100 Days of Trump Fights: Nordstrom Wins, Delta Loses and Five More Results

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In the hyper-partisan Trump era, brands have been caught up in conflicts with the president, his supporters and his opponents at breathtaking speed. And consumers have jumped on every one of them.

As voters take stock of President Trump's first 100 days in office, Ad Age asked research firm MavenMagnet to help evaluate the impact so far on seven brands that got caught up in what you might call Trump fights: CNN, Delta, Lyft, Macy's, Nordstrom, The New York Times and Uber.

Its analysis of more than 6,400 online conversations about brands and Trump from election day through April 1 suggests that while diving (or falling) into the thicket of national politics is probably best avoided for marketers, the outcome is not preordained.

Consider two brands that that got very different reactions to their Trump fights: Nordstrom and Lyft. When Nordstrom dropped Ivanka Trump's clothing line, online discussion about it had an overall positive 24% "net vibe," with 62% of conversations on the subject favorable to the brand and 37% negative. That was the best that any of the brands evaluated did.

Lyft, which made an ACLU donation in opposition to President Trump's first travel ban just as Uber was accused of profiteering during a related taxi strike, generated a net vibe of minus 32%, according to MavenMagnet.

TRUMP FIGHTS

Online conversation about seven brands' dust-ups with the president and partisans skewed against the brands on the whole.

Negative   Mixed   Neutral   Positive
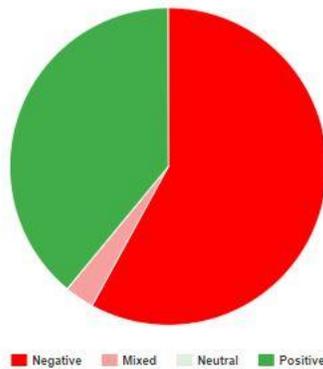
But some brands found far warmer receptions than others.

Positive   Neutral   Mixed   Negative
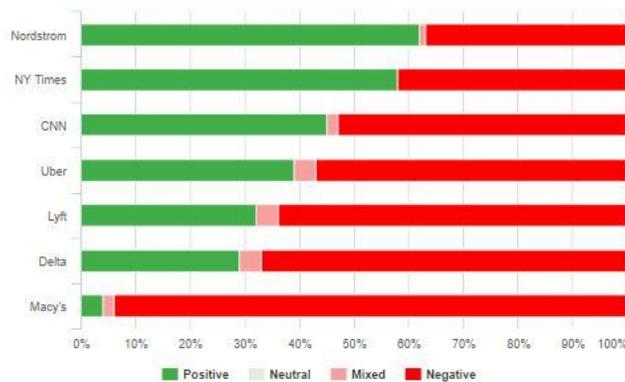
Source: MavenMagnet. Methodology: MavenMagnet analyzed 6,421 conversations in social media, on blogs, in forums and elsewhere online between Nov. 8, 2016, and April 1, 2017, selecting only conversations pegged to brands' conflicts with President Trump, his supporters and his opponents.

MavenMagnet conducted analysis of digital conversations in channels including social media posts as well as forums and article comments. All conversations and posts evaluated by the company for this research related to the brands' interactions with Trump and Trump policy, said Aditya Ghuwalewala, CEO of MavenMagnet. "Trump amplified the feelings around these things."

The unpredictability of the Trump effect also played out for two media outlets evaluated. Although Trump has long disparaged both CNN and the New York Times, they fared quite differently in public conversation online during the period measured.

The media brands

Maligned by Trump as "fake news" along with other news outlets in February, and previously mocked as "Clinton News Network," discussion of CNN in that context had a negative 8% net vibe. Terms including "fake," "biased," "reputation" and "truth" all surfaced as important words surrounding the brand, though from negative or neutral perspectives, according to MavenMagnet.

The news brand Trump likes to refer to as "failing," however? The New York Times seemed to get a positive spark from the Trump effect, enjoying a 16% positive net vibe in the period assessed. And as with CNN, the conversation around the Gray Lady's brand and Trump was driven by what MavenMagnet refers to as customer accountability measures, where the Times spurred more positive sentiment than negative. Yet some of the same terms that crept into CNN discussions came up often in those conversations about the Times, including "fake" and "truth," both from neutral points of view.

In the three weeks following the election, the New York Times told CNBC its subscription sales grew 10 times faster than in the same period the year before, netting an additional 132,000 paid subscriptions. "While the pro-Trump segment believed Trump's allegations of the publication fabricating news to propagate anti-Trump opinion, a larger majority believed in the legacy of the publication and supported it for exposing Trump," MavenMagnet said in its report.

The Times was also among media brands cashing in this week on Trump's criticism, running ads for Comedy Central's new series parodying the president that play off his "failing" and "fake news" jabs.

The retailers

And then there were the two retailers who were swept up in Trump-related controversy. Nordstrom, which dropped Ivanka Trump's clothing line in February, blaming poor sales, achieved the highest "net vibe" of any brand measured, at positive 24%.

Trump famously tweeted at the time, "My daughter Ivanka has been treated so unfairly" by the Nordstrom.

The company seems to have been saved from overall negativity in part because its explanation for dumping Ivanka Trump's brand was focused on its poor sales performance -- not pressure from the #GrabYourWallet boycott effort, which pressured consumers to stop spending with companies affiliated with anything Trump-related.

Macy's, however, did not fare so well. The retailer had ditched Ivanka's dad's menswear line way back in July 2015, after he referred to Mexican immigrants as rapists and criminals as he kicked off his presidential campaign. Yet, it appears consumer memories of that move may have been a little fuzzy after the election, when the brand was stung by the #GrabYourWallet campaign.

"The majority of the buzz around Macy's political affiliation was led by conservatives and Trump supporters who decided to boycott Macy's for banning Trump's line and caving into banning Ivanka Trump's line," noted MavenMagnet's research. Macy's never did actually dump her clothing line, though, and it appears the negative perception was partially spurred on by misinformation. According to the firm's analysis, Macy's, which has also been plagued by news of layoffs and store closures, had the lowest net vibe of all brands measured at minus 90%.

The transportation brands

"Customer accountability" was also a factor affecting brand perception for Delta. After United Airlines forcibly removed a passenger from a plane this month, some may have forgotten about what happened on a Delta flight in late November when a passenger bullied others to support the new president, shouting, "He's your president, every g—— one of [you]. If you don't like it, too bad." Delta banned the passenger from its flights for life, but made the mistake of allowing him to stay on the plane, which caused discomfort for other passengers. Overall, 35% of Delta conversations related to Trump were linked to customer accountability, and 62% of those were negative.

Delta also elicited allegations of racism by people who believed that it would have kicked the disruptive passenger off the plane if he hadn't been white. As a result, 8% of Trump-tied discussions around Delta revolved around social responsibility, all of them negative.

After its brush with the Trump effect, Delta's net vibe was low: negative 38%.

For ride-sharing competitors Uber and Lyft, the social responsibility factor played a big role in framing consumer perception.

In the wake of the Trump administration's initial attempt to ban travel into the U.S. by people from several majority-Muslim countries, Uber's decision to reduce surge pricing during an airport taxi strike in protest sparked a lot of discussion about the brand's social responsibility. The decision "was appreciated as a responsible act where Uber stepped up to support the consumers who were left stranded at the airport because of the taxi strike," according to the report.

In fact, the research shows the term "stepped up" had the most positive impact among terms associated with Uber in the period measured. The "delete" of "#DeleteUber" boycott fame also turned up as an influential term, but in a negative way, of course.

Despite the fact that others criticized Uber for "sabotaging" the taxi strike, discussion was split nearly evenly. In all, the Trump-related conversations revolving around Uber and social responsibility were 54% negative.

Uber's executive leadership also came into question, and according to MavenMagnet, 62% of conversations about the leadership team and CEO Travis Kalanick, who stepped down from President Trump's economic advisory council, were negative. "Concerns around Kalanick's ethics were led by his linkages with Trump," noted the report.

Uber's net vibe through it all was minus 19%.

In the midst of the #DeleteUber fiasco, Lyft made the bold move to publicly donate $1 million to the ACLU, partly in hopes of reinforcing its pro-immigrant stance to woo people frustrated with Uber. Only 9% of the conversations tracked around Lyft in relation to Trump were related to the brand's political leanings, though 67% of those were negative, "led by conservatives who disliked the anti-Trump measure of supporting ACLU."

Around 30% of the Lyft discussion revolved around social responsibility, although, using MavenMagnet's metrics as a gauge, the brand's ACLU donation bet may have backfired. Seventy percent of those conversations were negative. "Lyft's donation to ACLU was criticized by the right-wing Trump supporters who saw it as an anti-American act of supporting illegal immigrants who were perceived to be responsible for unemployment and terrorism in the country," MavenMagnet noted.

In all, Lyft, which chose to wade into the treacherous political waters rather than being thrust into them, generated a negative 32% net vibe, not far off from Delta's 38%.