



Visual GPS: Sustainability

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What defines the Sustainability Force?

Expressed by the UN more than 30 years ago, Sustainability is “Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” and ensuring Earth’s inhabitants have what they need to survive and thrive. From reducing our carbon footprint, reusing and recycling, to appreciating and protecting nature’s beauty—and ensuring our children are poised to do the same—it all matters more than ever.

What market research tells us people care about

Now much more mainstream, Sustainability is a Force that’s universal across generations, gender, and regions—while many think of younger generations as being more environmentally conscious, this does not play out consistently across the multitude of measures included in this research.

"...it’s now shameful both as a consumer as well as a business if you are not showing what you are doing in order to help the climate crisis."

-Getty Images Creative Insights Team

How people behave

When we look at what people believe versus how they behave, however, we see there’s a bit of a disconnect when sustainability issues collide with things that bring enormous pleasure and help improve wellbeing. As we see in the results, carbon footprints are less acted upon because it has a real impact on personal joy.

How sustainability is expressed visually

The following example represents the way expressions of Sustainability and environmental issues are evolving—as interpreted by our visual experts.

Let me show you why it matters

Data is one thing (and the statistics are strong around environmental issues) but we can’t change what we cannot see, and we need to see the environmental impact that our behavior is having on the world.

Visual content showing the effect of single-use plastic on the ocean kickstarted a global campaign against plastic usage.

There are now three evils:

1. Single-use plastic

The refillable water bottle industry is growing as they're becoming de rigueur—mainstream brands have popped up everywhere and the luxury market is now getting in on the action.

2. Takeaway coffee cups

Major fast food and coffee chains have come together with designers to develop a totally compostable cup.

3. Plastic straws

Some US cities have banned plastic straws. Searches for reusable metal straws up by 205% between March and August on [Etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com).

As well as plastic bags, coffee pods, and toothbrushes, what our products are made of is becoming key with more new products due to be launched in 2020. Our search data has seen huge increases in interest in reusable coffee cups, straws, water bottles, etc. This has led to the need to rethink what lifestyle and business content looks like. Often bottles, cups, and straws are small elements of a larger scene, but it's important to rethink what's in the image or video and whether it meets the modern sustainable standards of consumers.

See how to visualize this expression below.