

From insights to influence: Social listening as a tool for social responsibility

By [Katherine McInnes](#), issued by [Meltwater](#)

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Terms like 'environmentally sustainable', 'eco-friendly', and 'fair trade' have become part of everyday conversations. One thing is clear - the appeal of environmentally and socially responsible products isn't a niche anymore, its popularity cuts across demographics. The good news is that brands can gain invaluable insights, engage with their audience, and drive meaningful change, thanks to the exponential growth of such thought-provoking conversations on social media. The growing prominence of [social listening tools](#) and the surging demand for eco-friendly products present brands with great opportunities to prioritise social responsibility and establish a distinctive, positive positioning.



In fact, over the course of the last five years, products that made ESG-related claims accounted for [56%](#) of all growth, surpassing initial expectations by around 18%. For the sake of comparison, in two-thirds of categories, products that made ESG-related claims grew faster than those that didn't.

Leveraging the potential of social listening

The sustainability dialogue is one of sensitive nature, and evidently so. Besides, consumers along with an organisation's ongoing sustainability efforts, it's also crucial to monitor sustainability-related conversations around the brand, primarily to track the progress of reputation development but also to identify potential risks or negative sentiment around their environmental and social responsibility efforts.

Over a period of time, marketers should analyse the most prevalent themes and sentiments, while also paying attention to the voices of individuals and communities engaging with the brand. Besides, it's advantageous to track competitor activity in parallel to help craft a distinctive communication strategy for the brand, incorporating actionable insights to strike the right chord with the intended audience.

Growing awareness and social media engagement

Consumers are increasingly becoming more informed and vocal about socio-environmental matters. It's no surprise that social media is fertile ground for sustainability conversations. Allowing for a wide dissemination of relevant information, ideas, and discussions, it brings together individuals from around the globe and facilitates engagement that might otherwise have been impossible to take place at such a scale.

It also provides a powerful platform for creating awareness about issues that may be underrepresented in mainstream

media. Especially when it comes to matters of sustainability and environmental concerns, social media platforms also play a profoundly influential role in shaping perspectives and promoting social and environmental justice.

If we look at the social media mentions of 'green' product-related keywords, including 'sustainable', 'compostable', 'eco-friendly', and 'zero-waste', from 1 April 2022, through to 31 March 2023, there were an impressive 31.3 million of them. That represents a whopping 356% increase from the previous 12 months.

Actively tracking hashtags using social media metrics around various platforms is a highly rewarding way in which businesses can streamline their digital marketing strategy. For instance, 'sustainable' was the top hashtag in the global eco-friendly conversation, followed by #savesoil, the global movement to fight soil degradation.

When we say social media, it's prudent to keep in mind that we also need to consider forums that catalyse grassroots movements and activism, including environmental and social justice initiatives, like Reddit. It promotes thoughtful discussions and incentivises users to present logical and evidence-based arguments to substantiate their perspective. With a membership of over 1.2 million, the vegan Reddit forum r/Vegan, garnered an impressive 49.3K mentions from a curated list of 'green' keywords. It was followed by r/AskReddit, the site's advice forum and r/ZeroWaste, a low-and zero-waste lifestyle forum.

Monitoring and responding to relevant consumer conversations can be immensely beneficial for brands. Brands that can leverage community dynamics and deliver compelling responses to audience inquiries and reactions will amplify the effectiveness of their sustainability communications.

Customer journeys and social channels

Let's divide customer journeys into four parts, starting from when they want something, when they get it, when they use it, and ultimately, when they promote it. During the 'want it' stage, the phrases people use to find products include 'where do I find' and 'looking for recommendations'. While in the 'get it' stage, phrases and keywords like 'placed an order' or 'buying' are used to talk about purchases. Subsequently, in the 'use it' stage, consumers use phrases such as 'I used' or 'we're wearing' to talk about products they have. Finally, in the 'promote it' stage, they use phrases such as 'worth getting' or 'I recommend' to promote the products they enjoy using.

TikTok, Pinterest and Reddit are the top channels for promoting eco-friendly products and finding recommendations. While Twitter is where consumers head to discuss the products they've just purchased, WeChat has the highest proportion of mentions of consumers talking about products they are using. Reddit too, may be joining the league of TikTok and Pinterest as a top product discovery destination.

Staying authentic – in actualisation and articulation

With more and more consumers turning to minimalism, thrifting, and similar sustainable practices in their daily lives, sustainability is gradually becoming a way of life. It's important for brands to stay authentic without giving in to the temptation to greenwash. Moreover, it's effective sustainability communication that will convey the right message to consumers. That has to be built from quality information and proof points presented in the most compelling way to create a desirable impact on the intended audience.

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