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**Article:**

Ashiq, R. [orcid.org/0000-0002-1262-9848](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1262-9848) and Carnie, B. (Accepted: 2025) Maintaining Brand Authenticity Through Rebranding: A Case Study of Ponda.bio. Fashion Practice. ISSN 1756-9370 (In Press)

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## **Fashion Practice**

### **Maintaining Brand Authenticity Through Rebranding: A Case Study of Ponda.bio**

<b>Submission ID</b>	242899231
<b>Article Type</b>	Design Case Study
<b>Keywords</b>	branding; sustainability; social media; authenticity, fashion
<b>Authors</b>	Rubab Ashiq, Bruce Carnie

For any queries please contact:

RFFP-peerreview@journals.tandf.co.uk

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## Comments from the Editors

At the moment you place your images in Appendix 2. The editors and reviewer 2 suggest that it will be better to place them within text where most appropriate, as for our readership seeing the image alongside the text makes for greater ease of understanding.

There needs to be more context in the case study for those new to the brand, old or new name (as our readership may well be) For example the text should clarify from the start that this is a manufacturer of textiles, and also explain what is Biopuff.

Reviewer: 1 Comment

An interesting insight into a highly relevant contemporary area of research, both within the fashion industry and with relevance to wider fields.

Reviewer: 2 Comment

The authors might consider placing the images within text rather than as appendix.

## Authors response:

Thank you for taking the time to review our work and provide valuable feedback.

As per your suggestion, we have placed the images within the text where they are most relevant and removed them from the appendix.

Additionally, we have introduced Ponda.bio and Bio Puff in the introduction section and added a paragraph in the methodology section to reinforce the brand. We edited an existing paragraph to make the company's mission more accessible to readers without using technical language. The changes are highlighted in bold red text for easy identification.

We hope that the paper is now ready to be published in your esteemed journal. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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5 **Maintaining Brand Authenticity Through Rebranding: A Case Study of**  
6 **Ponda.bio**  
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11 Dr Rubab Ashiq, Dr Bruce Carnie  
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13 *School of Design, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom*  
14

15 [R.ashiq@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:R.ashiq@leeds.ac.uk)  
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18 Word count: 3952  
19  
20

21 **Disclosure statement:** There are no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests to  
22 report.  
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## Maintaining Brand Authenticity Through Rebranding: A Case Study of Ponda.bio

Stakeholders are increasingly using social media to demand that fashion companies align their business practices with sustainable endeavours. This channel facilitates dialogue, allowing stakeholders to express ideas, needs, and demands for fashion brands to support social causes and practice sustainability. However, fashion brands face the challenge of maintaining authenticity and their brand DNA when responding to stakeholder demands and implementing sustainability actions that are perceived as authentic. This case study investigates the Ponda.bio brand, formerly known as SaltyCo, a member of the Future Fashion Factory ecosystem and a Responsive R&D project recipient, which aligned with their 'Sustainability and Circular Economies' core research theme. This paper assesses the effectiveness of their rebranding strategy and the authenticity of their brand transformation. By analysing brand communications on social media and an interview with a Ponda.bio representative, the study aims to offer guidance for fashion brands to authentically align with sustainability goals while preserving their brand identity and establishing genuine connections with stakeholders.

Keywords: branding; sustainability; social media; authenticity, fashion

## 1. Introduction

In today's complex and often inauthentic world, consumers and other stakeholders, such as partner organisations, increasingly seek brand authenticity to determine their engagement and loyalty to brands (Guèvremont, 2018). Authenticity reflects our trust in a brand- how sincere, honest, and genuine we perceive it to be. This trust being gained through our experiences and interactions with the brand (Södergren, 2021). Brand authenticity is more than just perception, it is "the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful and true toward itself and its consumers, and to support consumers being true to themselves" (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 202). From a business perspective, maintaining authenticity is critical for a brand to remain viable and relevant to both consumers and business partners (Morhart et al., 2015). For fashion brands to maintain their brand DNA, it is imperative for the brands' core values to be maintained as an integral aspect of authenticity (Carnie et al. 2023). While much research has explored the authenticity of brands, relatively little has been done to understand how authenticity can be maintained during rebranding. Rebranding, especially when it involves a name change, poses significant challenges. Confusion can arise for stakeholders, and consumers may lose their connection to and confidence in the authenticity they have come to expect from the brand. This study addresses this gap by examining how Ponda.bio Inc. successfully managed to maintain its authenticity while rebranding from SaltyCo.

**Ponda.bio is a UK-based biomaterials company that specialises in creating innovative textiles from plant-based materials. Their flagship product, BioPuff, is an insulating fibre made from *Typha latifolia* (also known as bulrushes, cattail, or corndog). This plant grows in wetlands, and when processed into BioPuff, it becomes a lightweight, warm, and water-resistant insulation. BioPuff offers an eco-friendly alternative to traditional materials like animal fur, such as goose down, and synthetic fibres like polyester.**

Through rigorous analysis, this research demonstrates that maintaining a brand's DNA and connection with stakeholders is achievable even during significant transitions. This study addresses the gap in understanding how authenticity is maintained during rebranding, offering insights into preserving core values while navigating brand transformation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Defining Brand Authenticity***

Brand authenticity has become a critical and widely discussed topic among academics and businesses, identified as a key factor in fostering brand loyalty and ensuring fiscal sustainability (Kim et al. 2021). Authenticity is often defined as truthfulness (Kennick, 1985), with sincerity, originality, naturalness, and honesty as key components (Fine, 2003; Boyle, 2003). Consumers assess the authenticity of the brands they engage with through various cues (Kayzar, 2004, Leigh, 2006). Studies on brand authenticity have shown that, from a consumer perspective, the sincerity and honesty of how a brand operates are crucial (Nunes et al. 2021). Additionally, how a brand communicates its honesty and sincerity to consumers has been studied, particularly through brand websites and social media platforms (Fritz, Schoenmueller, and Bruhn, 2017; Pringle et al. 2019; Carnie et al. 2023). In the context of this paper, brand authenticity can be understood as the perceived consistency of a brand's behaviour, which reflects its core values and norms while maintaining its essence without undermining its substantive nature (Fritz, Schoenmueller, and Bruhn, 2017). This definition highlights the importance of consistency in aligning a brand's actions with its values, which is fundamental to how consumers perceive authenticity.

Building on this understanding, brands must cultivate a vision and culture that is deeply rooted in authenticity. To convey their values effectively, they should integrate communication strategies that align with their core principles into their operations (Ghani et al. 2020). Ensuring that their values, actions, behaviours, and communications are aligned is essential for reinforcing brand authenticity.

## ***2.2 Brand Authenticity and Brand Trust***

Customers are increasingly demanding more sustainable and responsible brand practices, including greater sustainability and transparency in supply chains (Brindley and Oxborrow, 2014). Employees are also advocating for more conscientious practices within the businesses they work for (Girschik, 2020). In response to this shift, many business-to-business (B2B) start-ups have embedded sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) firmly into their brand DNA (Carnie et al. 2023). CSR aims to align with the broader societal shift toward sustainability and considers the interests of a business's stakeholders, including consumers, producers, employees, and shareholders (Okpara and Samuel, 2013). As brands adapt to these changes, it has been shown that consumers perceive greater value when a brand is seen as authentic (Napoli, Sonia and Michael, 2016). The stories brands tell and how they communicate their values are key to building trust and confidence with their customers (Portal, Abratt and Bendixen, 2019; Huang and Guo, 2021). A compelling brand narrative can capture attention, foster identification, and persuade consumers to trust the brand. Social media platforms and apps, which are well-suited for storytelling, provide an effective way for brands to share their narratives with consumers (Soetaert and Rutten, 2017).



### ***2.3 Communication of authentic brand content via social media***

Social media continues to have a significant impact as a platform where brands communicate with their consumers and other stakeholders (Yang, et al. 2021). These channels facilitate dialogue, enabling stakeholders to express their ideas, needs, and demands for fashion brands to support social causes and practice sustainability (Kong, Alexander and Funju, 2021). However, fashion brands face the challenge of maintaining authenticity and staying true to their brand DNA when responding to stakeholder demands and implementing sustainability actions that are perceived as genuine. Dialogue between brands and their stakeholders creates a virtual space where brands can be questioned and scrutinised by the public (Bulmer, et al. 2024). A key aspect of this scrutiny is how authentic a brand is perceived to be, especially when a brand chooses to rebrand itself.

Social media platforms not only offer a space for brands and followers to connect but also provide a digital environment to develop a relationship built on trust and exchange (Modi, Dipali, and Li Zhao, 2021; Kumar and Singh, 2022; Sharin and Sharma, 2023).

Building trust among stakeholders through an honest narrative on social media can manifest in various ways. Words, images, and videos all contribute to telling a compelling and authentic brand story. Like all brand communication, the words, images, and videos used to tell these stories must be consistent. Consistency in narratives helps foster trust among followers, and when the narrative is authentic, it becomes easier to maintain that consistency, as it is rooted in the core values and mission — the brand DNA — of the brand (Sharin and Sharma, 2023; Bulmer, et al. 2024).

### ***2.4 Perceived brand authenticity***

Most content creators on social media platforms are laypeople, and many brands have started adopting these users' preferred communication methods to generate content that resonates more

authentically with everyday users (Schnackenberg and Tomlinson, 2016). Transparency plays a key role in establishing and maintaining trust between a brand and its stakeholders (Jestratijevic, Nancy, and James, 2020; Jestratijevic, Uanhoro, and Creighton, 2022). While communication transparency on social media can take many forms, having brand directors serve as the primary conveyors of messages and narratives is particularly compelling. When these stories are supported by elements like images and videos, the brand is more likely to be perceived as honest and authentic (Fouladi, Ekhlassi and Sakhdari, 2021). Public perceptions of social media content are generally more positive when the messages and narratives are persuasive, which in turn increases the likelihood of content being shared across followers' networks. Study by Yang et al. (2021) demonstrate that when narratives are honest, consistent, and aligned with the brand's DNA, they lead to higher perceived genuineness, trust, and loyalty.

### 3. Methodology

Case study was the method used for this research. Yin (2018, p.15) defines a case study as an “empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context”. Simply put, a case study involves a researcher conducting a thorough investigation of a real-world case within its natural setting. For the selection of the case study, a purposive sampling strategy was employed. This is a non-probability sampling method in which the researcher selects cases or participants based on specific criteria (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The selected case for this study was the Ponda.bio brand, formerly known as SaltyCo, a member of the Future Fashion Factory (FFF) ecosystem and a recipient of a Responsive R&D project grant. The selection criteria focused on identifying a company that aligns with FFF's core research theme of “Sustainability and Circular Economies,” allowing

for the exploration of its rebranding strategy and its alignment with the brand's DNA and sustainability goals.

**Ponda.bio is a biomaterials company focused on sustainable textile innovation. It specializes in developing regenerative fibres, such as BioPuff, that contribute to ecosystem restoration. By integrating regenerative practices into its products, Ponda.bio works with fashion brands to enhance biodiversity, build climate resilience, and support long-term agricultural sustainability.**

This study aimed to evaluate whether Ponda.bio successfully maintained its brand authenticity during its rebranding from SaltyCo. To achieve this, two methods were employed: online observation and a semi-structured interview. Online observations focused on the brand's social media pages. The analysis examined the brand's copywriting materials text and images, both before and after the rebranding effort. Key aspects, such as the tone of voice, communication of mission and values, sustainability messaging, and alignment between sustainability initiatives and the branding mix, were critically analysed. A semi-structured interview was also conducted with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Julian Ellis-Brown, to gain deeper insights into the motivations, strategies, and outcomes of the rebranding process. The discussion explored the rationale behind the rebranding, steps taken to preserve brand authenticity, and the role of sustainability and stakeholder engagement in this transition.

The specific questions used to guide the online observations and interview discussion are included in the Appendix 1.

## **4. Results**

### ***4.1 Social Media Strategy and Brand Consistency Post-Rebrand***

Ponda.bio has taken a new approach to the graphics used on their social media pages. In contrast to SaltyCo, where the graphics were monotone and simple line drawings were used to convey information with minimal ambiguity, Ponda.bio uses more complex, multi-coloured graphic images (pictograms). These graphics appeal to a younger demographic through colour, while still maintaining clear infographics with minimal ambiguity. Both approaches can be regarded as authentic in their honesty. **The figures below show examples of the graphic style before and after rebranding.**

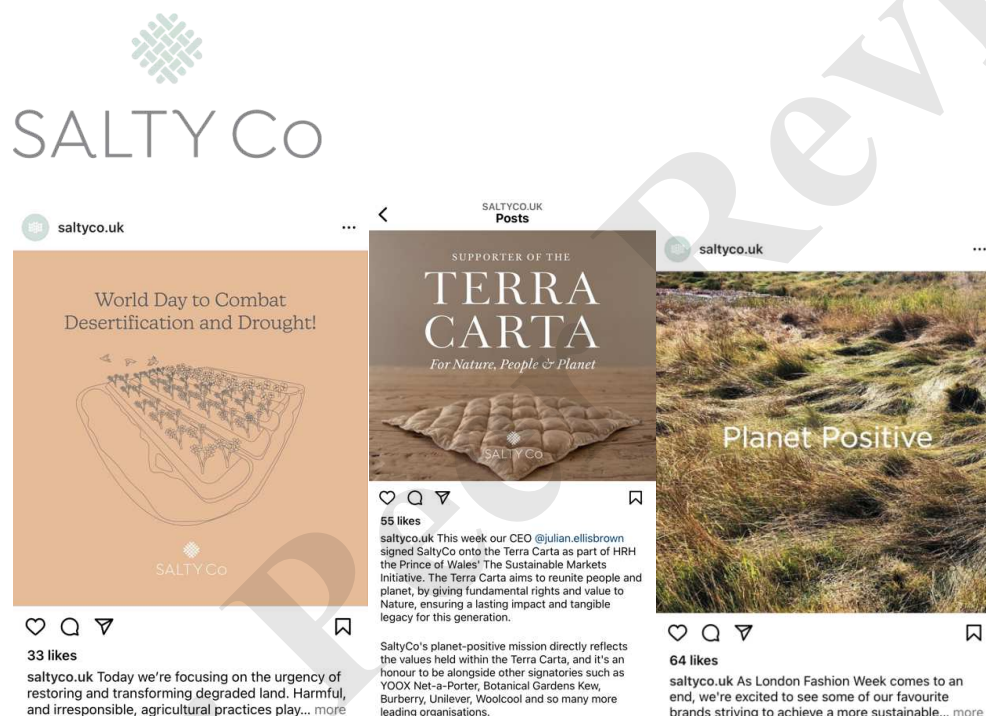




Figure 1 is a collection of images showing the graphic style for SaltyCo (Source: [Instagram](#); [theindexproject](#))

 **ponda**

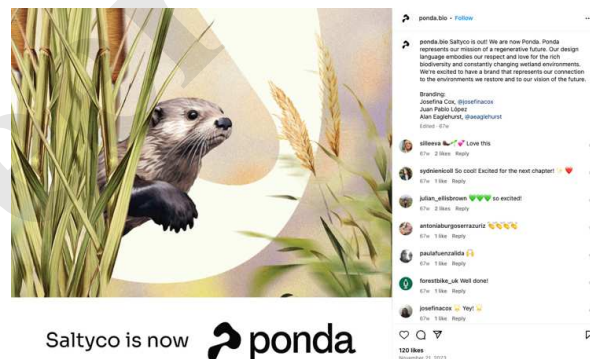




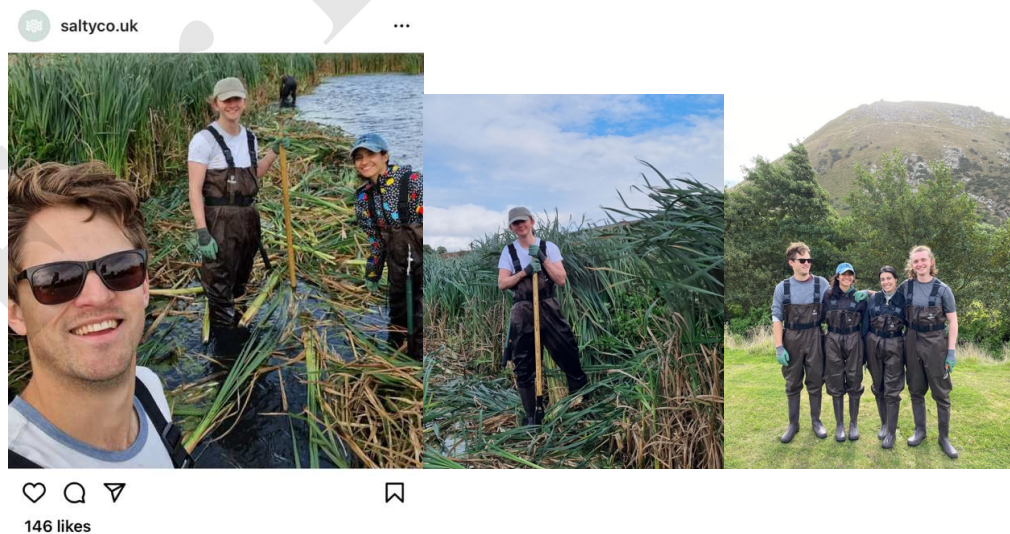


Figure 2 is a collection of images showing the graphic style for Ponda.bio (Source: [Instagram](#); [Official Website](#))

The images and pictograms continue to express and tell a clear narrative of the brand's innovations in regenerative agriculture, maintaining an authentic visual voice in their brand communications. As part of their rebranding, Ponda.bio also released a video summarising the brand's values, mission, and vision. This video further reinforces their commitment to authenticity and can be viewed here: [Ponda.bio Brand Values Video](#).

Furthermore, in keeping with their commitment to authenticity, Ponda.bio continues to feature the same core management team on their social media, just as SaltyCo did before the rebrand.

This can be seen in the figures below:



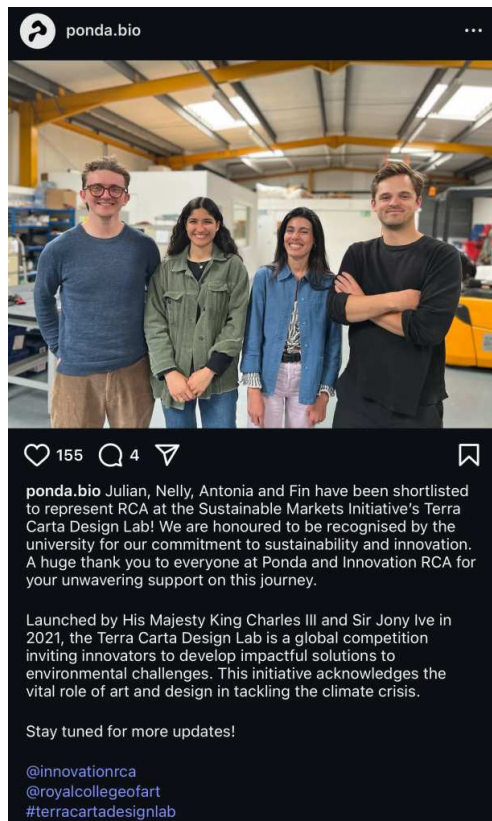


Figure 3 is a collection of images showing the four founding members of the brand, both before and after rebranding (Source: [Instagram](#))

This consistency helps maintain the brand's DNA, values, and authentic voice in communications with stakeholders. The core team's diverse backgrounds, which once helped shape SaltyCo's multidisciplinary approach, remain central to Ponda.bio's identity.

Applying the guiding questions from Appendix 1, the analysis before and after the rebranding shows that the social media content (both images and text) reflects a trustworthy tone—friendly, yet well-informed and honest. The brand's mission, vision, and values are clearly communicated in various forms to both viewers and B2B customers. The fundamentals of the brand, or its DNA, remain consistent before and after the rebranding, alongside its core beliefs and continued commitment to sustainability. The focus on regeneration is evident, with the brand demonstrating this through images, videos, text, and narratives aimed at addressing

social and environmental issues. This is also reflected in the brand's CSR initiatives and the overall branding mix, where consistency in messaging reinforces its authenticity.

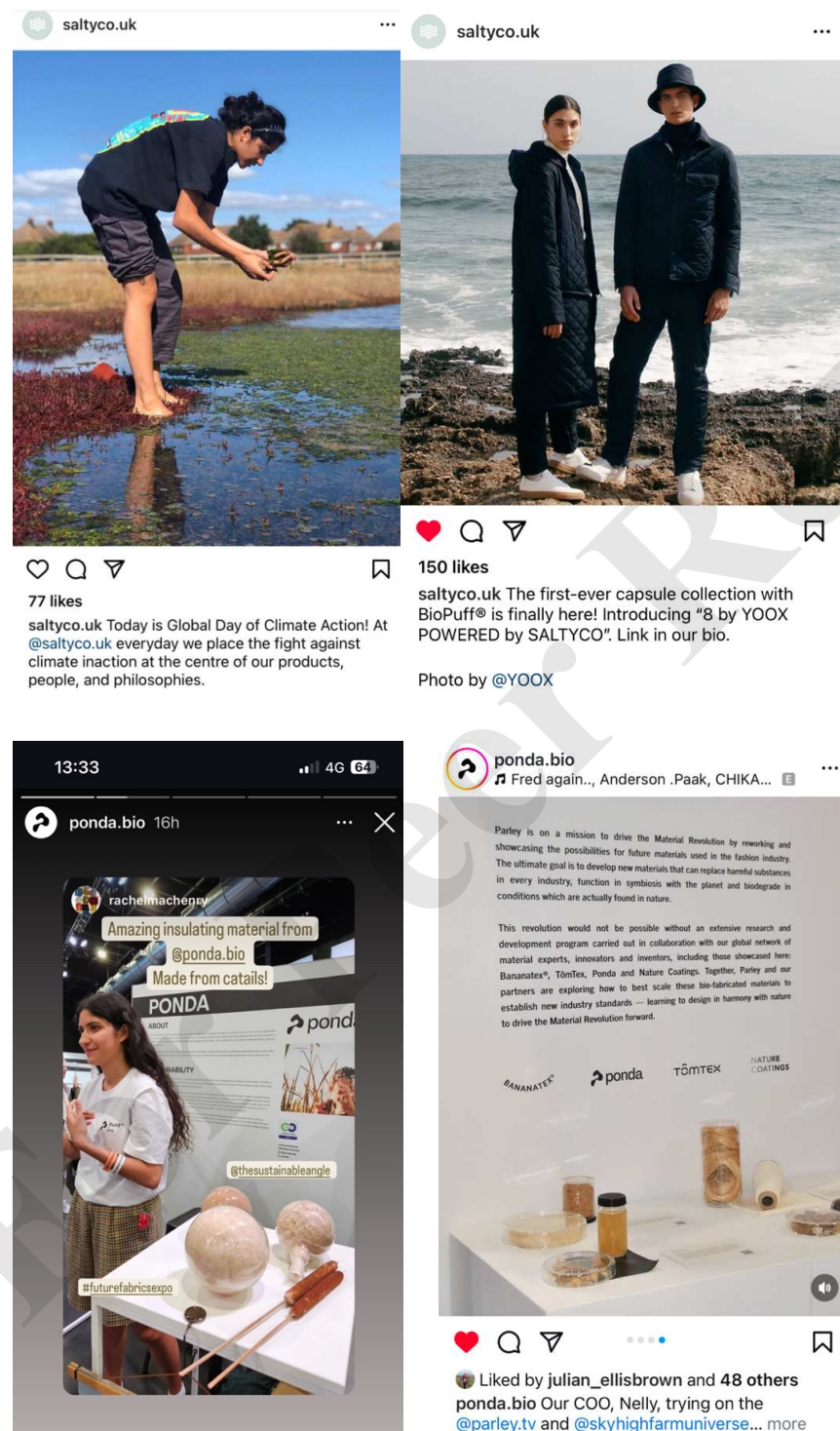


Figure 4 shows a collection of images reflecting the vision and mission before and after rebranding, highlighting their centrality to environmental sustainability (Source: [Instagram](#))



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4 The analysis indicates that the rebranding has not altered any of the brand's core attributes- its  
5 values, mission, or vision. These elements have remained intact, ensuring that the brand  
6 continues to be perceived as trustworthy, honest, and authentic in its communication with  
7 stakeholders. This consistency confirms that the rebranding process successfully preserved the  
8 brand's essence, reinforcing its ongoing commitment to its original goals and values.  
9  
10 **4.2 Key Findings from Interview and Integration with Social Media Insights**  
11

12  
13 Building on the social media analysis presented earlier, this section presents key findings from  
14 the interview. These combined insights from both the interview and the social media data offer  
15 a holistic view of the brand's rebranding process, its consistency in messaging, and its ongoing  
16 commitment to authenticity. Guiding questions and the excerpts from the interview that support  
17 each of the following findings are provided in Appendix 2.  
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#### 23 24 25 *4.2.1 Mission and vision transition* 26

27  
28 The key driver behind their rebranding was the shift in the company's mission and vision,  
29 transitioning from salt-tolerant plants to focusing on wetland and peatland ecosystems. This  
30 realignment enabled them to achieve their goal of creating sustainable textiles better while  
31 addressing crucial environmental challenges.  
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36  
37 The CEO, Julian Ellis-Brown stated: "The original focus was seeing whether we could offset  
38 the demand for fresh water for thirsty plants like cotton or using Salter and alternatives irrigated  
39 with sea water, which makes up 97% of global water supply. We decided to pivot, and that  
40 pivot took us from not from looking at fault tolerant crops to looking at plants which thrive in  
41 wetland environments in general".  
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#### 47 48 49 *4.2.2 Potential gains from rebranding* 50

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52 Rebranding, though potentially risky due to challenges like maintaining search engine  
53 optimisation (SEO) and market recognition, can be a strategic move to realign a company's  
54 identity with its evolving mission and values while fostering a stronger sense of ownership and  
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4 unity among employees. For Ponda.bio, this process allowed the brand to reflect its renewed  
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6 focus on regenerative ecosystems and deepen its connection with stakeholders.  
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#### 9 10 4.2.3 *Rebranding driven by mission shift to regenerative design* 11

12 Ponda.bio's rebrand reflects a shift from reducing freshwater use to regenerating ecosystems.  
13  
14 The re-branding emphasises regenerative design and the natural beauty of wetland  
15  
16 environments to better engage with customers and stakeholders. Explaining this, Julian Ellis-  
17  
18 Brown mentioned:  
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21 "To begin with, creating SaltyCo was all about reducing freshwater consumption and making  
22  
23 more freshwater available in various parts of the world. Whereas now, our mission is very  
24  
25 much about how we can regenerate some of these incredibly important ecosystems and rebuild  
26  
27 a business model. The fundamentals of what we do haven't changed in the sense that what  
28  
29 we're trying to build as a company is a supply chain and a business model that effects more  
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31 change for good than change for bad as the world grows and scales. This needs to be seen  
32  
33 across all sorts of different supply chains. And for us, that's all around this concept of  
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35 regenerative design and how we can integrate principles of what it means to be regenerative.  
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37 We wanted that to be reflected in the brand itself".  
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#### 41 4.2.4 *Brand name and material focus* 42 43

44 Ponda.bio's focus on materials rather than apparel minimised concerns about brand conflicts.  
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46 Despite challenges with the name "Ponda.bio," it was chosen to reflect their vision and is  
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48 central to their community and environmental initiatives. Reiterating this, Julian Ellis-Brown  
49  
50 said:  
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53

54 "What we've done to stay true to our brand throughout the process is by sustaining the name  
55  
56 of our ingredient material, Biopuff, which is a key part. All of our media and content generation  
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has centered around producing content from the wetlands themselves. Each time we produce something, even if it's related to wetlands, we integrate our wetlands-themed interests as well. Even if we've entered an accelerator or won an award, we place the Ponda Wetlands-branded elements on it".

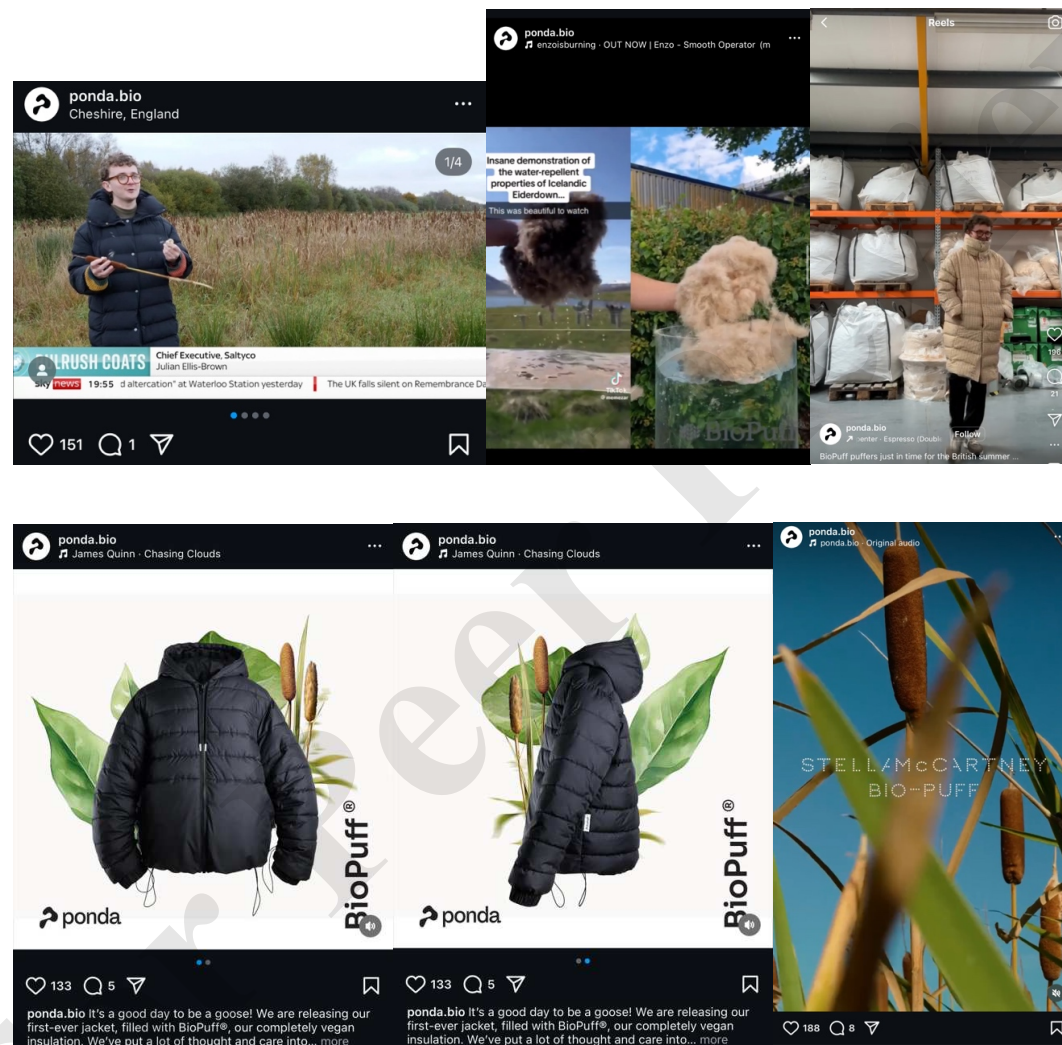


Figure 5 shows social media content featuring BioPuff and wetlands (Source: [Instagram](#))

#### 4.2.5 Ensuring authenticity in Sustainability while staying true to brand DNA

For startups like Ponda.bio, maintaining authenticity in sustainability can be particularly challenging due to limited resources and the high costs associated with certifications. Julian Ellis-Brown said:

“It’s very difficult when you’re a startup and are under-resourced. You’re not able to become a B Corp or meet every environmental standard or certification, such as those from Textile Exchange or Cradle to Cradle. Some of these we’ve achieved, but to do all of them and to have a truly robust level of certification is not only a huge amount of work and very arduous, but it is also very expensive”.

Despite these obstacles, Ponda.bio has managed to uphold its commitment to sustainability by taking a hands-on approach. The company invites fashion brands and customers to see their impact firsthand, offering them the opportunity to engage directly with the farmers involved in the production process. This transparency not only strengthens their sustainability efforts but also builds trust with stakeholders. In addition, Ponda.bio’s decision to build a new supply chain from the ground up reinforces its dedication to sustainable practices and ensures that every part of the process aligns with its environmental values. However, given its current size and reach, Ponda.bio must carefully balance the challenge of setting realistic, achievable goals with its broader, more ambitious vision for the future.

#### *4.2.6 Maintaining authenticity through storytelling and environmental focus*

Ponda.bio has successfully maintained its brand authenticity throughout the rebranding process by keeping its key ingredient, Biopuff, central to its identity. This focus ensures continuity and reinforces the brand's commitment to its core values. Additionally, Ponda.bio has consistently integrated wetlands-focused content into its media and storytelling. Whether celebrating achievements such as awards or participating in accelerators, the brand incorporates elements that highlight its environmental focus, ensuring alignment with its mission. To further engage

audiences, Ponda.bio uses compelling storytelling and historical references that bring depth to its narrative. For instance, the brand shares the story of stilt walkers in France; sheep farmers who navigated marshlands on stilts to manage their herds, making the environmental processes it champions more relatable and memorable. Such narratives, alongside visually engaging content, make complex ecological processes accessible while emphasising the brand's unique origins and mission. These efforts collectively enhance Ponda.bio's ability to connect meaningfully with stakeholders and reinforce its commitment to authenticity.

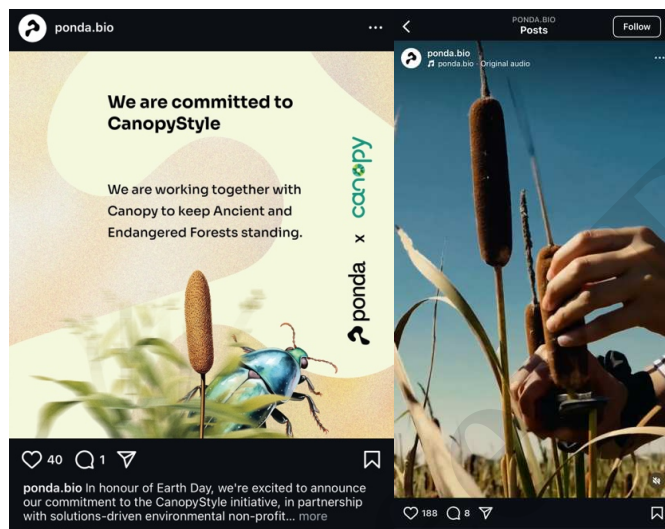


Figure 6 demonstrating the environmental focus of Ponda.bio (Source: [Instagram](#))

#### 4.2.7 Leveraging social media and industry engagement for stakeholder connection

Ponda.bio effectively uses social media and industry engagement to connect with stakeholders and communicate its sustainability initiatives. On social media, the brand focuses on visually compelling content and storytelling, showcasing its team and company culture rather than emphasising product launches. This strategy aligns with modern marketing trends and fosters authentic connections with its audience. As Julian Ellis-Brown, observes:

“But it’s interesting. The most popular things on social media tend to be not necessarily our product launches, but more the things that show us and the team within the company. Bringing

the team to the forefront is evident. Many people are aware that marketing has shifted, with greater interest in following personal stories and product stories. When we started, we tried to reflect that shift with our own marketing”.

Beyond digital platforms, Ponda.bio ensures visibility and credibility through consistent participation in key industry events such as Future Fabrics Expo and Premier Vision. These efforts collectively strengthen stakeholder trust and reinforce the brand’s commitment to its mission.

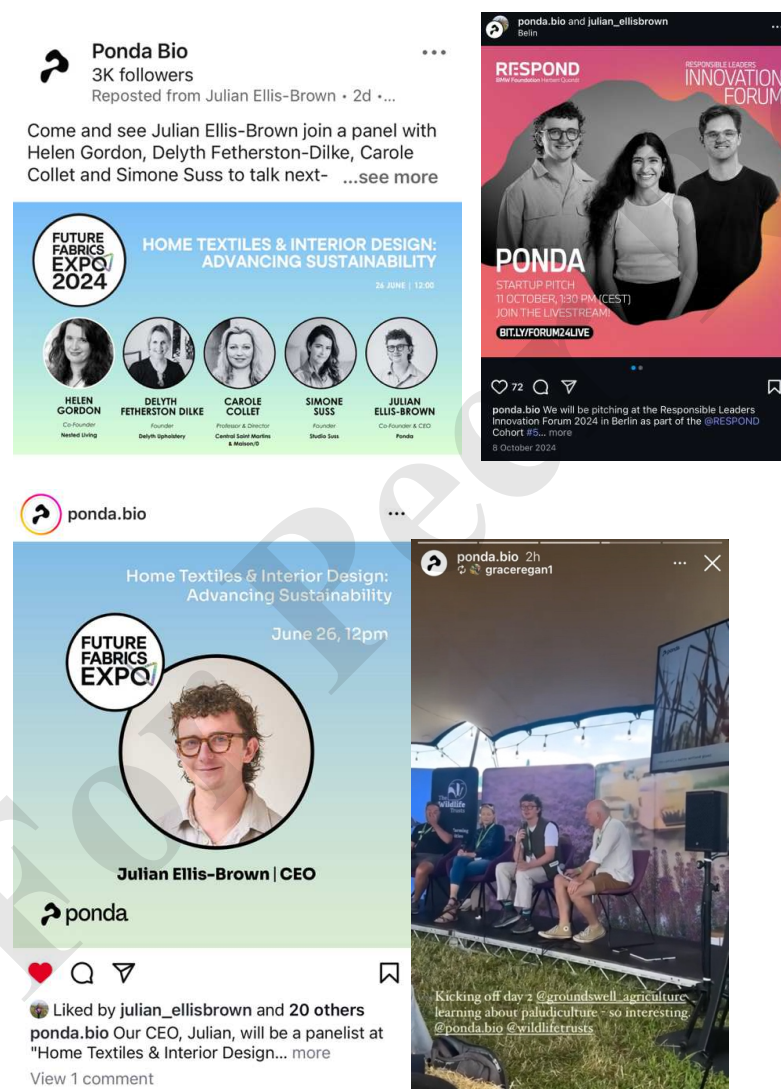


Figure 7 showing how Ponda.bio contributes to the sustainability discourse (Source: [LinkedIn](#); [Instagram](#))

## 5. Discussion

Maintaining authenticity during a rebranding effort is crucial to ensure that existing stakeholders maintain a genuine connection to the brand. In the case of Ponda.bio's rebranding from SaltyCo, this study found that the company successfully navigated the rebranding process by maintaining a consistent core message. Ponda.bio's commitment to preserving the integrity of its core values, while evolving its identity to reflect a growing focus on sustainability, aligns with the academic definition of brand authenticity, which emphasises consistency in behaviour, values, and communication (Fritz, Schoenmueller, and Bruhn, 2017). For example, the brand's continued focus on its core ingredient, Biopuff, and its central role in the company's identity and communications demonstrates Ponda.bio's dedication to staying true to its brand's essence.

Authenticity stems from consistency, and the brand has maintained the expression of its vision and mission by using the founding members as the voice of the brand. Involving customers, employees, and other stakeholders in the rebranding process provides valuable perspectives on what the brand means to them. This involvement is reflected in the use of images featuring the founders in many of Ponda.bio's social media posts, just as it was in SaltyCo. This approach ensures the continuity of the brand's voice, helping maintain authenticity throughout the transition from SaltyCo to Ponda.bio.

The company has also communicated openly about the reasons for rebranding through a video link, which emphasises that the rebrand is an evolution rather than a complete overhaul. Ponda.bio ensures that all communication reflects the new brand identity while remaining consistent with the brand's history and values. This consistency is further achieved through brand storytelling, which highlights key milestones, achievements, and the company's journey, creating a narrative that resonates with customers.

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4 The literature supports the power of storytelling as a tool for reinforcing brand authenticity. As  
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6 Huang and Guo (2021) note, compelling brand narratives are crucial for building trust with  
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8 consumers. Ponda.bio's rebranding efforts include the use of historical stories, such as the stilt  
9  
10 walkers in France, which help convey complex environmental themes in a more relatable way.  
11  
12 For Ponda.bio, storytelling through social media allowed the brand to engage with its audience  
13  
14 on a deeper level, while simultaneously showcasing its commitment to environmental  
15  
16 sustainability.  
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19  
20 Ponda.bio's use of social media further supports the literature on the role of digital platforms  
21  
22 in fostering brand authenticity. Studies show that social media enables brands to engage with  
23  
24 stakeholders in a way that promotes transparency and dialogue (Yang et al., 2021). In  
25  
26 Ponda.bio's case, the brand's social media strategy went beyond product launches, instead  
27  
28 focusing on showcasing the company's team and culture. This approach aligns with the  
29  
30 findings of Fritz, Schoenmueller, and Bruhn (2017) and Nunes et al. (2021), who emphasise  
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32 that consumers perceive greater authenticity in brands that maintain a sincere and transparent  
33  
34 presence. The brand's social media posts, featuring the founders, teams and behind-the-scenes  
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36 moments from environmental initiatives, humanise the company and make it more relatable to  
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38 its audience.  
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42 Furthermore, partnerships and participation in industry events have been essential in enhancing  
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44 Ponda.bio's rebranding efforts, helping the company reach a wider audience and reinforce its  
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46 commitment to sustainability. For example, Ponda.bio's collaboration with the Wildlife Trust  
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48 allowed the company to share its rebranding story with more people and reinforced its image  
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50 as an authentic and responsible brand. Additionally, Ponda.bio's involvement in major industry  
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52 events, where it showcases sustainable materials and its environmental focus, has played a  
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54 crucial role in building trust and supporting the brand's authenticity.  
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The findings from this study underscore the importance of maintaining brand authenticity through consistent messaging, transparent communication, and effective use of storytelling. Ponda.bio has ensured that all its marketing materials on social media platforms reflect the new brand identity while staying true to its values, vision, and mission. By integrating these elements into its rebranding strategy, Ponda.bio has successfully navigated the challenges associated with rebranding, ensuring that its brand remains authentic and trustworthy.

## 6. Conclusion

This study examined how Ponda.bio successfully retained its brand authenticity during its rebranding journey from SaltyCo. The findings reveal that the company effectively navigated the rebranding process by maintaining a consistent core message and preserving the integrity of its foundational values while evolving its identity to emphasise sustainability. Ponda.bio demonstrated that strategic, value-driven rebranding can strengthen a brand's identity rather than dilute it. Through consistent communication, transparent operations, and compelling storytelling, the company successfully connected with its audience and aligned its mission with environmental sustainability- a central theme of the brand since its inception. These findings emphasise that authenticity is not merely about maintaining consistency but also about evolving in a way that reinforces the brand's purpose. For businesses undergoing rebranding, this study highlights the importance of staying true to foundational values while thoughtfully engaging stakeholders throughout the transition. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of rebranding on consumer perceptions, as this study primarily focused on the business perspective.

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## 8. Appendices

### 8.1 Appendix 1

#### 8.1.1 Social Media Observation Questions

The following questions were used to guide the analysis before and after the re-branding:

1. What is the brand's copy suggesting about the tone of voice and personality of the brand?
2. Is the brand effectively communicating its mission, vision, and values?
3. Are the branding fundamentals understudy, explicitly stated or implicitly embedded in the brand's copy? Are there statements of the beliefs (values) and sustainability journey of the company?
4. Does the brand state a particular approach? Is there concrete evidence of initiatives taken by the company to solve social and environmental issues?
5. Are the CSR initiatives and branding mix in alignment?

#### 8.1.2 Interview Questions



The following questions prompted the interview discussion.

1. What prompted SaltyCo to consider re-branding? What were the drivers to make this change of branding?
2. What are your hopes for gaining from the re-branding?
3. Was the decision to re-brand SaltyCo required due to redefining the goals and mission of the business? Or was it due to the brand hopefully moving into new territories where Salty Co was an existing brand name such as Salty Co Australia or Salty and Co clothing and removing any confusion with potential consumers?
4. In the context of increasing stakeholder demands for sustainability, how does Ponda.bio ensure the authenticity of its sustainability efforts while staying true to its brand DNA?
5. Can you discuss some specific actions, Ponda.bio has taken to maintain its brand authenticity throughout the rebranding process?
6. How has Ponda.bio utilised social media and e-commerce platforms to engage stakeholders and communicate its sustainability initiatives effectively?

## 8.2 Appendix 2

Key Finding	Excerpts from the Interview
The key driver behind their rebranding was the shift in the company's mission and vision, transitioning from salt-tolerant plants to focusing on wetland and peatland ecosystems. This realignment enabled them to achieve their goal of creating sustainable textiles better while addressing crucial environmental challenges.	<p>“The original focus was seeing whether we could offset the demand for fresh water for thirsty plants like cotton or using Salter and alternatives irrigated with sea water, which makes up 97% of global water supply”.</p> <p>“We decided to pivot, and that pivot took us from not from looking at fault tolerant crops to looking at plants which thrive in wetland environments in general”.</p> <p>“So, we decided to make that pivot and as with that pivot, umm we after about a year or so of moving from self-tolerant plants to create textiles, to regenerated wetlands and</p>

	keep glands to grow plants, to create textiles from them”.
Rebranding, though potentially risky due to challenges like maintaining SEO and market recognition, can be a strategic move to realign a company's identity with its evolving mission and values while fostering a stronger sense of ownership and unity among employees	<p>"If you search for SaltyCo, we're still the number one result for SEO, and the entire first page is dedicated to us. On the other hand, there is a place in India called Ponda. Therefore, we've got quite a lot of competition to compare against. Additionally, Patagonia is another major competitor, and the top results for Patagonia are mostly related to clothing".</p> <p>“The I think what we're trying to gain is a refresh and identity, a brand that to next move to what we do as a company for one, but also the sort of company we want to be where we want to be. It's not just about a name change, it's about understanding what are the principles which are important to us as our company and what and what are the thoughts of principles that we want our employees to hold as well as we grow. Also, it helps for the employees to know all parts of your company when you go through a</p>

	rebrand. It gives them a more of an ownership of the process of change”.
SaltyCo's rebrand reflects a shift from reducing freshwater use to regenerating ecosystems. The re-branding emphasises regenerative design and the natural beauty of wetland environments to better engage with customers and stakeholders.	<p>“To begin with, creating SaltyCo was all about reducing freshwater consumption and making more freshwater available in various parts of the world. Whereas now, our mission is very much about how we can regenerate some of these incredibly important ecosystems and rebuild a business model. The fundamentals of what we do haven't changed in the sense that what we're trying to build as a company is a supply chain and a business model that effects more change for good than change for bad as the world grows and scales. This needs to be seen across all sorts of different supply chains.”</p> <p>“And for us, that's all around this concept of regenerative design and how we can integrate principles of what it means to be regenerative. We wanted that to be reflected in the brand itself. We're a textiles manufacturer at the end of the day, but we've chosen a brand that is very much led by wetland environments, determined by the</p>

	<p>flora and fauna you find in wetland spaces.</p> <p>We've drawn on the colors you find in these environments and brought that to the forefront. I think that has really helped our customers and other stakeholders who are interested in what we do engage with the brand in a much more visceral way because, you know, otherwise you can feel very disconnected from the origins of your materials".</p>
<p>Ponda Bio's focus on materials rather than apparel minimised concerns about brand conflicts. Despite challenges with the name "Ponda," it was chosen to reflect their vision and is central to their community and environmental initiatives.</p>	<p>"I didn't think we were ever concerned about other brands and areas like that. I think part of the reason we weren't is because we don't ever plan to sell jackets or clothing/apparel. As a textile supplier, our customer-facing brand will be our materials, which at the moment is Biopuff, and that is a really key tenet of what we do".</p> <p>"I like the idea of "pondering" to think on something, as well as being a concatenation between Ponder and agriculture. We're looking to expand into other areas; for instance, we made these paths that restore wetlands, which are a big hit with everyone</p>

	<p>who uses them. We're also aiming to build a larger community of stakeholders around what it means to be part of the Ponda community, not just as owners of Biopuff, and we're looking to call the community the Ponda Biome."</p>
<p>For startups like Ponda, maintaining authenticity in sustainability is challenging due to limited resources and high certification costs.</p> <p>Ponda maintains authenticity by inviting fashion brands and customers to see their impact firsthand and engage directly with farmers. This approach, alongside building a new supply chain from scratch, reinforces their commitment to sustainability. Considering its current size and reach, Ponda Bio must navigate the tightrope between realistic achievements and a broadly embracing vision.</p>	<p>I think it's really hard for a startup to do that because having responsibility for affecting our planet in an environmentally positive way or claiming environmental positivity comes with a real sense of responsibility and demands effective ways to verify and communicate transparently what we are actually doing on the ground and the effects our supply chain can have. It's very difficult when you're a startup and are under-resourced. You're not able to become a B Corp or meet every environmental standard or certification, such as those from Textile Exchange or Cradle to Cradle. Some of these we've achieved, but to do all of them and to have a truly robust level of certification is not only a huge amount of work and very arduous, but it is also very expensive".</p>

	<p>"We invite our customers to come to the locations where we're making an impact. We've had multiple fashion brands come and see the impacts, talk to the farmers, and have the opportunity to actually engage on the ground with what the actual benefits are. I think that really provides a level of authenticity, which we're able to offer because we're building a completely new supply chain from the ground up".</p>
<p>Ponda maintained brand authenticity by keeping Biopuff central and integrating wetlands-focused content. They shared compelling stories and historical context to engage audiences and reinforce their environmental message.</p>	<p>What we've done to stay true to our brand throughout the process is by sustaining the name of our ingredient material, Biopuff, which is a key part".</p> <p>"All of our media and content generation has centered around producing content from the wetlands themselves. Each time we produce something, even if it's related to wetlands, we integrate our wetlands-themed interests as well. Even if we've entered an accelerator or won an award, we place the Ponda Wetlands-branded elements on it".</p> <p>"And then it's also about finding those interesting stories that are unique to the space</p>

	<p>we come from and telling them in a compelling manner. For example, one of my pitch decks and presentations features a cartoonish display of the origins of our wetlands and how they are created, making it easier for people to understand the complex geological process of carbon storage in these environments. We've also shared stories about the stilt walkers in France, who are sheep farmers that worked on marshlands and lived on stilts to cover more ground and manage their herds without getting bogged down in the marshes. These kinds of stories are compelling and interesting, especially for environments that are not often focused on".</p>
<p>Ponda has leveraged social media and e-commerce platforms effectively by creating visually compelling content and partnering with organisations like the Wildlife Trust for broader media exposure.</p> <p>The brand's social media success is driven more by showcasing the team and company culture than by product launches, reflecting a shift towards storytelling in marketing.</p>	<p>"I mean, we, the four founders, come from design backgrounds and were keen to continue creating. We wanted to tell a beautiful story of the company's development and capture the materials and origins of those spaces through photography and video. We had a professional video crew come in and film a 3-minute segment, which we launched as part of the rebrand here in</p>



<p>Involving the entire team in annual harvest days helps align them with the company's mission and maintains engagement with its core values.</p> <p>Regular participation in key industry events, such as Future Fabrics Expo and Premier Vision, is crucial for enhancing brand visibility and building credibility.</p>	<p>Bristol. Although this was expensive, it was a key and lovely part of the rebranding effort. We've also engaged through our partners, such as the Wildlife Trust, which has given us access to various media outlets, including news and BBC. This has opened doors and allowed us to tell our stories to different and wider audiences."</p> <p>"But it's interesting. The most popular things on social media tend to be not necessarily our product launches, but more the things that show us and the team within the company. Bringing the team to the forefront is evident. Many people are aware that marketing has shifted, with greater interest in following personal stories and product stories. When we started, we tried to reflect that shift with our own marketing."</p>
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