

Bud Light's Crisis Explored





Overview

Following its decision to work with transgender influencer, Dylan Mulvaney, Bud Light found itself in crisis. Bud Light drinkers across the country boycotted the brand and ultimately impacted the company's bottom line.

We analyzed readership data to understand the crisis better, uncover trends, and identify learnings for comms pros.

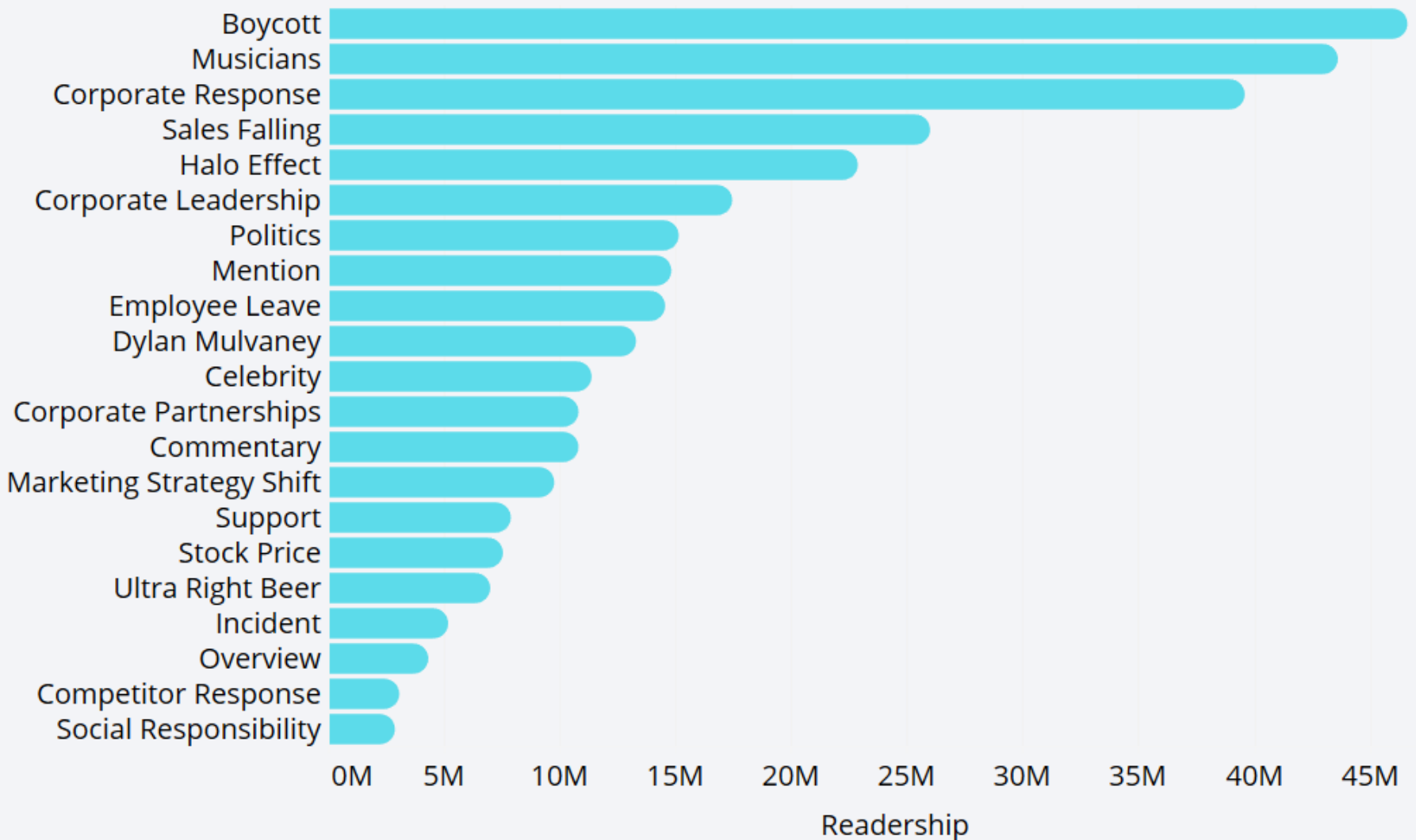
Memo analyzed just nearly 2,000 articles published between April 2, 2023 - May 23, 2023, across major U.S. publications, local news, consumer outlets, and trades.

Table of Contents

Sub-Topic Analysis	3
Timing Trends	4
Key Moments	5
Outlet Types	6
Takeaways	7

WHAT ARE PEOPLE READING ABOUT?

Total Readership by Sub-Topic



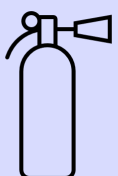
The Bud Light **boycott** is generating a lot of attention (46M readers total). The highest read articles focused on fully stocked fridges, bars removing Bud Light from their menus, and the boycott impact.



Country **musicians**, including Kid Rock and Travis Tritt, brought attention to the Bud Light controversy and kick-started the boycott.



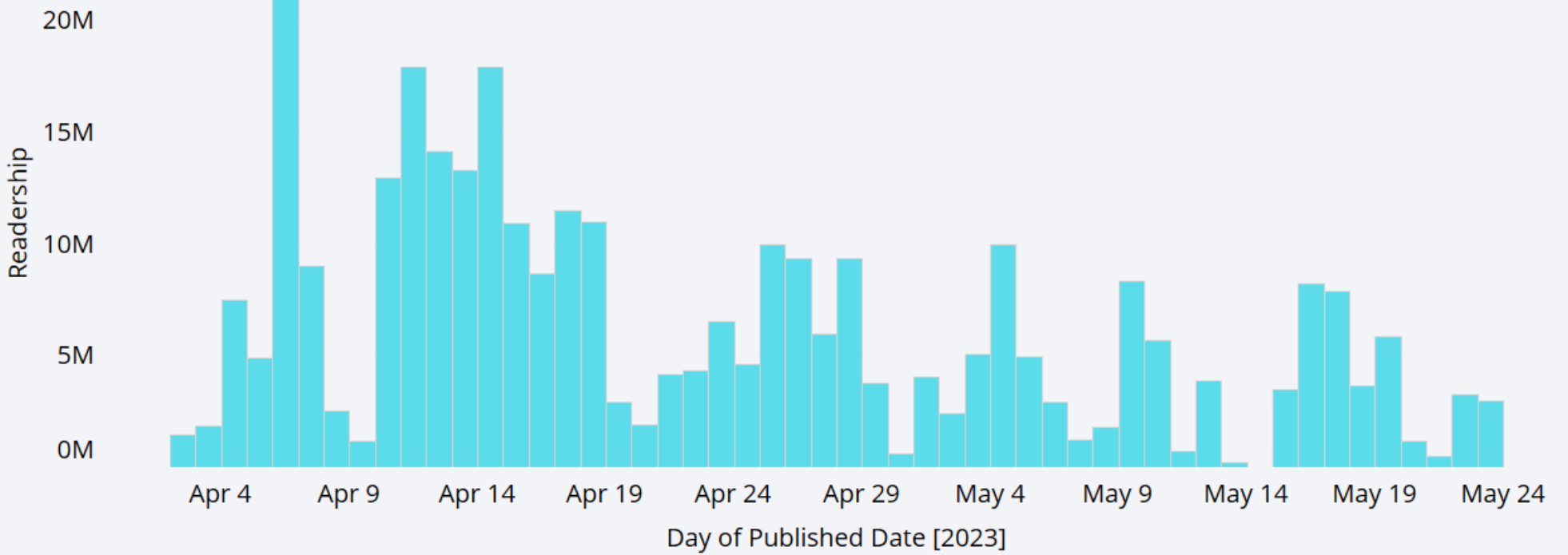
Anheuser-Busch's **corporate response** to the crisis also generated high readership. Highest read articles focused on the brand's social media silence, executive apologies, and free beer promotions.



After the Bud Light boycott began, similar controversies began popping up at companies across the country, like Miller Light, Nike, and Target. This **halo effect** started generating high readership in May.

TIMING TRENDS

Readership Over Time

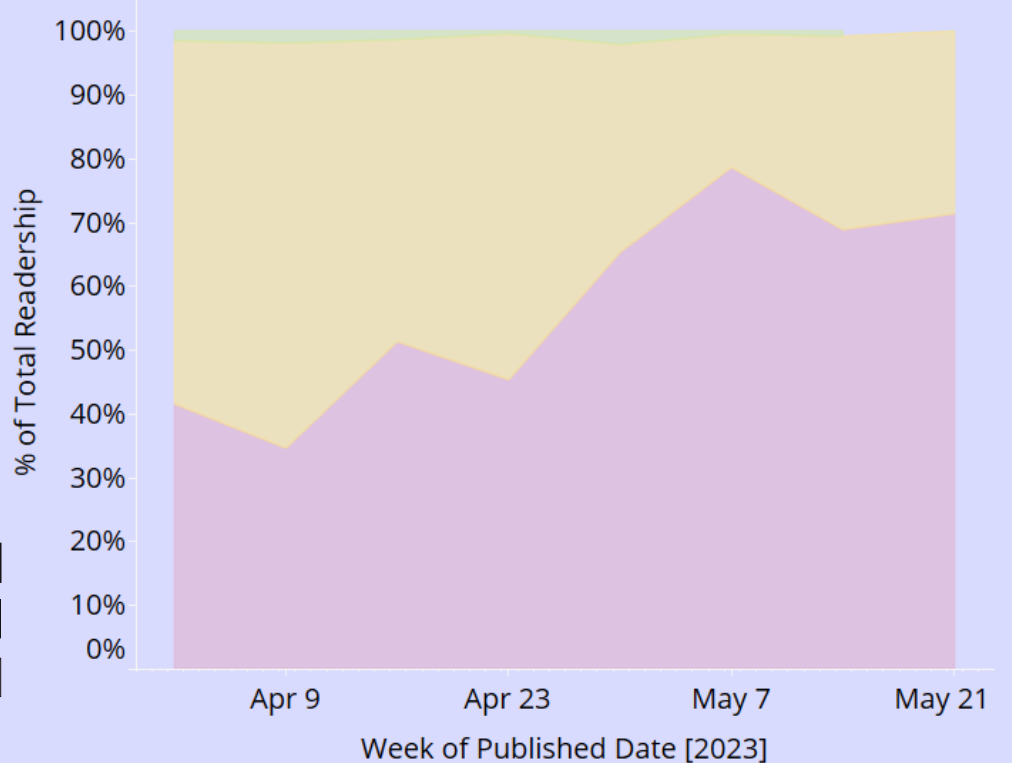


While readership on the Bud Light controversy is **steadily decreasing**, brand sentiment is becoming **more and more negative over time**.

Bud Light's brand sentiment continued to **worsen throughout the crisis**. Early in the news cycle, Bud Light's readership was mostly neutral. By May, nearly all readership came from articles that were negative on the brand.

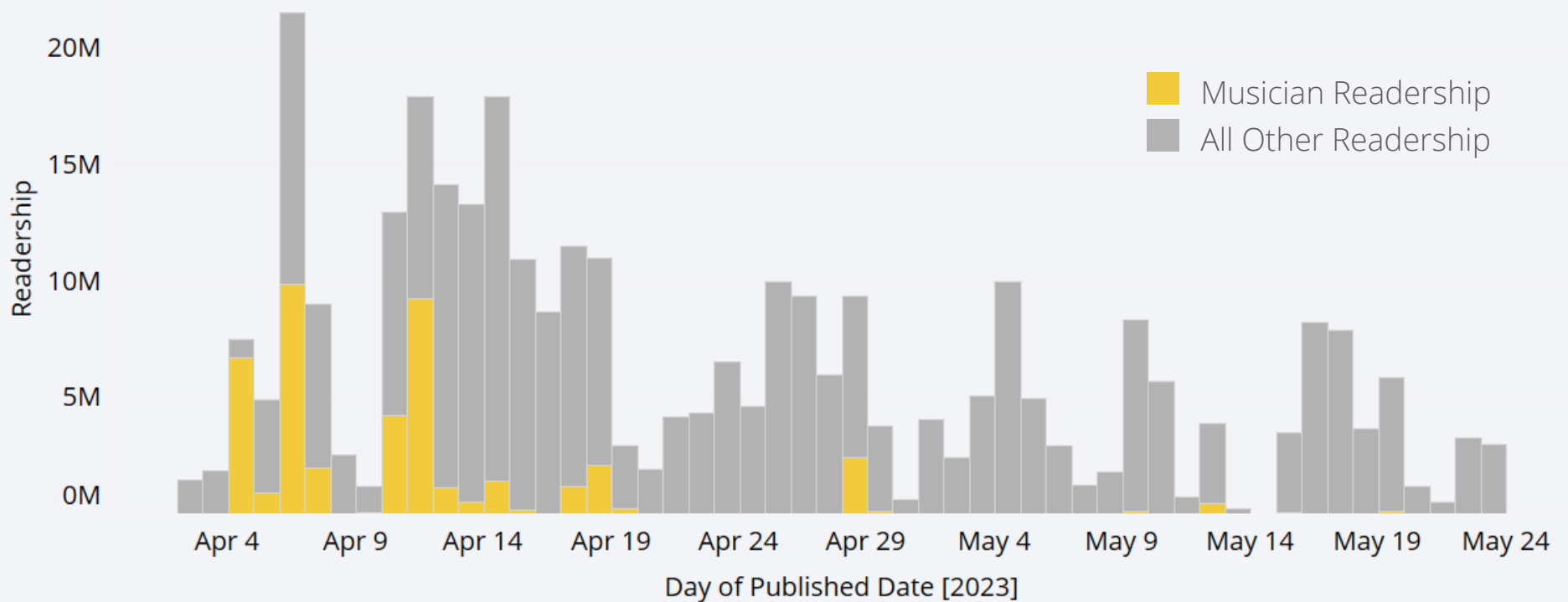
- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative

Brand Sentiment Over Time



WHAT KICK-STARTED THE CRISIS?

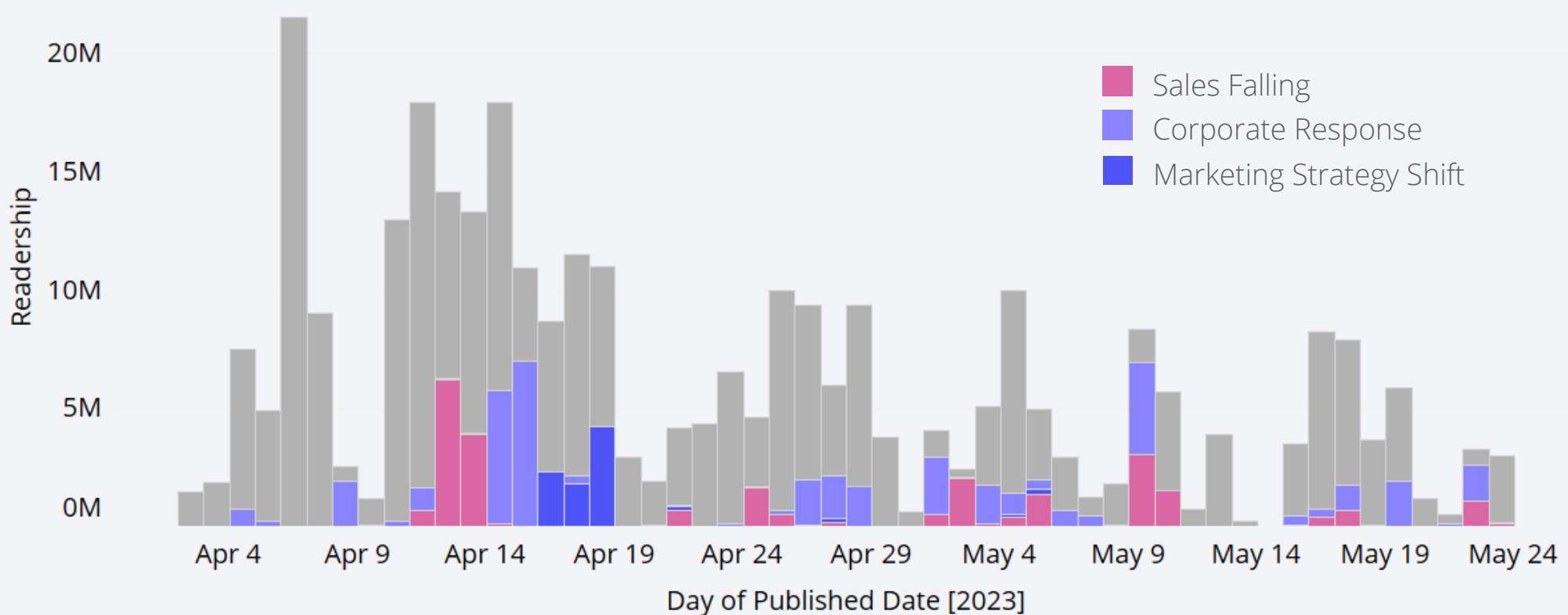
Celebrity Talent, specifically **country musicians**, used their platform to ignite the Bud Light boycott.



Kid Rock was the first of many country stars to publicly protest the brand by shooting Bud Light cans. Just two days later, **Travis Tritt** banned Bud Light from his tour.

BUD LIGHT MIS-STEPS

Instead of addressing the controversy immediately, **Bud Light waited until the boycott began affecting its bottom line.**



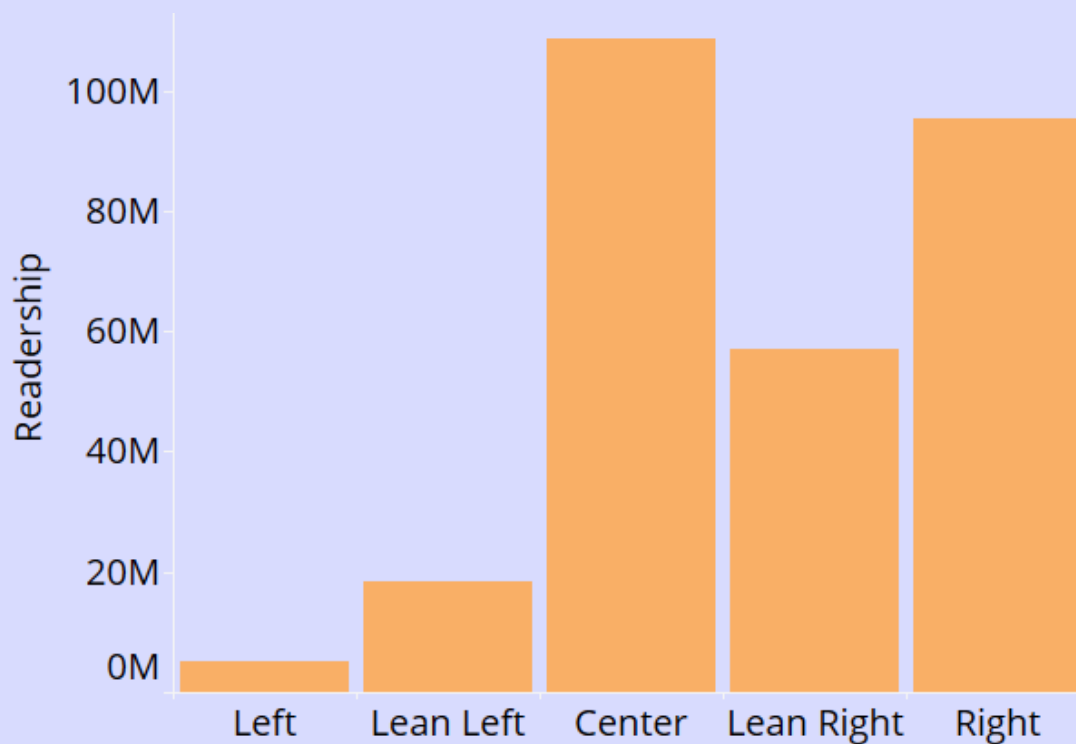
POLITICAL LEANING



Readership trends suggest the Bud Light controversy is **important to conservatives**. Despite higher coverage of the issue on left-leaning national news outlets, readership was significantly higher on center and right-leaning national news outlets. In fact, right and right-leaning coverage attracted **6.5x** the readers as left and left-leaning.

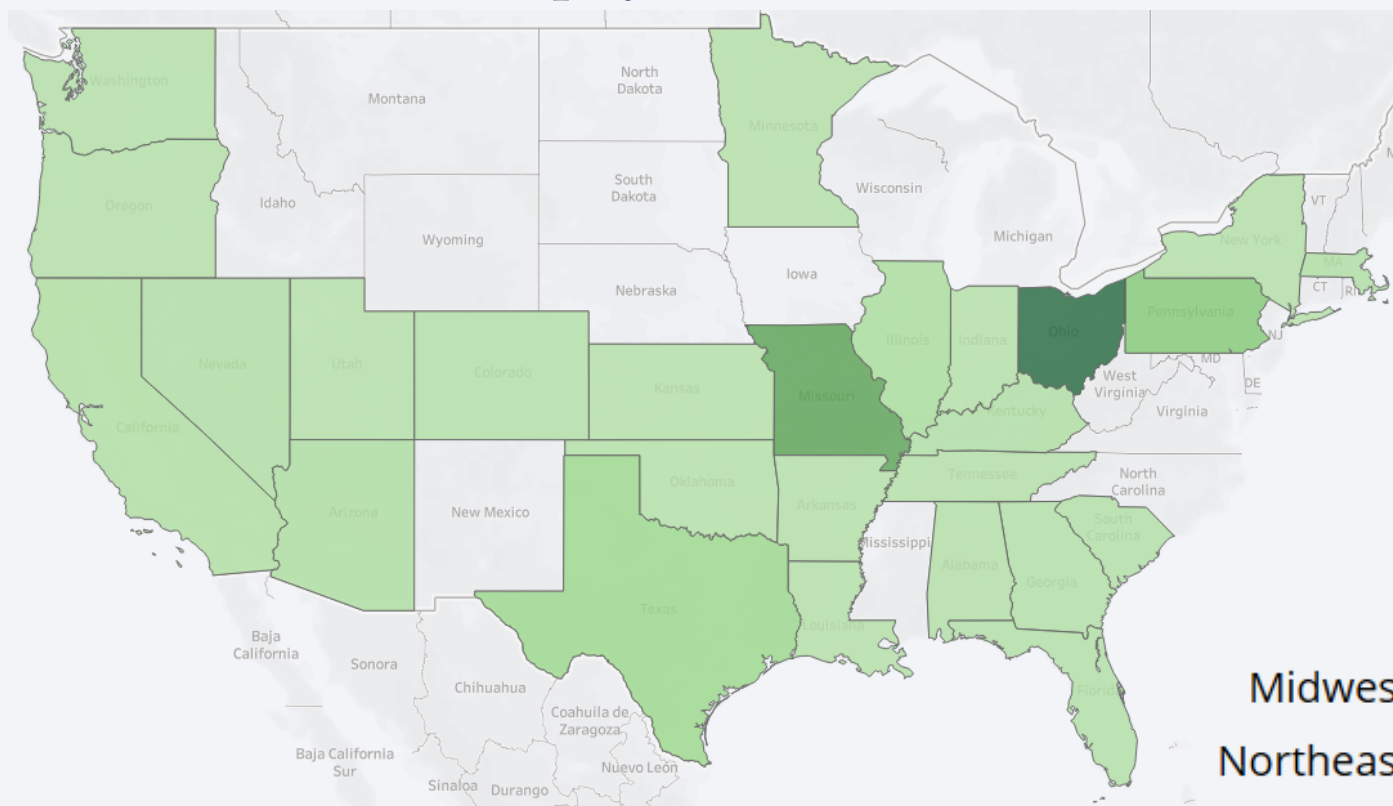
*Outlet leanings have been sources from Allsides.com

Readership by Outlet's Political Leaning



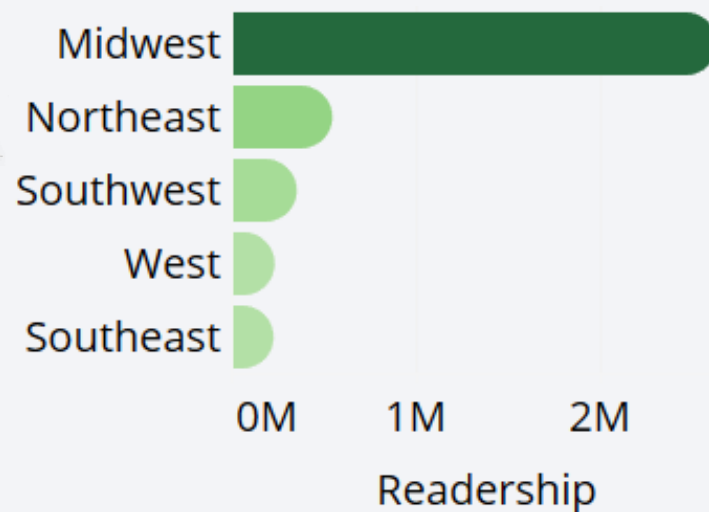
LOCAL READERSHIP

Readership by U.S. Destination



Consumers in the heartland are the most invested in the Bud Light crisis. Among all local new outlets, publishers located in the **Midwest** (most notably in Ohio and Missouri where Anheuser-Busch has corporate offices) dominated readership.

Top-Read Regions



Takeaways

- **Celebrity endorsements can have a massive impact on the severity of a crisis.** In this case, several famous musicians fueled the fire, likely making the situation more disastrous for Bud Light.
- **Brands should respond to crises swiftly to avoid negative press.** Like other brands of late ([Adidas](#), for example), Bud Light waited too long to address the controversy.
- **Readership data is key to understanding your audience during a crisis.** By analyzing readership data, Memo was able to zero into the exact markets and topics consumers cared about most relating to the beer brand.
- **Crises are contagious and competitors should be prepared to deal with similar controversy.** Bud Light's crisis spiked similar controversy at many other brands, including Target, Miller Light, and Nike.



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