

Principles

INSIGHT



Sustainable development:
brand perceptions

Sustainable development

The war on plastic and beyond

This year has seen brands embark on a war on plastic. The discovery and exposing of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch has alerted consumers, brands and governments to the need to reduce our plastic waste.

But our plastic addiction is not the only thing we need to give up. As a society we need to significantly reduce our carbon footprint so that we can start to mitigate the impact of climate change.

At Principles Insight we wanted to look at what brands should focus on next, after plastic, to meet the needs of consumers who want to act to save the planet.

Key findings

Consumers are a receptive audience for sustainability messaging. They care.

Although many consumers are willing to take some responsibility, in their eyes companies also have a high level of duty.

Supermarkets lead the way on turning around brand perceptions. They are now generally viewed positively by consumers after taking a series of actions.

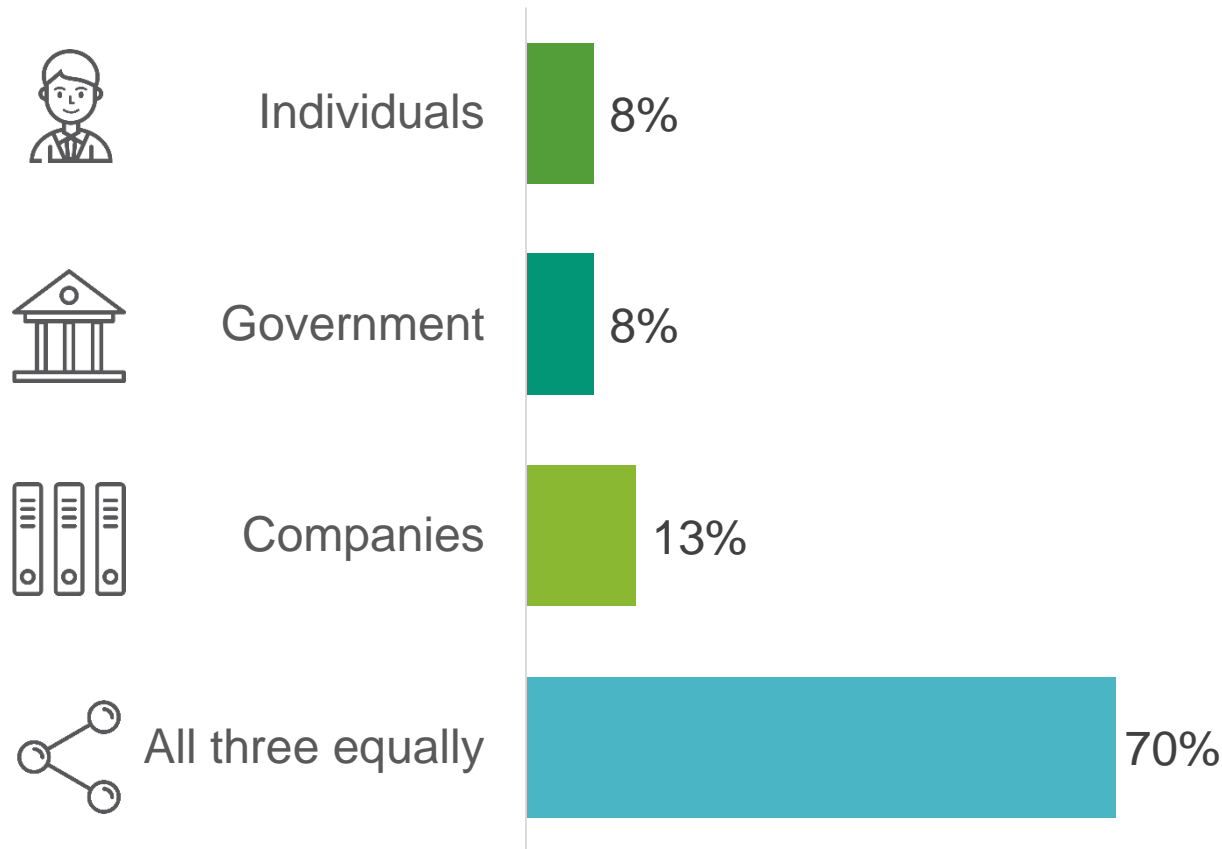
Other sectors can learn from supermarkets. Adopting more sustainable practices and communicating how you are changing will chime with consumers.

Brands that have committed to sustainability – who adopt sustainable practices throughout their business practices - are resonating strongly with consumers.

There is an opportunity for brands in negatively perceived sectors to be the first mover, and own sustainable perceptions in the sector.

Who is responsible?

The vast majority of consumers believe primary responsibility is split between individuals, consumers and the government. However, there is a sense that the balance of responsibility tilts towards businesses.

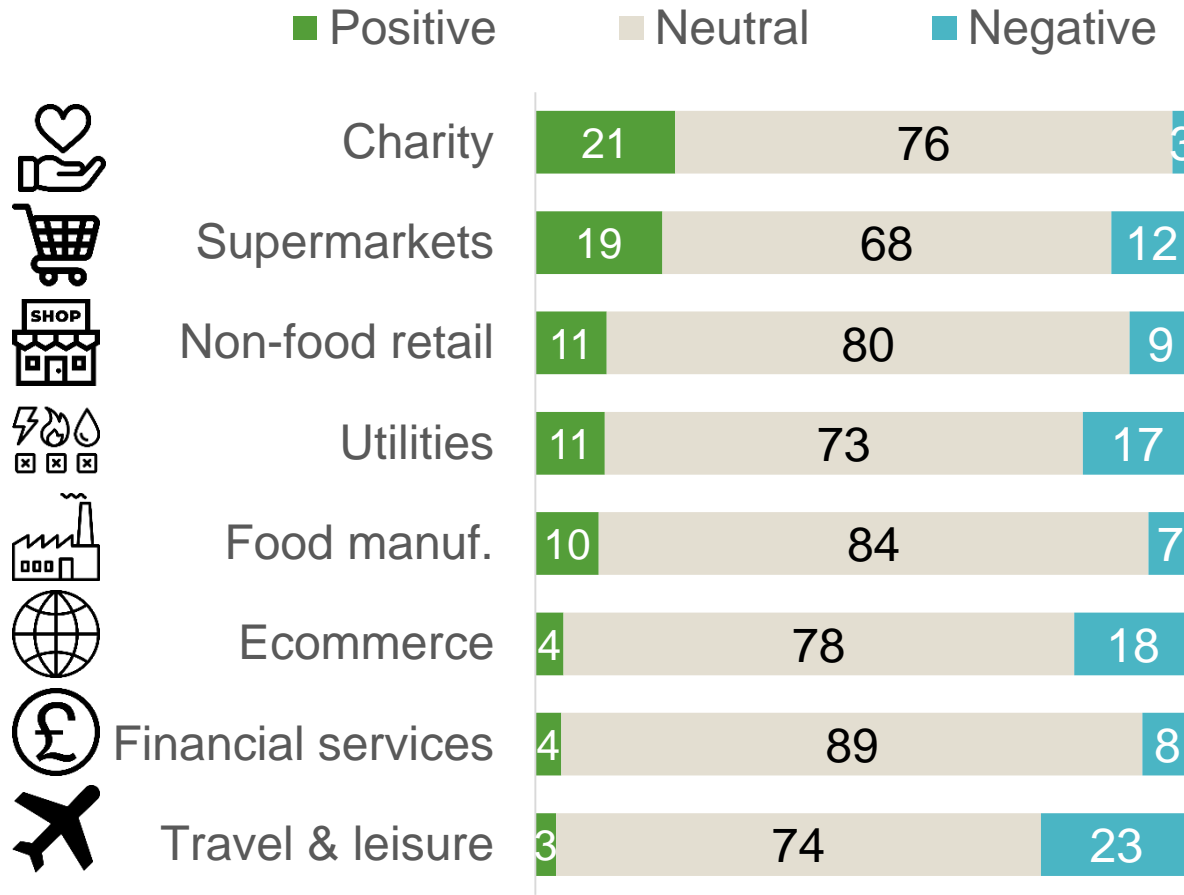


Younger consumers are more likely to place responsibility on companies and the government

- > 17% of under 35s feel sustainable development is the sole responsibility of companies (compared to only 12% of those aged 55+).
- > Older consumers are more likely to believe in shared responsibility, with 78% stating the duty is shared equally amongst individuals, companies and the government

Perceptions by sector

The charity sector is generally viewed very positively, with little negative sentiment. Supermarket sentiment is polarised, the sector has the second highest positive and fourth highest negative perception.



% Average sentiment for group of brands per sector

Supermarkets changing perceptions






- > Supermarkets have historically been associated with significant negative effects on sustainability, with plastic packaging, food miles and general food waste. However, the sector is increasingly pushing its green credentials through schemes such as wonky veg, removing or reducing plastic, and promoting local produce.

Brands in other sectors can follow suit

- > Just as supermarkets have taken steps to promote their sustainable schemes, other sectors can also promote their actions.
- > Utilities, e-commerce and travel brands in particular should implement and promote sustainable practices to increase their appeal.

Brand perceptions – top 5

When it comes to brands specific perceptions, those which are truly committed to sustainability come out on top.

Top 5 brands	% selecting brand as having positive impact on sustainability	Why are they performing well?
	50%	Greenpeace leads the way driven by their environment focus and charity status
	29%	The Co-op is regarded as a brand with strong ethical and community values, which is likely to drive this high performance.
	25%	Morrisons were one of the first supermarkets to take sustainability seriously, with wide praise for their “wonky veg” sections that were introduced several years ago.
	21%	Quorn is a well established meat alternative. With rising awareness around meat sustainability, we believe it will continue to be seen as a sustainable brand.
	20%	Iceland as a brand is dedicated to sustainability. Recent palm oil and plastic free campaigns are likely to have had a positive impact on brand perceptions.

Brand perceptions – bottom 5

Amazon and travel companies have high negative associations. Brands in these sectors that prioritise sustainability exploit this differentiation to gain advantage in a competitive market

Bottom 5 brands	% selecting brand as having negative impact on sustainability
	35%
	34%
	29%
	22%
	22%

Amazon takes the blame for the wide ranging negative effects of ecommerce

- > Ecommerce is often associated with long delivery miles, excess packaging and often selling 'throwaway' products.



Big travel companies closely follow

- > There is an opportunity for travel companies to benefit from first mover advantage in the sustainability space.
- > Schemes such as carbon offsetting or low carbon emission vehicles could be areas to explore and communicate with consumers.

Within each sector we have seen
considerable variance in the
perceptions of key brands.

Brand perceptions – Non-food retail

Non-food retailers are a mixed bag, again those which perform well are those brands with the strongest ethical credentials.

Brands	% positive	% negative
	18%	6%
M&S	13%	9%
	13%	9%
John Lewis	9%	8%
TOPSHOP	1%	16%

Topshop suffers from fast fashion






- > Topshop had particularly strong negative perceptions and suffers from strong consumer association with throwaway fashion.

No brand truly owns the sustainability space here

- > Lush performs well, but still is quite far behind when compared to the more ethical supermarkets
- > While Lush covers more of a niche market, no big brand performs well enough to be a well-known “sustainable” brand.

Brand perceptions – Online

Interestingly, online retailers as a whole have strong negative associations with sustainability, with plenty of scope for improvement.

Brands	% positive	% negative
	8%	35%
	8%	12%
	3%	11%
	2%	17%
	1%	15%

A number of factors are likely to influence perceptions








- > Excess packaging, long delivery distances, fast fashion and association with single use plastic products.

There is an opportunity for a brand in this space to push sustainability messaging

- > There are a number of areas online retailers could push their existing sustainable credentials e.g. cutting out the need for consumer travel, 100% recyclable packaging etc.
- > Amazon in particular should take heed as they have such high negative associations, but have the scale to work on sustainability messaging and make it a positive attribute for the brand.

Brand perceptions – Supermarkets

Supermarkets are generally viewed positively when it comes to sustainability, but some brands remain quite divisive.

Brands	% positive	% negative
	29%	8%
	25%	11%
	20%	10%
	17%	13%
	17%	17%
	14%	9%
	13%	13%

Ethical brands stand out from the crowd






- > Those brands with strong ethical and sustainable values stand out with high positive and relatively low negative perceptions.

The big 3 have ground to make up on sustainable leaders

- > The similar positive and negative scores indicate that consumers are not as convinced by the approaches taken by Asda, Tesco or Sainsbury's.
- > We believe the sentiment stems from an industry with a past history of unsustainable actions e.g. plastic bags & packaging.
- > The larger supermarket brands have ground to make up on the smaller but more ethically devoted brands and may need to take bold stances to catch up.

Brand perceptions – Travel & leisure

Travel brands are widely thought of as having a negative impact on sustainability. Overseas travel has a particularly negative impact on brands.

Brands	% positive	% negative
	10%	7%
 Thomas Cook	2%	29%
	1%	22%
	1%	22%
	1%	34%

All overseas travel brands have negative perceptions





- > Only UK based Center Parcs is held in relatively positive regard.

Travel brands should look to take a lead on sustainability

- > Shorter term sustainability could be achieved with areas such as adopting lower CO2 planes, carbon offsetting emissions.
- > There is an opportunity for a travel company to gain first mover advantage and be known as the sustainable travel brand.

Brand perceptions – Utilities

Water companies are currently the only utility business associated with more of a positive impact on sustainability

Brands	% positive	% negative
Local water company	16%	11%
	11%	17%
	10%	16%
	8%	21%
	8%	18%

Utilities is a sector where brands are starting to compete to be known for sustainability

- > E.on recently switched 3.3 million homes to 100% renewable electricity free of charge.
- > British gas have recently announced all their vehicle fleet will be 100% electric by 2030.
- > Scottish Power are focussing on onshore wind policy.
- > This sector, similarly to supermarkets, is undergoing a transformation towards a sustainable model and away from the highly unsustainable practices of the past.

Contact us to find out more

This report provides some highlights from our study, but we have plenty more we are keen to share. Get in touch to find out more.

More findings to share on:

- > How receptive consumers are to sustainable products
- > General consumer attitudes and practices around sustainability
- > Further sustainable actions beyond the war on plastic
- > Distinct demographic differences around sustainability



THANK YOU!

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