

MARKETING

Brands turn marketing strategies into get out the vote' campaigns

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Saks Fifth Avenue allowed customers to register to vote at its NY Flagship store. Image credit: Saks Fifth Avenue

By NORA HOWE

As the United States braces for one of the most pivotal elections in its history, many labels and retailers have shifted their marketing messaging to political rhetoric.

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The events and movements of this year including COVID-19, Black Lives Matter and climate change have contributed to a drastic cultural and emotional shift across the world. This U.S. election season, especially, has inspired discourse regarding the value of voting and brands are taking part in the conversation.

"Many consumers, especially those of high-end brands, want the brands that they use eat, drink, wear, shop at to say something about them through their use," said Deb Gabor, CEO and founder of [Sol Marketing](#) and author of *Irrational Loyalty: Building a Brand That Thrives in Turbulent Times*. "They require that their use of a particular brand tells a story that accurately reflects what they're trying to show the world."

Wearing the vote

From assisting customers with voter registration to selling "Vote" face masks, retailers and brands have rolled out a multitude of campaigns and collections encouraging customers to become involved in the democratic process.

In September, U.S. department store Saks Fifth Avenue launched "Register to Vote at Saks" at its flagship store and online. From Sept. 22 through Oct. 9, customers were able to visit the second floor of the department store to register to vote, complete absentee ballot applications and check registration status.

Saks is also making Election Day a paid holiday for all of its U.S. corporate associates and will help associates in stores and fulfillment centers coordinate schedules ensuring they have time to vote at the polls, if necessary. Similarly, New York-based designer Tory Burch announced in September that the company would compensate workers who volunteer or work at the polls, encouraging individuals to be active participants in the voting process..



Nordstrom launches the "Make Your Voice Heard" campaign. Image credit: Nordstrom

U.S. department store Bloomingdale's debuted a campaign called "Vote" and partnered with WarnerMedia to launch a limited-edition face mask emblazoned with the word VOTE created by director and producer Allen Hughes. Part of the proceeds from the sale of the face mask will go to the When We All Vote nonprofit organization (see story).

Other retailers are encouraging civic responsibility through storytelling.

LVMH-owned beauty retailer Sephora recently released a new installment of its "Stories of Belonging" video series. The new episode features a young woman, Danielle, who is the first black female student body president at her university in 159 years.

"It's so important to vote to make your voice heard to realize the impact you can have," Danielle says in the film. Throughout the series, Sephora features a multitude of individuals, celebrating diverse communities and inclusivity.

Stories of Belonging: Danielle (Voting)

Department store Nordstrom launched a campaign in partnership with non-profit When We All Vote and National Urban League as well as a "Vote" collection of apparel and accessories. The campaign encourages customers to make a plan for voting and provides information for voting by mail.

American fashion designer Christian Siriano released his "vote" dress from the spring 2021 collection and celebrities including Julianne Moore and Lizzo are already wearing the creation.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Monday morning message is to VOTE!! Such an honor to have an actress and activist who I admire so much @julianne Moore to be the first to wear our new collection. Fashion can be beautiful and powerful and we will see you all on November

3rd at the polls. Thank you Julianne! #bidenharris2020

A post shared by Christian Siriano (@csiriano) on Oct 5, 2020...

While there is no data proving these campaign efforts directly affect voter participation, it is worth considering how consumers might shift behavior and loyalty when their favorite brands, designers and celebrities advocate for these movements or do not advocate, for that matter.

"Many fashion and luxury brands are in the mix this season because they see that there's a greater risk associated with not participating a fear that consumers might see them as having no opinion, misaligned values, or worse yet, something to conceal from customers," Ms. Gabor said.

"When brands think about getting into the political fray, they should be thoughtfully prepared to be misunderstood or judged and must have prepared responses that demonstrate that they have a clear and, perhaps more importantly, unwavering point of view that isn't about paying lip service, but actually living the values of their brand," she said.

Responsible fashion

As social, environmental and economic landscapes shift, millennials and Gen Z are increasingly holding brands accountable and looking for brands who have aligned with their values.

British fashion label Stella McCartney is amplifying the voices of BIPOC women on the topic of social and environmental change through a recent video series. The series deeply examines the issues that inspire these changes and amplifies the voices of women who advocate for this growth ([see story](#)).

According to a recent report from the Lyst Index, consumers are seeking labels with labels with buoyant creative energy and a purpose that resonates.

For example, Liberian-American fashion label Telfar, a Black-owned brand that stood for inclusivity long before the Black Lives Matter movement, has the hottest product in the world this quarter the shopping bag. Telfar has been well placed to capture the increase in purpose-driven shopping, with demand for the bag spiking 270 percent ([see story](#)).

"Fashion brands often appeal to people who see themselves as trailblazers, pioneers and early adopters, who are probably more likely to want the brands they wear and use to tell a similar story about them," Ms. Gabor said. "Many brands have found that when they do and say the "right thing" as judged by their most loyal customers, their brands grow."

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