

# SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Uncovering the key challenges and  
levers to drive change

Capgemini 

| B L O O M |

 DASSAULT  
SYSTEMES

JUNE 2023

# INTRODUCTION

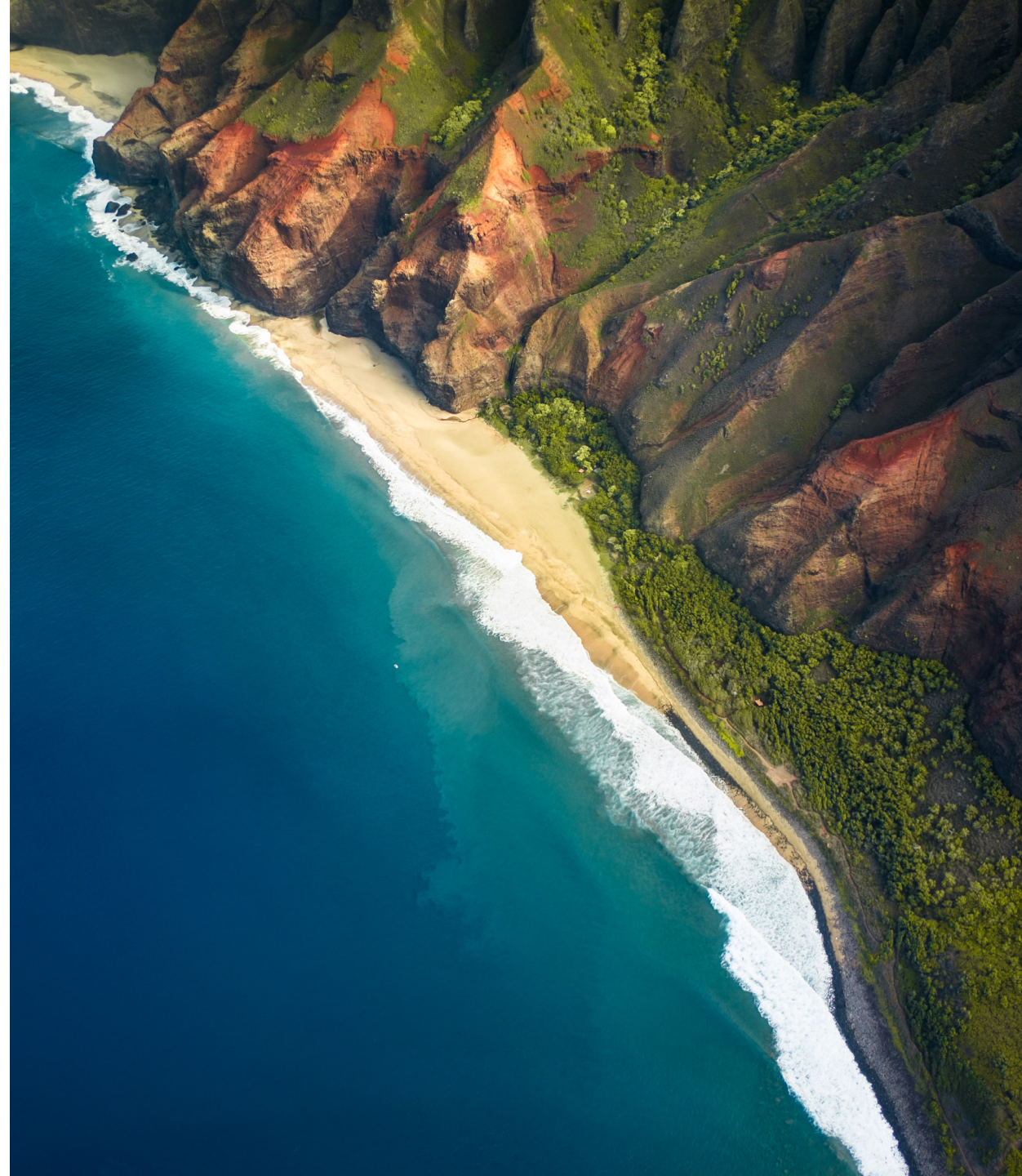
**Conversations about the climate crisis have become commonplace in every sphere of life, yet concrete actions toward a sustainable future remain rare. Now more than ever, this gap between words and results is cause for concern, as our planet faces a mounting tally of challenges.**

The internet facilitates many daily discussions about environmental concerns. Social media hosts 4.76 billion active users, or 60% of the world's population. It is known as the "sixth continent" due to its staggering size, and its user base increased by 250 million people in 2022. Social media users have formed 10 billion online communities dedicated to specific topics, opinions, people, and more. And on average, every month users produce 300 billion pieces of content.

Social media platforms are therefore a rich source of insight into international trends and attitudes toward climate change. In 2022, Dassault Systèmes and Capgemini joined forces with French technology startup, BLOOM to harness the power of artificial intelligence and analyze the global conversation on climate. The findings of this eight-month study give corporations and institutions invaluable insights to support them through the transition to a low-carbon economy.

BLOOM's analysis sheds light on the burning question: why, despite increasingly obvious signs of climate change, are we collectively not doing more? Guided by key United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the data helps highlight widespread beliefs about the climate crisis, as well as the critical barriers to action. These include a skeptical stance toward "greenwashing," increasing eco-anxiety and widespread frustration at the lack of reliable and relevant sources to guide our next steps toward a greener future.

The ultimate aim of the analysis is to examine the key topics as they pertain to sustainability trends with a broad social angle, in order to enable organizations to find the most efficient solutions adapted to them.



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# 01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022, the world was rocked by major upheavals that exacerbated the climate crisis. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine sent shockwaves across the rest of the world, impacting global food and energy security. The onset of a major war in Europe made citizens – still recovering from the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic – acutely aware of the dynamics and fragility of global supply networks, and amplified calls to accelerate the energy transition.

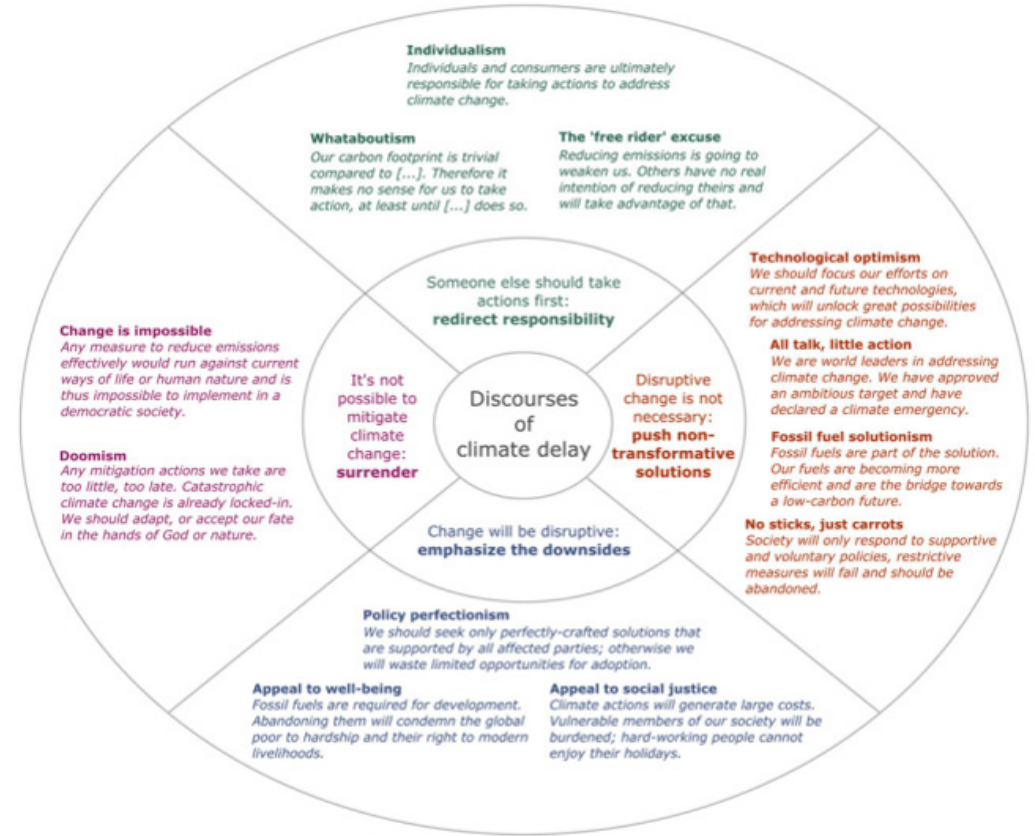
In the same year, climate disasters killed hundreds of thousands of people worldwide and displaced millions. Such events, including intense wildfires, the catastrophic force of Hurricane Ian in Florida, the United States, and the deadly flooding in Pakistan, sparked online conversations about our impact on the planet and the dangers of inaction around climate change.

The study conducted by BLOOM, Dassault Systèmes and Capgemini delved into these and other conversations around climate on social media to identify and better understand global citizens’ key concerns. The findings will provide necessary background for organizations to redefine their approaches to climate action in a way that is tailored to citizens’ concerns and priorities.

## An advanced social-listening methodology

The group launched its eight-month study of English-language climate conversations on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. The study examined 14 million “written interactions,” or all written posts and comments. It identified 330 million “actors,” or individuals who respond to a written interaction. BLOOM tracked 480 million actions, called “engagements,” meaning posts, comments, likes or other reactions, over the course of the study.

A sophisticated algorithm, based on natural language processing models, was deployed on all 14 million written interactions, analyzing them for tone and emotional content. The model was refined enough to consider the emotional complexity of emoji use, as well. Once this analysis had been completed, the key terms in these posts were ranked by number of mentions, rather than by amount of engagement on a post. This approach aimed to ensure an adequate representation of the views of individuals, avoiding them being drowned out by corporate posts, which typically receive the highest engagement on social media.



Reference:  
Lamb, W., Mattioli, G., Levi, S., Roberts, J., Capstick, S., Creutzig, F., . . . Steinberger, J. (2020). Discourses of climate delay. *Global Sustainability*, 3, E17. doi:10.1017/sus.2020.13

## Understanding the main obstacles

These results were then incorporated into an adapted version of Cambridge University's typology of climate delay discourses:

1. **Disconnected optimism**  
Rewards and centers ambitious – but unrealistic – ideas for solutions
2. **Information gap**  
A lack of reliable and useful information promotes skepticism and a sense of powerlessness among citizens
3. **Fear of downsides**  
An outsized focus on the negative consequences of action that can detract from genuine opportunities for change
4. **Delegation of authority**  
The sense that tackling climate change is someone else's job
5. **Hopelessness**  
Feelings of defeat and pessimism, a sense that it is too late to do anything

Of these five pillars, Disconnected optimism was found to be the most-talked-about barrier to climate action, producing one million conversations in eight months. Information gap came next, followed by Fear of downsides, Delegation of authority and, finally, Hopelessness. The average number of written interactions related to three of these pillars remained stable, but there was a marked rise in debates about the Information gap and Hopelessness. This suggests that these pillars are becoming increasingly important to everyday people – and, increasingly frustrating.

## Bloom's dashboard analysis on the conversations related to climate action obstacles



## Which generations are most engaged?

Clearly, with 330 million actors, there is a significant community all over the world actively engaged in various debates around climate change. We also found that two-thirds of social interactions around climate take place on TikTok, the platform favored by younger generations, and that authorities have a role to play in sparking and fostering conversation everywhere.

## Emotions run high

We also saw that businesses and corporations seek to promote positive outlooks by celebrating events like climate reports. Such announcements do tend to generate debate, with 30% of posts expressing negative emotions.

In other words, people are seeing through the talk. They are speaking so corporations can hear them, and they are saying now is the time to act.



# 02

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LISTENING TO CLIMATE  
CONVERSATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA



# ZOOMING IN ON HIGH-IMPACT ISSUES FOR BUSINESS

The study's methodology was designed to obtain a nuanced view of climate conversations across the globe. The study focused on conversations in English, across all geographies – concentrating on just one language is necessary for comparison, and English was considered to provide an adequate sample.

First, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations were used as a filter for a month-long examination of online conversations on the broad theme of “climate.” This series of targets was set forth by the UN to help guide climate action in the coming years. Using them in our groundwork revealed a prevalence of debates around social issues. Topics included reducing inequality, the right to decent work, economic growth, and gender equality (a growing area of concern since 2018).

Then, the eight-month analysis began, running from February to October 2022. The framework for this analysis focused on conversations linked to the seven SDGs most pertinent to corporate climate action – those where corporations can likely have the biggest impact.

These SDGs are:



## Clean water and sanitation:

protecting Earth's water ecosystems and bringing clean water to everyone



## Affordable and clean energy:

promoting affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy sources



## Sustainable cities and communities:

ensuring every human settlement is inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



## Responsible consumption and production:

modifying consumption to promote more sustainable models of use



## Climate action:

counteracting the climate crisis and its many tangible impacts



## Life below water:

conserving the oceans, the cradle of life, which are of the utmost importance to all sustainability efforts



## Life on land:

respecting, restoring and sustainably engaging with terrestrial ecosystems to combat the impact of human actions

The aim of this SDG-based analysis was to identify the most frequently used vocabulary among everyday people discussing the climate. By avoiding an engagement-based ranking, researchers could prevent a scenario where brands ruled the conversation, due to the significant engagement their posts typically receive.



## UNDERSTANDING THE NUANCES OF CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS

These online conversations can be difficult to parse, not to mention overwhelming in scale and intensity. Our study limited the scope to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, and still produced more than 14 million written interactions to analyze.

“Written interaction” is a general term encompassing any written post – whether original or as a comment on someone else’s post – of any length. The 14 million written interactions reached 330 million “actors,” or individuals who engaged with them, be it through commenting, liking or sharing the post to their own network. These actions are called “engagements,” and BLOOM tracked roughly 480 million of them over the course of the study.

The written interactions were analyzed semantically, using a lexicon defined by natural language processing to identify their tone. Emoji use was also analyzed by the algorithm. This way, a tweet that might appear at first to be supportive – one praising the implementation of new climate-related policies, for instance – accompanied by a thumbs down or other negative emoji would not be falsely counted as a positive post but instead be omitted from the sample due to its ambiguity.

This sophisticated algorithm enabled 14 million written interactions to be placed into one of eight emotion categories: joy and trust (positive feelings), anticipation and surprise (neutral feelings), and anger, disappointment, fear and sadness (negative feelings).

The aim of breaking down written interactions in this way was to isolate and better understand the nuances of the climate conversations taking place between ordinary people. Such details can be lost on businesses taking too high-level an approach to client engagement. By working so precisely, the study helped identify the topics of most concern to citizens, where businesses have the highest potential impact.

For example, the method uncovered the importance individuals place on the social factors of climate change: the terms used most by everyday individuals are “human,” “rights,” “climate,” “change” and “people.”

# 03

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## KEY FINDINGS

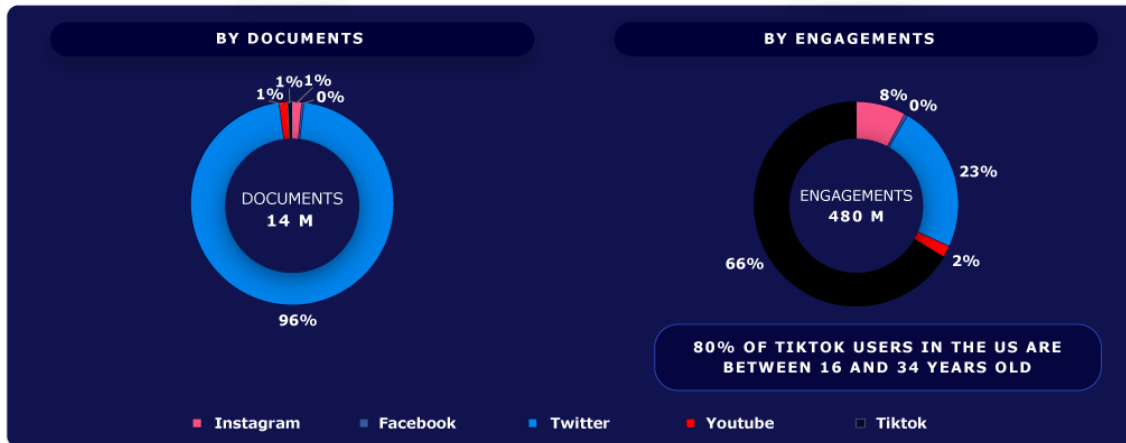


# THE CLIMATE CONVERSATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA: SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN FOCUS

The study produced many insights of vital interest to corporations seeking to drive climate action. We break down the key findings below, so that corporations can easily refer to them as a guide to upcoming initiatives.

## Climate concerns have no borders

The first major takeaway is that climate concerns are global. This conversation is not siloed to one particular country or user base. The results of this study show that 5% of the Earth's total population is taking part in online discussions about climate change in English and on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. The 330 million actors considered by the study produced 480 million engagements. These ranged from making posts and comments to simply liking or sharing the posts published by others. Analyzing all 14 million written interactions created by this group painted a picture of a highly engaged, impassioned global conversation on climate.

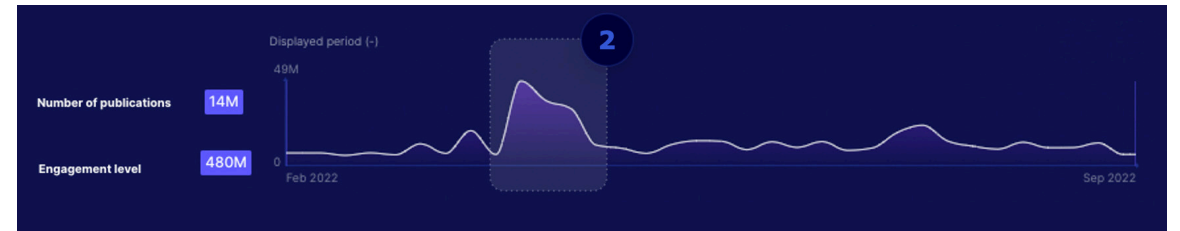


## The younger the users, the more engaged

The study also showed that engagement in climate-oriented discussions is highest on TikTok. This platform is a key terrain for corporations to understand and access, as 63% of its users are aged 16 to 34. Though this age bracket does not always initiate these conversations and tends to have less leverage or potential for direct impact, they also proved to be the most engaged group. Their interest and attention can be a source of momentum and progress toward meaningful change.

## Companies beware: people are watching

Another key takeaway – and source of inspiration for corporations everywhere – is that organizations do still have the potential for impact. Individuals are paying attention to the work companies are doing. This comes with a caveat, however: companies must approach their communications with care, to avoid playing into a cycle of temporary joy followed by enduring mistrust. In fact, 3%, or 9 million individuals expressed a belief that companies and institutions over-communicate about sustainability without any real impact on accelerating global warming.



This finding was gained by looking at the aftermath of the publication in April of the UN's sixth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This event is represented in our data as a sharp spike in online conversations – the highest peak, in fact, seen in the entire eight-month study. This shows that authorities still have a role to play in generating conversations.

## Emotions run high

Analyzing the semantics of all 14 million written interactions showed that there are mostly positive conversations taking place. However, overall, nearly a third (30%) showed negative emotions. This margin may not seem high, but when we consider the scale of responses being generated, we see that 30% is actually a huge number of dissatisfied, upset citizens. An average of 65 million actors were expressing emotions at any given point during the study – if 30% of them are expressing negative feelings, this represents nearly 20 million frustrated individuals.

Essentially, the study sheds light on the significant community of active actors, whose concerns about climate inaction are not currently being widely heard. Identifying this community, and the reasons for their negative feelings, is the first and most significant step to making a change and taking real action.

**330 million**

people discussed climate change on English-language social networks in 8 months



**3%**

or 9 million users believe that companies and institutions over-communicate about sustainability without any real impact on accelerating global warming

**30%**

of conversations are centered around negative emotions



# 04

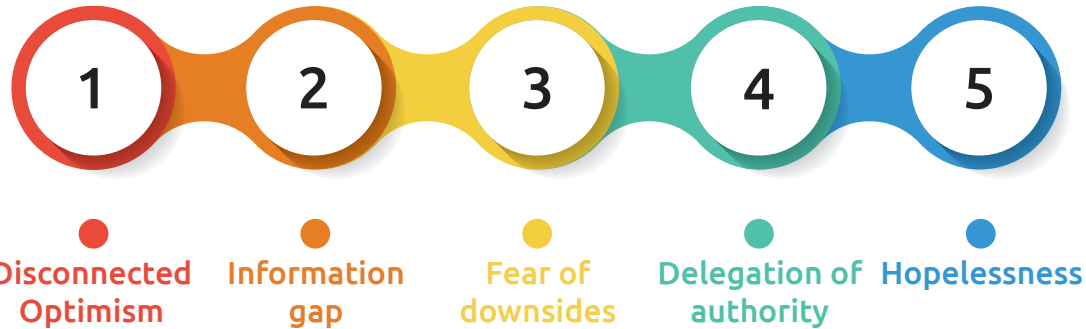
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DECRYPTING THE BARRIERS TO CLIMATE  
ACTION



# A SCIENTIFIC MODEL TO UNDERSTAND CLIMATE INACTION

Results of the study were incorporated into an adapted version of Cambridge University’s typology of climate delay discourses. The Cambridge model outlines distinct discourses, which can be grouped into four pillars: *Delegation of authority*, *Disconnected optimism*, *Fear of downsides* and *Hopelessness*. In addition to these, a fifth pillar emerged from the study’s data: *Information gap*.

This report’s updated version of the climate delay discourse model has five pillars, each representing a barrier to climate action:



Of these five pillars, Disconnected optimism was found to be the most-talked-about barrier to climate action. This barrier, which produced one million conversations in eight months, focuses on overly positive messages around solutions, even when they are non-transformative or unrealistic. Information gap came next, encompassing the skepticism and sense of powerlessness people feel when faced with a lack of useful information or misinformation. It was followed by Fear of downsides. This barrier comes into play when there is a perceived cost to people’s way of life that outweighs the potential long-term benefits of climate action. The next barrier, Delegation of authority, is the idea that the responsibility for climate change lies with someone else, typically large corporations or governments of global superpowers. Finally, Hopelessness represents conversations around defeat and pessimism: a sense that it is too late to avert the disastrous effects of climate change.

In this section, we look at each of these barriers in detail.

## Barrier 1: Disconnected optimism

The image shows a social media post on the left and a dashboard on the right. The post is about greenwashing and features a video of a Target store. The dashboard shows a ranking of sub-communities by Descriptive Power Index.

Sub-Community	Descriptive Power Index
All Talk Little Action	100/100
Tech Optimism	23/100
Good Will Only	20/100

On the surface, the most-talked-about barrier to climate action could sound like a strength. What could be so bad about optimism, after all? However, the pitfall is that optimism fosters complacency and a lack of innovative thinking. For instance, when companies focus all their energy on promoting new, green technologies as the “next big thing,” people can become overwhelmed or skeptical.

### Curbing false sustainability claims

Citizens across the globe, particularly those from younger generations, have grown to be wary of “greenwashing,” the practice of over-selling the sustainability potential of a product or service. This is due to their constant exposure to such messaging, which has only increased as people spend more time online. This barrier also illustrates the perceived disconnect between

how a product is marketed and its impact. In other words, when so-called “green” products do not live up to the hype, buyers feel let down and are less likely to believe in a similar product next time. People are particularly sensitive to this issue when they feel they have been misled or given false hope in the past.

In fact, the full scope and impact of the climate crisis can be difficult to grasp and understand. By stressing positive narratives and over-emphasizing minor progress, brands risk creating dissonance in people’s minds. Of course, companies focusing on the positives are not necessarily looking to mislead, but rather to inspire and motivate. However, good intentions are no longer enough, as online discussions show. The discrepancy between positive corporate messaging and the harsher reality of the climate catastrophe can in turn create mistrust and discourage individuals from acting.

## Tech for the future

This barrier also concerns “techno-optimism,” the idea that new technology is the key to solving all the world’s problems. This view is not held by the majority, but by a vocal minority of tech enthusiasts who are placing all of their eggs in one high-tech basket. This, too, could seem positive at first glance, but in fact offers a false sense of security. This is not to say that technology does not hold major promise; of course, the sustainable future will be built on human ingenuity and scientific advancements. However, it does mean that we must be cautious and not encourage the view that technology is a one-stop shop for reversing climate change. This view can artificially assuage anxieties and, again, prevent individuals from acting. In other words, if the machines have it covered, why get involved?

## Time for disruption

Our study also showed that companies that push non-transformative solutions are viewed as engaging in all talk and no action. Similar to the cause of their concerns about greenwashing, people are jaded by constant exposure to overly positive marketing. They no longer want to hear the same old ideas from the same old mouths, and are mistrustful of this type of messaging. This presents a real opportunity for actors who can bring genuinely fresh ideas and approaches and want to put their weight behind disruptive approaches. In other words, citizens are looking to corporations for real reasons for hope.

## Barrier 2: Information gap

The image displays a tweet from @ClimateReanalyzer dated August 19, 2022, at 9:59 pm. The tweet text reads: "Today's global warming is a mere 0.1°C warmer than the 1979-2000 average global temperature. That's not even measurable. It's all a hoax." Below the text is a world map titled "GFS-CFSR 1-day Avg 2m T Anomaly (°C) [1979-2000 base] Friday, Aug 19, 2022". The map shows temperature anomalies across the globe, with a red circle highlighting the "World" average of +0.1°C. Below the map, a table lists anomalies for various regions: World (+0.1°C), NH (+0.7°C), SH (-0.8°C), Arctic (+1.1°C), Antarctic (-2.7°C), and Tropics (0.8°C). The tweet has 9,110 Retweets, 535 Quotes, 24.2K Likes, and 795 Bookmarks.

To the right of the tweet is a dashboard interface. It features three tabs: "Power", "Descriptive Power", and "Potential Power". The "Descriptive Power" tab is active, showing a "Sub-Communities are ranked by Descriptive Power Index." Below this, three categories are listed with progress bars and scores: "Skepticism" (100/100), "Powerlessness" (25/100), and "Information is Key" (3/100).

Our study’s second barrier is the “Information gap,” so called because it refers to a lack of reliable and useful data available to users and everyday people.

In today’s information-saturated online ecosystem, the insight that individuals are not getting useful information might come as a surprise. However, it comes down to the classic problem of quantity over quality.

## Accessibility vs authority

In some ways, the issue can be explained by the complexity and density of scientific data being shared every single day. When it is difficult to understand the terms being used, it is impossible to grasp the importance of a given discussion. Making scientific insights accessible to everyone is therefore a crucial endeavor to combatting climate change.

But confusion around the meaning and weight of climate data is only one part of the puzzle. The unfortunate truth is that not all the information available online can be trusted or referred to with authority. Our study reinforces growing concerns that disinformation campaigns are prolific across social media platforms. Created by small but vocal groups of climate skeptics, bad-faith posts can “clog up” feeds and make it harder for science-backed information to break through. The majority of climate skeptics are in the US: the country accounts for half of the written interactions presenting climate skepticism, even though it only accounts for a third of the global conversation.

### Misinformation leads to mistrust

Contradictory information – or, really, misinformation – leads to confusion and skepticism, which, in turn, can exacerbate feelings of powerlessness. Even if most people agree about the importance of addressing the climate crisis, misleading and fear-mongering posts discrediting a given technology or criticizing a certain law can increase uncertainty and mistrust.

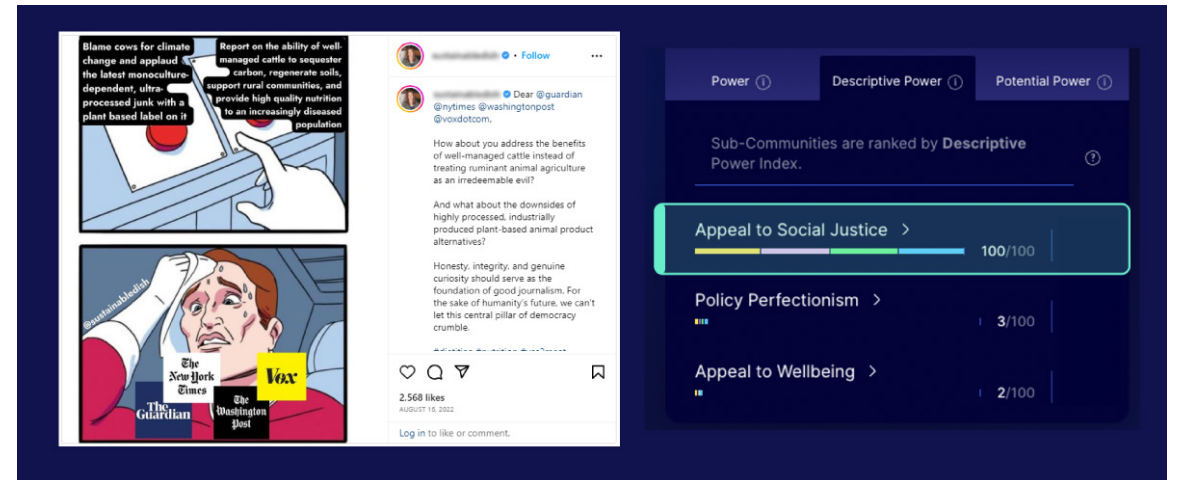
We see in the data that bad-faith, unreliable information generates unnecessary and unproductive tensions around sustainable solutions. The more ill-intentioned questions and misguided resistance to a potential solution, the less likely that solution will be to bring about the change that is needed.

### The importance of trust

Beyond these consequences, the information gap is also fostering a feeling of powerlessness among people. If a user does not even know which news sources to turn to for trustworthy insights, how can they expect to create and execute a sustainability action plan? Frustration can quickly transform into despair, which, in turn, can cause a person to stay where they are, rather than moving forward.

And, unfortunately, our data shows that discussions centering on the information gap are on the rise. This suggests that companies and institutions should adapt to offer better, more reliable information to citizens – and fast.

## Barrier 3: Fear of downsides



The study showed that in conversations around climate, social justice is a key concern. This becomes a barrier when it brings a belief that climate action may, in fact, carry a greater burden for society than the potential outcomes of inaction. An outsized focus on short-term downsides and costs of policies and actions can steer the conversation away from genuine opportunities for long-term change.

### No to regulations

Some commentators, for instance, suggest that politicians making climate protection policy are in positions of privilege and cannot understand the concerns of the everyday people their legislation impacts. For this reason, they suggest, we should mistrust and reject climate policies. But in reality, one could argue that such policies represent necessary change and should be welcomed by precisely the people who are rejecting them.

Why reject climate regulations, in this case?

Because climate action will require drastic changes to every aspect of daily life, and that is an overwhelming prospect. In response to such wide-scale challenges to our values and habits, it is natural that people may cast about for a reason to avoid making such changes. These citizens wonder if the social impact of climate policies be negative in the long run, especially for the most vulnerable groups in society, such as those living in poverty.

But social justice lies at the very heart of all climate action. In fact, climate justice is social justice, because of the intricate and inextricable connections between the environment and financial and social factors like sex, race, age and class. We could argue that to have a more fair and equal society, we must address the growing stressors on our planet.

### The cost of crisis

It is true that the most precarious populations are the most impacted by climate legislation; but it is also true that these groups are the first to feel the effects of the climate crisis. According to Greenpeace, the cost of climate change could be up to \$580 billion USD by 2030. This staggering cost will be mostly shouldered by developing and under-developed countries, the same places where the physical impacts of climate change will also be most felt.

### Seeking the perfect policy

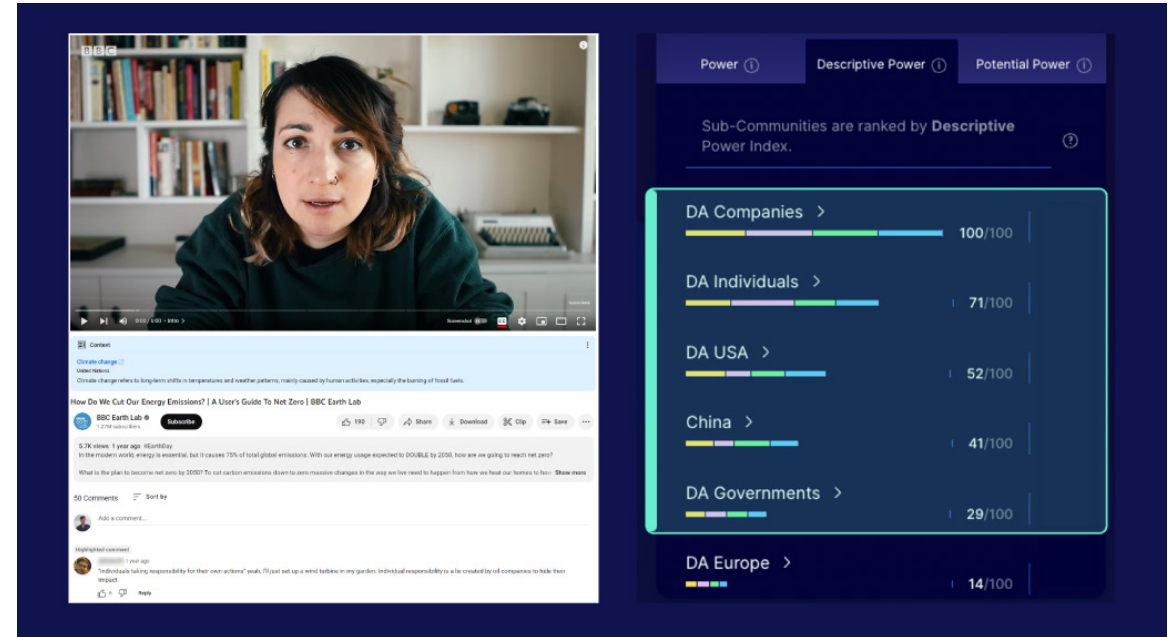
This barrier also includes a tactic known as “policy perfectionism.” Some people feel that every action we take toward a greener future must be met with 100% support and enthusiasm. With this mindset, no bill or statute will be acceptable, because no legislation can possibly address the concerns of every group impacted.

### Protecting citizens’ way of life

Finally, the barrier refers to the appeal to well-being that is sometimes made by those resistant to climate action. A case in point is this claim, likely familiar to many individuals: “Fossil fuels are a necessary evil toward more sustainable fuel sources.” The argument is couched in concern for developing nations, which rely heavily on such fuel sources. However, this line of thinking also emphasizes the downsides rather than the positive and encourages inaction today in favor of yet-undefined future action.

In actual fact, change must be disruptive. Individuals already know this, and corporations must also start to embrace this knowledge and push back against discourses focusing on the downsides of change by highlighting its positive, long-term effects for all echelons of society.

## Barrier 4: Delegation of authority



“Delegation of authority,” also known as “whataboutism,” encompasses instances of pushing off responsibility for climate change because it is perceived as someone else’s job or concern.

### Why me?

A popular belief is that, since companies are able to scale their actions, they should adopt a leadership role in mitigating climate change. If it’s in their power to create a sustainable future, shouldn’t they accept that responsibility?

To put it another way, individuals often see climate action as the remit of groups that do not include themselves. In fact, social media users see companies as the groups most capable of taking effective sustainable actions, far ahead of government bodies, which are seen to be corrupt and myopic in their approaches. These feelings intensify when discussing the United States and China, in particular, countries that are often seen as bearing a higher responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions.

Formerly, people had more faith in the “hummingbird” effect, the idea that individual actions in one area could trigger the changes needed for a greener future. However, as the urgency of the situation mounts, they no longer put stock in this view. Companies are largely considered to be responsible for the problem – at least, in part. Furthermore, they are seen as capable of acting more quickly than governments, a clear asset considering the pressing nature of the climate crisis.

### Individual action: a question of cost

This is not to rule out the impact of any and all individual behaviors. After all, we found that when select individuals are seen to act online, they generate emotion in other social media users, which is a clear motivating force. Celebrities, artists and other cultural influencers can set a strong example by committing to the causes of climate protection and sustainability.

People do not, generally, doubt that such stands made by individuals are important. But individual action for everyday people remains a complicated subject, in part because of costs. In the face of a rising cost of living crisis and global inflation, many consumers are forced to make hard decisions about what they can and cannot afford. Sustainable products and services are widely held to be more expensive than their traditional counterparts – as many as three in four people share this view.<sup>1</sup>

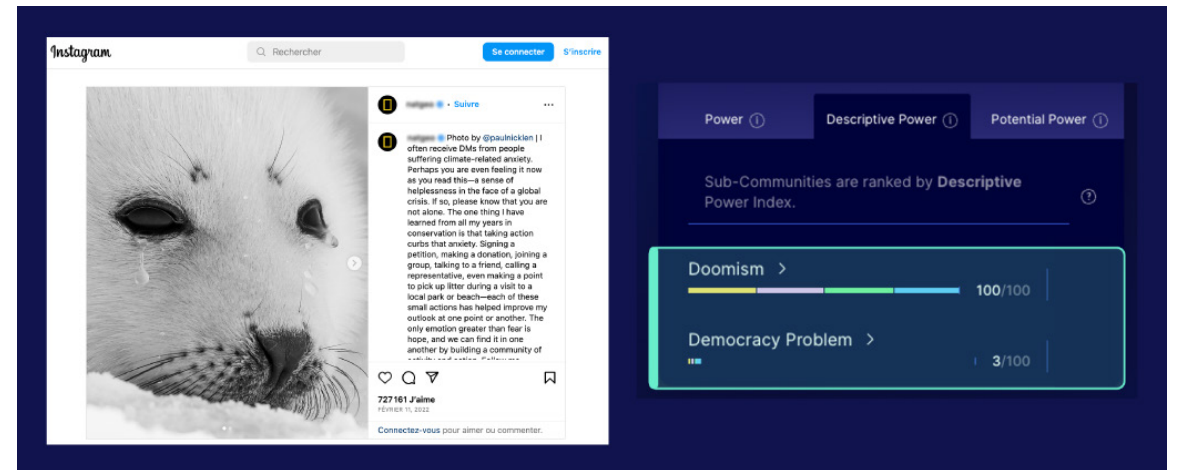
These consumers would welcome affordable, sustainable alternatives. They also expect companies to step up and fill this gap in the market. Brands must act to offer their sustainable products for affordable prices, so that clients with less purchasing power, including younger generations, can consume more responsibly. Companies should also be sure to clearly communicate the sustainability credentials of their products. People are largely receptive to information about the lower environmental impact of a product and appreciate the opportunity to make an informed choice.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theconsumergoodsforum.com/blog/2022/11/22/global-survey-shows-consumers-want-to-save-the-planet-but-inflation-is-taking-a-toll/>

## Citizens to corporations: ‘step up!’

Not only do consumers want such changes; they are demanding them. Our study shows that companies are being scrutinized and judged for their climate actions, or lack thereof. Even as individual activism increases in scale, corporations are expected to step up and do what they do best: mobilize large amounts of people in pursuit of a worthy goal.

## Barrier 5: Hopelessness



The fifth and final barrier is concerned with the state of the environment. This feeling is most likely familiar to everyone reading this, or to someone close to them.

### ‘Climate anxiety’ takes the world

Many of the documents analyzed in our survey expressed despair and anxiety about climate change – both its current-day manifestations and its future threat. Though some concern is natural and even welcome, this response becomes an obstacle when it crosses over into a constant or near-constant state of mind. This phenomenon, known to scientists and mental health professionals as “climate anxiety,” affects a significant number of users, especially younger individuals. In 2021, 45% of people age 16 to 25 reported that climate anxiety had a daily negative effect on them.

These negative emotions are understandably unpleasant and distressing and can cause people to freeze and dwell in negativity. The cycle of despair is not helped by the amount of negative climate news many users encounter every time they go online. When an environmental catastrophe like a fire or flood takes place, it is natural that more people will feel some level of climate anxiety. However, when this response is constantly being triggered it can actually discourage people from finding solutions and taking action. In the face of such unfortunate events, many citizens consciously elect to turn away and renounce the struggle for progress and change.

### Why try if we're all doomed?

The mindset that falls under this pillar can also be referred to as “doomism.” This attitude can essentially be summed up by the feeling that it is impossible to avert the fallout of climate change, and that we may as well give up. At this point, the thinking goes, no action can prevent the inevitable disaster. People following this line of thought might find themselves accepting their fate with a mix of strong emotions, including guilt and relief.

There can also be a sense of inertia among proponents of this worldview. It may seem that our global structure is too complex and deeply entrenched to truly change in any meaningful way. This idea, too, can inspire people to surrender to negative emotions and outlooks. However, such a view fails to take into consideration the plasticity and resilience of global communities, and the unique affordances of international cooperation.

### A major lever to drive action

These are weighty issues, and also a key factor brought to light by this study. Of all the barriers uncovered by our study, “hopelessness” provoked the highest proportion of negative emotions – but also, the highest level of commitment. Furthermore, over the course of the eight-month study, ideas within this barrier were expressed with increasing frequency by users. This implies that hopelessness is of growing concern to an ever-larger number of people. This, in turn, suggests that responding to such feelings and working to surmount this obstacle could be a great tactic for companies attempting to engage with individuals and combat climate inaction. Building climate engagement and promoting effective solutions will require that organizations tackle this feeling of futility head-on, for example by setting up processes to measure and demonstrating impact accurately and convincingly.



# 05

FROM INACTION TO ACTION



# THE SDG PERSPECTIVE

Each of these five barriers to climate action are interconnected and play off one another in various ways. In order to create a foundation on which organizations can build effective solutions, our data analysis included breaking the results up into the seven key SDG categories where companies and institutions are most likely to be able to impart long-term change. The analysis revealed that the key barrier to action in a given situation depends greatly upon which climate goal is being targeted at that time.

## Tackling sustainability goals armed with knowledge

For example, the biggest barrier to addressing UN SDG 13 – Climate action, was shown to be the Information gap (which was also a major obstacle for UN SDG 15 – Life on land). Meanwhile, the greatest barrier to acting to protect the oceans as per UN SDG 14 – Life below water, is Disconnected optimism. This difference may seem subtle – after all, as long as we are addressing the barriers at all, aren't we taking effective action?

In fact, a company's approach to tackling climate inaction will depend on the unique needs of its situation and the climate targets it is pursuing. Considering the difference above, a company seeking to protect the ocean's ecosystem would want to invest the most time and resources into **combatting techno-optimism**. At the same time, a company focused on inspiring general climate action would want to focus instead on **filling the information gap** with reliable, well-sourced data.

In general, across the seven SDGs used to frame our study, disconnected optimism was either the first or second barrier represented. This suggests that, for many companies with different goals, **cracking down on hollow talk** will be a strong starting point.

**Though of course there can be no one-size-fits-all solution to climate change, having a common goal across different sectors and industries could encourage exciting cross-discipline innovations.**

The analysis also showed that, across many of the SDGs, **Disconnected optimism** was followed directly (or almost directly) by **Hopelessness**. This may seem paradoxical at first. However, we can see how they stem from the same root cause: avoidance of the reality of climate change, which exists somewhere between these two extremes. And, as both responses result in renouncing individual responsibility, addressing these barriers need not require two completely different approaches.

Finally, **Fear of downsides** ranked high as a barrier to three of the four SDGs: UN SDG 7 – Affordable and clean energy, UN SDG 6 – Clean water and sanitation, and UN SDG 11 – Sustainable cities and communities. This makes sense when we consider that all three of these SDGs are connected directly to daily comforts and conveniences. Social justice concerns are central to these three areas, so it follows that our data would pinpoint them as a key battleground.

Companies working in these areas must, therefore, be aware of the potential dangers of such discourse, and work to address the key concerns around our priorities as a society, especially in terms of climate regulations and policies, while not losing focus on their climate targets.

When breaking this data down further and analyzing different types of actors, more nuances arise. For instance, individual activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) both identify **Hopelessness** as a key problem impeding action. Meanwhile, in organic conversations of individuals distinct from these two groups, hopelessness is actually the least common barrier. This implies that the emotions felt by everyday people are not as dire as some actors would have us believe. It suggests that people in general are open to worthy and promising sustainability solutions.

# THE ROAD AHEAD

The key learnings from our survey can help organizations better understand the barriers most relevant to their own sector and client base. These obstacles should serve as a base on which to build a new strategy to tackle the climate challenge – one that is more likely to engage individuals and drive real actions for change.

## Climate is front and center

Chief among our insights is the pertinence and intensity of climate conversations. Even in a time of conflict and upheavals all over the world, 5% of the online conversations being conducted in English on major platforms concentrated on climate issues. People are not getting tired of talking about climate, nor are they planning to move on to another topic in the face of inaction. In order to protect their credibility, their reputations and their financial performance, brands and companies will need to sit up and listen.

## The impact of young voices

Another key learning from the study is the emergent importance of TikTok to fuel engagement. Younger audiences have flocked to the platform, with 77.5% of users under the age of 34. This is a significant segment of the “sixth continent” online population: the platform had 1.4 billion monthly active users in 2022 and is expected to reach 1.8 billion by the end of 2023. The youngest generations may not be the biggest actors, but they may indirectly have the greatest potential for impact: this age bracket proves to be the most engaged in discussions of climate change. Their concerns must therefore be top of mind, and the force of their engagement should not be underestimated.

## Common pitfalls for corporations

Our data also uncovered major areas which companies seeking to take climate action should focus on. These include:

- **Corporate messaging:** a glut of marketing materials and communications threatens to overwhelm citizens. Companies should avoid overinflating the results of their actions and the progress they have made, rather implement proper processes to control and measure impact – then communicate about them.

- **Clear information:** when faced with huge volumes of directly opposed data and analysis, people will naturally be frozen and indecisive. This “information fog” affects us all and can inspire hesitation and resistance to new technologies. For instance, if we are too caught up in asking if windmills are better than solar panels, we risk never installing either and continuing to use fossil fuels. Organizations should consider the volume and clarity of the information they share.
- **Social injustice:** many users are hesitant to move forward with sustainable options because they are uncertain how climate action will impact the ongoing struggle for social justice. They worry about overshadowing or crowding out other worthy discussions when they prioritize the environment. Companies and institutions can mitigate this by providing a balanced view of both any possible negative short-term effects and the positive long-term effects of climate action.
- **Taking ownership:** though many individuals acknowledge responsibility for their own actions, they also feel that companies should lead the change and create our sustainable future. This attitude identifies companies as the drivers behind climate change but ignores the vital role every person must play in living more sustainably. Organizations can meet this challenge by demonstrating the actions to be taken on every level and showing how they will impact the climate crisis.



## WHAT'S NEXT?

Our survey should be used as a jumping-off point for companies and public actors to reflect deeply on the intent and impact of their actions. Organizations should utilize their knowledge of the barriers to climate action to redefine their strategy and processes today, to bring them in line with citizens' expectations. Similarly, they must rethink how they evaluate and communicate about their environmental commitments, and how they verify their sustainability policies.

In the face of the increasingly harmful impact of climate change, the connection between citizens and science will become decisive for fostering a sustainable future. This report gathers evidence from the new observational capabilities introduced by social networks in the 21st century. It is a first contribution for further research and analysis, seeking to reinforce our social understanding and participate in creating a foundation for better global science coordination and governance on climate issues.



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# BLOOM



## About BLOOM

Bloom is a strategic anticipation platform that enables brands, industries and institutions to detect trends, weak signals, anticipate crises and decipher communities on social networks. It was founded in 2017 by Bruno Breton, an expert in media and social networks, and Alexander Polonsky, PhD in applied mathematics and neuroscience.

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