

Rainbow-Washing: Corporate Co-optation and Hashtag Activism

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Abstract

In the United States and increasingly around the world, Pride month is accompanied by a deluge of rainbows on social media, including from corporate actors. While some of these colorful posts are accompanied by genuine support and impact, others are accused of ‘rainbow-washing,’ or utilizing LGBTQ+ imagery for commercial ends. This Policy Brief places rainbow-washing in a broader conversation of hashtag activism and considers when these displays represent authentic allyship as opposed to performative activism. While rainbow-washing is most frequently observed in an American context, global displays of Pride-themed brand activism in India and the Philippines are also considered. The Policy Brief ends with recommendations for consumers and corporate entities to prevent the co-optation and commercialization of LGBTQ+ symbolism.

Introduction

“Rainbow-washing: The act of using or adding rainbow colors and/or imagery to advertising, apparel, accessories, landmarks, et cetera, in order to indicate progressive support for LGBTQ equality (and earn consumer credibility) – but with a minimum of effort or pragmatic result.” (Urban Dictionary)

Since 1969, the month of June has celebrated the LGBTQ+ community.¹ This month-long memorial traces back to a police raid in Greenwich Village. The resulting confrontation with police and resistance is known as the Stonewall Riots and was a watershed moment for LGBTQ+ activism. The following year, organisers marked the anniversary with a 'Pride' parade that challenged the dominant narratives of shame and guilt. Pride parades and celebrations spread across world in the coming decades. Rainbows spread to the digital sphere in the modern era, and June is now marked by colorful social media pages filled with rainbows and other LGBTQ+ imagery. While this can take a personal route with anecdotes and pictures of friends and family, social media users also witness corporate co-optation of the movement, with countless companies temporarily adding rainbows to their logos or announcing new product lines emblazoned with symbols of the LGBTQ+ community: from Pride-themed Listerine bottles to the Budweiser Pride collection. This paper explores the trend of 'rainbow-washing' during Pride month and considers the implications of this usage within a broader global conversation of hashtag and social media activism. Using frameworks from hashtag and 'slacktivism' scholarship, the report considers how and when corporate social media activism represents true allyship and presents six patterns of Pride marketing. In doing so, it seeks to fill a void in digital peacebuilding scholarship that rarely considers the role of private corporations. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations to empower instead of commodifying the LGBTQ+ community through corporate social media usage.

Review of Hashtag Activism and Opposition

If hashtag activism, or the use of social media for a cause, was once thought to be purely symbolic and without impact, the past decade has provided numerous counterexamples. Within an American context, #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, #ICantBreathe, #YesAllWomen and numerous other hashtag campaigns have illuminated pressing gender and racial crises (Jackson et al. 2020). Some of these campaigns focused on visibility and awareness (#EmptyChair). Others became rallying points and calls to action (#ICantBreathe).

Twitter is a common setting for activism in the 21st century. In a survey of Twitter movements, Caroline Dadas identifies four roles of Twitter: as "[1] a method for circulating information during a disaster, [2] a way for companies to market their services, [3] as a space for community building, and [4] as a site of activist gestures" (2017, 18). While traditional hashtag activism traditionally focuses on the latter, rainbow-washing takes on a dual role by utilising activist gestures to market companies' services. Indeed, another trend of social media activism is the co-optation of movements by opposition groups.

An unusual example of hashtag co-optation comes from the BTS fandom – supporters of a popular K-Pop boy band. Pushing back on #BlackoutTuesday in 2020, white supremacists sought to begin a pattern of #WhiteoutWednesday, filling social media channels with racist propaganda and overwhelming Black Lives Matter messaging in the flood. However, the resulting flood came not from right-wing supremacists but K-Pop fans. The fandom

¹ This community can be described by several different acronyms. 'LGBTQ+' will be used throughout this paper and is not intended to exclude any self-identifying members.

overwhelmed @WhiteoutWednesday, #WhiteLivesMatter, #MAGA, and #BlueLivesMatter with videos from BTS performances (Kirkland 2020). Ultimately, #WhiteLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter trended as Top 10 hashtags in the US that week. However, the content consisted of fan cams from concerts and information about the BLM protests and donation requests (Kirkland 2020). This 'hashtag takeover' speaks to the power of digital communities as well as the potential for co-optation.

As #YesAllWomen grew in popularity and gained traction in the US during the #MeToo protests against sexual violence, a counter hashtag #NotAllMen emerged as some men felt that they were being unfairly targeted as a single group of misogynists (Dadas 27). Those upset with #BlackLivesMatter created #WhiteLivesMatter and #AllLivesMatter. In response to the #ICantBreathe movement after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, the hashtag #CrimingWhileWhite was used to share personal stories of unpunished crime, to contrast their treatment with that of George Floyd. While intended to reinforce the disparate treatment of black, indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) by police, #CrimingWhileWhite has been criticised as 'ally theatre' or 'performative activism', terms that also apply to examples of rainbow-washing. In the book *Hashtag Activism*, Jackson et al. expand on this theory of ally theatre to explore the limits of social media activism in the context of #CrimingWhileWhite: that the movement can be overtaken by those who are not deeply connected to it, and that social media space will be filled with tweets that do not have a clear call to action (175). Similar concerns were raised over Blackout Tuesday, where black squares dominated social media pages. Ostensibly to protest police violence and the murder of George Floyd, such actions quickly led to accusations of virtue signaling and performative allyship. Onlookers introduced new terms from psychology to the conversation as well: moral grandstanding (where an individual's primary motivation for speaking up is to make themselves look good) and moral licensing (where simplistic, performative actions lead individuals to think they have fulfilled their responsibilities).

This discussion of performative and authentic allyship is critical to recognizing rainbow-washing and including it in a larger conversation of social media activism. While it may be tempting to use social media to signal a societal norm, doing so can overwhelm platforms with empty words and images and co-opt the original intention of the movement. Twitter's character limit may make information more accessible, but it does little to encourage detail or nuance. Instead, the limitations of the platform itself lay the groundwork for platitudes, uninformed sharing, and band-wagoning.

This is the two-edged sword of hashtags. Without ownership or oversight, they spread at breakneck speed, spreading awareness and norms. At the same time, without ownership or oversight, there is no telling who will use a given hashtag, and for what purpose. They can be overtaken by a K-pop group, a corporation, a hostile government, or political opposition. In each case, the original message and community is diluted through the presence of actors with different goals for the digital movement. In an attention economy, where currency is measured in views and engagement, distraction and dilution are weapons themselves. Understanding social media in the context of an attention economy, the danger of rainbow-washing becomes clearer, as it dilutes attention from authentic celebration of Pride from the LGBTQ+ community itself.

The Mainstreaming of LGBTQ+ Brand Activism

Companies have not always weighed in on social and political issues, but are increasingly asked to take a stand. According to an Axios poll, 59% of Americans claim “I care more about the values of the companies I interact with today more than ever before” (King 2023). Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) define brand activism as “the act of publicly taking a stand on divisive social or political issues by a brand or an individual associated with a brand.” The recent uptick in brand activism for LGBTQ+ issues can be attributed to societal pressures, economic rationale, or a legitimate commitment from leadership.

1. Societal Pressure

In 2022, Edelman found a global decline in trust of government was paired with the belief that companies should do more to address social and political issues (Global Trust Barometer). Companies are responding in kind, with 38% of S&P 500 firms making advocacy statements in 2019 – up from 1% in 2011 (Mkrtchyan, Sandvik, and Zhu 2023).

The pressure to demonstrate ethics combined with a societal shift towards recognising LGBTQ+ rights in parts of the world sets the stage for less-than-authentic demonstrations of support.

Corporate social responsibility is “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (CEC 2001). While voluntary by definition, many companies feel pressure to demonstrate their commitments to popular values, whether through announcing environmental policies, publishing a diversity statement, or signaling support for Pride month on social media. With a majority of Americans supporting LGBTQ+ rights, there are examples of companies being punished—either online or at the cashier—due to perceived anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes (Berg-Brousseau 2022; Hu 2012). Opposition, or even silence, during the month of June could have similarly negative consequences in contexts where LGBTQ+ rights are widely promoted.²

2. Marketing Audience

Another explanation simply points to economics. Despite continued discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community in the 1990s, advertising executives had an epiphany: they began to view gay men as ideal consumers, representing dual-income households without children and therefore additional discretionary income (Nölke 2018). Since then, companies have tried to market towards this community through several means, including in increased representation in advertising and posting for Pride events. With an estimated 8% of American disposable income, the LGBTQ+ community represents over \$3.8 trillion in buying power globally according to Deutsche Bank (Wolny 2019). Termed ‘pink money’,

² Of course, these societal trends are not universal and are largely limited to North American and Western European contexts. In many regions of the world, there is no societal pressure to visibly support this community; and doing so may prove unpopular with both consumers and governments.

the buying power of the LGBTQ+ community makes them an important demographic for most consumer goods. Furthermore, consumer research suggests that members of the LGBTQ+ community are more likely to purchase from companies that support their community (CMI 2020).

While the 'pink money' explanation once made Pride month an obvious choice for any marketing calendar, events of 2023 revealed that such corporate support can result in costly backlash. Bud Light, the best-selling beer in the US for more than twenty years, fell to second place after partnering with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney and facing a boycott from opponents (Durbin 2023). Retail giant Target faced a similar boycott after backlash from conservatives over its 2023 Pride clothing line, which included transgender friendly clothing (Murray 2023). The entanglement of these brands in 'culture wars' is not limited to an American context. South African retailer Woolworths was targeted after a Pride month post, and New Zealand company The Warehouse faced similar backlash for selling items from a Pride collection (Murray 2023).

Verlegh (2023) highlights this tension of misalignment, where companies can stand to lose business by taking a stand on controversial social issues. At the same time, divisive issues with clear in- and out-groups allow for greater signaling power and impact. These benefits and risks are unevenly distributed across companies. A Patagonia rainbow post is far less likely to raise anti-LGBTQ+ fury than one posted by Ford Motor Company.

3. Leadership Commitment

A more optimistic perspective credits an authentic desire from leadership to demonstrate allyship with the LGBTQ+ community through social media usage. An example of this motivation is Denise Morrison and her leadership of Campbell Soup Co. Since taking leadership of the company in 2011, Morrison reinvented the brand to include "all genders and families" and was named to the FT/OUTstanding Ally Executives list (Nicolau 2017). Campbell Soup Co. has been named a "best place to work for LGBT equality" by the Human Rights Campaign each year under her leadership and continues to utilise Pride month to demonstrate solidarity (Naolau 2017). Similarly, Apple supports LGBTQ+ pride through social media, rainbow-themed products, and donations under the leadership of CEO Tim Cook, the first openly gay CEO of a Fortune 500 company.

Companies with a leadership commitment have an eye towards their employees instead of just consumers. The Human Rights Campaign annually publishes a [Corporate Equality Index](#) that evaluates the types of resources available to LGBTQ+ employees. Their ratings of workplaces, less visible than a rainbow profile picture, offer additional information about an organisation's true convictions.

***An Asterisk of Authenticity**

Firms must also demonstrate authenticity, especially as awareness of rainbow-washing increases. Inauthentic activism is likely to backfire (Hydock, Paharia, and Blair 2020; Chu, Kim, and Kim 2022). Perception of authenticity is linked to three factors: fit with brand purpose and values, alignment with corporate practice, and right tone of voice (Vergeh

2023). Consumers are attuned to judge authenticity, and surveys demonstrate that they are especially unforgiving of rainbow-washing's relative: greenwashing. Green-washing is used to describe "disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image".³ As environmental issues become increasingly salient and consumers become more eco-conscious, there is an economic benefit for companies to appear more environmentally friendly. Still, adding green to a label or a tree emoji to a social media fails to contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. A survey from Axios revealed that consumers are more likely to forgive poor service (59%) than greenwashing (39%) (King 2023).

Understanding Impacts of Corporate Participation

These two aspects—corporate rationale for participation and a background of hashtag activism—provide the necessary conceptual footing to evaluate differential impacts of rainbow corporate activity.

It comes as no surprise that most large American companies devote social media real estate to Pride month. Some question whether rainbow-washing is problematic at all. Is it possible to have too many rainbows, too public a display of support, for communities that continue to experience harms and discrimination at a higher rate than the general population? Indeed, not all LGBTQ+ advocates have the same opinion of rainbow-washing. *Wired* interviewed some of its staff on the issue of rainbow-washing and collected a variety of responses:

"Rainbow-washing allows people, governments, and corporations that don't do tangible work to support LGBTQ+ communities at any other time during the year to slap a rainbow on top of something in the month of June and call it allyship." (Justice Namaste, Wired)

"Corporations could be powerful allies using their privilege and deep pockets to put people who do real work for the LGBTQ+ community front and center. Co-opting a color scheme and a few hashtags is ... not that." (Emma Grey Ellis, Wired)

"I completely agree that companies need to be held to a higher standard of allyship and dream of a world where LGBTQ+ people are genuinely supported and recognized. But unfortunately, bandwagoning of social rights sometimes needs to come before the genuine intent to support. In the meantime, if even one child sees that commercial with the rainbow flag and decides it is worth it to live another day, that meaningless advertisement was worth it." (Ahalya Srikant, Wired)

In hashtag activism broadly, the contagiousness of social media can spark a movement (#BlackLivesMatter), raise awareness (#MeToo), or contribute to virtue signaling (Black-out Tuesday). When corporates participate in social media movements, their rainbow

³ Oxford English Dictionary, Edition 10.

posts also have different effects. Drawing on literature from digital peacebuilding, hashtag activism, and business analytics sources, six pathways are identified:

- Superficial representation/signaling (harm)
- Rainbow marketing/pandering (harm)
- Dilution (harm)
- Normalization (support)
- Elevating LGBTQ+ voices (support)
- Contributing to LGBTQ+ causes (support)

Of these six, three are positive pathways of engagement and three are negative pathways to harm. Each pathway is considered in turn in the following section, with examples from Fortune 50 Twitter accounts where relevant. These may not be mutually exclusive groupings, but add a different dimension to evaluate and understand rainbow-washing.

1. Superficial representation/signaling

The mirrored harm of corporate signaling (i.e., companies that post a new logo) and individual moral grandstanding (i.e., Blackout Tuesday) is that companies or individuals feel that superficial engagement relieves them of their responsibility to engage in further action. Signaling is a demonstration for the sake of demonstration, without significantly contributing to LGBTQ+ rights. This is representative of ‘ally theatre’ and exemplified in Figure 1 below.

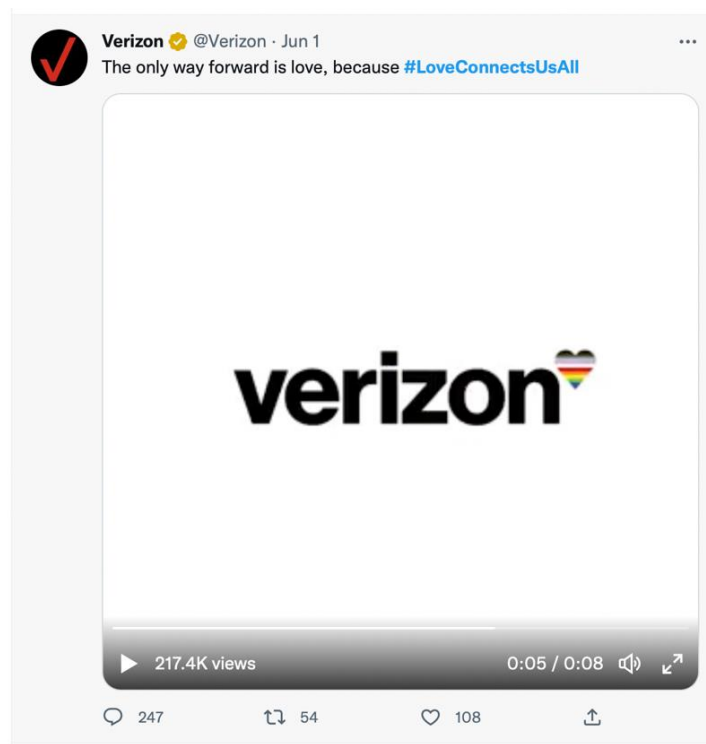


Figure 1: A tweet from Verizon (@Verizon) typical of ‘signaling’ during Pride month.

Wulf et al. (2023) demonstrated that vague (as compared to concrete) claims in Pride advertising were more likely to contribute to consumer perceptions of rainbow-washing. Typical signaling tweets will have rainbow filters on their profile pictures and will use generic hashtags related to LGBTQ+ concerns (e.g., #LoveConnectsUsAll, #LoveisLove, #Pride) to latch to the movement. These tweets neither connect the movement meaningfully to their own work nor contribute to the conversation of LGBTQ+ rights. While these actions may appear innocuous, they are guilty of moral licensing when such performative actions replace action. Additionally, these signaling actions can mislead consumers into thinking an organisation supports LGBTQ+ even as they contribute to anti-LGBTQ+ activities or legislation.

2. Rainbow-marketing/pandering

Rainbow marketing has similar features to signaling in its inauthenticity, but also introduces new products associated with Pride month. This tactic leads to increased consumer spending and profits for the engaged company. A typical marketing tweet is pictured in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: A tweet from Walmart (@Walmart) demonstrating a 'rainbow marketing' approach to Pride month.

In this example, the tweet from Walmart included a link to an entire collection of dog pride accessories. Using the hashtag #TakePride to connect back to the Pride movement, Walmart presents these items as helping the LGBTQ+ community, but no portion of the profits returns to the LGBTQ+ community. This could be misleading to consumers, and does not meaningfully contribute to a conversation of LGBTQ+ rights.

3. Dilution

Finally, rainbow-washing dilutes the social media space, taking attention (the currency of social media) away from personal stories of Pride by LGBTQ+ individuals or reminders of Pride's original purpose of resistance. The harm of dilution is more nuanced than the

previous two pathways, but other social media movements and opposition (i.e., Blackout Tuesday, BTS dilution of right-wing hashtags) provide evidence for its existence.

4. Normalization

- a. Representation matters. The “LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Advertising and Media” report demonstrates that non-LGBTQ+ Americans who are exposed to LGBTQ+ in media and advertising were more likely, on average, to be accepting of LGBTQ+ people. The same report finds that 80% respondents thought that companies including LGBTQ+ people in their advertisements are making a statement about the importance of recognising LGBTQ+ people (GLAAD 2023).
- b. Especially in highly polarised contexts, brands have unique access to wide swaths of the public. They can use this access to normalize the LGBTQ+ community, as IKEA did in the 1990s by advertising with same-sex couples. Razor brand Billie took advantage of its reach to normalise the LGBTQ+ experience in the retelling of classic fairytales with LGBTQ+ characters.



Figure 3: An Instagram image from Billie's (@billie) reimagined version of Rapunzel.

Nappier Cherup and Eilert (2020) also highlight brands' highlighting effect by commenting on their ability to raise awareness and influence attitudes. This type of normalisation, often in the representation of LGBTQ+ relationships, was often mentioned in the *Wired* quotes earlier. Summarily, small actions can have larger influences in what is considered 'normal' or 'acceptable.'

5. Elevating LGBTQ+ voices

Another supportive category amplifies LGBTQ+ voices. For example, the tweet in Figure 4 by Google Doodles (@GoogleDoodles) highlights an LGBTQ+ activist and encourages further learning by including a link to additional information. This has the potential to add to a conversation about Pride and also encourages larger conversations around intersectionality and LGBTQ+ identity.



Figure 4: Tweet from Google Doodles (@GoogleDoodles) that celebrates LGBTQ+ activist Kiyoshi Kuromiya,

Many of the companies utilising this category of social media activism are tech companies. Microsoft hosted a celebratory Pride event featuring LGBTQ+ artists.

6. Contributions and donations to LGBTQ+ Organisations

In contrast to rainbow marketing, corporations can use their media platform to encourage donations to LGBTQ+ organisations. Since 2019, Macy's has partnered with The Trevor Project to support donations through their website, raising over \$5 million (Macy's 2023). If using Pride to market rainbow or Pride-themed products, corporations can donate proceeds to LGBTQ+ organisations. Madewell pledged to donate half of the purchase price of its Love to All jean collection to the ACLU in 2023, and brands from Nike to The North Face to Quip pledged smaller percentages (Avery 2023).

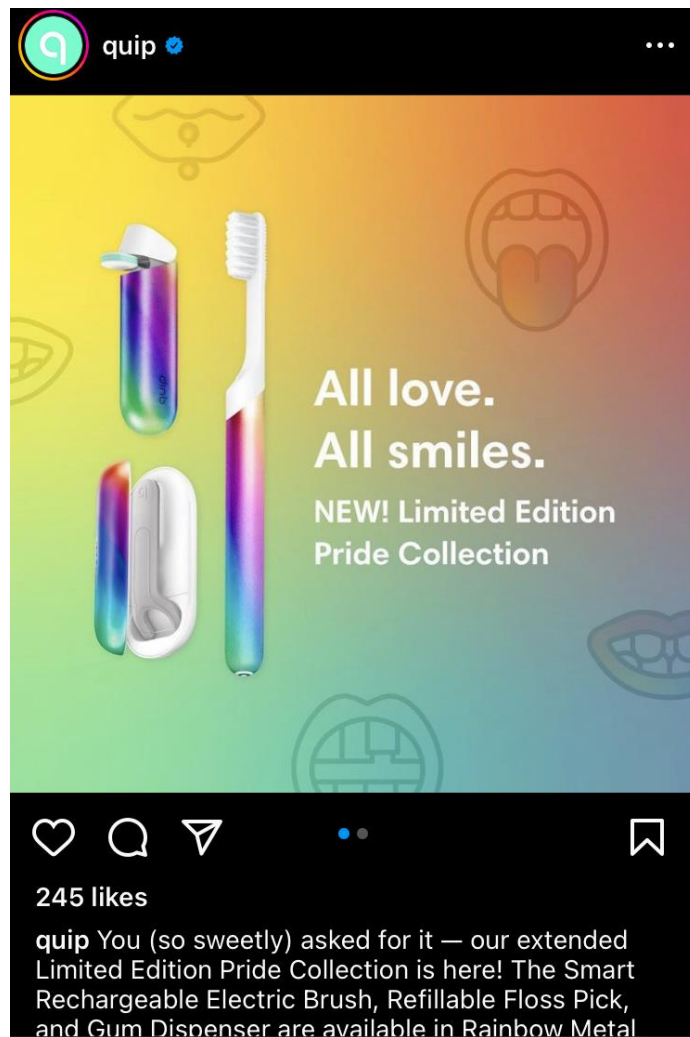


Figure 5: An Instagram post from Quip (@quip) advertising their Pride collection, with a portion of proceeds donated to the Tennessee Equality Project in June 2023.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, whistleblowers have pointed out the dissonance between companies that celebrate Pride month while donating to politicians that vote against LGBTQ+ legislation. The Guardian reported that Walmart, Amazon, Home Depot, and AT&T contributed to anti-LGBTQ+ politicians during the 2020 election cycle while publicly heralding June with rainbows and fanfare (Chalabi 2021).

LGBTQ+ Hashtag Activism in non-Western Contexts

Rainbow-washing is a relatively new conversation, and is typically discussed in the context of the US, Germany, and Israel. Expanding the conversation of corporate LGBTQ+ activism globally illuminates bright spots where such public stances are meaningful and salient. LGBTQ+ hashtag activism is more likely to be authentic in countries where attitudes towards the community are less favourable, places where pandering to 'pink money' or signaling progressive stances has little economic benefit.

If rainbows are the norm in many social media spheres, silence dominates the corporate Pride narrative in the Middle East. American conservatives were quick to point out that

while Twitter profiles for BMW, Cisco, Bethesda, and BP were coloured in honour of the month, Middle East branch accounts for each of the brands were notably less colourful (Sabes 2023).

International branches of multinational corporations (MNCs) occupy a unique space within the social media realm. With international headquarters in Western cities, these smaller country offices must navigate specific cultural contexts while adhering to guidelines from headquarters. Several of these MNC country offices were also analysed for their usage of Pride imagery and activism on Twitter. While the rationale for Pride month social media content is clear in the US, the context in other countries may mean such advocacy is viewed less positively. In these settings, social media activism can be powerful. Here, two entities stand out for their LGBTQ+ advocacy in non-Western contexts: Google India and McDonald's Philippines.

Google India

In keeping with their central brand's priorities and activism, Google India posted eight tweets for Pride 2022. Some of these tweets could be labeled as 'signaling,' but in a country where public opinion towards LGBTQ+ rights is less favourable than the US and gay sex was only decriminalized in 2018, this symbolic action has increased weight (Mugisha 2019). The remaining tweets move beyond signaling and offer practical help for LGBTQ+ businesses and others seeking to support LGBTQ+ individuals. Google India offered free workshops for LGBTQ+ businesses and posted the below tweet explaining authentic support.



Figure 6: A tweet from Google India (@GoogleIndia) with practical tips for Indian businesses to be LGBTQ+ friendly.

This tweet is a model case for global brands, as it is context-specific and informative. Building on Google's affordance for 'LGBTQ+ friendly' tag on Google Business Profiles, the

post strategically and gently reminds its audience to practice authentic allyship with the LGBTQ+ community in India.

McDonald's Philippines

Despite a population that is 85% Catholic, the Philippines is known to be one of the most gay-friendly countries in Asia (De Guzman 2022). The Filipino branch of McDonald's posted two Pride tweets in June 2022, one of which is included as Figure 7 below.

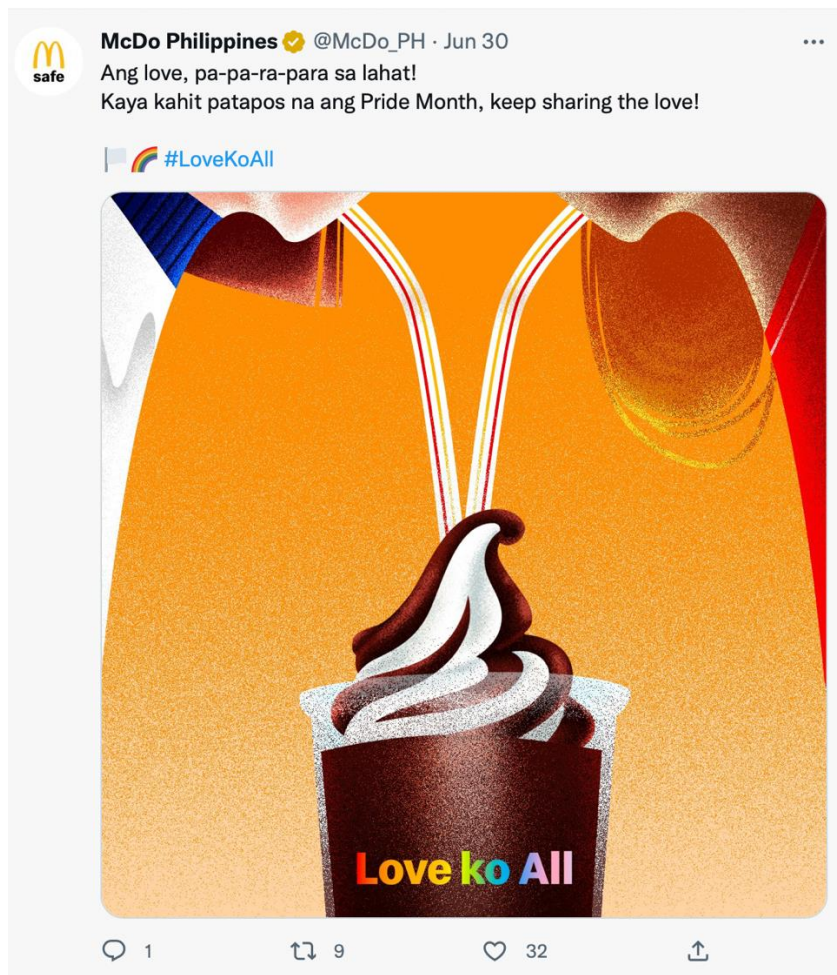


Figure 7: Tweet from McDonald's Philippines (@McDo_PH) demonstrating allyship with the LGBTQ+ community.

The English translation of text in Figure 7 is "Love is for everyone. So even though Pride Month is coming to an end, keep sharing the love!" While this text is largely symbolic and may be considered 'signaling' in the US, such messaging is still impactful when LGBTQ+ rights are less mainstreamed.

Response To Rainbow-Washing

Numerous media outlets have noted the recent phenomenon of rainbow-washing. A counter-hashtag emerged, and #stoprainbowwashing is used on both Twitter and LinkedIn. A less explicit response to rainbow-washing is #queerallyear, which is used by the LGBTQ+ community, advocates, and corporates alike to remind others that discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community is not limited to the month of June, and advocacy is essential throughout the year. Until opposition incurs costs to corporate entities, they are likely to continue in their activities. The following section recommends actions several communities can take to limit the impact of rainbow-washing and raise costs for companies that engage in the practice.

Recommendations

1. *Social media companies should allow users to filter out corporate accounts in their searches.*
 - i. Especially during identity-sensitive celebrations like Pride month, social media companies should allow for filtered searches that exclude registered businesses. Twitter already has documentation of this group as they have a gold check mark, so on a programming side the filtering capability is already possible. In allowing for this 'opting-out', users can further customise their content.
 - ii. This affordance may also encourage businesses to work with LGBTQ+ influencers as part of their Pride activities and thus amplify other voices.
2. *Researchers and social scientists must continue work to better understand rainbow-washing and how to identify it.*
 - i. While this report attempted to present an introduction to rainbow-washing and explain its harm, there is more research to be done. Scraping of social media platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn can reveal whether similar patterns exist. Sentiment analysis can quantify the extent of jarred content. Finally, acquiring a large dataset of corporate usage can determine if advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community is consistent throughout the year as a means of identifying rainbow-washing.
 - ii. Researchers can build on the methodology of Ramus and Montiel (2005) in their research on greenwashing for a robust understanding of rainbow-washing, how to identify it, and its presence in different sectors.
 - iii. Echoing Bergkvist and Langner (2023) and Verlegh (2023), there must also be closer exchange between practitioners and academics.
3. *All social media users can be critical consumers, using their knowledge of rainbow-washing to evaluate corporate posts.*
 - i. Gauging authenticity online is difficult, but is key to identifying rainbow-washing and other forms of performative allyship. When unsure, use these guiding questions for rainbow posts:
 - i. Have they partnered with members of the LGBTQ+ community?
 - ii. Do they share information about donating to organisations or links to learn more?

- iii. If they are advertising goods, do proceeds return to the LGBTQ+ community?
 - iv. Is there evidence of action beyond the month of June?
 - v. Are they rated by the Human Rights Campaign?
4. *Corporate entities should prioritise authenticity and impact in their social media activism.*
- i. Elevate LGBTQ+ voices and partner with LGBTQ+ artists where possible in marketing campaigns.
 - ii. Consider intersectionality in designing social media campaigns and avoid tokening LGBTQ+ individuals or reducing them to one component of their identity.
 - iii. Ensure proceeds from Pride marketing contribute to LGBTQ+ causes.
5. *Western-based multinational corporations can use social media as a platform to indicate allyship in countries with anti-LGBTQ+ policies.*
- i. Given the different societal environment, this does not construe rainbow-washing, even if the message may be considered simplistic in more LGBTQ+ friendly environments.
 - ii. Ensure that content is culturally sensitive and specific to the local context (i.e., Google India and McDonald's Philippines).

Conclusion

Social media is a powerful tool for social movements. However, the dangers of hashtag activism broadly, and rainbow-washing in particular, lie in how they can be co-opted by other actors that dilute and drown out the voices that matter. In demonstrating patterns of rainbow-washing during Pride month and presenting policy recommendations, this paper encourages authentic usage of LGBTQ+ imagery by corporate actors that directly benefits the LGBTQ+ community. As brand activism and corporate social responsibility continue to push corporations towards political messaging, the frameworks presented here can be applied to other contexts, including brands that leverage Juneteenth imagery for profit. At its best, hashtag activism improves visibility for vulnerable groups and corporations have the potential to raise awareness. While pandering and disingenuous usage endangers this power, authenticity and commitment can return Pride posts to their roots, providing tangible support and solidarity for LGBTQ+ individuals.

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