

The background of the entire image is a close-up photograph of two hands, palms facing each other, heavily coated in dark brown mud. The mud is thick and uneven, covering the skin and filling the creases. The lighting is dramatic, with highlights on the mud and deep shadows in the background.

SUSTAINABILITY AS CLEAR AS MUD

#AsClearAsMud

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MAKING THE PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY CLEARER

From niche strategy to table stakes, sustainability is now everybody's mandate.

But amongst the lofty promises, greenwashing and Extinction Rebellion-esque brand stunts, how can we better engage our consumers and our organisations with our missions?

In this report, we aim to clarify how brand managers can galvanise their stakeholders and tackle sustainability in a way that is relevant to their consumers, authentic to their brand and most importantly, action-orientated.



CULTURAL CONTEXT



BRANDS CAN PLAY A ROLE IN THE CHANGE CURVE OCCURRING

Country by country we are seeing different rates of adoption on sustainability- some are just reaching awareness whilst others are already taking-action.

These adoption rates are being influenced significantly by their respective country's levels of regulation and their cultures, but brands can also make a difference here.

Brands can play a meaningful role in consumers' lives along this curve – by raising awareness, taking action on behalf of consumers, or supporting consumers to take action themselves.

COVID-19 HAS MADE CONSUMERS MORE AWARE OF THEIR IMPACT

The Covid-19 crisis has caused consumers to dramatically reassess their consumption behavior.

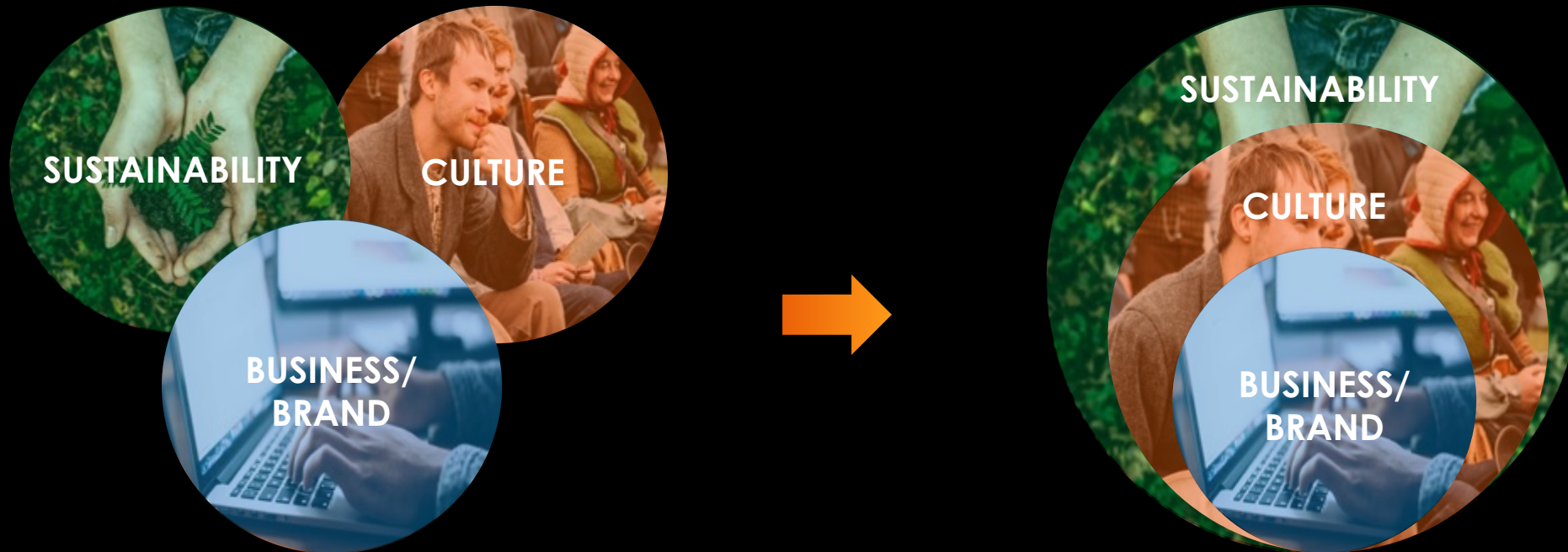
More consumers than ever are wanting to act now – giving a huge opportunity to brands to play a meaningful role supporting them.

“60% of consumers reported making more environmentally friendly, sustainable or ethical purchases since the start of the pandemic.”

BBC, 2021



THE RELATIONSHIP OF BRAND TO CULTURE AND CULTURAL ISSUES IS CHANGING



Traditionally businesses saw cultural issues like sustainability as only being relevant to certain parts of their organisations...

...now many are shifting, embedded tightly in culture with the specific issue of sustainability becoming a halo for decisions across the board.

THE MUD: CREATING A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO BRAND, PLANET & PROFIT

BALANCING PROFITS & THE PLANET

The financial and social decisions involved with sustainability efforts are significant. Proposed changes need a clear strategy and plan to deliver positive short and long-term impacts.

SPEAKING AS ONE BRAND

There is a natural tension between brands - their products and their history and the way they can act and speak on sustainability. Speaking or acting in a way that is out of character for your brand or that denies a product or brand truth can result in a loss of consumer trust.



WHAT BRANDS SAID: MIND THE GAP

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We spoke to 100 brand leaders to find out how their brands were approaching sustainability, now and in the future.

We then hosted a Sustainability Webinar titled 'As Clear As Mud' with Katie Reed (Vice President, Arla Brand) and John Roscoe (Business Angel and Trustee to The Wildlife Trust) to discuss the topic further.

This report summarises our research findings and conclusions from the session.



THE SUSTAINABILITY NEEDMAP

We hypothesised the motivations behind Sustainability translating them onto our NeedMap™ to show the underlying drivers of purchase decisions

The archetypes aligned to the motivations show how a brand would 'show up' and communicate their sustainability messaging

We asked brand owners...

'How do you feel your brand needs to adapt in the future in terms of the dialogue it has with consumers?'



THERE IS A CLEAR SPLIT ON HOW BRANDS PLAN TO ACT ON SUSTAINABILITY

There was an even split between brands that either told us they wanted to be seen in the future as **Outlaws** (the Elon Musk persona that is seen to be out there pushing boundaries) or those that wanted to be seen as **Everymans** (the Joe Wicks persona that embodies taking everyone on the journey).

THIS NOTION LEADS TO A NUMBER OF INTERNAL BRAND TENSIONS:

- How a brand speaks vs. what they actually do
- What a brand knows consumers want vs. How that brand can credibly behave
- Short-term thinking vs. long term vision



WE ASKED... “WHERE WILL YOUR SUSTAINABILITY FOCUS BE OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS?”

“To look at our **brand purpose** and strengthen our sustainability position”

“To analyse our **supply chain** and make sure we're being as ethical as possible”

“A focus on **distribution**, understanding where our product is needed most”

“**Product innovation**, creating new ideas that are better for the planet”

“Looking at our **packaging solutions** that are more environmental”

“A focus on **ingredients** and being more **transparent** about what's in our products”

“A focus on **animal welfare** and protecting wildlife”

“Investing in becoming **carbon neutral**”

“Understanding what our **consumers** are looking for in an ethical brand”

“Focus on how we **communicate to consumers**, trying to educate how to be more ethical”



THEIR MOST SIGNIFICANT FOCUS IS BRAND PURPOSE - STRENGTHENING THEIR SUSTAINABILITY POSITION



WE ALSO ASKED...WHAT COVID-ACCELERATED SUSTAINABILITY TRENDS ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?



LOCALISM

Covid-19 has put local products in the spotlight and the term has evolved to encompass much more. Consumers are seeking quality and freshness but also want to support their individual communities



ELEVATED MINIMALISM

Consumers are starting to buy fewer, better quality, crafted items with longevity. A backlash from throw away fashion, guilt of consumption and over stimulation has led to people leading a more minimal lifestyle



MICRO-HEDONISM

There is a need to release and break free from the stresses of 2020/1, however, consumer anxieties mean they want to find a balance, therefore will seek small, experience-led moments of hedonism



BACKLASH NATION

Consumers are rebelling and cutting out brands completely that don't match their values, instead looking to radically transparent, ethical brands that are significantly making a difference, on their doorstep or global scale



UBER CLEAN

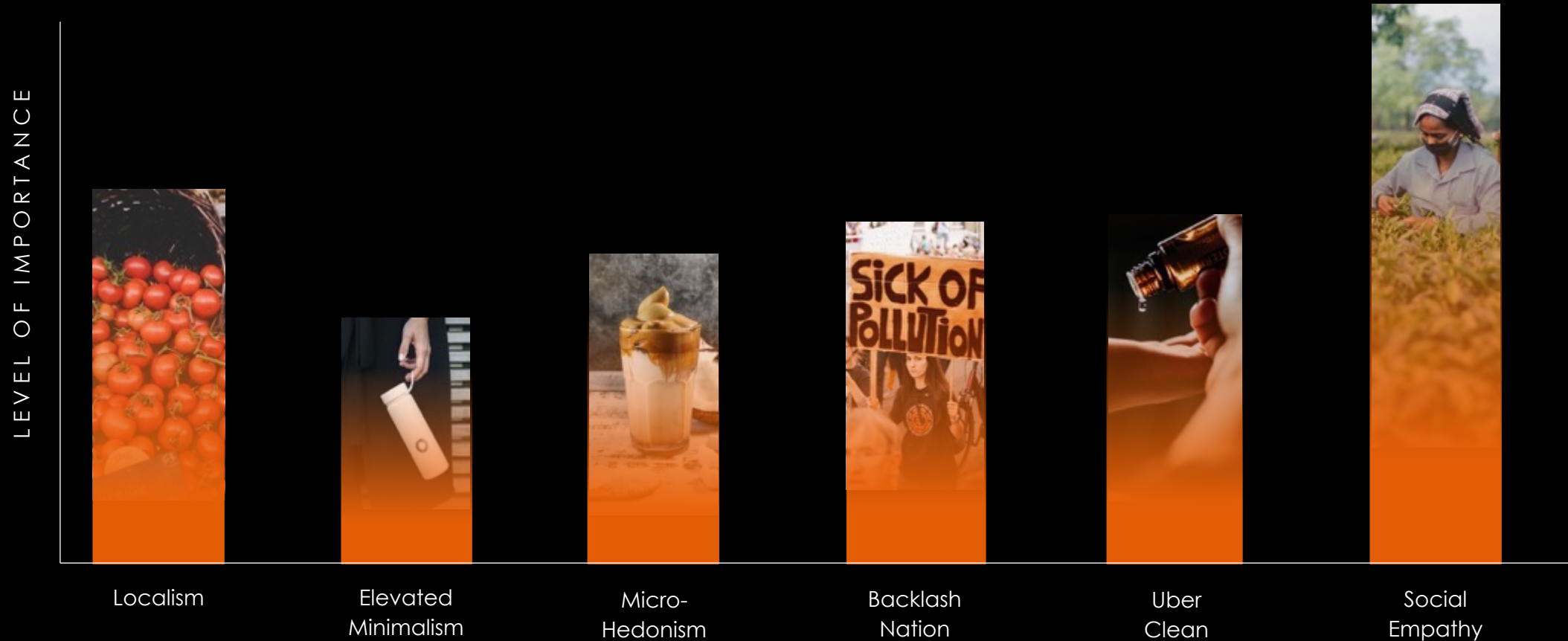
Consumers are looking for ways to protect their health and prevent illness so are looking to brands that provide the most natural ingredients. Plant Based, Veganism, Organic etc will be scrutinised and the cleanest ones will come out on top



SOCIAL EMPATHY

Consumers are keen to buy into 'human' brands that show generosity and acts of compassion. Now more than ever they will value underlying moral principles of respect and empathy, rebalancing the social status quo

BRAND HUMANISM WAS THE CLEAR FRONT-RUNNER





CONCLUSION: SUSTAINING SUSTAINABILITY

1. EMBED SUSTAINABILITY INTO YOUR BRAND DNA

Embed sustainability into your brand by revisiting your brand purpose.

Although less tangible, a company guided by an inspiring brand purpose has the potential to implement a long-term systemic change.

Consider if your brand purpose is well enough defined - is it too functional? Is it too near term? Is it able to guide your business in the future?

“There is a seismic shift going on out in the world. Marketers are absolutely right to revisit their brand purpose.”

John Roscoe, Business Angel & Trustee, The Wildlife Trust, HMc As Clear As Mud Webinar, June 2021

VOLVO CARS

After positioning itself firmly in automotive safety for decades, Volvo is now broadening its focus to make sustainability as ingrained in the brand as safety has always been. Its latest campaign is a reminder that the biggest threat to our safety isn't on the road. Today, climate change is the ultimate safety test.



KETEL ONE VODKA

Ketel One vodka recently repositioned to connect more emotionally with its consumers as a brand that believes in 'doing things right'. It celebrated its new brand purpose "Doing good tastes better" with a new partnership with The Felix Project, a British charity that rescue and deliver good quality surplus ingredients from within the food and drinks industry.

2. BUILD A CULTURE OF CHANGE

To successfully implement change throughout an organisation, take the entire organisation on the journey with you.

Educate your entire business and particularly your marketers.

Brand leaders need to galvanise their organisations behind their missions with a clear vision, communicated regularly with belief and urgency from the top.

“At Arla we take that responsibility very personally, every colleague who works for our company does. That is what makes it a really powerful change.”

Katie Reed, Vice President of Arla Brand, HMc As Clear As Mud Webinar, June 2021



“If you want to deliver a big change to a big organisation, you need to have it hardwired from the top. Bring that direction into all meetings, presentations, audit reports, monthly updates.”

*John Roscoe, Business Angel & Trustee, The Wildlife Trust,
HMc As Clear As Mud Webinar, June 2021*



3. KEEP IT ALL CONSISTENT

Sharing grand sustainability ambitions or claims can feel empty and lack meaning to consumers if those words feel disjointed from the heart of your brand.

Avoid this by using the Needmap™ to align your sustainability position with your brand personality.

Locate where your brand currently sits on the Needmap™ and let it guide your internal and external communications to ensure consumers hear from you in a consistent and authentic way.



INNOCENT DRINKS

Innocent Drinks “Little Drinks, Big Dreams” campaign put’s a very authentically caring spin on the climate change crisis. The campaign emphasises how we can all strive for a healthy, happier planet, showing how collective, positive action can drive big change. This feels very in keeping with the brand personality.



4. CONNECT CHANGES TO SPECIFIC CONSUMER NEEDS & MOTIVATIONS

Connect what the consumer wants and what your brand is doing. Conscious consumption encompasses a mix of motivations – personal, community & planet, ensure you have a clear consumer benefit for them today.

“Make changes easy for your consumers – they don’t want big habit change.”

Katie Reed, Vice President of Arla Brand, HMC As Clear As Mud Webinar, June 2021



ODDBOX

Oddbox, a fruit and vegetable subscription box connects their sustainable approach to their consumer's personal motivations by letting them know how much CO2 & litres of water they are saving with every box purchased.



LEVI'S

Levi's "Buy Better, Wear Longer" campaign communicates its sustainability credentials whilst appealing to consumer needs now for fashionable clothes.

5. BALANCE LOFTY MISSIONS WITH TAKING ACTION NOW

“Brands need to strike the right balance between having a big lofty mission and making changes now.”

Jamie Hollum, Strategy Director, HMc As Clear As Mud Webinar, June 2021

Talking too long term can result in disconnecting your consumers. Although ambitious targets and brand purposes are important internally for steering organisations, externally we need to ensure we are delivering real change, not just promises.

“Business need to show they are taking action – they need to demonstrate they are moving through proof points and are actually making fundamental change.”

Katie Reed, Vice President of Arla Brand, HMc As Clear As Mud Webinar, June 2021

One way to combat this is by introducing packaging changes and product innovation. These tend to be quicker wins that brands can focus on today - tapping into consumer demands whilst also delivering for shareholders.



ARLA

Arla is making tangible changes now as well as being purpose led. As part of their ambitious sustainability program, Arla introduced sustainable packaging for Skyr that reduced plastic by 40% and reducing CO2 emissions by 30%.



CIF

As part of parent company Unilever's Clean Futures program, Cif launched Cif Ecorefil a completely new type of product that is made with 75% less plastic that works for consumers now and the environment.

6. GO OUT AND LEARN AGAIN

Very few people are an expert in this field, except those who've dedicated themselves to it. So, commit to going out and learning more, beyond the day-to-day.

Find time for yourself and your colleagues to better understand why, where, when and how to create tangible change.

Those organisations who deeply understand and enact the changes that the world needs, will be rewarded.

“Be curious. Go out learning again. It is a really complex topic and it needs real change. This is not about marketing, it is about real changes that will make a difference.”

Katie Reed, Vice President of Arla Brand

THANK YOU

Hayley Roe

hayley.roe@hainesmccgregor.co.uk

M: +44 (0) 7787 546747

