

**McCANN**  
WORLDGROUP

**the truth about**

# **SUSTAINABILITY**

Truth and Actions for a Hopeful Future

November 2021

the truth about

# SUSTAINABILITY

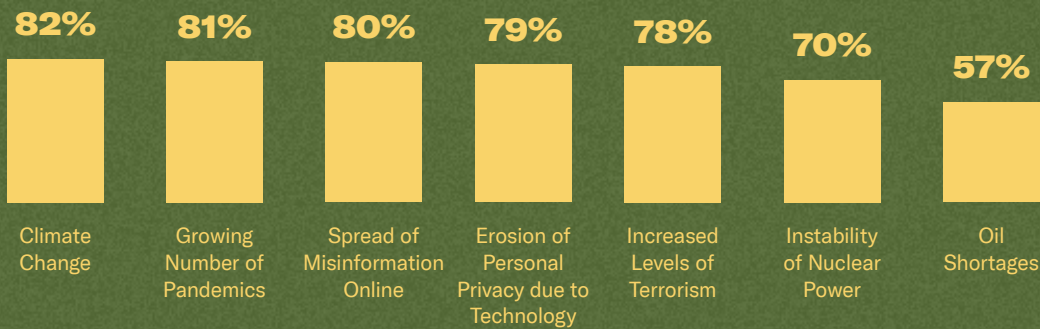
## Truth and Actions for a Hopeful Future

The issues of sustainability and climate change are among the most important of our time, with **82% of people globally saying climate change is the biggest challenge facing the world in the next 20 years**, on par with the threat of a growing number of pandemics.

Today, sustainability is affecting everything from government policy to consumer behavior to identity politics to marketing efforts.

To tell the new story of sustainability, we start not from a place of business imperative or technological innovation, but from a place of humanity. From that vantage point, we can begin to navigate the ways in which brands and businesses can recast their strategic efforts to contribute to a healthy planet where everyone can thrive.

### Predictions on What Challenges the World Will Face in the Next 20 Years



In order to best understand this issue from the ground up, we used the following methodology:

**32,000** Global Interviews across 26 markets (Wave 1, 2019).

**11,700** Global Interviews across 18 markets (Wave 2, 2021).

**1,000** Online qualitative community interviews across 24 markets.

**455** Interviews across the global McCann Worldgroup network.

**13** Expert interviews across a range of geographies and disciplines.



# Chapter 2

## Deep Sustainability Stories

...We need to humanize this critical issue.

If we're going to humanize this critical issue, it's imperative that we dive into the distinctly human stories and think beyond a one-size-fits-all solution.

### Culture

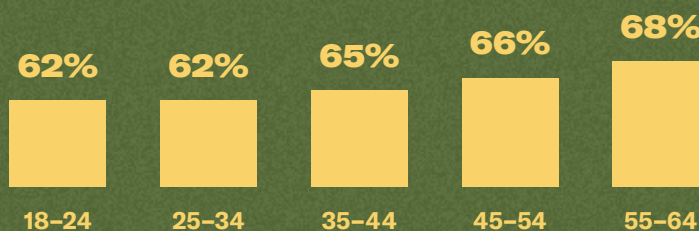
Sustainability is a global challenge with local nuances. Our cultural contexts play a key role in understanding how sustainability is not only perceived but acted upon across the world. In our research, we explore how to connect with people across an attitudinal segmentation (right).

By understanding the distinct composition of these groups in specific markets, we can flex our messaging and strategic efforts to align with them. Not every solution will work for every market, and brands will have to tap into the cultural context to be successful.

### Generations

While Gen Z is an activist generation, **when asked specifically about climate change, our findings reveal that people aged 55–64 are more likely to say they are concerned than those aged 18–24.** “Greta” has become a catch-all for “young people care about the environment” and brands are potentially missing a trick by not nurturing connections between generations.

The Percentage of People Worried About Climate Change



### Parents

A sometimes overlooked group of individuals with real skin in the game are parents. When asked specifically about climate change, our research uncovered that **70% of parents globally are more worried compared to 61% of non-parents.** It's their passion and vision for future generations that could save the day.

### Income

Being “sustainable” is often associated with great expense and privilege, causing people to give up the fight. Globally, **the number one barrier to living a sustainable life is that “it's too expensive.”** Reframing sustainability as an exercise in accessible simplicity can shift the narrative away from sustainability being for the 1%.



#### Truth

Sustainability isn't just for the young, for the developed world, or for the wealthy. It needs to be for all of us.



#### Provocation

Instead of focusing on speaking to a million eco-warriors, how can we fuel impact and create 7 billion imperfect environmentalists?

**39%**

**Worrying Witnesses**

“I worry but feel powerless to stop it.”

**31%**

**Anxious Activists**

“I constantly worry about climate change.”

**12%**

**Headline Handwriters**

“I only worry about it when a disaster occurs.”

**11%**

**Distracted Denizens**

“I don't worry about climate change.”

**7%**

**Reality Refuters**

“I don't believe climate change is real.”

## Chapter 3

# From Darkness Comes Light

*...We need to create a global narrative and action for everyone.*

We've identified key shifts to propel us towards meaningful change in the world. Each shift can be harnessed to reveal more ways that are good for business and good for the people and planet we need to protect.

### From Changing Culture to Enriching Culture

The good news is that **90% of people globally are willing to change something to live more sustainably**, whether by reducing plastic use to commuting by bicycle. But cultural context matters, and local nuance will inform action. For example, in India, where there is a preponderance of vegetarianism, people are most likely to say they will give up meat to fight climate change. By meeting people where they already are, we can build onto existing habits and norms to spark real enduring change.

### From Less Stuff to More Living

Much sustainability-based messaging is about asking people to stop behaviors or give things up. When asked directly, **only 13% of people are willing to give up meat, and only 9% are willing to limit international travel**. A creative, hopeful approach to behavior changes at both the individual and corporate level is far more effective than one of sacrifice and deprivation.

Meaningfully addressing sustainability through a lens of "more" (more time, health, flourishing, community, joy) rather than less (less sickness, pollution, stress, exploitation), reveals opportunities to unleash creativity to solve challenges that shape a hopeful future.

### From Hard Decisions to Easy Defaults

When asked who has the greatest responsibility for reversing climate change, the top three answers are pegged neck and neck.



**44%**

**National Government**



**43%**

**Companies & Businesses**



**41%**

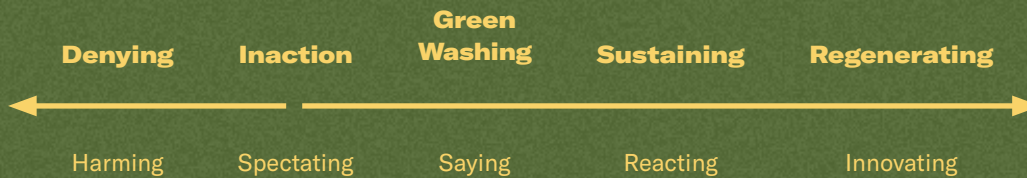
**People Like Me**

People are tired of the mental gymnastics when it comes to purchasing decisions, and sustainability needs to be the accessible default choice. **1 in 3 people say they sometimes buy the cheapest option even if they know it's bad for the environment**. If brands are perceived to hold equal responsibility as the government and everyday people, why put customers in a position to choose "the most sustainable option?"

## From Creative Messaging to Creative Business

With **77% of people globally saying that brands have more power to make a positive impact than the government**, there is enormous potential and responsibility for brands in this space.

Ultimately, we must move away from framing our efforts as “sustainable” or “green.” Sustainability is how good business should function. By building sustainability into every aspect of the business, we can unlock true innovation that leads to fundamental change.



When it comes to sustainability, there’s an enduring cultural myth that you need to perfectly recycle, be a vegan, and live a holistically sustainable lifestyle to have a role to play. But collective imperfect progress is the only true way forward. While governments, brands, and individuals all share responsibility for reversing climate change, the simple truth is that it’s individual humans that make up our institutions, communities, and groups. So, how can we move forward together in an imperfect way to craft a far better future for all?

## Want to learn more?



To learn more about our work please visit  
[www.mccannworldgroup.com/about/truth](http://www.mccannworldgroup.com/about/truth)



For any follow-up requests or questions, please contact us at  
[truth.central@mccann.com](mailto:truth.central@mccann.com)



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