



HATE IS IN THE AIR

WHITE PAPER

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PHILIP MORRIS
INTERNATIONAL

ACKNOWLEDGING THE NEGATIVE, ENGAGING FOR THE POSITIVE

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“Hate is simple. So the first thing that happens in a conflict is that we choose a side, because that’s easier than trying to hold two thoughts in our heads at the same time. The second thing that happens is that we seek out facts that confirm what we want to believe—comforting facts, ones that permit life to go on as normal. The third is that we dehumanize our enemy.”

—Fredrik Backman, *Beartown*



If you have spent any time on social media in the past several years, you will have seen harassment and hate in all its ugliness. Social media platforms, initially touted as mechanisms to bring the world together, have grown into petri dishes breeding hostility, harassment, and hateful discourse. Hate and antisocial behaviors are also increasingly prevalent offline.

At Philip Morris International (PMI), we are no strangers to hate. That comes with being a prominent player in an industry that has long been reviled for its primary product: cigarettes. And vestiges of that hate remain, even as we move ever closer to the time when we will no longer manufacture or sell cigarettes (see “Delivering a Smoke-Free Future” below).

We have seen an array of responses to our company and the transformational journey it is on. Many experts acknowledge

our transformation and the progress we are making toward delivering a smoke-free future. Public health authorities have reviewed the science behind our smoke-free alternatives and vetted key elements of it. Regrettably, others—most notably, deep-pocketed special interest groups and the NGOs they fund—refuse to consider the tremendous breakthrough in public health that smoke-free products represent for adults who smoke. Nor are they willing to engage in debate over these products’ potential to accelerate an end to smoking. This hostile reception is supported by misinformation and false statements. We see science dismissed, measurable progress discounted. And that risks perpetuating the demand for cigarettes among the very individuals these organizations are purporting to help.

DELIVERING A SMOKE-FREE FUTURE

Philip Morris International is on a path to a smoke-free future. Since 2008, the company has invested billions of dollars in developing, scientifically validating, and manufacturing better alternatives to cigarettes. These smoke-free products are the result of nearly two decades of R&D work, underpinned by a rigorous scientific assessment program and led by a team that today includes more than 930 world-class scientists and other experts. We make our scientific findings and methodologies available for others to scrutinize, we invite independent research into our products, and we encourage a broad, science-based conversation with regulators, scientists, and the public health community about the best way to make these products available to adult smokers while minimizing unintended use. As of June 30, 2021, smoke-free products account for nearly a third of our net revenues (29 percent), and we aim to increase that to 50 percent or more by 2025. We are convinced that, with the right regulatory frameworks and societal support, we can end the sale of cigarettes in many countries within 10 to 15 years.

The best choice a person can make is never to start smoking or, if they do, to quit tobacco and nicotine use entirely. Our smoke-free products are intended exclusively for those existing adult smokers who would otherwise continue to use cigarettes, the most harmful form of tobacco consumption. For more information, please visit www.pmi.com and www.pmisience.com.

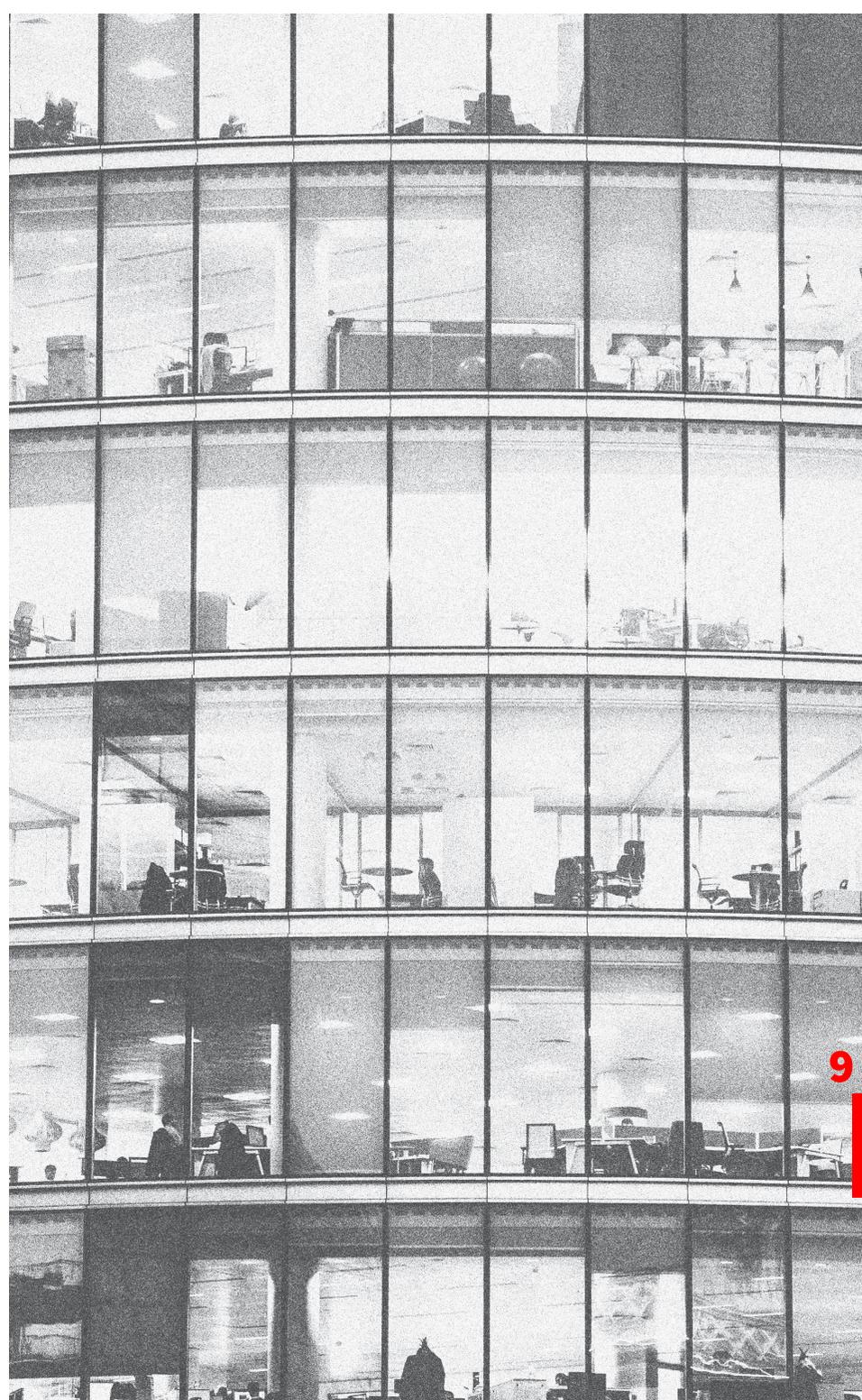




This is not a paper about PMI or its pursuit of tobacco harm reduction, however. The topic we explore is far broader than that. Our experiences of the past several years have spurred us to question what factors have led to the rise in hate and misinformation and the loss of civil discourse and respect for objective truth. How can organizations across industries and sectors not only protect themselves from the damage incurred by hate but also contribute to meaningful progress? How can we begin to replace confrontation with collaboration so we can make headway on societal challenges, whether as intimate as returning civility and consideration to social media conversations or as colossal as addressing climate change?

We know from our own experience that enmity is not always personal or deep-seated. Sometimes, with patience and goodwill, long-standing hostility can be dialed back, even if just briefly, to open the way for good-faith conversation. This, in turn, can lead to curiosity and even the beginnings of dialogue and understanding. This was what happened when we set up a venue to share our science and address common misperceptions about smoke-free alternatives in Davos in January 2020. People strolled in to check out PMI's "Unsmoke Your Mind" lounge on the Promenade, and many stayed to talk. It is what we have experienced in response to the [white paper](#) on trust we released in December 2020. And it is what we have been seeing at our [Open Science](#) events.

In combination, these experiences have made us cautiously optimistic about the possibilities for fruitful dialogue in the future. And they have given us hope that reason and civility can be restored to the public discourse.





UNCERTAINTY BEGETS FEAR; FEAR BEGETS HATE

Hate is in the air, both as an emotion that people feel personally and as an attention-grabbing word in headlines and articles. We can even see it entering the lexicon in new forms:

Hateism (n.): Prejudice and discrimination against other humans not because of the color of their skin or ethnicity but because you hate all of them equally

Hatetriot (n.): A person who zealously supports political dogma to the point of bigotry towards people of opposing opinions

Hatetriotism (n.): The propaganda of hate disguised as patriotism in order to achieve vested personal or collective goals

To get a more global perspective on the issue of hate and societal discord, we surveyed just over 5,000 adults in five markets: Brazil, France, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States.[†] Most respondents (70 percent) reported that the level of hate and hate speech in their country has increased in

[†] A total of 5,026 interviews were conducted across Brazil (n=1,007), France (n=1,005), South Africa (n=1,002), South Korea (n=1,005), and the United States (n=1,007) between October 1 and 10, 2021. The research was commissioned by Philip Morris International. Engine Insights conducted the online interviews via its CARAVAN International Omnibus Survey. Survey data were weighted to be nationally representative of the adult population of each country.

the past two years—with agreement levels ranging from a low of 67 percent in the United States to a high of 77 percent in Brazil.

Why does hate seem more pervasive than in the last century? It comes down in part to chaos as the new normal and the uncertainty that engenders. Over the past two decades, there have been plenty of factors prone to stir up anxiety and fear—emotions that can manifest as aggression and tribalism: the aftershocks of 9/11; the long repercussions of the 2007–2008 global financial crisis; the stagnation and decline of living standards for workers; the prospect of ever more jobs being taken by machines; shifting demographics affecting culture and politics; the migration crisis and the rise of nationalism and populism; coordinated disinformation campaigns; and clashing views on whether and how to address big issues such as climate change and resource insecurity. On top of all this, since early 2020, has been the global spread of COVID-19. Understandably, people are on edge.





Against this backdrop of populations on high “threat alert” and a crowded media environment, the word *hate* and the emotion that goes with it resonate. Worse, it is becoming normalized. On social media and beyond, there has been a growing trend of prominent people and even low-profile newsmakers being subjected to hostility, hateful abuse, and worse. Threats of violence, rape, and death used to be the stock-in-trade of criminal gangs. Now, lurid screeds and blood-curdling threats are posted not only by the usual parade of outrage merchants but also by regular people talking big from a position of anonymity. This, despite the fact that only 13 percent of our survey respondents say hate is tolerated within their social media communities.

The repercussions extend well beyond the web. The Council on Foreign Relations [reports](#) that “hate speech online has been linked to a global increase in physical violence toward minorities, including mass shootings, lynchings, and ethnic cleansing.” [Election administrators](#) in the United States faced months of harassment and death threats before and after the 2020 election. Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the U.S. National

Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, [beefed up security](#) after receiving death threats from people who may have been egged on by the likes of former Trump advisor Steve Bannon, who [proclaimed](#) that Dr. Fauci and FBI Director Christopher Wray should be beheaded as a warning to federal bureaucrats who failed to “get with the program.”

Faced with billions of users uploading unimaginable quantities of antisocial content every day, tech companies have struggled to draw the line in defining what is unacceptable. And they have struggled to enforce the lines once drawn. Whatever decision they make, they are certain to face a torrent of criticism from the media, activists, legislators, and the public. Akin to the holders of the rings of power in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, these tech giants find themselves with platforms that hold greater power than they can contain. They are charged with controlling an environment in which hostility and hate are at the bursting point.

Offline, hate is expressed through confrontation, intimidation, and violence. [Statistics](#) from the FBI indicate that hate crimes in the U.S. rose to the highest level in more than a decade in 2020 and have been increasing almost every year since 2014. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security [regards white supremacist hate and violence](#) as a primary national security threat.

It is hardly a uniquely American phenomenon. Nearly half of our survey respondents (43 percent) say they encounter hateful speech, either online or in person, at least once a week. Reports of hate are on the rise in [Germany](#), [France](#), [Sweden](#), and other European countries, prompting Europol to coordinate a [clampdown](#) on online hatred and incitement to violence. Hate also looms large in other countries, including [India](#), [Myanmar](#), and [Australia](#). It is a global phenomenon being heightened by the interplay of words and images online and real-world deeds offline.





THE RADICALIZING POWER OF HATE

Online hate content has a [well-documented](#) role in drawing in and radicalizing susceptible people. [According to](#) the Council on Foreign Relations:

As more and more people have moved online, experts say, individuals inclined toward racism, misogyny, or homophobia have found niches that can reinforce their views and goad them to violence. Social media platforms also offer violent actors the opportunity to publicize their acts.

In Germany, Oliver Saal from Civic.net has seen [growing evidence](#) of hatred online:

In the last five years, the willingness to articulate xenophobia on social networks has increased—for example, in forums hostile to refugees. ... Social networks are built algorithmically in such a way that they reinforce particularly blatant statements that provoke extreme reactions in the form of likes. The network then assumes that it is a relevant contribution, which gives it a lot of visibility. The problem lies in the technical conception [of those platforms].

Jihadist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) use online platforms to recruit adherents, provide informal training, and spread shocking images such as executions.



Anti-terror legislation makes it hard to accurately assess the reach and impact of such content. Suffice it to say that ISIS has devoted considerable resources and expertise to its [recruitment efforts](#) and continues to operate sophisticated [social media operations](#).

Similarly, right-wing and white supremacist groups share content and [encourage](#) each other through social networking. In 2019, when a lone gunman attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, he [livestreamed](#) the carnage on Facebook. Despite Facebook removing 1.5 million copies globally within 24 hours of the attack, the video [metastasized](#) onto YouTube and Twitter, even as these platforms scrambled to pull it down. Five months later, a gunman accused of massacring 23 people in a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas, cited the Christchurch massacre as inspiration.



CLARITY ON THE STATE OF HATE

Without question, there are myriad media outlets and individuals stridently stoking up hate, whether for ideological reasons, political ambition, or the pursuit of financial profit. Simultaneously, there are individuals, media outlets, and organizations aiming to help the world deal with the current surfeit of hate, including by understanding the phenomenon within a broader historical context. If we are to heal the rifts of hate, we must first unpick the strands of negative emotion that are so tightly intertwined within it.

As a first step, we think it essential to approach the issue of hostility and hate with the sort of clarity that does not come readily in these anxious, hyperreactive times. For instance, it is worth considering that our world may not be living through a particularly hate-filled period. Experimental psychologist Steven Pinker has amassed empirical evidence to [argue](#) that violence and hateful behavior are far less common now than ever before. He contends that human society is actually in the midst of an [extraordinary decline](#) in aggression and brutality, a decline that is centuries in the making.

From a purely objective, statistical perspective, Pinker may well be correct. The world as a whole is living in an era in which hostility and hatred are the exception rather than the norm. In most parts of the world, the sorts of casual violence that once were commonplace are now far less usual. That is all the more astonishing when one considers how much more crowded

the planet is now. The global population has [almost doubled](#) since 1975, with more than half crammed into cities—including [34 megacities](#) of over 10 million people. So, if the world really is now more peaceable, how come so many people have the impression that societies have become more mired in hostility and hatred, not less? What has changed?

As we have touched on already, one big change is the invention and massive adoption of social media. An entity that barely existed 15 years ago is used by an estimated [4.48 billion people](#)—57 percent of the world's population. It is a platform on which hostility and hate [thrive](#). A [large-scale study](#) of research into online hate concluded: “The exponential growth of social media has brought with it an increasing propagation of hate speech and hate-based propaganda.”





The 24/7 news cycle also deserves some of the blame for our skewed perceptions. Anyone with a smartphone, a tablet, a computer, or a TV has constant access to “news updates” that have to compete with each other to grab attention. As news editors, citizen journalists, social media users, and algorithms have confirmed, nice does not cut through. In the battle for audience attention, it is the content promising sensational nastiness that tends to win out. Or, as the old news editor maxim puts it: “If it bleeds, it leads.”

Thanks to algorithms, instances of hostility and hatred are constantly being [amplified](#) and fed into people’s media streams because platform architecture “privileges incendiary content, setting up a stimulus-response loop that promotes outrage expression.” And people become hyperaware of these negative events and behaviors because they check their media streams [multiple times a day](#). Psychologically, it does not matter all that much whether events are taking place down the street or on the other side of the world. With our powerful portable technology, they are all immediately present on screens that are rarely more than an arm’s length away.

There is an endless supply of video clips showing people shouting at each other or ranting to the camera, some of it even making its way onto broadcast or cable media. There are the mean memes. There are angry, threatening comments on social media threads and online news reports, reports of other people making angry, threatening comments, and discussions about reports of people making angry, threatening comments. And there are extremes of hostility and hate manifested in events such as mass shootings, terrorist attacks, and political violence, with graphic images that make the impact more shocking and the emotion more visceral. Because of a cognitive bias ([the availability heuristic](#)), all of these images come readily to mind and can combine to create the impression that hostility and hate are everywhere. And so, whatever the objective reality is—however grounded in fact Pinker’s theory may be—people’s perceptions tell them something different. And those perceptions feel more real than a bunch of percentages and trend lines.



THE POSITIVE POWER OF SOME NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

As we consider the damage caused by incivility, hate speech, and the like, it would be a mistake to disregard the utility of some of the negative emotions behind such antisocial behaviors. People like positive feelings. That goes some way toward explaining the enduring popularity of “feel good” stories and romantic comedies. Nonetheless, there is a place for—and purpose to—darker emotions such as fear, anger, and anxiety. These negative emotions generate energy; they are highly motivating and can even make people feel good when the response is considered justified.

The Dominican friar Bede Jarrett is widely quoted as saying: “The world needs more anger. The world often continues to allow evil because it isn’t angry enough.” This sort of morally righteous anger can easily become self-righteous anger, and for some it can feel very good. On any hot-button issue—climate change, racism, big tech, vaccination, political corruption—expressing indignation or outrage can feel brave, noble, and morally superior.

In line with Jarrett’s thinking, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was no stranger to the power of negative feelings. He channeled his anger, and that of the civil rights movement, into positive forms of protest. Early in his career, in his mid-20s, he recognized the double-sided power of anger, writing later:

How could I make a speech that would be militant enough to keep my people aroused to positive action and yet moderate enough to keep this fervor within controllable and Christian bounds? [...] What could I say to keep them courageous and prepared for positive action and yet devoid of hate and resentment? Could the militant and the moderate be combined in a single speech?

Mahatma Gandhi is remembered as a peaceful man, but he, too, felt and channeled anger. In his 2017 book, *The Gift of Anger: and Other Lessons from My Grandfather Mahatma Gandhi*, Arun Gandhi recalls his grandfather telling him that anger is important; not only can it act as fuel, but it can also indicate an underlying problem and should be heeded.

One of the characteristics of negative emotions such as indignation, outrage, and anger is that they tend to be short-lived. They burn hot in the moment, but they do not last unless they are regularly stoked with fresh fuel. If anger is fired up often enough, it can turn into hate—forming a bed of hot embers that can be fanned again and again into renewed anger. Hate is a less fiery emotion, but it can last much longer. And while anger may be used as righteous fuel that can power action to create good outcomes, hate is toxic and does not lead to good outcomes. Quite the reverse.

Anger is not the problem. The problem is when it festers and turns into hate rather than being channeled into purposeful, open discourse and positive action.





THE IMPACT OF “WOKE” CULTURE

There is a paradox at play in our consciousness of hate. The widespread reporting of hate and acts of violence may be a sign of positive change. Yes, this reporting gives us the impression that antisocial behavior is rife than even a decade or two ago, but it also shows that societies worldwide are less willing to tolerate violence, hatred, and lack of compassion.

Are there really more instances of racially motivated assaults and other hate crimes, as the FBI and others have reported, or are people less willing to tolerate them and more prepared to record and report them, so the number of cases logged goes up? Are instances of police brutality and bias more prevalent—or simply better chronicled because of the ubiquity of smartphones and more police departments mandating body cameras? Are incidents of hate getting more media coverage because they are more frequent or because they are now of more interest to audiences?

This perception-versus-reality discussion has itself created divisions in the culture. Positions taken by people on side A are amplified by people on side B to rally their supporters and justify side B taking more extreme positions. They lob hostile, hate-filled jibes—*woke*, *snowflake*, *neo-Nazi*—and accusations at each other.

An optimist might compare the situation to the [hygiene hypothesis](#) in public health. Some [evidence](#) indicates that children growing up in very clean environments have a higher rate of hay fever, asthma, and a wide range of other conditions. The theory is that because these children encounter fewer microbes at an early age, their immune systems do not learn to handle the normal conditions of life. Therefore, they are more susceptible to ordinary diseases and are [hypersensitive](#) to dust, pollen, and certain common foods.

As with the microbial environment, so with the social environment. The less hatred and deadly hostility there is in the wider world, the more reactive people become to those cases that are reported prominently. This is likely to be particularly so for people who access online media frequently—especially avid consumers of news. The great majority of people who live outside conflict zones are now much more likely to face hostility and hatred online than in person. In pre-digital times, teens and preteens may well have experienced bullying at school or in other in-person social situations, but not when they were on their own. Where in the past their homes and bedrooms may have been a refuge from hostility, they no longer are. Now young people may face bullying, hostility, and hatred any time they “check” online. Even if they themselves are not the targets of hostility, it does not take much [doomscrolling](#) to find a whole lot of nastiness. For anyone who feels vulnerable to online aggression, nowhere is safe now because connectivity is everywhere.





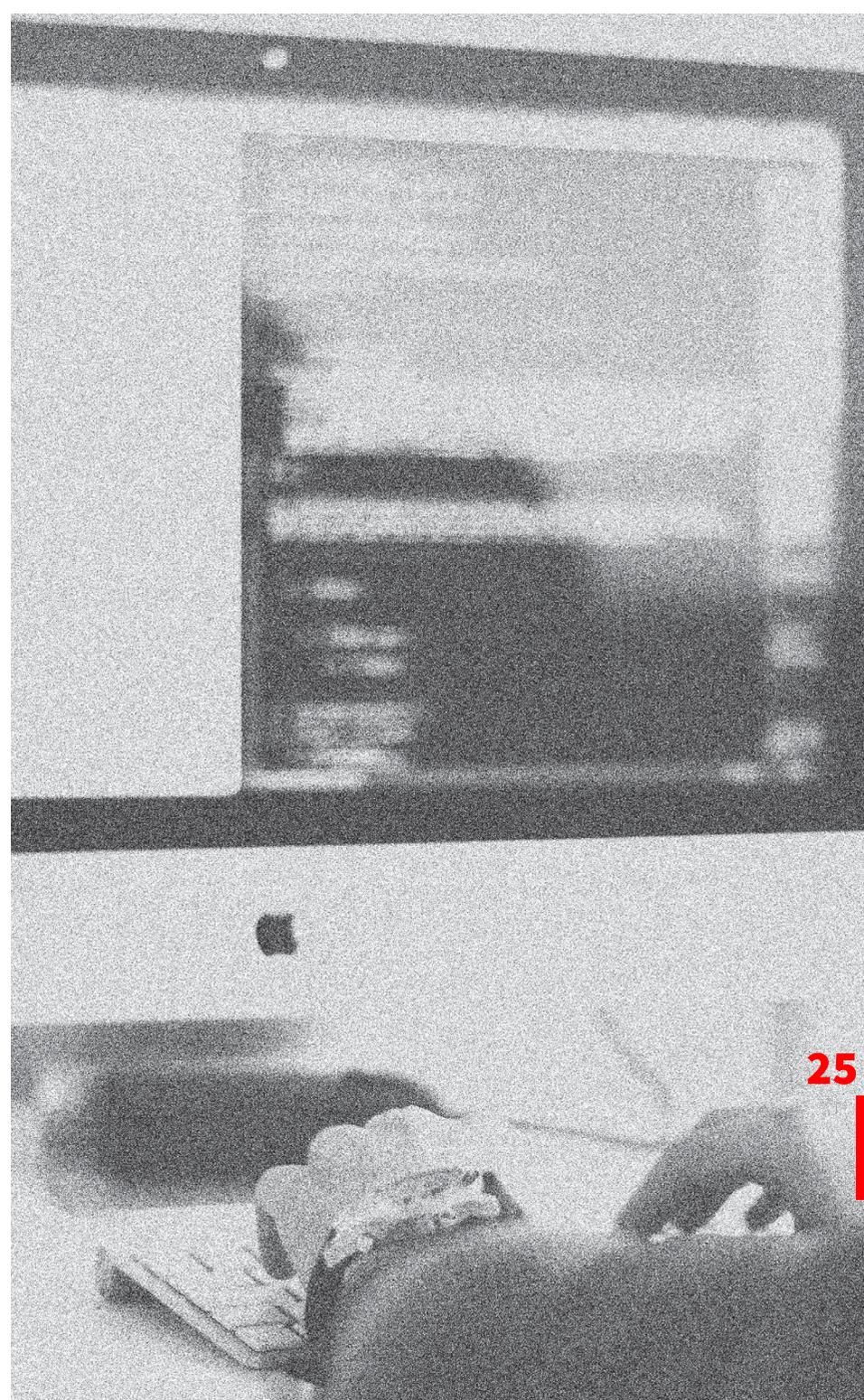
A KINGDOM OF TROLLS

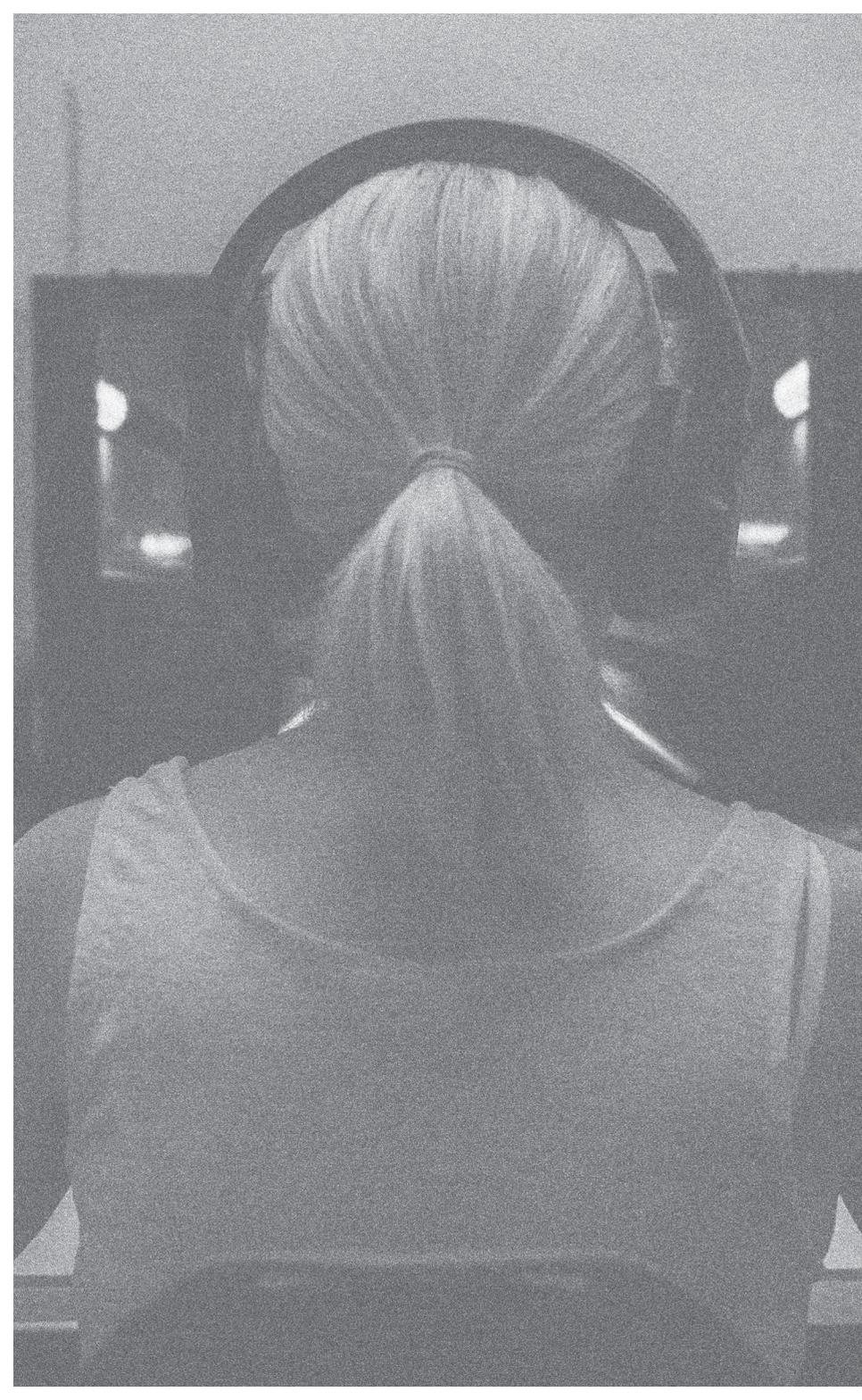
Cyberbullying is one of the most visible forms of hostile and hateful behavior—and is eliciting both alarm and action. As a rule of thumb, the term covers anything posted online that is intended to hurt or upset someone else. It covers harassing, threatening, demeaning language as well as deliberately embarrassing another person in an online forum.

All over the world, this social ill is being addressed by new initiatives such as the Anti-Bullying Movement, Stomp Out Bullying, Teens Against Bullying, Non Au Harcèlement, Stop Pesten Nu, and No Al Acoso Escolar. As is so often the case, such efforts face resistance from those who think the whole thing is blown out of proportion. They may complain that people are getting too sensitive (“snowflakey”) about the ordinary rough and tumble that has always been part of life.

Nevertheless, the movement to combat the issue is gaining steam as more people begin to recognize the impact of cyberbullying on mental and physical health. A 2020 survey by Pew found that 55 percent of U.S. adults think people being harassed or bullied online is a major problem. Among the same sample, 41 percent said they personally had been harassed online, including 25 percent who cited severe harassment. Globally, a third of parents surveyed by Ipsos reported knowing a child in their community who has been bullied online.

Multiple studies have pointed to cyberbullying as a risk factor among youth for both self-harm and suicidal behavior. A 2018 study found that students who experience bullying or cyberbullying are nearly twice as likely to attempt suicide.





THE INTRACTABLE PROBLEM OF HATE SPEECH

Whereas cyberbullying targets individual victims, hate speech is typically directed toward groups and often seeks to incite violence or other harmful actions against them. Ethnicities, religions, and corporations alike are subjected to comments and even orchestrated campaigns intended to marginalize and harm them. It is a problem not easily solved in an environment that decries censorship.

From the internet's early days up to the present, the underlying ethos has been freedom of speech and expression. In some respects, the World Wide Web has lived up to its promise by enabling learning resources such as Khan Academy and facilitating pro-justice movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo. But even the pioneering Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)—which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2020—foresaw a dark side, [noting](#) that “EFF took root because even from those early days it was clear that powerful [new digital tools](#) could be used to hurt as well as to heal.”

The EFF [concedes](#) that hate speech is virtually intractable online:

Hateful speech presents one of the most difficult problems of content moderation. At a global scale, it's practically impossible. That's largely because few people agree about what hateful speech is—whether it is limited to derogations based on race, gender, religion, and other personal characteristics



historically subject to hate, whether it includes all forms of harassment and bullying, and whether it applies only when directed from a place of power to those denied such power. Just as governments, courts, and international bodies struggle to define hateful speech with the requisite specificity, so do online services. As a result, the significant efforts online services do undertake to remove hateful speech can often come at the expense of freedom of expression.

This is not an issue in countries that strictly control citizens' access to content—those countries do not have freedom of expression. But in non-authoritarian countries that vaunt freedom of speech, it gives free rein to anybody from anywhere to post hostile or hateful content for whatever reason.

Keyboard warriors routinely unleash verbal attacks that range from snarky or derisive to chilling.



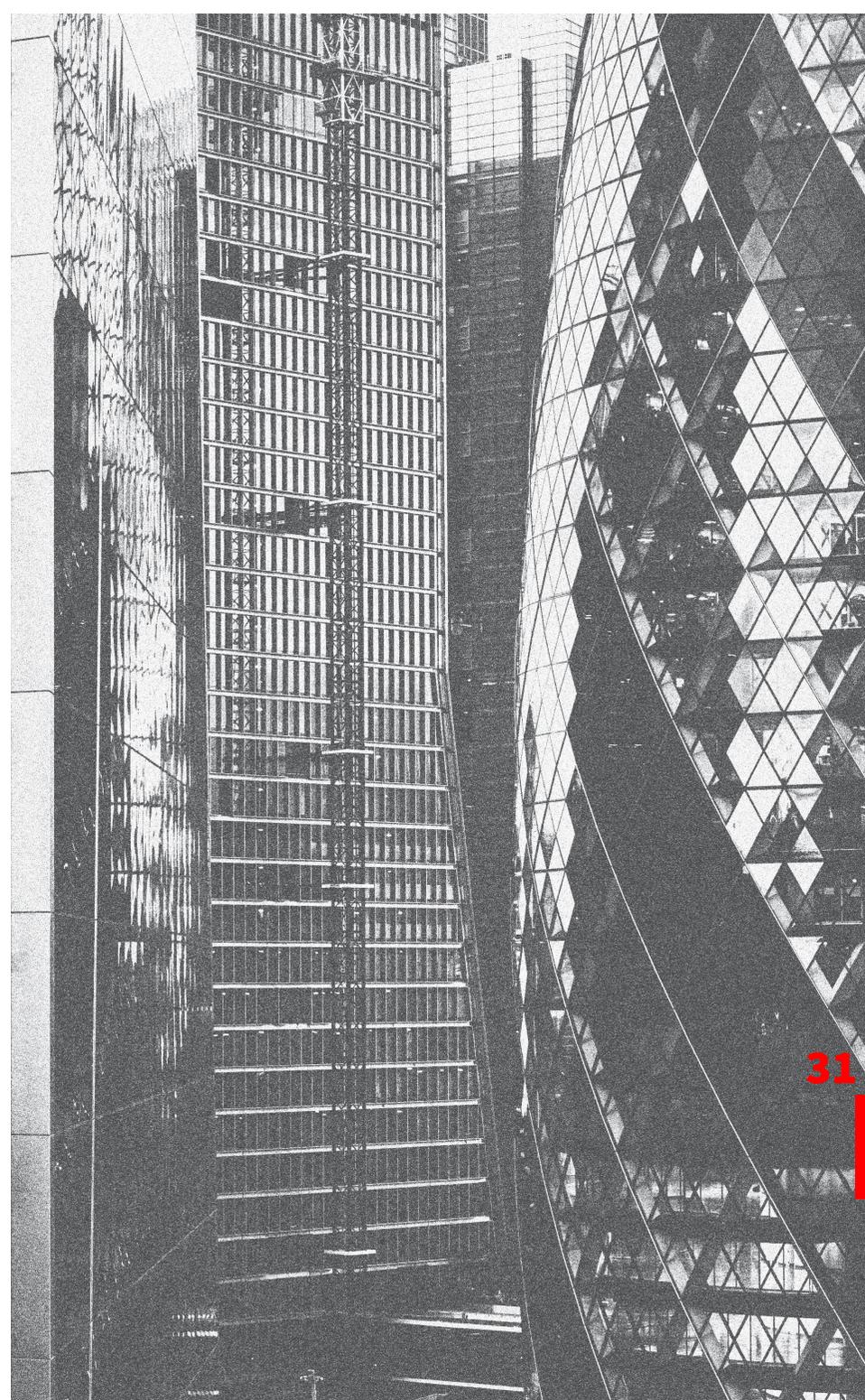


BIG BUSINESS FEELING THE HEAT

The digitally driven media environment has encouraged and even normalized hostility and hate. It has become all too ordinary for people to use extreme language and express extreme opinions. Yet fortunately, in most countries and most instances, this is armchair aggression, not hands-on hate. This is the context of most of the negativity and hostility that large companies and their employees are experiencing.

This antipathy toward corporations is due in part to people's perceptions (and suspicions) of their power, intentions, and interests. As French philosopher Michel Foucault put it: "Where there is power, there is resistance." Confrontational attitudes stem, too, from a greater sense of familiarity and increased access to large companies. For the most part, these companies no longer operate in secrecy, sequestered behind iron gates (proverbial or literal). They are out in the open, easily researched—and reached.

As the balance of power globally shifts toward massive corporations, their behavior comes under closer scrutiny. And that makes sense. Individual citizens have little power beyond their vote, their purchasing choices, and possibly their membership in pressure groups. Their attention is mainly focused on managing their day-to-day. Their governments have more power—a lot more power—because they can create laws and regulations and enforce them. But governments also have many calls on their attention and limited resources to focus on pressing issues. Moreover, in democratic countries, governments





come and go with electoral cycles, so some of their attention has to be focused on winning elections and staying in power. Multinational companies, in contrast, are far more stable and, compared with many nations, far more powerful. The nominal value of some is bigger than the economies of many small countries. These corporate entities have the capacity to plan and implement long-term strategies and focus their resources on achieving their long-term objectives. In practice, they are some of the most powerful forces in existence.

From the perspective of the general public (and the media that serve it), big businesses and, in particular, big multinationals are fair game for hostility and hatred. Unless companies can convincingly show otherwise, people are likely to think they pursue their own interests regardless of negative impacts on those outside the company or on the planet. There are certainly historical and even more recent instances of big company malfeasance to give them grounds for suspicion.

While majorities of the general public may not feel motivated to pay much interest to corporate doings, vocal minorities are often highly motivated to take an interest and to speak their criticism out loud. This was already the case in the pre-digital era when pressure groups organized boycotts and divestment campaigns. In the age of digital media, it is a lot easier for individuals and groups to rally against perceived corporate enemies. In an environment in which no-holds-barred expressions of hostility are so common, they feel free to ratchet up the rhetoric. They can hurl invective and abuse against what they perceive as the misdeeds of all-powerful corporations. More seasoned company employees may be hardened to such treatment, but for others it can be deeply disturbing.



THE WAY THROUGH— UNDERSTANDING, CIVILITY, AND EMPATHY

The general hostility and divisiveness discussed in this paper is unlikely to abate anytime soon. So learning how to deal with it is essential. For individuals, effective strategies may include social media “cleanses”—avoiding digital forums and the negative emotions they can engender—or, at the opposite end of the spectrum, persistent, positive engagement with those seeking to wound. We saw a classic example of the latter approach in late 2017 when American comedian Sarah Silverman responded to an internet troll with kindness and sympathy for his struggles. By engaging her attacker in caring conversation, Silverman was able to turn the situation around—and even promoted a fund drive to help him resolve some medical issues.

Without question, society needs to devise solutions to the debilitating problems of hate and incivility—and the ever-broadening political divides. Engaging in constructive conversations about these issues with people across the political and social spectrum is a good place to start. Intelligence Squared U.S. (IQ2US) is working to “restore civility, reasoned analysis, and constructive public discourse to today’s media landscape.” The nonpartisan, nonprofit organization hosts debates on topics ranging from student debt forgiveness to legalizing psychedelics and whether the United Nations is obsolete. Another organization, AllSides, aims to “free people from filter bubbles so they can better understand the world—

and each other.” Each of its news postings consists of three reports: one from the political left, one from center, and one from the right so that users can access and compare opinions across the political spectrum. The group also maintains a chart showing the perceived political biases of major news outlets to help people “consume a balanced news diet and avoid manipulation and fake news.”

While such efforts may seem Sisyphean in the context of today’s rabid media environment, any action that puts a spotlight on divisiveness, disinformation, and discord—any effort that encourages conversations between partisan groups and injects pinpricks into media bubbles—is a move in the right direction.





LOOKING AHEAD: WHAT CORPORATIONS CAN DO TO ADDRESS HATE

This paper is intended to contribute to the conversation around hate and division and encourage more individuals and organizations to work toward resolving these critical challenges. We do not have definitive answers, but we are seeking to learn and contribute to progress every day. For the remainder of this paper, we will focus on the subset of the larger issue with which we are most familiar: the anger and hostility facing large companies such as ours. There are some who would advocate that corporations hunker down and, to the extent possible, avoid exposure to those who oppose them. PMI rejects that approach. We believe in fostering constructive engagement with understanding, civility, and empathy. There is much to be learned from most interactions, and wounds rarely heal properly when left untreated.

As we have explored hate and hostility, we have gleaned several lessons and tactics that promise to be useful for organizations and others confronting these issues. While we continue to engage in and learn on this topic, our preliminary recommendations are as follows:

Engage, engage, engage

It can sometimes appear as though trust-building is a lost art. How does one establish trust when people cannot even seem to agree on what counts as “truth”? When people exist within



practically impermeable media and information bubbles that shield them from opposing views and proof points? The solution is to relentlessly seek out opportunities for interaction, dialogue, and debate, even with—perhaps especially with—those who consider you the enemy. Eighty-one percent of those surveyed for our study say that, even when they strongly disagree with someone, they are more likely to consider their arguments if their “opponents” are open to dialogue and willing to address concerns and questions.

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a small, rectangular piece of paper. The paper has the words "SHARE LOVE NOT HATE" written on it in a bold, sans-serif font. The word "SHARE" is at the top, "LOVE" is in the middle, "NOT" is below "LOVE", and "HATE" is at the bottom. The hand is positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers gripping the edges of the paper. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light gray.

SHARE
LOVE
NOT
HATE

Do the right thing

Establishing trust requires continuous, constant effort. Sweeping statements have their place, but they are rarely as powerful as the cumulative effect of small, everyday actions that combat misgivings, clear up misunderstandings, and solidify relationships. Companies can counter negative perceptions every day by operating with transparency, keeping their promises, and inserting themselves into society in positive and productive ways. Religious texts, the social sciences, literature, and history are rich with lessons on how to amend errors, reconstruct relationships, and reestablish trust. Seek them out.

End exclusionary policies and practices

It is an irony of our times that even as more people embrace the tenets of diversity and inclusion, we are seeing a countervailing trend toward exclusion—most prominently, in the rise of so-called “[cancel culture](#).” We certainly see this in the debate on tobacco harm reduction, wherein some NGOs not only work hard to exclude the industry from contributing to solutions, but also seek to exclude the opinions and preferences of the people at the heart of the issue: men and women who smoke and desire access to better alternatives. Among our survey respondents, 77 percent agree that society’s biggest challenges will never be solved if we demonize and exclude those with whom we disagree.

The gatekeepers controlling access to conversations must be made to recognize that discomfort and debate often go hand-in-hand, especially when one is looking to make meaningful changes in society. To be truly inclusive means to make room for differences and even dissent. That is how we innovate and progress.



Embrace discomfort

It is not easy to leave behind the familiar and comfortable to venture into the unknown and potentially hostile. If we stay within the relative safety of our echo chambers, however, how can we hope to find common ground with those on the other side of issues?

Champion the primacy of science and fact

It is easier than ever today to fact-check in real time and disseminate critical truths to push back against misinformation and clear up misunderstandings before they are allowed to take root and spread. Using data and proof points as anchors, companies must use their full voice to show up in conversations and counter the noise created by those seeking to confuse or mislead.

Exist beyond the ordinary

Extraordinarily challenging times call for extraordinary organizations. Consumers want businesses and brands of all sizes to make life easier and more fulfilling while also addressing broad societal issues. In this new environment, visionary brands have been showing up as “super solvers,” taking a leading role in tackling the most challenging issues—and, critically, involving consumers in that work.

Be your audience

Organizations and brands that stay close to their consumers are less likely to make unforced errors or communicate in a tone-deaf manner. Part of staying close means reflecting one’s consumer demographics in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, and culture. Organizations committed to inclusion and diversity are better positioned to ensure their sustainability and growth.



Recognize that hate offers no solutions

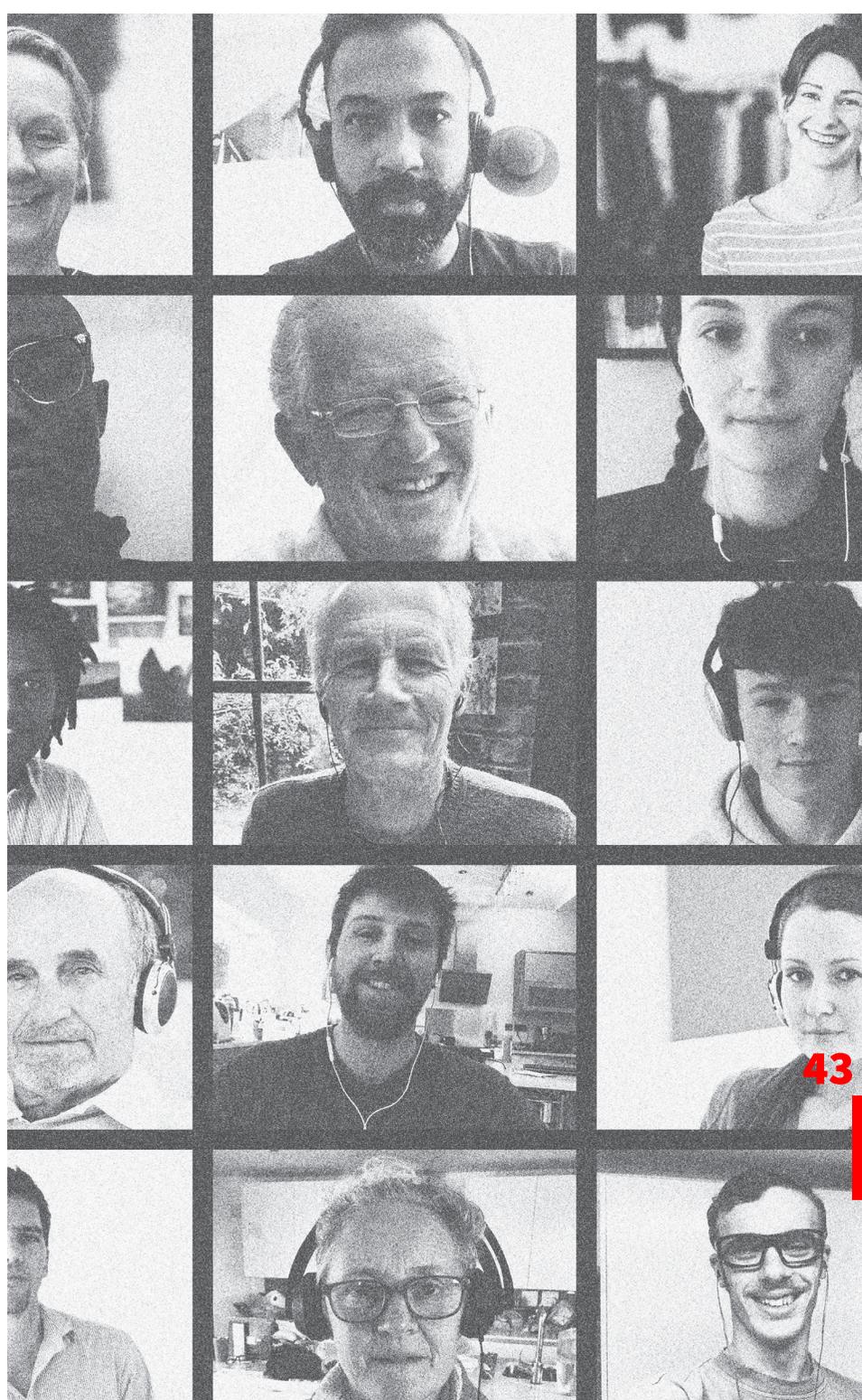
It can be easy to allow one's anger or sense of injustice to contort into hate. Among our survey respondents, 45 percent claim to know people who hold hateful opinions or attitudes. And 12 percent admit to holding such opinions or attitudes themselves. That need not be a permanent condition: 63 percent are making an effort to cleanse themselves of hate. We all should be able to agree that the path to progress never entails demonizing one's critics or opponents. As much as hate speech and false accusations may make one's blood boil, organizations and individuals would do well to view them as an invitation—an opportunity for clarity and connection. Meeting hate with hate, incivility with incivility leads only to reciprocal radicalization, whereby hate on one side is used to justify an escalation of hate on the other. In that scenario, no one wins.

Deescalate

We all need to learn to take a verbal punch and hear a person out before offering our own perspective and version of the "facts." That can be difficult—especially when the attack feels personal and unwarranted. Rest assured that if you feel comfortable, you are probably not having the right conversation. Precious few people seem to understand the art of civilized conversation these days. Learn to lead on that.

Weaponize empathy

We all use empathy in our daily interactions. We listen, we comfort, we counsel. Expand your powers of empathy to encompass those who would spread hate. Remember that this emotion often is rooted in fear or a sense of being unmoored. Hold out a hand and lend an ear, even if you know you will not like what you hear. As David Augsburger said so well, "Being heard is so close to being loved that, for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable."



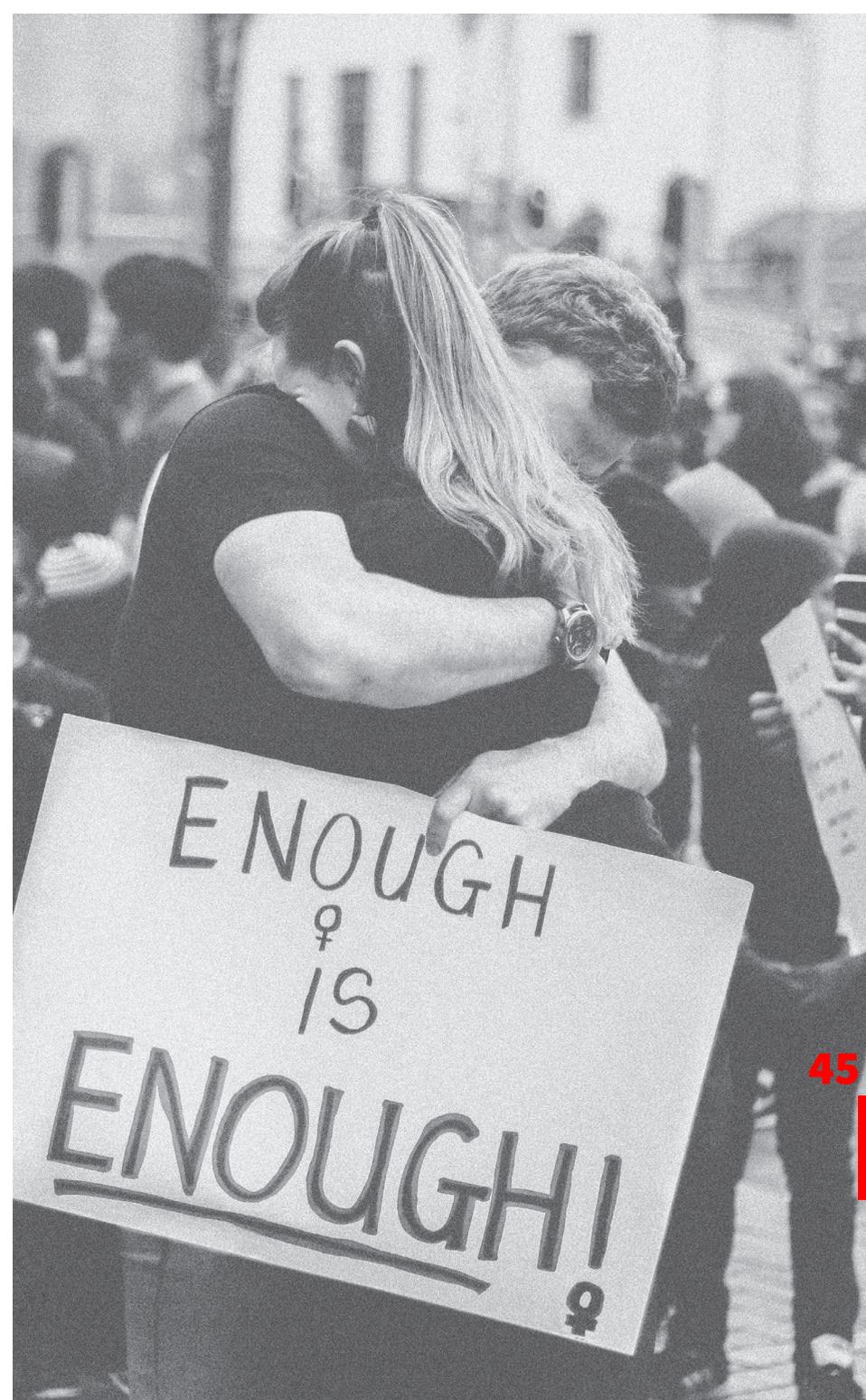


CLOSING THOUGHTS

Hate is in the air, but we need not tolerate or perpetuate it. Indeed, we cannot afford to do either at a time when our world faces existential challenges on multiple fronts.

A majority of our global survey sample (51 percent) worry that hate and hostility are hampering progress. In our view, they are correct. We cannot hope to solve the problem of hate by ignoring it or casting blame on everyone other than ourselves. We cannot breach divides by remaining ensconced without our protective media and information bubbles. We cannot root out the underlying causes of hate and division without digging deep into the experiences and convictions of those with whom we disagree and committing to transparent and civil communication with them.

As the Southern Poverty Law Center [reminds](#) us, “Sitting home with your virtue does no good.” We must speak out and stand up to heal divisions, eliminate exclusion, and combat misinformation and hate. And we must do it now.





PHILIP MORRIS
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