ENGAGING AUDIENCES WITH SUSTAINABILITY

BBC

If you deal with content about modern **life**, this is relevant to you.



CLIMATE CONTENT PLEDGE

What's more...

At the UN Climate Change Conference, COP26, the BBC signed the **Climate Content Pledge** – committing us to:

considering climate themes when we are commissioning, developing and producing content, to help more of our audience understand the journey to a sustainable world and inspire them to make greener choices.

This is a **creative opportunity** with many potential approaches...

Sustainability can be woven into content:

Explicitly

From set pieces to segments - help improve understanding of climate change and provide practical tips for how to be more sustainable.

Implicitly

Portray sustainable behaviours and integrate conversations about sustainability through talent, storylines, production etc.

The vast majority of the UK are worried about Climate Change & environmental issues.

census 2021 Data and analysis from Census 2021

Home > People, population and community > Well-being > Three-quarters of adults in Great Britain worry about climate change

Three-quarters of adults in Great Britain worry about climate change

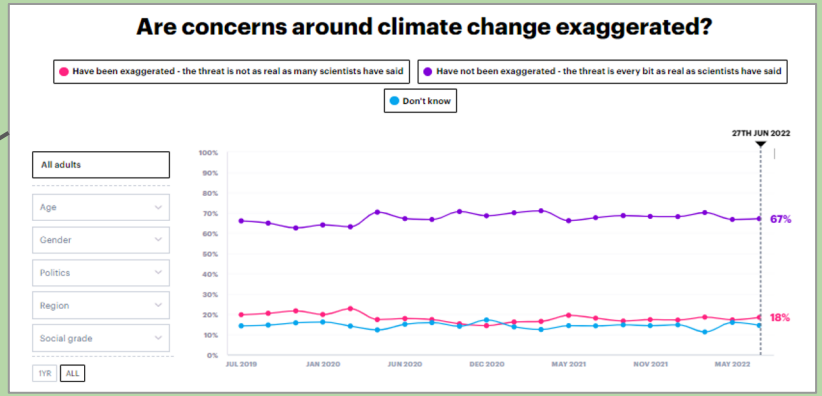
Those who are worried about climate change are also more likely to make lifestyle changes in response.

5 November 2021

Ipsos > News & Events : News > 8 in 10 Britons concerned about climate change – half think net zero target should be brought forward

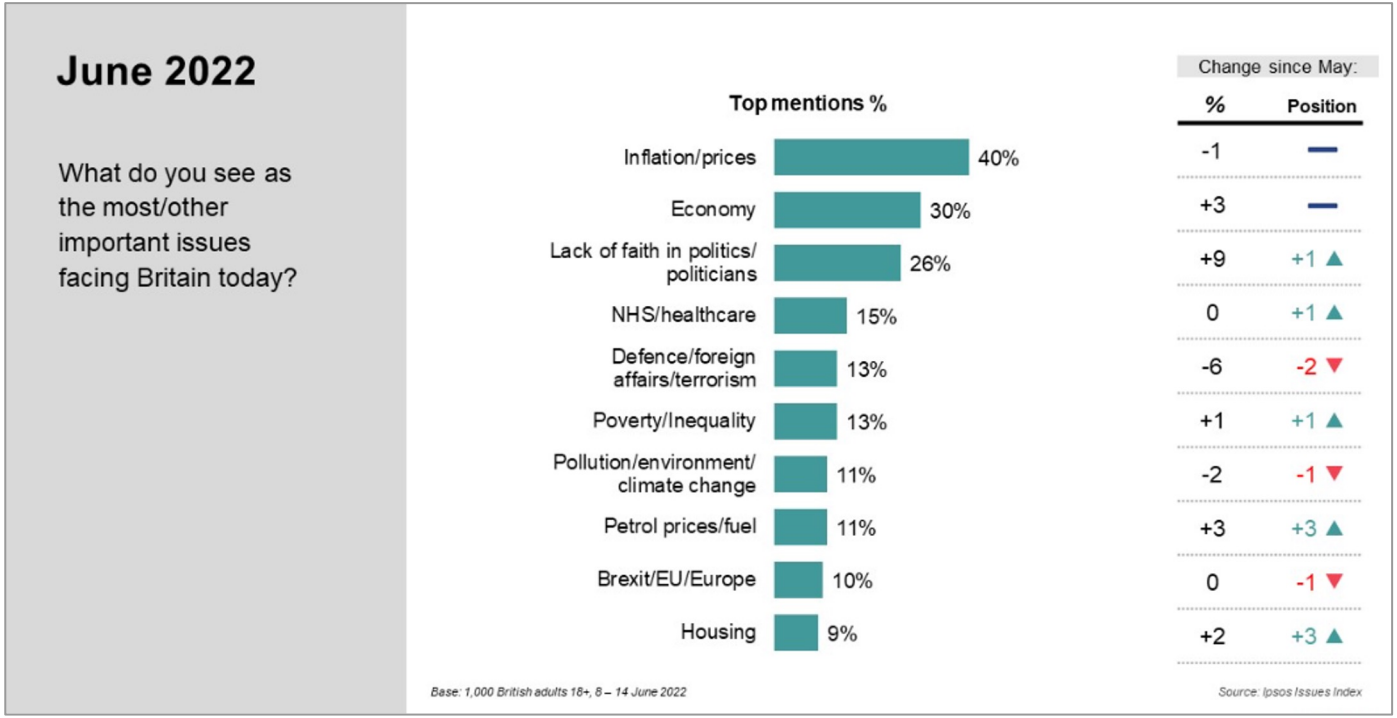
8 in 10 Britons concerned about climate change – half think net zero target should be brought forward

67% of the population think the threat of climate change is as real as scientists have said



Sources: Census (2021), Ipsos (2022), YouGov (2022)

But when asked to rank concerns, many of our audiences are faced with more pressing everyday issues – especially in the midst of a cost of living crisis and amongst lower socio-economic groups.



Source: Ipsos Issues Index, June 2022

So, while climate change affects everyone
activism and sustainability can be perceived as **privileges of the wealthy.**

*"Climate activists are often seen as "**middle class tree-huggers**". This is fed by a mainstream media that positions environmentalism as the privilege of the wealthy who **don't need to worry about bread and butter issues**"*

Dr Catherine Happer
Glasgow University

The irony is that **poorer communities experience the highest impact from climate change and environmental issues** as a result of greater exposure to air pollution, flood risk, poor quality water in rivers, and the smell, noise and pollution that comes from industrial or waste sites.

Source: Sir James Bevan, Speech at the Environment Agency's 'State of the Environment', 2021: Clean Up, Green Up and Level Up: how to build a future city

Hearing authentic climate conversations from ‘people like me’ can help to close this gap .

89% of young people report feeling concerned about the climate crisis but **only a third are regularly talking about it with their friends**.

*“Young people **hearing and seeing relatable voices and faces** gives them the confidence to speak out more and do more. **A diverse range of people speaking out on climate change will result in richer conversations** and offer solutions based on wider experience.”*

Francisca Rockey, Geographer & Campaigner

Source: Supercharging the climate conversation, Global Action Plan, 2021

Explaining the global problem will only go so far. Audiences need to see **solutions** that **feel good,** and reflect their personal **interests, aspirations** and **anxieties**. Hard hitting approaches can even be a turn off for some.

Issue-based storytelling > Action-based storytelling

"Climate storytelling should support [audiences] in discovering how to act.
As a community ***we need to create an array of agency-provoking stories*** *of [people already taking positive action] across different communities...*
What is needed now are not the menus —but ***the recipes, cookbooks, and cooking classes of climate action****."*

Dr Kris De Meyer, Leader of UCL's Climate Change Action Unit

If you are creating content that **explicitly** speaks to the climate change problem, build hope & agency into the story.

Audiences want to see that changes can be made:

1) **PERSONAL CHANGES:** what can I do? What changes in my life can I make - as a citizen and a consumer?

1) **POSITIVE EXAMPLES:** the impact of positive change and stories of what a better future might look like

1) **EXAMPLES OF BIODIVERSITY IN ACTION:** the role nature can play in keeping us and our planet healthy

1) **BIG CHANGES:** how countries and business are making changes & innovation that might help

> Help them learn how by seeing others engaged in action

> Inspire a sense of "*if they can do it, so can I*"

> Acknowledge and encourage conversation about the big 'system shifts' that would make change easier - '*action' can be about, eg, engaging with your local council/community re safety for cyclists, as well as using a bike*

Source: Online GfK Green Planet Survey, February 2022

Sustainability is a mainstream concern.

It needs to be treated in turn as a part of mainstream culture.

There are many ways to include sustainable messaging in our output

E.g.

Set pieces

E.g. factual pieces like *Our Changing Planet*, dramas like *The Trick* or Cli-fi

Segments that promote sustainable behaviour

E.g. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle week on *The Great British Sewing Bee*, sustainable interiors in *Your Home Made Perfect*

Creating a space for authentic conversation

E.g. discussion and debate reflecting different world views in *I May Destroy You* or *EastEnders*

Behaving sustainably as a by-product

E.g. as a by-product of making some extra cash in *Money for Nothing*, or a charity shop challenge on *Ru Paul's Drag Race*

Modelling sustainable behaviour

E.g. reusable water bottles, prizes = travel by train vs flight, plant based dishes

More explicit ⟵ ⟶ **More implicit**

The media has an opportunity to **inspire all audiences** to be more sustainable by making sustainability feel personally relevant and accessible to everyone.

We have the power to rewrite the story
& shift the focus from **problems to solutions**

From an overwhelming problem
> to a common goal that just makes sense

From an issue for middle class tree huggers
> to a conversation that feels **personally relevant**

From feeling like my actions won't make a difference
> to feeling **part of something bigger**

From seeing sacrifices I can't afford to make
> to changes that feel **practically possible**

What we say and how we say it matters

Research has identified **universal principles for engaging audiences** in sustainability

Create a common goal that just **makes sense**

Make sustainability feel **personally relevant**

Help people **feel part of something bigger**

Make change feel **practically possible**

1/ Use **straightforward language**

2/ Talk about a common and **measurable goal**

3/ Show **people I relate to** in worlds I feel part of

4/ Show me **what's in it for me**

5/ Portray **action as everyday**, not inaction

6/ Emphasise **we're all in it together**

7/ Make **change feel doable** (individual & societal)

8/ Make it **feel good**

On Road: Climate Stories that Work (2020)

We are all somewhere on the journey to being more sustainable.

We've identified four opportunity groups with shared values that we could be engaging more.

Making Ends Meet

My Kids and their Future

Making My Mark

Aspiring Changemakers

More eco- conscious



Less eco- conscious

Those with fewer resources (e.g. money, support) tend to be less overtly eco-conscious. Not because they don't care about the world, but because there are more pressing motivations in life.

To be relevant to audiences, we need to see sustainability as a way to realise their needs and help alleviate their worries.

They all experience slightly different barriers and motivations...

and present us with different content opportunities..

Making Ends Meet

More likely to be C2DE Audiences. Behaving sustainably can feel expensive, time-consuming and worthy. Motivated by family, locality, convenience. Opportunity to engage them with light-hearted, entertaining content, humour and down-to-earth talent.

My Kids and their Future

More likely to be C2DE Audiences. Too busy with the day-to-day to give sustainability much thought. Focused on their kids' best interests. Opportunity to engage them with entertainment for the whole family and light-touch educational content that feels like life, not a lesson.

Making My Mark

More likely to be teens. Care about the world but feel powerless to do much about it. Working out who they are and how they fit into the world. Opportunity to engage them with identity- forming content, relevant young talent & inspirational young people 'like them' making a difference.

Aspiring Changemakers

Think progressive Netflix audience with a global outlook. Identify as behaving sustainably, but more talk than action. Like to feel 'in the know' and learn about new ideas. Opportunity to engage them hard hitting content with a hopeful twist, modern experts, and real-world solutions.

In summary:

We all have a role to play - in how we make our content off-screen and what we portray on-screen, explicitly & implicitly, not to campaign but to inform and inspire.

If your content (or a segment of it) is dealing with climate change or sustainable behaviour explicitly:

> Experiment with a **tonal range** (inject entertainment, go beyond the doom and gloom)
> Empower audiences with **solutions,** show change is doable at every level
> Tap into sustainable **topics that are culturally relevant**; use audience motivations as authentic hooks in
> Go beyond expected presenters: **leverage mainstream talent** for audiences to learn alongside
> Don't forget it's **not all about the individual** – acknowledge systems shifts that would make change easier, but that we can be part of making those happen (by using our voice, being active citizens...)

If your content is not dealing with sustainability explicitly, reflect it implicitly by:

> **Portraying** sustainable behaviours (not unsustainable behaviours)
> **Referencing in conversation** - authenticity is key, puncture the worthy nature with a sense we're all learning together
> **Focusing on 'co-benefits' rather than saving the planet -** E.g. ditching the car for short trips and walking instead, to save money, improve your and your family's health, and reduce local air pollution; spending time in nature to improve your sense of wellbeing
> Asking what **sustainable decisions you could highlight** in 'making of' content - e.g. electric car vs diesel car, using biodegradable glitter