

Graphika

From Consumers to Culture Wars

The Changing Dynamics of
Corporate Boycotts

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Overview

With government leaders, corporate moguls, and other influential individuals posting support on social media for corporate boycotts, this method of protest has become an increasingly visible feature of the online information environment in the U.S. Public discourse about brands is deeply intertwined with politics and culture, and boycott campaigns are no longer driven solely by consumer dissatisfaction; they're being [shaped](#) by the way corporate actions are interpreted, politicized, and amplified across platforms.

Online communities – particularly influential accounts and platform dynamics – play a central role in shaping the outcomes of boycotts. [Graphika's intelligence reporting](#) provides insights into online backlash against companies by detecting, mapping, and analyzing those communities and the coordinated and organic narratives driving them. This includes examining how boycott campaigns emerge, scale up across platforms, and translate into reputational or financial effects.

Below we present our analysis of 30 boycott campaigns targeting U.S.-based companies between June 2025 and March 2026, exploring how they developed across the digital ecosystem. Our inexhaustive case selection was based on visibility, cross-platform spread, involvement of influential accounts, and distinct narrative and amplification patterns.

Key Findings

- **The decision to boycott depends on how a target company's actions are interpreted and amplified** within the online information environment – more so than what the company actually does. Additionally, reputational fallout has become faster, less predictable, and more driven by platform dynamics and narrative ecosystems.
- **Political or other ideological conflict is the primary driver of boycott campaigns.** Most campaigns in our dataset were rooted in broader cultural and political tensions rather than

product dissatisfaction, indicating that corporate boycotts now function largely as support for culture-war arguments.

- **A small number of influential accounts disproportionately shape campaign visibility**, particularly in right-wing communities where narratives are rapidly initiated and scaled. Left-aligned campaigns tend to take different pathways to visibility and persistence, relying more on distributed networks and organized mobilization.
 - **Boycott campaigns are inherently spread across platforms but follow a consistent pattern:** Influential accounts often initiate and amplify narratives, which then spread across multiple platforms through broader participation. X seems to be the central amplification layer, regardless of where activity ultimately takes hold.
 - **Reputational impact is the default outcome of boycotts.** Typically, financial effects occur only when sustained amplification or high-reach accounts convert online narratives into measurable consumer or investor behavior.
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Methodology

- We reviewed 30 boycott campaigns targeting U.S.-based companies across major social media platforms, including X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Reddit, Threads, Bluesky, and Truth Social.
- We identified these campaigns through systematic cross-platform monitoring, focusing on heightened engagement, coordinated calls to action, and sustained narrative propagation. We then chose one salient campaign per week to analyze, based on scale, involvement of influential accounts, narrative resonance, cross-platform spread, and comparability to the other chosen campaigns.
- The chosen boycott campaigns showed clear evidence of mobilization (e.g., calls to action, sustained engagement, cross-platform propagation); we excluded general, isolated, hypothetical, or low-engagement threats or rhetoric, as well as boycotts without a clearly defined target.
- The dataset spans the full political spectrum, enabling comparative analysis across communities.
- For each campaign, we examined influential accounts, high-engagement content, hashtags, engagement patterns, trigger events, and narrative framing, as well as how activity originated and scaled.

- We used a mixed-method approach to analysis, centered on Graphika’s proprietary technology and complemented by external social listening tools, such as Meltwater and Brandwatch; news media; and publicly available market data, such as from Google Finance.

Limitations

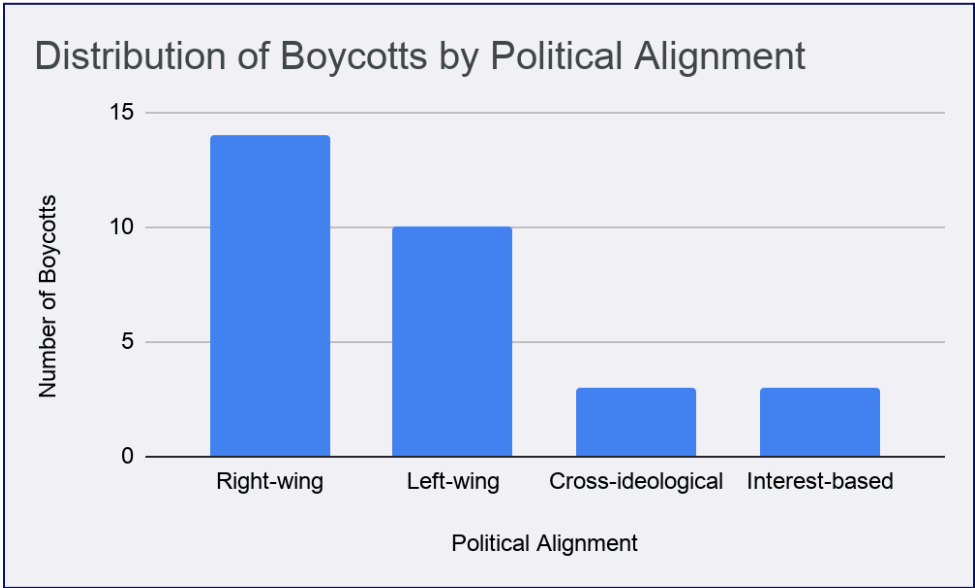
- Our analysis illustrates prominent patterns, not the full universe of boycott activity; the findings may overrepresent campaigns of substantial scale or those amplified by influential accounts.
- We relied on publicly available social media data, not capturing activity in private channels, in closed networks, or offline; the data may not fully reflect certain forms of coordination or early-stage mobilization. In addition, observed activity may be influenced by platform-specific dynamics, such as algorithmic amplification.
- X activity may appear especially prevalent, as social listening tools and media reporting frequently rely on and cite X accounts. This reflects a broader structural challenge in capturing and tracking influential activity across other platforms.
- Our determination of boycotts’ impact, based on observable signals (e.g., engagement trends, public reactions, reported business effects) does not reflect verified, comprehensive, or long-term financial outcomes.
- We based our determination of boycotts’ political alignment on the primary driver of each campaign, observed narratives, and participating communities. In practice, participation may span multiple ideological groups, and some campaigns may overlap categories.
- Finally, our attribution of narratives and motives to certain accounts, individuals, or groups is based on observed discourse that may include incomplete, misleading, or contested information; regardless, we consider them as factors shaping the dynamics and outcomes of boycott campaigns.

Political Drivers of Boycotts

Boycott campaigns are primarily driven by events or reactions to events interpreted through a political or other ideological lens. However, the mechanisms through which campaigns emerge, scale, and persist differ across ideological communities, with right-wing campaigns often being more reactive, and left-wing campaigns showing more coordination and a basis in issues and broader advocacy initiatives.

Observations

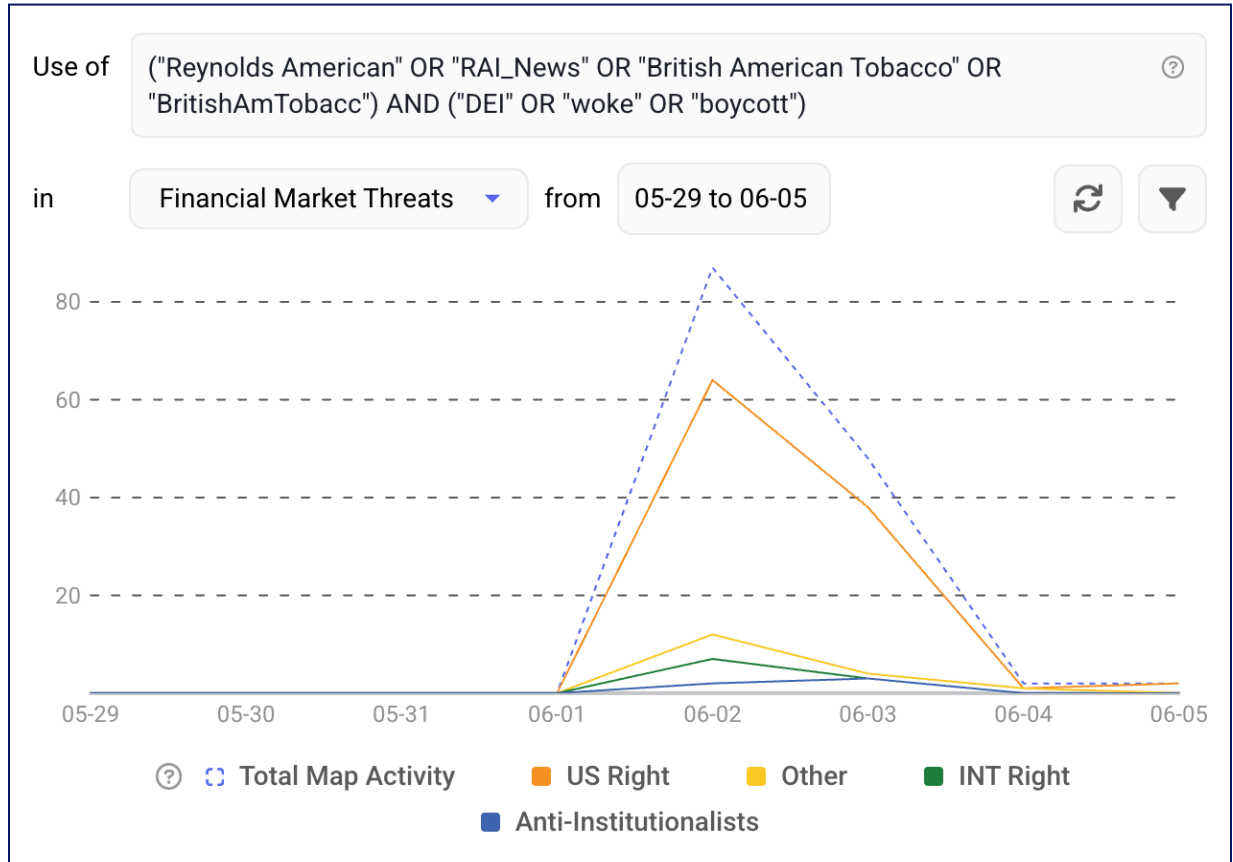
- **Political alignment predominantly motivates boycott campaigns.**
Of the 30 analyzed campaigns, 80% were driven by politics or other ideologies; backlash was clearly most often rooted in cultural and political conflict rather than product-related concerns.
- **Right-wing campaigns represent the largest share, centered on culture-war issues.**
Right-aligned campaigns account for 47% of the dataset and were frequently tied to issues such as diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), LGBTQ+ policies, perceived anti-conservative bias, immigration, and political affiliations. Right-aligned campaigns tend to emerge rapidly in response to perceived ideological signals and be framed within culture-war narratives.
- **Left-wing campaigns are more structured and issue driven.**
Left-aligned campaigns represent 33% of the dataset and were more thematically concentrated – on labor practices, geopolitics, corporate political activity, censorship, and immigration enforcement. Unlike right-wing campaigns, these are more likely to develop through organized networks and sustained mobilization around specific causes or policies.
- **Cross-ideology and interest-based campaigns fall outside traditional partisan alignment.**
The remaining 20% of campaigns do not fall clearly into left- or right-wing categories, instead reflecting overlapping ideologies or a center in interest-based communities. They're driven by shared grievances, such as perceived corporate overreach or censorship concerns, and by sector-specific issues within gaming, cryptocurrency, and finance communities.



Boycott activity chart based on the primary driver of each campaign in our dataset. "Cross-ideological" indicates that multiple political communities initiated or drove the campaign; "Interest-based" refers to campaigns driven by nonpartisan or issue-specific groups. Although each case is assigned a primary category, participation may extend beyond that group.

Case Study

Participants in backlash against tobacco company Reynolds American in June 2025 framed criticism of the company's LGBTQ+ and DEI initiatives as evidence that the company was pursuing an overly progressive agenda. Interpreting corporate policies as political signals, they held Reynolds American up as an example in broad ideological discourse about ongoing culture wars, calling for a boycott.



Posts in Graphika's Financial Market Threats map mentioning tobacco company Reynolds American or its parent company alongside boycott calls or accusations that they are "woke" spiked on June 2, 2025, after conservative activist Robby Starbuck claimed it was time to "expose" the company for its DEI initiatives.



Starbuck posted a video on X and other platforms that called on followers to rethink purchasing products from the tobacco company Reynolds American or its parent company, citing their LGBTQ+ policies.

Triggering Factors

External incidents are the most common of the various triggers that catalyze calls for boycotts, and escalation depends on how the calls are framed within broader ideological narratives and amplified by online communities.

Observations

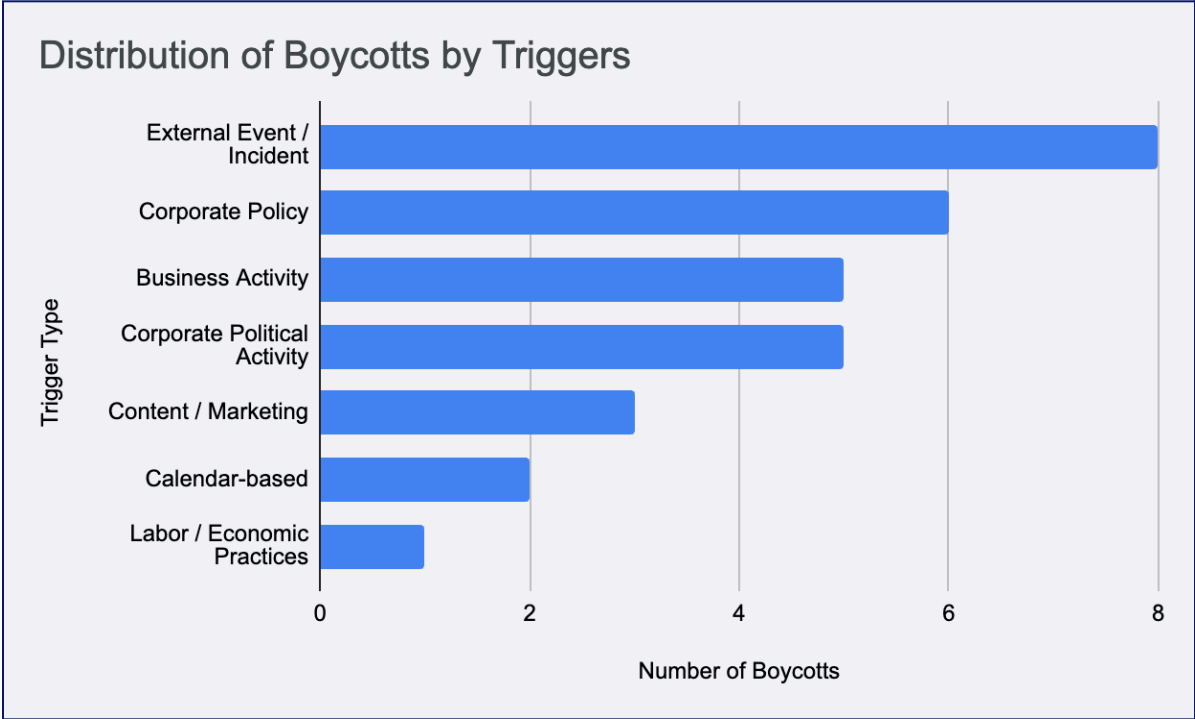
- **External incidents are the most common catalyst for a boycott.**
External events accounted for 27% of the 30 campaigns analyzed, and were typically highly visible, narrative-driven moments, such as workplace confrontations or arrests that were widely shared online. Such moments quickly gain traction and are framed as evidence of broader corporate or societal issues.
- **Corporate policy and political activity also consistently motivate boycotts.**
Corporate policy decisions triggered 20% of the campaigns in our dataset, often linked to DEI or LGBTQ+ positioning, internal company actions, or public statements interpreted as ideological signals. Dissatisfaction with corporate political activity, such as executive donations or perceived partisan alignment, triggered 17% of campaigns.

- **Although less frequent, other corporate actions can activate boycotts when they intersect with politically or culturally sensitive narratives.**

Business activity and marketing or content decisions accounted for 17% and 10% of campaign triggers, respectively, and labor or economic practices for 3%.

- **Cultural and calendar-based moments can also be triggers.**

Symbolic dates, of national holidays or major retail events, accounted for 7% of campaign triggers. Online actors use such moments strategically to boost participation and embed boycott calls within cultural or economic contexts, even without a single triggering event.



Boycott activity chart based on motivating factors seen in our dataset.

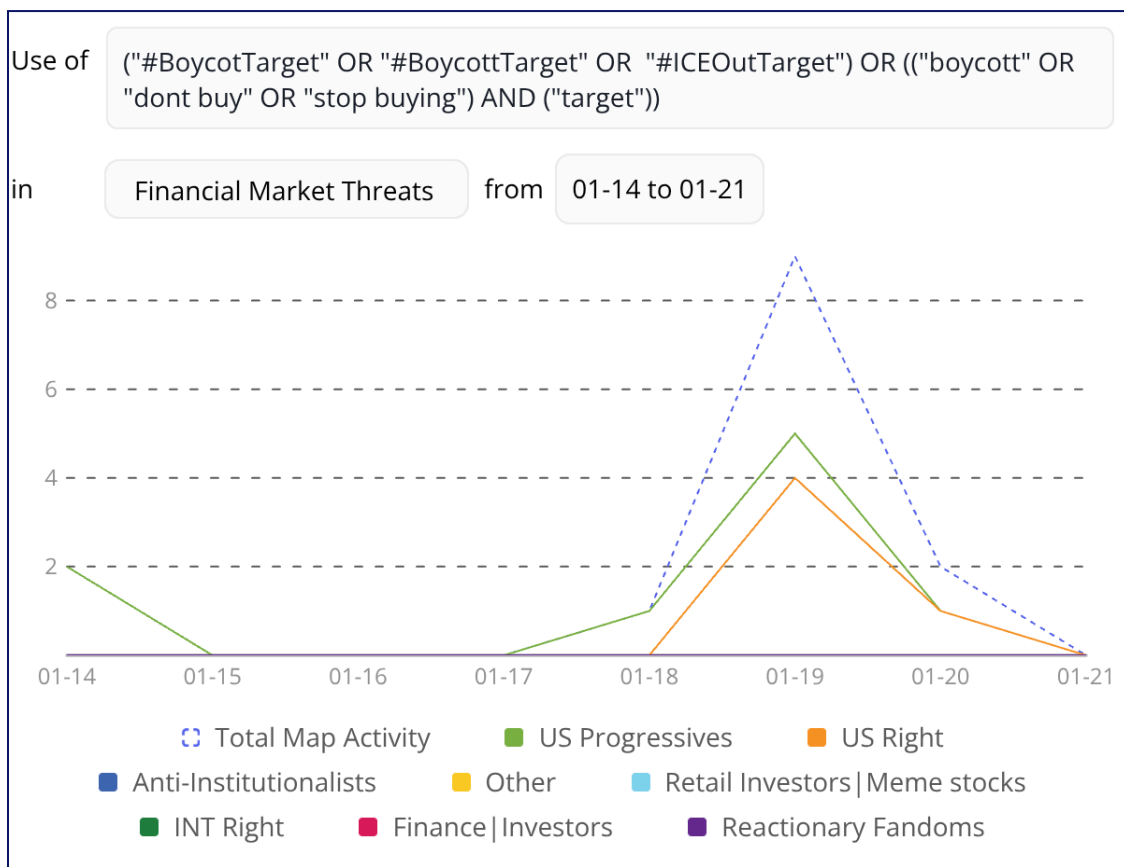
Case Study

In January 2026, a boycott campaign focused on retail chain Target, after videos circulated online showing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents detaining employees at a Minnesota store. Although the incident originated from federal enforcement activity, online communities framed Target’s perceived lack of response as complicity with ICE, driving calls for a boycott and demands for corporate action.

**BOYCOTT
TARGET
NOW!**

ICE OUT OF MN

Image shared on Instagram promoting the January 2026 Target boycott, based on the retailer's perceived inaction in relation to immigration enforcement.



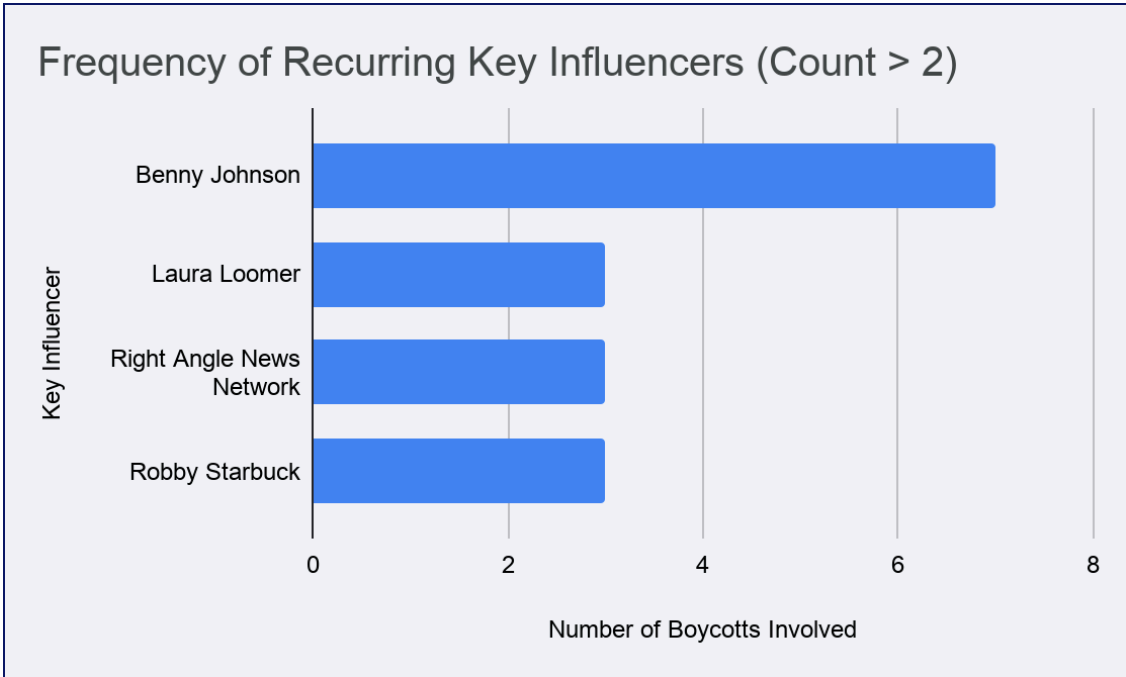
X posts from accounts represented in Graphika's Financial Market Threats map using #BoycottTarget, #ICEOutTarget, or other boycott-related terms alongside "Target" rose through mid-January 2026, peaking around Jan. 19 when Unidos MN endorsed a Target sit-in protest.

Influential Account Dynamics

Influential accounts are not just amplifiers but key drivers of boycott campaign dynamics, particularly in right-wing communities, and we observed various pathways to achieving campaign visibility, speed, and persistence.

Observations

- **A small number of influential accounts drive online boycott activity.**
Across the 30 campaigns we analyzed, 11 highly followed accounts disproportionately shaped visibility and spread. In right-wing campaigns, this concentration was particularly pronounced, with certain accounts participating in multiple campaigns and consistently driving early momentum.
- **Right-wing activity is centralized and rapid.**
Right-wing campaigns are characterized by frequent posting and rapid upscaling driven by prominent accounts with large follower bases. These accounts often act as initial catalysts, enabling narratives to reach large audiences quickly and triggering broader participation across platforms.
- **Left-wing mobilization is more distributed and coordinated.**
Left-wing campaigns rely less on recurring participation from highly followed accounts and more on coordinated networks, advocacy groups, and grassroots mobilization. Left-aligned campaigns tend to build momentum more gradually, often through sustained messaging and collective action rather than widely shared online events.
- **The type of participation affects campaign dynamics.**
Campaigns evolve and persist according to participation: Centralized amplification among influential accounts enables faster escalation and sharper spikes in visibility; mobilization distributed across networks leads to more sustained engagement over time.



Activity chart showing recurring participation of social media influencers in boycotts; each influencer participated in more than two campaigns in our dataset.

Case Study

In August 2025, restaurant chain Cracker Barrel redesigned its logo, prompting a small number of highly followed accounts on X and other platforms, led by Benny Johnson, to rapidly amplify claims that the redesign reflected “woke” branding. Additional prominent accounts, including that of U.S. President Donald Trump, reinforced the messaging, driving millions of views and accelerating calls for a boycott.



Image shared by an X user promoting the boycott against Cracker Barrel, criticizing the company's redesigned logo and framing it as part of a "woke agenda."



X accounts in our Financial Market Threats map participated in boycott conversations about Cracker Barrel from Aug. 15 to 29, 2025, including right-wing influencer Benny Johnson. Each colored node represents an account, and its size corresponds with the account's number of in-map followers: a proxy for influence.

Platform Dynamics

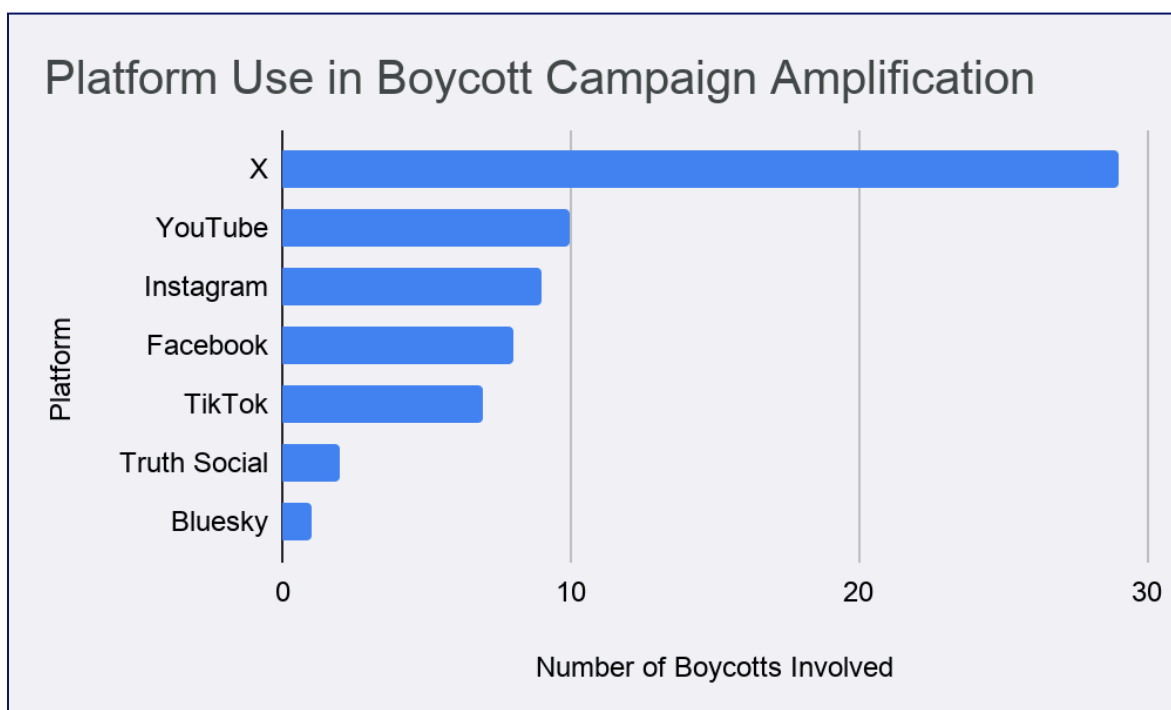
Although boycott campaigns originate in diverse platform environments, they're often initiated and amplified by influential accounts on a few platforms, then migrate widely across other

platforms through broader user participation. Their visibility and impact rely on this cross-platform convergence, particularly when narratives reach X, where amplification and audience exposure are most concentrated.

Observations

- **Amplification is concentrated on X and driven by a small set of influential accounts.**

Influential accounts initiate boycott calls and drive early amplification primarily on X, which serves as the central platform for narrative formation and spread. Secondary amplification occurs on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, but these platforms have a less consistent role. Large-scale narrative takeoff is primarily driven by a few influential accounts operating within a concentrated platform environment.



Activity chart showing the number of campaigns in our dataset that saw amplification on particular platforms. Campaigns may be counted for more than one platform, if activity appeared on multiple platforms.

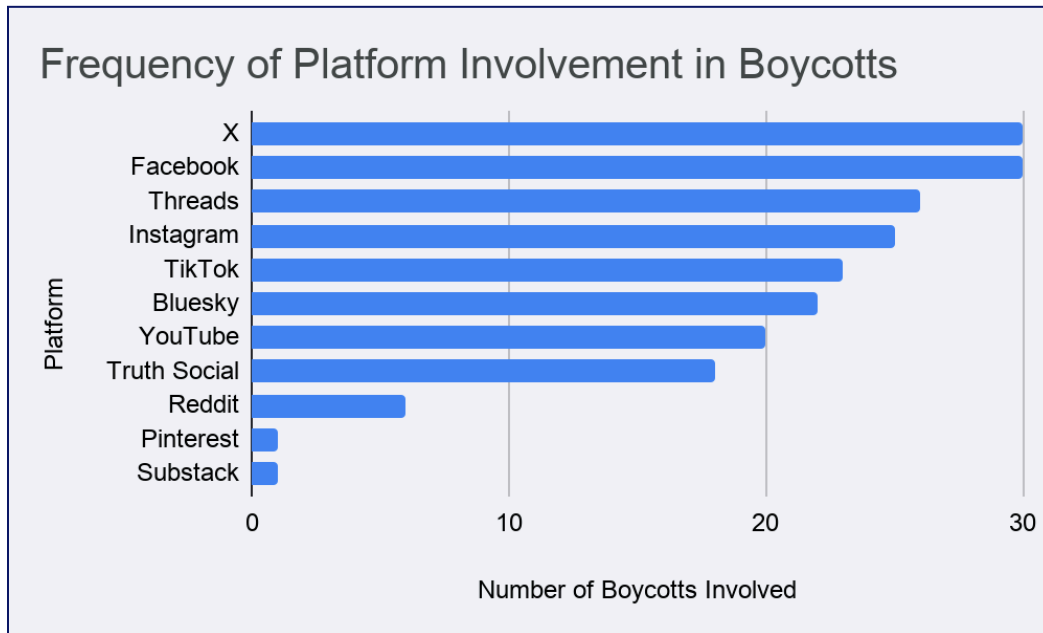
- **Cross-platform propagation is the norm.**

Boycott campaigns are widely broadcast across major platforms, including Facebook (100% of our dataset), X (100%), Threads (87%), Instagram (83%), and TikTok (77%), and evolve through this digital ecosystem.

- **Less popular platforms reinforce and extend reach.**

Platforms such as Bluesky (73%) and Truth Social (60%) play a supporting role in pushing narratives within specific communities; Reddit (23%) and other more niche platforms do so

sporadically. Regardless, all these platforms are used to reinforce narratives and extend the reach of campaigns.



Boycott activity chart showing the platforms that saw boycott-related activity in our dataset, including participation and content dissemination, regardless of where a campaign originated or grew. Campaigns typically span multiple platforms.

Case Study

Grassroots group People's Union USA led a boycott campaign against McDonald's in June 2025, citing the fast food chain's rollback of DEI initiatives and allegations that it avoided paying taxes and was exploiting workers. The boycott gained early traction on Instagram and TikTok through posts by the group's founder, and short videos and coordinated messaging helped spread it across activist communities before expanding to X, where it achieved broader visibility and engagement.



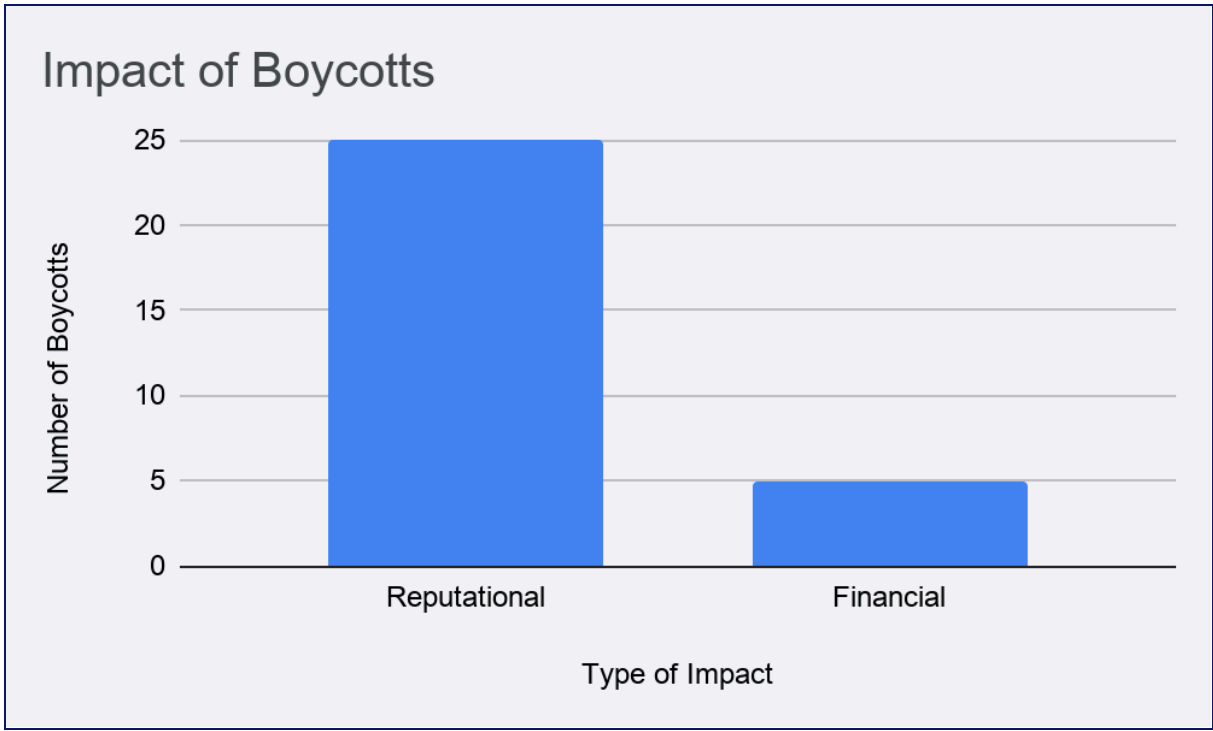
Screenshot of a June 24, 2025 Instagram post by People's Union USA founder John Schwarz, announcing the start of the McDonald's boycott.

Impact of Boycotts

Boycott campaigns are more effective at shaping public perception and creating a reputational impact than driving immediate economic consequences. Financial impacts are uncommon, occurring only with sustained amplification or when influential accounts effect measurable consumer or investor behavior via compelling narratives.

Observations

- **Impact is predominantly reputational.**
Across the 30 campaigns we analyzed, 83% resulted primarily in reputational effects. Most drew attention to brands in the context of broader cultural or political narratives, and caused limited observable direct impact on purchasing behavior.
- **Financial effects are limited and conditional.**
Only 17% of the dataset triggered observable financial signals, such as stock volatility, subscription changes, or public corporate responses. Those that did typically exhibited highly sustained visibility, widespread engagement, or escalation involving highly followed accounts.



Boycott activity chart based on signals of impact on reputation (perception driven) or economics (such as stock movement) observed in our dataset. This classification doesn't reflect definitive financial outcomes.

- Intensity influences impact.**
 Campaigns that were confined to specific communities or platforms tended to show limited measurable impact; those that spanned platforms and were amplified by prominent accounts generated broader attention and potential spillover into consumer or investor behavior.
- Reputational effects can create longer-term financial vulnerability.**
 Despite immediate financial impacts being uncommon in the dataset, sustained boycott campaigns have the potential to create long-term financial risk, if they can [sway](#) public sentiment and damage brand reputations to the extent that buyers change their behavior.

Case Study

Backlash against streaming service Netflix related to airing LGBTQ+ content in October 2025 intensified after sustained amplification by highly followed accounts. X owner Elon Musk (237.5 million followers) played a central role, posting at least 26 times within three days and repeatedly urging users to cancel their Netflix subscriptions. During this period, Netflix experienced a temporary dip in its share price.

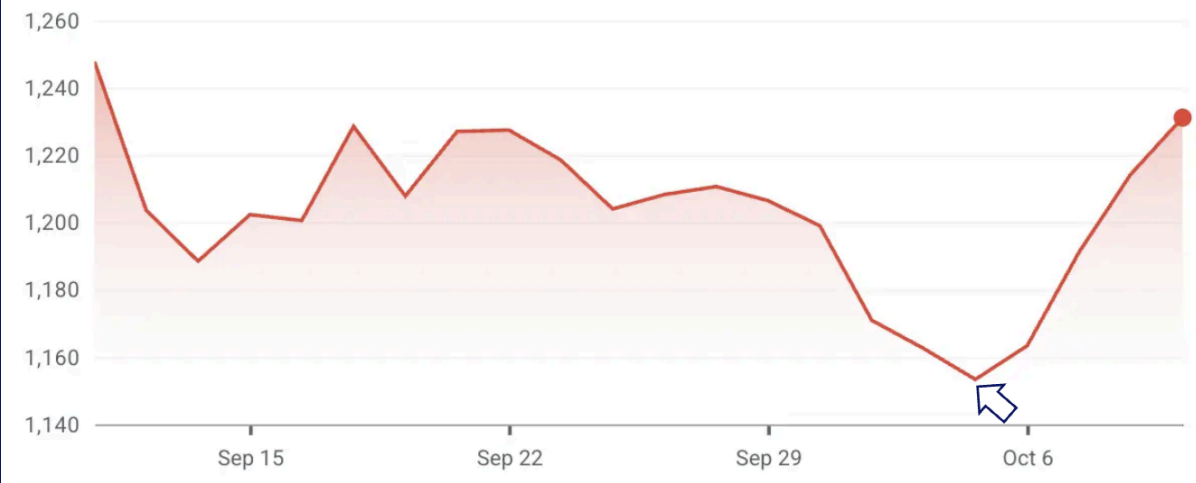
Netflix Inc

\$1,231.07 ↓ 1.33% -16.64 1M

After Hours: **\$1,233.62** (↑ 0.21%) +2.55

Closed: Oct 9, 7:20:08 PM UTC-4 · USD · NASDAQ · Disclaimer

1D 5D 1M 6M YTD 1Y 5Y MAX



Netflix's share price showed brief volatility in early October 2025, dipping around Oct. 1 following Elon Musk's amplification of the call to cancel Netflix, then rebounding by Oct. 8. Source: Google Finance.



Musk shared this image on X, promoting calls to boycott Netflix, which he accused of a “transgender woke agenda” targeting children.

Sectors’ Exposure

Boycott campaigns are more likely to target sectors with high, consumer-facing profiles and cultural relevance, where brands intersect with culture, identity, and everyday behavior. But all sectors are vulnerable to boycotts, given that their basis lies in how individuals interpret and amplify corporate actions, as well as broader social or political narratives.

Observations

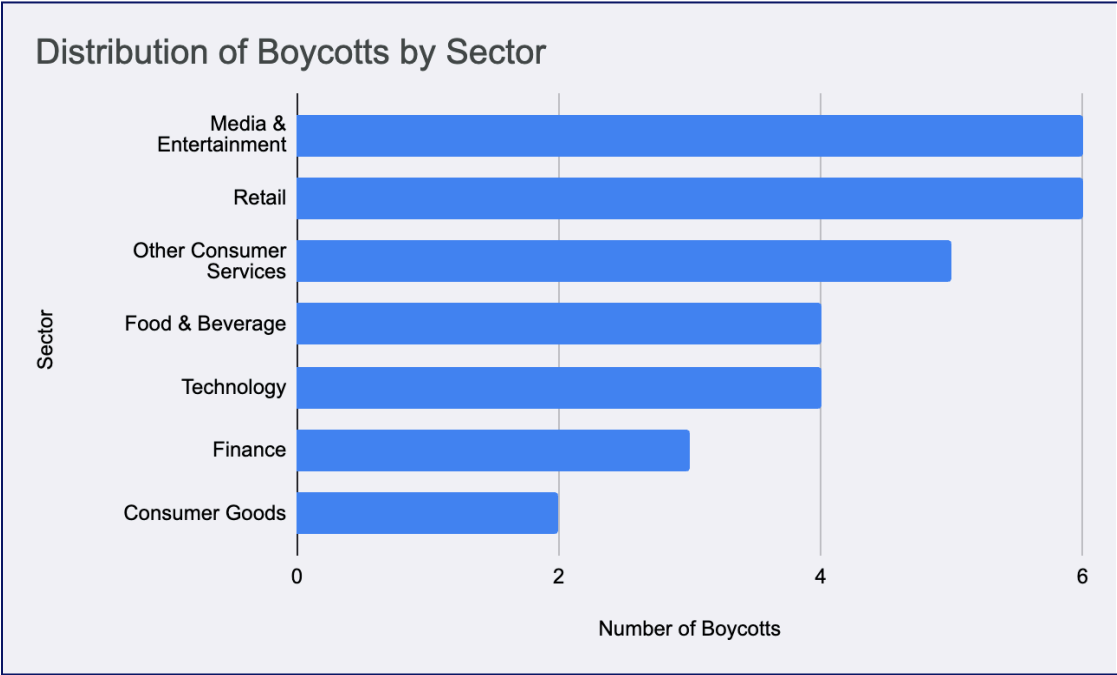
- **Targeting is concentrated in consumer-facing, high-profile sectors.** Media and entertainment and retail are the most frequently targeted sectors, accounting for six campaigns each in our dataset. Together, they represent 40% of the campaigns, reflecting the high vulnerability of companies whose offerings are culturally relevant and directly engage audiences.

- A few sectors were the targets of the majority of campaigns.**

The top four targeted sectors in our dataset – media and entertainment (six campaigns), retail (six), food and beverage (four), and technology (four) – collectively represent 67%. These sectors share such characteristics as prominent brand visibility, frequent interaction with consumers, and connection to politically or culturally sensitive issues.
- Other consumer-facing sectors are moderately exposed to targeting.**

Other types of consumer services, such as travel, automotive, fitness, and gaming, accounted for five campaigns. Such companies are exposed to boycott targeting through direct consumer interaction, and boycotts are often triggered by specific events or controversies rather than sustained ideological positioning.
- The right triggers and conditions make any sector susceptible.**

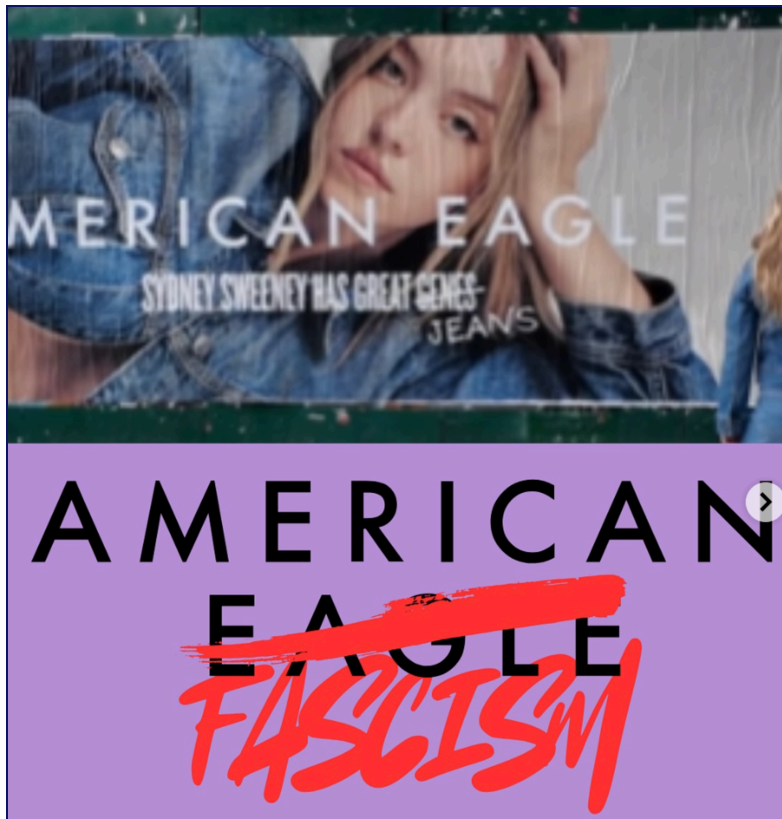
Three campaigns targeted the finance sector, and two took aim at consumer goods, making these sectors less frequent targets but vulnerable regardless, especially when calls for boycotts were linked to political narratives, economic issues, or corporate affiliations.



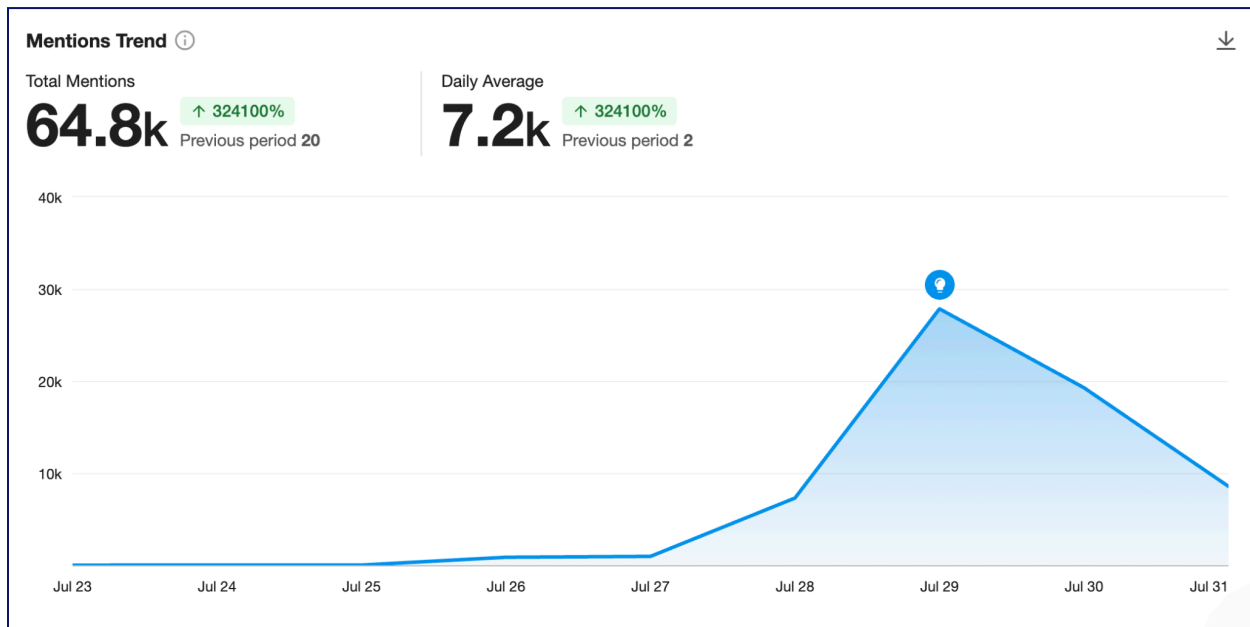
Boycott activity chart based on sectors most targeted in our dataset.

Case Study

In August 2025, clothing retailer American Eagle produced an advertising campaign featuring actress Sydney Sweeney with a double-entendre “jeans/genes” tagline that caused some online actors to claim the company was reinforcing exclusionary beauty standards. The narrative gained traction across platforms, with calls for boycott emerging alongside broader debates around representation and identity.



An Instagram user shared this image criticizing American Eagle for the ad campaign, alleging that the tagline's claim of "great genes" promotes eugenics-adjacent messaging.



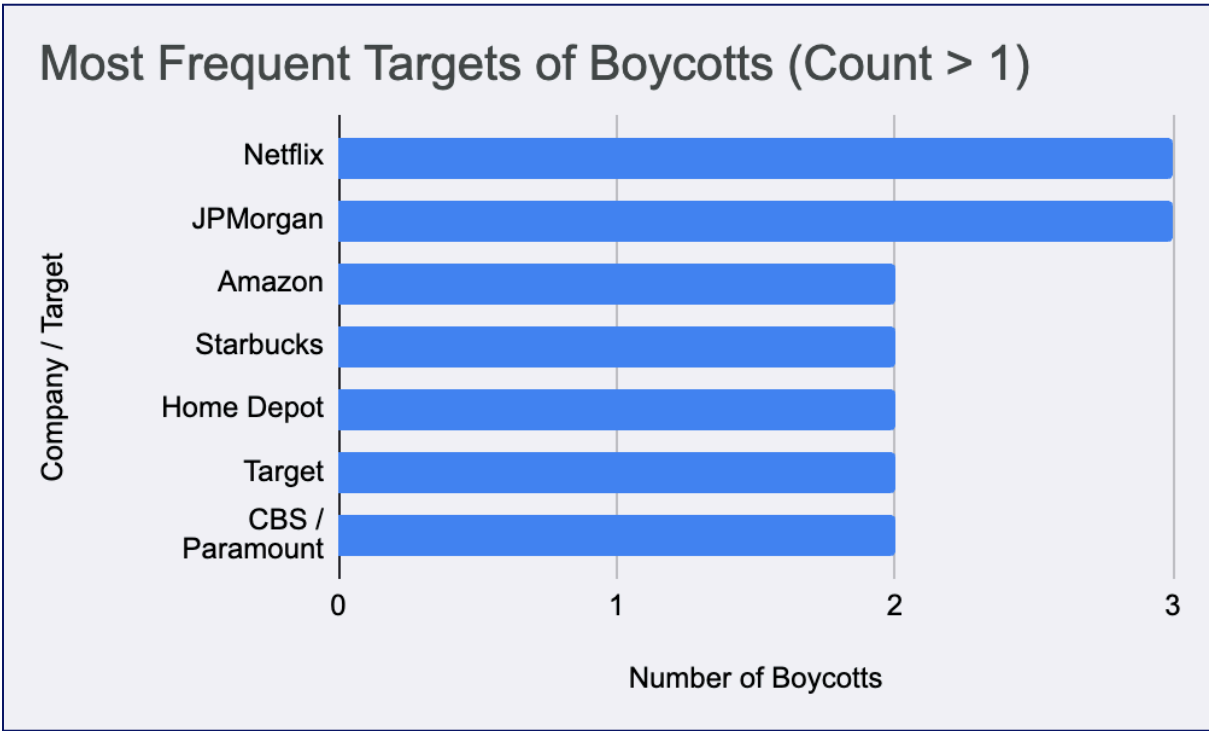
Online mentions of "American Eagle," "aeJeans," or "AmericanEagle" alongside terms like "eugenics," "fascism," "nazi," "boycott," or "cancel" surged sharply beginning July 28, 2025 and peaked on July 29. Source: Meltwater.

Company Exposure Patterns

Although any company can become a boycott target, sustained boycott campaigns are more likely to target high-profile brands that occupy a central role in cultural, political, or economic narratives. Corporate action, or inaction, is not the only factor driving a boycott's longevity.

Observations

- **Targeting is broadly distributed, and repeat targeting is concentrated.**
The 30 campaigns we analyzed targeted 27 discrete companies. Of these, 20 (74%) were targeted only once, suggesting that most boycotts were isolated incidents rather than sustained pressure. The 26% percent that were targeted multiple times were companies whose brands were very well known and culturally relevant.
- **A small pool of companies have been targeted repeatedly.**
Seven companies appeared more than once in the dataset: Netflix and JPMorgan were each targeted three times, and Amazon, Starbucks, Home Depot, Target, and Paramount (CBS) were each targeted twice.



Boycott activity chart showing the companies most frequently targeted in our dataset.

- **Repeat targets are large, consumer facing, and systemically relevant.**
The most frequently targeted companies have high profiles, broad consumer reach, and perceived influence within cultural, political, or economic systems. These attributes make them more likely to attract multiple, distinct critical narratives – often driven by different communities or issues – over time, rather than repeated criticism for a single issue.
- **Repeat exposure reflects narrative relevance rather than single events.**
Multiple campaigns we observed targeting the same company were often driven by different triggers and issues, rather than a single sustained controversy. This indicates that vulnerability to boycotts is affected by a company’s positioning in ongoing public discussions, making it more susceptible to reinterpretation in multiple contexts.

Case Study

Financial institution JPMorgan was targeted by multiple boycott campaigns linked to discrete controversies, including allegations of anti-conservative “debanking” (August 2025), cryptocurrency-related grievances (November 2025), and claims of market manipulation (December 2025). These campaigns emerged from different communities that framed the bank as a symbol of broader political, economic, or institutional distrust.



An X post linked to the #BoycottJPM campaign circulated this image, depicting a figure tearing a JPMorgan-branded card.

Estimative Language Legend

Assessments of Likelihood

Graphika uses the following vocabulary to indicate the likelihood of a hypothesis proving correct. If we are unable to assess likelihood due to limited or non-existent information, we may use terms such as “suggest.”

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Real Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain(ly)
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%

Confidence Levels: Indicators of Sourcing and Corroboration

Graphika uses confidence levels to indicate the quality of information, sources, and corroboration underpinning our assessments.

Low Confidence	Medium Confidence	High Confidence
Assessment based on information from a non-trusted source and/or information we have not been able to independently corroborate.	Assessment based on information that we are unable to sufficiently corroborate and/or information open to multiple interpretations.	Assessment based on information from multiple trusted sources that we are able to fully corroborate.



About Us

Graphika is the most trusted provider of actionable open-source intelligence to help organizations stay ahead of emerging online events and make decisions on how to navigate them. Led by prominent innovators and technologists in the field of online discourse analysis, Graphika supports global enterprises and public sector customers across trust & safety, cyber threat intelligence, and strategic communications spanning industries including intelligence, technology, media and entertainment, and global banking. Graphika continually integrates new and emerging technologies into our proprietary intelligence platform and analytic services, empowering our customers with high-precision intelligence and confidence to operate in a complex and continuously evolving information environment.

For more information or to request a demo, [visit](#) our website.

