

# National Apparel Chain

*Manufactured Boycott Amplified by Coordinated Inauthentic Accounts During a Policy Announcement*

SECTOR <b>Retail</b>	PLATFORM COVERAGE <b>X, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook</b>	CRI AT PEAK <b>91 / 100</b>
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## THE THREAT

A national apparel chain with over 400 stores announced a revision to its supplier diversity policy. Within three hours of the announcement going live, Signal's narrative theme clustering identified a rapidly accelerating negative discourse cluster on X and TikTok centred on four hashtags: two pre-existing activist tags and two that had been created that morning with no prior history.

Velocity analysis showed a 490% spike above the brand's 30-day activity baseline within an 11-minute window, consistent with the synchronised burst pattern documented in AI Uniti's research across 793,000 TikTok videos. Account creation analysis flagged 34% of the accounts driving the initial surge as having been created within a 72-hour window, with posting-behaviour patterns matching AI Uniti's inauthentic amplification loop fingerprint: hub accounts seeding content to peripheral accounts for redistribution at coordinated intervals.

The attack pattern was consistent with publicly documented precedents. Cyabra's 2024 analysis of the Target DEI backlash found that coordinated inauthentic accounts materially accelerated consumer boycott momentum and contributed to stock price movement. Cyabra's analysis of the #BoycottPlanetFitness campaign identified a fake profile as the origin point of the hashtag itself, the first documented case of inauthentic accounts not merely amplifying an organic crisis but manufacturing its ignition point. Signal's detection flagged the same structural signature here.

## HOW SIGNAL DETECTED IT

Signal's Coordination Risk Index reached 91/100 within 4 hours of the attack's initiation, well before mainstream media had picked up the story. Cross-platform ingestion confirmed that the identical content cluster was appearing simultaneously on X and TikTok, with posting intervals that were statistically incompatible with organic independent discovery.

Narrative theme clustering identified three fabricated claims embedded in the coordinated content: a misquoted policy document, a fabricated supplier statement attributed to a named individual, and a video purporting to show in-store staff behaviour that Signal's temporal analysis placed as pre-existing content from an unrelated incident.

Escalation modelling assessed a 78% probability of mainstream media pickup within 6 to 8 hours if no proactive counter-narrative was established. The communications team was briefed

with Signal's full narrative map, distinguishing coordinated inauthentic activity from authentic consumer sentiment, within 5 hours of the attack's first signal.

## SIGNAL'S VALUE DELIVERED

- **Narrative map separating coordinated attack from authentic voice:** Of the 22,000 posts analysed in the first 12 hours, Signal assigned high inauthentic probability to 38%. The remaining 62% of authentic negative sentiment was isolated and treated as a separate signal, legitimate consumer concern requiring a legitimate response, not crisis suppression.
- **Prevented misallocated crisis response:** Without Signal's coordination map, the communications team's instinct was to address all negative sentiment with an immediate public statement. Signal's intelligence confirmed this would have amplified the inauthentic accounts' reach by engaging with coordinated content as though it were organic. The team instead targeted authentic influencers while ignoring the coordinated network.
- **Regulatory evidence package:** Signal's platform report, with full coordination evidence, was submitted to X and TikTok within 8 hours. Platform action removed 1,400+ flagged accounts within 72 hours, visibly reducing the attack's apparent scale and releasing trapped authentic sentiment.

*"We were about to issue a full crisis statement responding to what we thought was organic consumer anger. Signal showed us that 38% of the volume was coordinated and inauthentic. We responded to our real customers and ignored the bots. That decision was worth more than any crisis PR firm."*

— Head of Corporate Communications, national apparel retailer

### WHAT STANDARD SOCIAL LISTENING WOULD HAVE SHOWN

*Elevated negative sentiment volume, high hashtag velocity, and a recommendation to issue an immediate crisis statement. No coordination signal. No fabricated content identification. No separation of authentic consumer voice from manufactured amplification. The communications team would have responded to a crisis that was, in significant part, not real, amplifying the inauthentic network's reach in the process.*

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