

# Consumers Expect the Brands They Support to be Socially Responsible

QUANTITATIVE SURVEY | SEPTEMBER 2019 | CONDUCTED BY CERTUS INSIGHTS

# Methodology

**DATE CONDUCTED:** August 13, 2019–August 16, 2019

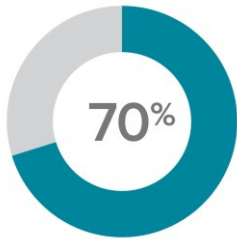
**SAMPLE SIZE:** 600 nationally representative U.S. adults age 18+

**METHODOLOGY:** Online Survey

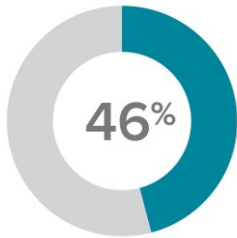
**A new survey of Americans finds that corporate social responsibility is important to the buying decisions of many consumers, but that there is skepticism about the sincerity of these efforts. The survey was conducted by Certus Insights for Markstein.**

# Overview of Key Findings

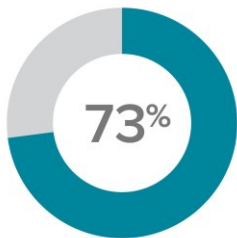
## CONSUMERS FIND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY EFFORTS IMPORTANT



say they want to know what the brands they support are doing to address social and environmental issues

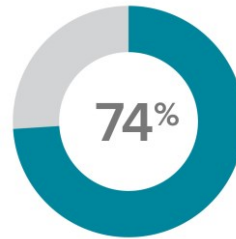


say they pay close attention to a company's efforts to be socially responsible when they decide to buy something

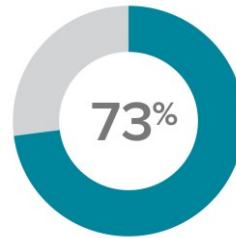


Agree that their expectations around social responsibility are the same for small companies as large companies

## CONSUMERS ARE HIGHLY SKEPTICAL OF CORPORATE MOTIVATIONS

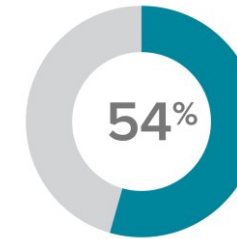


agree that when big corporations donate to charities and help with community projects, they're doing it more to make themselves look good and less to actually help people in need

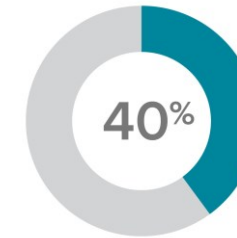


agree that when major corporations talk about their charity and community work, they are often compensating for bad customer service

## IT IS INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO AVOID PARTISAN ASSOCIATIONS



think that a major company has gone too far in its support of social activism when it gets involved in partisan politics



think that when they hear that a company is a socially responsible or purpose-driven company, they guess the company leans to the Democratic side of the political spectrum

# Consumers Want to Know What the Brands They Support Are Doing to Address Social and Environmental Issues

- Consumers are interested in knowing more about the social responsibility efforts of their preferred brands:
  - **70%** say they want to know what the brands they support are doing to address social and environmental issues.
  - **46%** of all consumers (and **51%** of millennials) say they pay close attention to a company's efforts to be socially responsible when they decide to buy something. Only **17%** say they don't pay attention at all.

A recent study by the NYU Stern Center for Sustainable Business found **50%** of consumer product growth between 2013–2018 came from sustainability-marketed products. Products marketed as sustainable grew **5.6x** faster than those that weren't.

# But Consumers are Skeptical

- But, when consumers are paying attention, they are not always willing to take companies at their word when they say they are socially responsible—**9%** say they believe corporate claims about social responsibility “all the time” and another **67%** believe them “some of the time.” There is a generational difference—only **2%** of Boomers believe companies “all the time” compared to **19%** of Millennials.
- Consumers question motivations behind efforts to demonstrate social responsibility. Nearly three-quarters agree that when corporations donate to charities and help with community projects, they’re doing it more to make themselves look good and less to help people in need.

**“When it comes to social responsibility, consumers are looking for brands to show them—not just tell them—what they’re doing,” said Sheila McLean, president of Markstein, mid-Atlantic.**

# Younger Consumers Are More Willing to Pay Higher Prices for Environmental Initiatives

- **Environmental initiatives** is an area where Millennials are more tolerant of price increases. **44%** of them agree that a company they do business with should support environmental initiatives all the time, even it means raising prices a little. However, **47%** think companies should support environmental initiatives only if they can pay for it without raising prices. Older generations are less tolerant of price increases for environmental initiatives—**28%** of Gen X and **35%** of Boomers think companies should support them even it means raising prices.



# Brand Involvement in Partisan Politics Goes Too Far for Many

- Most consumers want companies to stay clear of partisan politics in their social activism. **54%** think a company has “gone too far” in its support of social activism when it gets involved in partisan politics.
- Many Americans view corporate social activism as having a partisan skew. **40%** of Americans surveyed say when they hear that a company is socially responsible or a “purpose-driven company,” they guess that the company leans Democratic, compared to **13%** who assume it leans Republican. **25%** assume that a socially responsible or purpose-driven company leans to neither side.
  - When asked about specific issues, many consumers make assumptions about the politics of the company. Consumers believe a company leans Democratic when it’s active on issues related to poverty and employment opportunities (**43%**), the “Me Too” movement (**50%**), social justice and equality (**55%**), and environmental and sustainability (**48%**).





# Individuals, Not Corporations, Will Drive Social Change

- **Consumers aren't looking at business to be the primary drivers of social change.** Instead, they look to individual citizens as the most likely to drive social change. While **12%** look to social media companies to drive social change, only **6%** look to large companies and **5%** look to small companies.
  - Older generations are more inclined to look to individuals—**34%** of Boomers versus **17%** of Millennials.
  - Another interesting finding: **73%** of Americans say their expectations around social responsibility are the same for small companies as large companies.





# The Implications for Brands

- Align with your **core customers** and **employees values**
- Stay focused on initiatives that deliver **true impact**
- Leverage data analytics to build **emotional connections**
- Share **key learnings** and **challenges**

# About Us

## About Markstein

Markstein, an integrated communications agency, blends art and science to craft custom solutions to business challenges. Our insights-driven partnership model is built on extensive diagnosis, creative strategies and vigilant performance measurement. While our approach enables our partners to achieve their goals, our inspiration lies in the belief that helping solve complex problems, be it business, legislative or societal, can change the world for the better. Markstein was founded in 2003 and serves clients nationwide from its Birmingham, Alabama, and Washington, D.C. offices. To learn more visit [markstein.co](http://markstein.co). member/employee research. To learn more visit [CertusInsights.com](http://CertusInsights.com).

## About Certus

Certus Insights is a full-service research firm based in the Washington, D.C. area. We are industry-leading experts in helping clients answer important strategical and tactical questions through quantitative, qualitative, and analytical methods. Certus Insights are experts in public opinion, message development, reputation, media share of voice, social media analytics, elite opinion makers, and member/employee research. To learn more visit [CertusInsights.com](http://CertusInsights.com).

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