. The audience is demanding real action on extremely difficult topics—superficial statements or one-off projects aren't sufficient.

Top Issues to Be Considered a Leader of Strong Values/Purpose

- Employee personal needs (physical, mental, financial well-being)
- Income/employment inequality
- Education opportunities/inequalities
- Inequity/access to health care
- Climate change/environmental sustainability
- Human rights violations

Case Study: **VOLVO**

Pledging to reduce carbon emissions by some faraway decade is easy. Implementing the policies that will get a brand there is hard. Volvo has been very transparent about its multi-pronged strategy to be climate neutral by 2040. Every new Volvo model launched since 2019 is available with an electric or hybrid powertrain. All of Volvo's European plants have run on hydro-electric power since 2008, and the company's global plants are powered by over 80% climate neutral energy. Volvo is building on its brand promise of prioritizing safety, stating "Climate change is the ultimate safety test."





Where to Connect

Although the younger Gen Z/millennial cohort is highly engaged in interactivity of social media, traditional forms of communication are still considered highly effective across generations.

The top three channels for communicating with consumers and B2B are:

- Press release/media statement
- Television/media interview with CEO
- Brand posts on company's social media

History is happening. Brands need to ask themselves, “Which side are we on? What will our legacy be?”

Appendix:

Brands in Motion Methodology


The **WE Brands in Motion report** is a worldwide study of how perceptions shift over time conducted by WE and YouGov. Now in its fifth year, Brands in Motion has surveyed 90,000+ consumers and B2B decision-makers about their attitudes regarding:

- Expectations for brand actions and investments
- Forces affecting the market on a macro level
- Expectations for purpose initiatives
- Industries

WE Brands in Motion report 2021: The Bravery Mandate

- 2021 Total respondents: 8,353
- Evenly split between consumers and B2B decision-makers

YouGov conducted the Brands in Motion global study using an online interview administered to panelists who had agreed to take part in surveys. Respondents to the survey were 18 years of age or older, did not work in advertising/PR/marketing/market research, and were qualified to rate one of the categories based on purchase history and purchase intent. A total of 8,353 responses were collected across eight markets between May and June of 2021.



...surveyed 90,000+ consumers and B2B decision-makers

Eight markets:

US/EMEA

United States: 1,053

United Kingdom: 1,073

Germany: 1,058

South Africa: 1,030

APAC

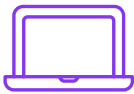
Australia: 1,033

China: 1,012

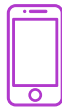
India: 1,040

Singapore: 1,054

Eight categories



Computing Devices



Consumer Technology



Enterprise Technology



Finance/Banking



Health & Wellness



Health Technology



Prescription Health



Food & Beverage

Demographics

Consumer

Male: 44% (N=1,927)

Female: 56% (N=2,470)

Gen Z (18-24): 19% (N=854)

Millennials (25-39): 21% (N=919)

Gen X (40-54): 23% (N=1,026)

Baby Boomer/Silent (55+): 37% (N=1,598)

B2B

Male: 56% (N=2,229)

Female: 44% (N=1,728)

Gen Z (18-24): 12% (N=473)

Millennials (25-39): 47% (N=1,872)

Gen X (40-54): 27% (N=1,083)

Baby Boomer/Silent (55+): 13% (N=528)

Your Brand in Motion

Our world is constantly changing. Brands in Motion reports provides data-driven tools that will help you develop the agility to respond to disruptions and the stability to build an enduring legacy.

To learn more about Brands in Motion or find out about Brands in Motion events in your area, contact WE:

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WE | Brands in ***Motion***

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your brand
and your stories are in motion.

WE helps you go the distance.

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