GENDER DIFFERENCES IN APPROACHING SUSTAINABILITY:
AN ANALYSIS OF MULTINATIONAL CEOS
ON LINKEDIN

Master's thesis for obtaining the academic degree

Master of Science

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submitted by

Roberta Ramos

Department of Knowledge and Communication Management

at University for Continuing Education Krems

Advisor: Dr. Marguerite Barry

Advisor: Dr. Kay Mühlmann

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What a ride! When, at the age of 42, I decided to pursue an international Master's degree, little did I know about how much growth I would get from being in the most diverse environment I have ever been to. It is impossible not to acknowledge the importance of this group of people who were put together in TISE - 3rd cohort, for both the good and the challenging moments. From the beautiful chaos of having such a unique family everywhere we moved to the constant reviewing of beliefs, knowledge, and values, growing with them has been the most fantastic adventure! A beautiful pot of the most seasoned and flavorful magic potion there is.

This diversity, and how it helped me see things through new lenses, was a reinforcement of the importance of different perspectives for future creation. If we want to make things different, we need different people in positions of power. And here is where I highlight the mighty women I had the privilege of spending time with over the past two years. How incredible it is to see the development of strong and caring leaders, inspiring me and others on so many levels. From amazing professors to my dearest colleagues, the world will be in good hands if they are in charge.

Speaking of women, three of them are sources of inspirations in my life and my biggest supporters: my beautiful grandmother, already in another dimension, whom I would drive crazy with my stories and who would do anything she could to build a better life for her family; my mother, a force of nature who not only spreads love wherever she goes but also encourages me to follow my dreams, always (always!) has my back, and has visited me in all four countries, bringing me a little bit of home – and the drawings of my now five-year-old nephew – wherever I am; and my amazing sister, who is my partner in crime, my person, and the second love of my life (downgraded after my nephew was born) – she is so much of everything good that I cannot find words to represent her.

For all the women who came before me, from all times and places, who have fought the fight and paved the way so we can talk about gender without being thrown in the fire, thank you! We still have a long way to go, but it is for them that I will continue to do my best to be a good ancestor for future generations.

ABSTRACT

In an era where corporate sustainability is both a moral imperative and a performative practice, executive communication plays a pivotal role in shaping public expectations, institutional legitimacy, and imagined futures. This thesis investigates the differences in how men and women in CEO positions develop and communicate sustainability leadership on LinkedIn, a platform where visibility is currency and leadership is continuously performed. Drawing on a dataset of 682 original posts by 40 global CEOs, the study applies a hybrid analytical framework that combines directed content analysis and thematic analysis, identifying ESG categories (then divided into Sustainability Priorities and Sustainability Language), Narrative Tone, Leadership Style, and Future Framing. Findings reveal that while both men and women in executive positions engage deeply with sustainability discourse, they do so through distinct rhetorical strategies. Women CEOs more frequently frame sustainability as a disciplined exercise in innovation, performance, and accountability, favoring strategic tone, technical language, and long-term planning. Men CEOs, by contrast, tend to adopt visionary and emotional styles, positioning themselves as narrators of purpose and collective ambition. These are not merely stylistic choices; they are gendered strategies for credibility, shaped by platform rules and social norms. Women appear more constrained by a logic of justification; men are more socially licensed to inspire. The study offers a methodological blueprint for assessing sustainability narratives, presenting tools to decode what is said about ESG, as well as how legitimacy is constructed through language. It also demonstrates the symbolic asymmetries embedded in digital leadership performance, where emotional authority and strategic vision are not equally distributed. By revealing the gendered contours of future-making in corporate discourse, the thesis calls for a broader rethinking of how we define leadership, value voices, and perform sustainability in the digital public sphere.

Key words: gendered leadership, sustainability communication, LinkedIn, ESG discourse, digital platforms, performative leadership

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1. Introduction: Context and Scope

In the context of accelerating environmental degradation, rising social inequalities, and ongoing governance challenges, sustainability has become a central issue in contemporary global discourse (United Nations, 2015). Current scientific assessments indicate that greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by half by 2030 to meet the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target, while over 3.6 billion people already live in areas highly vulnerable to climate change (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022, p. 12). Alongside environmental concerns, shifting public expectations and growing consumer activism have increasingly positioned businesses as key actors in advancing social and environmental objectives.

This shift has redefined corporate legitimacy. Sustainability is no longer a peripheral concern but a strategic necessity, shaping how firms operate, communicate, and differentiate themselves. According to a global study by Accenture and the United Nations Global Compact (2022), 98% of CEOs view sustainability as a central aspect of their roles. However, only 18% believe that the global economy is on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Similarly, 70% of institutional investors now integrate sustainability metrics into portfolio decisions (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks have emerged as the dominant architecture for translating sustainability goals into reportable actions. Here, 'sustainability' denotes the broad ethical imperative, while 'ESG' refers to its operationalized framework. They serve compliance and transparency functions while also acting as narrative tools, devices through which companies express their values, shape perceptions, and build reputational capital (Hahn & Lülfs, 2014; Kotsantonis et al., 2016). Executive leadership plays a critical role in this process by projecting credibility and future-readiness through ESG communication (Marres & Gerlitz, 2016, pp. 33–34).

At the forefront of this narrative work is the CEO. Once confined to internal strategy and closed-door governance, today's executives are highly visible actors in public discourse. Platforms like LinkedIn have amplified this shift, transforming leadership into a hybrid performance of authority, identity, and strategic foresight. With over one billion users globally (LinkedIn, 2023), LinkedIn serves as a platform that combines résumé logic, institutional messaging, and personal branding. Executives use it to articulate sustainability

commitments, mark milestones, and align corporate identity with stakeholder values (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 203; Gandini, 2016, p. 30).

Recent studies highlight how CEOs use LinkedIn to establish symbolic authority and project authentic leadership through carefully curated rhetorical strategies (Tolbert, 2024, pp. 7–9). For example, Tolbert's analysis of 4,000 posts identifies practices such as humblebragging, emotional resonance, and meme-sharing as tools for enacting digital leadership personas. Others highlight the platform's strategic value for employer branding and audience alignment (Joglekar & Tan, 2022; Marin & Nilă, 2021).

This transformation concerns not only communication, it also relates to power, credibility, and expectation. What Duffy (2017, p. 31) calls "executive self-narration" reflects broader dynamics of platform capitalism, where visibility and symbolic labor become prerequisites for leadership. On LinkedIn, CEOs are expected to be simultaneously authoritative and relatable, institutional and personal.

These expectations are deeply gendered. Research consistently shows that men and women leaders tend to adopt different communicative styles. Women emphasize empathy, collaboration, and long-term thinking, while men foreground assertiveness, task orientation, and performance metrics (Marie et al., 2024, p. 126; Bai, 2024, p. 49). These stylistic patterns affect how messages are framed and how leadership is interpreted, especially on platforms where visibility and authenticity are publicly negotiated.

It's worth noting that throughout this thesis, I refer to "women" and "men" CEOs when analyzing leadership discourse and communication patterns, reflecting a sociological understanding of gender as a socially constructed and performed identity, rather than a biologically fixed category (Barr et al., 2023). However, several sources in the literature use the terms "female" and "male" to describe participants or findings. These terms have been retained in direct discussion of those studies, in order to preserve their original intent and accuracy.

In high-visibility contexts, such as LinkedIn, these gendered scripts influence how sustainability is narrated. Emerging research suggests that women leaders are more likely to emphasize ethics, community, and collective responsibility, while men tend to focus on innovation, scalability, and infrastructure. These tendencies are not fixed but reflect adaptive strategies to perform credibility under the platform's logic.

In light of these patterns, this thesis asks: Do women CEOs frame sustainability in terms of transformation and care? Do men CEOs emphasize growth, metrics, and delivery? And how do these rhetorical styles perform credibility and legitimacy differently, especially in the performative space of LinkedIn?

To explore these questions, the study draws on the sociology of expectations (Borup et al., 2006; Beckert, 2016), which regards future-oriented language not as an abstract speculation but as a performative practice. When leaders project goals like "net zero by 2030," they are constructing legitimacy in the present through imagined futures.

This approach is particularly well-suited for analyzing gendered leadership discourse, where credibility is both stated and enacted. By examining how CEOs use language to narrate sustainability futures, the study investigates how leadership is constructed in real time, shaped by gendered norms, platform dynamics, and evolving expectations around corporate responsibility.

While sustainability leadership has become increasingly visible in digital arenas, little is known about how gender shapes the way this leadership is constructed and communicated on professional platforms. Prior studies have explored gendered leadership styles, while others have examined corporate ESG messaging; however, these areas have rarely been discussed concertedly. This thesis addresses that gap by examining how men and women in CEO positions articulate sustainability leadership on LinkedIn, a platform where communication is both strategic and performative.

1.1 Research Questions and Objectives

This study is guided by one central research question, supported by two others:

1. How do men and women CEOs construct and communicate sustainability leadership on LinkedIn?

> 1.1. What thematic, tonal, and stylistic patterns can be identified in their ESG discourse?
>
> 1.2. How is future-oriented language used to project leadership identity and legitimacy across gender?

To explore these questions, the study pursues the following objectives:

- To analyze how CEOs frame sustainability in their LinkedIn posts through tone, language, and thematic emphasis;

- To compare the leadership styles, rhetorical strategies, and symbolic repertoires used by men and women CEOs;
- To apply the sociology of expectations to interpret how imagined futures are constructed as part of gendered executive discourse;
- To contribute to broader understandings of platformed leadership, gendered communication, and the performance of sustainability in digital corporate narratives.

2. Mapping the Theoretical Landscape

This chapter reviews four key strands of literature that inform the research design and analytical framework of this study. It begins by examining how ESG and sustainability are presented in corporate communication, with a focus on language, legitimacy, and performative commitments. It then examines gendered patterns in leadership communication, focusing on tone, credibility, and rhetorical constraints. The third section turns to LinkedIn as a platform of visibility and professional performance, highlighting how its affordances shape leadership discourse. Finally, the chapter engages with the sociology of expectations, offering a lens to analyze how imagined futures are constructed and narrated. Together, these perspectives frame the interdisciplinary gaps this thesis seeks to address.

2.1 ESG and Sustainability Framing

The concept of sustainability has evolved significantly over the past decades, expanding from early environmental conservation movements to encompass multidimensional concerns about long-term ecological balance, social justice, and economic resilience (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 16). Frameworks such as the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1998), the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and corporate social responsibility (CSR) have each affected how organizations interpret and operationalize sustainability. However, among these, the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) framework has emerged as one of the most prominent business-integrated models in recent years (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019, p. 107).

As the name indicates, ESG comprises three core dimensions:

- **Environmental**: climate mitigation, emission reduction, biodiversity protection

- **Social**: diversity and inclusion, human rights, labor practices, community engagement

- **Governance**: transparency, board diversity, executive pay, ethical conduct

These dimensions go beyond reporting categories; they operate as strategic narratives that influence how sustainability is communicated and perceived. By translating abstract ideals into measurable and actionable commitments, ESG frameworks enable companies to meet stakeholder expectations while simultaneously building reputational capital (Kotsantonis et al., 2016, p. 10). As Hahn and Lülfs (2014, p. 402) observe, "ESG language is

inherently strategic, enabling organizations to frame sustainability in ways that reinforce both moral legitimacy and competitive positioning."

A defining feature of ESG discourse is its anticipatory nature. Pledges such as reaching net zero by 2030 or achieving gender-balanced leadership serve as strategic signals, projecting future readiness, conveying institutional values, and fostering stakeholder trust in the present. Such public declarations embody what Borup et al. (2006, p. 286) describe as generative expectations: discursive commitments that shape imagined futures in order to guide current actions.

Gendered frameworks of leadership also affect ESG narratives. Research suggests that women executives are more likely to foreground care ethics, social justice, and collective well-being, whereas men tend to emphasize technological innovation, governance structures, and performance metrics (Bear et al., 2010, p. 212; Adams & Funk, 2012, p. 220). For example, Glass et al. (2016, p. 501) found that female leaders often frame sustainability through relational and ethical lenses, while male leaders adopt a more outcome-driven, technical approach.

At the same time, ESG is not a neutral terrain. Critics have highlighted its vulnerability to greenwashing and its potential use as a form of corporate signaling rather than substantive transformation (Kotsantonis & Serafeim, 2019, p. 50). These critiques highlight the importance of examining how leaders frame ESG, as well as how platforms like LinkedIn mediate the tension between visibility, credibility, and performative commitment.

2.2 Gender and Leadership Communication

Gender plays a foundational role in shaping leadership behavior and how legitimacy is perceived (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 2). Historically, leadership ideals have been closely aligned with traditionally masculine-coded traits, such as assertiveness, control, and instrumental rationality (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, p. 786). Although the presence of women in executive leadership has increased in recent years, significant disparities persist in style expectations, rhetorical freedom, and audience perception.

Empirical studies consistently show that women are more likely to adopt transformational leadership styles, characterized by empathy, inclusiveness, and long-term thinking, whereas men tend to lean toward transactional styles that prioritize efficiency, performance, and decisiveness (Bear et al., 2010, p. 212; Tannen, 1994, p. 32). These

tendencies extend into communication: women leaders often favor collaborative language and ethical narratives, while men tend to emphasize impact, innovation, and hierarchical authority. However, such generalizations mask a deeper dynamic: leadership communication is shaped not only by gender but also by the social expectations attached to it.

A central concept here is the double bind: women in leadership must demonstrate both warmth to be liked and competence to be respected, but are often penalized when expressing either quality too strongly (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 98; Catalyst, 2007). As a result, female leaders may adopt more strategic or technical tones in their public messaging, not necessarily because they lack emotional conviction, but because such expressions may be perceived as less credible or more risky. Role congruity theory supports this: traits typically associated with leadership (e.g., assertiveness, decisiveness) are still perceived as masculine-coded, meaning women who exhibit them may be viewed as violating gender norms (Eagly & Diekman, 2005, p. 26).

These constraints are particularly visible in digital platforms, where leadership must be continuously performed and evaluated. Research by Gandini (2016) and Duffy (2017) indicates that digital visibility is both an opportunity and a burden, as it requires constant rhetorical labor and brand management, often under asymmetrical expectations. On LinkedIn, where authenticity and engagement are algorithmically rewarded, male leaders appear more socially licensed to display visionary or emotional tones. In contrast, female leaders may feel pressure to emphasize performance, planning, and procedural legitimacy (Orgad, 2024, p. 7).

Recent scholarship expands this insight through the lens of performative vulnerability. Orgad (2024) argues that emotional disclosure on LinkedIn – expressions of humility, gratitude, or hardship – is highly strategic. Similarly, Yue et al. (2020) find that male CEOs who communicate emotion are often rewarded with increased engagement and enhanced perceptions of authenticity. In contrast, women who display similar emotional tones may risk being perceived as less competent or less authoritative. This rhetorical difference underscores that the way leaders communicate is as consequential as what they communicate and that those choices are filtered through gendered norms of visibility and power (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 140).

An intersectional lens further complicates this scenario. As Crenshaw (1991) argues, gender does not operate in isolation; it intersects with race, class, nationality, and other identity markers. Leadership communication, particularly on high-visibility platforms such as

LinkedIn, is shaped by the intersection of multiple forms of identity with institutional culture and audience expectations. While this study adopts a binary gender lens to examine broad patterns in executive communication, this approach is driven by methodological constraints tied to publicly available data rather than a denial of complexity. The aim is not to essentialize gender, but to trace how it intersects with the platform's affordances to define different performances of sustainability leadership.

Ultimately, gendered leadership communication cannot be understood as a matter of personal style alone. It is a function of social expectations, institutional position, and discursive affordance, influenced by the platformed environments in which leadership is performed nowadays. These differences are consequential. They shape how credibility is constructed, how futures are narrated, and who is seen as legitimate in speaking for sustainability (Eagly & Heilman, 2016, p. 349).

2.3 LinkedIn as a Platform for Performative Expectations

LinkedIn is no longer just a digital résumé platform; it has become a powerful arena for executive branding and symbolic leadership performance (Marres & Gerlitz, 2016; Gandini, 2016). With over one billion users worldwide (LinkedIn, 2023), the platform combines formal authority with an informal voice, allowing CEOs to present themselves as both strategic and relatable (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 203).

From a sociological perspective, LinkedIn operates as a performative arena where narratives about the future are staged and made visible. When CEOs use hashtags like #NetZero, #2030Goals, or #ESGLeadership, they signal alignment with global norms and forecast organizational futures. This practice reflects what Marres and Gerlitz (2016) describe as platformed visibility. It echoes Van Lente's (2012) concept of performative signaling, where digital expressions serve to construct credibility and influence public evaluations of leadership.

What distinguishes LinkedIn in this context is its hybrid interface, which merges corporate communication, personal branding, and thought leadership into a single performative space. Posts ranging from articles and data points to personal reflections and visuals form a discursive archive through which leadership is enacted in real time. Within the symbolic economy of ESG, these communicative acts are strategic, crafted to build trust,

define identity, and project future readiness (Hahn & Lülfs, 2014, p. 402; Kotsantonis et al., 2016, p. 10).

In this sense, LinkedIn does more than mirror executive leadership; it actively shapes it. As Gandini (2016, p. 30) argues, platforms like LinkedIn transform visibility into a form of labor, requiring executives to actively curate their presence, sustain engagement, and continuously perform credibility in order to remain relevant. For CEOs, this means constantly managing their public image: demonstrating authority while also appearing relatable and authentic. In this context, ESG discourse does not concern just strategy or values; it becomes a kind of performance, where future goals, personal credibility, and public image are all negotiated to fit the platform's logic (Duffy, 2017, p. 31).

2.4 The Sociology of Expectations

The sociology of expectations, first articulated by Borup et al. (2006) and further developed by scholars such as Van Lente (2012) and Beckert (2016), provides a powerful lens for analyzing how imagined futures influence current behavior. Rather than viewing future-oriented discourse as purely speculative or promotional, the sociology of expectations emphasizes its performative nature: expectations do not merely describe what might come, they actively shape what people do in the present.

Expectations operate at both individual and institutional levels. They are embedded in language, symbols, and narrative forms that align actors toward shared visions of what is desirable, possible, or necessary. Beckert (2016, p. 11) refers to these as "fictional expectations:" socially constructed imaginaries that serve as coordination instruments, particularly in uncertain or contested environments. Similarly, Muiderman et al. (2020, p. 6) conceptualize these future-facing narratives as part of anticipatory governance – discursive mechanisms through which actors legitimize strategies, mobilize stakeholders, and influence which futures are considered valid or actionable.

Within corporate leadership, expectations play a crucial role. Executives employ discursive projection to foster investor confidence, define internal priorities, and position their organizations within long-term trajectories (Konrad, 2006; Van Lente & Rip, 1998). These narratives are particularly salient in sustainability communication, where related buzzwords serve as strategic goals and public commitments.

The relevance of this framework to the present study lies in its ability to reveal how future-oriented language is both gendered and performative. CEOs are not simply outlining ESG strategies; they are narrating credibility, embedding their leadership identity within imagined futures (Borup et al., 2006, p. 286). The sociology of expectations offers tools to understand these narratives as active leadership performances, shaped by gendered norms and platform dynamics.

As Hodgson (2024) observes, executives increasingly use platforms such as LinkedIn to merge corporate messaging with personal expression, crafting "authentic" projections of their values, goals, and strategic vision. Perceived through this lens, the sustainability discourse becomes more than a reflection of organizational priorities; it is a staged performance of the future, driven by rhetorical choices and affected by social expectations (including gender).

2.5 Synthesis and Research Gap

This literature review examined how ESG frameworks, gendered leadership styles, LinkedIn as a digital platform, and the sociology of expectations intersect to determine executive sustainability communication.

First, sustainability communication has evolved from a reporting obligation to a strategic and symbolic practice (Hahn & Lülfs, 2014, p. 402). ESG frameworks allow companies to translate abstract values into measurable commitments, positioning sustainability as both a business imperative and a narrative device for legitimacy (Kotsantonis et al., 2016; Hahn & Lülfs, 2014). These frameworks reflect corporate responsibility and signal alignment with long-term goals and stakeholder values.

Second, gender plays a crucial role in communicating leadership and sustainability. While women often foreground ethics, care, and social transformation, men tend to emphasize technical performance and innovation (Bear et al., 2010; Adams & Funk, 2012). These rhetorical tendencies are not uniform, but they reflect broader social expectations that define how credibility and influence are enacted in public-facing leadership.

Third, LinkedIn has emerged as a key space where these communicative practices unfold. As a platform that merges strategic messaging with personal branding, LinkedIn enables CEOs to perform leadership in real time, through posts that blend institutional goals with an individual voice (Van Dijck, 2013; Gandini, 2016). Visibility on LinkedIn is not

passive; it requires ongoing narrative labor that reinforces authority, trust, and alignment with evolving norms (Duffy, 2017, p. 31).

Ultimately, the sociology of expectations provides a conceptual framework for understanding how future-oriented language operates in this context. Rather than considering that visions of the future are speculative, this approach regards them as performative perspectives, tools that influence present action and structure legitimacy (Borup et al., 2006; Beckert, 2016). CEOs utilize sustainability narratives to articulate their goals, convey their identity, establish credibility, and position themselves within a broader symbolic economy of leadership.

The literature reviewed in this chapter collectively highlights that sustainability leadership extends beyond institutional policy to a performative, communicative act shaped by social norms, technological affordances, and symbolic expectations (Hahn & Lülfs, 2014, p. 402; Van Dijck, 2013, p. 203; Borup et al., 2006, p. 286). However, important conceptual gaps remain. While gender studies have long shown how leadership is encoded through expectations of tone, credibility, and emotional display (Bear et al., 2010, p. 212), this perspective is rarely applied to the domain of sustainability communication. Likewise, while research on ESG discourse and imagined futures is expanding, it often treats leadership communication as a gender-neutral feature, overlooking how authority in sustainability is also filtered through identity and power. Finally, there is also a gap when we consider the relationship of these topics with the use of LinkedIn, a platform where leadership, identity, and sustainability are co-performed in public view (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 203). This thesis addresses these interdisciplinary gaps by investigating how men and women CEOs use LinkedIn to perform sustainability leadership and how their rhetorical strategies reflect broader symbolic asymmetries in the visibility, legitimacy, and imagination of corporate futures.

3. Research Design and Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology used in this study, which investigates gendered differences in CEO sustainability communication on LinkedIn. It describes the philosophical underpinnings, research planning, and data analysis strategies. The study employs a qualitative approach, using a two-phase qualitative methodology that combines content and thematic analysis of LinkedIn posts by CEOs of multinational corporations.

3.1 Research Philosophy and Approach

This research adopts a constructivist paradigm, which views knowledge not as a mirror of objective reality but as something continuously shaped through language, interaction, and shared interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 21). This perspective aligns with the sociology of expectations (Borup et al., 2006, p. 286), which posits that imaginings of the future are socially constructed and actively performed, determining how individuals and institutions guide their actions in the present. Concepts such as sustainability, leadership, and corporate responsibility are understood here not as fixed realities but as evolving narratives negotiated within social and organizational settings.

Building on this foundation, the study employs a qualitative research approach, which is well-suited for examining how meanings are created, communicated, and contested across different contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 22). Within this framework, leadership and sustainability are understood as both operational practices and discursive constructions, enacted, shaped, and legitimated through communication. Based on that premise, I identified themes within ESG pillars to understand which strategies regarding sustainability practices were being used and how they were being communicated in terms of discourse. Therefore, I chose qualitative content and thematic analysis as the method to explore how gender influences the narrative tone, leadership style, and the future framing of CEO communication on LinkedIn, offering an interpretive lens through which to understand the performative dimensions of executive sustainability discourse (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81).

3.2 Research Design

This study draws on the 2023 Forbes Global 2000 list, which ranks the world's largest publicly traded companies based on a composite of sales, profits, assets, and market value. The list provides a credible and widely recognized benchmark for corporate scale and

international influence (Forbes, 2023). From this dataset, a purposive sample of 40 CEOs, comprising 20 women and 20 men, was selected based on the criterion of having an active and openly accessible LinkedIn presence.

To maximize the relevance and richness of the data, the sample was designed using a purposive strategy complemented by maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002, p. 234). Variation was sought across key dimensions, including industry (26 sectors represented), geographical origin (12 countries), and ethnic background, while acknowledging the inherent limitations of LinkedIn concerning demographic visibility. Practical constraints also emerged during the sampling process: a substantial number of Chinese CEOs were excluded due to the absence of LinkedIn profiles or the use of anglicized names, which prevented precise identification. This issue is consistent with challenges observed in previous digital ethnographic studies (Kozinets, 2020, p. 89).

It is worth noting that several companies in the sample operate in sectors highly exposed to environmental and social scrutiny, including utilities, oil and gas, chemicals, and energy infrastructure. These organizations often frame their leadership communication through the lens of sustainability transformation, climate targets, and energy transition. As a result, terms such as "Energy Transition," "Climate Action," and "Governance & Ethics" may appear with higher frequency in these posts. While the sampling strategy aimed for variation across industries and geographies, the content itself is partially shaped by the strategic positioning of each sector within the sustainability discourse. Appendix 1 presents the final sample, including gender, industry, and country of the companies the selected CEOs work for.

While I analysed the dataset of 682 original posts considering Narrative Tone, Leadership Style, and Future Framing, I isolated a smaller subset of posts that explicitly referenced ESG pillars for a deeper analysis of sustainability framing. This dual approach ensured both breadth and thematic precision in exploring gendered communication of sustainability-related content.

3.3 Data Collection and Scraping

To collect LinkedIn data, the study used PhantomBuster, a cloud-based scraping tool widely employed in digital research for automating data extraction from public web platforms

(Marres & Gerlitz, 2016, p. 27). PhantomBuster was configured to extract both profile information and activity data, including posts, reposts, and comments made in 2024.

The following variables were extracted:

Profile-level data:

- Name
- Profile URL
- Author URL

Post-level data:

- Content (postContent), publication date (postDate), post URL (postUrl)
- Media attachments (images and video URLs)
- Engagement metrics: likes (likeCount), comments (commentCount), reposts (repostCount), views (viewCount)
- Comment-level data: Comment text (commentContent) and link (commentUrl)
- Post type: Original posts, shared posts, and comments (type)

Data was exported into structured .csv files. Only activities dated within the calendar year 2024 were retained for analysis to ensure temporal coherence in evaluating sustainability narratives.

3.4 Data Cleaning

The collected data was consolidated into a master spreadsheet containing 1,814 entries. Each record included:

- CEO name
- Gender (sourced and verified from company bios and external databases)
- Type of engagement (post, comment, share)
- Text content
- Action label (e.g., liked, commented, posted)
- Engagement metrics

Data was then pre-processed using Python's pandas and numpy libraries to:

- Normalize text fields
- Remove duplicates
- Handle missing values
- Standardize formatting across variables

As part of the pre-processing phase, posts originally written in Spanish, Portuguese, and French were translated into English using ChatGPT. Translating the posts ensured consistency in linguistic analysis and enabled cross-comparison across posts regardless of their original language. However, this approach may have limited the preservation of culturally embedded meanings, idioms, or rhetorical styles unique to the source languages. While care was taken to maintain fidelity, some nuances tied to local leadership discourses or culturally specific ESG framings may have been attenuated in the translation process.

3.5 Focus on Original Posts

Although the initial dataset included a variety of LinkedIn activities, the thematic analysis focuses exclusively on original posts authored directly by CEOs. This decision is grounded in both methodological rigor and theoretical relevance.

From a methodological standpoint, original posts provide a more direct window into the CEO's personal framing, tone, and narrative construction, as opposed to shares or comments that may reflect institutional messaging or reactive engagement. Prior studies on executive communication emphasize the importance of analyzing self-authored and intentional content, especially when assessing leadership discourse (Duffy, 2017, p. 31; Gandini, 2016, p. 30).

Moreover, in the context of digital leadership performance, original posts represent a more authentic and strategic mode of visibility. These are the posts that CEOs actively choose to publish and associate with their personal brand, constituting the clearest expression of their leadership values, sustainability framing, and rhetorical style. As such, they are particularly suited for thematic and linguistic analysis focused on gendered patterns of communication and the sociology of expectations (Borup et al., 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Excluding shared posts and comments also helps reduce analytical noise, allowing the study to maintain consistent units of analysis and to minimize interpretative ambiguity. While interactions with content written by others can offer complementary insights, they are often constrained by the framing of the original source and may dilute the analytical focus on self-authored discourse.

In one case, I identified a LinkedIn takeover campaign, where an intern temporarily posted on behalf of a CEO during Intern Day. This post was not classified to ensure that the dataset reflected only content authored or intentionally endorsed by the executive.

A total of 682 original posts were retained for the thematic analysis. Engagement data (likes, comments, and reposts) was preserved and linked to the posts to facilitate comparative exploration in subsequent stages of the research.

3.6 Data Analysis

This study employed a two-phase qualitative design combining content and thematic analysis. First, I used a directed content analysis to code LinkedIn posts according to predefined ESG pillars. Then I applied thematic analysis within the pillars to identify Sustainability Priorities and Sustainabiliy Language variants, in order to understand how the priorities were being communicated. In the third phase, I conducted a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to explore discourse style, type of leadership, and language geared towards the future, focusing on how men and women CEOs frame sustainability through emotional, strategic, and future-oriented language. I then identified themes through an iterative process of reading, coding, and refining, consistent with the subjective, interpretive stance of thematic analysis. Finally, the themes were grouped within the aforementioned thematic core: Narrative ToneLeadership Style and Future Framing. This approach allowed for both the quantitative mapping of ESG issues and the qualitative interpretation of symbolic leadership performance.

Posts were further segmented by media type to capture the diversity of communication formats utilized by the CEOs. The formats include:

Table 1

Media Segmentation

Content Type	Main concept
Image	Standalone images or photo galleries accompanied by captions are frequently used to highlight events, milestones, partnerships, or sustainability initiatives.
Video	Native LinkedIn videos published by CEOs, often featuring speeches, interviews, or corporate campaigns related to ESG issues.

Article	Long-form written pieces, either authored or shared by CEOs, typically providing deeper insights into sustainability strategies, leadership reflections, or industry trends.
Text-only	Short status updates without multimedia attachments, generally used to make announcements, share personal reflections, or comment on broader societal issues.
Document	Uploads of PDFs, reports, whitepapers, or presentations, often linked to ESG disclosures, annual sustainability reports, or governance frameworks.

This categorization enables a richer understanding of the modalities through which executives communicate, allowing the analysis to distinguish between symbolic, informational, and strategic communication tactics.

All posts were reviewed and analyzed through a six-phase thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87): (1) familiarization with data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) theme identification, (4) theme review, (5) definition and naming of themes, and (6) writing of the analytical narrative. A mix of manual coding and computational tools supported these stages.

Python was extensively used in the process. The pandas library helped structure and clean the data. ChatGPT was used as a supplementary analytical tool to support interpretation, not to generate original findings. Outputs from ChatGPT were always interpreted critically, triangulated with empirical data, and subjected to manual review, revision, and coding validation. Thus, the model functioned less as an analytical agent and more as a heuristic support, comparable to a research assistant that helped stress-test thematic boundaries or reveal overlooked nuances. Ultimately, I developed final interpretations, identified themes, and synthesized discourse independently to ensure full academic integrity.

Through this integrated approach, the analysis was able to indicate subtle yet consistent gendered patterns in how CEOs communicate sustainability, revealing the interplay between language, leadership identity, and digital performance. It is worth emphasizing that I analyzed all posts authored by the selected CEOs in relation to Narrative

Tone, Leadership Style, and Future Framing (the use of future-oriented language). However, only posts that explicitly referenced ESG, sustainability, or related concepts were included in the final synthesis of sustainability framing. This dual-layer approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of each CEO's communicative pattern while maintaining a focused lens on sustainability discourse.

3.6.1 Content Coding and Identification of Themes

The content coding process started with the identification and categorization of ESG-related posts. Posts could be tagged as representing more than one ESG pillar, depending on their content. I collected a total of 293 mentions of ESG-related topics.Those posts were then analysed in terms of Sustainability Priorities and Sustainability Language..

The specific answer to the main research question – How do men and women CEOs construct and communicate sustainability leadership on LinkedIn? – was obtained by conducting three other analyses: (1) Narrative Tone, (2) Leadership Style, and (3) Future Framing, considering firstly the full dataset of original posts and, secondly, the posts classified into one or more ESG pillars for sustainability focus. Thematic groups were guided by a structured keyword set (see Appendix 2), with examples such as "2030," "vision," and "next generation" used to identify Future Framing. Words like "proud," "excited," and "grateful" marked an emotionally expressive tone and so on.

While automation improved consistency across a large dataset, the manual layer was critical, refining ambiguous cases, ensuring semantic accuracy, and preserving the interpretive richness required for analyzing symbolic language. This approach enabled a layered understanding of how CEOs utilize LinkedIn to project authority, signal their values, and align themselves with evolving expectations surrounding sustainability leadership.

3.6.1.1 ESG and Sustainability Categorization

Posts were analyzed according to the three ESG pillars:

Table 2

ESG Pillars

Pillar	Main concept
Environmental	Assesses how a company manages its relationship with the natural world, including its role in addressing climate change, carbon emissions, pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and waste.
Social	Focuses on how a company influences and interacts with people and society. This includes considerations of diversity, equity, inclusion, labor practices, human rights, and the ethical management of supply chains and communities.
Governance	Examines the structures and processes by which a company is led and controlled. It includes issues such as executive pay, board oversight, leadership succession, shareholder rights, and overall accountability frameworks.

Additionally, a secondary layer of analysis was adopted to categorize posts into six Sustainability Priorities. I developed these themes through a synthesis of prominent ESG frameworks and recurring topics within the dataset. While not drawn from a single standardized taxonomy, they reflect widely recognized focal areas in corporate sustainability discourse, including those emphasized by the Global Reporting Initiative (2021) and the World Economic Forum (2020). The coding framework enabled a structured approach to identifying how CEOs emphasize particular aspects of sustainability in their communication.

Table 3

Sustainability Priorities

Priority	Main concept
Climate Action	Language related to carbon reduction, emissions, net-zero goals, and global warming mitigation.
Social Equity	References to fairness, equality, diversity, inclusion, and efforts to improve access or reduce social disparities.
Innovation/ Technology	Emphasis on digital transformation, AI, and future-facing tech solutions used to address sustainability challenges.
Circular Economy	Mentions of recycling, reducing waste, product life cycle strategies, and closed-loop systems.
Energy Transition	Expressions related to shifts toward renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind energy, or reducing dependence on fossil fuels.
Governance & Ethics	Terms related to transparency, compliance, board diversity, and ethical leadership.

I then analyzed gender differences in the frequency of these themes to determine divergent emphases in sustainability leadership.

Three themes formed the analysis on Sustainability Language: (1) ESG-Specific Terms, (2) Strategic Buzzwords, and (3) Action-Oriented Language. Those themes capture the communicative texture of how CEOs narrate sustainability:

Table 4

Sustainability Language

Theme	Main concept
ESG-Specific Terms	Vocabulary directly aligned with Environmental, Social, and Governance reporting frameworks, such as "carbon emissions," "diversity," or "compliance." These terms reflect alignment with formal corporate sustainability structures and are often used in the context of reporting, regulation, or standardized goals.
Strategic Buzzwords	High-frequency, often forward-looking expressions that signal visionary leadership and brand alignment with global sustainability narratives – examples include "net zero," "green growth," "inclusive economy," and "2030 goals." Buzzwords are commonly used to create legitimacy and rally stakeholder interest (Marres & Gerlitz, 2016).
Action-Oriented Language	Verbs and phrases that emphasize execution and leadership accountability, such as "deliver," "implement," "accelerate," and "invest." This language indicates the performative role of CEOs in enacting sustainability, reinforcing their agency in corporate transformation.

These linguistic patterns suggest that CEOs may use Sustainability Language to craft a leadership persona that blends compliance, vision, and agency. By drawing on ESG-Specific Terms, Strategic Buzzwords, and Action-Oriented Language, executives may position themselves as credible and forward-looking figures, capable of navigating both stakeholder expectations and corporate transformation.

3.6.1.2 Narrative Tone Analysis

I categorized narrative tone into four distinct themes to reflect how CEOs frame their communication on LinkedIn. These themes capture the affective register and rhetorical

posture of each post, providing insight into how leadership is enacted discursively in digital public spaces.

Table 5

Narrative Tone

Theme	Main concept
Personal/Emotional	Emphasizes subjective language, emotional expression, personal pride, gratitude, and references to shared journeys or values. Common in messages celebrating teams, expressing inspiration, or conveying empathy.
Strategic/Technical	Focuses on operational achievements, frameworks, KPIs, compliance, or structural and industry-specific language. Often includes metrics, timelines, and performance indicators.
Inspirational	Highlights aspirational goals, visionary thinking, and future-driven leadership narratives. These messages frequently reference transformation, impact, and long-term commitments.
Neutral/Formal	Adopts a detached, institutional tone. Typically used for announcements, official updates, or procedural information, avoiding emotional or personal language.

These themes draw on distinctions proposed by Tannen (1994, pp. 23–36), who emphasizes gendered linguistic styles, and Eagly and Carli (2007, pp. 98–101), who distinguish relational (transformational) and directive (transactional) leadership discourses. Additionally, using sentiment indicators such as emotional tone and language formality reflects methods recommended in narrative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018, pp. 167–169).

I applied this coding scheme to a subset of posts explicitly referencing one or more ESG pillars to deepen the gendered analysis of sustainability communication. By isolating these posts, the analysis could more precisely assess how tone varies not only by gender but

also in the specific context of sustainability leadership, where legitimacy, accountability, and future vision are most explicitly performed.

3.6.1.3 Leadership Style Analysis

I categorized leadership communication styles into six distinct types, each representing a particular emphasis or orientation in how CEOs construct and perform executive identity on LinkedIn. These themes reflect the strategic positioning of authority, values, and organizational priorities through discursive choices.

Table 6

Leadership Style

Theme	Main concept
Collaborative	Reflects inclusive and team-oriented language, often emphasizing collective action, partnerships, and shared efforts. Words such as "together," "we," and "team" are common markers of unity.
Innovation Drive	Highlights the use of future-facing technology and digital transformation as strategic assets. Posts referencing AI, digital tools, and disruptive change fall into this theme.
Performance Focus	Centers on outcomes, goals, and measurable impact. Often includes terms such as "results," "KPIs," "targets," and "metrics."
Community Engagement	Reflects concern for broader societal impact, referencing the community, employees, and social responsibility. Aligned with stakeholder theory and participative leadership models.
Inclusion Focus	Indicates attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues. Language often references fairness, representation, and a sense of belonging.

Directive	Demonstrates a top-down, decisive style. These posts typically contain verbs such as "lead," "drive," and "decide" and reflect a strong voice of authority.

These themes are grounded in existing leadership communication theory, particularly distinctions between participative and directive leadership styles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, pp. 786–788), and align with established frameworks for analyzing executive discourse in digital and hybrid public settings.

In addition to analyzing leadership style across the whole dataset of original posts, I also applied the coding scheme to a focused subset of posts classified under at least one ESG pillar. This secondary analysis allowed for a more targeted assessment of how CEOs communicate leadership, specifically in the context of sustainability, highlighting whether patterns of collaborative, directive, or innovation-driven leadership vary when engaging with Environmental, Social, or Governance-related content.

3.6.1.4 Future Framing Analysis

Using the framework of the sociology of expectations, I analyzed the content regarding three distinct themes identified during the coding phase, linguistic dimensions that capture how CEOs articulate imagined futures in their LinkedIn communication. These dimensions draw from literature that conceptualizes future talk as performative: not simply describing what might happen, but shaping present action through projected trajectories (Borup et al., 2006; Beckert, 2016).

Table 7

Future Framing

Theme	Main concept
Future-Oriented Language	Includes expressions such as "2030," "net-zero future," or "next generation", which explicitly refer to long-term goals, visions, or intergenerational responsibility. These forms of language signal the performative nature of future commitments

	and are used to legitimize current actions by appealing to a shared trajectory (Borup et al., 2006, p. 286).
Normative Framing (Societal Norms)	Refers to language invoking values, ethics, and collective ideals, such as "responsibility," "justice," or "inclusive society." They reflect the articulation of normative anticipatory governance – shared visions of desirable futures grounded in ethical commitments and long-term societal goals (Muiderman et al., 2020, p. 6).
Strategic Foresight	Focuses on deliberate planning, using terms such as "roadmap," "prepare," or "scenario planning." This theme reflects technical and organizational tools to navigate anticipated changes and reduce uncertainty.

This lens enabled the differentiation between moral, imaginative, and technical dimensions of future-building in CEO discourse. It also allowed the study to identify how language operates not just as communication, but as a performative strategy of expectation-setting, reinforcing identity, legitimacy, and leadership intent.

Additionally, I applied the same framework to a focused subset of posts referencing one or more ESG pillars to deepen the analysis of how these future framing strategies intersect with sustainability messaging. This method enabled a more targeted examination of how imagined futures are constructed when sustainability becomes the explicit subject of executive communication, revealing whether normative or strategic projections are more prominent and how gender influences these performative choices.

3.6.1.5 Diagram of the Data Analysis

The diagram presented in Figure 1 shows the layered content and thematic analysis employed in this study. A subset of 682 original posts – defined as non-reshared, user-generated content – was selected from the complete dataset of 1,814 for an in-depth qualitative analysis. I first segmented this dataset by media type (image, video, article, document, or text-only) to capture the multimodal nature of digital communication.

I created each thematic group based on the themes identified in the analysed content, with the exception of ESG, which was analysed based on its own pillars (Environmental, Social and Governance). Posts were not restricted to a single theme/pillar; rather, one post could be assigned to multiple themes based on its content.

Posts classified within one of the ESG pillars were then analysed according to the same thematic groups as before (Narrative Tone, Leadership Style, and Future Framing), plus two more groups, related specifically to those posts: Sustainability Priorities and Sustainability Language. This analysis allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how leaders integrate overlapping sustainability issues in their communication.

Figure 1

Data Analysis Diagram
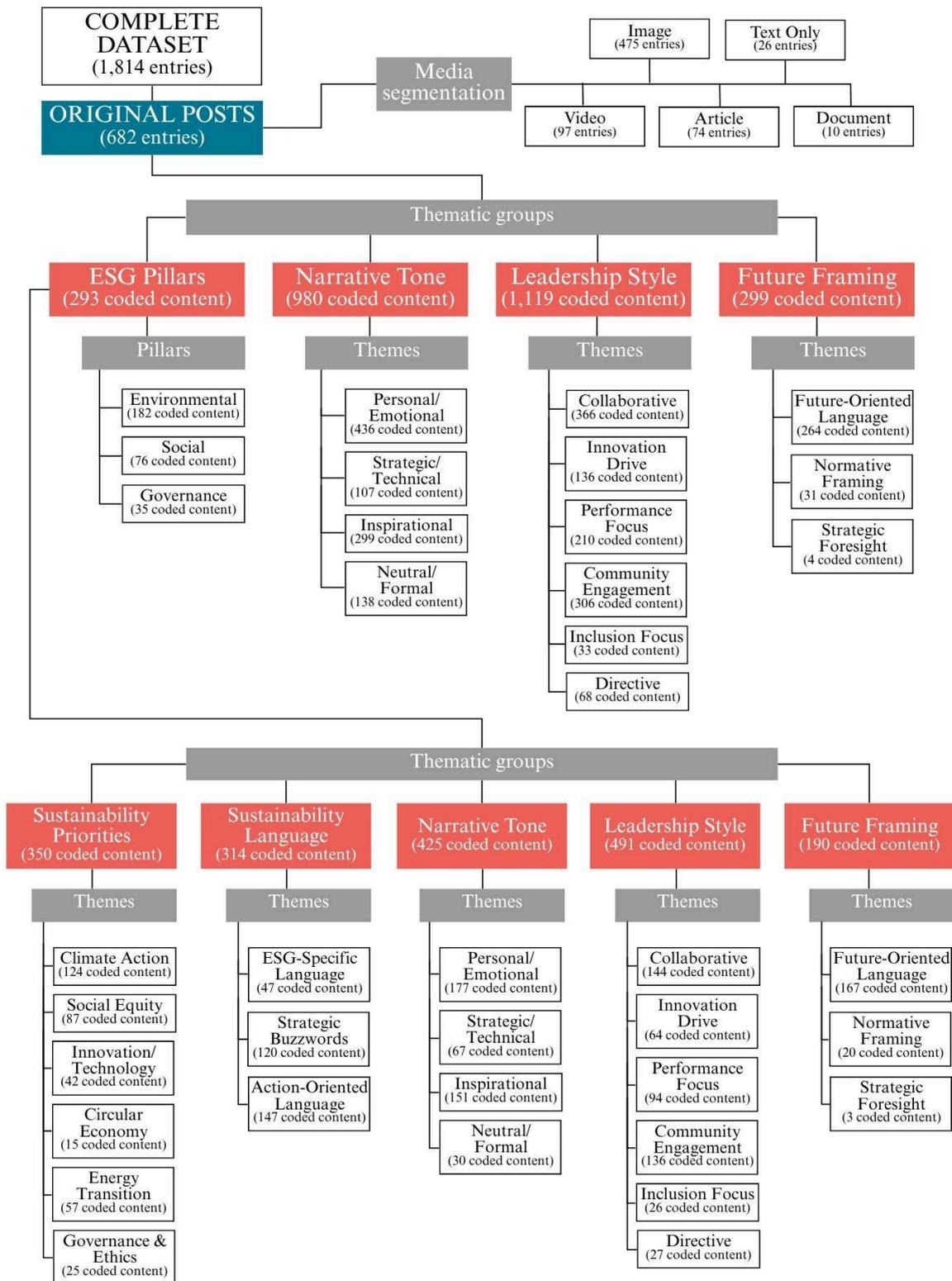
3.8 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure analytical credibility, I applied methodological triangulation (text, engagement metrics, screenshots). Ethical use of LinkedIn content was maintained by:

- Limiting analysis to public profiles
- Citing authors anonymously
- Avoiding manipulation of original posts

3.9 Limitations of the Methodology

This study focuses exclusively on LinkedIn and CEOs of multinational firms, which may limit generalizability. The dataset represents a snapshot in time (January to December 2024), meaning the results may not capture evolving narratives or crisis-specific communication. Posts originally written in Spanish, Portuguese, or French were translated into English using GPT-4, with care taken to preserve meaning and tone. However, some nuances of cultural embeddedness may have been lost in translation.

Gender was coded based on publicly available executive biographies and pronoun use, which reflects a binary categorization of gender. While this binary coding enables a comparative analysis, it may overlook the complexity of gender identity and expression in digital leadership discourse. Nonetheless, the in-depth nature of the qualitative analysis provides valuable insights into gendered sustainability discourse.

Furthermore, the comparative lens adopted in this study is structured around binary gender categories, which is only one possible framework for analysis. Other structuring lenses, such as industry sector, national culture, or regional policy environments, may reveal different patterns or even contradict the observed trends. Since this research did not include cross-sector or cross-national analyses, it remains unknown whether gender differences would appear weaker or stronger under different comparative conditions. This limitation highlights the constructed and partial nature of the analytical frame used here.

4. Presentation of Results

This chapter presents the key findings from the analysis of LinkedIn activity by CEOs of multinational companies. The results are based on a structured dataset collected through digital scraping, labeled through content coding, and analyzed according to thematic and content analysis, which aimed to identify dominant narratives, language strategies, and leadership framing related to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) discourse. To ensure analytical clarity, the chapter begins by mapping the full scope of data collected, including comments, shared content, and original posts, before narrowing the focus to the original authored posts, which serve as the primary material for thematic interpretation.

4.1 Distribution by Media Format

To better understand the expressive formats used in executive communication, all entries were categorized by media type. These included text-only posts, image-based content, videos, long-form articles, and documents. Figure 2 summarizes the distribution by gender:

Figure 2

Media Format Distribution of LinkedIn Posts by Gender
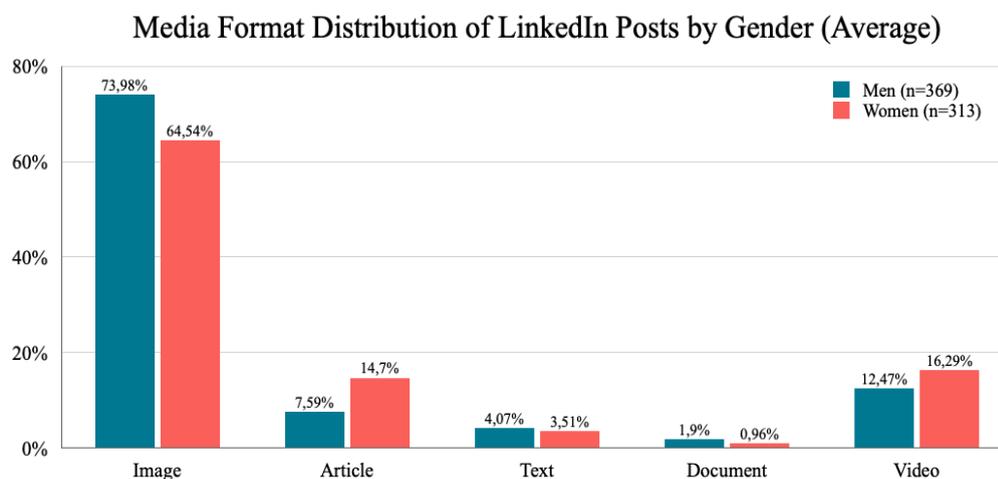
This distribution reveals noticeable differences in how men and women CEOs use LinkedIn media formats to communicate. Image posts were the most common format across both groups, but women CEOs made more use of other media types. Articles accounted for 14.7% of their posts, nearly double the share among men CEOs (7.6%). Video posts were also more frequent among women (16.3%) than men (12.5%). Although the differences were

not highly relevant, they suggest that women CEOs engage with a broader variety of content formats, including those that support more extended or expressive communication.

Text-only posts remained marginal, with similar proportions: 3.5% among women and 4.1% among men. Documents were the least used format overall, but men CEOs posted them more frequently (1.9%) compared to women CEOs (0.96%).

4.1.2 Engagement Metrics by Gender

This subsection examines engagement performance (likes, comments, and reposts) in relation to the gender of the CEOs.

Figure 3

Engagement Metrics by Gender
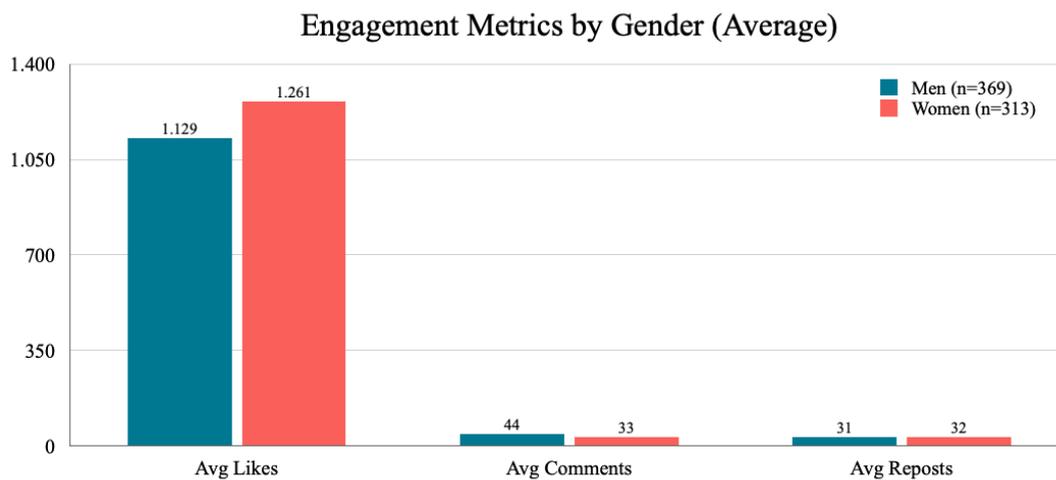
Men CEOs generated higher total engagement across all three metrics. However, on a per-post basis, women CEOs received more likes on average (1,257.03 vs. 1,128.77), indicating a stronger response relative to volume.

In contrast, men CEOs led slightly in average comments (44.50 vs. 32.44) and showed near parity in reposts (31.24 vs. 31.83). These numbers may reflect broader professional networks or differences in audience behavior across industries and post types.

4.2 ESG Pillars

This section categorizes the CEOs' posts based on their alignment with the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) pillars. Table 8 presents examples of the analyzed posts to illustrate the classification.

Table 8

ESG Pillars - Examples

Pillar	Example
Environmental	"We know there are challenges, including regulatory and supply chain bottlenecks and the need for capital to invest in clean energy projects. However, with urgent action, our climate goals are achievable." (CEO 38)
Social	"We are aiming to give 100 million people in #Africa and #India access to clean cooking by 2030, investing more than $400 million in the development of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) for cooking." (CEO 37)
Governance	"With a mission so vital, our (...) team has been leveraging the power of #AI for decades, while preserving human values and decision making." (CEO 24)

Figure 4

ESG Pillars by Gender
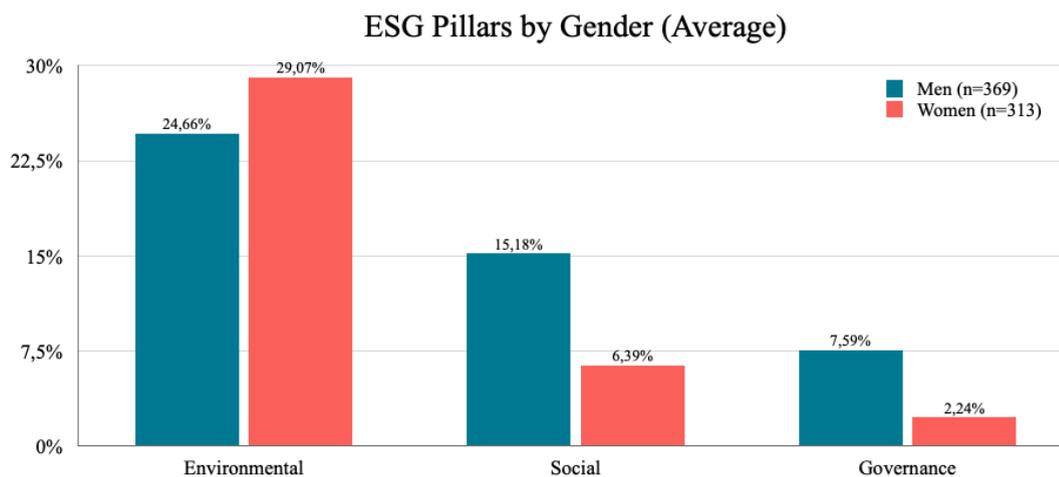
Men CEOs referenced ESG topics more frequently overall, with 147 posts mentioning at least one ESG pillar compared to 119 posts by women CEOs. These results suggest a

stronger integration of sustainability language into the communication strategies of men executives, at least in terms of volume.

Environmental themes were the most prominent across both groups. Although the number of posts was equal (91 each), environmental content accounted for a larger share of women-authored posts due to the smaller overall post volume. This pattern underscores the centrality of environmental issues in corporate sustainability discourse and highlights the prevalence of climate-related messaging in executive communication. As Beckert (2016) posits, future-oriented strategies often concentrate on domains characterized by significant uncertainty and visibility, particularly environmental risks and opportunities. While social issues such as polarization and wealth inequality are also marked by abstraction and unpredictability, environmental themes tend to be more quantifiable (e.g., emissions targets), globally comparable (e.g., climate agreements), and amenable to technological solutions (e.g., clean energy). These attributes make environmental concerns more actionable and reputationally advantageous within corporate strategy, especially on platforms that reward visible alignment with innovation and global agendas.

Importantly, this pattern is also shaped by the dominance of technosolutionist framing in corporate responses to climate change. As Wright and Nyberg (2017, p. 1641) argue, organizations often translate environmental issues into managerial and technical challenges that can be solved through innovation and operational efficiency. This framing positions climate action as a matter of business optimization, allowing environmental sustainability to be integrated into core business models, particularly in industries such as energy, infrastructure, and manufacturing. These dynamics help explain the broad uptake of environmental themes in CEO communication.

The social pillar revealed a notable gender disparity: 15.2% of posts by men CEOs addressed social themes, compared to just 6.4% from women. This pattern contradicts the common assumption in the literature that associates women leaders more strongly with relational and care-oriented communication styles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Bear et al., 2010). Instead, it suggests that topics such as inclusion, well-being, and education are becoming integral to men's executive discourse, possibly reflecting a strategic shift toward broader stakeholder engagement and reputational signaling. Rather than indicating a lack of engagement from women, this trend may signal the normalization of social equity themes

across corporate leadership, particularly as expectations for inclusive governance continue to rise (World Economic Forum, 2023; Accenture & United Nations Global Compact, 2022).

Governance remained the least visible pillar for both groups, with men CEOs referencing it in 7.6% of posts and women CEOs in 2.2%. This lower frequency may reflect its internal orientation, which tends to receive less attention in public-facing communication. As Hahn and Lülfs (2014, p. 402) argue, governance language often becomes salient only when linked to transparency or ethical accountability. Among women CEOs, such framing frequently appeared in relation to organizational culture or values.

These findings reinforce the centrality of environmental narratives in executive ESG communication. At the same time, the growing visibility of social themes and the selective, value-driven use of governance language suggest that ESG has become a more multifaceted and adaptive discourse. While this study covers a single calendar year, future research could track how the prominence of ESG pillars evolves over time, particularly whether the visibility of social and governance themes reflects enduring shifts or momentary trends. No longer confined to investor reporting or compliance, ESG now serves as a narrative framework through which CEOs articulate their values, demonstrate accountability, and build reputational capital in real time (Kotsantonis et al., 2016, p. 10; Hahn & Lülfs, 2014, p. 402).

All posts previously classified under the ESG pillars were also analysed regarding Sustainability Priorities and Sustainability Language. This process ensured consistency across analytical layers, allowing for a more granular understanding of how ESG narratives are framed and expressed.

4.2.1 Sustainability Priorities

This analysis identifies the specific sustainability themes emphasized by CEOs in their original LinkedIn posts. Posts were categorized into six predefined themes: (1) Innovation/Technology, (2) Social Equity, (3) Climate Action, (4) Governance & Ethics, (5) Circular Economy, and (6) Energy Transition. Posts could be assigned to multiple themes when they co-occurred. Table 9 shows examples for each theme.

Table 9

Sustainability Priorities - Examples

Priority	Example
Innovation/Technology	"(...) we decided to make a fundamental change to our core market infrastructure despite having industry-leading and highly-performant technology." (CEO 1)
Social Equity	"Addressing racial gaps requires transformative solutions, strong leadership and vision to help communities truly thrive." (CEO 4)
Climate Action	"(...) They might also have had a hard time imagining why I'd be there – since I wasn't holding a controller, but speaking into a mic with (...) about the challenges of the #EcologicalTransition and careers in the #water sector." (CEO 11)
Governance & Ethics	"As a company, (...) places HSE at the heart of everything we do. We are committed to making (...) a place where talent is nurtured, diversity is celebrated and Health and Safety is our top priority." (CEO 34)
Circular Economy	"It is a symbol of the way (...) turns resources usually discarded as #waste into precious new energy sources by tapping into local decarbonizing energy reservoirs, such as non-recyclable waste and residual heat and cold from industrial processes." (CEO 11)
Energy Transition	"We're excited about (...) Solar Park and not just because of the clean energy it will provide. Renewable projects like this help strengthen Michigan's economy, offering employment opportunities and extra income to the community." (CEO 22)

Figure 5

Sustainability Priorities by Gender
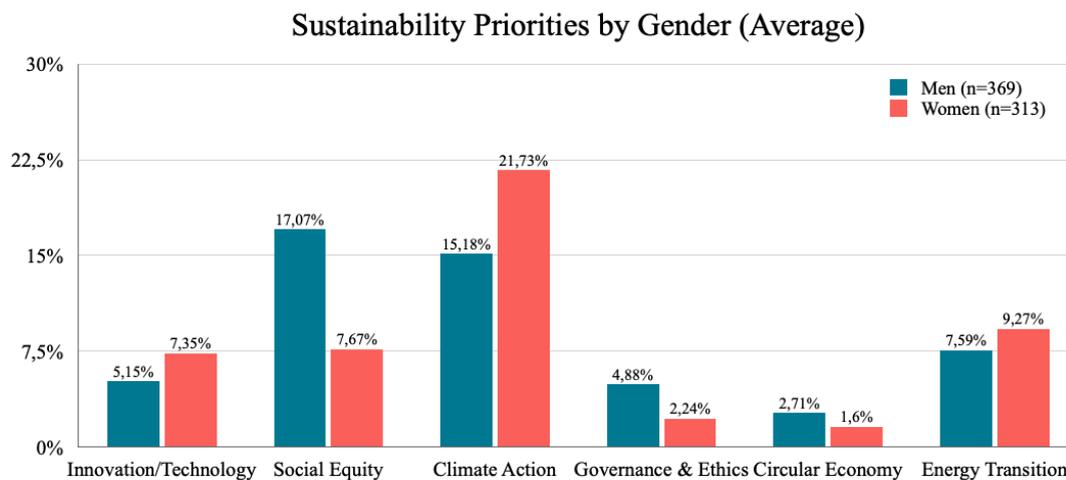
Climate Action emerged as the most frequently cited priority overall, with 124 posts across both groups. Women CEOs emphasized this theme slightly more than men (21.73% vs. 15.18%), with posts often focusing on emissions targets, renewable energy sourcing, and long-term climate strategies. Energy Transition followed closely and showed a similar balance (9.27% for women; 7.59% for men). These posts highlighted electrification, infrastructure shifts, and renewable investments. Innovation/Technology was a leading theme among women CEOs (7.35%), surpassing its mention among men CEOs (5.15%). These posts focused on AI, digital tools, and platform-based innovation as enablers of sustainability.

This distribution suggests that women CEOs tend to frame sustainability leadership through future-oriented, systemic commitments, particularly around climate action and technological innovation. Their posts often integrate long-term goals with detailed references to emissions and renewables, signaling accountability and vision. The higher emphasis on Innovation/Technology among women leaders also indicates a strategic positioning of digital tools not just as efficiency enablers but as central elements to environmental transformation.

In contrast, while men CEOs also engaged with Climate Action and Energy Transition, their slightly lower frequency may reflect a more diversified or less publicly emphasized ESG portfolio. These patterns point toward a gendered rhetorical distinction – women anchor their sustainability messaging in specific metrics and technological levers more frequently, while men may balance environmental commitments with broader governance or business imperatives.

Following that perception, we see Social Equity appearing more often in men-authored (17.07%) than in women-authored posts (7.67%). While care and inclusion are often linked to feminine-coded leadership styles (Bear et al., 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007), this pattern suggests a broader integration of equity language among men in leadership positions. At the same time, it is also plausible that some women CEOs strategically avoid emphasizing stereotypically "feminine" topics in highly visible digital spaces, such as LinkedIn, where traditionally masculine norms may still influence leadership credibility. This dual possibility underscores the performative nature of gender in executive communication and the evolving politics of inclusivity in corporate leadership discourse.

Governance & Ethics remained the least cited theme for both groups. Men CEOs referenced it in 4.88% of posts and women CEOs in 2.24%. These posts emphasized transparency, board oversight, and ESG-linked executive accountability. The Circular Economy was mentioned infrequently but nearly twice as often by women CEOs. These posts emphasized innovation in the product life cycle, material recovery, and waste reduction.

These findings both reaffirm and complicate gendered expectations in sustainability discourse. While women led in areas such as climate action, innovation, and circularity – domains often associated with future-oriented leadership (Glass et al., 2016) – men engaged more frequently with issues concerning equity and governance. At first glance, this may appear to challenge traditional gender frames. However, these patterns may reflect different strategies for achieving legitimacy: women may assert foresight and innovation as a way to claim strategic leadership authority, whereas men may adopt equity language to demonstrate social awareness and stakeholder responsiveness. This hypothesis supports prior research on gendered framing (Bear et al., 2010; Adams & Funk, 2012), while also highlighting the increasingly fluid and performative nature of leadership articulations in the ESG space, where visibility, credibility, and inclusivity are continually negotiated.

4.2.2 Sustainability Language

This analysis captures the rhetorical styles CEOs use to frame sustainability in their posts. I coded language into three primary themes: ESG-Specific Terms, Strategic Buzzwords, and Action-Oriented Language. These themes reflect branding strategies, discursive leadership positioning, and alignment with stakeholder expectations around sustainability. Examples of classified posts can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10

Sustainability Language - Examples

Theme	Example
ESG-Specific Terms	"Without a doubt, this is a major step forward for the energy sector, fully aligned with the goals of our 2030 ESG Plan." (CEO 14)
Strategic Buzzwords	"Investment in climate action is not just environmental – it's also the right business move, and the numbers show it." (CEO 12)
Action-Oriented Language	"In partnership with (...), (...) has been focused on advancing girls' rights and leadership around the world. Together, we have invested in more than 700 local girls, women and allied leaders who have positively impacted more than 27 million people globally." (CEO 21)

Figure 6

Sustainability Language by Gender
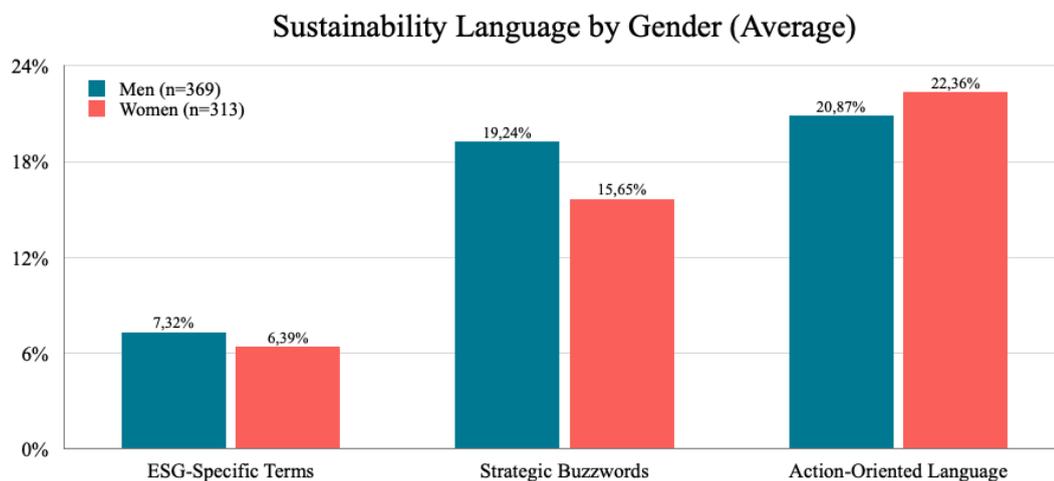
Action-Oriented Language was the most frequently used theme overall. Women CEOs applied this language feature slightly more often than men CEOs (22.36% vs. 20.87%). These posts frequently included verbs such as "accelerate," "implement," "invest," or "build," emphasizing momentum, execution, and agency in driving sustainability.

Strategic Buzzwords, such as "resilience," "transformation," and "inclusive growth," appeared in 19.2% of posts by men CEOs and 15.7% of posts by women CEOs. These terms function as symbolic markers, signaling alignment with broader global narratives around sustainable development and innovation. They serve to characterize the CEO – and, by extension, the company – as forward-thinking, adaptable, and value-driven. Their use reflects an effort to craft leadership identities that resonate with stakeholder expectations around impact, legitimacy, and relevance in an increasingly ESG-conscious marketplace.

ESG-Specific Terms, such as "net zero," "carbon neutral," "diversity," or "governance," were used at similar rates across genders (7.32% for men, 6.39% for women). These expressions reflect a shared vocabulary rooted in reporting frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (2021) and the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) (2023), which provide standardized guidelines for corporate ESG disclosure.

These patterns provide a nuanced perspective on executive communication. Women CEOs used Action-Oriented Language slightly more frequently, while men CEOs employed Strategic Buzzwords more often. Meanwhile, both groups employed ESG-Specific Terms at comparable levels. While prior literature suggests that women tend to favor relational or visionary styles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Bear et al., 2010), these results indicate an overlap in how rhetorical tools are used to project authority, accountability, and alignment with sustainability.

As Krippendorff (2018, pp. 167–169) observes, rhetorical choices convey message content and define how speakers position themselves in relation to their audience. The language CEOs use in their posts serves both purposes, advancing sustainability goals while reinforcing their public roles as leaders navigating complex social and environmental expectations.

4.5 Narrative Tone

This analysis overviews the CEOs' affective and rhetorical styles in framing their messages. Four Narrative Tones were coded: Personal/Emotional, Strategic/Technical, Inspirational, and Neutral/Formal. These themes reveal how CEOs balance performance-focused discourse, motivational leadership, emotional connection, and institutional messaging, as seen in Table 11.

Table 11

Narrative Tone - Examples

Theme	Example
Personal/Emotional	"I'm incredibly proud of the (...) team for making our Investor Day event a resounding success! We showcased the work we're doing to raise the bar, elevate our standards and lead the industry." (CEO 8)
Strategic/Technical	"The business serves 19,000 clients around the world, including 85% of the Fortune 500. Our network enables us to do business in nearly 180 different markets and move nearly $5 trillion for clients every single day – more than the GDP of Germany." (CEO 18)
Inspirational	"Yesterday, the (...) announced that it has achieved the goals of the 1 Billion Lives Challenge, a commitment by companies like (...) and governments around the world to improve the lives of one billion individuals by delivering affordable access to digital solutions across healthcare, finance and education. I am proud to share that we accomplished this more than a year faster than we thought possible – a testament to our strength and impact when we work together." (CEO 15)
Neutral/Formal	"Today, we have announced our 2024 interim results." (CEO 9)

Figure 7

Narrative Tone by Gender
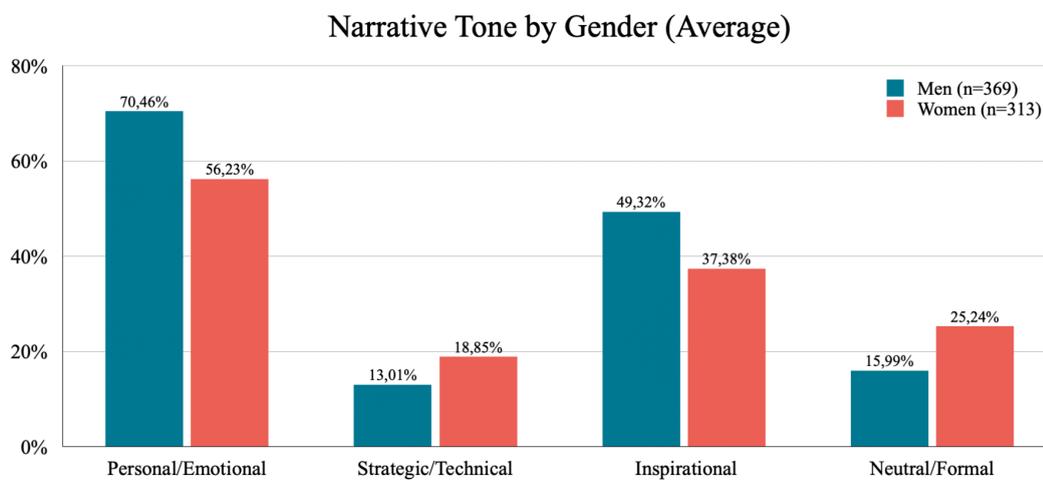
Overall, the Personal/Emotional tone was the most frequently used style, appearing in 70.5% of men-authored posts and 56.2% of the posts written by women. These posts often included storytelling, expressions of gratitude, or reflections anchored in shared values and milestones. The prevalence of this tone may be partially explained by the nature of LinkedIn itself: as a platform that blends professional branding with individual voices, it encourages executives to adopt a more personal and relatable style. Since the CEO is typically the direct author or visible sender of the message, emotional resonance and authenticity become strategic tools – helping humanize leadership, build trust, and enhance reputational capital (Marx et al., 2020, p. 3).

The fact that men CEOs used the Personal/Emotional tone more frequently than women CEOs challenges long-standing assumptions that women are more likely to employ relational or expressive communication styles (Tannen, 1994). In the context of LinkedIn, however, where leadership is publicly performed and visibility is integral to the platform's logic, an emotional tone becomes a strategic tool. For men in executive roles, expressing gratitude, pride, or vulnerability may strike a balance between authority and relatability, fostering connection and enhancing engagement (Tolbert, 2024, pp. 7–9).

A Strategic/Technical tone appeared more frequently in posts by women CEOs (18.9%) than in those by men CEOs (13.0%). These posts often focused on metrics, compliance frameworks, and Environmental, Social, and Governance reporting. These results may reflect efforts by women executives to assert institutional legitimacy and competence in

a landscape where their authority is still more frequently scrutinized. Research suggests that women in leadership roles often adopt a more formal or credentials-based rhetorical style to counter gendered perceptions of inadequacy or "lack of fit" in high-status positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Brescoll, 2011). In this context, the strategic tone can be read as a performance of authority calibrated for credibility, not simply as a communication preference.

The Inspirational Tone, framing leadership as vision-driven and transformational, was also common, especially among men CEOs (49.3%). However, it was also widely used by women CEOs (37.4%). A Neutral/Formal tone was more prevalent among women CEOs (25.2%) than among men CEOs (16.0%). These posts typically included announcements, reports, or updates aligned with investor interests.

4.5.1 Narrative Tone in ESG-Related Posts

The same analysis was applied to posts that referenced at least one ESG pillar to isolate how tone functions within sustainability communication. This subset offers a clearer picture of how CEOs frame sustainability when it is the primary focus of their messaging.

Figure 8

Narrative Tone by Gender in ESG-Related Posts
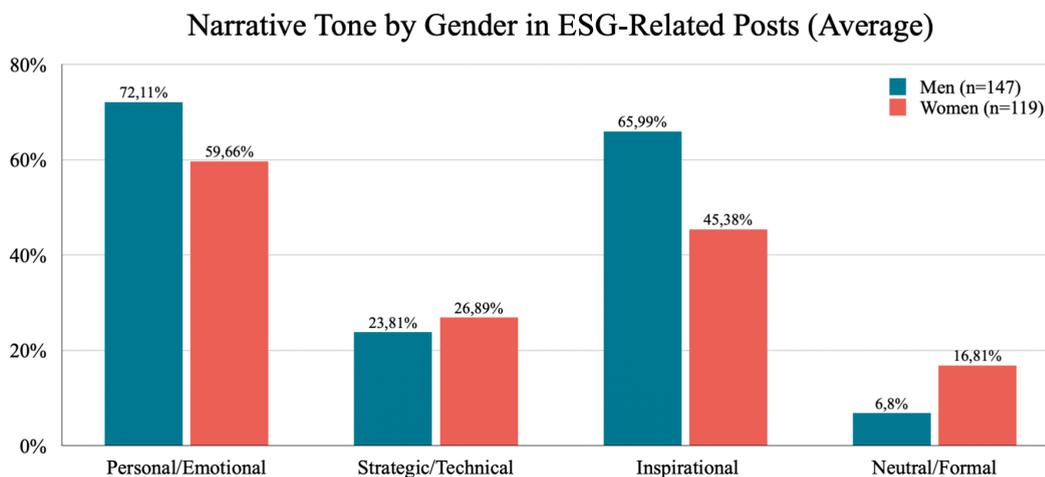
The tone patterns within ESG-focused posts reinforce broader trends and reveal important distinctions in emphasis. While both men and women CEOs used Inspirational and Personal/Emotional tones in their sustainability communication, men did so at notably higher rates. An Inspirational Tone was present in 66% of men-authored posts, compared to 45.4% of women-authored posts, and a Personal/Emotional tone was featured in 72.1% of

men-authored content versus 59.6% for women-authored content. In contrast, women executives showed a relatively greater use of Strategic/Technical language (26.89% vs. 23.81%) and a Neutral/Formal tone (16.81% vs. 6.8%).

In general, these findings challenge traditional gender stereotypes in executive communication. Rather than confirming the assumption that women default to emotional expressiveness, the data shows that women CEOs use technical, metrics-driven language more often in their sustainability messaging. Meanwhile, men CEOs demonstrate greater variation in tone, including a higher frequency of affective and visionary language. These findings support the argument that communicative styles reflect both gender norms and strategic intent, alongside organizational context and the performative affordances of digital platforms (Gandini, 2016; Duffy, 2017).

4.6 Leadership Style

This analysis captures how CEOs articulate their leadership identity and values through language. Posts were coded according to six leadership styles: Innovation Drive, Community Engagement, Inclusion Focus, Performance Focus, Collaborative, and Directive. These themes reflect how authority, purpose, and alignment with stakeholder values are made visible through executive discourse, especially in platformed settings where leadership must be narrated and made legible in public (Duffy, 2017; Gandini, 2016). Table 12 shows examples of classified posts.

Table 12

*Leadership Style - Examples*

Theme	Example
Collaborative	"Associates continue to step up, helping each other over and over again during the most challenging of times. I'm so proud to see associates like Austin at (...) in Asheville, and many more teams of associates working together to get our communities what they need as soon as it's possible. They are heroes." (CEO 10)

Innovation Drive	"(...) has been accepted into the Early Adopters program of the NISAR mission (NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar) – a joint initiative by the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to develop and launch, in 2025, an unprecedented Earth observation satellite equipped with Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) imaging." (CEO 30)
Performance Focus	"I am excited to share that (...) has been selected to join the Dow Jones Industrial Average, becoming one of only 30 companies in one of the most prestigious benchmarks in the global financial markets." (CEO 16)
Community Engagement	"Today the firm is expanding its commitment to the U.K. with plans for £40 million in investments for new business and philanthropic efforts that improve access to jobs and help families build stronger financial futures." (CEO 17)
Inclusion Focus	"They're places where young people can imagine, innovate and build the skills they need for careers in science, technology, engineering, and math. And by investing in the centers, we show the students that we care." (CEO 4)
Directive	"To (...), and many other officials I met, I made a point of emphasizing the importance of their commitment and vision to accelerate the energy transition. At (...), we are convinced it can only happen with them, and we are determined to support them in their ambitions and needs by: (...)." (CEO 6)

Figure 9

Leadership Style by Gender
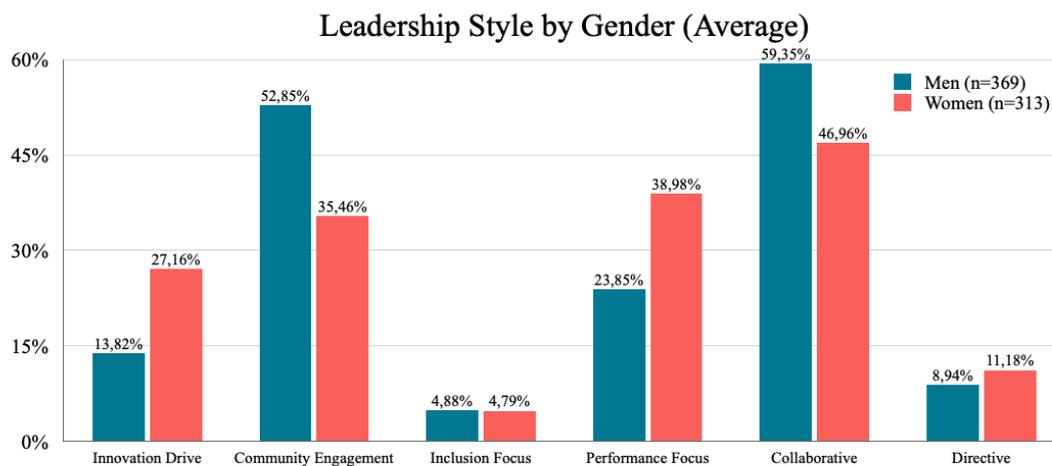
Collaborative leadership was the most prevalent style across both genders, particularly among men (59.4%), and was also frequently observed in women-authored posts (47%). This style emphasizes teamwork, shared responsibility, and mutual success, characteristics commonly associated with transformational leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007) and increasingly expected in public-facing executive discourse.

Innovation Drive was mentioned more than twice as frequently among women CEOs (27.2%) compared to men (13.8%), aligning with previous findings that women in executive roles often frame leadership around adaptability, long-term value creation, and technology-driven change (Glass et al., 2016).

Community Engagement was more common among men CEOs (52.9%), often expressed through messages of civic involvement, employee volunteering, or local partnerships. While this style is traditionally linked to feminine-coded leadership values such as care and inclusion (Bear et al., 2010), this suggests that community-centered narratives are also becoming a mainstream tool of legitimacy for men in executive positions.

Performance Focus, emphasizing outcomes, KPIs, and operational discipline, was more pronounced among women CEOs (39%) than among men (23.9%). These results support the argument that women in leadership positions often adopt a results-oriented style to establish credibility and visibility in environments where these qualities are particularly important, such as when discussing Environmental, Social, and Governance issues (Adams & Funk, 2012).

Directive leadership, typically associated with top-down decision-making, executive control, and institutional positioning, appeared slightly more in posts by women (11.2%) than men (9.0%). These numbers may reflect a strategic rhetorical choice: asserting authority in a platform space that values authenticity and approachability (Duffy, 2017), but where women leaders may still face scrutiny about decisiveness or assertiveness (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Inclusion Focus appeared in fewer than 5% of posts from both groups. Men CEOs used this style slightly more often, typically in posts showcasing targeted diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, inclusive hiring practices, or programs designed to foster social equity, both within the organization and in the communities they serve. In contrast, women CEOs were more likely to integrate inclusion language into broader leadership narratives, framing equity as a cross-cutting value embedded in innovation, collaboration, and performance rather than as a stand-alone topic. This difference suggests that while men may emphasize inclusion through formal commitments and visibility, women may approach it as an underlying principle that informs strategic direction.

4.6.1 Leadership Style in ESG-Related Posts

To sharpen the gendered analysis of sustainability leadership, styles were examined exclusively in posts referencing at least one ESG pillar.

Figure 10

Leadership Style by Gender in ESG-Related Posts
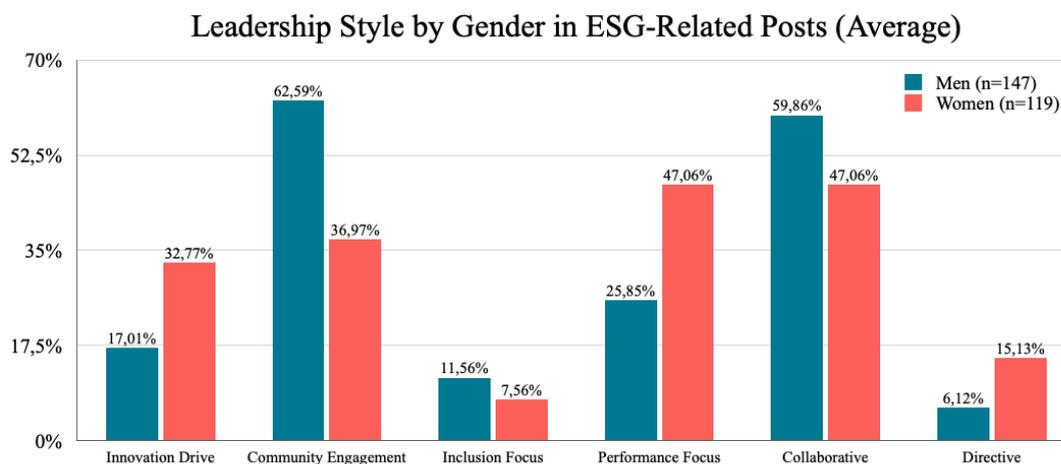
These ESG-specific results confirm and support previous findings. Women CEOs showed significantly higher use of Innovation Drive (32.8%) and Performance Focus (47%) compared to men CEOs, which suggests a leadership style oriented around foresight, results, and technical accountability when addressing sustainability issues.

In contrast, men CEOs leaned more heavily into Community Engagement (62.59%) and the Collaborative framing (59.86%), positioning themselves as team builders and civic actors within the sustainability space. These findings suggest that men in leadership may increasingly adopt socially inclusive language, traditionally perceived as feminine-coded (Bear et al., 2010), to establish legitimacy for their Environmental, Social, and Governance efforts.

Interestingly, the Directive style was used more than twice as often by women CEOs (15.1%) than by men (6.1%) in ESG posts, a reversal of typical assumptions about assertiveness and gender. This finding may reflect a rhetorical effort by women to assert executive authority in a public, male-dominated space like corporate sustainability.

The Inclusion Focus remained infrequent across both groups, although it was slightly more prominent among men in this subset, often framed as targeted DEI initiatives or internal programs.

Rather than reinforcing static stereotypes, the data suggests a fluid and evolving repertoire of gendered communication styles that reflects both individual agency and the shifting norms of digital sustainability discourse.

4.7 Future Framing

This analysis examines how CEOs construct imagined futures in their sustainability narratives – what the sociology of expectations refers to as projective discourse (Borup et al., 2006, p. 286; Beckert, 2016, p. 10). Future-oriented language is not simply descriptive; it is performative. By invoking timelines, long-term goals, or visionary outcomes, executives engage in symbolic work that mobilizes stakeholders, legitimizes present action, and characterizes leadership as anticipatory and intentional. This behaviour aligns with what Muiderman et al. (2020, p. 6) describe as anticipatory governance: the strategic use of future-oriented narratives to influence decisions in the present and shape what futures are perceived as legitimate, desirable, or necessary.

This analysis encompasses three identified themes: Future-Oriented Language, Normative Framing (Societal Norms), and Strategic Foresight, as shown in Table 13.

Table 13

Future Framing - Examples

Theme	Example
Future-Oriented Language	"Ringing the opening bell wasn't just a celebration of (...)'s history. It was a celebration and symbol of the future of work. It was like standing on a summit and being able to see for hundreds of miles in front of you… Stretching all the way out to the horizon. And the view was stunning." (CEO 32)
Normative Framing (Societal Norms)	"In an environment where consumers remain under pressure, we're focused on delivering superior value, strong innovation and continued investment in our brands to win in the market. Anchored by the strength of our portfolio and the advancement of our (...) strategy, we are confident we are taking the right steps to deliver consistent and profitable growth for the long term." (CEO 27)
Strategic Foresight	"The strength of our results is a matter of pride for us, as it enables (...) to mobilize the resources necessary to fulfill our ambitions, and to concretely implement our roadmap." (CEO 37)

Figure 11

Future Framing by Gender

Future Framing by Gender (Average)
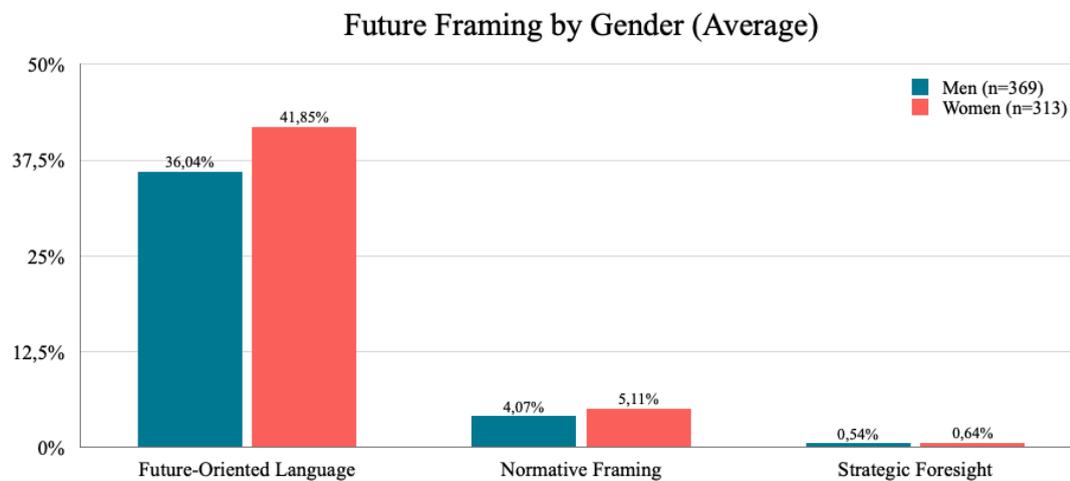
Future-Oriented Language was the most prevalent theme, appearing in 41.9% of women-authored and 36% of men-authored posts. The expressions within this theme reference long-term goals, intergenerational responsibility, and scalable transitions. Phrases such as "net-zero by 2030," "next generation," or "sustainable future" serve to position CEOs as stewards of transformation.

The results align with earlier research suggesting that women are more likely to frame leadership through future-oriented, relational, and value-driven discourse (Bear et al., 2010; Van der Hel, 2016). It also reflects Borup et al.'s (2006) concept of generative expectations, which are narratives that anticipate and shape the present through imagined futures.

Normative Framing was slightly more frequent among women (5.1%) than men (4.1%). Posts in this theme often invoked sociotechnical imaginaries (Muiderman et al., 2020), linking sustainability goals to collective moral visions. This pattern reinforces the existing literature that connects women's leadership to social accountability and care ethics (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Crenshaw, 1991). Men-authored posts coded as Normative Framing tended to view ethical ideals through the lens of growth or innovation, reflecting more instrumental rationales.

Strategic Foresight, which includes explicit references to long-term planning tools such as roadmaps, scenario thinking, or staged implementation strategies, was mentioned in only 0.6% of posts from both men and women CEOs. This low incidence suggests that while many leaders invoke the future in broad, aspirational terms, few publicly articulate detailed or

procedural visions for achieving it. The absence of foresight language does not necessarily imply a lack of long-term planning in practice, but rather indicates that such planning is rarely made visible or narrativized on LinkedIn, which may reflect the platform's preference for clarity, momentum, and symbolic leadership over complex, uncertain, or technical future mapping.

4.7.1 Future Framing in ESG-Specific Posts

The Future Framing analysis was also applied to posts that referenced one or more ESG pillars to better understand how leaders map out the future when discussing sustainability explicitly.

Figure 12

Future Framing by Gender in ESG-Related Posts
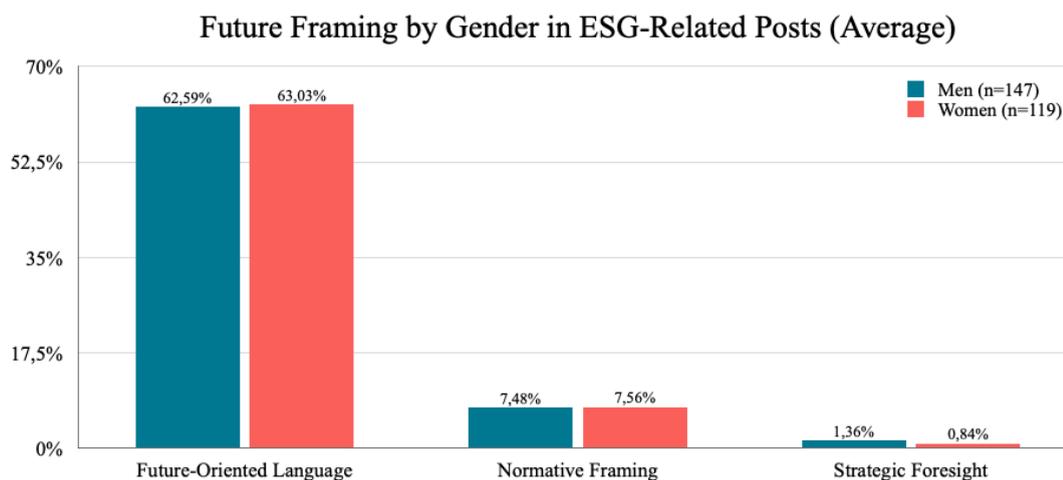
Within ESG-classified posts, Future-Oriented Language remained the dominant form of projection, appearing at nearly identical rates across gender (62.6% for men and 63% for women), suggesting that when CEOs engage directly with sustainability issues, invoking the future becomes a shared communicative strategy, used to establish direction, legitimacy, and alignment with stakeholder expectations.

However, while the frequency is similar, the content and tone of these future projections differ meaningfully by gender, just as it does in the analysis of the overall posts. Women CEOs were more likely to frame long-term goals in normative or ethical terms, invoking responsibility, collective well-being, and social transformation. Men CEOs, in

contrast, tended to emphasize outcomes tied to innovation, infrastructure, and operational performance.

The findings support Beckert's (2016) argument that fictional expectations are shaped by identity and institutional position and extend it by showing how gender mediates the way imagined futures are constructed and communicated. As LinkedIn becomes an increasingly prominent stage for narrating institutional purpose, these differences highlight how sustainability leadership is shaped by what is said, alongside how, why, and by whom it is stated.

These results highlight patterned tonal, thematic, and symbolic differences in how men and women CEOs communicate sustainability. The next chapter interprets these findings in light of broader literature and theoretical frameworks.

5. Discussion: Narrating Tomorrow

This chapter interprets the empirical findings presented in Chapter 4 through the lens of the theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter 2. It connects the observed patterns in tone, sustainability framing, and gendered expression to broader questions of visibility, legitimacy, and symbolic power on digital platforms. Each section draws from the data while integrating insights from gender studies, sustainability discourse, and futures theory, offering a multidimensional account of how sustainability leadership is performed and constrained differently by men and women in CEO positions.

The chapter is organized around three key insights that emerged from the analysis:

(1) LinkedIn functions as a performative stage for narrating imagined futures, where visibility and credibility are tightly coupled;

(2) Gendered communication styles reflect strategic adaptations to platform logic and leadership norms rather than fixed traits;

(3) Sustainability is narrated through gendered visions of the future, blending moral legitimacy, operational identity, and rhetorical agency, revealing how imagined futures are constructed, authorized, and differently embodied in digital leadership discourse.

What follows is a deeper examination of these themes, illustrating how gendered patterns in tone, leadership style, and future projections contribute to the different ways in which men and women CEOs approach and frame sustainability on LinkedIn. These three insights structure the core of the discussion. A final section then reflects on the wider implications of these findings for digital leadership, symbolic sustainability, and scholarly inquiry.

5.1 LinkedIn as a Performative Platform for Expected Futures

In today's digital landscape, leadership is increasingly expected to be visible, authentic, and future‑oriented – a shift shaped by both organizational pressures and digital platform dynamics (Frontiers, 2019). Platforms such as LinkedIn play a central role in this transformation, urging executives to communicate strategy, vision, values, and accountability in public, performative ways (Marres & Gerlitz, 2016; Gandini, 2016). These are not neutral expectations. They are entangled with symbolic norms and algorithmic incentives that shape how leadership is enacted, especially when it comes to narrating sustainability.

The data presented in Chapter 4 shows that men-authored posts were more likely to adopt a Personal/Emotional tone (70.5%), often emphasizing vision, inspiration, or gratitude. Women-authored posts, meanwhile, displayed a higher frequency of a Strategic/Technical tone (18.9%), aligning more closely with metrics, delivery, and technical detail. While both groups engaged in future-framed discourse, they did so through markedly different tonal repertoires, suggesting that the performance of leadership on LinkedIn is not flat – it is structured by visibility, gender, and symbolic expectation.

These differences reflect more than individual styles; they point to structural asymmetries in how credibility is developed and maintained. Women CEOs may navigate a tighter range of acceptable rhetorical performance. As Eagly and Carli (2007) argue, women in leadership positions face the "double bind": they are expected to be both warm and assertive, but penalized for being too assertive or too warm. In platform settings, where authority must be rendered visible, but still appear palatable and professional, this bind may be heightened. Adopting a technical or strategic tone may serve as a rhetorical safeguard, enabling women leaders to signal competence without violating traditional gendered expectations of self-presentation.

Conversely, men CEOs may have more rhetorical flexibility. Their use of emotional and visionary tone is unlikely to threaten perceptions of authority; in some cases, it may even enhance it. Studies on performative vulnerability (Orgad, 2024; Yue et al., 2020) suggest that emotional expression, particularly when paired with competence, can humanize power and strengthen engagement. Therefore, men leaders may be better positioned to meet the platform's demand for visibility without incurring symbolic costs.

These patterns reveal how projective discourse, which Borup et al. (2006) define as future-oriented language that mobilizes the present, is not uniformly accessible. While the sociology of expectations often focuses on what futures are imagined, these findings suggest that who gets to narrate them – and how they are narrated – remains profoundly shaped by gender. Together, these patterns demonstrate that gender influences not only the tone CEOs adopt but also how they construct legitimacy and enact symbolic leadership in digital spaces. Emotional authority and technical competence are not equally accessible to all executives; they are shaped by the gendered constraints of platformed visibility.

5.2 Managing Expectations: Gender, Visibility, and Credibility

While the previous section examined LinkedIn as a platform where CEOs perform future-oriented leadership, this topic of discussion narrows the lens to explore how these types of performance are shaped by gender. If digital leadership increasingly depends on visibility, affective resonance, and projected futures, then credibility itself becomes a staged accomplishment, something negotiated in real time, under the gaze of stakeholders and algorithms alike. Crucially, this negotiation is not neutral. It is influenced by persistent social scripts that define what legitimate leadership looks and sounds like and who is most easily seen as embodying it.

The findings in the analysed data challenge conventional assumptions about gendered communication. Women CEOs in the dataset used a strategic or directive tone more often than their male counterparts, while men CEOs leaned more frequently into emotional and inspirational rhetoric. These patterns do not merely invert stereotypes; they raise more profound questions about how leaders manage visibility and credibility in a gendered environment, particularly on platforms like LinkedIn.

One plausible explanation draws, yet again, on the concept of the double bind, which posits that women in leadership are often perceived as too feminine or too masculine, never quite fitting either ideal (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 98). In this context, strategic and performance-driven rhetoric may serve as a protective strategy. Women leaders may emphasize metrics, planning, and institutional language to establish competence while avoiding negative judgments associated with emotional expressiveness or perceived softness.

Role congruity theory (Eagly & Diekman, 2005, p. 26) offers an additional explanation. It suggests that traits associated with leadership (e.g., assertiveness, control) align more closely with stereotypically masculine roles. Women who enact these traits may risk social penalty, while men who incorporate warmth or emotional appeal may be rewarded with perceptions of authenticity or balance. This asymmetry could help explain why men in CEO positions feel freer, or even more incentivized, to use emotional or visionary tones, while women may feel compelled to maintain more formal or strategic styles.

A third explanation lies in the evolving norms of executive visibility on social platforms. Research indicates that vulnerability is being increasingly used as a performative tool in professional settings. Orgad (2024, p. 7) argues that emotional disclosure on LinkedIn

is often strategically curated, not necessarily as an expression of authenticity, but rather as a means to cultivate trust and relational capital. Similarly, Yue et al. (2020, p. 14) demonstrate that an emotional tone can enhance a CEO's reputational appeal, particularly when paired with competence cues. In this light, men in executive positions may be leveraging affective language not to soften their authority, but to strengthen it, projecting relatability without losing status.

These interpretations are speculative by necessity. This study cannot determine whether rhetorical patterns are the product of a conscious strategy, audience feedback, or long-term socialization. Some women CEOs may actively avoid stereotypically "feminine" styles; others may unconsciously mirror the expectations they have learned to navigate. Likewise, men CEOs may not intend to perform vulnerability, but benefit from a platform logic that rewards it. Future research using interviews or mixed methods could clarify the degree to which these choices are intentional, intuitive, or institutionally shaped.

Additionally, while this analysis primarily focuses on gender as a key axis of difference, it is essential to acknowledge that leadership communication is also affected by intersecting identities, including race, ethnicity, nationality, and organizational culture. The absence of granular demographic data in this study limits the capacity to assess how these dimensions fully influence rhetorical strategy. However, the patterns observed during the coding process suggest that men of color, in particular, were more likely to foreground themes of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their posts. This may reflect their positionality within broader structures of representation, where DEI discourse functions not only as a strategic commitment but also as a personal stake. Moreover, prior research highlights that leaders from historically marginalized groups often bear an "amplified burden" of visibility and legitimacy (Crenshaw, 1991), a dynamic that may alter how they frame leadership and responsibility in digital spaces. Future studies that adopt a more intersectional analytical framework could provide richer insight into how multiple identity categories co-produce styles of executive communication and credibility performance on platforms like LinkedIn.

The findings suggest, however, that the performance of sustainability communication on LinkedIn is deeply entangled with gendered expectations. Women may work harder to signal competence and control; men may feel freer to express their vision, emotions, or vulnerability. Both patterns reflect a negotiation of visibility and credibility, one that plays out in what CEOs say, how they say it, and how others perceive them.

5.2.1 Gendered Emphases in Sustainability Communication

Although this study does not assess sustainability outcomes or corporate impact, the findings show that gender influences how sustainability is framed discursively. Both men and women CEOs engage with ESG themes, yet their rhetorical emphasis and symbolic alignment often differ. These findings matter because the language leaders use to communicate sustainability helps define which ESG pillars become salient, legitimate, or actionable.

The analysis found that men in CEO positions posted more frequently about sustainability and were more likely to associate ESG with innovation, competitive advantages, and organizational transformation. These posts often used an emotional or visionary tone, framing sustainability as a strategic frontier of modern leadership. Women CEOs were more likely to frame sustainability as a question of ethical responsibility, social justice, and long-term care. Their language leaned into intergenerational concern, collective well-being, and inclusive governance.

These patterns suggest that gender shapes not just participation in sustainability communication but the moral and symbolic priorities embedded within it. Rather than interpreting this as a binary divide, it may be more productive to see it as a difference in emphasis, with men and women CEOs highlighting different facets of what sustainability means. This difference is analytically significant: it reveals that the sustainability agenda, even in high-level executive discourse, is not ideologically or narratively uniform. Gender adds nuance to how the future is imagined and how corporate responsibility is articulated, reminding us that sustainability is not only a technical challenge but also a communicative and cultural project (Franz-Balsen, 2014).

5.3 Gendered Futures: Imagining Direction, Legitimacy, and Impact

Building on the analysis of gendered credibility and discursive strategy presented in the previous section, this discussion turns to the kinds of futures CEOs construct and how these imagined futures are affected by gendered expectations. While visibility and credibility are established in the present, as Section 5.2 argues, legitimacy is also projected forward through the language of transformation, commitment, and long-term impact. Nevertheless, not all futures are narrated or received with equal ease. This asymmetry is particularly

evident when considering how men and women CEOs articulate strategic direction, ethical purpose, and anticipated outcomes in their LinkedIn communications.

The data suggests that both men and women in executive roles rely heavily on future-oriented language. Terms such as "net zero by 2030," "next generation," or "sustainable transformation" were common across the board. However, the tone and function of these projections differ in telling ways. Men CEOs more frequently embedded their future visions within emotionally resonant and inspirational narratives, often invoking collective ambition and societal change through an inclusive "we." These aspirational tones tend to humanize their authority and amplify engagement, aligning with the affective turn described in platformed leadership literature.

By contrast, while women CEOs were equally invested in articulating forward-looking commitments, they often did so through the lens of performance focus and innovation. They were more likely to tie future goals to strategic delivery, metrics, and technical planning, reflecting a need to assert organizational legitimacy in ways that counteract persistent gendered skepticism. This pattern aligns with broader scholarship on anticipatory labor and gender, which suggests that women in high-visibility roles may feel compelled to over-demonstrate procedural credibility before being granted visionary authority (Brescoll, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

These stylistic divergences reflect the gendered politics of imagined futures. In this context, the sociology of expectations serves as a diagnostic tool, revealing that the ability to project credible and desirable futures is not equally distributed. Some leaders are socially authorized to inspire; others are expected to prove their qualification. This dynamic raises important questions about how platform audiences evaluate transformation narratives and who gets to sound visionary without first sounding defensive.

It is also worth noting that while both groups used normative language – appeals to justice, equity, and responsibility – women CEOs more frequently integrated these ideals with organizational foresight, such as structured roadmaps and innovation frameworks. Men CEOs, conversely, often wove ethical visions into emotionally driven posts about community, team resilience, or purpose-led leadership, suggesting a subtle yet significant divergence in how moral authority is claimed and framed. For women, normative ideals may need to be embedded in strategy; for men, they can stand alone as evidence of leadership character.

These findings also highlight the importance of futures thinking – as a leadership trait and as a cultural resource. Futures studies have long argued that we can only build what we are able to first imagine. The language of anticipated transformation, long-term goals, and visionary framing is not merely aspirational; it is performative. It guides action in the present by scripting what is possible, necessary, or desirable. As Jasanoff and Kim (2009) posit, imagined futures shape governance. Yet, if the ability to narrate futures is unequally distributed – if some voices are more likely to be heard, believed, or rewarded – then so is the power to define the sustainability agenda, making futures thinking not just a leadership skill but a terrain of symbolic inequality that requires critical attention.

Altogether, these patterns highlight that gendered futures are a matter of credibility. Executives do not simply describe the future; they make it happen. And the way it is judged is deeply affected by gendered expectations around authority, risk, and legitimacy.

5.4 Implications: Leadership, Narrative Authority, and Sustainability

This section returns to the central research question of this study: How do men and women CEOs construct and communicate sustainability leadership on LinkedIn? Based on content and thematic analyses of ESG-related posts, the findings suggest that sustainability leadership is not defined by the presence of particular content but by how that content is framed, narrated, and performed. Thus, sustainability and more specifically ESG become a stage for leadership identity.

Both men and women CEOs engage substantively with ESG themes, but their approaches differ in tone, emphasis, and discursive style. Women executives more frequently foreground Environmental issues, particularly energy transition, climate action, innovation, and the circular economy, framing these priorities with performance-focused and technically precise language. Their posts are more likely to include action verbs, metrics, and implementation strategies, presenting sustainability as an operational mandate rather than just a vision to look forward to.

Men CEOs, while equally active in sustainability discourse, tend to frame their leadership in relational and visionary terms. Posts referencing Social topics, such as community engagement, inclusion, or employee well-being, are more frequent and often articulated through an affective or inspirational tone. Even when addressing environmental or governance issues, their framing leans toward shared purpose rather than operational

delivery. Strategic buzzwords and emotional cues help construct a narrative of value-driven leadership, where legitimacy stems from both vision and execution.

These patterns reveal a critical difference: the same ESG goals are communicated through different discursive pathways, each shaped by gendered norms of authority. Men CEOs are more socially licensed to use emotional, abstract, and future-facing rhetoric to establish ESG credibility. Women CEOs more often rely on grounded, strategic, and technical framing, potentially as a response to heightened scrutiny or the perceived need to "earn" legitimacy in visible leadership roles. In short, the future of sustainability is imagined by both groups, but not equally performed.

These differences have implications for how sustainability assessment methodologies are designed and interpreted. While ESG reporting has become increasingly standardized through frameworks such as the GRI and SASB, qualitative assessments of narrative content remain underdeveloped. This thesis presents a methodological blueprint that integrates content and thematic analysis to reveal not only which ESG pillars are emphasized but also how they are framed through emotional, technical, inspirational, or normative language. This approach could serve as a model for real-time discourse audits, helping organizations and analysts to better understand how sustainability is being performed across leadership communication and how those performances relate to stakeholder trust, platform visibility, and reputational capital.

Moreover, the data suggests a need for a broader rethinking of sustainability discourse beyond reporting. In line with research from futures studies and anticipatory governance (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2021; Kristóf & Nováky, 2023), the way leaders frame the future is a form of institutional power: it shapes what is thinkable, actionable, and valuable. The repeated invocation of "net zero by 2030" or "green growth" goes beyond describing strategy; it establishes a horizon of legitimacy. Yet these projections are also shaped by gendered discursive practices, as Section 5.3 has shown. Thus, future-building becomes both a leadership act and a sustainability act, one in which the boundaries of credibility are continuously negotiated.

Finally, the implications of this analysis extend beyond gender. As discussed earlier, intersectional factors, including race, geography, and sector, are likely to shape how executives engage with different pillars of ESG. While this study operated within a binary gender framework due to data constraints, future research should consider mixed-method and

intersectional approaches that allow for a more complex understanding of how leadership identity interacts with sustainability performance. Without such attention, the symbolic labor of sustainability risks reinforcing existing hierarchies of voice, visibility, and value rather than disrupting them.

Therefore, sustainability leadership is not merely a matter of aligning with established frameworks; it is a practice of narrating futures in ways that are intelligible, credible, and inclusive. This study shows that such narratives do not circulate evenly and that some voices are granted more legitimacy than others. Confronting such imbalance is both a critical analytical task and a strategic responsibility for those seeking to advance corporate sustainability in meaningful ways.

5.4.1 Revisiting the Research Questions

This study was guided by one central research question, supported by two analytical subquestions:

Main research question: How do men and women CEOs construct and communicate sustainability leadership on LinkedIn?

Subquestion 1.1: What thematic, tonal, and stylistic patterns can be identified in their ESG discourse?

Subquestion 1.2: How is future-oriented language used to project leadership identity and legitimacy across gender?

The findings presented across this study offer grounded responses to these guiding questions. In relation to subquestion 1.1, the analysis identified clear tonal and stylistic differences between men and women CEOs. Posts authored by men more frequently used an emotional or personal tone, emphasizing inspiration, gratitude, or visionary framing, while posts authored by women more often adopted a strategic or directive tone, highlighting execution, metrics, and technical language. These distinctions reflect how gendered expectations influence the symbolic repertoires available to leaders in digital spaces.

Subquestion 1.2 was addressed by examining future-oriented language and how it functions as a tool for discursive leadership construction. Both men and women employed timelines, long-term goals, and aspirational framing to convey legitimacy, but they did so in distinct ways. Men often paired future discourse with emotional resonance and confident self-branding, while women were more likely to invoke collective responsibility and ethical

accountability. These divergent narrative strategies suggest that leadership identity and credibility are not only communicated but also constrained through gendered expectations of future vision.

Together, these insights address the main research question by demonstrating that the construction of sustainability leadership on LinkedIn is deeply gendered. It is shaped not only by content and topic selection but also by how leaders align with platform norms, institutional expectations, and symbolic futures. Gender operates as a structuring force, affecting what is sayable, how it is received, and who gets to narrate the future with authority.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has explored how sustainability leadership is discursively constructed by men and women CEOs on LinkedIn – a platform that merges professional identity with the algorithmic logic of visibility. Through a combination of content analysis, reflexive thematic interpretation, and theoretical engagement with the sociology of expectations, the study demonstrates that gender remains a structuring force in digital leadership communication. While ESG has become a dominant narrative in executive discourse, it is not expressed uniformly. Instead, it is filtered through symbolic repertoires shaped by gendered norms of authority, legitimacy, and rhetorical credibility.

At the heart of this analysis lies a paradox: LinkedIn promotes ideals of authenticity and transparency while simultaneously reinforcing established asymmetries in symbolic capital. The findings show that men in CEO positions are more likely to employ emotionally resonant and visionary language, establishing a charismatic and affective leadership persona. Women CEOs, in contrast, more frequently rely on strategic and technical language, aligning their discourse with expectations of competence and precision. These differences are not incidental; they reflect the enduring influence of the "double bind" and the narrowed rhetorical space in which women leaders are expected to perform. While both groups use future-oriented language to construct legitimacy, they do so in rhetorically distinct ways, revealing how imagined futures are gendered, curated, and made performative.

6.1 Summary of Findings and Contributions

This study makes a meaningful contribution to emerging conversations at the intersection of gender, leadership communication, and sustainability discourse in digital contexts. Theoretically, it brings together concepts from gender studies, platform labor, and the sociology of expectations to show how symbolic authority is performed – and constrained – across gender lines in executive communication, especially when targeting sustainability-related content. By analyzing how men and women CEOs frame sustainability differently, the thesis reveals that digital leadership encompasses strategic expression and negotiated legitimacy shaped by platform norms and social expectations.

Methodologically, the thesis offers a structured yet flexible analytical framework that combines content analysis, thematic analysis, and narrative interpretation. This approach can

be applied to future research on public leadership performance across sectors and platforms, while also contributing to the methodological repertoire for studying platformed discourse.

Practically, the findings have implications for leadership development, corporate communication, and platform design. Organizations committed to sustainability should be aware of how gendered communication styles affect public reception and how symbolic asymmetries may influence which voices are amplified or trusted in sustainability dialogues. Making space for a broader range of rhetorical styles – especially those grounded in care, equity, and long-term responsibility – could enable more inclusive and credible sustainability leadership.

Finally, by demonstrating that imagined futures are not neutrally constructed but deeply gendered in their articulation, the thesis underscores the need to critically examine who gets to narrate the future and how they do so. This insight adds a new dimension to sustainability studies, where discourse itself becomes a site of power, inclusion, and ethical reflection. As organizations continue to navigate urgent sustainability challenges, understanding how leadership is performed and by whom it is performed becomes essential to building more inclusive, accountable, and future-facing narratives of change.

6.2 Methodological Reflections and Limitations

Like any interpretive project, this study is shaped by its methodological and epistemological contours. First, the dataset is bounded by platform (LinkedIn), timeframe (January–December 2024), and scope (40 CEOs from multinational firms), limiting the generalizability of its findings. The one-year snapshot provides a rich but static view, unable to capture the temporal dynamics or crisis-responsive shifts in discourse. Second, posts originally authored in Spanish, Portuguese, or French were translated into English using GPT-4, which, despite careful review, introduces the risk of cultural or tonal distortion. Third, gender was inferred from publicly available pronouns and biographies, reinforcing a binary classification that fails to accommodate nonbinary or fluid identities. This binary framework was analytically useful but theoretically limited, and future research must push beyond it to reflect the complexity of gender as it is lived and expressed. Lastly, the use of LinkedIn as the sole platform of analysis necessarily frames visibility, tone, and engagement in specific ways. The findings may not translate directly to other digital arenas where leadership is performed differently.

The hybrid strategy allowed for both breadth and interpretive depth, but also meant that some contextual nuances, both linguistic and cultural, may have been lost in translation. Thematic coding reduced complexity, while tone and narrative interpretation required subjective judgment.

6.3 Broader Impact and Recommendations

As CEOs increasingly use platforms such as LinkedIn to express strategy, purpose, and moral commitment, the symbolic labor of visibility becomes central to how leadership is enacted and received. However, as already stated, this visibility is not neutral; it is filtered through gendered norms, platform logic, and cultural scripts that shape what styles of communication are perceived as credible or compelling. Recognizing these dynamics calls for deliberate action across levels – by leaders, organizations, platform designers, and researchers – to foster more inclusive and authentic sustainability discourses.

Below, some suggestions are put forward for each group of stakeholders.

Some actions that can be adopted by organizational leaders and CEOs are:

- Embracing diverse rhetorical styles: to bridge symbolic asymmetries, leaders should be encouraged to articulate sustainability visions through varied styles, balancing visionary and emotional language with technical and strategic narratives, in order to appeal to diverse stakeholder groups and normalize multiple expressions of credibility.

- Promoting inclusive communication training: organizations can support leaders by offering training that raises awareness of gendered communication norms and provides tools for crafting messages that challenge stereotypes and expand narrative possibilities.

- Leading by example: women leaders, in particular, may be uniquely positioned to demonstrate how alternative discursive approaches – grounded in care, ethics, or accountability – may embody strong, authentic leadership. Modeling this diversity helps reshape dominant norms around voice and authority.

For organizations and policy makers, suggestions are:

- Fostering inclusive platforms: social media platforms and corporate communication systems should be designed to support different expressions of

> leadership. Features that prioritize nuance, long-form reflection, or care-oriented discourse can help mitigate visibility biases and enable broader participation in shaping sustainability narratives.
> - Encouraging intersectional approaches: efforts to diversify leadership must go beyond gender; initiatives should integrate intersectional analyses, considering race, class, geography, and industry, to understand the complex, layered dynamics that define who is seen, heard, and legitimized in the sustainability space.

Lastly, here are some gaps that can be addressed by researchers and future studies:

- Expanding intersectional and cross-cultural research: this thesis foregrounds gender, but future work could examine how intersecting identities affect digital leadership discourse across different cultural, national, and sectoral contexts.

- Conducting longitudinal and crisis-responsive analyses: analyzing how communication patterns shift over time, particularly during crises or moments of institutional change, can reveal how narrative authority is negotiated, lost, or reinforced in real time.

- Auditing sustainability language as a symbolic power: researchers can also develop new tools to evaluate ESG communication taking into account not only its content but also its ethical, emotional, and imaginative resonance, helping organizations reflect on how they frame responsibility, inclusivity, and futures.

Addressing gendered patterns in digital leadership communication is a strategic and ethical imperative. By adopting more inclusive rhetorical practices and challenging platformed norms of credibility, leaders and organizations can strengthen stakeholder engagement, broaden the legitimacy of sustainability narratives, and help co-create more sustainable and just futures.

6.4 Future Research

The findings presented here open fertile ground for future inquiry. First, a longitudinal design would allow for the study of discursive change over time, particularly in moments of organizational transformation, environmental crisis, or social reckoning. Second, future

studies might compare platformed leadership discourse across LinkedIn, X, Instagram, or Threads, analyzing how affordances shape tone, authenticity, and perceived legitimacy. Third, a deeper engagement with intersectionality is needed. While this study foregrounds gender, the symbolic construction of authority is also affected by factors such as race, age, nationality, and industry. Future work could explore how intersecting identities contour the possibilities of executive expression in the sustainability arena. Additionally, qualitative interviews with communication strategists or the CEOs themselves could reveal how conscious these discursive choices are, whether leaders curate their posts strategically or operate through intuitive performance influenced by organizational and platform cultures. Finally, researchers may build upon the framework adopted in this study to develop tools for auditing ESG discourse itself, not just for its content but also for its ethical, emotional, and imaginative implications.

In tracing how men and women CEOs speak of sustainability and what futures they are authorized to narrate, this thesis underscores that leadership is never merely about what is done, but also about what is said, how it is framed, and who is allowed to speak with moral and strategic authority. The digital stage of executive visibility offers new modes of expression, but it does not dissolve old asymmetries. Understanding the symbolic labor of sustainability communication is thus not only an academic task; it is a critical lens for examining the futures being built before they arrive.

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Appendix 1: Final Sample of Selected CEOs

	Gender	*Industry*	*Country*
CEO 1	Woman	Banking and Financial Services	United States
CEO 2	Woman	Insurance	United Kingdom
CEO 3	Man	Oil and Gas Operations	Greece
CEO 4	Man	Utilities	United States
CEO 5	Woman	Specialty	United States
CEO 6	Woman	Utilities	France
CEO 7	Man	Utilities	United States
CEO 8	Man	Transportation	United States
CEO 9	Woman	Food/Drink and Tobacco	United Kingdom
CEO 10	Man	Pharmacies	United States
CEO 11	Woman	Utilities	France
CEO 12	Woman	Chemicals	Denmark
CEO 13	Woman	Banking	Spain
CEO 14	Man	Utilities	Brazil
CEO 15	Man	Telecommunications Services - Cable Supplier	United States
CEO 16	Woman	Home Improvement	United States
CEO 17	Man	Banking and Financial Services	United States
CEO 18	Woman	Banking and Financial Services	United States
CEO 19	Woman	Insurance	South Africa
CEO 20	Man	Banking and Financial Services	United States
CEO 21	Woman	Engineering - Manufacturing	United States
CEO 22	Man	Utilities	United States
CEO 23	Man	Food/Drink and Tobacco	Mexico
CEO 24	Woman	Aerospace and Defense	United States
CEO 25	Man	Household and Personal Products	United Kingdom
CEO 26	Woman	Home and Furnishings	United States
CEO 27	Woman	Retail and Wholesale	United States

CEO 28	Woman	Semiconductors/Electronics/Electrical Engineering	United States
CEO 29	Man	Utilities	United States
CEO 30	Woman	Construction/Chemicals/Raw Materials	Brazil
CEO 31	Woman	Telecommunications Services - Cable Supplier	United Kingdom
CEO 32	Woman	IT Software and Services	United States
CEO 33	Man	Retail and Wholesale	United States
CEO 34	Man	Construction	Switzerland
CEO 35	Man	Business Services and Supplies	United Kingdom
CEO 36	Man	Banking	Nigeria
CEO 37	Man	Construction/Chemicals/Raw Materials	France
CEO 38	Man	Utilities	United States
CEO 39	Woman	Banking and Financial Services	United States
CEO 40	Man	IT Software and Services	United States

Appendix 2: Keyword Coding Schema

Dimension	Category	Keywords/Indicators
ESG Pillars	Environmental	carbon, emissions, CO_2, climate, renewable, sustainability, green, solar, wind, biodiversity, fossil, trees, pollution, energy, solutions, green growth, sustainable growth, transition, clean, water, biosolutions
	Social	equity, inclusion, diversity, community, communities, well-being, employees, DEI, social impact, people, health
	Governance	compliance, ethics, transparency, governance, audit, reporting, oversight, employees
Sustainability Priorities	Climate Action	carbon, net-zero, emissions, footprint, mitigation
	Social Equity	diversity, inclusion, equity, access, representation, fairness
	Innovation/Technology	AI, innovation, digital, technology, automation
	Circular Economy	recycle, reuse, waste, life cycle, circular, materials
	Energy Transition	solar, wind, renewables, fossil-free, clean tech
	Governance & Ethics	transparency, compliance, ethics, accountability, audit

Sustainability Language	ESG-Specific Terms	ESG, carbon emissions, diversity, GRI, SASB, SDGs, governance
	Strategic Buzzwords	net zero, inclusive growth, resilient, climate leadership
	Action-Oriented Language	deliver, implement, drive, accelerate, invest, launch, commitment, support
Narrative Tone	Personal/Emotional	proud, grateful, inspired, excited, our story, team spirit
	Strategic/Technical	metrics, performance, timeline, initiative, KPI
	Inspirational	vision, transformation, impact, bold change
	Neutral/Formal	announcement, update, report, institutional statement
Leadership Style	Collaborative	together, we, collaboration, co-create, partnership
	Innovation Drive	future-ready, AI, breakthrough, digital transformation
	Performance Focus	results, KPIs, outcomes, exceeded, targets
	Community Engagement	communities, stakeholders, society, employees
	Inclusion Focus	diversity, inclusion, belong, equity, parity
	Directive	lead, drive, CEO priorities, I decided, mandate, institutional positioning

Future Framing	Future-Oriented Language	2030, long-term, vision, next generation, commitment, future, vision, change
	Normative Framing	justice, responsibility, better world, values, ethics
	Strategic Foresight	roadmap, scenario, anticipate, planning, projection