CORPORATE ADVOCACY

What do Finns, Swedes and Estonians think about companies taking a stance?

3 countries
over
3,000 respondents
Miltton asked Estonians, Finns and Swedes how they saw the role of companies in addressing social issues and tackling important and pressing challenges facing their respective societies. A comparative study of three countries, the online survey* was conducted by SynoInt in May 2017, with over one thousand 18–80-year-old respondents from each country taking part. The study was representative of age, gender and region in Sweden and Finland. In Estonia, it was representative of age and gender, but focused on Tallinn and Tartu, therefore leaving out other Estonian areas.

* The questions were translated into three different languages, which might arguably result in small differences in the connotation of the questions asked. This can, in some cases, be the reason why answers vary.
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1 Foreword

The people demand action
Societies in the New Nordic countries – namely the Nordic and the Baltic countries inhabiting the Baltic Sea region – are transforming rapidly in many senses, one of them being the way their citizens perceive companies’ roles and responsibilities. Companies are not only actors who strive to produce products and services, create jobs or increase profits. They are also considered to be corporate citizens who have essential roles to play in advancing positive change across society at large.

Expectations towards companies are shifting; according to this study, a clear majority of Estonians, Finns and Swedes both support and expect companies to take stances in public discussions, as well as actively tackle challenges facing our respective societies.

Companies in many Anglo-Saxon countries, such as the US, the Netherlands and the UK, are already well aware of this and act accordingly. Studies in the US have shown that more than 80 per cent of Americans believe that businesses have a duty to bring about societal change on important issues.

That said, US citizens’ overall confidence in big business is low and several companies have had the experience of being criticised for their lack of responsibility concerning issues like labour rights, pay gender inequality, and environmental care.

This might be the reason behind why some of the world’s most respected companies and brands (e.g. Apple, Google, Ikea, Microsoft, Unilever et al.) have made a habit of addressing issues that match their own, their employees’, as well as their customers’ and stakeholders’ values. In short, they have engaged in corporate advocacy.

Protesting against President Trump’s so-called “Muslim ban”, addressing climate change, and supporting Pride festivities celebrating LGBTQ rights, have been among actions that companies have engaged in – and been largely praised for doing so.

This way of thinking and acting is now making its way to the New Nordics. As will be shown in this report, we can see the same trends impacting companies in Estonia, Finland and Sweden. The citizens of the New Nordics increasingly expect businesses to take part in addressing and then tackling important social, as well as environmental issues, and they also take this into account when choosing products, services and even employers.

Maria Wetterstrand
Managing Director, Milton Purpose
Corporate advocacy – What is it and does it pay off?

Corporate advocacy, sometimes referred to as corporate activism, is a term that is used to describe a company’s proactive and visible involvement in advancing what it perceives as the common good – either through communications or a concrete action. A concept that works alongside and describes the purpose behind a company is that of purpose marketing, which for some companies can also include socially-responsive communications.

Corporate advocacy relates to a company’s active involvement in public discussion and its contribution to solving social issues. In other words, it encompasses more than just traditional charity. In addition, corporate advocacy doesn’t necessarily concern strategic corporate social responsibility, which strives to link CSR as closely as possible to the company’s day-to-day operations. When making a statement, a company might make donations to a cause that it considers important, or it may draw topics of discussion from its own corporate responsibility agenda, but this need not be the case.

Corporate advocacy is based on societal issues that companies identify with, and so attempt to address by stating their views – for example, by sharing their perspective in public discussions, by taking concrete actions through their marketing or public affairs, or by otherwise visibly expressing their opinions.

Companies across the globe can now be seen addressing societal issues that are not directly linked to their business. By taking a stand and participating in public discussions, they are also presenting their own values to the wider world. Often the statements companies make are motivated by a desire to stand out in public discussions on topics that are important to their stakeholders.

What can you win?

Many organizations that have noticed their stakeholders’ increasing interest in corporate responsibility and in companies’ guiding purposes see corporate advocacy as an opportunity to support their business and strengthen their brand image and employer brand. However, the means and extent of corporate advocacy vary significantly from one company to another. In an ideal world, companies would demonstrate their corporate statements through concrete actions or business models that would increase their positive impact on people, the environment and society.

One of the best-documented examples of a comprehensive and commercially successful corporate advocacy approach is that of Unilever and...
Unilever has over 400 brands, and a handful of these have been labelled as Sustainable Living Brands that are meant to have a social or environmental purpose at their core.

In 2016, Sustainable Living Brands delivered 60 per cent of Unilever’s total growth, which was up an impressive 46 per cent from the previous year. Those of the brands that stand for social issues or causes, for instance, Ben & Jerry’s and Dove, also grew more than 50 per cent faster than the rest of Unilever’s business in 2016. As a result, Unilever has since stated that all of its brands “are on a journey towards reducing their environmental footprint and increasing their positive social impact.”

The fact is that an increasing number of us want to make socially and environmentally sustainable choices as consumers, investors, employees and members of society – and those of us who do prefer companies, organizations and brands that want to be a part of the solution.

As shown in Unilever’s case, combining a purchase with a purpose can pay off. In the best case scenario for an organization, corporate social participation can significantly support the company’s business, growth and brand image.

Who’s responsible for it?

But who within a company has the responsibility for advancing social change or considering how to engage in corporate advocacy?

The answer, naturally, depends on the company itself. There are companies who prefer to invest in the very core of corporate responsibility by building ambitious sustainability programs and communicating the results through reporting, rather than taking a public stance on a social or environmental issue.

There are CEOs who actively take part in public discussions, but do not see fit to make public comments on matters outside of the company’s core business. There are also companies who prefer to lobby quietly and behind closed doors, even if these efforts might benefit society at large.

Perceiving companies as “corporate citizens” means that companies can also be seen as having a responsibility to contribute to a positive change in both the society and environment they operate in. This frequently entails speaking out publicly. However, taking a stance on pressing societal issues has sometimes been cynically viewed as nothing more than “purpose washing” or “green washing”.

Cases such as the instantly-infamous 2017 Pepsi commercial featuring the reality-TV star and model, Kendall Jenner, is an example of a bad advertisement, not corporate advocacy. The Pepsi commercial was heavily criticised for appearing to trivialise and oversimplify demonstrations aimed at tackling social justice causes – and rightfully so.

Marketing and communications efforts easily fail if they seem pretentious or woefully misguided, or have not understood the real, underlying implications of their message. Good corporate advocacy has to be aware of context, cultural nuances and local concerns.

This, however, is no reason for shying away from taking part in public discussions on social issues. There is a lot of potential in corporate advocacy for companies, as being a neutral observer seems to be impossible during our age of ‘real-time’ conversations and reactions.

Also, there are already positive examples of companies in the New Nordics that have been praised for engaging in corporate advocacy. For example, companies have made different minorities more visible through marketing, or have addressed gender equality. Likewise, other companies have benefited from communicating their sustainability efforts openly and as part of their marketing strategies, by, for example, publicly committing to only use MSC certified fish.

Compliance with laws and regulations and taking corporate responsibility to a company’s strategic agenda is essential, but companies could do considerably more to express their opinions and aspirations.

Our study shows that taking a stance is not a ‘thing’ of the future, but is something that Estonians, Finns and Swedes consistently expect to see. Therefore, corporate advocacy is something that forerunners should not be just considering, but also investing in – right now.
Executive summary: Estonia, Finland and Sweden compared

The message of this study is clear: people in the New Nordics region want companies to join other actors in discussing, taking a stance and delivering concrete action to bring about change in matters important to their stakeholders: consumers, employees and the general public.

And, crucially, not just concerning issues directly linked to their business. Taking a stance on important issues creates a positive brand image. It also makes the survey respondents rate companies higher as current or potential employers.

What then are these “important issues” that companies should address? The results differ to some extent between the three countries studied. Whereas climate change is the number one issue in Sweden and Finland, it doesn’t make it to the top five in Estonia. Likewise, the Estonian third-placed issue, overconsumption, does not make the top five in Sweden or Finland. What is also worth noticing here is that the two possible-to-choose issues concerning gender equality, both end up in the top five in Sweden, and not only for women, but also for men.

Companies should be involved in solving societal problems

Companies should take a stance to address important issues facing society*

* The Estonian phrasing differed from the Finnish and Swedish ones, and can be translated into "Companies should take a stance to address important issues facing society"
Which of the following issues and topics do you think are suitable for companies to address?

- Climate change
- Circular economy, recycling and waste reduction
- Human and labour rights
- Pollution in the Baltic Sea
- Tax evasion

Regarding which issues to address, younger respondents had somewhat different expectations than their elderly counterparts. Whereas older respondents (between the ages of 56–80) felt climate change, the circular economy and waste reduction, and tax evasion, as well as health, were the most important issues, the younger respondents (aged between 18–22 and 23–35) felt more strongly towards social issues such as racism, gender equality, and LGBTQ rights.

At this juncture, it is important to note that only 6 per cent of Swedes, 7 per cent of Finns and 11 per cent of Estonians think companies should NOT take a stance on any of the issues mentioned in the survey.

Even if an issue is divisive or controversial, companies should still take a stance reflecting their values, according to the respondents in all three countries. Of interest, women and younger age groups were more inclined to support companies’ involvement in social issues that are highly divisive.

Companies should take action to address societal issues or topics even if these were strongly divisive

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
Which of the following issues and topics do you think are suitable for companies to address? Tick 5 most important ones.

(Based on a full list of 25 topics)
Young people expect companies to get involved

In all three countries, respondents aged 18–22 were those most in favour of companies taking a stance and acting to solve pressing concerns facing society. The results were most striking in Sweden, where a majority 64 per cent of respondents aged 18–22 were strongly in favour of companies’ stances. Additionally, another 24 per cent of the respondents agreed that companies should be involved in solving important societal challenges (totalling 88 per cent agreement overall).

The same optics can be seen in all three countries: younger generations have stronger views and greater expectations that companies should actively bring about positive societal change. This is directly linked to transformation of societies; younger generations have different perceptions of societal power.

Younger citizens of Sweden have grown to expect companies to take a stance, but the same expectations are also arguably becoming more apparent in Estonia and Finland – where companies may not necessarily have had as long a tradition of joining social discussions and debate. However, younger generations’ media consumption is global, and, for example, American companies’ inspiring campaigns addressing social issues often go viral on social media.

As a rule, younger generations expect brands and companies to be meaningful and bold. This is a result that companies and brands, targeting young people, cannot afford to ignore.
In addition to a positive brand image and thought leadership status, taking a stance and acting decisively on important social issues can also provide a competitive edge in building a strong employer brand. The best employees have possibilities to choose from different employers, and the pull factors will become more value-based in the future.

The same optics can once again be seen in all three countries: younger generations here indicate that they have stronger views and greater expectations that companies should actively bring about positive societal change.

When evaluating a company as a current or potential employer, 51 per cent of Swedes and Estonians found it important or very important that the company in question had taken a stance on an important issue the prospective employees cared about. Among Swedes aged 18–22, the figure hit 65 per cent. Conversely, only 5 per cent of Swedes aged 18–22 thought this issue was not important at all.

Finns, however, are more divided on the topic, as 19 per cent of them did not think it was important at all that their employer had taken a stance on a social issue important to them. Still, when evaluating a

**When you are evaluating a company as your current or potential employer, how important is it for you that the company has taken a stance on an important societal issue that you care about?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Not important at all</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
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<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The best employees have possibilities to choose from different employers, and the pull factors will become more value-based.
company as a current or potential employer, a clear majority of Finns thought it was very important, important, or to some extent important that the company in question had taken a stance on a social issue. Like the Swedes, young Finns aged 18–22 are most interested in employers influencing social change.

These results might not necessarily mean that people will decline to work for a company which has not taken a clear public stance on social issues, but the study reveals that doing so can provide crucial competitive advantages, not least when companies in the New Nordics region compete for highly skilled professionals – especially young, well-educated women.

Companies increasingly complain about the difficulty of finding employees with the right skills and education. Caring about the society around them might be one way to reach new potential employees.

The fact that young people, and women across all demographic groups, are more concerned about social inequality, environmental issues and societal concerns in general, have been revealed across several different kinds of studies. That seems to also be true here. As a rule, you find the strongest support for social action amongst the young, people with higher education and women.

That said, it is also worth noting that a majority of men, a majority of people with a basic education, and a majority of the age group 56–80 agree that companies should take a stance on pressing challenges facing society.

A notable part (37–43 % in the three countries) of the respondents in the 56–80 age group believed it was important or very important that a company had taken a stance on important issues when they made a purchase. Furthermore, another substantial group (33–42 %) said it was “to some extent important”. The numbers increase the younger the respondents get, but they all seem quite unanimous in all three countries: people like to combine purchase with a purpose.
As a consumer, how important is it to you to prefer brands or companies that have taken a stance on a societal issue that you consider important?

- **Finland**:
  - Very important: 19%
  - Important: 34%
  - Moderately important: 11%
  - Not important at all: 28%

- **Sweden**:
  - Very important: 16%
  - Important: 35%
  - Moderately important: 13%
  - Not important at all: 4%

- **Estonia**:
  - Very important: 5%
  - Important: 36%
  - Moderately important: 11%
  - Not important at all: 32%
Stance, action, results?

Respondents in all three countries considered that the best way to address an issue was to take action – to do something concrete. Also, campaigns, social media engagement, as well as linking a product or a service to a good cause, were perceived as good ways of taking a stance – in addition to donations to a good cause.

The only concrete difference between countries was that 40 per cent of Estonians saw opinion pieces in newspapers as one of the most relevant ways to engender social change – even though the Estonian respondents seem to seek information online more than Finns and Swedes do.

There were naturally differences in perceptions between generations. Older respondents in all three countries considered actions, donations and meeting political decision makers as good ways of influencing social change. The two youngest age groups saw actions, linking a cause to a product or service, as well as social media and campaigning, as the optimal ways to influence.

Which means or media would you prefer companies used in expressing their views on a societal issue?
The New Nordic countries varied most in their respondents’ ways of noticing companies’ involvement in discussing issues facing societies – especially with regards to media consumption and the differences therein. Finns had gathered their information on companies’ stances from news coverage, Swedes from advertising and Estonians from social media.

The differences might reflect the ways in which we, as audiences, have intentionally happened to have been targeted – whether it be through earned or paid media – or what kind of exposure companies’ social media campaigns get in Estonia, Finland and Sweden.

Nevertheless, companies’ stances on important issues facing society create earned media: that is, they make headlines and engage people on social media platforms they already occupy. The key takeaway here: if a company acts to influence social change, they should also be vocal about it.

Overall, the media has an important role to play in both conveying companies’ stances on social issues, as well as being a powerful actor in influencing change itself. Each of the three countries polled considered the media to be very high on the list (second in Estonia, third in Finland and Sweden) when asked which actors had the power to influence social change.

Traditional decision-makers, namely the government/ministers and parliament, were considered the two most powerful actors in Finland and Sweden, but Estonians placed the media as being more powerful than the government.

Many people have sceptical feelings towards politicians, but they simultaneously yearn for changes in the way we treat people and the environment. Companies have been able to fill some of this perceived gap by providing different
perspectives and opinions to pressing societal matters.

Polarisation and political turbulence generates scepticism and deep-seated cynicism towards political decision makers. This is an opportunity for companies to gain trust by expressing their opinions and driving positive change.

Companies’ power in terms of impacting or influencing social change was unanimously high in all three countries. Not all companies need, or are even able to take part in social and public discussion, but most, if not all companies, should be able to share their values with their stakeholders as well as be prepared to take part in real-time conversations. In doing so, they will get pulled in by consumers and communities – with or without their consent.

The conclusion of this country comparison is clear – companies should take part in important discussions and actively drive change in Estonia, Finland and in Sweden.
4 Country sections
Estonian results: responsible companies are desirable

Corporate social responsibility – and companies’ involvement in public discussions on social issues has not been studied much in Estonia, since it is only starting to become a part of the agenda for Estonian companies.

In this study, we were interested to know how Estonian people saw companies’ involvement in bringing about social change, and the data shows that Estonians do expect companies to take a social stance on important issues facing society – a clearly definitive 85 per cent of the total 1,143 Estonian respondents said that companies should take stances on societal issues.

That said, the respondents of this survey are mainly from the urban areas of Tallinn and Tartu, so this result does not necessarily represent the opinion of more rural areas. Nevertheless, this unambiguous (85%) number should be in the minds of every business leader in Estonia when making future plans on how to engage with their stakeholders in a relevant, interesting and even mutually profitable way.

According to the results of this study, it seems clear that the youngest age group had the strongest and most positive opinion on companies taking a stance on societal issues. It also shows that young people want to see real actions taken, not just non-binding and ultimately empty words, a vocal stance neatly summed up as “lip-service”.

It is not totally uncommon for Estonian companies to address social issues when branding or selling their products and services, but it is not yet on any comparable level to Sweden nor Finland – let alone the Anglo-Saxon world.

We tested six randomly selected campaigns or statements that had recently taken place in Estonia to find out if, how, and which different types of stances depicting social issues were noticed among Estonians.

The results were surprisingly positive and should give an incentive to companies to work for the common good of Estonians, as well as to PR and marketing specialists to create campaigns which profit not only business, but also Estonian society as a whole.

The most recognised campaign was “Aitan lapsi” where people could push a “cultural donation” button when returning empty bottles to Eesti Pandipakend recycling stations, to support children attending different cultural events.

Should companies take a stance to address important issues facing society?

- Strongly agree: 32%
- Agree: 53%
- Undecided: 1%
- Disagree: 13%
- Strongly disagree: 2%
The data shows that 85 per cent of Estonians do expect companies to take a social stance on important issues facing society.

In addition, Tallinn Music Week, Estonian Food Bank and the grocery stores cooperation project “Trash Dinner”, as well as Selver supermarkets “Koos on kergem” campaigns donating to support a children’s hospital, were among the most memorable instances of companies taking a stance on social issues in Estonia.

**Issues people care about in Estonia?**

So, if companies should voice their opinion on social and political issues, what issues are the most important ones? We gave a number of suggestions of current public issues that companies could stand up for, including the alternative “companies should not take a stance on any of the above-mentioned issues”. Respondents could choose a maximum of five issues.

This was the question where the Estonian results differed the most in comparison to the opinions expressed by the Finns and the Swedes. Whereas climate change was the most important issue in Finland and Sweden, in Estonia it was only placed 7th with 19 per cent of the respondents considering it important. Topping the Estonian list was human and labour rights.

Looking closely at the other issues that matter most in Estonia – circular economy, recycling and waste reduction, conservation of nature, overconsumption, equal pay, and healthcare – we can make an interesting observation. That is, that due to the differences in the welfare level between the three countries in the survey – where the purchasing power is the lowest in Estonia – Estonians, in general, worry more about their local life than about more ‘abstract’
global problems, such as climate change which does not come “too close to your own skin”.

From the Estonian perspective, there were also differences in what men and women perceived as important issues for companies to address. Estonian women tend to have stronger opinions on most of the social issues companies could address, but men had remarkably stronger opinions than women in only three issues, namely tax evasion, use of public space, and freedom of speech.

Another finding comes from looking at the age groups where the so-called Millennials (born approx. 1985–2000) differ completely from all other age groups. To them, climate change, animal rights, equal pay, gender equality, racism and sexual minorities’ rights matter the most.

These young people are born into a more global, digital world where social media has...
Understanding the complex new mindset might prove to be a genuine wake-up call for many, if not all companies targeting the Millennial generation as consumers or potential employees.

no borders and are strongly influenced by events taking place in the world, as they follow global trends, get their news through social media and from other young people.

Will the businesses run by people born before the 1990s be competitive enough in five to ten years from now if they do not adopt, or even consider younger generations’ values and expectations? Understanding this complex new mind-set might prove to be a genuine wake-up call for many, if not all companies, targeting the Millennial generation as consumers or potential employees.

Employer branding and CSR

According to the results of this survey, a potential employer’s brand image was particularly important for Estonians. A decisive 81 per cent in total felt that it was very important, important or somewhat important that a potential employer had taken a stance on an important social or public issue that fitted the respondents’ value base. Only 13 per cent considered it not important at all.

Taking into account the analysis presented by the Estonian Institute of Economic Research in spring 2017, analysis that posited that the biggest obstacle to economic development in Estonia is the lack of a skilled workforce, it appears crucial for companies that they take employer branding seriously.

The closest attention should be paid to the youngest age group (18–22 year olds) where up to 85 per cent of the group considered it advantageous that an employer had engaged in corporate advocacy. That said, the number is high in all age groups and demographics. We believe that the importance of employers’ brands has the potential to grow in all age groups, and to that end, companies taking a stance would seem to offer considerable benefits overall.

Companies are relevant to Estonians, and not only as potential or current employers, but also from the consumers’ perspective. As a consumer, 79 per cent of Estonians preferred brands or companies to have taken a stance on a social issue they cared about, with some differences between age groups.

When you are evaluating a company as your current or potential employer, how important is it to you that the company has taken a stance on an important societal issue that you care about?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Not important at all</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18–22</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23–35</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>36–55</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>56–80</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</table>
Not just centralised and regional government, but also the media and companies, are the ones to look to for answers for the future well-being of society and the environment.

and genders. Not surprisingly, younger respondents and women preferred companies to influence social change a little more than men and older age groups.

‘E-Estonia’ offers great opportunities for companies to join in public discussions

Estonians seek and find information online regarding companies’ stances on societal issues more than Finns or Swedes do. Again, we set our focus on the Millennials who – according to this study – get their information from social media far more often than other generations do.

Even though companies are most likely to get the attention of younger citizens via social media, in comparison to Finland and Sweden, the figures in Estonia were the highest among other age groups as well, excepting 56–80-year-olds, where traditional news is still considered a priority.

The results show that ‘E-Estonia’ is not just simply about digital services; it also helps describe the behaviour of people. It can be assumed here that one likely feeds the other, as the more services we have online, the more we spend time online, and also consume more information online.

A new path for decision makers

There are three main conclusions, based on the survey, that we recommend as a way to create a better society in Estonia. Firstly, people care more and more about society and they believe companies have a responsibility to contribute to its overall wellbeing.

Secondly, the younger generations’ interests and habits differ considerably from the older ones’, and Estonian companies, as well as decision makers, should remember this when making decisions that have an impact on future society.

Finally, in a modern and progressive society, input is expected from all stakeholders, which means, that not just centralised and regional government, but also the media and companies, are the ones to look to for answers for the future well-being of society and the environment.

KEY FINDINGS

• 85 per cent of Estonians expect companies to take a social stance on important issues facing society

• Young people differ greatly from older generations in what they perceive to be the most important issues companies should tackle.

• 81 per cent say that it is very important, important or somewhat important that a potential employer has taken a stance on an important societal issue they care about
4.2 Finnish results: The old rules no longer apply

Finnish companies and international companies operating within the Finnish domestic market, have not, by default, made a habit of addressing burning social issues or tried to influence political decision-making through corporate advocacy efforts. The equal marriage law initiative by Tahdon2013 was the first widely visible exception to this: nearly 1,000 companies and organisations stood up for the equal rights of sexual minorities through the #metahdomme corporate challenge. This was big news in Finland, as companies have traditionally shied away from taking a public stance on social issues.

The context where companies operate in Finland is changing, however, and companies have started to express their views with regards to social and environmental matters. During the last few years, companies in Finland have – for example – highlighted their sustainability efforts in marketing communications. A notable recent example includes Kotipizza’s achievement of being the world’s first pizza chain to use only MSC certified fish.

Companies including ethnic minorities in their advertisements (e.g. Felix Ketchup) and as target groups (Itäkeskus) are also relevant examples of corporate advocacy in the Finnish context, since sexual or ethnic minorities, or people with disabilities, have not, by and large, been represented in the public sphere in a neutral light as citizens or consumers.

Even though marketing communications and advertising campaigns have slowly started to reflect diversity and changing demographics in Finland, it is still the case that only a few companies have engaged in corporate advocacy. Therefore, Finlayson’s campaign in 2017 to fight the gender pay gap, was greeted with much praise – but also some criticism, especially by male activists.

Finlayson announced that during a week-long campaign, women were to pay 83 cents for purchases worth one euro to highlight the fact that the “female euro” was still only 0.83 cents in comparison to males. The campaign showed that much needs to be done with reference to gender equality, and proved that companies can have an important role in sparking public discussions.
A clear majority of Finns agree: companies should stand up for social issues

In this study, we presented 12 randomly chosen examples of public stances made by companies in Finland during recent years and asked the respondents which of them they had noticed. The most memorable were the ones that gained a large amount of earned media, i.e. when Finlayson ceased all cooperation with the retail chain Kärkkäinen due to Kärkkäinen’s support of racist media, as well as VR’s (Finnish national railways) support for equal marriage rights through its Kivimiehet figures.

Likewise, Telia’s campaign that focused on creating new connections between people with different backgrounds, as well as Kotipizza’s MSC promise, were deemed memorable by the respondents. However, there were clear differences of opinion between demographics, genders and age groups.

In general, 75 per cent of Finnish respondents agreed that companies should be involved in tackling pressing societal challenges. As many as 69 per cent of those surveyed argued that companies should take a stance on issues that were strongly divisive. Finns clearly want companies to be brave and take part in creating value for society as a whole.

Like in Sweden and Estonia, younger age groups and women felt more positively about companies enhancing social change. The results show that when targeting Finnish Millennials, companies are likely to make waves by taking a stance on a topical social issue. However, we need to be aware here that the

Have you noticed these corporate statements promoting a societal issue?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finlayson stopping cooperation with Kärkkäinen, in order to stand up against racism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VR stone figures celebrating gender neutral marriage law</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Telia’s new videos on building connections and understanding between people</td>
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<td>Kotipizza’s MSC certificate</td>
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<td>Kaleva Koru’s ad “Untamed” for embracing individuality</td>
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Companies should be involved in solving societal problems

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<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18–22</td>
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<td>23–35</td>
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<td>56–80</td>
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Strongly agree
Agree
Undecided
Disagree
Strongly disagree
overall support for companies’ stances is high across all age groups.

So, if companies should voice their opinions on social and political issues, what issues are the most important ones? The survey gave a number of suggestions of current public issues that companies could stand up for, including the alternative “companies should not take a stance on any of the above-mentioned issues”. Respondents could choose a maximum five issues.

Overall, the issues that resonated the most with the respondents did not differ too much from those posited by Swedes and Estonians. Climate change, conservation of the Baltic Sea, circular economy, waste reduction and recycling, as well as human and labour rights, were topics of significance within the Finnish sphere.

And again, differences between genders and age groups were clear, as in all countries. In general, younger age groups and women saw social issues such as racism, equality and rights of minorities as very important, in comparison to men and older age groups who had a much stronger view only on tax evasion.

Differences within Finland also exist. Whereas conservation of the Baltic Sea is important to every third Southern Finlander, the group of respondents who saw it as important a topic was smaller among those living in Eastern Finland. For the respondents living in the eastern parts of the country, human and labour rights were the most important topics, while a smaller group of those living in Western Finland saw it as an important topic. However, climate change was considered the most important topic by respondents in all parts of the country.

**Taking a stance matters; but how should we do it?**

The results of the survey reveal that Finns expect companies – employers, service providers or trusted brands – to raise their voices in public discussions, and better yet, also take action in order to influence positive social change.

A clear majority of those questioned were interested in having their potential employer take a stance on an important social issue that they, the respondents, also cared about. Furthermore, Finns are also increasingly interested as consumers in terms of combining their purchase with a purpose, namely, to prefer brands and companies that have taken a stance on a social issue they consider personally important.

Finnish respondents from different geographical areas, genders, age groups and educational backgrounds, seem quite unanimous in saying that companies really should get involved in both confronting and positively impacting pressing societal concerns. But, the only question remaining is: how to do it?

The best way for companies to engage in social and public discussions is by not only engaging in dialogue, but also through demonstrating clearly defined actions. A broad majority of Finns want to see companies’ own
Which of the following issues and topics do you think are suitable for companies to address?

- Climate change
- Recycling, circular economy and waste reduction
- Human and labour rights
- Contamination and eutrophication of Baltic Sea
- Tax evasion
- Gender equality
- Animal rights
- Racism
- Conservation of nature
- Health and diseases
- Access to clean drinking water
- Equal pay
- Overconsumption
- Traceability of products’ origins
- Local production
- Freedom of speech
- Equal opportunities for education
- Employment of vulnerable groups, such as disabled people or refugees
- Integration of immigrants
- LGBTQ rights
- Sharing parental leave in families
- Use of public space
- Intellectual property rights
- Rights of ethnic minorities
- None of the above
When you are evaluating a company as your current or potential employer, how important is it to you that the company has taken a stance on an important societal issue that you care about?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Quite important</th>
<th>Not important at all</th>
<th>I can’t say</th>
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<td>18–22</td>
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As a consumer, how important is it to you to prefer brands or companies that have taken a stance on a societal issue that you consider important?

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<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Quite important</th>
<th>Not important at all</th>
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Which means or media would you prefer companies used in expressing their views on a societal issue?

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<tr>
<td>Companies’ own actions to promote a cause</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social media posts/discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donating company money to a good cause</td>
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<td>Communication or advertisement campaigns</td>
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<td>Meeting with political decision makers and/or legislators</td>
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<td>Cooperation with NGOs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linking a cause to their product/service</td>
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<td>Company corporate responsibility communication and reporting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opinion pieces in media</td>
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<td>Allowing employees to volunteer</td>
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<td>Company newsletters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encouraging employees to donate to a good cause</td>
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What actors have the most power to influence societal change?

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<td>Government/ministers</td>
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<td>Parliament</td>
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<td>Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Companies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Municipalities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public officials</td>
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<tr>
<td>President</td>
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<td>NGO’s</td>
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<td>Civil Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
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Consumers are now invited to help save endangered salmon together with K-Ryhmä and WWF, which will in return, hopefully, increase interest both towards endangered fish as well as the well-established and traditional grocery store chain that has sustainability high on their agenda.
Different actors do not need to tackle important social issues alone. Cooperation between companies, the media and civil society, for example, can be a powerful tool for engendering social change.

The most sceptical audiences might consider companies’ public stances on a range of issues as “greenwashing” or “purpose washing”. However, our survey results now clearly show that Finns really do expect companies to actively and concretely take part in tackling social and environmental issues. Therefore, it is a great time to consider what your company’s values are, how you could share those with your stakeholders in new ways – and contribute to a positive change in society.

### KEY FINDINGS

- 75 per cent of Finnish respondents agreed that companies should be involved in tackling societal challenges
- Finnish respondents from different geographical areas, genders, age groups and educational backgrounds seem unanimous in saying that companies should get involved in influencing social change
- 71 per cent say that it is very important, important or somewhat important that a potential employer has taken a stance on an important societal issue that they, the respondents, care about
4.3 Swedish results: Swedes care and Swedes demand

In Sweden, it is not uncommon for companies to address social or public issues of concern, when branding or selling their products and services. People in Sweden care about the environment, equality, racism, integration, and children's welfare, to name but a few examples. If a company positions itself within these issues' eco-systems, they can generally expect to be noticed and met with a more positive attitude.

There are numerous examples, like the Åhléns' campaign "Bryt könsmåttordningen", questioning how we look at clothes and gender, or the longstanding campaigns from ICA standing up for the importance of integrating people with disabilities into the labour market. But how do the Swedish public really perceive campaigns with a social angle?

This survey reveals, perhaps not very surprisingly, that it generally seems to be a good idea for companies to take a stance on important issues facing society, be it social or environmental challenges. Swedes want companies to show that they care, as well as take part in addressing these issues. Companies are now expected to do rather more than just offer products or services to the market, create jobs, make profit and enrich shareholders.

In the survey, we mentioned nine different Swedish campaigns, allowing the respondents to indicate which campaigns they had noticed. Among all age groups, ICA's commercials about “praktikanten Jerry” were the most noticed, with over 50 per cent of the respondents indicating an awareness of the campaign.

Amongst the youngest age group, Max Hamburgare's campaign for vegetarian alternatives was deemed memorable. Conversely, only 18 per cent among the oldest age group were aware of the Max campaign. Also, Coops' campaigns for organic food, "ekoeffekten", and reducing meat consumption, “kärköttbit”, achieved an average result of over 20 per cent, numbers comparable with ICA's commercial against racism, “Välkommen till butiken Abbe”.

In general, it appears that younger people and women notice campaigns with a social angle the most. Only the Stockholm Sport Association's campaign against putting too much pressure on children in...
The respondents were asked a number of questions about companies taking a stance on important issues facing society. The general support for companies being involved in helping solve societal problems was 80 per cent, while only 7 per cent of the respondents disagreed partially or completely (those not included in these numbers were “undecided”).

More interestingly, though, is that there was also significant support for companies taking a stance on issues that were deemed strongly divisive across society. A total of 61 per cent of the respondents agreed that companies should stand up for divisive issues as well, while only 13 per cent disagreed. On this latter question the support was strongest from young Swedes, with 74 per cent showing support for taking stances on divisive issues and with only 2 per cent believing it to be a bad idea.

**Should companies stand up for important issues facing Swedish society?**

So, if companies should voice their opinion on social and political issues, what issues are the most important ones? We gave a number of suggestions of current public issues that companies could stand up for, including the alternative “companies should not take a stance on any of the above-mentioned issues”.

Seven per cent of the Swedish respondents answered that they did not think it suitable for companies to take any standpoint on the issues mentioned, this being a more popular answer amongst men (9%) than women (5%).

Amongst all respondents, climate change was the most commonly chosen topic of concern, followed by human and labour rights, and then recycling.
and waste reduction. Even though issues relating to equality, namely gender equality and equal pay, was more important to those respondents identifying as female, they made it into the top five also for men. The youngest age group considered racism to be one of the top five issues, pushing recycling down to sixth place.

Should companies take action to address societal issues or topics even if these were strongly divisive?
Is there money in it?

So, people want companies to care about society and contribute in tackling difficult challenges. That’s not very surprising. But is there any money in it for the company? We asked the respondents a couple of questions about that, too.

Competition is harsh. It might still be possible to compete by selling the best, the most competitively priced, or the coolest products, but there definitely seems to be opportunity to compete in other ways as well, judging from our survey. Of the Swedish respondents, 48 per cent revealed that companies’ stances on social issues were important or very important to them as consumers or clients. Another 35 per cent indicated that companies standing up for social issues was considered somewhat important. This was a very general question, and can probably not be interpreted as having a definitive impact on all the respondents’ purchases, but it still shows that there is a potential (indicated by 83% of all respondents) for companies to increase sales by positioning themselves within important social and public issues, especially if they wish to target the younger generations. Only 13 per cent of all respondents considered it “of no importance at all” when it came down to their purchase decisions.

The more highly educated the respondents were, the more important the employer’s stances on social and political issues were.

Appropriate employee recruitment is considered to be a high priority for many Swedish companies. Suitable and skilled employees will unquestionably be key to businesses’ success in the future. If companies want to increase their competitiveness and enhance their brand as an employer, taking a stance on different social and public issues is one way of standing out amongst all possible employers.

This is particularly the case if you want to attract young, well-educated women. In the survey, 81 per cent of Swedes saw it very important, important or moderately important that the employer was engaged in issues that the respondents considered beneficial for society.

This is actually one the few issues where we can see any significant difference between people of different educational backgrounds in Sweden. The more highly educated the respondents were, the more important the employer’s stances on social and political issues were.

This might be connected to a difference in expected opportunities available in terms of choosing the right employer between respondents of different educational background. Also, the younger respondents saw this factor as being more important than those in the older age group.

Even though the younger age groups and women showed the strongest support for companies taking a stance, there was also support amongst the oldest age groups and men. For example, 43 per cent of the age group 56–80, found it important or very important that a company had taken a stance on an important issue when choosing products or services, and another 39 per cent found it moderately important.

This survey indicates that Swedes, in general, see it as positive that companies stand up for and help

The more highly educated the respondents were, the more important the employer’s stances on social and political issues were.
KEY FINDINGS

• 80 per cent of Swedish respondents agreed that companies should be involved in the tackling of societal challenges.

• 74 per cent of the youngest age group showed support for taking stances, also on highly divisive issues, with only 2 per cent believing it is a bad idea.

• 81 per cent say that it is very important, important or somewhat important that a potential employer has taken a stance on an important societal issue that they, the respondents, care about.

There is an opportunity to compete in other ways than just by selling the best, the most competitively priced, or the coolest products.
5 Conclusion

In this complex, globalised world, competition for clients and employees is becoming ever more intense. Furthermore, humanities’ knowledge of global challenges has advanced, and issues like equality, climate change, racism, human rights and tax evasion demand action, and not only from politicians and civil society.

This study shows that people want companies to be active when it comes to addressing common social and environmental issues. People now expect companies to act as responsible citizens and get involved in tackling important issues facing society.

There is no longer such ‘thing’ as a neutral observer.

This can be interpreted in either a proactive or more passive way, but no matter which path you choose, there is work to be done.

**Pro-active, transparent, opinionated**

Many examples could be cited of a company’s reputation that has been damaged by scandals that were not directly connected to bad products or services, but to ways the company had addressed, or rather not addressed, social and public issues.

This does not mean, however, that every company has to be perfect in every sense, but that it is recommended, on a company’s management level, to discuss important issues facing our societies, and to be aware of the impact the company might have on them. In addition, we need to acknowledge that companies actually may be expected to handle them. This is the more passive approach.

A more proactive response to people’s expectations on companies’ engagement is to actually take an actionable stance and get engaged in addressing some of the challenges facing our societies, to take a step forward and show that the company is ready to be a part of the perceived solution.

Ostensibly, this means also having the courage to face the company’s own issues, namely the potentially and sometimes problematic or unethical side of products or services, and act to transform the business model to fit it into a more progressive and sustainable future. Engaging in social or environmental advocacy, while being transparent about the companies’ own challenges...
will, almost without fail, strengthen brands and the image of the company behind them.

**Stronger brands, appreciated employers**

This survey indicates that corporate advocacy will become increasingly important in the years to come. Young people now expect much more from companies and see them as a natural part of the change that is needed to create more sustainable future societies.

And the more people are used to seeing corporate advocacy in action, the more they expect companies to know what their own purpose is, and what they stand for, in relation to different public challenges.

These expectations are in line with what is happening within the political sphere, with stronger regulations concerning companies’ responsibility towards society, and in the media, which will question any actions that are considered immoral or unethical. It is not an option to oppose this change or stay unprepared.

In this respect, Estonia, Finland and Sweden are part of a bigger, global trend. Many companies, of course, have already taken steps in this direction. They have identified issues they want to tackle and found ways of showing their support for a particular social and public change.

According to the results presented in this report, this is also widely appreciated. Engaging in corporate advocacy and addressing important issues has the capacity to increase sales, and create strong brands that clearly stand out from the crowd. In the eyes of Nordic people, sustainability is an important quality amongst the other features of a product or service, such as price and design.

Engaging in corporate advocacy also makes the company more appreciated as an employer, both for current and future employees. This is most noticeable among young people, the well-educated, and women, but highly appreciated by other groups as well.

The conclusion is that social engagement and addressing important issues facing society often pays off – and not only for the company.
6 Four claims you should remember about corporate advocacy

✔ PEOPLE EXPECT MORE FROM COMPANIES
Companies should no longer position themselves against their competitors, but instead highlight where they fit within society at large. Stakeholders, from consumers to investors and job seekers, want to know whether a company acts responsibly and if it works towards positive change.

✔ A COMPANY DOES NOT NEED TO BE PERFECT IN ORDER TO BE GOOD
It is much more important to be honest, self-critical and committed to make a change. A statement creates the biggest impact when it is backed by concrete and visible objectives and actions.

✔ REMAINING A NEUTRAL BYSTANDER ISN’T AN OPTION FOR COMPANIES
Communication has become a series of real-time conversations, and the position of a silent observer is becoming more and more difficult. Companies are expected to contribute to discussions that are important to their employees and stakeholders – not only on matters directly related to their business.

✔ GOOD COMPANIES ARE REWARDED
Sustainability is more than a mere hygiene factor. Taking stances on social and environmental issues as well as branding around sustainability can become important tools to support a company’s sales and reputation. Companies should accept that a positive change can be pursued through commercial means.
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