



**KANTAR**

**SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION**

**BUILDING EFFECTIVE  
SUSTAINABLE MARKETING IN 2026**



2025 was an intense year. Geopolitical shocks, on-going economic pressures and the rapid acceleration of GenAI, many people entered 2026 feeling overwhelmed, uncertain and stretched.

Environmental sustainability competed for attention causing a decline in momentum, whilst social sustainability became more top of mind. But separating momentum from importance is key because consumers still care deeply, although still struggle to navigate what's true, what matters and which actions really make a difference. Brands need to make a strategic choice: dial back and risk irrelevance... or move forward with clarity, evidence and empathy.

For most people, what we call 'sustainability' has always been a set of lived concerns – basic human needs, the impact of climate on our life, inequality, pollution, health and safety – rather than an abstract concept called ESG.

Our latest [Sustainability Sector Index reveals](#) a striking truth: expectations remain high but trust and attention are fragile. Across 12 countries and 42 sectors, people want brands to help them act, not ask them to care more. They want less noise and more proof, fewer promises and more progress.

The challenge is to navigate this new landscape and unlock sustainable growth by showing up differently. Last year Kantar worked with more than 1,200 brands on sustainability and our Engagement Architecture identifies a series of layers that need to be considered before any sustainability message can land credibly and effectively. It's about starting with reality: ESG reality, consumer reality and sector reality. Only then can you decide how your brand should show up. Consumer and sector context will determine how to build an effective sustainability marketing approach in 2026.

THE ENGAGEMENT  
ARCHITECTURE  
FOR SUSTAINABLE  
MARKETING



**PARTNER WITH KANTAR**  
to shape your brand sustainability leadership and drive growth

SUSTAINABLE  
MARKETING IN 2026:  
CLARITY, CREDIBILITY AND ACTION

There are five key actions that separate the brands that are at risk of irrelevance and loss of trust from those that will lead.



- |  |  |   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| Adapt your voice, not your ambition. Relevance before volume. Proof before promises. | Put sustainability where people can feel it, not just hear it, to support equity building. | Start with category 'must-address' issues before you stretch the message. | If it isn't inclusive, it isn't convincing or scalable. | Design a behaviour, show the proof and reward the action. |
|--|--|---|---|---|

On the following pages will explain each of these actions, including:

- Why it matters;
- What the evidence shows; and
- And what you can apply immediately



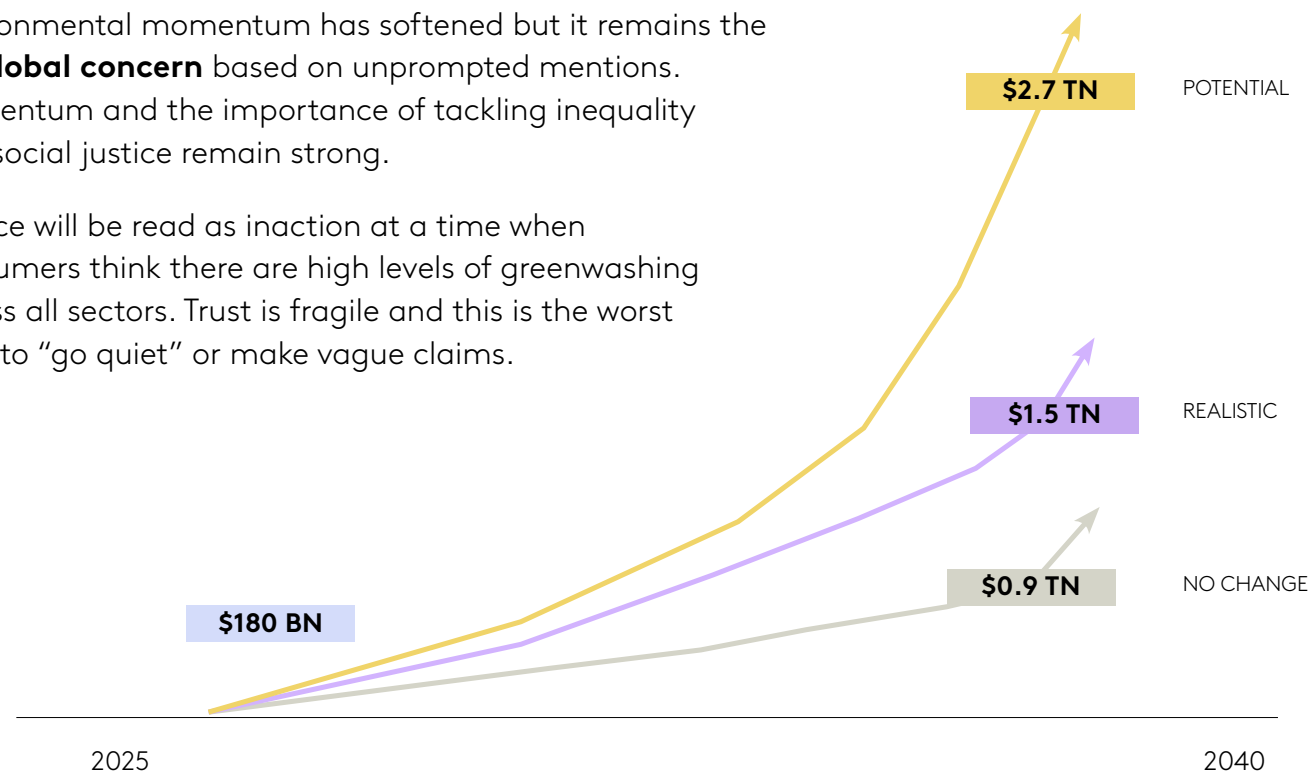
# 1 DON'T DIAL BACK

## ADAPT YOUR VOICE, NOT YOUR AMBITION.

Kantar BrandZ predicts the contribution of sustainability to the value of the Global Top 100 brands will reach a potential \$2.7 trillion by 2040, but only if brands get sustainability right.

In 2026, people are not disengaged, they're overwhelmed. Climate and environmental momentum has softened but it remains the **#2 global concern** based on unprompted mentions. Momentum and the importance of tackling inequality and social justice remain strong.

Silence will be read as inaction at a time when consumers think there are high levels of greenwashing across all sectors. Trust is fragile and this is the worst time to "go quiet" or make vague claims.



**This is not the time to cut back. This is the time to lead. This is not a moral issue anymore. It is a business imperative.**

**PETER BAKKER**

Former Nestle CEO, current WBCSD CEO

Source: Kantar BrandZ



### LOW LEVELS OF AWARENESS OF SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES ACROSS SECTORS AND COUNTRIES

On average only  
**15%**  
globally say they know a lot about brand sustainability efforts.

#### WHAT THIS MEANS:

Now is not the time to retreat. Brands that slow down will pay later because equity takes time to build. Integrity is foundation of trust and maintaining commitments shows authenticity. It is time to **show up with clarity, calm and concrete proof.**

#### WHAT TO DO:

- Keep sustainability visible. Current levels of awareness of brand initiatives are low – equity can't form if people don't know what your brand is doing
- Acknowledge the context and adapt your voice. Reduce cognitive load by making fewer, clearer claims
- Adapt tone to the 2026 mood: reassuring, confident and practical. This is not activism for its own sake, you need to lead with proof, not pledges

#### YOUR OPPORTUNITY:

Brands that maintain their ambition and adapt their communications will build trust, resilience and long term value.

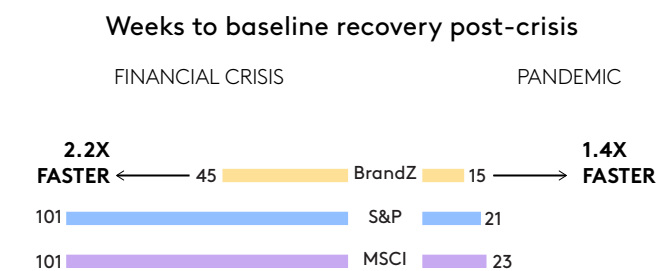
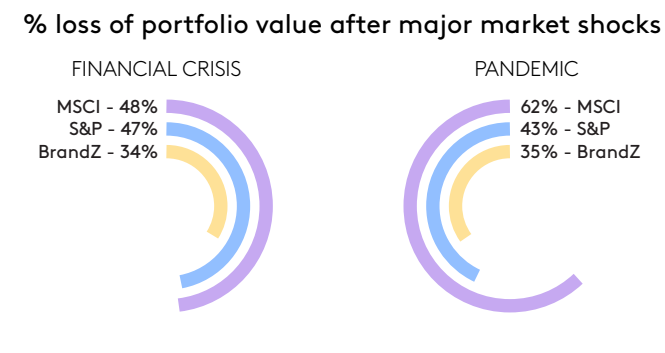


# 2 BE MEANINGFULLY DIFFERENT TO MORE PEOPLE

## PUT SUSTAINABILITY WHERE PEOPLE CAN FEEL IT, NOT JUST HEAR IT AND SUPPORT EQUITY BUILDING.

Strong brands outperform in times of uncertainty. Kantar BrandZ data demonstrates resilience and long-term outperformance when brands remain Meaningfully Different. Whatever disruption lies ahead, you need to ensure your brand is strong enough to weather the storms.

Our [LINK](#) database shows that ads with environmental or social content show higher levels of Meaningfulness (+6 percentile points) and Difference (+12 percentile points). Additionally showcasing sustainable behaviours can increase ad distinctiveness (+11 percentile points) and emotional engagement (+8 percentile points).



Source: Brand strength drives crisis recovery - Kantar

**Sustainability is not  
a trade-off between  
purpose and profit.  
It's the foundation  
of competitiveness,  
resilience, and growth.**

**SANDA OJIAMBO**  
UNGC CEO

## WHAT THIS MEANS:

More than ever, we must design sustainability marketing so that it is meaningfully different to more people:

- Meaningful is meeting consumers' functional and emotional needs, keeping the brand relevant
- Difference means standing out vs. your competitors and being unsubstitutable in peoples' minds

## WHAT TO DO:

- Talk about your sustainability efforts in a way that is consistent and connected with what the brand does and is known for
- Pair one functional proof (what changed, what's new) with one human benefit (why it matters to me). This will help people experience real benefit and meet their emotional needs: better quality, less waste, more convenience, safer choices and better value
- Measure the brand lift you care about: track your Sustainability Power (contribution to equity) not just warm sentiment. This should be a secondary KPI in all campaign readouts

## YOUR OPPORTUNITY:

Becoming Meaningfully Different through sustainability protects against disruption and accelerates growth.





# 3

## CHAMPION TOPICS FOR TRUST AND EQUITY

### START WITH CATEGORY 'MUST-ADDRESS' ISSUES FIRST, THEN STRETCH THE CONVERSATION.

People judge brands on a sector-by-sector basis. While waste, over consumption, plastics, carbon footprint and overpackaging come up as the five biggest issues across sectors, expectations and risks do vary dramatically. If we compare AI Tools and Milk (boxes on the right), we can see the areas of concern vary widely, for example. Communicating on irrelevant topics or using the wrong strategy puts customers' trust in your brand at risk.

### WHAT THIS MEANS:

Where your brand can credibly play depends on your sector. To be relevant, start exploring sector expectations before choosing your brand battles.

### WHAT TO DO:

- Map your sector's **"Shields"** – the 'must address' issues you have to visibly fix
- Identify sector relevant **"Swords"** – potential stretch topics that will make your brand stand out
- Sequence your message correctly: Shields first, Swords second. Plan ahead to develop market ready narratives that connect multiple issues (e.g., waste – circularity – affordability) in a way that allows you to tell a coherent story over time. Otherwise, you will appear to be making isolated claims
- Lead with the changes closest to consumer experience (e.g., packaging reduction, repair/return, resale) before marketing system-level commitments

### YOUR OPPORTUNITY:

A strong sustainability strategy is always sector native. When brands address the issues that people already associate with the category, they can build trust quickly and avoid scepticism.

### AI TOOLS

#### Top 5 Concerns

- Social isolation and loneliness
- Mental health issues
- Not enough learning and skills for the world ahead
- Lack of jobs with a sufficient living wage
- High carbon footprint of products and services

### MILK, YOGHURTS ETC..

#### Top 5 Concerns

- Animal cruelty and abuse
- Overpacking, single-use, non-recyclable packaging
- Waste
- Quality of food degradation
- Overproduction and overconsumption



# 4 BE INCLUSIVE

## IF IT ISN'T INCLUSIVE, IT ISN'T CONVINCING OR SCALABLE.

Inclusive advertising leads to higher short- and long-term sales. It builds closeness by making everyone feel that they belong.

Inclusion also means getting people invested in your actions. Successful brands make people feel empowered to make truly better choices. They stop being mere observers of your brand's good deeds and become connected participants on the journey.



## WHAT THIS MEANS:

Inclusion is core to growth. Sustainability will only scale when it works for the many, not the few.

## WHAT TO DO:

- Market and sector sophistication levels differ dramatically. Messaging that is too advanced can feel alienating, if it's too basic, it feels irrelevant. Meet people where they are
- Make the "how" visible: show the change in use (pack open, refill happening and repair kiosk working), proof before promises
- Use identity, community and rituals to keep good intentions alive
- Target for inclusion, design for mainstream: this is about belonging not barriers
- Review how positive and progressive your ads are perceived to be

## YOUR OPPORTUNITY:

The brands that win in 2026 will make sustainability feel like a natural part of everyone's everyday life, not a premium add on.





# 5 OFFER A WAY FORWARD

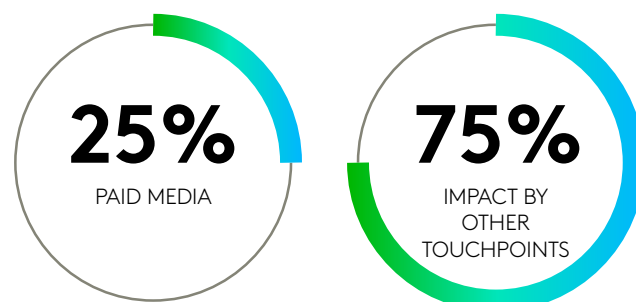
## DESIGN BEHAVIOURS, MAKE PROOF VISIBLE AND REWARD ACTION.

We often think of brand building as advertising and paid media. This is important but only makes up a quarter of the perceptions people have about brands. That leaves another 75% to be built by every other element of the journey, with a huge contribution made by sales and service experiences.

Brands must craft and deliver the right messages but ultimately people must experience more sustainable products, services or solutions to form positive perceptions. For example, consumers won't believe a sustainable substitute to a traditional detergent "cleans clothes well" until they've tried it.

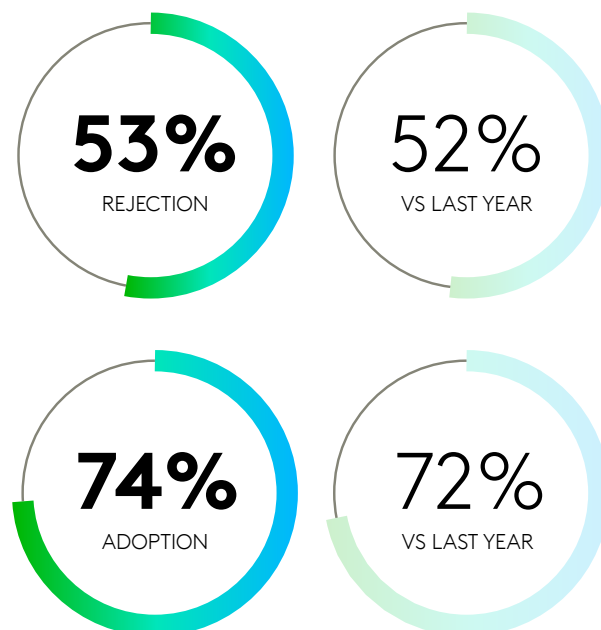
This understanding changes the game. Equity building is deeply tied to the fundamentals: the 4Ps (Product, Place, Price, Promotion) and demands investment and time, especially in mature categories where behaviours are deeply established.

What builds a brand? Everything



Source: 400.000 touchpoint evaluations across 550 Connect studies

Adoption and rejection -  
the dual effect of sustainability perceptions



## WHAT THIS MEANS:

Building equity isn't instant, it relies on market exposure and consumer experience. If the visibility of your brand's sustainability efforts is foundational, simply talking about sustainability isn't enough to guarantee engagement.

## WHAT TO DO:

- Build sustainability into the 4Ps by considering the end-to-end customer experience to identify key moments of effort and delight. Create a prioritised action plan of interventions
- Design a behaviour, not a claim: add at least one friction-removing feature (e.g. default refill, clear eco-label, instant buy-back credit) to the experience
- Plan for both sides of demand: track adoption (trial unlocks) and rejection (risk mitigation) explicitly in your brief and KPIs
- Experience turns intent and claims into belief. Boosting the trial of your sustainability solutions is a prerequisite for equity building

## YOUR OPPORTUNITY:

People want to act. Brands that make action easy win trust, trial and repeat behaviour.



# SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION: WHAT WILL MAKE THE DIFFERENCE IN 2026?

## CLARITY. CREDIBILITY. ACTION.

The brands that thrive in 2026 won't shout louder, they will show up smarter. They will:

- Stay present;
- Build meaningful difference;
- Focus on the right topics;
- Make action easy;
- Design for inclusion.

Above all, they'll ground everything in **evidence, sector context and human understanding.**

At Kantar, we help brands cut through the complexity of sustainability with data driven guidance, validated metrics and practical tools – from the Sustainability Sector Index to BrandSustainability, Brand Inclusion Index and LINK.

### Ready to turn sustainability ambition into meaningful difference?

[Visit our website](#) or contact your local Kantar representative to get started and see how we can help you unlock your brand's next wave of growth.

At Kantar, we are committed to providing the strategic intelligence you need for your brand to drive growth with sustainability.

Kantar can help your brand's sustainability strategy in multiple ways.

### UNDERSTAND TRENDS, SECTOR AND MARKET

Use [Sustainability Sector Index](#) and [DX Analytics](#) to reveal how sustainability is shaping your category and competitive landscape.

### DRIVE BRAND EQUITY

Use [BrandSustainability](#) to assess how your brand is perceived on sustainability with validated metrics and identify where to focus to drive brand equity.

### ENGAGE UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS

Understand how under represented audiences perceive your brand and where inclusion can drive growth with [Brand Inclusion Index](#).

### UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCES

Use [Bridging the Gap insights](#) to identify sustainability attitudes and behaviours across your audience groups.

### LAND YOUR SUSTAINABILITY MESSAGES

Look at [Kantar's and Ad Net Zero ad tracker](#) insights to understand how sustainable behaviours messaging lands and how well they support greener advertising goals.

### INNOVATED SUSTAINABLY

Evaluate [sustainable innovations](#) to ensure they meet real consumer needs and deliver impact.



