

WIM VERMEULEN

**SPEAK
UP
*NOW!***

**MARKETING IN
TIMES OF CLIMATE
CRISES**

Lannoo
Campus

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**We are
already at
+1.1°C global
warming**

**The damage
is no longer
reversible**

**The Amazon
lost 17%
from its
forest**

**5 mass
extinctions
in Earth's
history**

**First chance
to stabilise
climate again is
around 2050**

**We have
8 years to
halve global
emissions**

**Oceans
at least
1.5°C
warmer**

**Humanity
has wiped out
60% of animal
populations**

**The climate
crisis is a race
we can
still win**

**Exceeding
1.5°C triggers
climate tipping
points**

**A drought
warning is in
place for 47%
of the EU**

**+12.000
species are
threatened**

Preface.



The scientific consensus is clear: we are sleepwalking off the edge of a cliff.¹

These are not the words of a climate scientist, but those of James Watt, cofounder of BrewDog, the hip and well-known brewery causing a stir in the United Kingdom. His words create a stark mental image that perfectly summarises his conversation with Sir David Attenborough and instantly sets the tone for BrewDog's climate plan.

Watt understands that the focus of BrewDog's business operations must be the climate. He also understands that consumers need to hear this loud and clear, because today they expect companies to take climate leadership. This is confirmed by our own research: 83% of the consumers surveyed are calling on the business sector to take the lead in the climate transition. This is momentous. Never before have so many consumers appealed to companies to solve a social issue. They expect answers, they expect brands and companies to make their voices heard, they expect them to explain how they are tackling the climate crisis. They want businesses to speak up and they want them to do it now. Some companies would rather not do this, they would rather continue with business as normal on the side-lines. That's understandable; most companies would rather not put themselves in the spotlight and certainly not when it comes to the climate. But it's becoming ever more difficult to stay silent, because silence is construed as doing nothing. According to consumers, companies that do nothing to solve the climate crisis are part of the problem. They are the ones that will bear the brunt of the impact in the years to come.

In chapter 1, we'll see why consumers are making this appeal and why it is so important for companies to take this issue seriously. We'll dive into the history of the climate crisis to understand the origins of the Great Hesitation and why we're in the situation we're in today. Seven years after the Paris Agreement

was adopted, scientists have to admit that it's highly unlikely we will meet the target of 1.5 degrees Celsius. This means that we will miss our first chance to stabilise the climate by around 2050 and that we'll have to wait until around 2070 for our second chance. This is a massive risk for the business sector because it means that, until 2070, we will have to endure more frequent and more intense extreme weather events. In the meantime, climate fear and protests are multiplying. It's not just young people taking back to the streets following the pandemic. In April 2022, over 1,000 climate scientists took to the streets as part of Scientist Rebellion, chaining themselves to the doors of banks and gas-and-oil companies. Even ex-diplomats, involved in years of climate negotiations, are joining Extinction Rebellion and calling for civil disobedience. If you don't follow the situation closely, you wouldn't believe everything that is happening. And it's all having an impact on consumers. They no longer see the future through rose-coloured glasses. They're losing their confidence in political leaders to guide us safely through the climate transition and are instead looking to the business sector to take the reins. That carries expectations that companies had better take seriously.

Chapter 2 lays out the risks for the business sector and there are quite a few of those. We'll dive into climate science in order to clearly explain what those risks mean. However, the climate crisis also brings with it opportunities. We'll look at how companies can lead the climate charge in different ways and explore with what language and with which voice they can share this with the consumer. Not all companies will have a talent for it. We'll discuss the importance of the uptick in climate-friendly consumption and the decline in consumption of regular products. This switch could cut global emissions by 40 to 70% which, according to some sources, is necessary to achieve the 1.5 degrees Celsius target set out in the Paris Agreement. This is one very important insight from the latest IPCC report that deserves much more attention from marketers and advertising professionals than it is currently getting. Making climate-friendly consumption the social norm is one of the essential conditions to achieve the much-needed emissions cuts. This offers not only an opportunity for growth in the short-term, but can also limit the risks for businesses in the long-term. Making a certain consumption pattern the social norm is right up every marketer's street. We'll look at how climate-friendly companies are already doing this and how they're trying to dismantle the barriers standing in the way of climate-friendly consumption in chapter 3.

Nevertheless, it's not going to be easy, which brings us to chapter 4. Here we will get to the heart of the most pivotal climate barrier for businesses: the climate-friendly claims that companies are making lack credibility. Few consumers believe companies when they talk about their climate-friendly initiatives. This is an important finding of the research we conducted under the leadership of professor Gino Verleye in late 2021. We mapped the cynicism and disbelief shown toward the business sector on topics such as climate friendliness and climate leadership. We presented almost a hundred 'sustainable' advertising campaigns to consumers to sound out how credible they were. The results were staggering. The credibility of companies' climate communications is exceptionally low. We truly are looking at a 'language problem'. The language that marketers speak is that of the old normal, not of the climate normal.

Credibility, in the language of the old normal, is not a problem. If a toothpaste brand promises that our teeth will be sparkling white in no time using their product, nobody would take that tube back to the supermarket after two uses to complain that the company lied. We don't believe that our teeth will ever appear as white as those of the man or woman in the ad. Our expectations are much lower. At most, we just want our teeth to look a little less yellow and we know for a fact that that won't happen overnight. However, when it comes to sustainability, credibility is a key factor in consumers' evaluation criteria. Most importantly, it's the key to making sustainability communication effective. In other words, sustainability communication does not work if it's not believable. We researched what makes climate-friendly communication credible and have been able to identify several key factors. It's clear what type of language consumers expect from us and what criteria it must fulfil. We also know which story lines are better suited to the new climate normal and which aren't.

It's not just consumers who are setting new and higher bars for the language that companies speak in the climate normal; policymakers are also scrutinising how companies communicate their climate commitments. They do not approve of the work they see today. In several European countries, new rules are being implemented for all climate-friendly communications. Those rules leave no room for interpretation: climate commitments must be clear, unambiguous and substantiated. If they're not, firm action will be taken: campaigns are being banned on a regular basis nowadays.

Marketers and advertising professionals have been called 'the architects of desire'.² We create demand among consumers for certain products or services. At times, there comes a point when we need to question whether it is socially responsible to keep boosting demand for a particular product. We questioned our practices in the same way when the scientific consensus clearly established the damaging effects of smoking. Is it still socially responsible today to promote products that aren't climate-friendly? Shouldn't we be doing exactly the opposite and putting all our creative strength into speeding up the transition to climate-friendly consumption?

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." That's what Charles Dickens wrote in *A Tale of Two Cities* during the French Revolution. In some ways, it's reminiscent of the world today. For marketers and advertising professionals, it is 'the season of light'. Companies are being asked to take the lead in the sustainable transition that the world needs to embark on. To do that, they need to step out of the shadows and explain what we can do. They have to speak up now. Most companies don't yet speak the language of the new climate normal and that is where marketers and advertising professionals come in. Now, more than ever, they can make a difference but first, they must learn the language.

CLIMATE CRISIS TODAY

We are
already at
+1.1°C global
warming

- ! Current levels of atmospheric CO₂ have not been experienced for at least two million years.
- ! 32 years ago, IPCC scientists urged us to take immediate action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- ! The rate at which CO₂ has increased in the atmosphere since 1900 is at least 10 times faster than at any other time during the last 800,000 years.
- ! That current 1.1°C temperature rise is already causing disruption to weather patterns.
- ! The momentum of industrial activity and the delayed response of the atmosphere and oceans mean a further increase to at least 1.5°C warming is inevitable — and many scientists expect 2°C to be breached even if the world takes the strongest action that we can realistically expect.
- ! Pollution from fossil fuels is killing 8.7 million people every year. That means 1 person dies every 4 seconds because the air we breathe is poisonous.
- ! According to the IMF, we directly and indirectly subsidise the fossil-fuel industry to the tune of \$5.3 trillion annually. That's \$10 million every minute.

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Oceans
at least
1.5°C
warmer

The air
we breath is
poisonous

The Great Hesitation.



Hesitation will get you killed.

Laurell K. Hamilton

THE GODS NO LONGER CROSS LAKE SUWA

At the foot of the Japanese Alps lies the vast body of water, Lake Suwa. For more than 500 years, Shinto priests have measured the temperature of the water. According to Shinto legend, if they have three measurements of minus 10 degrees during a season, there is a chance that *omiwatari* – ‘the God’s Crossing’ – will occur. At night, you can hear the ice cracking under the footsteps of the god Takeminakata, crossing the lake to meet his beloved, the goddess Yasakatome. In reality, the thundering sound comes from the thick ice cracking due to prolonged freezing temperatures. In the middle of February 2020, Shinto priest Kiyoshi Miyasaki measured the temperature of the water. He was concerned; that winter, he hadn’t yet measured any freezing temperatures at all. The *omiwatari* was already becoming a less frequent occurrence. That year, it wasn’t going to happen either. The thermometer showed that the water was 5.7 degrees Celsius.

According to Shinto priests’ archives, Takeminakata used to cross the lake almost every winter. Since the second half of the 20th century, this has changed considerably. Between 1950 and 2000, there were 22 winters without *omiwatari*; since 2000 there have already been 13. Shinto priests’ writings about

the *omiwatari* are some of the oldest climate archives in the world, inevitably showing us how quickly the Earth has warmed in the last few decades.³ The time when the ice cracked under the feet of the gods seems to be gone for good.

Never has a natural phenomenon managed to throw the climate system as off-balance as humankind itself. Even the meteorite that crashed into our planet 65 million years ago didn't have the same impact, even though it cast darkness over the planet for two years and wiped half of all living beings, including the dinosaurs, off the globe.⁴ Today we know perfectly well what we're doing and what the consequences of our actions will be. Scientists have spelled it out clearly. Their work speaks volumes. The consequences of the climate and biodiversity crisis will make it ever more difficult to maintain our social structures and wellbeing. That, in turn, has an impact on the business sector. We're making an effort, but we've not (yet) succeeded in obtaining the systemic change that is needed to limit the duration and impact of the consequences of both crises. We're dragging our feet at a time when we should be kicking things up a gear.

WHEN SCIENTISTS SOUND THE ALARM, POLITICIANS GET TO WORK

Scientists have been sounding the alarm for four decades.

A climate scientist first managed to make world news back in 1988 when two leading figures found each other: American senator, Tim Wirth, and NASA climate scientist, James Hansen. Tim Wirth, from Colorado, was elected senator in 1986. In that role, he started to receive more and more concerning reports about climate change; he was looking for a way to bring political attention to the issue. At the same time, NASA climate scientist James Hansen had spent several years studying climate change. In 1981, in an article in the renowned journal *Science*, he predicted that the burning of fossil fuels would lead to a global temperature increase of 2.5 degrees Celsius by the end of the 21st century. That prediction didn't receive much response. This was in the 80s, when America was under the spell of capitalism and the *money-is-everything* mentality, glamorised in films like *Wall Street*. Nobody was interested in a scientist coming to break that happy bubble.

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Seven years later, in 1988, America sweated through a heatwave. The water level in the Mississippi was so low, inland navigation was impossible. Crops were drying up and forest fires took hold throughout the country. Almost half of America was declared a disaster zone. The cover of Time magazine on 4th July 1988 summed it up in three words: 'The Big Dry'.⁵ Just at that moment, James Hansen had finished a study with conclusive evidence that the climate was heading in the wrong direction. He was looking for a way to share his research with the wider public. Meanwhile, Senator Tim Wirth wanted to highlight the fact that the heatwave was no coincidence and was the work of humankind. When they came across each other's work, Wirth promised to organise a hearing so that Hansen could share his findings with the people who could do something about it. On 28th June 1988, on the day of the hearing, it was 38 degrees Celsius, the warmest day of the heatwave. It's as if the heat had wanted to give Hansen a helping hand. Waiting to speak before the 'Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources' and 15 television cameras about his scientific conclusions, he wiped the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief.

Hansen started his speech by showing that the climate in 1988 was warmer than it ever had been and that the likelihood that these high temperatures were merely a coincidence was no more than 1%. He then showed what many people, with the fossil-fuel industry at the fore, decried: the climate crisis was being caused by humankind and more specifically by the burning of coal, oil and gas. Hansen also gave the senators and the public a glimpse of the future: "In 2029, in 41 years, it will be abnormally warm everywhere in the world and that could have disastrous consequences for our society because there will be more and worse droughts, heatwaves, floods and water shortages. We can prevent this," he said, "but to do that the emission of greenhouse gases must drop drastically." The next day, the New York Times printed on the front page: 'Global Warming Has Begun'.⁶ Hansen's message had been delivered. Together with Tim Wirth, they had succeeded in putting global warming firmly on the international community's agenda. Once the alarm has been sounded by scientists, the international community jumps into action. At least, that's the rule. Hansen and Wirth expected their work to be picked up and for a reaction to follow.

The climate issue is not the first life-threatening problem that the global community has had to deal with; the first was the hole in the ozone layer.

That problem was tackled with the clout and speed needed. On that issue, there was no question of hesitation. In 1974, a group of scientists published a study which suggested that the hydrochlorofluorocarbons or HCFCs used in consumer products such as aerosols, packaging and fridges damage the ozone layer. The ozone layer sits 14 to 45 km above the Earth and absorbs most (97%) of the ultraviolet rays emitted by the sun. Ultraviolet rays are dangerous for people, plants and animals. They're dangerous to such an extent that if there were no ozone layer, life on Earth would be impossible.

In 1985, 11 years later, scientific evidence showed that there was a hole in the ozone layer above Antarctica. The international community shot into action. In 1987 in Vienna, just two years later, it was agreed to halve the use of HCFCs. Three years later, in Montreal in 1990, it was decided to completely ban the use of HCFCs in industrialised countries by 2000 and in developing countries by 2010. Today, the use of HCFCs is banned in 197 countries and the ozone layer is recovering, slowly but surely. Any talk of HCFCs threatening all life on Earth is long gone.

The combination of the scientific warning cry and the international community's preparedness to act shows how quickly a global issue can be tackled. Add to that the willingness of several countries to accept rules being imposed on them from above and a business community that actively seeks to offer solutions, and many thought they had found the formula for success to solve all global problems swiftly and effectively. James Hansen's warning to the American senate in 1988 also didn't fall on deaf ears, at least initially. Four years later, in June 1992, 179 countries came together in Rio de Janeiro for the 'United Nations Conference on Environment and Development', better known as the 'Earth Summit'. Everyone was there: 108 Heads of State and Government, 2,400 NGO representatives and 10,000 journalists. The result is well-known: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), better known as the Climate Convention. The world set itself the goal "to combat global climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions."⁷ The countries present committed to developing national policy plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) while working together to seek ways in which we could adapt to a warmer world (adaptation). It was also agreed that they would meet yearly at a COP, or Conference of the Parties, to ensure that sustained progress was being made. You'd think they were ready to get cracking.

THE GREAT HESITATION

But then began the Great Hesitation. In 1997, nine years after Hansen raised the alarm, the yearly COP meetings led to the climate conference in Kyoto. There, the EU and 164 other countries signed the Kyoto Protocol, pledging to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 8% between 2008 and 2012. In 2001, the first flaws in the agreement started to show. The American senate didn't want to ratify it, even though Al Gore had played an important role in the development of the agreement and President Clinton had signed it. Then US President George Bush thus withdrew from the agreement, to which he also had strong objections. His main concern was that the Protocol only imposed commitments on industrialised countries and not on developing or newly industrialised countries such as China, India and Brazil. They were already generating considerable amounts of emissions while the emissions cuts imposed on the US would have a severe impact on the coal industry. At that time, the US was dependent on coal for half of their electricity supply. Reducing emissions would cause not only a hike in electricity prices that would affect millions of Americans, but could also lead to millions of lost jobs. Those risks were too great for a president to take. The Kyoto Protocol thus entered into force without the US. Seeing as the US was responsible for a third of global CO₂ emissions at that time, everyone knew the agreement was dead in the water.

In 2005, COP11 was held in Montreal. It was the largest international gathering since the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol. By then, everyone knew that the Kyoto Protocol wouldn't bring us any closer to achieving our goal. Global greenhouse gas emissions were still climbing unchecked. There was no willpower for a new agreement or for stricter reduction targets. The only decision that was taken was to buy some time and extend the Kyoto Protocol until 2012.

The next large conference was in December 2009 in Copenhagen. All the international community could do was come to the same conclusion as in 2005: greenhouse gas emissions were still rising in various countries. Meanwhile, scientific reports showing the negative impact of emissions on the climate were piling up. You would think that, at this point, the international community would start putting serious pressure on countries to convince them to mitigate that negative impact. Instead, the conference entered the history books as 'Floppenhagen'. No consensus was reached for further reduc-

tion targets. It was a severe blow to the hope that one day a plan would be adopted to tackle the climate crisis together and end the Great Hesitation. Images of a world marked by extreme weather events, political conflicts over water and food, and social conflicts over the ever-worsening economic situation suddenly became very real. Someone had to get matters back on track.

Christiana Figueres is the daughter of Jose Figueres, leader of the Costa Rican revolution who came to power in 1948. Christiana was 12 when her father became president for the third time. She spent part of her childhood growing up in the presidential palace and the rest on a coffee plantation her father owned. Her father taught her her life motto – “Impossible is not a fact, it is an attitude.” She is proud to be the daughter of a revolutionary. “I’m very comfortable with the word revolution,” she said. “In my experience, revolutions have been very positive.”⁸ In 2009, six months after the disastrous summit in Copenhagen, she was asked to be the architect of a new climate agreement as the executive secretary of the UNFCCC. Everyone, herself included, knew that this climate agreement would be our last chance. If she didn’t succeed in getting 195 countries to agree in 2015, we had no chance of curbing the climate crisis. That was the consensus. It thus became her responsibility to save the planet, but she didn’t have any authority: every country is sovereign. She was enthusiastic, but not really optimistic. When asked at her first press conference if she thought a new climate agreement was feasible, she answered: “Not in my lifetime.”⁹

In the meantime, climate scientists kept sounding the alarm bell, including in the fifth IPCC report published in 2014. The IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, is a UN organisation that was created to give the international community and its policy makers regular updates on the scientific state of climate change. They publish a report every six years, the result of the work of hundreds of scientists who base their work on tens of thousands of other scientific reports. The conclusions of the report thus force the international community to face the facts. All their agreements and attempts to convince various countries to do something about greenhouse gas emissions have served no purpose. The concentration of greenhouse gases – especially CO₂, methane and nitrogen oxide – in our atmosphere is now higher than it has been for the last 800,000 years. According to scientists’ calculations, we’re on track for warming of 3.7 to 4.8°C compared to pre-industrial levels (the level before the industrial revolution began). The world will become a very difficult place for humans to survive. Everyone agrees on that.

Finally, 40,000 people, including 147 Heads of State and Government, were expected to attend the summit on 30th November 2015 in Paris. Security measures at COP21 were high. Just two weeks earlier, Paris had been the target of several terrorist attacks. Three terrorists blew themselves up at the Stade de France, while another group shot at people seated on restaurant and café terraces and another set forced entry into the Bataclan concert venue and shot at the crowd. It was the most deadly attack France had seen since WWII and the deadliest in the EU since the attack in Madrid in 2004. Several people called for COP21 to be called off but Figueres and Laurent Fabius, the French minister of Foreign Affairs, stood their ground.

Two weeks later, on 12th December, 200 negotiators hugged and congratulated each other in the hall of the conference centre at Le Bourget airport. Fabius ended the COP21 just before 7.30pm with good news. The Paris Agreement had been concluded. Figueres had succeeded in getting the world to take action. The Great Hesitation was over. The aim of the Paris Agreement was to limit the global temperature increase due to the climate crisis to no more than 2 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels. Furthermore, they wanted to do everything they could to limit warming to 1.5 degrees. The strategy was to halve emissions by 2030 and to reduce emissions to net-zero by 2050. No specific climate goals were imposed. Every country was to define their own targets in what was named 'Nationally Determined Contributions' or NDCs. The culmination of all NDCs would determine whether we could truly tackle the climate crisis. At the time of signing, ambitions were admittedly not high enough to limit global warming to the agreed 2 degrees or less; rather, they would lead to warming of 3 degrees by the end of the century. However, the negotiators counted on countries setting ever more ambitious targets. In order to provide the world with some assurances, it was agreed that countries would revise their NDCs every five years and, if needed, step them up a notch. The next meeting would have been in 2020, but we all know that the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with that. As a result, the first overview didn't take place until 2021 at the climate summit in Glasgow.