

**IGNITING**  
**IMPACT,**  
**ACCELERATING**  
**SUSTAIN**  
**ABILITY**

A QUARTERLY VIEWPOINT ON  
THE MOBILITY AND FRAGILITY  
OF SUSTAINABILITY TODAY



# WEL CO ME

**Last year, the PN London team was treated to a talk from Jeremy Gilley MBE, founder of Peace One Day, a movement designed to create a more just, inclusive and peaceful world.**

Jeremy's work had taken him to war zones, where he had witnessed first-hand the devastating effects of conflicting and often extreme ideologies. His experiences had opened his eyes to the importance of 'constructive narratives' - the idea that rather than sow division and doubt, words and stories, when used constructively, have the ability to power positive progress. As Jeremy put it, 'storytelling for good... can inform, inspire and engage people towards action'.

As we turn our attention to the issues of today, and the last few months in particular, constructive narratives have never been more vital or needed. Faced with deepening polarisation, context, honesty, balance and nuance are fast-becoming essential tools in the communicator's toolkit.

But finding the middle ground can be tricky when so many people are speaking a language of extremes; when it's now more widely accepted to label rather than listen.

How can we be constructive when opinions are viewed as only either right or wrong, facts are deemed true or false, and actions, products or policies are reduced to being either good or bad? In this edition, we explore where battle lines are being drawn - from Gen Z attitudes, to AI, to sustainable food production and corporate responsibility versus consumerism - and discuss how organisations can best navigate this new environment of either/or.

We hope you find it as valuable as it is thought-provoking and, as always, we welcome your thoughts.

**Your Porter Novelli Team**

# CONTENTS

## ➤ INTRODUCTION

---

- Constructive narratives in an age of deepening polarisation

## ➤ THE BIG CONVERSATIONS

---

- Gen-Z: progressive or more polarised than ever?
- Corporate responsibility versus consumerism: is it possible to build brand loyalty without driving overconsumption?
- AI: moving beyond a divided debate
- Farmers fight back: finding the middle ground for food supply chains

- Vaping: a public health solution or a scourge on society?
- Sustainability comms: a modern minefield?

## ➤ THINGS WE LOVE

---

- Football and prostate cancer screening
- Lidl launches bottle deposit scheme
- A novel way to recycle energy from data centres
- Reef rejuvenation

## ➤ ON OUR RADAR

---

- What we've been reading and listening to

**BIG**

CONVERSATIONS





# GEN-Z.

progressive or  
more polarised  
than ever?



Young people today are usually associated with a liberal set of attitudes and an openness to emerging social trends. On issues such as climate change, or the role of government in tackling racial and gender equity, for example, the views of the Gen-Z population are generally considered to be more progressive. But recent studies have shown that this may not necessarily be the case – and what we could be seeing is a generation that is more divided than ever. So, what is going on?

## THE GROWING GENDER DIVIDE

[Research from King's College London](#) suggests there is an emerging gender divide between young men and women on issues such as feminism. According to the study, Gen-Z males are more likely than older baby boomers to think that feminism has done more harm than good. [In the US, Gallup data](#) shows that after decades where the sexes have been spread relatively equally across liberal and conservative world views, women aged 18 to 30 are now 30 percentage points more liberal than their male contemporaries.

How did we get here? Many see the launch of the #MeToo movement in 2017 as a clear turning point. While of course this has seen many positive effects, critics of the movement claim it has turned into a witch-hunt style campaign, causing reputations to be ruined without appropriate or fair process. From this, phrases like 'toxic masculinity' have emerged – [a term which according to the King's College London research, more young men find unhelpful than women do.](#)







# MANY SEE THE LAUNCH OF THE #METOO MOVEMENT IN 2017 AS A CLEAR TURNING POINT

scientists are unreliable". In 2018, New Denial narratives constituted just 35 per cent of all climate denial content on YouTube. Today, this has increased to 70 per cent.

## THE ALGORITHM BUBBLE

As a generation who have grown up with social media, it's no surprise that content platforms like YouTube and TikTok are playing a crucial role in shaping Gen-Z's view on important societal issues. But these media sources often exacerbate polarisation due to the echo-chambers they create. Algorithms are always biased: studies have shown that Facebook ads target particular racial and gender demographics, and it's no secret that search engines prioritise links based on what they deem most relevant. This means that Gen-Z social media users are essentially living in a "filter bubble" with their own unique information universe, which has been tailored by algorithms – and it's these "filter bubbles" that are driving trends towards greater polarisation.



## A CONCERNING NARRATIVE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

And it's not just gender – young people's views on climate change are seeing shifts too. Alarming new research published by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) has found that a third of UK teenagers believe climate change is "exaggerated", due to the huge prevalence of climate misinformation on sites like YouTube.

The report published by CCDH earlier this month found that the nature of climate denial is changing. While "Old Denial" narratives tried to suggest that climate change wasn't happening or not caused by humans, "New Denial" narratives question the science and solutions for climate change, perpetuating ideas such as "clean energy won't work" or "climate





## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

Communicating effectively in an age of polarisation can be tricky, particularly when the subject is complex.

### CONSIDER HUMAN STORY-TELLING

Stories that put a spotlight on human experiences and real-world examples of people represented by the data give different audiences a chance to relate to complex issues like gender diversity and climate change. In fact, research has shown stories that are human-driven and emotionally and personally compelling releases oxytocin, which engages more of the brain than facts. So, giving an issue a human dimension is not only important for effective communications, but it could also help drive meaningful behavioural and cultural change.

### CUSTOMISE YOUR STRATEGY

When you have multiple audiences from one demographic (e.g. age) with completely different views, there really isn't a one-size fits all approach. Consider a data-led approach, such as audience profiling to really understand who you are communicating to – what motivates them; what channels do they consume; and who are they influenced by? By understanding these nuances, you'll be able to build an effective communications strategy that resonates. In our [Change Decoded](#) report, published earlier this year, we explored how communicators can stand out among their

peers by better understanding audiences' diverse and complex realities, as well as acknowledging the counterintuitive and paradoxical nature of life in the mid 2020s. Brands that push beyond broad-based 'target audience' descriptions, see audience groups as dynamic ecosystems, seek local perspectives, and recognize individual differences will achieve greater engagement and credibility.

### ACT QUICKLY

Known as the "instant generation", Gen-Z is the first group in society to be raised entirely on technology. Social media is their go-to for news and information, and they expect immediate answers to questions. So, it's important to act quickly if you want to effectively connect with them. Platforms like TikTok have seen a rise in raw-unedited content, and as a key source of information for Gen-Z audiences, the quality expectation doesn't have to be high. So, when communicating on these platforms, consider keeping your content simple and focus less on producing highly polished material.

# KNOWN AS THE "INSTANT GENERATION", GEN-Z IS THE FIRST GROUP IN SOCIETY TO BE RAISED ENTIRELY ON TECHNOLOGY



# CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY VERSUS CONSUMERISM:

Is it possible to build brand loyalty without driving overconsumption?



At the beginning of this year, a scientific [paper](#) claimed that a human “behavioural crisis” is leading to climate breakdown. The authors argued that just reducing greenhouse gas emissions won’t be enough to protect the future of our planet. Instead, we need to address “a deeper, more subversive modern crisis of human behaviour”, which is driving dangerous levels of overconsumption and, in turn, leading to environmental degradation.







# SALE

## TEMU'S 'SHOP LIKE A BILLIONAIRE' IS ONE NOT SO SUBTLE EXAMPLE OF HOW BRANDS DEPICT THEIR PRODUCTS AS THE PATH TO ACHIEVING A 'DESIRABLE' LIFESTYLE

According to the paper, “media and marketing manipulation” have, in part, exacerbated these dangerous behaviours and brought humanity to a tipping point, “threatening the fabric of complex life on earth.” In recent decades, companies have used well-known marketing and communications tactics to convince consumers that buying a product – or buying more of it – will make them happier or help them achieve a certain lifestyle. To differentiate themselves from a myriad of competitors, brands have sought to make their products a lifestyle symbol; convincing shoppers that what you buy reflects who you are, or the person you want to be.

The paper cites the example of toothpaste to demonstrate how these marketing tactics work. Instead of marketing toothpaste as an essential hygiene product, to differentiate themselves from competitors, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies might brand the product as a “mint-flavoured confidence boost... that could make you feel more attractive.” Suddenly, buying the ‘right’ brand of toothpaste becomes a decision that will reshape your future. E-commerce giant Temu’s 2024 [Superbowl ad](#),

‘Shop like a Billionaire, is one not so subtle example of how brands depict their products as the path to achieving a ‘desirable’ lifestyle. The ad features people joyously purchasing low priced goods to the lyrics, “the prices blow my mind, I feel so rich.”

The environmental impact of overconsumption extends beyond the impact of the manufacturing of goods themselves.

[Transporting](#) products from low-priced e-commerce sites internationally (often from China to the West) is also leading to a spike in emissions. E-commerce giants Shein and Temu together send almost 600,000 packages to the United States every day, according to a June 2023 report by the US. Congress. In March, France took the bold move of being the first country to legislate against fast fashion.

Measures will include a ban on advertising cheap textiles and an environmental charge on low-cost options. Even products that are marketed as environmentally friendly can sometimes end up causing more harm than good. One notable example is the Stanley Cup, which has risen to social media stardom in recent months, with [videos](#) showing people fighting each other for the latest edition of the cup in stores. The hype around products like the Stanley Cup means that, while the products are designed to reduce waste from disposable plastic water bottles, with some consumers purchasing hundreds of the cups, the environmental benefits are lost. This problem is not exclusive to Stanley but is common amongst other brands who sell 'reusable' products like water bottles or bags. As Bloomberg journalist Jessica Nix wrote in a recent [piece](#) on the Stanley Cup trend, these products "are often marketed as a way to displace single-use alternatives and cut greenhouse gas emissions. But that calculus only works if the reusable product is actually reused, and it definitely doesn't work if the product is never used at all." While pervasive marketing and sales tactics may be driving overconsumption, the paper notes that they might also be "our best chance at avoiding ecological catastrophe." Just as the marketing, communications, and advertising industries have demonstrated their ability to drive high levels of overconsumption, we also have the power to help change social norms for the better, including when it comes to our purchasing habits.



While there are some grim examples of brands adopting tactics to sell as many goods as possible, there are also many case studies of companies manufacturing – and marketing – high-quality, timeless products that are designed to last a lifetime. Among them is Patagonia, which made headlines in 2022 when it [announced](#) a new ownership model, with its profits being “distributed as dividends to protect the planet.” Patagonia also has a commitment to repair, replace or refund any item of clothing through its ‘[Ironclad Guarantee](#)’. Last year, the company [launched](#) a fashion repair centre in London which will focus on employing and training people with challenges finding employment, such as refugees. Other brands like Le Creuset offer [lifetime guarantees](#) on all products, while a growing number of fashion brands such as Burberry are offering repair and aftercare services. While it no longer offers a lifetime guarantee for its shoes, Dr. Martens offers an authorised [repair service](#) in the UK. Each repair is hand finished using the same machines that construct the brand’s boots and shoes. These solutions are an encouraging sign of how brands can create a loyal following that doesn’t centre around encouraging their customers to buy more products they don’t necessarily need.





## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

Do sustainability and consumerism have to exist as an either/or? Is it only right and fair for people to enjoy life, while not putting pressure on our planet's resources?

Marketing and communications professionals have an important role to play in challenging social norms around consumption and changing consumer behaviour for the better.

The scientific paper we mentioned earlier notes that "if we were to effectively address the crisis of human behaviour, the desirable alternative behaviours (like buying and wasting less), must be creatively framed in ways that accentuate the benefits to the individual rather than highlight their personal sacrifices."

We can take inspiration from organisations like Agency for Nature, who are already putting their talent behind efforts to show that consuming more doesn't always lead to a better quality of life. We can help brands promote repair or refurbishment schemes, showcase second-hand fashion, and put high-quality, responsibly made products in the spotlight.

As consultants, we can also work with clients to demonstrate that brand loyalty doesn't only come from consumerism, it comes from connection. Sometimes, less is more: businesses like Patagonia have proven it's possible to achieve commercial success by providing quality products and minimising environmental impact. This on its own won't solve the climate crisis or prevent ecological destruction, but it will play an important role.



Advertising and creative agencies are also getting on board with the mission of reducing hyper consumerism. [Agency for Nature](#), which has branded itself as the "creative agency for life on earth", launched the 'Girls Just Wanna Grow Plants' campaign ahead of London Fashion Week. The campaign is designed to target Gen-Z women who feel pressure to keep up with the latest fashion trends or are looking to escape hustle culture in search of "rustle culture".



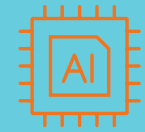
# CONSUMING MORE DOESN'T ALWAYS LEAD TO A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE





# AI:

## Moving beyond a divided debate



the International Monetary Fund and the Basel Banking Committee indicating that 60% of jobs in advanced economies could be impacted by machine learning, resulting in lower salaries, reduced hiring, and job loss for many. However, there was also recognition that confining AI's future to the extremes of financial and societal collapse and all-out revolution limits the constructive conversations that are needed for AI to actively shape our future.

### GLOBAL FORUMS LIKE DAVOS 2024 IN JANUARY INDICATED A SHIFT TOWARDS A MORE NUANCED, PEOPLE-CENTRIC APPROACH TO AI, PRIORITIZING HUMAN WELL-BEING ABOVE ALL ELSE

AI is rarely out of the news. At its core, it promises revolutionary advancements across various sectors, including healthcare, transportation, finance, and education. However, as we have covered in previous reports, the technology also poses significant threats to key issues such as inequality, climate change, governance, and the spread of fake news.

Global forums like Davos 2024 in January indicated a shift towards a more nuanced, people-centric approach to AI, prioritizing human well-being above all else. As business leaders, regulators, and policymakers gathered, concerns about AI exacerbating inequality and financial instability were prominent, with warnings from institutions like

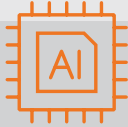


This prompted calls for proactive measures to address these challenges through governance and regulation.

Only a few weeks ago, the EU became the first jurisdiction globally to approve the world's first comprehensive framework for constraining the risks of artificial intelligence. Known as the AI Act, the new rules will divide the technology into categories of risk, ranging from “unacceptable” — which would see the technology banned — to high, medium and low hazard. The President of the European Parliament described the act as trailblazing, paving the path for other countries to follow suit. But critics warned that the act could quickly become outdated and would do little to curb the ‘monopolistic abuse’ of AI by the most dominant tech companies.

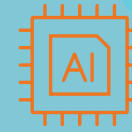
At the AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park, which we mentioned previously in our Q4 2023 edition, discussions highlighted both the opportunities and risks associated with AI in a more nuanced way than contentious dialogue in the past. This culminated in the creation of ‘The Bletchley Declaration on AI Safety,’ emphasizing the need for responsible development and deployment of AI to address potential existential risks and harness its potential for tackling global challenges like climate change.

# CONFINING AI'S FUTURE TO THE EXTREMES OF FINANCIAL AND SOCIETAL COLLAPSE AND ALL-OUT REVOLUTION LIMITS THE CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS THAT ARE NEEDED FOR AI TO ACTIVELY SHAPE OUR FUTURE



The technological prowess of AI that has the potential to tackle these challenges also comes with a significant environmental cost due to the immense energy demands of AI algorithms, contributing to heightened greenhouse gas emissions. Achieving net-zero AI is, therefore, crucial, requiring efforts to optimise energy consumption. Regulations like the EU's Digital Services Act, aimed at reducing the environmental footprint of digital technologies, including AI, help to define specific obligations of deployers and providers to bridge solutions to trustworthy uses of large AI models. Companies like Google have also taken significant steps to find the balance between all-out positivity and doomsaying by using AI to optimise data centres for energy efficiency and investing in renewable energy sources to power them. Collaborative efforts like the Climate Neutral AI initiative aim to establish standards for sustainable AI through stakeholder collaboration.

# EXPERTS HAVE WARNED THAT THE DISCOURSE REVOLVING AROUND AI BEING EITHER 'GOOD OR BAD' IS GROSSLY OVERSIMPLIFIED



## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

There's been a lot of talk about the 'swinging pendulum' of the great AI debate. There are those who argue it has the potential to rescue humanity and those who say it will bring about our inevitable demise. While neither outcome is likely to happen in the near future, the conversation has become increasingly polarised, thanks in part to the spread of misinformation across social and mainstream media.

Experts have warned that the discourse revolving around AI being either 'good or bad' is grossly oversimplified and a more nuanced understanding of its benefits and uses is needed. In fact, such a binary debate risks confusing the general public even more.

In his [article](#) for Forbes, technology journalist Adrian Bridgwater writes: "If we want to lessen the amplitude of these pendulum swings, it seems clear that we perhaps need to find a way to achieve consensus around some of the increasingly polarized narratives in the AI development space.

There is no universally (or even globally) agreed way forward with AI as a whole, but many commentators and analysts agree that we need to target bias and AI hallucinations from an open and collaborative stance. Equally, we need an intelligently nuanced and flexible approach to AI controls to ensure that only the harmful uses of AI are subjected to outright ban or extreme regulation."

In short, for organisations, this means finding the balance between preparing for potential risks (deepfakes, scams etc) while educating stakeholders on the specific benefits to the business and, importantly, employees and customers.

For more on this subject, check out our [Change Decoded](#) report, which looks at how brands are exploring the productive uses of AI, including how it can help to tap into upcoming trends and stakeholder sentiment, and how it can be a valuable tool in building stronger 'emotional humanity' and connections with audiences that matter most.





# FARMERS FIGHT BACK:

## Finding the middle ground for food supply chains

The start of 2024 saw a big rise in farmer protests in many countries across the world including several [European](#) countries, [India](#), [the US](#), [Brazil](#) and [Mexico](#). These protests have been forcing governments to dilute their plans to reform the sector and have highlighted the need for regulation to be 'reality-tested' with all stakeholders when developing more comprehensive environmental policies.

Whilst these protests have roots in localised issues, they also reflect many shared concerns: plummeting sale prices, escalating costs, stringent regulations, dominant retailers, debt and climate change. Despite feeling first-hand the impact of climate change on their crop outputs and the availability of water, farmers are caught between the demand for affordable food and environmentally friendly practices. In [Europe](#), the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), a longstanding subsidy system in the EU, has favoured larger farms, leading to consolidation and increased debt. The EU's flagship initiatives, such as the "Farm to fork" strategy, which aim to address climate change have increasingly been met with scepticism and resistance from farmers who find the policies unrealistic and economically unviable. Governments have responded to protests with concessions, such as Germany easing diesel subsidies and France offering financial assistance. As farmers gain support from far-right parties, politicians are under pressure to address their grievances with further concessions likely as European Parliament, US and Mexico elections approach.







## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

The challenges faced by the agricultural sector are indicative of a broader trend affecting numerous industries that feel marginalised by environmental policies.

While farmers grapple with falling prices, rising costs, and stringent regulations exacerbated by climate change, similar struggles are echoed in various sectors. Industries reliant on fossil fuels, manufacturing, and transportation are facing enormous pressure to transition to sustainable practices, often at the expense of profitability and competitiveness. Moreover, the influx of cheap imports from countries with lax environmental standards exacerbates the challenges faced by domestic producers.

This broader trend underscores the tension between environmental sustainability and economic viability, highlighting the need for policies that balance both objectives while ensuring no sector is left behind in the transition towards a greener future. To achieve this balance, it is essential for regulators to seek input from all stakeholders, ensuring that the concerns and needs of each industry are considered and addressed. Collaboration and dialogue amongst policymakers, businesses, environmentalists and communities are crucial to formulating effective and equitable policies that promote sustainability while safeguarding the interests of all involved parties.



**THIS BROADER TREND UNDERSCORES  
THE TENSION BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL  
SUSTAINABILITY AND ECONOMIC VIABILITY**



# VAPING:

## A public health solution or a scourge on society?

**In 2003, Chinese pharmacist Hon Lik created e-cigarettes to kick his heavy smoking habit. Two decades later e-cigarettes, or vapes, have exploded in popularity. This, alongside policy change and public health campaigns, have had success in curbing cigarette consumption. Since 1990, the global prevalence of smoking has steadily decreased.**

However, this has ushered in a new 'epidemic' of vaping. Controversies about vaping encompass the health impacts, gateway effects among children and the environmental impact of disposed lithium batteries and plastic packaging. While most health authorities consider vapes to be less harmful than cigarettes, studies have shown that vaping harms cardiac and respiratory systems, and even mental health. In the UK, a shocking 20% of children aged 11-17 have tried vaping.



Environmentally, the UK discards a staggering 5 million disposable vapes each week, an amount that is equivalent to scrapping the lithium batteries of 5000 electric vehicles.

To date, 34 countries globally have entirely banned e-cigarettes, while 88 countries have no age restriction in purchase and 74 countries have no regulations in place at all. This year, there are set to be stricter regulations sweeping the globe, for example France is set to ban vapes in September this year. In the UK, the government has announced its intention to ban disposable vapes, alongside restrictions in packaging, flavours and shop displays as part of its 'smoke-free generation' campaign.

From a policy perspective, there is a balance to strike between allowing adult smokers to use e-cigarettes as a quit-smoking tool, while curbing the gateway effects among children. Surging of popularity worldwide has made a total ban difficult - case studies in Australia and India have shown that illicit markets have thrived. Moreover, the use of unreliable e-cigarettes poses an additional health burden - exemplified by the emergence of product use-associated lung injury (EVALI).





## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

Last year, the UK government announced ambitious plans to create a ‘smoke-free generation’. This legislation aims to ensure that people born on or after 1 January 2009 would not legally be able to be sold tobacco in their lifetime.

Achieving something of this scale would make a significant difference on public health. And it needs to be actioned globally: 80% of the world’s 1.3 billion tobacco users live in low-and middle-income countries.

Pharmaceutical companies will need to pay attention to these legislative changes. Those working in disease areas affected by tobacco and e-cigarette consumption (cardio, respiratory, cancers, mental health etc) should consider how to engage with these public health campaigns to amplify impact.

Looking at the issue more broadly, launching a product with clear pros and cons demands transparency and responsible communication. It is of equal importance to highlight the harm reduction potential for smokers seeking to quit traditional cigarettes, and to acknowledge both the potential benefits and risks associated with vaping. Striking a balance in the marketing message is essential, avoiding the glamorisation of vaping while emphasising its intended use as a smoking cessation tool.

Responsibility in marketing entails adhering to strict age restrictions, clear health warnings, and steering clear of tactics that appeal to younger demographics. By prioritising education, supporting public health campaigns and actively promoting overall well-being, companies can ensure their products positively contribute to public health without inadvertently encouraging addiction.

**LAUNCHING A  
PRODUCT WITH  
CLEAR PROS AND  
CONS DEMANDS  
TRANSPARENCY  
AND RESPONSIBLE  
COMMUNICATION**



Sustainability comms:

# A MODERN MINEFIELD?



When it comes to sustainability marketing, communicating with clarity, accuracy and creativity has become akin to finding the holy grail. But is it really as difficult as it seems and why are so many brands getting it wrong?

Businesses who operate or trade in the EU are going to have to get their thinking caps on following a new anti-greenwashing directive that was passed by the EU Parliament in January. Under this new legislation, businesses will not be permitted to make vague claims about the environmental impact of their products or services unless they can be backed up with evidence. Claims in the firing line include 'eco-friendly', 'environmentally friendly', 'natural', 'recycled' and 'biodegradable'.





# THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS 'CARBON-NEUTRAL' OR 'CO2-NEUTRAL' CHEESE, PLASTIC BOTTLES, FLIGHTS OR BANK ACCOUNTS. CARBON-NEUTRAL CLAIMS ARE GREENWASHING, PLAIN AND SIMPLE

**Ursula Pachi**, deputy director of BEUC

“There is no such thing as ‘carbon-neutral’ or ‘CO2-neutral’ cheese, plastic bottles, flights or bank accounts. Carbon-neutral claims are greenwashing, plain and simple,” said Ursula Pachi, the deputy director of EU consumer advocate body BEUC.”

While the changes aren't expected to come into force until 2026, many businesses are coming under fire, and are even being investigated, for misleading customers with green marketing. Unilever – often considered to be at the forefront of sustainable business – is currently being investigated for greenwashing by the UK's Competition and Markets Authority. Formula One sponsor, Saudi Aramco, and the Financial Times have been accused of making misleading environmental claims and for relying on ‘confusing use of terminology’

for its ads promoting low carbon fuels. The Advertising Standards Authority has even started to use AI to regulate environmental claims, with the aim of monitoring 10 million online adverts this year. The flipside of all of this is that companies are starting to roll back on communicating their sustainability efforts or are avoiding it altogether – a practice known as greenhushing. There are also reports of businesses ‘greenstalling’, whereby companies

are wanting to do the right thing to ramp up decarbonisation efforts but are unsure of the right approach for fear of criticism. New research by South Pole found that 70 percent of sustainability-minded companies around the world are deliberately hiding their climate goals to comply with new regulations and avoid public scrutiny. Companies in fashion, consumer goods, tech, oil, and, surprisingly, even environmental services are some of the worst offenders. So how can companies get their sustainability communications right? Does the mystical middle ground really exist where comms can be used to engage, educate, influence – even entertain – while remaining steadfast to the truth and the science?







## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

Communicators, marketers and advertisers are facing a reckoning over greenwashing as regulatory crackdowns intensify. This is leaving many businesses in a difficult position – either communicate and be criticised or don't communicate and be criticised.

Communications is one of the most powerful levers to influence positive change, and with that comes responsibility. So, when misinformation is rife, companies have a duty to get it right, not greenwash.

Some of the worst greenwashing culprits have resorted to vague, unspecified language in the mistaken belief that these will be easier to understand and will be a shortcut to reputational gains. In fact, a [study](#) by Trajectory and Fleet Street published in January found that only a quarter of the British public clearly understand the terms 'green', 'sustainable' and 'environmentally-friendly'. This is despite 47% of those surveyed saying they believed that brands had the most responsibility when it came to delivering action on the climate crisis.

All of this points to the need for a significant reset when it comes to how sustainability goals, progress or products are communicated. Sustainability communications is truly the middle ground between art and science. It requires technical knowledge of the topics at hand and creative flair to make them resonate. It uses storytelling and context as a way to move people

towards an ambition that's largely relied on numbers and scientific jargon to achieve. Rachel Arthur of the UN Environment Programme explains: "So much of this field of sustainability is completely intangible. It's almost impossible for the everyday person to be able to imagine what that actually means...It's [important to] make sustainability the thing we all hanker after or aspire to. And for that, we need to paint a picture for everyone."

Often, it's not just about the words you use but how. Studies have shown that humour and climate-related comedy can actually help people feel more optimistic and more committed to taking action. One study has even shown that exposure to [climate change memes](#) increases people's intention to engage with online climate action.

So, creativity and storytelling are vital tools in the communicator or marketer's toolbox, but not at the expense of clarity or accuracy.

If sustainability is about painting a picture for everyone, communicators and marketers need to go beyond buzzwords, lazy stereotypes and one-liners and think about who they're actually communicating to and why. Start with the scientific evidence, map it to who you're talking to and go from there – there will be ways to bring it life without resorting to over-simplification or overloading people with stats.

Above all, sustainability communications is about trust. Because if we lose the trust of stakeholders, we lose the ability to make progress.

PLANET  
EARTH FIRST



# THINGS WE LOVE



# FOOTBALL AND PROSTATE CANCER SCREENING



How a football club is utilising match-day screenings to raise awareness for prostate health

Standing as the largest congregating space for men in the local area, Plymouth Argyle is leveraging this hub of camaraderie to prioritise the health of its fan base. In partnership with Chestnut Appeal, the football club offered free prostate cancer testing before the fixture against Ipswich Town on 2nd March. Men aged 50 and over, or over 45 with higher risk factors, were encouraged to participate by booking their place online.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men, with over [52,000 new cases and 12,000 deaths annually in the UK](#). It is also the [fourth most commonly diagnosed cancer](#) in the world. The initiative is in memory of Dr. Salvo Natale, one of the founders of the Chestnut Appeal and a dedicated fan of the club. Not only does it underscore the significance of men's health and enhances accessibility to screening, but also utilises the football stadium as a pivotal gathering point to raise awareness and provide essential health services.



## PROSTATE CANCER IS THE MOST COMMON CANCER IN MEN, WITH OVER 52,000 NEW CASES AND 12,000 DEATHS ANNUALLY IN THE UK



# LIDL LAUNCHES BOTTLE DEPOSIT SCHEME



## Lidl launches recycling deposit scheme in Glasgow

Lidl [launched](#) a city-wide drinks packaging recycling scheme across its 21 stores in Glasgow in February. This came after the Scottish government delayed the introduction of a nationwide Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) to October 2025 at the earliest.

In return for recycling empty PET plastic and aluminium drinks containers using 'reverse vending machines', customers will receive a 5p reward for each eligible item returned – which they can either put towards their Lidl shop or donate to Lidl's partner charity, The STV Children's appeal. The scheme will run for a trial period until 11th August 2024 with potential for it to be expanded further.



While Lidl is taking the lead in Scotland, other countries, including Ireland, are going further with nationwide bottle deposit schemes. Ireland's scheme launched on 1st February, and in the first month, consumers have returned over 2 million drinks containers to participating shops and supermarkets across the country. Incentivisation certainly seems to be working. Established deposit schemes in other European countries, including Norway, Denmark, and Germany, have return rates of over 90%, according to [Euronews](#).

**CUSTOMERS WILL  
RECEIVE A 5P  
REWARD FOR EACH  
ELIGIBLE ITEM  
RETURNED**



# A NOVEL WAY TO RECYCLE WASTE ENERGY FROM DATA CENTRES

How energy from data centres is being used to heat swimming pools

**Renewable energy company, Octopus Energy, has partnered with tech startup Deep Green to pilot using energy from data centres to heat swimming pools.**

Processing data generates a lot of wasted heat so this new initiative, which is currently being trialled in Exmouth, Devon, aims to repurpose it and provide free heat for energy-intensive organisations such as leisure centres, which have been affected by soaring bills in the cost-of-living crisis, with many having to close or cut their hours. The technique works for the data centre and the pool - the heat from the computers warms the water and the transfer of heat

## TO TACKLE THE ENERGY CRISIS HEAD-ON, WE NEED INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO UNUSUAL PROBLEMS



into the pool cools the computers. In Exmouth, the swimming pool was able to slash its heating bill by more than 60%. Thanks to additional investment, Deep Green is aiming to roll out this innovative approach to leisure centres across the UK over the next two years. Octopus has described it as a win-win solution, saying: "To tackle the energy crisis head-on, we need innovative solutions to unusual problems. By using excess heat from data centres to slash energy bills for communities across the UK, Deep Green solves two problems with one solution."

# REEF REJUVENATION:

Restoring our planet's underwater ecosystems

Across the globe, several initiatives are prioritising the rejuvenation of our planet's damaged coral reefs.



In Indonesia's South Sulawesi province, coral reefs that were once devastated by dynamite fishing are experiencing remarkable regrowth, thanks to innovative methods utilising steel lattices. University of Exeter researchers, in collaboration with the Mars coral reef restoration programme, have observed that reefs equipped with steel lattices for over four years now boast nearly as much coral coverage as

nearby healthy reefs. Meanwhile, Fiji's tourism board introduced a unique Valentine's Day initiative this year, offering couples the chance to symbolically adopt a 'bouquet of coral' as an eco-conscious alternative to traditional flowers. The campaign not only raised funds and awareness for the challenges facing the region's coral reefs but also promoted sustainable consumerism and helped to enhance Fiji's reputation as an environmentally responsible tourism destination.

**REEFS EQUIPPED WITH STEEL LATTICES FOR OVER FOUR YEARS NOW BOAST NEARLY AS MUCH CORAL COVERAGE AS NEARBY HEALTHY REEFS**



ON OUR

ROAD

AR

# WHAT WE'VE BEEN READING AND LISTENING TO...



## The Climate Stories Our World Needs Now, TIME

This inspirational essay by Tom Rivett-Carnac and Oliver Jeffers discusses the transformative power of storytelling and mindset shifts required for climate action: “If we root our despair in climate change, then we must root our hopes in its solutions. It’s time to intentionally put our efforts into creating and sharing stories of what is possible. Stories that bring out the most extraordinary aspects of humanity: compassion, kindness, ingenuity, and creativity. These are the stories we can choose to tell. And we must choose to tell them together.”



## Things Fell Apart, Season 2, BBC Sounds

Writer and broadcaster Jon Ronson returns for a second series of his jaw-dropping podcast exploring the origins of the culture wars. From Covid conspiracies and Antifa hysteria, to racial and gender identity politics, free speech and protests against lockdown, Ronson discovers how easily words and misinformation can be abused to devastating effect. Highly recommended!



## How Business Can Avoid The Traps On The Way to Finding Purpose, Forbes

News that the UK arm of The Body Shop had fallen into administration came as a blow to many, particularly those of us who had grown up with the brand in the Nineties. This article is a reminder of the fundamental challenges that still exist for businesses that want to reconcile a higher purpose with keeping customers and investors happy. Referencing new book *Higher Ground*, the article highlights the importance of leaders “getting to grips with the real issues rather than bandwagons” and thinking about purpose holistically so it is aligned across all functions of the business.



# PORTER NOVELLI



## REACH OUT TO OUR TEAM:

### **Sarah Shilling**

EVP & Head of Strategic Services, EMEA  
[sarah.shilling@porternovelli.com](mailto:sarah.shilling@porternovelli.com)

### **Natalie Hall**

Associate Director, Purpose & Impact  
[natalie.hall@porternovelli.com](mailto:natalie.hall@porternovelli.com)

### **Follow us:**

[@porternovelli LinkedIn](#)  
[@porternovelli Instagram](#)