

Walk It Like You Talk It: Corporate Social Responsibility and the Magic of
Meaning Theory in Major Corporations LGBTQ+ Pride Advertisements

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Abstract

Millennial advertising audiences are more pro LGBTQ+ and care deeply about queer issues than prior generations. Corporate brands have responded to this demographic shift by implementing LGBTQ+ issues into their marketing strategy thus boosting cultural influence and increasing profits. Through utilizing corporate social responsibility and the magic of meaning theory, corporations that produce pride advertisements such as Target, Nike, and CVS have gained popularity and increased profit when they produce pride campaigns with consistent communication and implementation of CSR. This thesis analyzes the implementation and communication of LGBTQ+ related affairs of several corporations that produce pride advertisements, including their donations to politicians and pro-LGBTQ+ or anti-LGBTQ+ causes, physical or monetary contributions to LGBTQ+ activism, and the authenticity of their social media, corporate communication, and advertising campaigns. This research concludes with an analysis of how corporations should approach CSR related to social causes like LGBTQ+ activism as a result of the findings in the case studies of three corporations.

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Introduction

In 2009, President Barack Obama officially declared June as Gay and Lesbian Pride Month. Pride Month is celebrated every year throughout the month of June and was initially inspired by the 1969 Stonewall Uprising,¹ a tipping point for the Gay Liberation Movement in the United States (Lee, 2022). The purpose of the month is to, “Recognize the impact that LGBTQ+ individuals have had on society locally, nationally and internationally” (Lee, 2022).

The 21st century has seen expanding representation and rights for members of the LGBTQ+ community. The rise in support for this group from millennial advertising audiences has caused brands to implement their support of LGBTQ+ rights and representation into advertisements to gain profit and popularity.

Advertisers can better understand how their brand should approach social issues in the future by studying the effects and evolution of previous pride advertisements of large companies known for their pride campaigns, like the Target Corporation, Nike, and CVS. Noting how advertising giants use providing representation to profit and discovering what past campaign results mean for corporate social responsibility in up and coming social movements can help advertisers better understand how their brand should approach future social issues.

Background and Significance of the Study

Communications experts dedicated to the advancement of the LGBTQ+ community such as Bob Witeck (Witeck Communications, 2019) agree that gay ads and messaging do not only gain support from the community itself but from families that may look different than a

¹ Lee, J. M. (2022, August 1). *Why do we celebrate pride month in June and LGBT History Month in October?* University of Central Florida News | UCF Today. Retrieved March 12, 2023, from <https://www.ucf.edu/news/why-do-we-celebrate-pride-month-in-june-and-lgbt-history-month-in-october/>

traditional family would,² “50 years ago” (Zonkel, 2014).³ He argues that excluding the gay community from ads excludes a group that is more affluent and influential than the average population. News blogs like Vox call out the many companies that use acceptance and celebration of the LGBTQ+ movement in advertising but do not donate any profit or provide visible or tangible support to the gay community (Abad-Santos, 2018).⁴ AT&T, Pfizer, and UPS are among the many corporations that include pride flags during pride month in their advertising but donate to openly anti-gay politicians (Ennis, 2021).⁵

However, current media and communications experts have not addressed the central question of how a brand benefits or, in some cases, loses credibility and sales in producing pride-related campaigns. Despite being in an era where brand involvement in political and social issues is at an all-time high and topics like LGBTQ+ brand support have been popular,⁶ knowledge gaps exist on both pride advertisements' effect on the corporation's social and economic means (Moorman, 2020). Addressing these gaps can help determine the fate of future social movements and their impact on advertising.

Purpose of the Study

This study is a senior honors thesis analyzing advertising giants such as Target, Nike, and CVS's LGBTQ+ pride campaigns and proposing how companies and advertisers should

² Bob Witeck. Witeck Communications. (2019, June 10). Retrieved August 15, 2022, from <http://www.witeck.com/bios/bob-witeck/>

³ Zonkel, P. (2014, Jun 30). Companies wooing LGBT community. *Redlands Daily Facts* <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/newspapers/companies-wooing-lgbt-community/docview/1541797408/se-2>

⁴ Abad-Santos, A. (2018, June 25). *How LGBTQ pride month became a branded holiday*. Vox. Retrieved August 15, 2022, from https://www.vox.com/2018/6/25/17476850/pride-month-lgbtq-corporate-explained?__c=1

⁵ Ennis, D. (2021, December 10). *Don't let that rainbow logo fool you: These 9 corporations donated millions to anti-gay politicians*. Forbes. Retrieved August 15, 2022, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dawnstaceyennis/2019/06/24/dont-let-that-rainbow-logo-fool-you-these-corporations-donated-millions-to-anti-gay-politicians/?sh=5500eacc14a6>

⁶ Moorman, C. (2020). Commentary: Brand Activism in a Political World. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 39(4), 388–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743915620945260>

approach implementing social and political movements in their future advertising to maximize the use of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and be consistent in CSR advertising and implementation practices. This study tests the theory that in times when companies donate money to politicians and political causes that support LGBTQ+ causes and rights, physically (meaning providing tangible contributions, such as volunteering, pledging services, or other forms of concrete help) or monetarily contribute to LGBTQ+ activism, and produce authentic and well considered social media and advertisement campaigns, the corporation will receive more revenue, a positive image and consumer support because of the consistency they place in CSR advertising and implementation practices. Companies in the future that implement consistent CSR communications related to LGBTQ+ pride and equality will also be successful, and there will be a consistent relationship between the implementation of these items and corporate gain.

Theoretical Background

The Magic of Meaning theory,⁷ created by cultural theorist Raymond Williams, describes the correlation between consumerism and the signifying function goods can provide. He says that, “Advertising is “magic” because it transforms commodities into glamorous signifiers, such as making a car into a sign of masculinity, and these signifiers present an imaginary.” Williams has explained that, “Today, the use-value of many commodities is their signifying-function.” Pride advertising has gone beyond selling related products, but has become involved with signifiers related to one’s values and political beliefs (Williams, Chapter 29). The Magic of Meaning theory suggests that, “Advertisements infuse products and meaning, so when companies promote popular social topics, they create a larger profit and positive gain.” Because

⁷ Williams, R. (n.d.). *Advertising - the magic system* - erginguney.com. Retrieved November 20, 2022, from http://erginguney.com/web/coursematerial/Advertising_The_Magic_System_pdf.pdf

of this, companies that create social and political meaning with their products and advertisements tend to benefit if their campaign is done right.

The Magic of Meaning theory has raised a series of questions within corporate advertising. One of these being that if goods and merchandise provide social and political value to people, do companies possess a responsibility to play into and control this value. Should companies become involved in social and political issues to create value to consumers and if they do, is the value they provide profitable? CSR has emerged to evaluate a company's involvement in social, political, and environmental issues and demonstrates how different companies have responded to this question.⁸ “CSR refers to companies voluntarily contributing to social and environmental goals through minimizing environmental impacts, voluntarism, corporate philanthropy, and activism such as taking a stance on equality, diversity, human rights, and education. (Hartmann et al., 2022)”

When done correctly, CSR can positively influence people’s associations of a brand, thus improving consumer responses. When a corporation incorporates CSR into their advertising,⁹ “Companies can not only generate favorable stakeholder attitudes and better support behaviors (e.g. purchase, seeking employment, investing in the company), but also, over the long run, build corporate image, strengthen stakeholder–company relationships, and enhance stakeholders' advocacy behaviors” (Du et al., 2019).

⁸ Hartmann, P., Marcos, A., & Apaolaza, V. (2022). Past, present, and future of research on Corporate Social Responsibility Advertising. *International Journal of Advertising*, 1–9.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2121902>

⁹ Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2019, August 12). *Maximizing business returns to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): The Role of CSR Communication*. Retrieved December 29, 2022, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228118694_Maximizing_Business_Returns_to_Corporate_Social_Responsibility_CSR_The_Role_of_CSR_Communication

Corporate social responsibility is most commonly implemented and targeted through the stakeholder theory, in which CSR strategies are,¹⁰ “Directed towards society, environment, and employees or as per the triple bottom line approach of economy, ecology, and society” (Fatima & Elbanna, 2022). Corporations are likely to assume corporate social responsibility in issues that affect their stakeholders, including LGBTQ+ rights and equality, but studies have shown an imbalance between CSR communication and CSR implementation, or the advertising of corporate involvement in social issues and actual action of CSR in relation to the topic or issue at hand. This phenomenon stems from the communication complexity of CSR.

Communication complexity arises when the consistency in the information being communicated and the consistency that needs to be maintained across the messages is necessary in ensuring that the organizations are also walking the walk and not just talking the talk” (referenced from Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Brunton et al., 2017).¹¹ Along these lines, a series of research articles have examined the concepts of CSR walk and CSR talk, where the former represents actual CSR implementation while the latter focuses on CSR communication (referenced from Graafland & Smid, 2019;¹² Schoeneborn et al. 2020;¹³ Wickert et al., 2016¹⁴).

Further, Graafland and Smid (2019) found that the overall impact of CSR implementation on the society and environment is dampened where there is incongruence between CSR activities being communicated and CSR activities actually being implemented. (Fatima & Elbanna, 2022)”

¹⁰ Fatima, T., & Elbanna, S. (2022, February 2). *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) implementation: A Review and a research agenda towards an Integrative Framework - Journal of Business Ethics*. SpringerLink. Retrieved December 29, 2022, from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-022-05047-8>

¹¹ Baumann-Pauly, D., Wickert, C., Spence, L., & Scherer, A. (2013). Organizing corporate social responsibility in small and large firms: Size matters. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 115(4), 693–705.

¹² Graafland, J., & Smid, H. (2019). Decoupling among CSR policies, programs, and impacts: An empirical study. *Business & Society*, 58(2), 231–267.

¹³ Schoeneborn, D., Morsing, M., & Crane, A. (2020). Formative perspectives on the relation between CSR communication and CSR practices: Pathways for walking, talking, and t(w)alking. *Business & Society*, 59(1), 5–33.

¹⁴ Wickert, C., Scherer, A. G., & Spence, L. J. (2016). Walking and talking corporate social responsibility: Implications of firm size and organizational cost. *Journal of Management Studies*, 53(7), 1169–1196

In other words, when corporations do not physically or politically contribute, or do not donate to an issue or cause that they use in advertisements to produce positive feedback from CSR, the effects of the CSR campaign are diminished.

This walk the walk versus talking the talk phenomenon has been exemplified by companies that incorporate LGBTQ+ rights and issues into their CSR. Where companies have practiced genuine support while simultaneously incorporating LGBTQ+-related CSR into their communications and advertisements, they have seen better feedback from the audiences represented in the stakeholder theory. Conversely, when CSR communication did not match implementation for a company, they received negative feedback in the form of online cancellation and negative commentary, lowered sales, and missed opportunities. Studying individual corporations and their implementation versus communication of CSR with LGBTQ+ issues can help corporations discover what implementation of CSR should look like in order to “Walk it like they talk it.”

Corporate Involvement with LGBTQ+ Campaigns

Corporation's intentions when engaging in LGBTQ+ activism have faced speculation for a long time,¹⁵ with the term “Pinkwashing” (Schulman, 2011) first mentioned in a New York Times article coming to common use, describing, “Corporations that adopt LGBTQ+-friendly politics and engage in LGBTQ+ activism,¹⁶ but do not invest into the issue itself or challenge inequalities in society, but instead profit from it.” Pinkwashing indicated that businesses are, “Taking LGBTQ+ advocacy as opportunities and not responsibilities” (Zhou, 2021).

¹⁵ Schulman, S. (2011, November 23). *Israel and 'pinkwashing'*. The New York Times. Retrieved December 13, 2022, from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/opinion/pinkwashing-and-israels-use-of-gays-as-a-messaging-tool.html>

¹⁶ Zhou, A. (2021, May 10). *Communicating corporate LGBTQ advocacy: A computational comparison of the global CSR discourse*. Public Relations Review. Retrieved December 14, 2022, from <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0363811121000539?token=90FC8265EC9906B6CB733F430F5DE2471654919E0DCB49F23F55938693E394980F63D5BF492B4B6721EDF2DD792142AE&originRegion=us-east-1&originCreation=20221214053432>

Despite the possible selfish intentions, businesses tend to benefit when they give physical and monetary support to the LGBTQ+ community because of the distinct qualities the community possesses. The World Economic Forum states that the LGBTQ+ consumers,¹⁷ “Are among the most loyal; they reward companies who have their back, even if this means spending more on their shopping basket.” The spending power of the community goes unnoticed by corporations, with spending power, “In the U.S. alone, calculated in the region of \$800 billion a year.” Overall, “Companies openly championing LGBTQ+ rights are reaping the benefits” (Zappulla, 2017), no matter their intentions.

Corporations may also take political stances for or against the LGBTQ+ community and their rights in order to impact corporate image and revenue. Their stance and involvement typically depends on prior political commitments, the political stance of their staff and affiliates, and the company’s reliance on political regulation and laws.

Company's stance in LGBTQ+ issues is correlated to their prior activism and commitments. Corporations will,¹⁸ “Want to support politicians that will advocate for a favorable regulatory environment, corporations’ activism on LGBT issues may be related to their existing political orientations. We would not, for example, expect a corporation with a history of only supporting conservative politics to be active on LGBT issues” (Maks-Solomon & Drewry, 2020). History of party and political support can make a company more or less prone to incorporate LGBTQ+ activism into their marketing, even if it helps profits or image.

¹⁷ Zappulla, A. (2017, January 17). *The simple reason why so many businesses support LGBT rights*. World Economic Forum. Retrieved December 14, 2022, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/why-so-many-businesses-support-lgbt-rights/>

¹⁸ Maks-Solomon, C., & Drewry, J. M. (2020, September 2). *Why Do Corporations Engage in LGBT Rights Activism? LGBT Employee Groups as Internal Pressure Groups*. Cambridge Core. Retrieved December 14, 2022, from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>

Throughout the 1990s to the present day, company involvement on LGBTQ+ issues has become an important factor of corporate political activism. Ball states,¹⁹ “One of the most important consequences of LGBTQ activism aimed at corporations at the end of the last century was that it helped, after the new century, to turn big businesses from targets of political activism on behalf of queer equality to sources of that activism. This transformation is reflected in the ways in which corporate America has pushed for the adoption of LGBTQ antidiscrimination law and marriage equality while vigorously opposing so-called religious freedom law and transgender bathroom laws that condone or encourage discrimination against people ” (Ball, 2019). Political support has not only come from donations to candidates but through legislation and political action. Modern day companies act strategically when determining their actions, or lack of action, when it comes to corporate political activity (CPA). With LGBTQ+ rights and activism becoming one of the most prominent issues where companies have completed or reported CPA, it is important to understand corporate motives and the actors behind determining LGBTQ+ affiliated CPA.

The political stances of staff and affiliates of a corporation are also a factor in why a company may or may not participate in LGBTQ+ activism. Namely, a corporation’s Political Action Committee (PAC) is the main actor in determining this position. Maks-Solomon and Drewry explain that, “Corporate PACs behave as if they are trying to seek access to politicians, supporting powerful incumbents that they can later lobby in Congress. Yet there do appear to be ideological differences across industries. This variation in PAC ideology might explain variation in corporate activism” (Maks-Solomon & Drewry, 2020). PACs have a large voice in the company's corporate political activity (CPA), which is the overall report of a company's efforts to

¹⁹ Ball, C. A. (2019). *The queering of corporate America*. Google Books. Retrieved December 14, 2022, from https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Queering_of_Corporate_America/tuW2DwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&kptab=getbook

influence political activities. Because of this role, this body of the company's staff and affiliates is essential in determining the company's stance and actions on LGBTQ+ activism and rights.

The PAC's decision is usually persuaded by the political interests that benefit the company, especially the political party or political views that support legislation that helps the company. Maks-Solomon and Drewry explain that, "Corporations benefiting from regulation and those dependent upon government contracts are least likely to engage in partisan political activity, while those facing hostile regulation support economically conservative political parties. Heavily-regulated corporations should be less likely to make (liberal) activist statements on LGBT rights because they will not want to challenge established government policies and a status quo from which they benefit" (Maks-Solomon & Drewry, 2020). Legislation can impact company image and profits, thus it is imperative to companies who focus on benefiting from political and social activity to act strategically in order to not disrupt the standards that have made them successful this far.

While many companies's pride campaigns and corporate activism have payed off, many face backlash and lose profits because they donate money to anti-gay politicians and political causes, do not physically or monetarily contribute to LGBTQ+ activism, and produce inauthentic and illconsidered campaigns. It is important to consider these factors when evaluating past campaigns in order to determine what can make future campaigns successful.

Past campaigns have faced backlash for implementing rainbows and pride symbols into their logo and Twitter profile in order to appeal to the LGBTQ+ supporting audience during pride month because of their recent donations to politicians who do not support gay rights or LGBTQ+ equality. In 2021, for example, Representative Pramila Jayapal called out American Airlines and AT&T for their 2020 donations to conservative politician Mitch McConnell, who

blocked the equality act as senate minority leader.²⁰ These corporations faced a hit to their image and lost the trust of LGBTQ+ people and allies (Nunez, 2021).

Companies that donate to LGBTQ+ causes also tend to do very well and create respect and profits for the company. Their genuineness is important to consumers because consumers want companies to physically contribute to the cause and not just use pride month as a way to advertise new products or seem socially-aware by adding rainbows to their logo. Through UGG's 2022 pride campaign,²¹ they donated \$125,000 to the Trevor project and promoted their all-gender Pride range (Thornton, 2022). This campaign gained a great response from consumers and pride advertising critics.

Inauthentic and ill considered campaigns are the most common of the pride campaigns that face public ridicule and consequences. While companies may produce a seemingly flawless campaign for pride month that seems to be respectful to the LGBTQ+ community, they may not practice what they preach.

Google's 2021 pride campaign, for example, contained the typical rainbows on the logo and even a confetti and pride flag surprise when anything about pride is searched, but Google failed to maintain their activism when it came to employment. The internet revealed that they were excluding those who selected "Unknown" for gender (non-binary people) from seeing job ads. This caused backlash towards google and impacted their image in a negative way (Nunez, 2021). Campaigns like this that are inauthentic and not well thought out are quick to be canceled by internet users, thus it is important that companies consider all factors of their company when claiming to practice equality and justice among other pillars of pride month.

²⁰ Nunez, J. A. (2021, June 8). *5 horrible pride campaigns so far*. Chaos+Comrades. Retrieved December 14, 2022, from <https://chaosandcomrades.com/stories/5-horrible-pride-campaigns-so-far/>

²¹ Thornton, L. (2022, June 17). *Discover the best (and Worst) Pride Marketing Campaigns: Digital ethos*. Digital Ethos®. Retrieved December 14, 2022, from <https://digitaletmos.net/discover-the-best-and-worst-pride-marketing-campaigns/>

Study Objectives and Research Questions

The objective of this research is to find what types of pride campaigns produce the best results for the company advertising and for the LGBTQ+ community and use the findings to pinpoint the ideal campaign that implements social issues. Through these findings, both the company and the gay community will benefit more from CSR. This information is crucial to know so that advertisers can proceed with progressive campaigning in the most efficient and non offensive way possible. If more research is conducted on what an ideal social progression campaign looks like, companies will benefit, and ally corporations will be able to push for equality and awareness for all effectively. These findings provide a significant contribution to defining the components of a model social progression campaign that will benefit companies as they navigate finding the ideal intersection between taking on social responsibility and implementing their CSR into their campaigns to add value to their branding. The following questions are addressed in this research and guide the case studies.

- What elements of pride campaigns impact the CSR and magic of meaning produced?
- What scenarios or models of company CSR and political involvements hurt CSR and magic of meaning? Which ones help?
- Based on the case study findings, what should corporations keep in mind when producing future pride advertisements?
- What has changed over time in pride advertising? What can change or will continue to change in the future?
- How have companies benefited from pride campaigns in terms of product sales, positive CSR, and the creation of magic of meaning?

Method

This paper is based on a series of case studies of LGBTQ+ pride campaigns and contributions implemented by some major corporations in the United States. The various time periods were evaluated based on the elements of their campaign such as political, physical, and monetary support and campaign depth and components. Using key performance indicators of campaign profit, social media engagement, and donation amounts, this study will determine the effectiveness of various corporations' pride campaigns. It will evaluate corporations that have changed their approach to pride advertising over time and what elements an ideal future campaign should include.

These indicators were measured with contributions to anti-gay entities and the usual company's revenue in mind in order to analyze the campaign as a whole. The analysis is based on the case study of Target, Nike, and CVS's pride campaigns before 2009, 2009-2010, 2011-2012, 2013-2014, 2015-2016, 2017-2018, 2019-2020, and 2021-2022. All advertisements and content analyzed originated from 2009-2022 besides previous related campaigns and background information in order to maintain time relevance and give the company's most up-to-date campaign information. The analysis of pride campaigns starts in 2009 because pride month was formally recognized by the United States then. Once federally recognized, American companies were more comfortable and more likely to produce pride advertisements. Since pride month is once a year, two year analysis periods allow for consistencies and sudden shifts to be easily identified year to year. Continuations and themes are able to be found within these shorter time periods and because the periods are only two years long, specific political and social movements can be easily identified and associated with the time period as a whole.

Each time period was evaluated based on the implementation of corporate social responsibility, including the company's physical and monetary contributions to LGBTQ+

activism, and the communication and advertising tactics utilized to introduce LGBTQ+ activism as a part of the company's CSR to determine if the impact of CSR is dampened by an incongruence in communication and implementation, producing a negative consumer response, or consistent, producing a positive consumer response.

This information was collected from the company sites, company advertisements, press releases, databases, communication organization's websites, scholarly studies, research articles, company reports, social media websites, news websites, websites of related projects, and verified online sources. All information has been verified through multiple sources to ensure that the integrity of this study meets a high standard. This information has been accessed through verified online sources, when scholarly sources were unavailable, due to the contemporary scope of the project and gaps in literature.

The corporations used in this study are representative of companies that produced consistent (Nike), inconsistent (CVS), and somewhat consistent (Target) positive outcomes CSR. These companies were chosen to show how they are dissimilar and had different outcomes because of their CSR.

List of Tables

Table 1

CSR Communication or Implementation Tactics Table

CSR Communication or Implementation Tactic	Target	Nike	CVS
Pride related social media posts	✓	✓	✓
Anti-LGBTQ+ politician or organization donations	✓		✓
Pro-LGBTQ+ politician or organization donations	✓	✓	✓
Colleague Resource Group or equivalent			✓
Pride Collections	✓	✓	

Video Advertisements/ Commercials	✓	✓	✓
Poster/Graphics advertisements	✓	✓	✓
Negative Partnerships	✓		
Positive partnerships	✓	✓	✓
Highlights employee stories	✓		✓
DEI employment prioritization		✓	
Live Informative sessions			✓
Equality and pro-LGBTQ+ awards	✓	✓	✓
Showcase of gender identity and transition guidelines		✓	
Stolen content/ideas	✓		
Sponsoring LGBTQ+ conferences/summits	✓		✓
Paid Social Media Campaigns	✓		
Supported anti-LGBTQ+ legislation			✓
Supported LGBTQ+ legislation	✓		
Produced one or more campaigns/collections that were offensive/ received backlash	✓	✓	
Merchandise partnership with LGBTQ+ member		✓	

Table 2

Case Study CSR and Magic of Meaning Findings

Company	Implemented positive LGBTQ+ pride related CSR that benefited the company and the LGBTQ+ community	Instilled a magic of meaning within their products and corporation by utilizing CSR and LGBTQ+ advocacy
Target	Somewhat	Yes
Nike	Yes	Yes
CVS	No	No

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Chapter 1: Target Inc.

Target is one of the most popular corporations today, and they have become known for their elaborate pride campaigns and pride month merchandise. But, Target was not always known for having supportive pride campaigns. The brand started with major misses in supporting the LGBTQ+ community through pride campaigns, but seemed to shift around 2012 and made more meaningful and authentic campaigns while still suffering from backlash due to some insensitive and costly mistakes in their campaigns.

1.1 Background-Before 2009

The early 21st century marked the start of a long road to LGBTQ+ equality and rights that is still ongoing today. Target was among the first corporations to implement the Magic of Meaning theory into their advertising strategy with the incorporation of a team focused on

diversity. This signified to consumers the values and commitment of the company, providing social value to customers of Target. But, the theory can and did only work when Target was consistent in the advertising and incorporation of LGBTQ+ related corporate social responsibility. Their support of pride month and LGBTQ+ issues and advertising and communication tactics utilized in their pride campaigns started to be more consistent and intertwined in 2012, but remained unstable.

In 2003, Target established a Diversity Steering Committee and by 2009,²² the committee became the Office of Diversity & Inclusion. Before the end of 2015, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion became a part of the corporate social responsibility team, where Target began to, “Invest in external stakeholder engagement initiatives. (President et al., 2022)” They became known for their journey to implementing LGBTQ+ related causes into their corporate social responsibility plan and execution. Though they started their path in including diversity within the corporation’s social responsibility in 2003, their execution of CSR did not match their advertising or the publication of the values within their diversity initiatives until around 2014. Because of this, Target did not benefit from implementing LGBTQ+ issues into their CSR due to the incongruence between the communication of CSR and implementation of CSR until 2014, and still encountered some issues with this dilemma ever after 2014. Target’s implementation of diversity and LGBTQ+ issue awareness into their corporate social responsibility goals embodies a company that used social issues to advance their marketing campaigns after taking a major loss because they were conscious of consumer expectations and the magic of meaning that pride merchandise and pro-LGBTQ+ companies provide for consumers.

²² President, K. F. S. V., Fernandez, K., & President, S. V. (2022, March 7). *Diversity, equity & inclusion: Target sustainability & ESG*. Target Corporate. Retrieved January 4, 2023, from https://corporate.target.com/sustainability-ESG/diversity-equity-inclusion?clkid=a33d9e95N87dd11edb8cfdb68a5a1aa91&lnm=78775&afid=Connexity+US&ref=tgt_adv_xasd0002

Target has a clear vision for their implementation of LGBTQ+ social causes into their marketing through a variety of avenues, with company stating,²³ “Our marketing celebrates the intersectionality of identities and interests while creating and contributing to affirming spaces through engagements in social media, streaming playlists with annotations from LGBTQIA+ musical talent favorites, a Snapchat lens to celebrate with us in store, stories from the LGBTQIA+ community and more” (*LGBTQIA team members & guests: Target corporation*).

1.2 2009-2010

Target’s relationship with its LGBTQ+ consumers and allies started off rocky, with the retail store losing consumer trust after donating to the Minnesota Forward Group in 2010.²⁴ This group, “Was spending money on anti-gay Republican Congressman Tom Emmer” (Rivera, 2022). The company was met with boycotts and in defense.²⁵ Target CEO Gregg Steinhafel wrote an apology regarding the corporation’s monetary support, claiming that the, “MN Forward donation was to support economic growth and job creation” (Scheck, 2019). A company spokesperson stated that, “The company will also do a strategic review of political donations and plans to lead a discussion on improving gay rights in the workplace” (Scheck, 2019).

Target made efforts to combat the negative public view of Target produced by their donation to MN Forward and push their marketing to reflect that of a company that celebrates and strives towards diversity and inclusion. Target’s CEO at the time, Gregg Steinhafel, provided reasoning for the company's donation and attempted to provide evidence of Target’s support for

²³ Target Corporate. (n.d.). *LGBTQIA team members & guests: Target corporation*. LGBTQIA+ Team Members & Guests. Retrieved January 15, 2023, from https://corporate.target.com/sustainability-ESG/diversity-equity-inclusion/team-members-guests/lgbtqia?clkid=a33d9e95N87dd11edb8cfdb68a5a1aa91&lnm=78775&afid=Connexity+US&ref=tgt_adv_xasd0002

²⁴ Rivera, P. by K. (2022, June 1). *Lessons learned from target: How to celebrate Pride Month at work*. She+ Geeks Out. Retrieved December 14, 2022, from <https://www.shegeeksout.com/blog/lessons-learned-from-target-how-to-celebrate-pride-month-at-work/>

²⁵ Scheck, T. (2019, July 15). *Target apologizes for donation to MN forward*. MPR News. Retrieved December 14, 2022, from <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2010/08/05/target-apology-donation>

the LGBTQ+ community in a company press release.²⁶ He stated, “Let me be very clear, Target’s support of the GLBT community is unwavering, and inclusiveness remains a core value of our company. Some current examples of that support include: Domestic Partner Benefits, Sponsorship of Twin Cities Pride, Sponsorship of Out & Equal Workplace Summit. (Steinhafel, 2010)”

The press release provides some inconsistencies in the brands message though, as Steinhafel makes the claim that, “We do not have a political or social agenda. (Steinhafel, 2010)” when it is clear from the evidence he provided on LGBTQ+ causes that Target has supported, that the company does in fact have a social agenda at least. The company also went on in later years to have clear involvement in LGBTQ+ related legislation, thus also having a political agenda.

Despite this press release and other messaging efforts to apologize and recover from the backlash faced from their donation to MN Forward, Target was continuously met with negative reactions, receiving 240,000 boycott notices.²⁷ It is clear that Target’s actions as far as CSR and their implementation of LGBTQ+ relations did not match their communications efforts, and thus their CSR impact dampened. Target was not releasing pride merchandise or creating LGBTQ+ pride specific campaigns at this time, likely because their implementation of CSR as it is related to LGBTQ+ issues would not match their negative communication efforts.

1.3 2011-2012

In 2011, despite the company’s efforts to apologize for their donation to MN Forward, the company suffered a major loss when, “Lady Gaga dropped out of a planned partnership to

²⁶ Steinhafel, G. (2010, July 27). *A Message to Target Team Members from Gregg Steinhafel, Target Chairman, President & CEO*. Target Corporate. Retrieved January 4, 2023, from <https://corporate.target.com/press/releases/2010/07/a-message-to-target-team-members>

²⁷ YouTube. (2010). *Target Hq Gets 240,000 Boycott Notices*. YouTube. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyuFWXSDBCs>.

release a special album with the retailer” (Rivera, 2022). The Wall Street Journal claimed that Lady Gaga,²⁸ “Severed ties with the company because Target gave money to MN Forward, a political action committee that supported Tom Emmer, a 2010 Minnesota gubernatorial candidate who is opposed to gay marriage”(Dow Jones & Company, 2011). Their contributions to an anti-LGBTQ+ organization and politician caused them to miss out on a major opportunity and immense profit.

The company also failed to improve their political relations related to the LGBTQ+ community. When same sex marriage was brought up in 2012 with a constitutional amendment being voted on at the polls in Minnesota, Target was, “One of the state’s biggest employers”, yet they, “Remained neutral on the amendment” (Ball, 2019).

The company did, however, make sure to call attention to the social areas that they did well in. Still trying to recover from previous backlash, Target made sure to use communication methods to highlight their wins in diversity. In a press release from March 16, 2011,²⁹ they attempted to gain media attention for being, “Named One of the “World’s Most Ethical Companies.”

2012 marked the first year that target seemed to do right by the LGBTQ+ community and marketed a pride t-shirt to raise money to support a marriage equality group in Minnesota that wanted to defeat a possible amendment that would ban gay marriage,³⁰ contrary to their behavior in 2010. CBS News reported that, “The T-shirt promotion will raise up to \$120,000 for the Family Equality Council, a Washington-based group that is part of a Minnesota coalition pushing to defeat the constitutional amendment. (CBS News, 2012) ” Rivera states, “In 2012, Target put

²⁸ Dow Jones & Company. (2011, March 10). *Why did Lady Gaga and Target part ways?* The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved December 14, 2022, from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-SEB-64226>

²⁹ Target. (2011, March 16). *Target Named One of the "World's Most Ethical Companies"*. Target Corporate. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://corporate.target.com/press/releases/2011/03/target-named-ethical-company>

³⁰ CBS Interactive. (2012, June 1). *Target 'pride' shirts anger gay marriage opponents*. CBS News. Retrieved January 8, 2023, from <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/target-pride-shirts-anger-gay-marriage-opponents/>

themselves out there with the release of a Pride t-shirt and voiced their support of the LGBTQIA+ community with a campaign supporting marriage equality” (Rivera, 2022). Fox News stated that,³¹ “Spokeswoman Molly Snyder said the T-shirt promotion was organized by a group of gay Target employees and their allies.”

To market their campaign to improve the company's positive results from CSR, they started to match their communication and statements of LGBTQ+ relations with the advertising message produced by their products- that they stand for LGBTQ+ equality, rights, and pride.

Their 2012 pride collection consisted of several t-shirt designs, with the company selling designs from notable celebrities to increase popularity. Fox News stated, “The \$12.99 shirts will be sold on Target's website through June, or while supplies last. They come in four designs, emblazoned with words such as "harmony" and "pride. Singer Gwen Stefani designed one shirt featuring a rainbow and a cloud that says, "LOVE IS LOVE (as shown in figure 1). (Fox News, 2015)" Since this, their campaigns have been among the most praised and 2012 marks a clear turning point for Target’s CSR relation to LGBTQ+ issues and the brand began to produce magic of meaning.

³¹ FOX News Network. (2015, January 6). *Retail chain Target's 'pride' t-shirts rile marriage amendment supporters*. Fox News. Retrieved January 8, 2023, from <https://www.foxnews.com/us/retail-chain-targets-pride-t-shirts-rile-marriage-amendment-supporters>



Figure 1: “Love is Love” pride shirt designed by Gwen Stefani and sold by Target Inc. (Fox News, 2015)

With this campaign’s proceeds going towards a cause that supports the LGBTQ+ community, Target’s CSR communication and implementation started to become consistent in 2012, garnering positive feedback from a majority of their consumers, with up to 120,000 raised from consumer purchases. After 2012, Target became more involved in LGBTQ+ activism and started to expand their pride campaigns and political contributions to LGBTQ+ issues.

1.4 2013-2014

CEO Gregg Steunhafel, who was deemed responsible for the company’s donation to Tom Emmer’s 2010 campaign,³² resigned in 2014. There is an apparent positive trend in positive LGBTQ+ related CSR after 2014 that may be related to a change in management and the growing support for LGBTQ+ rights and equality within society.

Target started taking larger steps of action towards political equality for the LGBTQ+ community in 2014 when the corporation formerly stood in support of marriage equality and,³³

³² Birkey, A. (2015, June 19). *Target releases LGBT Pride Campaign: #TakePride*. The Column. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <http://thecolu.mn/17207/target-releases-lgbt-pride-campaign-takepride>

³³ *Target history timeline*. Target Corporate. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://corporate.target.com/about/purpose-history/History-Timeline?era=3&id=133>

“Joined several other national companies to sign on to a brief in support of marriage equality that was pending in the Seventh Circuit. This brief evaluated the issues created by states that prohibited same-sex marriage and also refused to recognize marriages that were conducted legally in other states. (Target history timeline)” This corporate involvement among other protests and political support lead to the U.S. Supreme Court decision that, “The Fourteenth Amendment requires all states to grant same-sex marriages and recognize same-sex marriages granted in other states. (Target history timeline)”

Many corporations, including Target supported the Employment Non-Discrimination Act despite conservative backlash in congress from 2013-14. The act was killed by the speaker of the House of Representatives due to a lack of support from conservatives (Ball, 2019).

1.5 2015-2016

After the Employment Non-Discrimination Act was killed in the 2013-14 congress, Target shifted its support to the Equality Act, described as a, “Much more expansive federal bill that would prohibit discrimination not only in employment, but also in housing and in the provision of goods and services by places of public accommodation”(Ball, 2019). Target was among the companies to form the Business Coalition for the Equality Act and Target worked with the Human Rights Campaign to push for the legislation to be enacted.

The passing of North Carolina’s 2016 HB2, dubbed the “Bathroom bill” prohibited LGBTQ+ people from going to the bathroom of the gender that they identify with. Target responded to the controversial law by, “Announcing that it would allow transgender employees to choose bathrooms and fitting rooms that match their gender identity” (Ball, 2019). The company received mostly praise for this measure and this incident helped build the store’s relationship with its LGBTQ+ customer base.

Target's 2015 pride merchandise included,³⁴ "An inclusive ad campaign" (Wong, 2017) that was, "Unveiled June 8, the Minnesota-based retail giant's #TakePride line is available online and in select stores. It includes T-shirts, swim trunks (See figure 2) and flip-flops (See figure 3), as well as headphones, iPhone cases and other products. (Wong, 2017)" Their pride commercial for this campaign,³⁵ "Pairs archival footage of LGBT rights milestones with colorful, time-lapse images and present-day Pride clips. (Wong, 2017)" The content of the commercial reflects the overall communication tactics of the company's CSR plan, which are to stand for the LGBTQ+ community, their equality, rights, and pride. The popularity of the commercial, which received thousands of views, deems the communication tactics of Target as positive for the company's CSR. The company provided poster copies of the language used in the commercial later in the year. Target says to, "Hang it (the poster) in a special place as a reminder to always take pride in who you were born to be. (*Snap a pic in purple and #takepride on Spirit Day 2015*)"

Target's CSR goals and values are also reflected by their pro-LGBTQ+ campaign and merchandise, with Laysha Ward, Target's Executive Vice President and Chief Corporate Responsibility Officer stating, "We're making our message loud and clear: Target proudly stands with the LGBT community, both as a team member and team player through all that we do – from our volunteer efforts to our long-standing partnerships with groups like Family Equality Council and Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, to the very products we carry in our stores and online. (Wong, 2017)"

In addition to their monetary support and press statements, Target actively participated in pride events, stating, "Pride Month is in full swing—Target proudly participated in Pride events

³⁴ Wong, C. M. (2017, December 7). *Target's new pride commercial will make your queer heart sing*. HuffPost. Retrieved January 12, 2023, from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/target-take-pride-campaign_n_7545624

³⁵ *Target's Pride Manifesto Video*. (2015). *Target Corporate*. Retrieved January 12, 2023, from <https://corporate.target.com/videos/news-features/2015/pride-week-video>.

in Los Angeles, New York and the Twin Cities, and thousands of our team members are taking part in festivities from coast to coast. (*How target team members #TakePride 2015*)” In addition, Target announced their involvement in an LGBTQ+ related award show, stating, “Target is also proud to be a sponsor of the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) Respect Awards taking place Oct. 23 in Los Angeles. (*Snap a pic in purple and #takepride on Spirit Day 2015*)” This physical support is an important piece of both the implementation and communication of Target’s CSR because it shows that they aren’t just donating for press and putting out a collection for profit. Target has genuine interest and is a stakeholder in the LGBTQ+ events that occur during Pride Month and beyond.

In 2015 Target also took a more personal approach to incorporating pride into their CSR objectives. The highlighted individual employee stories stating,³⁶ “Meet four of our team members who shared their personal Pride stories, and their take on why it’s so important to #TakePride all year long. (*How target team members #TakePride 2015*)” Michael Assetto was among the employees featured, stating, “My Target team has also been really supportive- it’s great that we have such a welcoming work environment” (*How target team members #TakePride 2015*).

These stories were utilized in Target’s news and features as a part of their pride campaign. Highlighting employee stories gives the campaign a sense of sincerity and genuineness. This tactic makes it seem like Target really does support the causes that it profits from, such as pride. Target’s CSR implementation and communication have a close relationship here, as the employee stories highlight implementation of diversity and a positive work culture within their stores while using the stories as a way to promote their pride collection.

³⁶ *How target team members #TakePride*. Target Corporate. (2015, June 26). Retrieved January 15, 2023, from <https://corporate.target.com/article/2015/06/target-team-members-take-pride>

For the first time, in 2015 Target expanded their LGBTQ+ activism beyond pride month by implementing Spirit Day in partnership with GLAAD.³⁷ Target said the company is, “Proud to be a presenting sponsor of GLAAD's Spirit Day on Oct. 15—joining other companies, organizations, schools and millions of individuals rallying together to raise awareness about bullying in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community and show support for LGBT youth across the country” (*Snap a pic in purple and #takepride on Spirit Day 2015*).

Strategically, Target and GLAAD implemented a popular social media app to advertise this CSR campaign, with Target stating, “We just unveiled a special Spirit Day filter on Snapchat, available all day. Snap a photo of you and your friends or family, and apply the filter to show your Spirit Day support. You can also share your photos and messages on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels using the hashtag #SpiritDay. It’s all about taking pride in what you stand for, and who you’ll stand by. (*Snap a pic in purple and #takepride on Spirit Day 2015*)”

Continuing their press statements in order to match their communications efforts to the implementation of the campaign, Laysha Ward, the chief corporate social responsibility officer at target stated, “LGBT youth deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential. To be comfortable with and proud of who they are. To be free to be exactly who they were born to be. Target is excited to be a Spirit Day presenting partner, working with GLAAD to raise awareness around the issue of bullying in the LGBT youth community. (*Snap a pic in purple and #takepride on Spirit Day 2015*)” This statement really drives home the communication efforts of the campaigns because it comes directly from the CSR implementer and she is able to communicate her and the companies intentions.

³⁷ *Snap a pic in purple and #takepride on Spirit Day*. Target Corporate. (2015, October 15). Retrieved January 15, 2023, from <https://corporate.target.com/article/2015/10/spirit-day>

Target's 2015 campaign presented consistency in their CSR communication and implementation, with the corporation politically supporting the group, partnering with LGBTQ+ educational causes, highlighting employee stories as campaign advertisements, and releasing statements like that of Ward's while advertising their pride clothing line through commercials and product photos.



Figure 2: "Pride Swim Short" sold by Target Inc. (Wong, 2017)



Figure 3: Pride Flip Flop Sandals, Rainbow Chevron sold by Target, Inc. (Wong, 2017)

1.6 2017-2018

2017 marked the fifth year of Target's #TakePride campaign with pride merchandise and apparel and messages that show themes of,³⁸ "Love, peace, and unity" (Clausen, 2017). The campaign continued to have lots of support, but some remain wary of a corporation producing pride campaigns. Clausen points out that many people are worried a corporation may support a social cause like pride because of the profits they gain from it, not from genuine support. With pride campaigns becoming popularized, consumers started to wonder if businesses like Target were just using pride to make more money. This heightened awareness raised the stakes for companies that produced pride campaigns because any misstep or poor implementation of CSR was bound to be called out by consumers.

In a 2018 press release,³⁹ Target claimed that, "For more than 20 years, we've supported local, regional and national LGBTQ+ organizations financially and through volunteerism. And this year, along with our product collection and partnerships, we'll also have thousands of team member volunteers bringing community events to life across the nation. (*Pride month is here, and Target has everything you and your family need to celebrate* 2018)" Though there is not any known public evidence that supports Target having this long of a commitment to the LGBTQ+ community, their 2018 campaign included many elements that have been used in past campaigns. With over 90 products in their 2018 Pride collection and a donation to long-time partner GLADD, they kept some of the campaign elements the same.

They also introduced new elements, including a movie partnership and a collaboration for a limited edition item. The press release states, "We teamed up with 20th Century Fox to offer an exclusive DVD release of its award-winning film, "Love, Simon," including bonus movie

³⁸ Clausen, A. (2017, May 15). *In spite of backlash, target continues to #TakePride*. The American Genius. Retrieved January 12, 2023, from <https://theamericangenius.com/business-news/target-take-pride/>

³⁹ *Pride month is here, and Target has everything you and your family need to celebrate*. Target Corporate. (2018, June 11). Retrieved January 22, 2023, from https://corporate.target.com/article/2018/06/pride?ckid=403a23fcN99f611ed8a1ac11f71ee36b1&lnm=78775&afid=Connexity+US&ref=tgt_adv_xasd0002

content and collectible book, which drops June 12. We also worked with popular men's grooming brand Harry's on a limited-edition Shave with Pride gift set, and 100% of profits made from its sale will be donated to LGBTQ+ causes, including the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). (*Pride month is here, and Target has everything you and your family need to celebrate 2018*)”

Target also included statements from team leads regarding the corporation's involvement in pride events and the items the store is featuring in preparation for pride parades and events. “For the second year, our New York volunteers are teaming up with local partners on a Target-sponsored event called Youth Pride, a community celebration of LGBTQ+ youth and their families at a local park, with food, games, art, photo ops and lots more fun. As a founding partner, Target helped co-develop the festival in 2017, and our team members look forward to volunteering again this year. (*Pride month is here, and Target has everything you and your family need to celebrate 2018*)”

1.7 2019-2020

In 2019, Target continued their tradition of releasing a pride collection,⁴⁰ this time of more than 90 items. As a part of their CSR and LGBTQ+ activism, Target partnered with organizations and gave donations to LGBTQ+ related organizations, “Contributing \$100,000 to support GLSEN. (*In honor of Pride month, here are the ways Target's helping guests celebrate 2019*)”

Target also mentions their employee's contributions to LGBTQ+ activism and instills service as one of their CSR components. Target stated, “Our team participates in Pride volunteer activities, parades, festivals and more throughout the month, all part of our year-round tradition

⁴⁰ *In honor of Pride month, here are the ways Target's helping guests celebrate*. Target Corporate. (2019, June 3). Retrieved January 15, 2023, from <https://corporate.target.com/article/2019/06/pride>

of volunteering in the communities where we live and work. This year, team members will be on tap to volunteer at more than 30 Pride events across the country, including this year's World Pride in New York City " (*In honor of Pride month, here are the ways Target's helping guests celebrate* 2019).

Their approach seemed to work because in 2020 the company also released a large pride collection for pride month and provided support to the LGBTQ+ community.⁴¹ Target states, "For decades, Target has supported local, regional and national LGBTQ+ organizations financially and through volunteerism. This year, in honor of Pride Month, we're proud to donate \$100,000 to GLSEN to help their mission of creating inclusion and safety for all. (*Here's how target's helping guests and team members Honor Pride Month* 2020)" In 2019 and 2020, Target used articles as a communication method to advertise their CSR implementation

1.8 2021-2022

Continuing the trend they set in 2019, Target donated to LGBTQ+ causes and released a pride collection in 2021. They expanded their pride collection and donations,⁴² with, "Over 150 inclusive products" (*Take pride! here's how Target's recognizing Pride Month* 2021) and, "In our 10th year supporting GLSEN and its mission to create affirming, accessible and antiracist spaces for LGBTQIA+ students, we're making a \$100,000 donation (marking nearly \$2 million we've provided throughout our partnership). We also continue to support local, regional and national LGBTQIA+ organizations throughout the year including the Human Rights Campaign and Out & Equal with donations and volunteer hours from our team members. (*Take pride! here's how Target's recognizing Pride Month* 2021)"

⁴¹ *Here's how Target's helping guests and team members Honor Pride Month*. Target Corporate. (2020, June 11). Retrieved January 15, 2023, from <https://corporate.target.com/article/2020/06/pride>

⁴² *Take pride! here's how Target's recognizing Pride Month*. Target Corporate. (2021, June 2). Retrieved January 15, 2023, from <https://corporate.target.com/article/2021/06/pride>

Target also began to highlight members of the queer community and their creations by including them in their video and online campaigns. Target said that,⁴³ “This year’s marketing campaign, created by Target Creative and featuring young-adult author Leah Johnson along with Target team members, is all about celebrating stories of affirmation. The campaign showcases people being their authentic selves by letting their unique style shine, and highlights the diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community” (*Take pride! here's how Target's recognizing Pride Month* 2021).

Target highlighted their online articles about their pride efforts, contributing to the massive campaign that the brand creates every year. They tweeted,⁴⁴ “Taking pride — today and every day. Here’s how Target’s recognizing Pride Month,” and included the link to the article (News, 2021).

In 2022, Target was called out by consumers and the non-profit Act Up, an AIDA awareness organization for selling a t-shirt with a slogan that was widely made and utilized non-profit without permission. Because of the backlash in response to this incident, they, “Pulled the shirt, but overall it showcases a tremendous lack of awareness to use a logo that ties in a vital point in LGBTQIA+ History without providing context” (Rivera, 2022). Though they attempted to show physical support for LGBTQ+ causes through the slogan of a popular AIDS awareness platform, they stole part of the organization’s branding and profited from it.

Target’s 2022 pride campaign included the addition of binders or compression tops to their sales floor. This was monumental, as, “This inclusion marks one of the first mass-market big-box stores to make these products available nationwide” (Rivera, 2022). The company was championed for including trans, gender fluid, and non-binary people, but the company that

⁴³ Target Inc. (2021). *Take Pride: Meet Leah Johnson*. Retrieved January 15, 2023, from <https://corporate.target.com/videos/news-features/2021/06/take-pride-leah-johnson>.

⁴⁴ News, T. (2021, June 1). *Taking pride - today and every day. here's how Target's recognizing Pride Month*: <https://t.co/q1h6s4b5dv> [pic.twitter.com/axllrvknvc](https://t.co/q1h6s4b5dv). Twitter. Retrieved March 19, 2023, from <https://twitter.com/targetnews/status/1399685246585655297>

Target worked with to produce this product was controversial. Target's partner TomboyX was, "Accused of not being inclusive when working with models" (Rivera, 2022). Thus, the company faced backlash for not doing further research on who they partnered with and created a campaign that seemed ill-considered and inauthentic.

By 2021-2022, Target still did not produce campaigns with consistent communication and implementation of CSR. With an inclusive merchandise collection for pride month, the company did profit from pride but also made sure to make donations to LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations and provide volunteers, and feature members of the LGBTQ+ community in advertisements. Despite these efforts, their main error was not doing research on the merchandise and partnerships that they produce. The backlash that they received for their partnership with TomboyX and for using Act Up's slogan demonstrates the heightened awareness around the profitability of pride campaigns that has grown over the years and the increase in consumers holding companies like Target accountable when they mess up.

1.9 Analysis

Despite Target's many inconsistencies in CSR implementation and errors with producing well considered merchandise collections, the company has produced a magic of meaning through pride campaigns, though a controversial one. This is because of the massive and multifaceted campaigns that they produced over the years through their pride month merchandise collections. Many people know about Target's controversial political actions, inauthenticity, and recklessness in some of their campaigns, but the convenientness and widespreadness of their pride merchandise allows the company to still sell lots of products and produce a positive magic of meaning for consumers because Target is now known for implementing CSR and social issues into their campaigns.

When consumers walk into Target stores every June, they are met with a wide range of pride merchandise and when they look at the brand's social media, they are met with rainbows pro-LGBTQ+ statements. This makes it hard to deny the company's values on the surface. With how prominent Target's pro-LGBTQ+ aspects are now in their overall branding, it's hard for their mistakes to deter customers from not buying pride merchandise from one of the biggest store chains in America.

Despite this, with the increased awareness around the company's profitability with pride campaigns and a growth in cancel culture,⁴⁵ the brand's magic of meaning has been tumultuous and constantly going up and down. In order for the corporation to continue to produce authentic and profitable pride campaigns that create a magic of meaning, they cannot make the same mistakes that they have in the past, including donating to non-LGBTQ+ supporting politicians and organizations, using nonprofit's slogans without their permission, and partnering with controversial organizations.

One way that the company could have mitigated some of the inconsistencies in CSR is to implement more internal systems that support LGBTQ+ people. Creating programs like employee resource groups, implementing and showcasing their gender identity and transition policies, and putting in lots of effort to obtain a diverse group of suppliers could have made the corporation more socially conscious and educate employees on social causes, thus they would have been less likely to produce inauthentic and inconsiderate campaigns.

Future pride campaigns can learn from Target's highs and lows in order to execute better CSR than them, but they also must understand how Target is different from most brands. Target's position and popularity are rare. With how prominent Target's pro-LGBTQ+ aspects are now in

⁴⁵ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Cancel culture definition & meaning*. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved March 19, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cancel%20culture>

their overall branding, it's hard for their mistakes to deter customers from not buying pride merchandise from one of the biggest store chains in America.

Target was not completely canceled in the past because of their CSR inconsistencies, but with social media becoming increasingly influential the company could easily be canceled now if they made major political contributions to anti-LGBTQ+ politicians or organizations or made an obviously inauthentic or not thought out campaign to the extent that it could drop profits or lose a substantial amount of customers. Future pride campaigns should keep cancel culture in mind and carefully produce authentic campaigns. Cancel culture can cause consumers to no longer want to shop at Target or boycott the company because of the company's poor CSR implementation with LGBTQ+ related marketing, thus causing Target to lose large amounts of profit. Because it is a department store with many competitors, cancellation to the extent that consumers pledge not to shop there is highly feasible and even likely if Target faces major online controversy today.

Chapter 2: Nike Inc.

Nike is a corporation that designs and manufactures athletic apparel and equipment, including footwear, clothing, and accessories. In the past 18 years,⁴⁶ it has received a 100% score from the Human Rights Campaign, and Nike has a record of participating in social issues and using CSR to elevate their brand's message.

Nike is one of the few corporations with little to no inconsistencies in their pride advertisement messaging and their implementation of CSR. Nike's consistent implementation matches its communication practices because of its large donations to organizations that advance

⁴⁶ BRIGHT Marketing Solutions. (n.d.). *Case Study: Nike*. Marketing the Rainbow. Retrieved March 12, 2023, from <https://marketingtherainbow.info/case%20studies/fashion/nike>

LGBTQ+ equality. Now, Nike possesses the magic of meaning in terms of consumers buying Nike products and custom gear because of their support of the LGBTQ+ community.

2.1 Background-Before 2009

Nike's support of the LGBTQ+ community started much earlier than their actual pride campaigns. The company showed support for those with HIV and the gay community by featuring Ric Muñoz, a marathon runner and member of the LGBTQ+ community who had HIV (*Case Study: Nike* 2022). The video advertisement shows Muñoz running and features the text,⁴⁷ "Ric Muñoz, Los Angeles. 80 miles every week. 10 marathons every year. HIV positive. Just do it" (*Nike - Ric Muñoz, HIV Runner (1995)* 2019). The advertisement demonstrated that people with HIV can do amazing things while managing an illness and destigmatize HIV by humanizing it (*Nike - Ric Muñoz, HIV Runner (1995)* 2019).

But, it was not Nike's first progressive implementation of CSR. Their socially-conscious branding started in the 1970s, when they released their first women's shoe line.⁴⁸ They utilized empowering sayings in the names of women's shoes when women's empowerment in branding was rare (Natalia Mehlman Petrzela in (*Case Study: Nike*). They have also featured advertisements with paralympians,⁴⁹ elderly people,⁵⁰ and overweight runners.⁵¹ By featuring all different people and especially people who are not typically featured in athletic ads, they have utilized CSR to expand their audience while normalizing exercise and being in athletic

⁴⁷ YouTube. (2019, August 10). *Nike - Ric Muñoz, HIV Runner (1995)*. YouTube. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDo-AutKDiM>

⁴⁸ *Vintage 1978 Nike liberator*. Shoes Your Vintage. (2022, July 31). Retrieved March 14, 2023, from <https://www.shoesyourvintage.com/product/vintage-1978-nike-liberator/>

⁴⁹ The One Club. (n.d.). *Nike: Nike Paralympics - stare, sorry, awkward*. Nike | Nike Paralympics - Stare, Sorry, Awkward | The One Club. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from <https://www.oneclub.org/awards/theoneshow/-award/1587/nike-paralympics-stare-sorry-awkward>

⁵⁰ The One Club. (n.d.). *Nike: Nike Paralympics - stare, sorry, awkward*. Nike | Nike Paralympics - Stare, Sorry, Awkward | The One Club. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from <https://www.oneclub.org/awards/theoneshow/-award/1587/nike-paralympics-stare-sorry-awkward>

⁵¹ Nike France. (2012, August 3). *Nike - Find Your Greatness : Jogger*. YouTube. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9pmgoETgQQ>

advertisements for everyone. Through advertisements, Nike has taken on corporate social responsibility to end stigmas and promote inclusivity for many, including the LGBTQ+ community.

Before issuing major pride-related advertisements, Nike started as a sponsor of the Out and Equal Work Summit in 2007(*Case Study: Nike 2022*) and produced a small campaign for the summit sponsorship. Nike's allyship demonstrated through their sponsorship shows the corporation's commitment to the LGBTQ+ community.

Nike's marketing faced some early bumps in the road when they received backlash for their 2008 Hyperdunk campaign that featured photos of intimate male encounters of basketball player's slam dunking and ending up face to crotch with another player.⁵² These advertisements displayed phrases over the photograph like, "That Ain't Right" and "Isn't That Cute" that Nike said were not aimed at a gay audience.

Figure 4: That Ain't Right Nike 2008 Campaign (*Case Study: Nike 2022*)



Nike received criticism that the advertisements were homophobic on the Widen+Kennedy website blog. Widen+ Kennedy is the advertising agency that Nike hired to

⁵² Dash, G., Silver, J., & Hereford, D. (n.d.). *Masculinity, Homophobia, and Racism in Advertising*. Masculinity, homophobia, & racism in advertising: "that ain't right". Retrieved March 14, 2023, from https://www.reed.edu/anthro/adprojects/2011/dash_silver_hereford/that_aint_right.html

produce the ads, and people commented things on their blog like, “They [the ads] look great but why keep hitting that same ignorant drum that its not "right" to have your face next to some dude's junk. There are plenty of dudes that have to deal with this bigoted idea in a real way every day. Love the others though" (Dash et al., *Masculinity, Homophobia, and Racism in Advertising*).

While this opinion was the majority, Nike’s campaign had some supporters. These commenters said things like, “Great ads. They don't have anything to do with homophobia. Nobody wants to get dunked on. Get over yourselves. Not every media ad is an attack on your sexuality. Your hypersensitivity is embarrassing.” and, “As a gay male and a black male, I find that some of the commenters are jumping the gun and crying wolf for an ad that I feel is in no way homophobic. Growing up, what made dunking on someone embarrassing was and is not a man's genitals in your face but the fact that you were slammed on...I can't help but to feel that these comments are coming from people who don't play or enjoy basketball to get the point of reference” (Dash et al., *Masculinity, Homophobia, and Racism in Advertising*).

Nike responded with an apology and the takedown of these advertisements. The corporation’s president’s formal apology on June 23, 2008 stated,⁵³ “Nike is strongly opposed to discrimination of any kind and has a long history of supporting athletes regardless of their sexual orientation” (Hunsberger, 2008).

Despite Nike’s known support of the LGBTQ+ community, the backlash from these advertisements resulted in a wasted investment in marketing and created confusion about the brand’s intentions and continuation of LGBTQ+ support. The corporation’s CSR in LGBTQ+ involvement displayed inconsistent communication and implementation. While the company clearly showed support for the LGBTQ+ community with their past advertisements including

⁵³ Hunsberger, B. (2008, July 23). *Nike responds to Hyperdunk AD Critics*. oregonlive. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from https://www.oregonlive.com/playbooksandprofits/2008/07/nike_responds_to_hyperdunk_ad.html

LGBTQ+ members and sponsoring of the Out and Equal Work Summit, this campaign was a step back in their general communication of corporate social responsibility.

Not only was the advertisement viewed by many as offensive for the LGBTQ+ community, but it was speculated to involve racism and toxic masculinity. The advertisements also came at a time where race and sexuality were especially hot topics. Dash states, “The power regimes of sexuality, race, and gender all arise within Nike’s Hyperdunk ads, which reflects a culturally charged time of race and sexuality relations. When these ads were first posted in March of 2008, Barack Obama was leading the race for the presidential ticket in the Democratic party, representing an important shift in African American representation in politics. The debate over sexual equality was also extremely saturated with controversy in 2008 with the national discourse over Proposition 8,⁵⁴ which attempted to ban gay marriage in California and eventually was passed in November” (Dash et al., *Masculinity, Homophobia, and Racism in Advertising*).

Overall, the usual pro-LGBTQ+ company lost some of its magic of meaning, with its inconsistent messaging in this 2008 campaign creating confusion and disgust for many. While some consumers may have bought from them in the past because of their usual inclusive and diverse advertisements, this was a strong deterrent from that and the brand’s overall socio-political meaning has brought to a low momentarily.

2.2 2009-2010

In 2009, there were no major campaigns produced by Nike that related to the LGBTQ+ community, likely because Nike was focused on incorporating diversity at the internal level. Nike’s corporate responsibility report of 2007-2009 revealed that Nike’s Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion moved from reporting to the Nike brand president to reporting directly to

⁵⁴ Proposition 8 Case, California Courts (California Courts November 4, 2008). Retrieved March 14, 2023, from <https://www.courts.ca.gov/6465.htm>.

the CEO of Nike.⁵⁵ This was a move that allows the brand to prioritize diversity and inclusion and demonstrates the brand's efforts to prioritize diversity in the general practice of their brand.

2.3 2011-2012

Nike's 2012 "Be True" campaign pulled inspiration from their 1985 campaign,⁵⁶ dubbed with a longer phrase of, "Be True to Your School", where the corporation released shoes with popular universities' colors. But, the 2012 campaign connected with the LGBTQ+ community through custom athletic wear.⁵⁷ Starting as a grassroots campaign by Nike employees with the mission to provide equality in sports for everyone,⁵⁸ "Be True" became Nike's first release of pride-related merchandise. Using NikeiD to create custom pride themed items, the collection stood for the values of the company and provided a meaning of equality, pride, and love for consumers.

Nike specifically celebrated the achievements of progressive cities, like New York, San Francisco, and Portland for being leaders of LGBTQ+ life by selling city-specific footwear with a coordinating hat and t-shirt (*Case Study: Nike* 2022). This annual collection is created and managed by Nike designers in the LGBTQ+ community and Nike's Pride Network. The collection releases each June for pride month.

2012 also marked the year that Nike started donating money to LGBTQ+ causes, matching their campaign communication messaging with actual company action implementation.

⁵⁵ Nike. (n.d.). *Nike, Inc. Corporate Responsibility Report FY07-09*. Nike. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/purpose-cms-production01/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/16054840/FY18-Nike-Impact-Report_Final2.pdf

⁵⁶ Sanchez, L. (2016, October 20). *A brief history of the 'be true to your school' nike dunk series*. Sole Collector. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://solecollector.com/news/2014/03/a-brief-history-of-the-be-true-to-your-school-nike-dunk-series>

⁵⁷ Natalie Washuta, C. U. (2018, June 21). *Nike's 'be true' campaign promotes LGBTQ+ equality in Athletics*. Study Breaks. Retrieved March 6, 2023, from <https://studybreaks.com/culture/nike-be-true-lgbtq/>

⁵⁸ *Nike be true collection*. The Drop Date. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://www.thedropdate.com/releases/nike-be-true-collection-flyknit-racer-vapormax>

The corporation provided \$2.5 million in financial support to LGBTQ+ causes through the sales of “Be True” products from 2012-2016 (Natalie Washuta, 2018).⁵⁹

2.4 2013-2014

Nike continued their “Be True” line in 2013 by expanding the collection,⁶⁰ this year featuring multi-colored sneakers and sandals. A portion of the profits from sales of “Be True” items were donated to the LGBTQ+ Sports Coalition (Zimmerman, 2013). Nike also held its annual Nike LGBT Sports Summit in June 2013, which included college and professional athletes, coaches, athletic administrators, political figures, LGBTQ+ advocates and journalists (Zimmerman, 2013).

Nike released their third “Be True” campaign in 2014 to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community.⁶¹ The apparel and footwear line included sneakers and t-shirts. As a part of the campaign, Nike pledged to donate up to \$500,000 of its net proceeds to the LGBTQ+ Sports Coalition to help fight discrimination against player’s sexual preference (Staff, 2014).

2.5 2015-2016

Nike starred Chris Mosier in a short film in 2016.⁶² As the brand’s first transgender athlete to be in the company’s advertisements and the first openly trans athlete to earn a spot on the U.S. men’s national team, he was a part of Nike’s “Unlimited” campaign that was launched during the Rio Olympics (*Case Study: Nike* 2022).

⁵⁹ Mantor, C. (2017, May 30). *Nike sets example for its brands with Pride Month Collection*. FashionNetwork.com. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://us.fashionnetwork.com/news/Nike-sets-example-for-its-brands-with-pride-month-collection,832894.html>

⁶⁰ Zimmerman, D. (2013, June 13). *Nike launches be true line to support LGBT athletes*. Boston.com. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from http://archive.boston.com/lifestyle/blogs/bostonspirit/2013/06/nike_launches_be_true_line_to.html

⁶¹ Staff. (2014, June 5). *Nike 2014 summer #BETRUE Collection*. Hypebeast. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://hypebeast.com/2014/6/nike-2014-summer-betrue-collection>

⁶² YouTube. (2018). *Nike - Chris Mosier "Unlimited Courage" (2016)*. YouTube. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3P6UBZHlI8&t=54s>.

The company also continued to expand their “Be True” collection, highlighting different cities (see figure 5).



Figure 5: Nike 2015 Be True Merchandise Collection (*Case Study: Nike* 2022)

2.6 2017-2018

Nike continued its “Be True” campaign with the release of the 2017 BETRUE Collection. Nike created the Nike Cortez VaporMax Air shoe in an eight color rainbow swoosh design. This design was one of the first to have “Been True” printed on the sock liner and the first time the collection was available world-wide (Natalie Washuta, 2018).

This collection featured other implementations of the pride flag, including the classic rainbow gradient and other well known symbols of pride like the color pink and the triangle (Natalie Washuta, 2018). The campaign’s messaging and use of phrases like “Be True” and “Run Fierce” promotes equality through clear, short phrases.

Nike staff at this time seemed to have a clear vision of the goal of LGBTQ+ pride being implemented in product advertisements. Robert Gorman, Nike’s LGBTQ+ network leader, said that the brand’s focus was to “Create something that people could unite around to show their

support for LGBTQ athletes. (Natalie Washuta, 2018)” This campaign had lots of social and economic success (Natalie Washuta, 2018), proving that the consistency within communication tactics and the implementation of pro-LGBTQ+ action and donations was beneficial for the brand.

In 2017 Nike collaborated with Amazon Mother Leiomy, "The Wonder Woman of Vogue" and the only transgender person to compete in “America’s Best Dance Crew (*Case Study: Nike* 2022).” The advertisement featuring her pays homage to New York City’s underground ballroom scene,⁶³ which is a community that was created by impoverished Black and Latino LGBTQ youth as a place for them to safely express themselves and perform their artform (*Case Study: Nike* 2022). This project also celebrates voguing, which is a dance move previously performed by queer and transgender people in the 1960’s Harlem, and these genres were made famous again by the TV-series Pose (*Case Study: Nike* 2022).

Nike also produced their “Equality” video in 2017,⁶⁴ supporting equality and diversity. The advertisement features several famous athletes, including Megan Rapinoe, who is openly gay.

2.7 2019-2020

Nike continued their work in 2019 with Megan Rapinoe, who was named The Best FIFA Women’s Player of 2019. Nike had commemorative boots made by Nike in honor of her accomplishments. With colors inspired by her hair and the trophies she has won, her name on the sides of the boot, and four stars on the heel counter and sockliner that represent her national team (see figure 6) (*Case Study: Nike* 2022).

⁶³ Kennelly, J. (2019). *Nike - Bettrue, Amazon Mother Leiomy (2017)*. YouTube. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2LtnKkBBwg>.

⁶⁴ Nike. (2022). *Nike - Equality (2017)*. YouTube. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bu16KK9xub8>.



Figure 6: Megan Rapinoe Commemorative Shoes by Nike, 2019 (*Case Study: Nike 2022*)

Rapinoe was also featured in Nike's "Dream With Us" advertisement,⁶⁵ which showed the U.S. Women's National Team and demonstrated their influence on young athletes ahead of the World Cup in France. The ad shows young and professional athletes gathering at a stadium tunnel as the U.S. Women's Team prepares to head out onto the field. Both of these projects with Rapinoe provide representation for the LGBTQ+ community and promote equality for all (*Case Study: Nike 2022*).

In May 2019 Nike unveiled the new "Be True" collection, recognizing the 50-year anniversary of the Stonewall uprising, with its new Air Max 720 trainers (*Case Study: Nike 2022*). For the first time, the annual collection included the original eight-color Pride Flag designed by Gilbert Baker. The shoes in the "Be True" campaign have a black tongue with bubble-effect, translucent midsoles that have Baker's signature printed on the outer edge (*Case Study: Nike 2022*).

As part of their continuing "Be True" campaign for 2019, Nike's short film "Nobody Wins Alone" affirmed their support of the community.⁶⁶ The film stars athletes in the LGBTQ+ community such as Chris Mosier and Brittney Griner. The film gained lots of support, with it

⁶⁵ Nike. (2022). *Nike - Dream With Us (2019)*. YouTube. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQqTuQrECbE&t=84s>.

⁶⁶ Nike. (2020). *Nike - Nobody wins alone (2019)*. YouTube. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ck76-4lAgV4>.

being a finalist in the 4th Annual Shorty Social Good Awards.⁶⁷ 2019's campaigns sent consistent messages in support of the LGBTQ+ community, and thus garnered positive feedback like the Shorty Award and through sales of their Be True collection.

Nike's 2020 "Be True" campaign presented a gender neutral lineup that featured three sneakers that celebrated the "Pursuit of equality for all athletes" (Verry, 2020).⁶⁸ The Nike Air Force 1 was included in the "Be True" line for the first time, and Nike says it was, "Created as a reflection of performance art" (Verry, 2020). Verry states that, "The featured designs pay homage to underground ballroom culture, the Nike Air Max 2090, which uses its colors to celebrate unity in times of uncertainty and the Nike Air Deschutz, which shows that sport means something different to everyone" (Verry, 2020).

The Air Force 1 has a 10-color rainbow mark on the heel that Nike said is inspired by the *More Color, More Pride* flag. The black and a brown stripe on the shoe is to recognize people of color in the LGBTQ+ community (Verry, 2020). "To celebrate Pride Month, we're honoring the strength, creativity and Black roots of Pride," the company said, announcing the campaign (*Case Study: Nike* 2022). Nike chose six LGBTQ+ athletes, advocates and role models to be in the 2020 BeTrue campaign (*Case Study: Nike* 2022) in order to promote inclusivity and feature a diverse group of people.

The brand also used social media to support the LGBTQ+ community and advertise their "Be True" campaign by tweeting things like,⁶⁹ "Honor Pride and celebrate diversity in every

⁶⁷ The Shorty Awards. (n.d.). *Nobody wins alone - the shorty awards*. The Shorty Awards - Honoring the best of social media. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://shortyawards.com/4th-socialgood/nobody-wins-alone>

⁶⁸ Verry, P. (2020, June 22). *Nike reveals its 2020 betrue collection ahead of Pride Month*. Footwear News. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from

<https://footwearnews.com/2020/focus/athletic-outdoor/nike-be-true-2020-pride-month-1202995228/>

⁶⁹ Nike.com. (2020, June 22). *Honor pride and celebrate diversity in every community. share the #BeTrue apparel collection with your friends and neighbors in animal crossing.creator code - MA-5774-9927-1462*

<https://t.co/x4rexpikj#globalpridecrossing pic.twitter.com/oh7kkkihnl>. Twitter. Retrieved March 19, 2023, from <https://twitter.com/nikestore/status/1275195613316091912>

community. Share the #BeTrue apparel collection with your friends and neighbors in Animal Crossing” (Nike.com, 2020).

Nike’s physical contributions are consistent with the messaging of their campaign from 2017-2020, as Nike partnered with MENTOR and PeacePlayers International to unify youth and communities (Natalie Washuta, 2018). The company Mentor is, “The unifying national organization in advancing quality youth mentoring relationships and connecting volunteers to opportunities in local communities. (Natalie Washuta, 2018)” PeacePlayers International is a program that uses basketball in order to, “Bridge divides, develop leaders, and change perceptions” in divided communities around the world. (Natalie Washuta, 2018)”

Through these partnerships, Nike has made a considerable amount of monetary and physical contributions.

Nike supported 20 organizations in their 2019 campaign and focused on the LGBTQ+ community in 2020 through grants administered by the Charities Aid Foundation of America.

In 2020, Nike continued their work with Chris Mosier in their “Breaking Barriers Through Sport” project and “Nike: The Chris Mosier Project.”⁷⁰ This campaign raised the visibility of trans people and specifically trans athletes. This 10 minute documentary was made in partnership with Nike through its “Be True” fund. The documentary highlighted Chris Mosier’s story and how he achieved his goals (*Case Study: Nike* 2022).

Nike produced another advertisement in 2020 that focuses on displaying and giving a platform to diversity in sports.⁷¹ The “You Can’t Stop Us” advertisement shows various athletes at important moments or celebrating, including a man carrying a torch that is burning rainbow

⁷⁰ Nike. (2020). *Nike: The Chris Mosier Project. Working Not Working*. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://workingnotworking.com/projects/182507-nike-betrue-the-chris-mosier-project>.

⁷¹ Nike. (2020). *Nike - You Can't Stop Us (2020)*. *YouTube*. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcXTnyCmQbg>.

colored smoke, which represents pride and the LGBTQ+ community. The narrator says, “We're never alone, and that is our strength. Because when we're doubted, we'll play as one. When we're held back, we'll go farther, and harder. If we're not taken seriously, we'll prove that wrong. And if we don't fit the sport, we'll change the sport” (*Nike - You Can't Stop Us* (2020) 2020).

Nike donated \$5 million in 2017 to various organizations that advance equality in communities across the U.S. These organizations include MENTOR and PeacePlayers International. Their monetary contributions demonstrate that they do not produce pride campaigns to make money, but make genuine change for the LGBTQ+ community.

Through Nike’s authentic support of the community in their advertisements and merchandise campaigns, the brand established solid CSR communication tactics that reigned congruent to the monetary contributions that they provided. The messaging that Nike uses in their communication practices that helped raise awareness and visibility for the LGBTQ+ community.

2.8 2021-2022

Nike launched the “Play New” campaign in 2021 during the European Football Championship (*Case Study: Nike* 2022). The first video includes a diverse group of people and shows clear support for the LGBTQ+ community,⁷² with two men kissing a 0:32 and the voiceover states, “Be with whoever you want.” Nike’s support and inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community continued to be consistent in their communication and advertising practices through the “Play New” campaign.

In the 2021 “Play New” campaign, Nike featured soccer player Mara Gomez, who is the first trans woman to play in Argentina’s professional league. The advertisement features her

⁷² Nike. (2021). *Nike - Play New: The Land of New Football* (2021). *YouTube*. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=812LqB3km10>.

discussing the impact that soccer has had on her life.⁷³ “Today I’m the first professional transgender player in Argentina, and it was not easy, because I didn’t have a role model to follow. So it’s my turn to open the door for the athletes to come” (*Nike - Play New: Nuevas conquistas (Mara Gomez, Argentina, 2021) English subs 2021*).

Continuing their streak with soccer player Megan Rapinoe, in 2021 Nike featured Rapinoe and her partner Sue Bird in their “New Victors” video advertisement.⁷⁴ The advertisement promotes inclusivity in sports, especially for women and LGBTQ+ people. In the video, Bird discusses the legacy she wants to leave, stating, “I want the younger generation to be able to stand up for what they believe in, what they feel is right ” (Hoffman & Fauchier, 2022). Nike’s advertisement stands as an investment in visibility and women's sports.

In late 2021 Nike and Rapinoe announced the 360 Megan X Nike partnership. The merchandise designs included Rapinoe’s own Nike logo with a “V” added to the Nike swoosh, standing for victory redefined (*Case Study: Nike 2022*). The collaboration commemorated her work in LGBTQ+ advocacy and is another testament to the corporation’s implementation of magic of meaning, with many buying these shoes as a statement to their support for the LGBTQ+ community and the meaningfulness of the campaign, “Victory Redefined.”

Nike continued their LGBTQ+ advocacy on social media for pride month in 2022, tweeting,⁷⁵ “For #PRIDE month we’re checking in to discuss how sport cultivates a culture of belonging. When has the community in sport provided you with a safe space?” (Nike, 2022). The company’s attempt to start meaningful conversations online makes them seem authentic and shows that they utilize their platform for more than just advertising their collections.

⁷³ Nike. (2021). *Nike - Play New: Nuevas conquistas (Mara Gomez, Argentina, 2021) English subs*. YouTube. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAgJxs0Heec>.

⁷⁴ Nike. (2022). *Nike - New Victors: Megan Rapinoe & Sue Bird (2021)*. YouTube. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlqR7Vd3oik>.

⁷⁵ Nike. (2022, June 17). *For #pride month we're checking in to discuss how sport cultivates a culture of belonging*. Twitter. Retrieved March 19, 2023, from <https://twitter.com/Nike/status/1537858631034556416>

Nike's 2022 "Be True" collection celebrates love through identity, expression, and sports (*Case Study: Nike 2022*). The collection was created by LGBTQ+ visionaries at Nike and featured fluid gradients, bold pieces, and footwear that evolves with you (*Case Study: Nike 2022*). Their continuation is because of the strong consumer support they have received as a result of consistently authentic campaigns.

But Nike's advocacy expanded beyond products. Nike's press release states that the company provided \$2.7 million to LGBTQ+ causes from 2019-2022 to organizations that advance inclusion and celebrate all athletes.⁷⁶ The company has supported their employees with tools like Gender Identity and Transition policies and stood with organizations like the Human Rights Campaign, GenderCool, and GLAAD (*The Be True Summer 2022 Collection Celebrates the Fluidity of the Community 2022*).

2.9 Analysis

Nike was one of the first brands to stand for diversity and the LGBTQ+ community, and for about 15 years the brand has given consistent advertising and physical and monetary contributions to LGBTQ themes and organizations (*Case Study: Nike 2022*). Apart from their 2008 campaign mistake, Nike has produced well-meaning campaigns and not given any attention to those who hate their campaigns.

Nike's campaigns had many integral parts that made it successful, including internal and external CSR communication and implementation practices. The company's implementation of Gender Identity and Transition policies, creation of colleague resource groups, and prioritization of DEI are all reasons why the company rarely made errors in their CSR. These internal practices

⁷⁶ Nike. (2022, June 2). *The Be True Summer 2022 Collection Celebrates the Fluidity of the Community*. About.nike.com. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://about.nike.com/en/newsroom/releases/nike-be-true-collection-air-max-90-cortez-oneanta-sandal-official-images-release-date>

allowed for a qualified group of people to review their pride campaigns and for their employees to be supported. This increased the genuineness of their pride collections and campaigns because they were produced by people who were educated on the matter and understood the importance of producing authentic campaigns both for the community and the brand.

Nike was a part of the 14th annual LGBTQ Consumer Survey which found that brands that support LGBTQ+ rights can expect an increase in reach and sales (*Case Study: Nike 2022*). “More than 34,000 respondents were asked which brands they preferred and Nike was the only sportswear company, along with Amazon, Disney/ABC, or Google, among the 13 most frequently mentioned in the study” (*Case Study: Nike 2022*).

This information proves the magic of meaning that Nike has produced for their brand through their continuous advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community through their merchandise collections and advertisements. Taking on LGBTQ+ issues and visibility as a part of their corporate social responsibility has proven to be profitable and consistent with Nike. The corporation’s communication and implementation of corporate social responsibility are consistent in the messaging of being pro-LGBTQ+ rights and equality, and Nike is a solid example of a corporation that has had few bumps in the road for their overall execution of LGBTQ+ CSR.

One way that Nike could have improved their CSR implementation is donating and supporting political causes and legislation that benefit the LGBTQ+ community. Nike has not made any widely known donations to politicians or supported any legislation that could have helped LGBTQ+ causes, and doing these things could have not only made their support for the LGBTQ+ community more authentic and impactful.

Chapter 3: CVS

Background-Before 2009

CVS, short for Consumer Value Store, is an American convenience and drug store that has had consistent communication practices within their corporate social responsibility, but mixed messages with their implementation because of their inconsistencies in political involvements. The corporation has produced little LGBTQ+ related advertising campaigns that have been used to sell specific products like Target and Nike. Their efforts that reference their work in helping the LGBTQ+ community are mostly shared and spread through press releases, news articles, and social media posts. The corporation also does a lot of internal work on LGBTQ+ equality by giving support and implementing ways of visibility to their employees by featuring them online or through their creation of colleague resource groups.

3.2 2009-2010

The Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index is one of the earliest studies of CVS's equality communication and implementation practices. In both 2009 and in 2010,^{77 78} CVS received a score of 90, indicating that the company had put in some strong efforts to promote equality but had room to grow.

3.3 2011-2012

Early on, CVS Caremark (CVS's pharmacy benefit manager) made generous contributions to LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations, including the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center. The corporation contributed over \$250,000 to the center and was recognized as a supporter on the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center's 2012 annual report.⁷⁹ Despite contributions like this, CVS

⁷⁷ Human Rights Campaign. (2009). CORPORATE EQUALITY INDEX 2009. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/CorporateEqualityIndex_2009.pdf

⁷⁸ Human Rights Campaign. (2010). CORPORATE EQUALITY INDEX 2010. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/CorporateEqualityIndex_2010.pdf

⁷⁹ <https://files.lalgbtcenter.org/pdf/annual-reports/Los-Angeles-LGBT-Center-2012-Annual-Report.pdf>. (2012). L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center 2012 Annual Report. Retrieved March 18, 2023.

received a score of 90 on the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index in 2011,⁸⁰ not moving up from the previous two years.

3.4 2013-2014

In 2014, CVS released their first LGBTQ+ inclusive advertisement. The advertisement includes two men who are presented as a couple in the advertisement,⁸¹ something uncommon for this time. As their first actual marketing campaign related to the LGBTQ+ community, this marked a big step for the company and allowed for a magic of meaning to begin now that CVS was being very open about their support.

As a part of their internal efforts to support their LGBTQ+ staff, CVS offers programs called Colleague Resource Groups to help their employees develop,⁸² grow professionally, and have the opportunity to connect with one another through a particular affinity, culture or perspective (*Making connections through colleague Resource Groups* 2021). First mentioning these groups in their 2013 Corporate Social Responsibility report,⁸³ the groups are a way that CVS supports the LGBTQ+ community internally. This includes their Pride+ CRG that, "Builds and facilitates a culture of inclusion for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender colleagues and their allies. Open to everyone, this group has a national focus and structure" (*Making connections through colleague Resource Groups* 2021).

They also continued their support of LGBTQ+ vendors and suppliers, with over \$300 million spent by the company in 2013 with vendors in the Supplier Diversity Program, which

⁸⁰ Human Rights Campaign. (2011). Corporate Equality Index: Rating American Workplaces on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/CorporateEqualityIndex_2011.pdf

⁸¹ Ring, T. (2015, November 17). *Watch: CVS health releases gay-inclusive AD*. Advocate.com. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://www.advocate.com/business/2014/09/04/watch-cvs-health-releases-gay-inclusive-ad>

⁸² CVS. (2021, December 8). *Making connections through colleague Resource Groups*. Leading Health Care Solutions Company. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/community/making-connections-through-colleague-resource-groups.html>

⁸³ CVS Health. (2013). 2013 Corporate Social Responsibility Report. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/content/dam/enterprise/cvs-enterprise/pdfs/2013-csr-report.pdf>

included LGBTQ+ owned vendors (*2013 Corporate Social Responsibility Report* 2013). This marked an increased spend of 45 percent since 2012 with diverse vendors (*2013 Corporate Social Responsibility Report* 2013).

3.5 2015-2016

CVS received a score of 100 percent on the 2015 Corporate Equality Index (CEI),⁸⁴ a, “National benchmarking survey and report on corporate policies and practices related to LGBT workplace equality, administered by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation” (DeAngelis, 2014).

One of the ways CVS has implemented internal uses of corporate social responsibility is through their suppliers. In order for CVS to obtain their goods from a diverse group of suppliers, they have partnered with organizations that help diverse suppliers obtain the resources to do business with large corporations like CVS.⁸⁵ In order to support suppliers in the LGBTQ+ community, CVS partnered with the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce. Their efforts to support LGBTQ+ owned brands demonstrates the values of the brand. The company spent \$2 billion in 2016 with women's business enterprises and minority-owned, veteran-owned, and LGBTQ+-owned businesses.

CVS began its major political involvements in LGBTQ+ issues when it spoke out in support over the Equality Act,⁸⁶ which ensures equality in rights and responsibilities for LGBTQ+ people. “As a leading health care company, we are proud to endorse the Equality Act

⁸⁴ DeAngelis, M. (2014, November 19). *CVS health earns top score on 13th Annual scorecard on LGBT workplace equality*. The Providence Journal. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/2014/11/19/20141119-cvs-health-earns-top-score-on-13th-annual-scorecard-on-lgbt-workplace-equality-ece/35265388007/>

⁸⁵ CVS. (n.d.). *Supplier Diversity Community Affiliations: CVS health*. Supplier Diversity Community Affiliations | CVS Health. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/about/our-strategy/diversity/supplier-diversity/affiliations.html>

⁸⁶ Cicilline, D. (2016, May 5). *CVS endorses equality act*. Congressman David Cicilline. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://cicilline.house.gov/press-release/cvs-endorses-equality-act>

and stand with Congressman Cicilline in this effort,” said CVS Health VP of Workforce Strategies and Chief Diversity Officer David L. Casey (Cicilline, 2016). This effort really established CVS as a major player in the DEI realm (diversity, equity, inclusion) and established politics as a component of their LGBTQ+ CSR plan.

3.6 2017-2018

CVS continued to receive a perfect score of 100% on the 2018 Corporate Equality Index (CEI),⁸⁷ giving the company a perfect score for the fourth consecutive year. It joined the ranks of 609 major U.S. businesses which also earned top marks this year.

The company’s press release states, “CVS Health received top marks for a variety of programs, including making gender transition guidelines available for colleagues and their managers who may be involved in a workplace gender transition; supporting the company's colleague resource group PRIDE, which provides support for LGBTQ colleagues and their allies; and following the CVS Health Supplier Ethics Policy that supports the inclusion of LGBTQ vendors and suppliers” (Gattuso, 2017). The release makes it clear that this is not the first time CVS has been recognized for its implementation of social issues into its corporate social responsibility, stating, “This recognition is the latest in a series of third-party acknowledgments for CVS Health's commitment to diversity and inclusion, including the Billion Dollar Roundtable (supplier diversity spending), LATINA Style 50 (Top Companies for Latinas), Corporate Responsibility Magazine (100 Best Corporate Citizens) and Disability Equality Index (Best Places to Work)” (Gattuso, 2017).

⁸⁷ Gattuso, M. (2017, November 9). *CVS health earns perfect score in 2018 corporate equality index*. Leading Health Care Solutions Company. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/diversity-equity-inclusion/cvs-health-earns-perfect-score-2018-corporate-equality-index.html>

The company also made their debut on DiversityInc's Top 50 Companies for Diversity and were recognized by the Human Rights Campaign as one of the Best Places to Work for LGBT Equality in 2017,⁸⁸ demonstrating the company's quick growth in the diversity field.⁸⁹ CVS was also awarded by the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC) and its partners in the National Business Inclusion Consortium (NBIC) with a 2018 Best-of-the-Best Award for the second year in a row in 2018 for being an inclusive workplace.⁹⁰

CVS's many awards are a testament to their work towards inclusivity and diversity within their company and outside of it. Their corporate social responsibility implementation was consistently recognized because of the programs that they have for their employees, diverse group of suppliers, and work towards an inclusive healthcare space.

3.7 2019-2020

In 2019 CVS obtained the 27th ranking on DiversityInc's Top 50 Companies for Diversity list.⁹¹ The company has made the list since 2017 and was on the list for the third consecutive year and was named #1 in Top Companies for Supplier Diversity for its increased investments in its diverse supply chain in 2019 (Slavin & Gattuso, 2019). CVS was also named one of the Human Rights Campaign's Best Places to Work for LGBT Equality in 2019 again

⁸⁸ Goode, J. (2017, May 3). *Diversityinc recognizes CVS Health on list of "top 50 companies for diversity"*. DiversityInc Recognizes CVS Health on List of "Top 50 Companies for Diversity". Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/diversity-equity-inclusion/diversityinc-recognizes-cvs-health-list-top-50-companies-diversi.html>

⁸⁹ Goode, J. (2017, February 16). *Fortune recognizes CVS Health on list of "World's most admired companies"*. FORTUNE Recognizes CVS Health on List of "World's Most Admired Companies". Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/company-news/fortune-recognizes-cvs-health-list-worlds-most-admired-companies.html>

⁹⁰ CVS. (2018, April 24). *CVS health honored as an inclusive workplace*. Leading Health Care Solutions Company. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/diversity-equity-inclusion/cvs-health-honored-as-an-inclusive-workplace.html>

⁹¹ Slavin, E., & Gattuso, M. (2019, May 8). *CVS health ranks #27 on DiversityInc's 2019 top 50 companies for diversity list*. CVS Health Ranks #27 on DiversityInc's 2019 Top 50 Companies for Diversity List. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/diversity-equity-inclusion/cvs-health-ranks-27-on-diversityincs-2019-top-50-companies-for.html>

since 2017.⁹² These awards clearly demonstrate the company's work towards equality and diversity internally and externally. It is clear that CSR related to LGBTQ+ visibility and issues has increasingly become a priority for the brand.

3.8 2021-2022

CVS created news stories collections called "Heart at Work" from 2021-2022 to share the stories of their LGBTQ+ employees including Melissa,⁹³ who states, "It's so important because our company goal is to be in every household by 2030. It's only through inclusivity and equity that we will be able to do this" (*Heart at work: Pride month: It's about acceptance* 2022). Melissa is one of many at CVS that believe that incorporating LGBTQ+ support into the company's goals help them succeed. CVS's use of corporate social responsibility is necessary for them to increase profits and popularity of the popular convenience store.

Another "Heart at Work" story features Jess,⁹⁴ a Senior Advisor in the Enterprise Career MAPS Retail Program. She testified that CVS promotes an inclusive and welcoming environment, stating, "My family instilled in me how great it feels to help others. We're a family at CVS, too. It's so important to create more inclusion within the community" (*Heart at work: Jess is working to break down barriers* 2021). CVS also released video content in order to cater to the health care of the LGBTQ+ community through their CVS Health Live.⁹⁵ This resource is one of the many ways that CVS used their own website to support the LGBTQ+ community. The

⁹² CVS. (2019, February 26). *CVS health named one of Fast Company's 2019 most innovative companies*. Leading Health Care Solutions Company. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/community/cvs-health-named-one-of-fast-companys-2019-most-innovative-companies.html>

⁹³ CVS. (2022, May 31). *Heart at work: Pride month: It's about acceptance*. CVS Health. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/heart-at-work/heart-at-work-pride-month-its-about-acceptance.html>

⁹⁴ CVS. (2021, June 3). *Heart at work: Jess is working to break down barriers*. Leading Health Care Solutions Company. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/heart-at-work/heart-at-work-jess-is-working-to-break-down-barriers.html>

⁹⁵ CVS Health Live. (2021, July 6). *CVS health live: Supporting the holistic health of the LGBTQ+ community*. Leading Health Care Solutions Company. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/cvs-health-live/cvs-health-live-supporting-the-holistic-health-of-the-lgbtq-community.html>

video details the, “Barriers that many members of the community face in accessing health care, and the importance of taking an intersectional approach to understanding and addressing these disparities. It also highlights the role of policy in reducing discrimination and addressing social determinants of health” (*CVS health live: Supporting the holistic health of the LGBTQ+ community* 2021).

This form of content focuses on directly helping the LGBTQ+ community by discussing healthcare, as opposed to their “Heart at Work” campaign that highlights LGBTQ+ employees and normalizes LGBTQ+ support. Their video content does something more tangible and direct, and it’s important for CVS’s corporate social responsibility that they support the LGBTQ+ community in different ways in order to maximize their audience and seem authentic.

Throughout pride month in 2022, CVS highlighted their PRIDE+ Colleague Resource Group (CRG) in a company news article and featured CVS employees who shared their,⁹⁶ “Individual experiences and voices to create an engaging and inclusive environment at work and for the customers we serve each day” (*Celebrating pride month with CVS health pride+* 2022).

One of the featured people was Carolyn Scully, a member of the General Management Develop Program in Product and Strategy, stated, “As a young professional joining CVS Health last June, I was afraid to share my identity at work. That feeling soon changed as I joined the PRIDE+ CRG within my first month and realized I wasn’t alone in my experiences. Professionals of every generation bring their authentic selves to work and do it proudly. I have loved being a part of a welcoming group that always makes me feel supported, included, valued and heard” (*Celebrating pride month with CVS health pride+* 2022).

⁹⁶ CVS. (2022, June 1). *Celebrating pride month with CVS health pride+*. CVS Health. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/diversity-equity-inclusion/celebrating-pride-month-with-cvs-healths-pride-colleague-resource.html>

CVS utilized social media to publicize their support of the LGBTQ+ community in 2021 and 2022. The company tweeted things like,⁹⁷ “LOVE was never canceled, but we’re feeling 2x the PRIDE this year. Happy #PrideMonth everyone” (CVS Pharmacy, 2021) and,⁹⁸ “We stand with the LGBTQ community and for diversity and inclusion in all its dimensions. Follow @CVSHealth this month, and all year, as we celebrate our LGBTQ colleagues, customers, patients and families that are a critical part of healthcare and our workforce. #PrideMonth” (CVS Pharmacy, 2022). They also utilized twitter to quote their LGBTQ+ employees in order to relate to their consumers in 2022.⁹⁹

CVS participated in the popular phenomenon of companies incorporating the pride rainbow into their logo (figure 7) on social media during pride month to show support for the LGBTQ+ community,¹⁰⁰ but also utilized this platform to help something that effects many LGBTQ+ youth, suicide. Citing the Trevor Project,¹⁰¹ the company made a tweet (figure 8) about suicide prevention month and provided resources for those struggling. This post makes it clear that CVS is not just posting about pride month for fun or to sell products, but to help people and execute the corporation’s values.

⁹⁷ Pharmacy, C. V. S. (2021, June 5). *Love was never canceled, but we're feeling 2x the pride this year. happy #pridemonth everyone!* Twitter. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://twitter.com/cvspatharmacy/status/1401131686516101121?lang=en>

⁹⁸ Pharmacy, C. V. S. (2022, June 1). *We stand with the LGBTQ community and for Diversity and inclusion in all its dimensions. follow @CVSHealth This Month, and all year, as we celebrate our LGBTQ colleagues, customers, patients and families that are a critical part of health care and our workforce. #pridemonth.* Twitter. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://twitter.com/cvspatharmacy/status/1532037232088981506?lang=en>

⁹⁹ Health, C. V. S. (2022, June 14). *PIC.TWITTER.COM/P8BJ7JEC4E.* Twitter. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://twitter.com/CVSHealth/status/1536717748138651649?ext=HHwWgsC9nc2pwtMqAAAA>

¹⁰⁰ Ruth, W. (2022, June 1). *Pic.twitter.com/IXo4mbvwhV.* Twitter. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://twitter.com/itswolfgangruth/status/1531994681269174272>

¹⁰¹ Aetna. (2021, June 22). *More than 1.8 million LGBTQ young people seriously consider suicide in the U.S. every year.* Twitter. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://twitter.com/Aetna/status/1407337611744665612?ext=HHwWmICzsb-G74cnAAAA>



Figure 7: CVS Health Pride Rainbow Logo (Ruth, 2022)



Figure 8: CVS Trevor Project Tweet (Aetna, 2021)

CVS has exemplified corporate social responsibility through their communication efforts, but has inconsistent tangible implementation of their efforts towards the LGBTQ+ community through their political support. They have given political support and attention to the LGBTQ+ community in both positive and negative ways. Despite then signing the Business Statement Opposing Anti-LGBTQ State Legislation,¹⁰² CVS was found to have supported candidates who seek to block or restrict equal rights based on gender or sexual orientation (Helmore, 2021).¹⁰³ CVS, “Supported sponsors of anti-trans legislation in Texas, North Carolina, and Tennessee, through its corporate political action committee. In Texas, CVS backed Republican state senators Dawn Buckingham and Bryan Hughes, co-sponsors of Senate Bill 1646 (2021), which would,

¹⁰² CVS. (2021, June 8). *CVS health signs human rights campaign's business statement opposing Anti-LGBTQ State legislation*. CVS Health signs Human Rights Campaign's Business Statement Opposing Anti-LGBTQ State Legislation. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.cvshealth.com/news/public-policy/cvs-health-signs-human-rights-campaigns-business-statement.html>

¹⁰³ Helmore, E. (2021, June 14). *25 corporations marking Pride donated over \$10m to anti-LGBTQ+ politicians – study*. The Guardian. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jun/14/corporations-anti-lgbtq-politicians-donations-study>

“Change the state’s child abuse law” to make it a crime for parents to allow children to receive gender-affirming medical care” (Helmore, 2021).

CVS also backed North Carolina state senator Ralph Hise through the political action committee and donated \$1,000 to Hise in August 2020. He was the primary sponsor of Senate Bill 514 (2021), which would, “Ban anyone under 21 receiving gender-affirming treatment” (Helmore, 2021). Overall, CVS has, “Donated \$259,000 to 54 members of Congress who received a HRC rating of zero, largely through voting against the Equality Act over the last two years” (Helmore, 2021).

The Human Rights Campaign clearly also saw the company’s contributions as damaging,¹⁰⁴ stating, “These anti-LGBTQ bills harm our team members and their families, stripping them of opportunities and making them feel unwelcome and at risk in their own communities” (Cloutier & Giorno, 2022). This organization works with and awards many companies for their work in equality, so when they call out organizations for anti-LGBTQ+ practices the mistakes become more publicized and lose respect from the DEI sphere.

Their embarkation on being politically involved with LGBTQ+ issues displays a huge mistake for CVS and a major impact to their magic of meaning because a consumer that buys from CVS is supporting an organization that supported anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and politicians. Consumers that support CVS’s political involvement cannot shop there with a clear conscience and be unable to be delighted that the store supports the same causes they do, thus they are less likely to want to shop there. With dozens of articles written about CVS’s controversial donations, the company received lots of negative press and backlash.

¹⁰⁴ Cloutier, J., & Giorno, T. (2022, June 22). *Companies that claim to back the LGBTQ community send political contributions to state lawmakers who advanced anti-transgender bills*. OpenSecrets News. Retrieved March 19, 2023, from <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2022/06/companies-that-claim-to-back-the-lgbtq-community-send-political-contributions-to-state-lawmakers-who-advanced-anti-transgender-bills/>

Though the company never releases pride collections specifically for pride month, the brand does sell pride gifts.¹⁰⁵ Thus, they have the potential to make profits from pride advertising directly.

3.9 Analysis

Outside of political involvements, CVS had produced a consistent CSR campaign, but political involvements are extremely important to corporation's CSR because they show the causes that the organization actually supports and allows the company to make and support actual changes to the rights and equality of the LGBTQ+ community. Since the legalization of same sex marriage in 2015, the public has been much more focused on the political implications of LGBTQ+ equality and support. With consumers holding brands more accountable and cancel culture becoming more prevalent, political involvements are especially important for brands and they should be careful with what politicians and causes they donate to, especially when it counters other agreements they have signed (the Business Statement Opposing Anti-LGBTQ State Legislation). The political involvements of the company also impact sales, with many modern day consumers shopping places that align with them socially and politically. The company's poor political involvement coordination makes their CSR efforts irrelevant and non-impactful.

The company failed to create a strong magic of meaning for consumers because they did not produce enough digital and video campaigns. While Target and CVS produced multiple commercials and released mass advertising for their collections, CVS only produced content on their website including news stories and press releases, made social media posts, and released one commercial related to the LGBTQ+ community. The lack of overall communication and inconsistencies in LGBTQ+ political support do not create a strong connection between the

¹⁰⁵ CVS. (n.d.). *Pride Gifts*. CVS.com. Retrieved March 19, 2023, from <https://www.cvs.com/photo/s/pride2022>

brand and widely known and recognized LGBTQ+ activism, thus consumers are not likely to shop at CVS because of their LGBTQ+ or pride relations.

The company differs from Nike and Target because they did not release pride collections. They did, however, take many steps to do business with a group of diverse suppliers, and particularly LGBTQ+ owned companies. This is something that Target and CVS could take notes on.

CVS should also implement pride and LGBTQ+ relations to advertisements even if they do not produce pride-specific campaigns. Featuring more LGBTQ+ people in their commercials, doing more digital and print advertising for pride month, and making more public statements of support for the LGBTQ+ community.

Analysis of Results

Studying the major corporation's pride campaigns and LGBTQ+ relations over time allows for systematic changes to be shown. Over time, companies were more likely to be called out by consumers due to an increase of publicity on LGBTQ+ related issues, the rise of social media, and an increase in LGBTQ+ related political affairs. Companies also used social media more from 2020 onward, expanding their methods of communication for pride month.

These case studies reveal the importance of two main things- political involvements and internal practices in pride campaigns and LGBTQ+ relations as well as the common indicators of CSR and magic of meaning, as shown in Table 2. Companies that donate to politicians or committees that support anti-LGBTQ+ legislation have poor CSR and thus are much more less likely to create a magic of meaning with their pride and LGBTQ+ relations, especially now with a rapid increase in LGBTQ+ related legislation.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Lavietes, M. (2022, March 20). *Nearly 240 anti-LGBTQ bills filed in 2022 so far, most of them targeting trans people*. NBCNews.com. Retrieved March 19, 2023, from

Internal practices have exemplified positive results for companies like CVS. The indicators in Table 2, including colleague resource groups, prioritization of staff that work in DEI, and publicity of their gender identity and transition guidelines are all internal practices that have helped their staff be more educated on social causes, have firm policies regarding equality and LGBTQ+ workplace rights, and helped their LGBTQ+ staff find community. These internal practices give the brand the authenticity factor that helps them establish socially-conscious campaigns. Because they support the LGBTQ+ community internally, their campaigns are more likely to be educated and carefully produced, and thus successful.

Implications and Limitations

Though this study and analysis was conducted on three vastly different and unique companies, it should be noted that these companies do not represent the trends of all pride campaigns and LGBTQ+ relations. These studies also represent a comprehensive overview of the LGBTQ+-related activities of the corporations studied and do not mention every LGBTQ+ related dilemma.

Conclusion

Table 1 lists the most recurring elements of pride campaigns from the case studies of Target, Nike, and CVS. Though all of these elements impact the CSR and magic of meaning produced, the impact of political involvements and internal practices seem to have the most influence on the CSR and magic of meaning produced based on these cases. These areas of CSR implementation had the most impact on public opinion and tended to be the deciding factor on the success or failure of the company's CSR pride campaigns overall. The political practices of

Target and CVS caused them to lose collaborations, receive backlash, and overall not match their CSR implementation with CSR communication, affecting the level of social meaning produced.

The internal practices of Nike were executed and communicated the best, with the company especially focusing on employee and company support for LGBTQ+ people. They did not focus on the more publicized internal practices that would be more known about by their consumers like sponsoring LGBTQ+ conferences and highlighting LGBTQ+ employee stories but went for a more genuine seeming angle by utilizing less flashy tactics like DEI employment prioritization and implementing gender identity and transition guidelines for employees. Nike's internal practices and CSR implementation complement their communication efforts in their pride collections and advertisements and solidifies the magic of meaning that the company aims to create. Consumers are able to shop from Nike without doubting that their treatment of LGBTQ+ issues and people matches how they seem to perceive these things in their CSR communication.

The three case studies verify the theory proposed in this study that CSR communication must match CSR implementation for a magic of meaning to be created. When political involvements, which are a large part of CSR implementation for a company, do not match the general communication of a company on a social cause, then positive CSR cannot be fully established. This phenomenon impacted CVS and Nike because they both donated to anti-LGBTQ+ politicians or political entities and thus suffered in positive CSR creation.

When long term consistency exists, especially in the internal and political aspects of CSR implementation in a company, advertisements just need to follow the values that are being implemented. This worked for Nike and the company was able to promote products by using consistent communication that followed their implemented ideals.

Future pride campaigns should keep in mind the growing importance of internal practices and political involvement in order to produce campaigns that seem genuine to their consumers. The United States has become increasingly polarized politically and social media has led to a **heightened** awareness of CSR by the public. Political involvements from companies are susceptible to criticism from all sides and the company must be aware of their specific audience and what will relate best to their consumers. They should also remain conscious of the political climate and be vigilant about improving their internal practices and support their LGBTQ+ employees.

The case studies analyzed over time reveal how pride campaigns have changed and how they will continue to change. The modernization of pride campaigns has come to fruition by becoming overwhelmingly digital (through website content, commercials, and social media). Some of the earlier related campaigns like Nike's Hyperdunk campaign were also on print throughout cities, but because pride month is so new, print media for pride campaigns is in many ways obsolete. Social media use has increased, especially in the 2021-2022 time period. This phenomenon is expected to continue and brands will potentially have to expand their platform diversity to meet audiences in a variety of generations who tend to be habitual social media users on a plethora of platforms.

Campaigns have been increasingly met with internet cancellation over the time periods studied, and this is expected to multiply. Cancel culture can cause consumers to no longer want to shop at a company because of the company's poor CSR implementation with LGBTQ+ related marketing, causing the company to lose profit. Market competitiveness is growing in most industries with online ordering expanding and the amount of businesses multiplying. Thus,

cancellation to the extent that consumers pledge not to contribute to a company by interacting or buying something is becoming increasingly feasible and is more likely to occur today.

Companies benefited in tangible and monetary ways as well as in branding consistency, likability, and consumer loyalty by producing magic of meaning and CSR through pride advertisements. Pride merchandise collections like those of Target and Nike helped promote a certain product and thus produce sales. All of the companies likely gained tangible elements such as higher employment interests, more products to sell, a special month to profit off of, and new campaigns to captivate and increase brand interest.

Incorporating solid company values and establishing them publicly through CSR helps the brand stay consistent and improve overall brand visibility and detectability. If the consumer agrees with the social causes that the brand attempts to internalize and produce a meaning of, then a consumer is more likely to like that brand and maintain loyalty to it. They are more likely to shop there if they agree with the values of the company and think that the general population has a positive perception of the brand and the causes the brand supports.

Overall, where corporations participated in mostly positive LGBTQ+ related CSR the corporation profited because of the magic of meaning created. Brands like CVS that had poor CSR failed to create a magic of meaning, thus not gaining and potentially losing credibility and profit.

The theory tested in this study that “In times when companies donate money to politicians and political causes that support LGBTQ+ causes and rights, physically or monetarily contribute to LGBTQ+ activism, and produce authentic and well considered social media and advertisement campaigns, the corporation will receive more revenue, a positive image, and consumer support because of the consistency they place in CSR advertising and implementation

practices. Companies in the future that implement consistent CSR communications related to LGBTQ+ pride and equality will also be successful, and there will be a consistent relationship between the implementation of these items and corporate gain” reigns true in terms of the information collected, though there are not many public records indicating the profits that companies have made from pride campaigns and collections.

The magic of meaning created from positive CSR is what gives companies the potential to make more revenue, better their image, and increase consumer support. Though all of the companies produced CSR communication measures that made the company seem to support the LGBTQ+ community, some of their implementation practices were inconsistent. This is what made the difference between companies that benefited from magic of meaning and those that did not obtain it.

These case studies are based on corporation’s pride campaigns, but reveal a larger message about corporate social responsibility as a whole. The Walk it Like You Talk Theory says that CSR communication and implementation have to be consistent to work positively for a company. This consistency must be clearly defined, and the political priorities of these campaigns must be clearly communicated and backed up by tangible action in order for CSR to be effective. Internal and external practices must both align with the company's social responsibility goals in order for the implementation clause to be fulfilled. Nike was the only company out of the case studies that proved to have good internal and external practices, with both CVS and Target lacking in some ways on both fronts. Though they were able to get it right sometimes, if their internal practices did not match their social goals then they seemed ingenuine to their audience and employees. If their external practices did not match, they became susceptible to backlash and cancellation. The division of internal and external implementation

practices is an important distinction to make and advertisers must pay equal attention to both in order to produce a positive CSR and magic of meaning for their company.

Target also defies the odds with its ability to create a magic of meaning despite the scandals they faced and establish some standard of CSR because of its domination of the pride merchandise industry, its trendiness thanks to social media, and the growth of the department store chain. This example demonstrates that CSR is not very clear cut and that even if a company establishes poor CSR implementation, they can still produce a magic of meaning if their communication and messaging is undeniably for a social cause and they dominate a market or product line. Capitalism, the changing economy, and ability for businesses to grow so quickly impacts traditional CSR theory and protocols. More research must be done to understand the implications and limitations of this.

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