




America *In Motion*

How Brands Can Take a Stand in a Divided Country



WE Insight & Analytics
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Executive Summary

In 2017, WE Communications released Brands in Motion, primary research on broad consumer views to ground the idea that brands are in motion relative to their geography, their industry – and the stakeholders critical to their success. By rejecting the notion of static brand positioning and measuring motion at all three of these levels, brands can create the momentum they desire, speak authentically to their audiences and stakeholders, and drive their story.

No better example of this constant motion can be found than in the aftermath of the 2016 election, when brands operating in the United States found themselves facing a new and powerful array of disruptive forces and environmental factors. The polarization of the American public that has resulted has become incredibly challenging for many brands to navigate.

Tech-enabled psychographics have helped brands target audiences with great specificity and get a pulse on this motion, but in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, have become a highly debated privacy issue. The notion of filter bubbles and psychographic targeting raises significant questions on the path forward for true engagement with brands and their consumers.

Many consumers are looking to brands to provide stability in the uncertainty and chaos that surrounds them. This may mean taking a stand on important issues, and it also may mean being that constant touchstone to provide much needed grounding in all the swirl.

But how do brands do this in a nation that is so divided, when taking a stand runs the risk of alienating parts of your audience, or even sparking a backlash? One potential strategy to consider is connecting to the core values that audiences share as a way to provide stability while mitigating the risk of weighing in on a political issue. Sitting alongside traditional demographics and tech-enabled psychographics, a values lens may provide a new dimension for segmenting audiences and messaging, one that can help marketers understand what may polarize their audiences – or move them to action.

America in Motion

Brands step into the political divide

To understand the opportunity, one first needs to examine what has transpired since arguably one of the most unpopular presidents in the modern era took office.¹

Trump was immediately polarizing. Within his first one hundred days in office, President Trump signed three executive orders on immigration and refugees that brought questions about human rights to center stage.² The president issued executive orders that overturned President Obama's plan to slash carbon emissions,³ and he signed into law H.J.Res 43, which removed certain fiscal protections for groups like Planned Parenthood.⁴

Brands' reactions to President Trump's early executive actions ranged from silence to fury.

Companies such as Microsoft, Amazon, Expedia, Airbnb, Uber, Lyft, Facebook and Google have either expressed concerns or their opposition toward Trump's travel ban.⁵

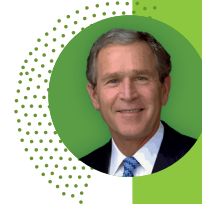
Patagonia took a clear stance against the Trump administration's decision to shrink Bears Ears National Monument and Grand Staircase-Escalante.⁶ Patagonia President and CEO Rose Marcario, an outspoken conservationist, responded to the cuts by creating a digital platform called Patagonia Action Works that connects customers to local grassroots organizations working to save the planet.

These are examples of brands operating with purpose, taking what could be considered a partisan stand based on their brand values and what they believe their brands represent to their customers.

Three key takeaways in WE Communications' Brands in Motion study speak to the opportunities brands have during these turbulent times.



APPROVAL RATING AFTER ONE YEAR IN OFFICE⁷



83%



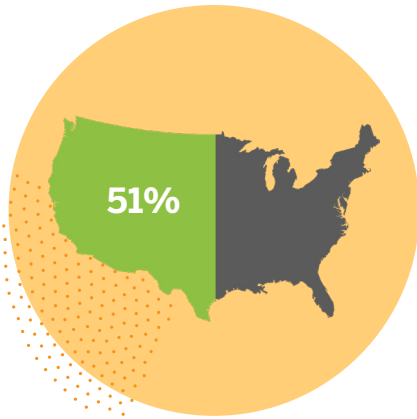
54%



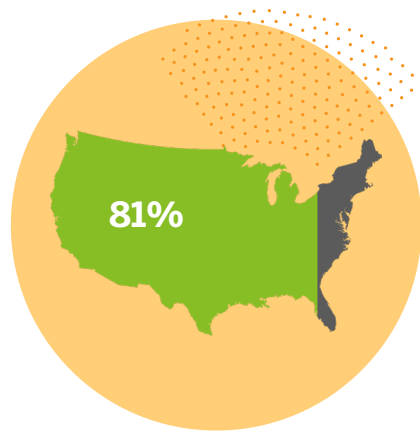
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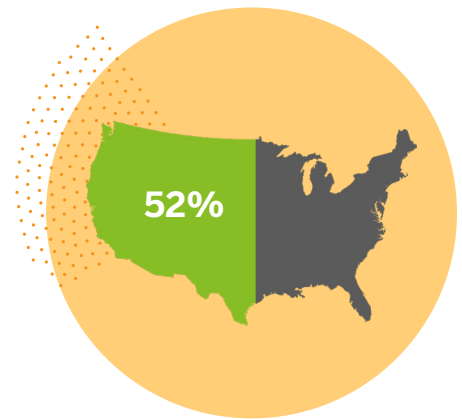
39%



51% of respondents in the U.S. said they are more likely to support a brand that both delivers a product with a high level of functionality and demonstrates a high level of purpose.



81% of consumers asked said that brands have the capability to provide stability in a climate of uncertainty.



52% of respondents said they believe brands should take a stand on important issues.

There is not only a permission slip for brands to step into the dialogue and lead (especially when they don't see media, government or education sufficiently filling that role), but an expectation that brands stand for something greater than just having a good product or service.

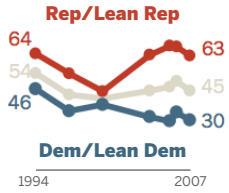
But many brands are cautious, and for good reason. After all, by taking a stand, they run the risk of cutting themselves off from segments of their audience that may not agree with that stance. How should brands navigate this political divide?

The first thing communicators need to understand is that polarized political discourse isn't going anywhere. Pew Research in October of 2017⁸ illustrates that "the gap between the political values of Democrats and Republicans is now larger than at any point documented in Pew Research Center surveys dating back to 1994."

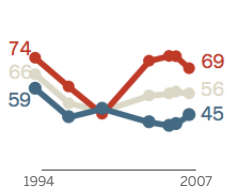
Growing gaps between Republicans and Democrats across domains

% who say...

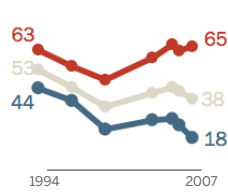
Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good



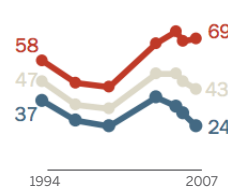
Government is almost always wasteful & inefficient



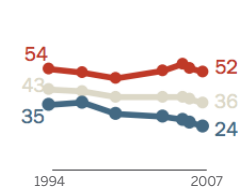
Poor people have it easy because they can get benefits without doing anything in return



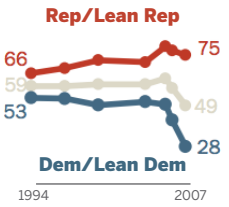
The government today can't afford to do much more to help the needy



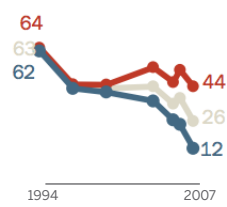
Most corporations make a fair and reasonable amount of profit



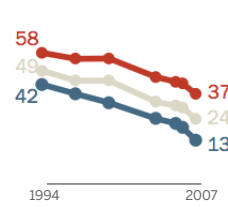
Blacks who can't get ahead in this country are mostly responsible for their own condition



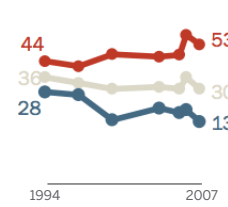
Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing and health care



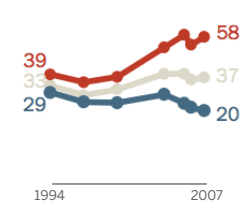
Homosexuality should be discouraged by society



The best way to ensure peace is through military strength



Most corporations make a fair and reasonable amount of profit



The nation is polarized, and all signs point to the problem getting worse. But as the Brands in Motion data suggests, during uncertain times brands have an opportunity to provide stability. Burying your head in the sand and trying to stay out of the fray is not going to win hearts and minds of consumers.

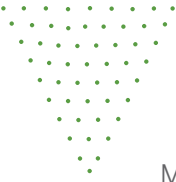
To understand how their messages will be received, brands need to understand where their audiences are likely to fracture along political lines and where they're not. This means examining customers through as many lenses as possible.



Demographics **GIVE** **WAY** to Psychographics

There is as much diversity in our nation as there are types of BBQ sauce, tastes in music and preference in college football teams. Consumers don't fit neatly into categories, and traditional demographics are a thing of the past.

The days of guessing at how a person voted, what they read, or what they do in their spare time by bucketing them into broad demographics like gender, race, household income or place of residence are over. Communicators now have access to much finer instruments to help them target the right people with the right message.



Marketers, pollsters, location planners and others have used demographic data to segment audiences for at least as long as the census has been available. A demographic slice might look like Asian males, 35–54, with a household income of \$100,000+. If this group were to make up a certain percentage of a location's population or a television show's viewership, then brands and marketers who wanted to reach this audience would build campaigns and deploy them in those geographies or on those programs.

What demographics fail to provide are audience interests and aspirations. If demographics answer the question “Who’s buying?” then psychographics helps to answer the question “Why are they buying?” Before big data, determining the “why” required expensive and time-consuming primary research, but now more companies than ever have access to valuable psychographic data, mostly thanks to the social media platforms that have unintentionally reinvented advertising as we know it.

Social media companies gather massive amounts of data on the behavior of their users, ethical use policies notwithstanding. Some of this indicates useful psychographic information — users' interests, activities and opinions. Looking to increase revenue, social media companies made psychographic information and audience segmenting tools available at scale, allowing marketers to target specific subgroups of people by interest, attitude, lifestyle and more.

But here in 2018, social media is an environment in turbulent motion. The recent Facebook scandal highlighted both the depth of this data and how it can be used to push a political agenda and further divide the country. U.S. legislators are now considering regulating the ways tech companies collect, share, and use data. Even before that, fake news, Russian meddling, bots, platform algorithm changes⁹ and companies like Unilever reconsidering their social media ad buys altogether had thrown the industry into chaos.

And brands looking to provide stability need to be especially careful: Although social media's laser-precise psychographic targeting has helped communicators reach the right people with the right messages, it's also quickly becoming a trigger point for conversations around privacy, and is one of the main contributors to the division happening in America today.

RISE of the Filter Bubble

In the wake of the 2016 elections, many criticized Facebook for apparent oversights. They hadn't stopped Russian groups from buying political ads to sway races in the U.S. Their psychographic targeting had allowed a then largely unknown Cambridge Analytica to target political messages with unheard of specificity. Misinformation, disinformation and polarizing messages were spread by a phenomenon dubbed the "filter bubble."

The creator of that term, internet activist Eli Pariser, defines a filter bubble as "the personal universe of information that you live in online — unique and constructed just for you" by information such as your location, past click-behavior, and search history.¹⁰ Although filter bubbles are built to maximize clicks, they also tend to isolate users in their own cultural and ideological bubbles.

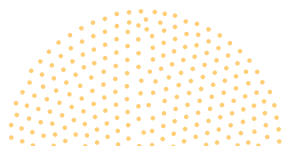
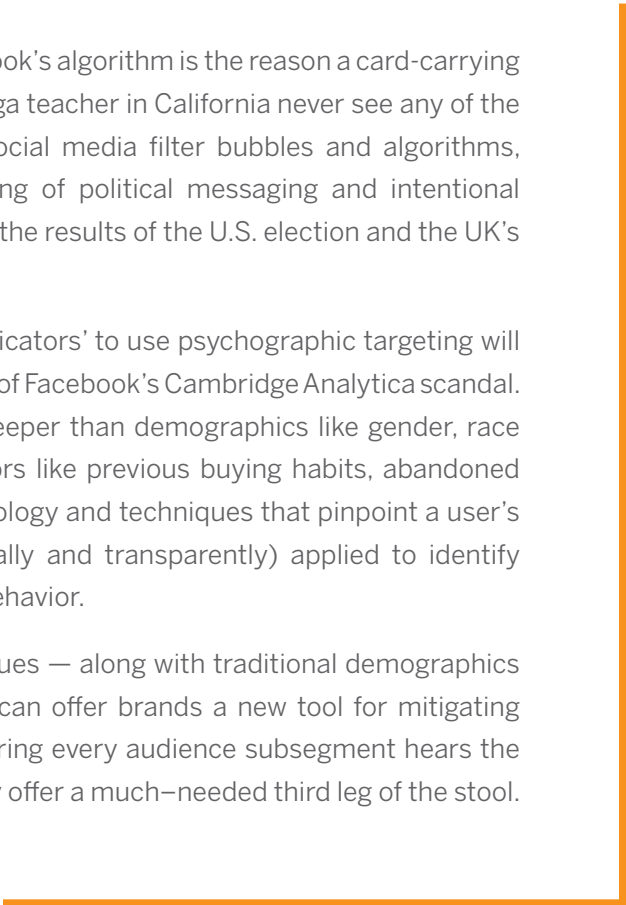


What's good for brands is bad for exposing users to a wide array of perspectives.

The filter bubble caused by Facebook's algorithm is the reason a card-carrying NRA member in West Virginia and a yoga teacher in California never see any of the same content. Experts believe that social media filter bubbles and algorithms, combined with psychographic targeting of political messaging and intentional misinformation campaigns, influenced the results of the U.S. election and the UK's Brexit vote.¹¹

The ability for marketers and communicators' to use psychographic targeting will undoubtedly be impacted by the fallout of Facebook's Cambridge Analytica scandal. One potential path forward: looking deeper than demographics like gender, race and religion or psychographic indicators like previous buying habits, abandoned carts and page views. The same technology and techniques that pinpoint a user's interests and attitudes can be (ethically and transparently) applied to identify personal principles and standards of behavior.

Segmenting audiences using these values — along with traditional demographics and ethical use of psychographics — can offer brands a new tool for mitigating the danger of taking a stand and ensuring every audience subsegment hears the message most likely to resonate. It may offer a much-needed third leg of the stool.








VALUES: A New Lens

Values are a person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life. It is through values that brands have an opportunity to look past their customers' racial, gender and income differences and focus on the deep attitudes and beliefs that drive their behavior.


And values may be able to give insight that demo- and psychographics cannot, or at least put context around a specific insight. "The belief that we have reached a very sophisticated stage in data gathering and analysis has been shattered," Chuck Porter, chairman and co-founder of Crispin, Porter + Bogusky told Adweek.¹² "If most analysts were so wrong about Trump and Brexit, are they really right about your airline or your car brand or your cereal?" What could looking at these same audiences through the lens of values reveal?

CEB (now Gartner) surveyed a total of 93 values in its Iconoculture Values and Lifestyle Survey (2017).¹³ The survey included such values as "access," "purpose," "ambition," "reliability," "conscience," "romance," "diversity" and "wisdom." When segmented and ranked by political affiliation, one can begin to understand why national discourse feels so divided.

DRIVERS FOR Liberal Consumers

 VALUE	VALUE STATEMENT	 LIBERAL RANK	 CONSERVATIVE RANK
Equality	I strongly believe that all people should have equal opportunity and equal access in all areas of life.	1	18
Sustainability	I strongly believe that people and businesses should use our planet's resources responsibly to sustain current and future generations.	2	45
Inclusion	I believe equal consideration and inclusion of others advances the culture.	3	62
Diversity	I am always open to ideas, people and cultures that are different from my own.	13	59

DRIVERS FOR Conservative Consumers

 VALUE	VALUE STATEMENT	 CONSERVATIVE RANK	 LIBERAL RANK
Integrity	I actively follow a strong set of moral or ethical principles that give me the courage to do what is right.	8	27
Belief	My beliefs give me strength and comfort.	12	59
Duty	I believe it is my duty to fulfill my obligations to family, friends, community and country.	16	53
Patriotism	I am very proud of and actively support my country.	21	82

This data suggests that brands who build campaigns leveraging values such as equality, sustainability, inclusion and diversity are likely to find strong support among liberal consumers, but less among conservatives. If a brand builds messaging around values such as integrity, beliefs, duty or patriotism, it may land well with conservatives but fall flat with liberals.

But there are a number of other values that aren't exclusive to Democrats or Republicans. Shared values such as authenticity, conscience, wisdom and serenity provide brands with particularly strong opportunities to generate cross-aisle appeal.

Shared Drivers

 VALUE	VALUE STATEMENT	 LIBERAL RANK	 CONSERVATIVE RANK
Authenticity	Being genuine and authentic is extremely important for me and for the things and people in my life.	5	6
Conscience	My inner sense of right and wrong always helps me to do the right thing.	7	15
Wisdom	I continually call on my knowledge and experience to make wise decisions.	17	18
Serenity	I seek out calm, peaceful and tranquil surroundings and situations.	24	25

Using Values: An Apolitical Approach

Identifying a single shared value that's authentic to your brand and building a campaign around it can be an apolitical way to earn your audience's love. Big brands often rely on this tactic in their advertisements, especially for campaigns built around tent-pole events like the Super Bowl or the Academy Awards.

Kraft's 2018 Family Greatly Super Bowl commercial¹⁴ is a cheesy example (pun intended) of a brand doubling down on the value of family. Without using words, Nike's recent Air campaign,¹⁵ speaks to values that are authentic to the brand and championed by its customers: authenticity, excellence, fitness, and self-actualization.

Next time you see a commercial from Budweiser, General Motors or Coca-Cola, consider how iconic brands tap into values-based marketing to highlight their audience's similarities.

Using Values: Taking A Stand

Using values as a lens through which to approach political topics can be trickier. For an example of a company doing it right, let's revisit Patagonia's "The President stole your land" campaign.

In the CEB study, support for the value of environmentalism fell along party lines—liberals ranked it their 31st most important value; conservatives ranked it 80th out of 93. Patagonia customers, however, would almost certainly rank it highly regardless of political affiliation (i.e., conservatives who shop at Patagonia are obviously outdoor enthusiasts and likely use public land). Patagonia knows that they can safely speak about conservation, even in starkly political terms, without upsetting too many of their current customers.

The image shows a black rectangular advertisement for Patagonia. At the top left, the Patagonia logo is visible. The main title, "The President Stole Your Land", is written in large, white, serif font. Below the title, a paragraph of white text reads: "In an illegal move, the president just reduced the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. This is the largest elimination of protected land in American history." At the bottom center, there is a white button with the text "Take Action Now". Below the button, the URL "http://www.patagonia.com/protect-public-lands.html" is displayed. The advertisement is set against a background of a grey shape with green and yellow dotted patterns.

Creating value-based campaigns cannot be taken lightly. Market research must be triple-checked and creative needs to present the values as authentically as the audience lives them — an inauthentic message can have a huge negative impact on a brand. Look no further than Pepsi's infamous Kendall Jenner ad for an example of a campaign based on inclusion and diversity that went awry.¹⁶

For a brand's political message to land, it needs to speak to authentic values shared by the brand and its customers, and it needs to make sense for the brand to take a stand. Patagonia can speak naturally and competently to issues around the environment and conservation. With its Kendall Jenner ad, Pepsi showed that it cannot speak naturally to issues of political unrest and race.

Providing Stability

Brands in Motion has proved that brands have the opportunity to provide stability in challenging times. But stability can mean many things. For some brands, it means building on their audience's similarities. For others, it means reinforcing their audience's perspective by taking a stand on political issues.

To provide either kind of stability, brands need to understand their audience's demographical and psychographical makeup, as well as the values they live by. Doing so will help communicators understand where to target political messages and how to mitigate the dangers of taking a stand on an issue.

What does your brand stand for?

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Thank you

ABOUT WE

WE is an integrated communications agency that has been telling transformative stories with innovative global brands for more than three decades. Female-founded, female-led, and fiercely independent, WE crafts campaigns to shift perceptions and drive action. Our work has been recognized at Cannes Lions, the Holmes Report SABRE Awards, the PRWeek Awards just to name a few.

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