

OUT NEWS

British chain Costa Coffee faces boycott calls over transgender illustration

The hashtag #BoycottCostaCoffee has garnered immense traction on social media, with supporters claiming the Coca-Cola subsidiary is promoting “mutilation.”



— Costa Coffee is the United Kingdom’s largest coffee chain and the world’s second largest coffee chain after Starbucks.

Jakub Porzycki / NurPhoto via Getty Images file

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By Emi Tuyetnhi Tran

Anti-LGBTQ social media users are threatening to boycott the world's second-largest coffee chain after a photo of one of its mobile cafe vans, which bore an illustration of a transgender person, began to circulate online Monday.

The hashtag #BoycottCostaCoffee garnered traction after outspoken critics took issue with the illustration, which shows a trans person with scars from a double mastectomy, also known as top surgery. Others tweeted in support of the illustration, saying it brought visibility to trans people. It was not immediately clear when the illustration was first displayed or how many cafe vans it was printed on.

James Esses, co-founder of the anti-trans group Thoughtful Therapists, told NBC News he learned of the cafe van mural when one of his followers sent him a photo of it through X, the platform formerly known as Twitter. Esses posted the photo to his account Monday, writing to Costa Coffee, "Could you kindly explain why you are glorifying irreversible surgery," among other comments.

Esses' post has been viewed over 6 million times as of Tuesday afternoon.

“I’m particularly concerned with private corporations pushing that narrative in pursuit of profits. I would call it ‘virtue signaling,’” Esses said. (When asked if he plans to boycott the company, Esses said he does not drink coffee or frequent Costa Coffee, but he “certainly won’t be now.”)

In a message to NBC News after initial publication, Esses said calling [Thoughtful Therapists](#) an "anti-trans group" misrepresents both him and the group. He said he is "not 'anti-trans,'" rather he has "concerns about an ideology and its impact of child safeguarding."

Laurence Fox, who founded the far-right populist Reclaim Party, also tweeted about the illustration Monday, denouncing it and accusing the company of promoting “mutilation,” a term that [echoes anti-trans language](#) used in legislation in the United States, [where 20 states have banned access to transition-related care for minors](#). “I hope you are boycotted out of existence,” Fox wrote in the [tweet](#).

Fox did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

[Costa Coffee](#), a subsidiary of Coca-Cola, is the United Kingdom's largest coffee chain, [according to the data platform Statista](#), and the world's second-largest coffee chain, after Starbucks. The company confirmed in [a statement to Britain's GB News](#) that the illustration, designed by Ashton Attzs, is a mural that appears on its Costa Express cafe van.

“At Costa Coffee we celebrate the diversity of our customers, team members and partners,” the statement said. “We want everyone that interacts with us to experience the inclusive environment that we create, to encourage people to feel welcomed, free and unashamedly proud to be themselves. The mural, in its entirety, showcases and celebrates inclusivity.”

Some social media users have pushed back against the anti-trans vitriol on X and celebrated Costa Coffee's depiction of a trans person.

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Jamie Raines, a U.K.-based LGBTQ advocate, [tweeted in support of Costa Coffee](#):

“Shockingly to them trans people exist, and might drink coffee. Anyway, as a trans man with similar scars, thank you Costa for the representation.”

Dr. Helen Webberley, the founder of [GenderGP](#), a U.K.-based online service that connects transgender people to gender-affirming care, [wrote on X](#), saying, “I know where I’ll be stopping for my morning cuppa tomorrow morning,” and, “Top surgery doesn’t harm people – it saves lives.”

“Every day I’m staggered about the hate that is directed towards trans people,” Webberley told NBC News. “It’s shocking and horrible, but it’s really caustic, and it seems to be getting worse.”

Webberley, a general practitioner in the U.K. who specializes in gender-affirming care, said the focus on top surgery for trans people is hypocritical, considering that breast augmentation and reduction surgeries for cisgender women are not criticized to the same extent.

“When you speak to trans men who have finally had the operation,” she said, “they are so much happier, so much more confident, so much braver to go out in the world.”

The calls for a Costa Coffee boycott are symptomatic of an era of open anti-LGBTQ backlash that has forced some companies to rethink their outward support of the LGBTQ community.

In April, right-wing groups and conservatives on social media prompted a large boycott of Bud Light beer after it initiated a branded content partnership with [trans influencer](#) Dylan Mulvaney, which has led to an [ongoing hit](#) in sales numbers. In May, Target announced it would pull some of its [Pride merchandise](#) after its employees received threats

following similar backlash.

These actions, mobilized by social media, have mainly targeted U.S. companies, but the controversy surrounding Costa Coffee suggests that they are not isolated to the U.S. A June report by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue found that the U.S. may be [exporting anti-LGBTQ rhetoric](#) overseas, including to the U.K.

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