



A Guide to Sustainable
Communication For Brands

Beyond Compliance: Mastering ESG Communication



Admind BRANDING AND
COMMUNICATIONS

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01 Introduction to sustainability



Understanding sustainability: a practical framework for today's business and marketing

As companies face growing expectations around environmental and social responsibility, sustainability has become essential to how businesses connect with people and show their values. While regulations apply to the whole company, it's the **brand** – the part of the company that customers and the public see – that reflects these commitments.

A **brand** is the way people think and feel about a company's products, services, and reputation. For this reason, sustainability efforts need to be clearly communicated through the brand to **build trust** and **create real connections with audiences**.

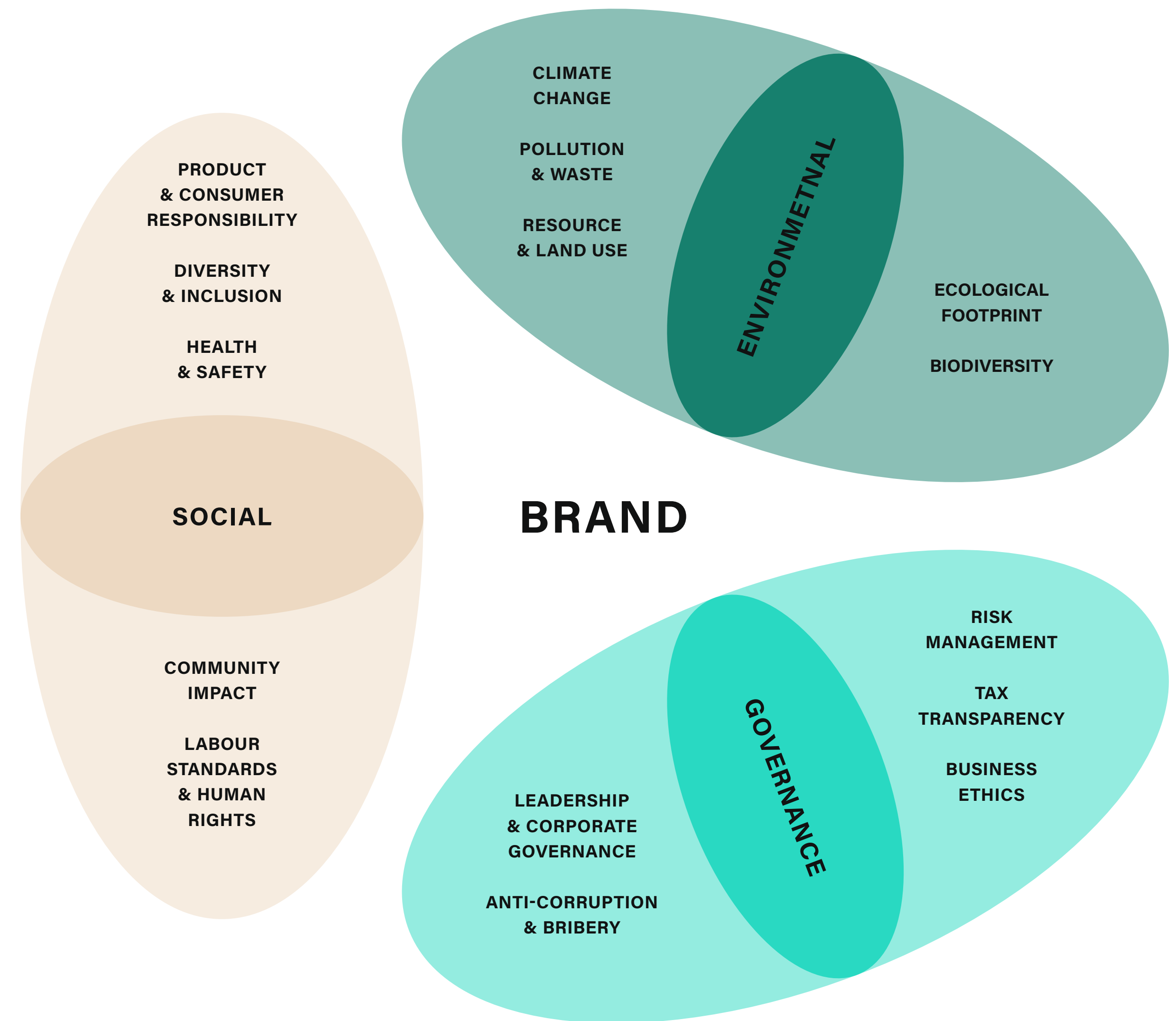
In recent years, sustainability – often structured through the **ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance)** framework – has become a key approach influencing business operations and marketing. It is now a guiding principle that shapes how companies operate, communicate, and build relationships with stakeholders.



Originally linked to responsible investing, sustainability now influences all areas of business, especially marketing. It represents a holistic approach that aligns business goals with social and environmental responsibility through three core pillars:

- **Environmental:** This focuses on what your brand does to protect the planet. It includes efforts to reduce carbon emissions, minimize waste, and promote the responsible use of resources. For example, a company committed to sustainability may prioritize renewable energy, limit plastic use, or actively reduce its carbon footprint. Additionally, companies are expected to understand and manage how their supply chains impact the environment, demonstrating a commitment to eco-conscious practices that resonate with environmentally aware consumers.
- **Social:** The social part of sustainability is about how a brand treats people – its employees, customers, and the community. This includes policies on diversity, mental health, labor rights, and community support. Brands that promote inclusivity, provide fair working conditions, and support local communities demonstrate a commitment to people over profit. This area shows the brand’s role in creating a positive impact on society.
- **Governance:** Governance is about the rules and practices a brand follows to ensure ethical and transparent operations. This includes policies to prevent corruption, ensure diversity in leadership, and communicate sustainability goals clearly to stakeholders. Strong governance builds confidence among investors and customers, showing that the brand operates responsibly and transparently.

These three pillars help brands not only meet regulatory expectations but also build a strong reputation, making sustainability a key part of today’s brand identity.



02 Why sustainability is important in marketing



For brands today, incorporating sustainability principles into marketing strategies goes beyond merely complying with regulations – it's about genuinely connecting with the values of customers, employees, and investors. Research shows that modern consumers are increasingly drawn to brands that demonstrate a true commitment to sustainable and ethical practices.

According to **Deloitte's Global Millennial Survey**, over 70% of millennials are more likely to choose brands that support sustainability. This survey highlights millennials' preferences for brands that align with social and environmental values.⁰¹

Additionally, **PwC's Global Consumer Insights Survey** reveals that consumers across all demographics are willing to pay a premium for products that are environmentally friendly or socially responsible. PwC's survey outlines shifting consumer behaviors and the increasing importance of ESG in purchasing decisions.⁰²

In the corporate realm, **KPMG's Survey of Sustainability Reporting** highlights that nearly 80% of the world's largest companies now produce sustainability reports, showing the rising importance of transparent communication of ESG practices.⁰³

Similarly, **EY's Global Institutional Investor Survey** confirms that investors are more likely to support companies with strong ESG practices, seeing them as indicators of long-term stability and reduced risk. This survey provides insights into the growing significance of ESG among institutional investors.⁰⁴

⁰¹ You can find more insights from Deloitte's survey here: <https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html>

⁰² Explore the full report here: <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/industries/consumer-markets/consumer-insights-survey.html>

⁰³ This comprehensive report offers a deep dive into sustainability reporting trends and can be accessed here: <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/11/the-time-has-come-survey-of-sustainability-reporting.html>

⁰⁴ Full details are available here: https://www.ey.com/en_gl/assurance/how-will-esg-performance-shape-your-future

By integrating sustainability into their marketing, brands can establish stronger connections with customers, attract values-driven investors, and position themselves for lasting success in an increasingly values-oriented market.

Bringing sustainability into marketing helps brands succeed and meet the growing demand for responsibility:

- **Attract values-driven investors** – Integrating sustainability demonstrates a long-term vision, appealing to investors who prioritize ethical impact alongside financial returns.
- **Strengthen customer connections** – Sustainable practices resonate with consumers, especially in markets that prioritize values alignment, helping brands differentiate and build customer loyalty.
- **Talent attraction and retention** – A clear commitment to sustainability draws in top talent from the market and fosters employee loyalty, as people are increasingly drawn to companies with a purposeful mission that aligns with their values.
- **Risk mitigation and compliance** – Emphasizing sustainability helps brands stay ahead of regulatory trends and mitigate potential risks associated with environmental and social impacts.
- **Operational efficiency** – Sustainable practices often lead to greater operational efficiencies, reducing costs and contributing to better overall financial performance.
- **Enhanced brand reputation** – Companies committed to sustainability are seen as forward-thinking leaders, which can elevate their public image and give them a competitive edge in their industry.
- **Long-term market positioning** – Building a reputation around sustainability positions brands for success in a market that increasingly favors companies focused on ethical impact.

03 What you need to know before starting sustainable communication

Understanding and aligning with European Union ESG regulations



03.1 Introduction: Why knowing the regulations matters

For marketers venturing into sustainability and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) communications, understanding the regulatory framework in the European Union (EU) is essential. While creative storytelling and impactful visuals are important, ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards prevents greenwashing and builds trust. Marketing teams must work closely with legal advisors in the relevant jurisdictions to align their messages with regional regulations.

NAVIGATING EU SUSTAINABILITY AND ESG REGULATIONS

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE EUROPE | GREEN DEAL New deal for consumers | | | | |
| | These overarching EU strategies aim to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and empower consumers to make sustainable choice. | | | | |
| CORE FRAMEWORK | TAXONOMY | | | | |
| | WHAT IT COVERS Applies to sectors such as energy, finance, manufacturing and infrastructure. Defines criteria for activities, contributing to climate goals. | WHO SHOULD CARE Organizations promoting green financial products, renewable energy or sustainability-focused services. | | | |
| | CSRD DIRECTIVE | | | | |
| | WHAT IT COVERS Mandates sustainability reporting for large organizations, focusing on ESG impacts. | WHO SHOULD CARE Corporations across industries like retail, logistics and automotives must align with the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). | | | |
| SUPPORTING POLICIES | GREEN CLAIMS | ECO-DESIGN AND LABELING | CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT | PACKAGING AND PACKAGING WASTE REGULATION | |
| | WHAT IT COVERS | Requires substantiation of all sustainability claims with verifiable data | Sets requirements for product design to improve recyclability and energy efficiency | Ensures accurate, accessible product information for consumers | Limits unnecessary packaging and mandates recyclability |
| | WHO SHOULD CARE IN A FIRST PLACE | Marketing teams in all industries should focus on clarity and avoid greenwashing | Manufacturers in electronics, appliances and consumer goods | Companies in consumer goods, retail and services should ensure transparency in product claims | Retailers, e-commerce businesses and packaging manufacturers |

03.2 The EU ESG regulatory framework

The EU has established a comprehensive framework to promote sustainability and protect consumers from misleading claims. Some key regulations include:

1. Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)

Requires large companies to disclose detailed information on environmental and social impacts. CSRD emphasizes consistency and comparability in reporting, affecting businesses across sectors.



What it means for marketers:

- **Alignment with reporting:** Marketing campaigns must align with the sustainability data disclosed in CSRD reports. For example, if a company highlights reduced carbon emissions in ads, those numbers must match what's published in official reports.
- **Storytelling based on data:** CSRD provides a wealth of sustainability data that can be leveraged for authentic and compelling narratives. Use these metrics to communicate achievements and progress to consumers.
- **Industry-specific insights:** Marketers in industries like finance, energy, and manufacturing must address sector-specific sustainability metrics outlined in the ESRS (European Sustainability Reporting Standards).



Potential pitfalls:

- Inconsistent messaging between marketing campaigns and CSRD reports can erode trust and attract regulatory scrutiny.
- Overemphasizing minor achievements while neglecting broader negative impacts (a form of greenwashing).

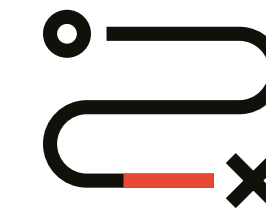
2. EU Taxonomy

A classification system to define environmentally sustainable economic activities. Marketers must ensure claims about environmental performance align with this taxonomy.



What it means for marketers:

- **Aligning environmental claims:** If your product or service is marketed as “sustainable,” it must meet the Taxonomy’s criteria. For example, a bank promoting “green financing” must verify that funded projects align with Taxonomy definitions (e.g., renewable energy or clean transportation projects).
- **Sector-specific standards:** Different industries have specific benchmarks, such as energy efficiency for real estate or water usage for agriculture. Marketing materials should reflect adherence to these criteria.
- **Avoiding greenwashing:** Broad, unsubstantiated claims like “eco-friendly” may conflict with Taxonomy standards. Ensure messaging is precise and compliant with the regulation.



Practical actions:

- Collaborate with sustainability teams to confirm which activities meet Taxonomy requirements.
- Focus messaging on verified contributions to climate change mitigation, biodiversity preservation, or other Taxonomy objectives.

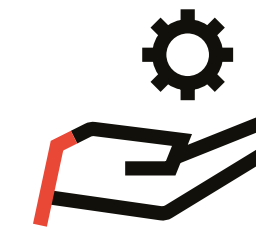
3. Green Claims Directive

Introduced to combat greenwashing (misleading consumers by falsely portraying products, services, or practices as environmentally friendly). This directive mandates that environmental claims in marketing must be substantiated with clear and verifiable evidence.



What It means for marketers:

- **Evidence-based claims:** Every environmental claim must be supported by documentation. For example, a product labeled as “100% recyclable” must have proof of recyclability across regions where it is sold.
- **Prohibited practices:** Vague terms such as “green,” “natural,” or “eco-friendly” are banned unless explicitly defined and backed by evidence.
- **Life cycle perspective:** Marketers must assess and disclose the environmental impact of products throughout their entire lifecycle.



Practical actions:

- Conduct a green claim audit to ensure all environmental messaging complies with the directive.
- Train marketing teams to avoid unsupported claims and collaborate with sustainability experts for data-backed messaging.
- Use third-party certifications to add credibility (e.g., EU Ecolabel, FSC Certification).

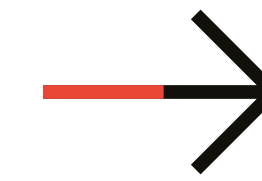
4. Consumer Empowerment Directive

Strengthens consumer rights, requiring transparent and accurate product information. This includes how sustainability metrics are communicated to the public.



What it means for marketers:

- **Clear and accurate information:** Marketing materials, websites, and product labels must clearly convey the product's sustainability features. For example, energy efficiency labels on appliances must be easy to understand.
- **Transparency in supply chains:** Companies must disclose details about the origin, production methods, and environmental impact of their products.
- **Accessible communication:** Sustainability information must be available to all consumers, including those with disabilities.



Practical actions:

- Develop dedicated website sections for sustainability information, regularly updating them with new data.
- Standardize labeling to make sustainability metrics easy to compare across products.
- Integrate QR codes or digital tags that allow consumers to access detailed product lifecycle information.

04 Building trustworthy sustainability messaging



04.1 Introduction: From compliance to credibility in sustainability messaging

Understanding regulations provides the foundation for responsible sustainability communication. However, compliance alone is not enough. To maintain trust and credibility, marketers must also steer clear of greenwashing – misleading practices that can harm both reputation and stakeholder relationships.

This chapter explores the key pitfalls of greenwashing, the common mistakes organizations make, and practical ways to ensure your communication is honest, transparent, and aligned with best practices. Avoiding these missteps is essential for building trust in your sustainability efforts.



04.2 Greenwashing: Definition and types

Greenwashing is the act of portraying a company or its products as more environmentally friendly than they truly are, often through false or exaggerated claims. This not only damages credibility but also leads to legal repercussions.



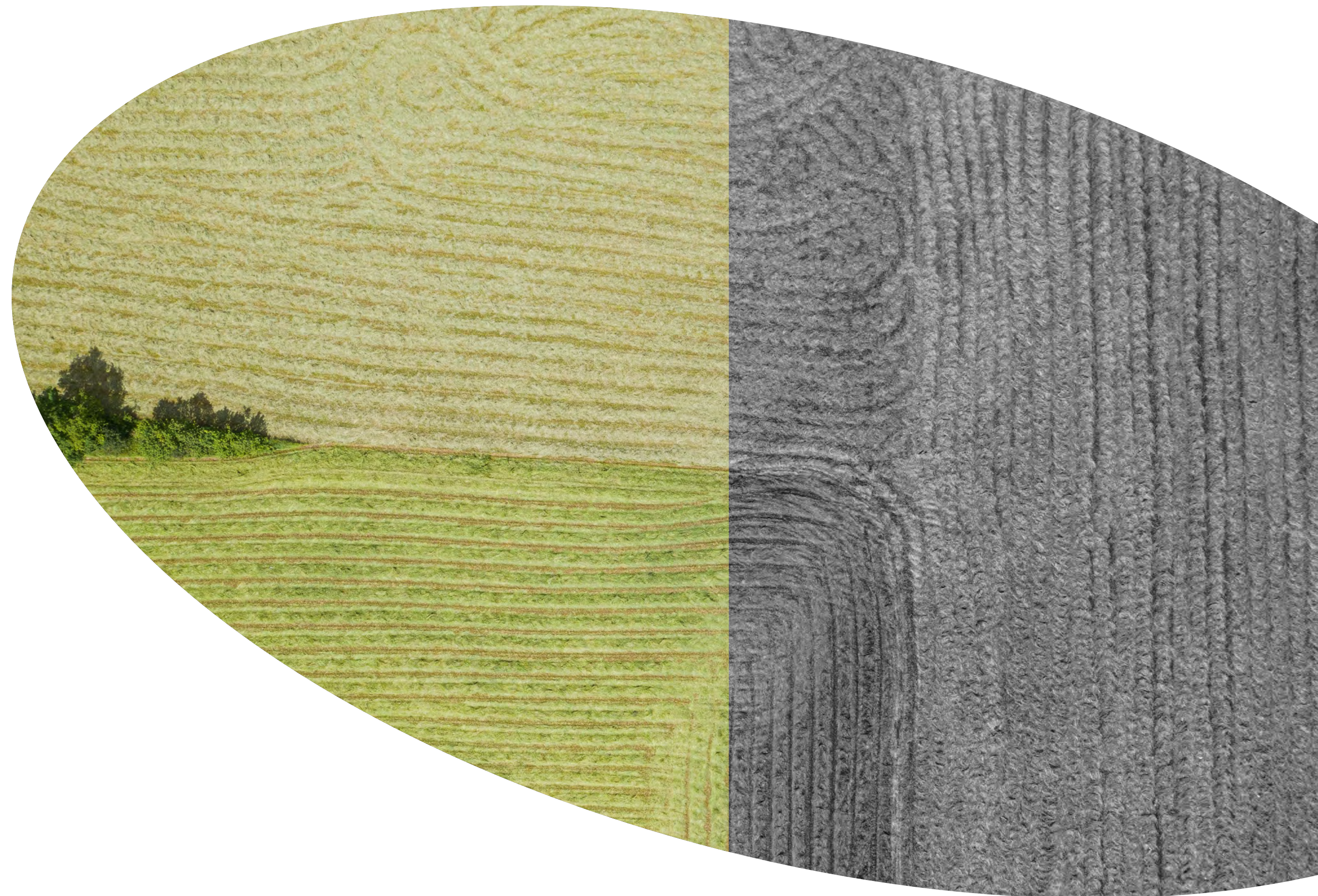
Common types of greenwashing, which often serve as a basis for other forms of washing, include:

- **Hidden trade-offs:** Focusing on one sustainable aspect while ignoring significant negative impacts.
Example: Highlighting energy efficiency while overlooking harmful production methods in the automotive industry.
- **Vagueness:** Using terms like “eco-friendly” or “green” without clear definitions.
Example: Financial firms promoting “sustainable investments” without transparent criteria.
- **Irrelevance:** Marketing claims that do not provide meaningful information.
Example: Claiming products are “CFC-free” when CFCs are already banned.
- **Lesser of two evils:** Justifying harmful practices by comparing them to worse alternatives.
Example: Fossil fuel companies promoting “clean coal” initiatives.

However, the concept of washing has evolved beyond environmental claims to encompass broader areas of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance). Companies now face scrutiny for misleading or exaggerated claims in social and governance practices, alongside environmental ones. This shift reflects the growing importance of transparency and accountability across all ESG dimensions.

04.3 Expanding the scope of “washing” practices

Beyond greenwashing, organizations may unintentionally or knowingly engage in other forms of deceptive “greenwashing.” To avoid such mistakes, it is essential to understand the various “shades” of greenwashing, each symbolizing a different type of misleading practice.



These forms of misleading communication include:

BLUE washing

False claims of adhering to principles of aquatic environmental protection or unjustified association with compliance to UN Global Compact principles.

Example: A beverage company claims to use sustainable water practices while draining local aquifers and harming communities.

PINK washing (also RAINBOW washing)

Statements of support for LGBTQIA+ communities without real protective actions for employees.

Example: A corporation celebrates Pride Month with rainbow-themed campaigns while failing to provide anti-discrimination policies for LGBTQIA+ staff.

PURPLE washing

Presenting as a company that supports diversity and inclusion for women, despite actions that contradict this message.

Example: A tech firm promotes women in leadership but lacks equitable hiring or promotion practices.

BROWN washing

Creating an image of support for BIPOC communities without taking genuine anti-discrimination actions.

Example: A fashion brand uses models from diverse backgrounds in ads but fails to address workplace discrimination.

RED washing

Publicly supporting Indigenous peoples while diverting attention from harmful actions.

Example: A mining company sponsors cultural events for Indigenous communities while engaging in land exploitation.

WHITE washing

Hiding corporate scandals and presenting false data.

Example: A corporation publishes inflated sustainability metrics to overshadow reports of internal corruption.

04.4 Emerging trends in “washing” practices

As ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) awareness increases, so does the creativity of misleading practices designed to appear sustainable. Companies are adopting more subtle tactics to influence perceptions, often at the expense of transparency and trust. These evolving practices not only mislead stakeholders but also undermine genuine efforts toward sustainability.

Understanding these trends is essential for businesses to communicate their sustainable initiatives honestly and for stakeholders to critically assess claims.



Here they are:

Greenhushing

Concealing or downplaying sustainability efforts to avoid scrutiny or criticism.

Example: A company achieves significant emissions reductions but avoids publicizing it for fear of backlash on other sustainability gaps.

Greenrinsing

Frequently changing ESG goals to create an illusion of progress without achieving real results.

Example: A corporation announces carbon neutrality targets but repeatedly extends the timeline without taking meaningful action.

Greenlabelling

Using unofficial, “green” labels to make products appear more eco-friendly than they actually are.

Example: A cleaning product with a self-created “Eco-Certified” label that lacks third-party validation.

Greenshifting

Shifting the responsibility for environmental problems onto consumers instead of addressing systemic issues.

Example: A fast-food chain asks customers to recycle packaging but fails to implement sustainable production methods.

Greenlighting

Highlighting a small, environmentally friendly aspect of a business or product to divert attention from less sustainable practices.

Example: A retailer promotes its use of paper bags while ignoring the environmental costs of its supply chain.

Greencrowding

Joining environmental initiatives or groups to obscure unsustainable practices and deflect criticism.

Example: A logistics firm partners with a climate coalition while continuing inefficient and high-emission transportation practices.

Greenstalking

This involves companies aggressively promoting their minimal or insignificant environmental efforts to distract from their substantial unsustainable practices.

Example: A corporation might heavily advertise a small-scale tree-planting initiative while continuing large-scale deforestation activities.

It's important to note that terminology in this field is continually evolving, and new terms may arise as practices develop. Staying informed about these terms is crucial for accurately identifying and addressing various forms of misleading environmental claims.

04.5 Best practices to avoid pitfalls

In today's landscape, where consumers and regulators are increasingly critical of sustainability claims, it's essential for brands to communicate responsibly. Effective communication can enhance trust, align with regulations, and safeguard your reputation. Below is our guide for marketers, enriched with best practices to navigate the complexities of sustainability messaging.



DO'S: Build trust through authentic and actionable claims

✓ **Substantiate all claims**

Ensure every sustainability statement is backed by tangible evidence. Use robust data, third-party certifications (e.g., B Corp, ISO), or transparent documentation. For example, if you claim carbon neutrality, provide details about the certification process and methodologies used.

✓ **Focus on current actions, not aspirations**

Highlight measurable initiatives you're actively implementing to reduce environmental or social impact. Avoid speculative language about future goals unless these are backed by clear, actionable roadmaps.

✓ **Use clear and accessible language**

Avoid vague terms like "green" or "eco-friendly" unless you can specify what these terms mean in the context of your product or service. Include definitions and ensure your language resonates with both experts and everyday consumers.

✓ **Be transparent about challenges**

Acknowledge areas where improvement is needed. Transparency about ongoing efforts, setbacks, and lessons learned demonstrates honesty and fosters consumer trust.

✓ **Leverage reputable certifications**

Partner with credible organizations to validate claims. Certifications like FSC, Fairtrade, or ISO provide external credibility and help differentiate your brand in a crowded marketplace.

✓ **Tailor messaging to local contexts**

Understand the cultural, environmental, and societal concerns of different regions. Tailor your communication to reflect local sensitivities, such as water scarcity, labor rights, or renewable energy initiatives.

✓ **Celebrate collaboration over individual efforts**

Emphasize partnerships with stakeholders, NGOs, or supply chain partners. Positioning your brand as part of a collective effort rather than the sole driver enhances credibility and relatability.

✓ **Adapt to a changing world**

Stay informed about regulatory updates, societal shifts, and technological advancements. Demonstrating agility in your communication ensures relevance in an ever-evolving landscape.

✓ **Audit your messaging regularly**

Review all marketing materials, from product labels to social media posts, to ensure consistency, accuracy, and alignment with your current practices and commitments.

✓ **Embrace empathy and inclusivity**

Recognize and respect diverse values and priorities among your audience. Communicate in ways that are inclusive and considerate of different cultural and societal norms.

DON'TS: Avoid common pitfalls in sustainability communication

- ✘ Don't oversimplify complex efforts**
Sustainability initiatives are multifaceted. Avoid reducing them to a single label or phrase that can mislead consumers. Provide context to educate your audience effectively.
- ✘ Avoid overreliance on carbon offsetting**
While offsets can be a helpful tool, they should not be the sole focus of your sustainability strategy. Instead, emphasize your efforts to reduce emissions at their source.
- ✘ Steer clear of misleading comparisons**
If you compare your product or service to another, ensure the comparison is factual, uses consistent metrics, and focuses on significant attributes.
- ✘ Don't exaggerate features**
Clearly articulate the extent of your product's sustainability benefits. For example, if only part of your product is made from recycled materials, specify this to avoid overstatement.
- ✘ Refrain from claiming compliance as an achievement**
Compliance with laws or regulations (e.g., EU Green Claims Directive) should be treated as a baseline expectation, not a marketing point.
- ✘ Avoid skipping expert consultations**
Engage ESG advisors, legal teams, and sustainability experts to validate your claims and ensure compliance with industry standards and regulations.
- ✘ Don't ignore the broader impact**
Sustainability goes beyond your products – consider the full lifecycle impact of your operations, supply chain, and business practices on people and the planet.
- ✘ Don't disregard media trends**
Stay attuned to public discourse about sustainability to proactively address potential areas of concern or criticism.
- ✘ Avoid polarity in messaging**
Communication should aim to build bridges rather than amplify divisions. Maintain neutrality on topics that could polarize your audience or stakeholders.
- ✘ Don't overpromise or underdeliver**
Unrealistic commitments can erode trust. Be realistic about what you can achieve and provide regular updates on your progress.

For brands operating across multiple regions, it is important to consider the unique cultural, societal, and media dynamics of each market. Understanding what resonates locally, where boundaries lie, and how sustainability efforts are perceived requires a tailored approach.

This guide provides a foundation, but every brand should adapt these principles to its unique context, markets, and goals. Responsible communication about sustainability efforts is more than a legal necessity – it is a moral imperative. By prioritizing authenticity, transparency, and alignment with verifiable data, brands can build stronger, lasting relationships with their stakeholders while safeguarding their reputation.

05 Connecting with stakeholders: Essential channels for sustainable messaging



05.1 Introduction

In today's business environment, stakeholders are much more than just onlookers; they actively shape a company's direction, especially in sustainability projects. Contrary to what might be assumed, many companies do not have a comprehensive mapping of all stakeholders or a full understanding of their impact on the organizational ecosystem.

This lack of information can lead to overlooked risks. Therefore, it's very important to carefully figure out who your stakeholders are and what they mean for your business. This helps not only in reducing risks but also in finding chances to improve the company's sustainability actions.

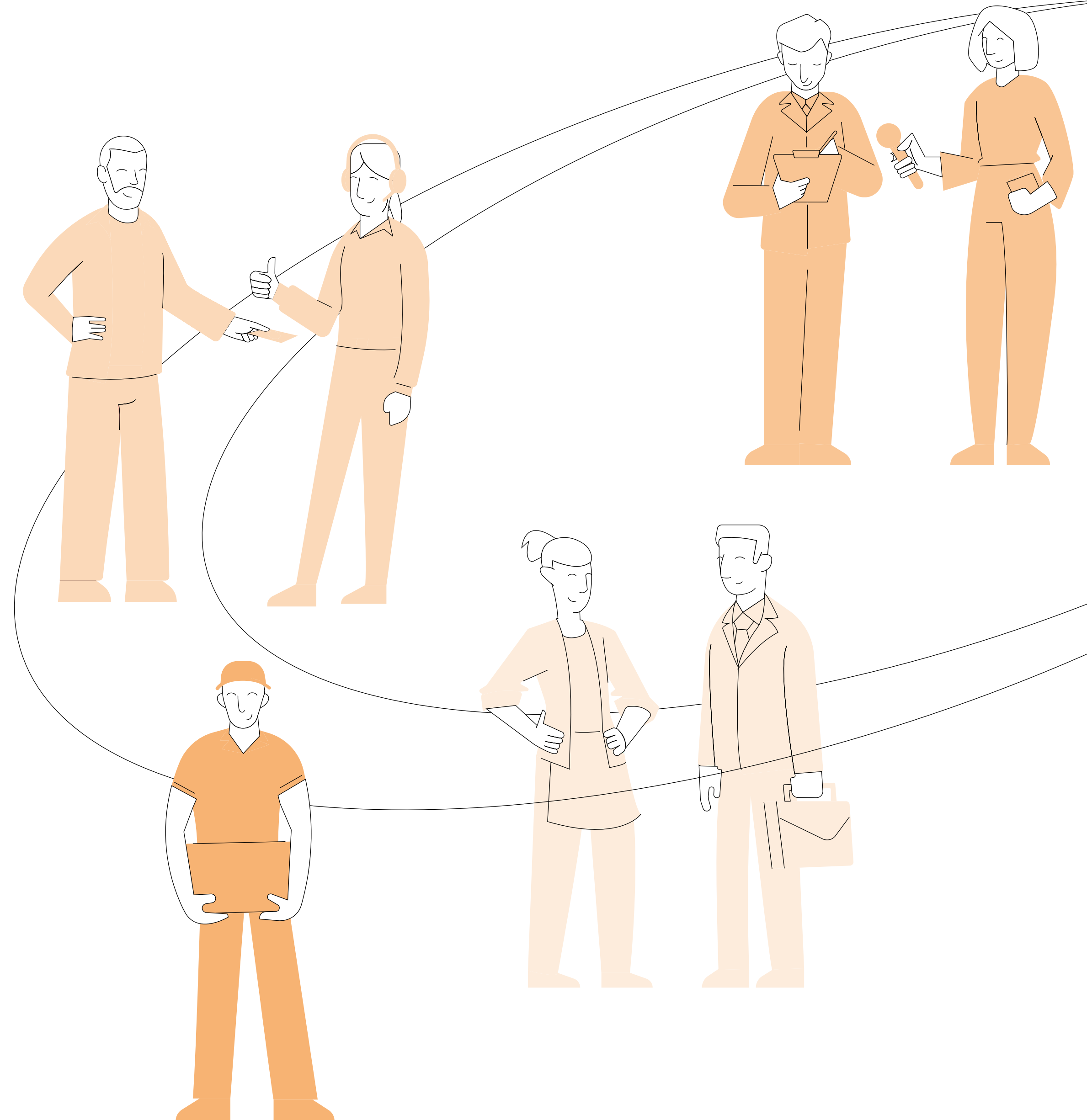
This chapter will discuss the importance of accurately identifying your stakeholders, understanding their expectations, and the impact they have on your business. We'll guide you on how to communicate effectively with them. This engagement is key to fostering open dialogue and supporting sustainability initiatives that align with both your company's objectives and the interests of your stakeholders. By adopting this approach, you ensure that all potential risks are managed and maximize opportunities for collaboration and enhancement. Additionally, effective stakeholder communication enhances brand reputation and as a consequence it's value, drives loyalty, and positions marketers at the forefront of sustainable business practices.

05.2 Identifying key stakeholders

Stakeholders include any groups or individuals who are affected by the company's operations or who can affect them in return. This broad definition may encompass for example such group:

- **Customers:** Who purchase and use the products or services.
- **Employees:** Whose work life is directly tied to the company's operations.
- **Suppliers:** Who provide the materials and services necessary for the business.
- **Investors:** Who have financial stakes in the company's success.
- **Local communities:** Who are influenced by the company's local economic impact, employment, and environmental practices.
- **Regulatory bodies:** Who enforce laws and regulations the company must comply with.
- **Media**

Each of these groups has a different relationship with the company, presenting unique challenges and opportunities in sustainability efforts.



05.3 Categorizing stakeholders

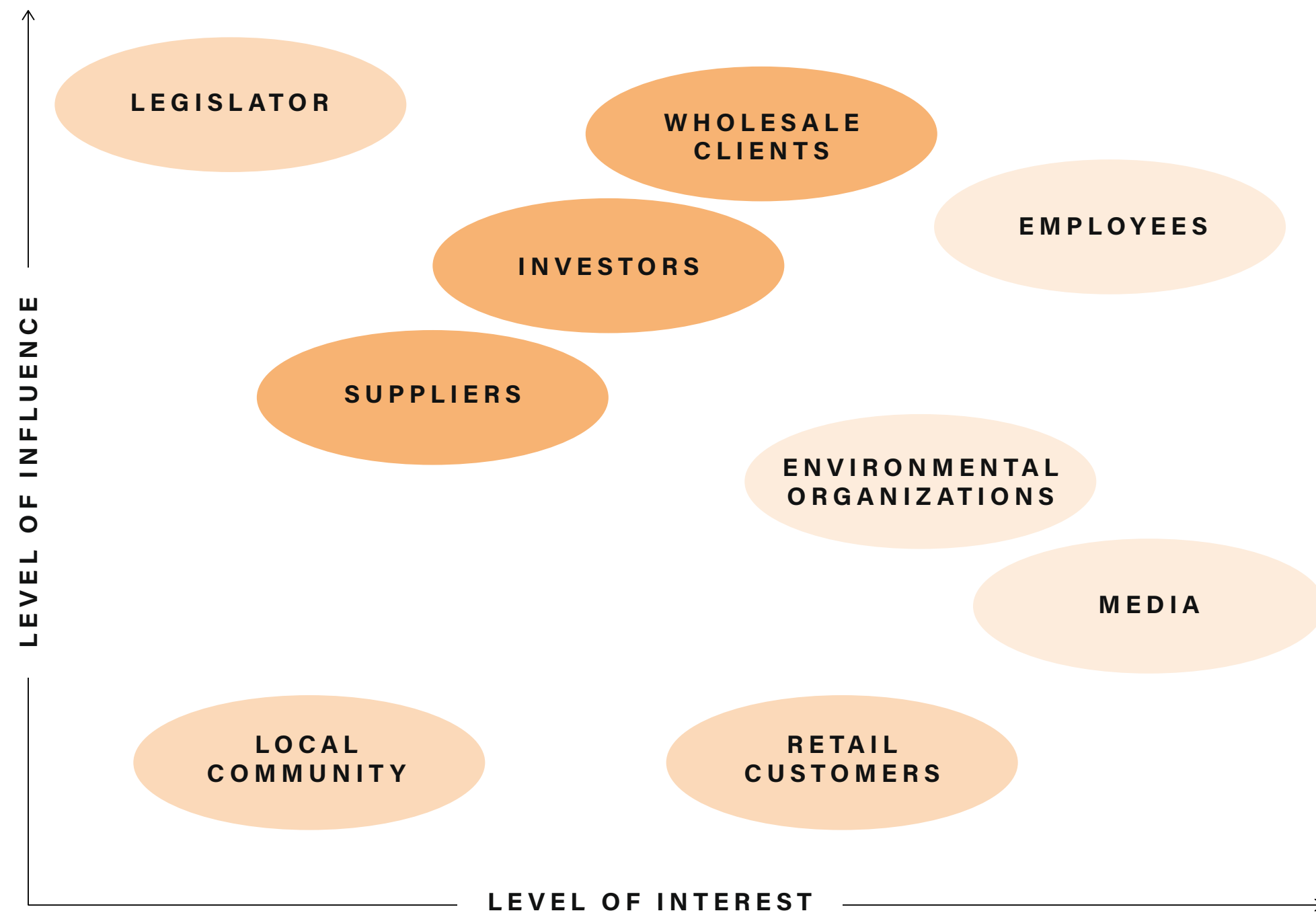
Not all groups will impact your business and brand image to the same extent, so it is crucial to categorize stakeholders and tailor your communication strategies according to their priority levels. This process ensures that resources and efforts are optimally allocated, enhancing the effectiveness of your sustainability communications. The simplest way to do this is to analyze their level of impact on your business and their interest in your business.

Having these levels, you can identify a few groups:

- **Primary stakeholders:** Usually, these are directly engaged with the core operations of your company. These stakeholders have high influence and high interest, necessitating continuous engagement and specially tailored communication strategies to meet their specific needs and expectations.
- **Secondary stakeholders:** Include groups less directly connected but still influential, like local communities and non-direct suppliers. Strategies for engaging these stakeholders usually involve periodic updates and community involvement initiatives to maintain a positive and cooperative relationship.
- **Tertiary stakeholders:** Often have an indirect or occasional impact on your operations. This group includes regulatory bodies and distant communities, where communications are typically more formal and driven by compliance and regulatory requirements.

Take a look at the basic breakdown of these stakeholders, making it easier for you to determine the targeted communication strategy. Below is an example chart that considers the level of impact on the organization and the level of interest.

Let's summarize what we see on this chart.



High influence, high interest (top right quadrant):

Investors and wholesale clients: These stakeholders are crucial as they significantly impact financial backing and revenue streams. Their high interest suggests they are actively engaged, and their actions can directly influence business decisions. Regular, in-depth engagements and tailored communications are necessary to align their interests with company sustainability goals.

Suppliers: Given their critical role in the supply chain and their vested interest in business operations, suppliers require strategic partnerships and continuous dialogue to ensure sustainable practice adherence and supply continuity.

High influence, low interest (top left quadrant):

Legislators: Although perhaps less interested in the day-to-day operations, their decisions have profound regulatory impacts. Communication should be formal and compliance-focused, aimed at informing them of regulatory adherence and advocating for favorable policy settings.

Low influence, high interest (bottom right quadrant):

Local community: Their high interest but lower influence suggests a focus on community engagement initiatives and periodic updates to maintain good relations and public image.

Retail customers: Engage through marketing communications and customer service to leverage their interest in promoting sustainability practices directly to the consumer market.

Medium influence, medium interest (central cluster):

Employees, ecological organizations and media: These groups are essential for internal advocacy, shaping public perception, and broadcasting the company's sustainability efforts. They require regular updates and involvement in sustainability campaigns to harness their support effectively.

05.4 Choosing effective communication channels

When planning how to communicate sustainability initiatives, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of each communication channel is vital.

Here's an evaluation of common channels:

- **Face-to-face interactions:** This channel offers a personal touch, fosters trust, and facilitates immediate feedback. It's highly effective for engaging stakeholders deeply but can be resource-intensive and logistically challenging.
- **Digital communication (emails, newsletters, display campaigns, websites):** These tools are cost-effective and excellent for reaching a wide audience quickly. They allow for detailed content but may suffer from low engagement rates due to the volume of digital communications stakeholders receive.
- **Press releases:** Ideal for official announcements and reaching media outlets. Press releases can help reach a broad audience but may not engage stakeholders who prefer more interactive or direct forms of communication.
- **Social media platforms:** Social media is crucial for reaching a younger demographic and engaging in real-time. It offers vast reach and high engagement potential but can require constant monitoring and rapid response management to address any arising issues effectively.

Each channel has its pros and cons, so the choice depends on your specific communication goals, the content's complexity, and the urgency of the messages.

Selecting the right communication channel involves also aligning stakeholder preferences with the nature of the message:

- **Investors and senior stakeholders:** Typically prefer detailed reports and direct emails. Regular updates through newsletters or dedicated investor relations sections on your website can keep them informed about sustainability efforts and their outcomes.
- **Younger consumers:** Tend to engage more with dynamic content on social media platforms. Utilizing visual content such as infographics, short videos, and interactive posts on platforms like Instagram or Twitter can effectively communicate sustainability initiatives and engage this group.
- **Local communities:** May benefit from face-to-face meetings, community gatherings, and local press releases to feel directly involved in relevant sustainability projects.
- **Employees:** Internal communication platforms, emails, and workshops can be effective for educating and engaging employees about sustainability practices and goals.



Next you can take a look at an example selection of channels for priority stakeholder groups for a FMCG company.

When developing your communication strategy, don't forget about considering the frequency of communication needed for each stakeholder group. For instance, investors might need quarterly updates on sustainability progress, whereas social media followers might engage better with more frequent, less formal updates.

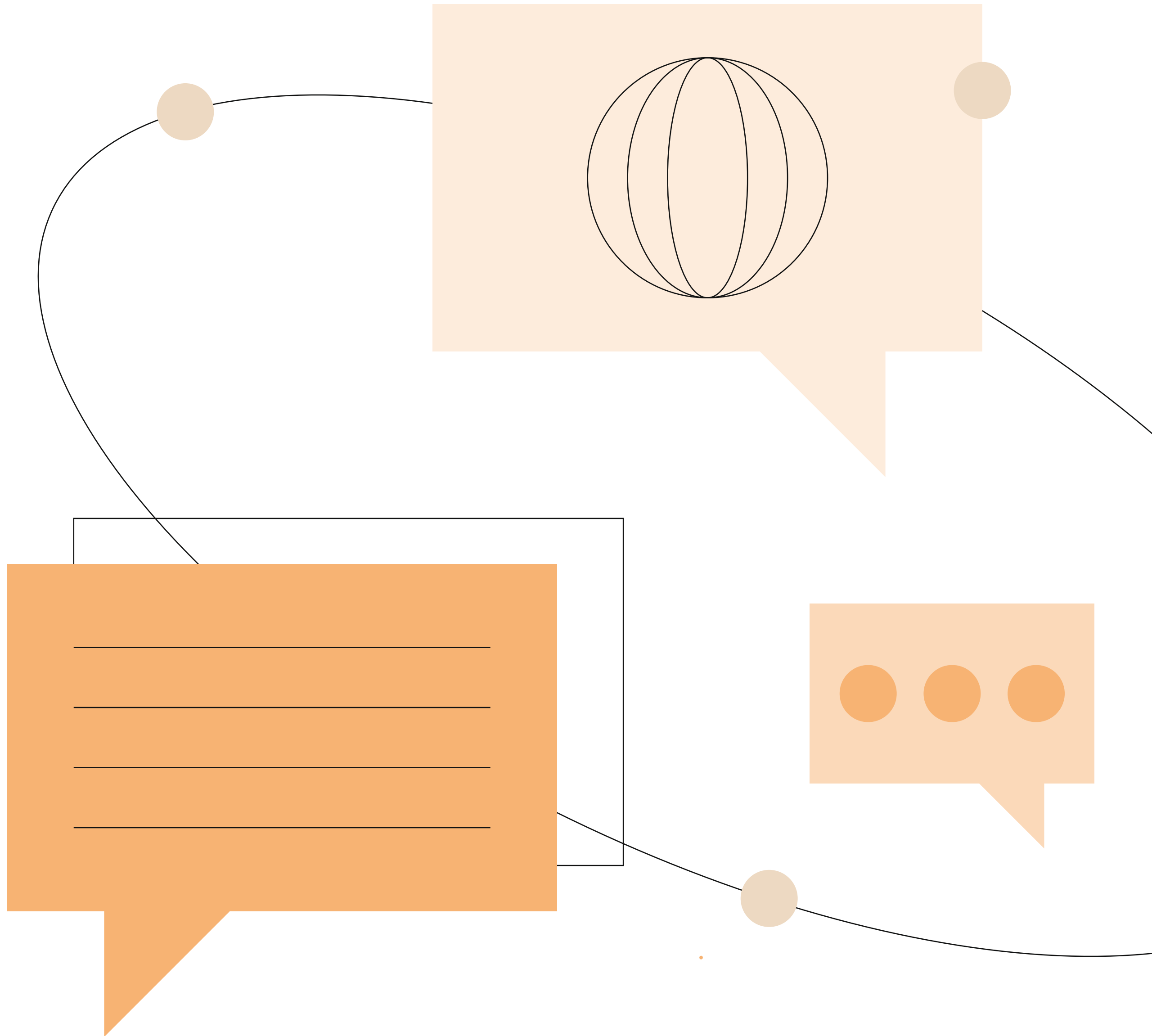
By matching the communication channel to the stakeholder's preferences and the message's nature, you can enhance the effectiveness of your sustainability communications, ensuring that the message not only reaches its audience but also resonates with them, driving engagement and action.

| KEY STAKEHOLDERS | ENGAGEMENT METHOD |
|-------------------------------|---|
| CONSUMERS | Satisfaction surveys, Customer Service Office, social media, website, online shop, reports on sustainable development. |
| EMPLOYEES | Development conversations and satisfaction surveys, internal intranet, newsletters, informational mailings, training and workshops, Management Board conferences for employees, reports on sustainable development. |
| TRADE GOODS SUPPLIERS | Regular communication within cooperation: e-mails, meetings, questionnaires and other direct communication. |
| OTHER SUPPLIERS | Regular communication within cooperation, meetings and other forms of direct communication with employees. |
| BUSINESS PARTNERS | Regular communication within cooperation with business partners, face-to-face meetings, industry events, newsletters, reports on sustainable development. |
| PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION | Face-to-face meetings, participation in local events, conferences, reports on sustainable development. |
| INVESTORS | Shareholder meetings, press conferences, current and periodic reports, reports on sustainable development. |
| FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS | Communication on corporate website, direct meetings and teleconferences, industry conferences, current and periodic reports, reports on sustainable development. |
| MEDIA | Press office and ongoing communication, correspondence via email on website, press releases on the website, press conferences. |

05.5 Tailoring the message for different stakeholders

Tailoring communication to various stakeholders is crucial for effective sustainability messaging. Different groups, such as employees and consumers, have unique values, expectations, and levels of sustainability understanding. For instance, communication aimed at employees might focus on their direct impact and responsibilities regarding sustainability, highlighting benefits such as workplace improvements and personal involvement. In contrast, messaging for consumers should emphasize the environmental benefits of initiatives, appealing to their ethical and environmental sensibilities.

Consistency across all communication channels is essential to build trust and credibility. It's important for all communications to genuinely reflect the company's sustainability efforts and align with the overall brand strategy. Inconsistencies can lead to stakeholder distrust and skepticism.



Engagement through interaction

Interactive engagement methods, such as stakeholder workshops, social media Q&A sessions, and community forums, are effective in deepening stakeholders' commitment and understanding of sustainability efforts. These platforms provide hands-on experiences and allow stakeholders to express concerns and receive immediate feedback, fostering a more engaged community.

Implementing systems to capture and analyze stakeholder feedback is essential. Tools like digital feedback mechanisms, surveys, and regular community meetings are invaluable for collecting insights. This feedback is crucial for refining sustainability strategies and enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of communication practices.



Case studies and real-world examples

Reviewing case studies from companies that have effectively engaged stakeholders through various communication channels can offer valuable insights. These cases should detail the strategies used, the outcomes achieved, and the lessons learned, providing actionable ideas for other companies.

A deeper understanding of the reasons behind the success of these engagement strategies is beneficial. Knowing how different approaches resonated with various groups can help in tailoring future stakeholder engagements more effectively.



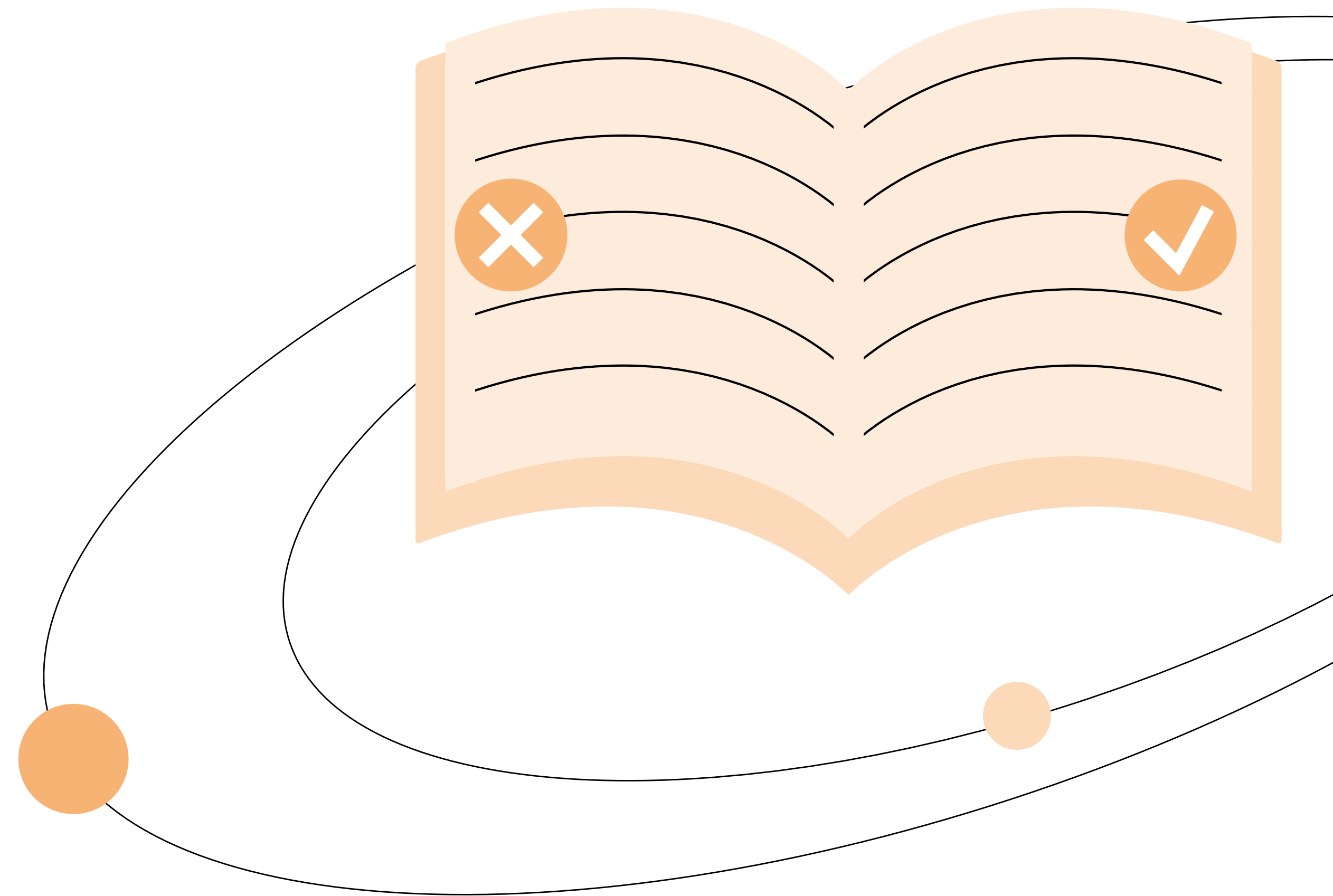
Overcoming communication challenges

Addressing common challenges like stakeholder skepticism, misinformation, and message fatigue is crucial. Discussing real-world scenarios where these challenges were effectively managed and the strategies employed to overcome them can provide practical insights.

Offering practical solutions and best practices for clear, honest, and engaging communication is fundamental. Stress the importance of transparency and accountability in building long-term trust with stakeholders. Regular updates, accurate reporting, and open lines of communication are essential for maintaining a positive and constructive dialogue.

This integrated approach ensures that your communication strategy is not only comprehensive but also specifically tailored to the needs and preferences of different stakeholder groups, thereby fostering more effective engagement and support for sustainability initiatives.

Summarize the key points discussed in the chapter, emphasizing the importance of effectively communicating sustainability initiatives to stakeholders. Encourage readers to leverage these strategies to enhance their own practices, ensuring that their sustainability efforts are understood and supported by all stakeholders.



Summary

In this chapter, we explored effective stakeholder communication strategies crucial for successful sustainability initiatives. Key takeaways include the importance of customizing messages to match the unique interests and knowledge levels of different stakeholder groups such as employees, consumers, and investors. Each message should reflect stakeholders' specific concerns while maintaining consistency across all communications to build trust and credibility.

Interactive methods like workshops and social media engagement play a vital role in deepening stakeholders' understanding and involvement in sustainability efforts. Furthermore, integrating feedback mechanisms is essential to continually refine and adapt sustainability strategies based on stakeholder input.

For marketers, this chapter provides valuable insights into how strategically crafted and communicated messages can enhance stakeholder engagement and drive the success of sustainability initiatives. By applying these principles, marketers can ensure their campaigns are not only informative but also genuinely resonate with their audience, fostering a proactive approach to sustainability.



About the author



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Alicja is an expert in brand strategy and communication, with a strong focus on **sustainability and ESG reporting**. She has completed studies in **ESG reporting** and is a participant in the **ESG Leaders program** on the Polish market. Additionally, she holds a **Cambridge Business School certificate** and frequently speaks at events on topics related to **greenwashing and responsible brand communication**.

With over 20 years of experience, Alicja has worked with leading agencies such as Brand New Galaxy, McCann Erickson, and 180heartbeats JvM. She has collaborated with global brands including Bayer, Unilever, Nestlé, General Motors, Mastercard, and ING Bank, as well as industry leaders in the energy and retail sectors. Her expertise lies in **integrating sustainability into brand communication strategies**, helping businesses navigate the evolving ESG landscape while ensuring authenticity and impact.

If you have any questions or are in search of a reliable partner to guide you through the ESG report implementation, please don't hesitate to contact our experts.

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