Levi's Issues Warning Over 'Rising Anti-Americanism'

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The iconic denim brand Levi Strauss has warned that growing international backlash against President Donald Trump could negatively affect its sales and those of other U.S. companies.

In a recent filing with the United Kingdom's national business registry, the California-based company noted the risk of "rising anti-Americanism as a consequence of the Trump tariffs and governmental policies." Levi's warned that this could increasingly push consumers in the U.K. away from American goods and toward non-American alternatives.

Newsweek has contacted Levi's via email for further comment.

Why It Matters

With over 3,000 stores worldwide and an annual revenue exceeding $6 billion, Levi's is one of the largest American brands to warn of the indirect effect on its operations from global opposition to Trump's trade policies.

An already observed side effect of Trump's tariffs has been a surge in calls to boycott American companies abroad. This first emerged in Canada, where ongoing grassroots and lawmaker-led boycotts have made a notable dent in some American companies' bottom lines. The recent decision to impose a 50 percent tariff on Indian goods has also sparked a similar "buy Indian" movement in the country.

One expert told *Newsweek* that we can expect boycotts of U.S. brands to continue through 2025, especially for companies such as Levi's that have "leveraged their American identity" and whose products are relatively easy to substitute.

What To Know

As well as rattling markets globally, Trump's April 2 announcement of "reciprocal tariffs" on dozens of U.S. trading partners sparked outrage among international consumers, outrage that quickly became directed at the American economy as a whole.

A survey conducted by YouGov between April and May across five European countries found that a majority in each were either very or quite likely to use fewer products or services provided by American companies in the future.

Tariff-related anger also fueled the "elbows up" and "buy Canadian" campaigns in Canada, which have resulted in citizens reducing travel to the U.S. and their reliance on American products.

Similar calls to boycott the U.S. have gained traction in India, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promoted economic self-reliance, while prominent leaders and lawmakers have warned of significant consequences if Indian consumers turn away en masse from American brands.

Levi's jeans on a table in Berlin on March 13. Sean Gallup/Getty Images

Beyond Levi's, other household names have recently expressed concern at this groundswell of anti-Americanism.

Brown-Forman, the parent company of Jack Daniels, recently reported a 62 percent year-over-year decline in Canadian sales during the quarter that ended on July 31. In a subsequent earnings call, company executives attributed this to the trade dispute with the U.S., which has created "significant headwinds," and the ongoing moratorium on U.S. spirit sales in many Canadian provinces.

After reporting sales declines in the U.S. and globally in its first quarter, McDonald's also noted growing "anti-American sentiment" across its key foreign markets.

"What we have seen in our survey work is that there has been an increase in people in various markets saying that they are going to be cutting back their purchase of American brands," said CEO Chris Kempczinski. "And we've seen an uptick in anti-American sentiment—call it eight- to 10-point increase in anti-American sentiment—most pronounced in Northern Europe and Canada."

What People Are Saying

Levi Strauss, in its filing with the U.K.'s Companies House, wrote: "Risk of rising anti-Americanism as a consequence of the Trump tariffs and governmental policies with consumer preferences possibly shifting away from U.S. products and brands increasing the willingness to substitute and buy national/European products."

Alan Bradshaw, a professor of marketing at Royal Holloway, University of London, **told *Newsweek*:** "Trump is aggravating different countries in different ways. Therefore, we can expect different levels of determination to boycott to emerge from different countries, even if there is a general disapproval of Trump's tariffs and policies across the globe."

He added: "I would expect Levi Strauss to be particularly vulnerable because their brand identity is very much built upon representations of Americana. In a way, we can expect Levi to be regarded around the world as an extension of American soft power—similar to Coca-Cola—and therefore an obvious brand to boycott. In addition, Levi products can easily be substituted for other brands."

Usha Haley, the W. Frank Barton Distinguished Chair in International Business at Wichita State University, told *Newsweek*: "Demand risk looms high in identity categories. Brands that signal Americanness such as jeans, whiskey, and tech are most exposed to substitution toward local and European options when anti-U.S. sentiment spikes."

She added: "But policy spillovers pose far greater risks than transitory vibes. Consumers' backlash tends to harden into non-market barriers—such as retaliatory tariffs, local-content rules, public-procurement preferences, labeling, standards friction, data-localization, and targeted inspections."

Jill Klein, a professor of marketing at Melbourne Business School, told *Newsweek*: "Because so many countries have been targeted by Trump's tariffs, there are vast consumer populations around the world that will be looking to avoid buying U.S. goods. International animosity has been found to not only affect what consumers buy while shopping, but also business-to-business purchases. It is hard to quantify the dollar figure but the effects are likely to be substantial."

She added: "One option for American brands would be to highlight any local manufacturing or other connections to the country in which they are trying to sell. For example, if a U.S. brand manufactures in Spain and/or is associated with Spanish entities, emphasizing this

domestic connection could be very helpful.

"Another option, though this can backfire, would be for a brand to disassociate from Trump's policies, perhaps through public statements. The danger is that this could lead to boycotts against the brand from U.S. consumers who support Trump."

What Happens Next

On Friday, the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Trump's use of emergency powers to impose his "reciprocal" tariffs, as well as those on China, Canada and Mexico. This ruling is set to take effect on October 14, but the administration is expected to file an appeal with the Supreme Court this week.

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