

# THE PERCEPTIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

BY CISION AND THE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

*An analysis of stakeholder conversations on Twitter  
about the environment and sustainability.*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	3
Methodology.....	3
Key Findings.....	4
Social Media Users Blame Big Oil, Among Others, for Climate Change.....	5
Where are Corporations Going Wrong?.....	7
Carbon Footprint.....	8
Greenwashing.....	9
Supply Chain.....	10
Patagonia Leads the Way in Corporate Handling of Climate Change.....	12
Three Different Camps of Social Media Users: Concerned, Unconvinced, and Dismissive.....	13
Concerned.....	14
Unconvinced.....	15
Dismissive.....	16
Recommendations for Communicators.....	17

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizations are increasingly turning their focus to fighting climate change through sustainable practices. [A 2022 report by Deloitte](#) found that 89% of executives agree there is a global climate emergency. Sustainable organizations are also being rewarded financially for their efforts. [A Korn Ferry study](#) found that purpose-driven companies post compound annual growth rates of 9.9% compared to an average of 2.4% for S&P 500 companies overall. However, companies are still accused often of greenwashing, or the act of making false or misleading claims about the environmental benefits of a product, service, technology, etc. ([Corporate Finance Institute](#), 2022).

The Institute for Public Relations and Cision examined conversations around environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) topics with a focus on the “E” in ESG – environment and sustainability.

Using Brandwatch’s Consumer Research tool, we analyzed over 170K Twitter posts discussing the intersection of business and sustainability to determine attitudes of consumers, employees,

and other key stakeholders toward sustainability and how well companies are doing to fight climate change. The key terms analyzed in this research report include:

- Carbon Footprint/Offset
- Corporate Sustainability Practices
- Corporate Regulation
- Greenwashing (disinformation disseminated by an organization to present an environmentally responsible public image)
- Supply Chain

## METHODOLOGY

Cision began by identifying terms relevant to the topic of business and sustainability and developed a robust search that we used to collect an overall body of relevant Twitter content. In order to explore specific aspects of the broader topic, we used keyword-based tags to focus on social conversation around themes such as greenwashing, supply chain management, regulation, values and specific industries. We conducted further quantitative and qualitative analysis to surface posts with high engagement and compelling messages to paint a picture of the evolving landscape around business and sustainability, including best practices and potential pitfalls.

# KEY FINDINGS

1

Employees are increasingly holding their employers accountable for their environmental practices. Some prominent examples include:

- o **Amazon employees** created a strike coalition they called “Make Amazon Pay,” a diverse group of employees fighting for different causes within the company including better wages and better environmental practices. “Make Amazon Pay” **demands that Amazon** take the following climate-related actions:
  - *Reach climate neutrality by 2030*
  - *Cease business activities which benefit companies extracting fossil fuels.*
- o More than 1,100 **employees at McKinsey** called out their company for worsening the climate crisis and asked management to stop working with high-polluting companies

2

Job seekers are prioritizing the environmental track record of companies when they are making decisions about potential jobs.

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3

Consumers and investors are wary of ESG claims if they’re not back by a meaningful, concrete actionable plan with goals and metrics.

- o Consumers are paying more attention to whether or not all parts of a company’s supply chain are sustainable and ethical
- 

4

Consumers want businesses to lead the way with sustainability practices such as reducing their production/ use of single-use plastics. Consumers also expect companies to have an ethical and sustainable supply chain.



# SOCIAL MEDIA USERS BLAME BIG OIL, AMONG OTHERS, FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

Individuals largely blame the oil and gas industry for climate change. Of the nearly 33,000 tweets about sustainability that mentioned fossil fuels, nearly half were tagged by Brandwatch as containing negative sentiment. Tweets tagged as positive were almost absent from the social media conversation.

Tweets also called out large financial institutions for failing to divest from Big Oil. Some claim big banks are a tool for the Fed to force ESG compliance.



Alex Epstein  
@AlexEpstein

A moral financial movement would eagerly seek to increase capital for all cost-effective energy, including fossil fuels. Instead, ESG is starving cost-effective energy of capital by pressuring companies to divest themselves of the fossil fuels the world desperately needs.

1:47 PM · Jan 6, 2022 · Typefully

22 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 98 Likes

## SOCIAL MEDIA USERS BLAME BIG OIL, AMONG OTHERS, FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

The public relations industry was mentioned 801 times in relation to sustainability, with the great majority of tweets tagged as neutral for sentiment.

Companies such as Apple, Disney, Amazon, and Microsoft have also been called out for their relationships with lobbying groups that oppose new legislature to fight climate change, despite the companies' public promises to fight climate change.



Executives from companies including Apple, Disney, Amazon, and Microsoft have been linked to lobbying groups backing a fight against the bill containing new measures to fight climate change — despite the companies' public promises to fight climate change.

**Apple, Disney, and others linked to groups fighting U.S. climate bill**



7:13 PM · Oct 1, 2021 · Twitter Media Studio

206 Retweets 27 Quote Tweets 290 Likes

Twitter users also brought Toyota into the conversation, citing their alleged obstruction of climate policies.



ILuvAmp 🧐❤️⚡  
@ILuvAmp

@Toyota dubbed as world's third-most obstructive company against climate policies



teslarati.com

Toyota dubbed as world's third-most obstructive company against cli...  
Independent think tank InfluenceMap has released its Corporate Climate Policy Footprint Report, which ranks the 50 most influential ...

8:30 PM · Jan 16, 2022



♡ 2    💬 Reply    ↗ Share

# WHERE ARE CORPORATIONS GOING WRONG?

## CARBON FOOTPRINT

Social media posted about the “personal carbon footprint,” or the total amount of greenhouse gases that are generated by an individual’s actions. Many Twitter users posited that the “personal carbon footprint” is a tactic used by big corporations to shift the blame for climate change from themselves onto individual consumers.



Sabrina Shankman   
@shankman



In case you were wondering how far companies would go to pin solving the climate crisis on individuals: I just got a PR pitch to buy carbon offsets for \*your breathing\*

What is happening.

10:27 AM · Dec 15, 2021 · Twitter Web App

110 Retweets 22 Quote Tweets 625 Likes

### GREENWASHING

As consumers become savvier about sustainability, they call out companies that make unfounded claims or deliver words without actions. Conscious consumers believe “if it sounds too good to be true, it likely is.” Greenwashing undermines consumers’ confidence in ESG in general.



Nate Van Cleve  
@natvancleve

Replying to @nickvanosdol

Imagine a future where every product claims carbon neutrality...

...and climate change continues to get worse.

What's to stop every company from greenwashing like this?



Paul Dawson  
@PaulEDawson

"We're currently witnessing a great deception, where the companies most responsible for catastrophically heating the planet are spending millions on advertising campaigns about how their business plans are focused on sustainability," @ClientEarth



theguardian.com

'A great deception': oil giants taken to task over 'greenwash' ads  
ClientEarth calls for tobacco-like health warnings on advertisements from fossil fuel firms

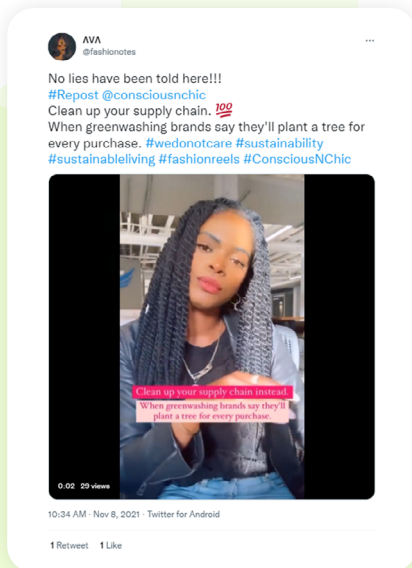
4:00 AM · Nov 14, 2021 · TweetDeck

78 Retweets 6 Quote Tweets 124 Likes

### SUPPLY CHAIN

Online consumers are pushing for companies to clean up their supply chain and publish their comprehensive Scope 3 footprint data in their sustainability reports. Scope 3 emissions are “the result of activities from assets not owned or controlled by the reporting organization, but that the organization indirectly impact in its value chain” (EPA, 2022).

Twitter users are also encouraging companies to provide supply chain details in their climate commitments and follow ups to these commitments.



## WHERE ARE CORPORATIONS GOING WRONG?

There was also conversation about how climate change is impacting the supply chain and related areas. Twitter users shared how natural disasters linked to climate change were directly affecting distribution of products and consequently, the supply chain.



EDF  
@EnvDefenseFund



With pie season upon us, bakers are facing a new threat to their livelihood: climate change. The cornucopia of ingredients that go into pie making are being squeezed by supply chain issues — some directly tied to climate change. [bit.ly/3coo23d](https://bit.ly/3coo23d)

7:30 PM · Nov 18, 2021



6



Reply



Share

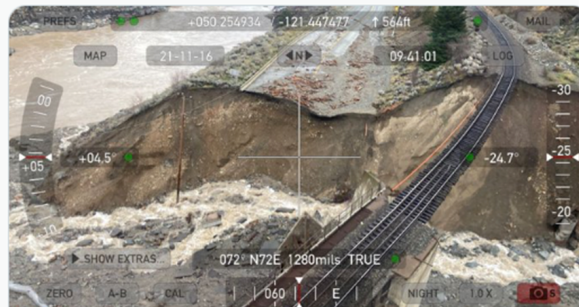
[Explore what's happening on Twitter](#)



Jonathan Overpeck  
@GreatLakesPeck



This is what human-caused climate change looks like: "The massive rains that unleashed floods & mudslides in British Columbia exposed the country's supply chain vulnerability as crucial railways and roads were severed from the country's biggest port"





# PATAGONIA LEADS THE WAY IN CORPORATE HANDLING OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Twitter users laud brands, especially impactful ones such as Patagonia and Ford, for their efforts in tackling climate change through long-term action. Patagonia CEO Ryan Gellert called for a higher corporate tax rate for climate investment and stopped advertising on Facebook since Facebook permitted posts containing misinformation about climate change.

Ford also stands out as a leader in this space with their track record of reporting on business sustainability.



Jim Farley  
@jimfarley98

Thanks to Bill Ford's leadership, 23 years ago @Ford issued its first sustainability report, which was a first for the auto industry.

Today we're releasing our 2022 report and a standalone human rights report – another first for the U.S. auto industry.



corporate.ford.com

#### Sustainability

We can make a positive impact on millions of people by empowering employees and protecting human rights in the ...

8:08 PM · Mar 31, 2022 · Twitter Web App

20 Retweets 148 Likes



Emily Atkin  
@emorwee

Wow -- Patagonia's CEO says the company supports a higher corporate tax rate to pay for climate investments, and says other companies should too

"The price of climate change is only going to increase. It will cost less if we pay now."



linkedin.com

Corporate America: Stop hiding behind the Chamber of Commerce and Busine...

Today and Friday, I am speaking at two events as part of the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26). As it happens, both are on...

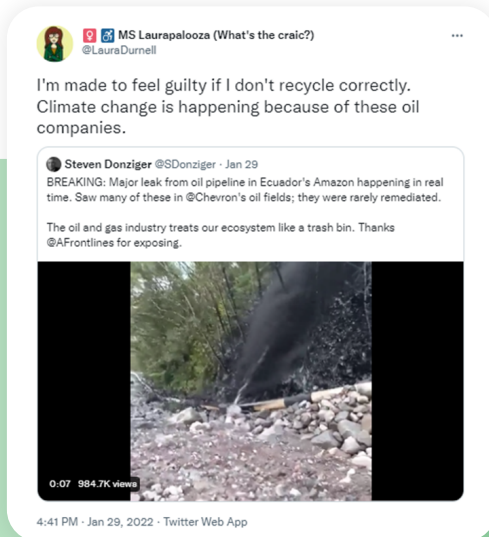
12:11 PM · Nov 4, 2021 · Twitter Web App

108 Retweets 12 Quote Tweets 454 Likes

## PATAGONIA LEADS THE WAY IN CORPORATE HANDLING OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Transparent reporting of sustainability practices is important, as individuals have reassessed their role in the climate crisis and now place the responsibility on corporations.

Access to more information has allowed individuals to understand the relative impact of their actions compared to those of big corporations, which has subsequently increased the pressure consumers place on corporations to do something about climate change.



# THREE DIFFERENT CAMPS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USERS: **CONCERNED**, **UNCONVINCED**, AND **DISMISSIVE**

Social media posters are unique because they are publicly engaging on the issue, compared to those who may not share their viewpoints on social media or simply view others' posts. Engaged social media users fell along points on a continuum of opinions about climate change, ranging from "concerned" to "unconvinced" to "dismissive."





## CONCERNED

- Highly engaged in the topic of climate change
- Uses social media as a platform to educate others about the issues, including how we got here
- Feels an ethical duty to speak out about action against climate change
- Uses emotional messages to persuade others to care about the issue or take action against it
- Calls on local, national, and global leaders to implement policy and regulations



Ross Gerber  
@GerberKawasaki

In a discussion this week I became convinced politicians will do nothing to stop our climate crisis. Only individuals changing behavior and business leaders making the effort to reduce our carbon footprint. #ClimateCrisis

6:16 AM · Nov 13, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

42 Retweets 4 Quote Tweets 546 Likes



Brianna Wu  
@BriannaWu

The most horrifying part of Covid is knowing it's a preview for how we'll handle climate change.

The adults will try lukewarm measures that prioritize business. The crazies will twist the destruction into a political advantage.

And we'll become numb to the death and chaos.

3:58 AM · Feb 18, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

206 Retweets 16 Quote Tweets 992 Likes



followGreta  
@GretaFollow

Worried about the climate crisis? We have plenty of company after the events of 2021: Heat waves, hurricanes, fires and floods hit new and deadly extremes. It's so critical that the UN declared a "code red" emergency. Yet there's hope if we act together.



crosscut.com  
Lessons from a year of reporting on climate solutions in the PNW | Crosscut  
11 steps Washington, Oregon and British Columbia can take to decarbonize the economy.

8:37 AM · Dec 26, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

20 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 32 Likes

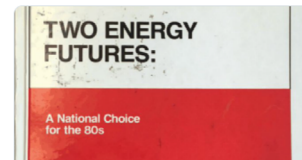


Carola Rackete  
@CarolaRackete

Never forget that the climate crisis is a crime scene.

The bosses of fossil fuel companies risk the safety of people for profit and deceived the public for decades. (thx to all who expose the files)

There is reason to be angry. Join a justice movement.



disinformationchronicle.substack.com  
In Their Own Words: The Dirty Dozen Documents of Big Oil's Secret Climate K...  
Science historian Ben Franta unpacks some of the most critical documents exposing what the fossil fuel industry knew and when they knew it.

12:39 PM · Jan 4, 2022 · Twitter Web App

62 Retweets 4 Quote Tweets 171 Likes



## UNCONVINCED

- Not as engaged in the topic of climate change as other groups
- Indecisive or inactive regarding sustainable practices in their personal lives
- Can be skeptical of climate scientists
- May minimize or avoid action because they are not sure how to make a difference
- May see climate change as a future rather than current problem, as immediate personal challenges are more important
- May ask a lot of questions
- Can be apathetic toward the issue (i.e., “I can’t even afford to pay for groceries, how can I be concerned about the environment”)



Chris Martz  
@ChrisMartzWX

70% of Americans are allegedly anxious and/or depressed about climate change. If I were them, I'd be more concerned about the astronomical increase in gas and grocery prices than what might or might not happen a century from now.

11:15 AM · Nov 9, 2021 · Twitter Web App

38 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 182 Likes

Karol Markowicz (columnist for the *New York Post* and *Fox News*) presented some reasoning that would fall under the “unconvinced” category in this tweet:



Karol Markowicz  
@karol

I wrote about this in 2016: people who say they're most worried about climate change do not act like they're worried about climate change and that sends the message to the rest of us not to worry about climate change. (P.S. it's very similar to COVID)  
[nypost.com/2016/01/24/why...](https://nypost.com/2016/01/24/why...)

Polls have long shown that Americans either don't believe in global climate change or don't consider it a serious issue. A Pew poll last November found that the United States was behind only China in its “concern” about climate change — but that such concern has grown substantially.

What polls also show, however, is that Americans are learning another lesson from our supposed elites: Believing in the existence of climate change or feeling “concern” is enough. Furrow your brow, and you're a hero. Even as belief and concern has increased in America, our behavior has stayed the same.

Could it be that we are hearing the hysterical pleas of “environmental activists” to change our ways or face doom and noticing that not only are they not changing their ways, but that their ways are far worse than our own? The loudest, most obnoxious and aggressive voices telling us the world is about to end plain old don't act like it.

We abandon ship when we see rats making a run for it, but these rats are lounging by the heated pool and playing shuffleboard on the Lido deck. When Leo heads for a lifeboat (admittedly his track record isn't on that score), the masses might follow.

All these activists sound very worried. But they don't act worried at all.

19 Retweets 83 Likes



## DISMISSIVE

- Active critics of climate change; they do not believe climate change should be a topic of concern
- May believe that climate change is a hoax
- Some are unable to see beyond the status quo into a different way of doing things more sustainably, while others are dismissive because of the complexities and breadth of climate science



Karen Harradine  
@KarenH777

If you aren't angry yet over what our overlords are doing to us through the diabolical twin agendas of Covid-19 and Climate Change, then you should be!

1:00 AM · Mar 1, 2022 · Twitter Web App

84 Retweets 3 Quote Tweets 402 Likes



seahawkfan76  
@the12thman76

The majority of people around the world know that "man made" climate change is a hoax & that its not possible to stop fossil fuel usage any time soon. This lie has been going around since the 50's & there are still a fraction out there that fall for it.



Kambree  
@KamVTV

I worried about fires when I permanently lived in California. This is my neighborhood. I did get scared at times because I never knew if it would be the homeless, arsonist, or my electric company who would start a fire during summer. They blamed climate change. They lie.



8:54 AM · Nov 9, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

301 Retweets 8 Quote Tweets 1,401 Likes



Glenn Beck  
@glennbeck

STOP doing business with any company that's on the ESG bandwagon. And tell them WHY you're taking your business elsewhere. That's how we end this.



3:10 PM · Jan 25, 2022 · Twitter Media Studio

200 Retweets 7 Quote Tweets 635 Likes



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNICATORS

## BE MINDFUL OF WHERE YOUR AUDIENCE MEMBERS LIE ON THE CONTINUUM

Knowing whether your social media audience is generally concerned, unconvinced, or dismissive of climate change will provide information on where their priorities lie and should be used to inform messaging toward these groups.

The Yale program on Climate Change developed six audiences from their research on the general public, rather than ours focused primarily on social media users, and their perceptions on science change. The “[Six Americas](#)” demonstrate that each of these archetypes respond to this issue in their own way.

## ADDRESS AUDIENCE MEMBERS WHO ARE UNCONVINCED

Unconvinced social media users often question why the loudest voices about climate change are not doing their fair share. Backing up claims with concrete action is especially pertinent with this audience, as that will make messages more credible.

## DO NOT ASSUME YOU HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS

Communicators and organizations should listen to what audiences are saying and, most importantly, *demonstrate* that the organization is listening.

## **BE AWARE THAT CONSUMERS ARE HOLDING COMPANIES ACCOUNTABLE**

Consumers are aware that companies do have the resources to make a change when it comes to the environment, and they are being vocal about their expectations for corporations to create change.

## **ENSURE THAT CLAIMS ARE BACKED BY ACTION, OR RISK BEING ACCUSED OF GREENWASHING**

Consumers are keeping an eye on corporate sustainability claims and practices. They also now have more access to corporate sustainability data through the media, and they are using this information to publicly place blame where they think it should be placed.

## **BE TRANSPARENT IN ALL COMMUNICATIONS REGARDING SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES**

This includes complete sustainability reporting which includes supply chain details and following up on sustainability commitments with periodic updates. If/when your company makes a mistake in the future, stakeholders are more likely to assume good intent if you have been historically transparent.

## **TAKE INDUSTRY INTO ACCOUNT**

Every industry has unique needs and issues that will impact the product, service, or consumer. Communicators should be aware of the client or organization's unique position to determine which factors should be considered in messaging.

## ABOUT US



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