

### Can companies make us better citizens?

- 1 If you want to know what coffee and elections have in common, ask Starbucks. In May, the US giant ran a campaign in the Philippines called “care to vote”, which rewarded customers with a free drink if they turned out to vote in the country’s general election. Having visited a polling station, all customers had to do was show an ink-stained voting finger to a barista in order to get their complimentary coffee or other beverage. “Our intent was simple,” says Keith Cole, head of marketing for Starbucks Philippines. “By helping to increase voter participation we believe more people will have an opportunity to make their votes count.”
- 2 From campaigning on voting rights, to sustainability, healthy eating, and gender equality, businesses are increasingly speaking out about societal issues, in the hope of influencing – and improving – our behaviour. The aim, they say, is to use their power and influence for good, and not just for profit. But with corporate scandals never far from the news, can we seriously take their word for it?
- 3 The idea that brands might encourage us to be better citizens is not new. UK chocolate manufacturer Cadbury and US carmaker Ford invested heavily in the towns where their employees lived in the 19th and 20th centuries, and in return expected workers to live according to certain values – both in and outside work. But today such efforts tend to be more focused on customers because the aim is to promote social good while encouraging loyalty to their brand at the same time.
- 4 Take Dutch brewer Heineken, for example, which has promoted moderate drinking in its advertising since 2011. Heineken PR manager Milly Hutchinson says that the firm believes it has “a role to play in society”, and the “perfect platform to spread the message of moderate consumption”. She adds that the firm is also reflecting a “visible shift in consumer behaviour”, as its own research shows that a majority of young adults now limit the amount of alcohol they drink. A Heineken survey published in January found that 75% of drinkers aged between 21 and 35 limited the amount of alcohol they drank on the majority of their nights out. The study was conducted across five countries – the US, the UK, the Netherlands, Mexico and Brazil.
- 5 Charlotte West, from UK charity Business in the Community, says it is true that a growing number of firms are making their campaigning voices heard. She adds: “Companies can see that being associated with a certain practice reflects well on them, and might bring in additional customers. But they can risk seeming preachy too, 22.”

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