CLIMATE outreach

Beyond 'trusted messengers'

New insights on trust & influence in climate communications

May 2024

About Climate Outreach

At Climate Outreach, we help people and organisations tell a different climate story: from one of a lost cause to a story of people, progress and potential.

With 20 years of research and insight, we know how to make climate stories as powerful and impactful as possible.

We work with environmental groups, government and communities, helping them to understand their audiences and communicate powerfully with them. Armed with our insights, organisations and leaders can effectively engage and involve people at scale.

CLIMATE outreach

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Cover image credit: SolStock

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Introduction

We all want our audiences to trust us. But we know that trust in institutions is low. And we know that not everyone is trusted to talk about climate change.

So, as communicators, we look to surveys exploring 'trusted climate messengers' to help us work out who can persuade those we struggle to reach and connect with.

But do we have a good handle on why certain people and groups are trusted? How trust works? How it's earned or lost? What can we do, as communicators, to build trust?

This report digs into these questions. It's designed to help climate communicators explore the concept of trust, and be much better equipped to build it.

Because earning trust at the scale we need goes beyond finding the right, "already trusted" messenger or influencer.

At Climate Outreach we believe everyone can be more trusted when they're talking about climate. But this requires us to dig deep, and to better understand ourselves and each other.

All of us communicating about climate change have a responsibility to think hard about this, because it's essential if we're to bring everyone with us.

Building on our **Britain Talks Climate** research, we spoke to campaigners and strategists, dug into the literature on trust, and ran focus groups with each of the seven British segments based on More In Common's Core Beliefs model.

We've presented our findings and given some hypothetical scenarios about how you might use this research. We think there is far more to do in this space, and far more we want to learn. We hope you might want to learn with us.

1

What is trust and influence and why does it matter?

What do we mean by trust?

Trust is a person's belief that another person or institution will act positively and in the way they expect them to.[1]

Trust is the result of three factors:

- the person who trusts.
- the person or institution who is to be trusted.
- the context: the matter in hand and the circumstances around it.

The mix of these three factors determines whether or not people are able to trust in any given moment.

Image credit: SolStock

Why does trust matter now?

To transition to a low-carbon society, people need to be able to trust the wide range of people and organisations that want to help us get there.

But trust in government and the media is at a 10-year low.[2] People across British society feel the country is 'broken.' Eight in 10 Brits say they are dissatisfied with how the government is running the country.[3]

Many think people in power don't have the competence or the goodwill to bring about positive change.[4] This is a key driver of polarisation, which impedes cross-society action, and makes it hard for some to believe that as a society, we can tackle climate change in a way that benefits everyone.[5]

This context calls on us as communicators to understand:

- the vital role that trust and influence play in good climate communication.
- that the onus is on us to earn people's trust if we're to have influence.

It is impossible to have a positive influence unless there's at least some level of trust. And it is not bestowed automatically.

This is foundationally important - and it poses a deep challenge for us as climate communicators and campaigners, most of whom are not widely trusted at the moment.[6]

Which “messengers” are trusted on climate?

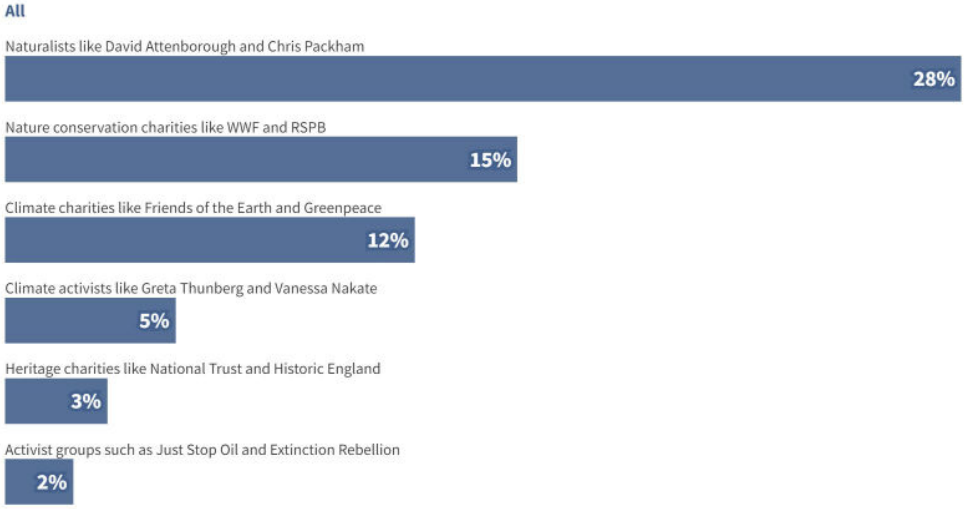
Some people are trusted more or less to talk about climate.

Certain public figures and groups embody the characteristics people find trustworthy. They, and others, have a vital role to play in communicating about the transition.

But knowing which celebrities, politicians, professions or other interest groups people are more likely to select in a survey only gets us so far. It doesn’t tell us what we really need to know: **why** certain people are trusted – and what to do with that information.

Trust in climate activists and NGOs to speak about climate change

'Generally speaking, which of these, if any, do you trust to speak on the subject of climate change? Please pick up to three.'



Source: Climate Barometer Tracker • Data is from a survey of 2553 GB adults, conducted in October 2023. These are among 26 total options that participants could have selected.

Climate Barometer

What does this tell us?

Digging into this question across trust literature, interviews and focus groups told us that trusted people are seen as some combination of:

- human
- sincere
- down to earth
- kind
- reliable
- honest

Earning trust at the scale we need goes beyond finding the right, “already trusted” messenger or influencer.

At Climate Outreach we believe everyone can be more trusted when they’re talking about climate – but this requires us to dig deep, and to better understand ourselves and each other.

Image credit: SolStock

2

Four things to know about trust and influence to be a great climate communicator

1 We need - and want - to trust to live our lives

Whether it's trusting that your dentist will pull out the right tooth, or that your house keys are safe with your neighbour, we need to trust people and things just to be able to live life.

So when we talk about being in a "low trust environment" – it doesn't mean people trust no one. It means that who's trusted has shifted, and that many traditional institutions, such as major corporate brands or political institutions, have generally become less trusted. Trust is shifting, and becoming spread across people who are a part of wider institutions, such as healthcare professionals and taxi drivers. [7]

The people who we spoke to in the disengaged and so-called "lower trust" segments from Britain Talks Climate were still very trusting of their friends and family – those who they had firm evidence of having acted in their best interests. Fundamentally, people do want to trust.

> *It is kind of hard to say* [who I trust] *outside of family and friends. If I don't know you, I don't see reasons why I should trust you. I think it's just people who've proven that they care about you and to their actions that they're trustworthy and influencers online on TV, they haven't physically shown you anything."*
>
> **Disengaged Battler**

> *I think that you've got to have a certain amount of trust in nearly every situation working. Obviously the job that I do, I'm working with children so the parents have to trust me to leave their kids with me. Same as you trust a doctor to obviously look after you if you're sick, your bank, you've got to have trust in these people when you're giving them your money. (...) Yeah, I think trust is a big thing for quite a lot of relationships."*
>
> **Backbone Conservative**

2 Trust helps people quickly work out who's on their side

As people, we interpret most of what we see and hear automatically and instinctively, not slowly and meticulously. [8]

Being able to rapidly assess who's to be trusted is handy both for survival, and for knowing who deserves our attention in an information overloaded world.

When an audience hears from a messenger who demonstrates that they are genuine, and genuinely connected to an issue, those instinctive judgements *can* be positively overridden, to powerful effect.

However, people are more likely than not to dismiss a messenger, especially if they assume they're hearing from what they perceive to be hectoring environmentalists or out-of-touch protestors.

In many contexts, messengers need to be prepared to be a little vulnerable for an audience to believe that they're on their side. Showing openness and humanity towards those we want to trust us can kick-start a reciprocal process of opening up and listening.

> *"It's a gut feeling. Sometimes it's a gut feeling and sometimes it's, you just go off someone's track record and that tells you what you need to know."*
>
> **Civic Pragmatist**

> *"Someone who's got something about them or they've done something or they've supported a cause. Or if you are very into the environment, if they've done something for the social awareness or if someone has built up something, you're going to give them a little bit more respect and have a little bit more time to learn about them maybe."*
>
> **Loyal National**

3 Trust is a sliding scale, not an on/off switch

The way you communicate can increase trust, or decrease mistrust, nudging you along the trusted scale.

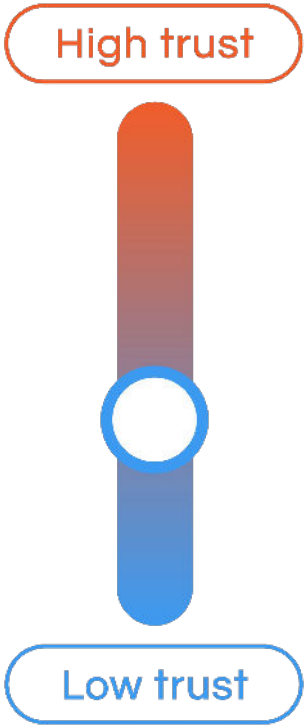
Trust is often built up over time.

Long term-friends, colleagues and former colleagues were frequently mentioned by our research participants as people they trusted.

The public figures that audiences trust most on climate change have built familiarity and trust over time.

But trust is easier to lose than gain. It's easier to go down the scale than up.

Public figures who've earned people's trust over long periods can see trust withdrawn rapidly if they act in a way that's inconsistent with who they claim to be.



"It's all on length of time you've worked with someone and what you've experienced and what you've gone through. And I'm a little bit negative. I think perhaps in that I am a little bit wary of people (...) Because I have been in quite a few situations where I thought I've trusted someone and they've been very honest, upfront and then they've stabbed me in the back and it's got quite... not very nice."

Disengaged Battler

"I mean I've been in workplace situations where people have come across as incredibly genuine and then six months, nine months down the line you've seen that they've had ulterior motives but also relationships, friendships, maybe friendships that you've had for years. And then I think it's all part of growth. But yeah, length of time definitely, I'm more likely to trust somebody that I've known for years and has been dependable for years than somebody I met two weeks ago."

Established Liberal

Image credit: Ahmani Vidal

4 If a person or message does not feel relevant, it doesn't stand a chance

One of the most frequent responses to messengers we tested in our research was "whatever this person is talking about isn't for me."

As communicators, we often think that our communications and asks are relevant to our target audiences (and indeed to most people). This doesn't mean that the people we're speaking to think so.

As communicators, we need to translate our issue and ideas carefully, making causes relevant, clear and immediate. Without this, we won't be able to influence or earn the trust of our audience because we'll be 'tuned out'.

This 'tuning out' isn't necessarily a reflection of disagreement, distrust or ill will but simply because of convenience: with huge demands on everyone's time, no one is likely to pay attention to things that don't feel immediately and obviously relevant.

> *No, I mean* [a council meeting to hear more about new walking and cycling lanes] *wouldn't really interest me. I don't cycle. I'm surrounded by cycle lanes where I live as it goes and half the time cyclists don't use them."*
>
> **Civic Pragmatist**

> *I think petitions just in general, I don't really see the value in them, never hear anything come out of 'em. And then also, this isn't something I'm usually passionate about, so I'm busy working all day, then I've got the commitments and stuff. I doubt I'd spare 10 minutes to log onto the website and do all that stuff."*
>
> **Loyal National**

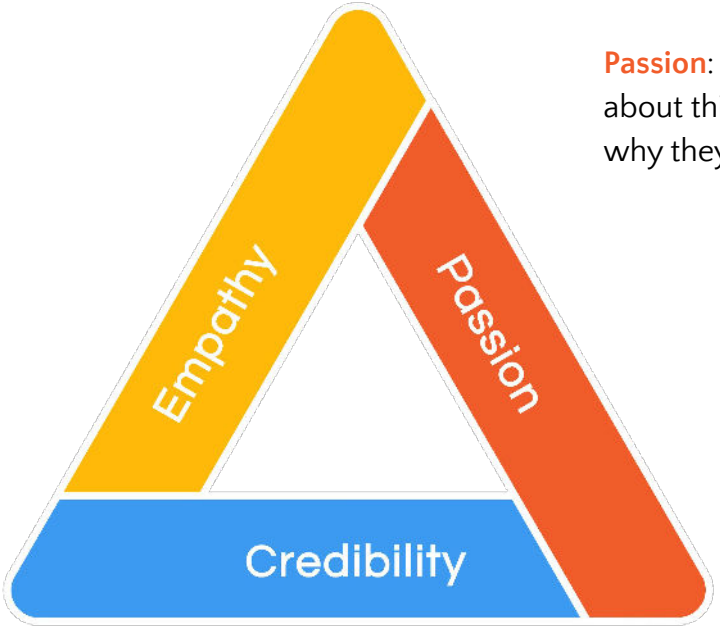
3

Three key ingredients of trustworthiness

There are three key ingredients of trustworthiness

How an audience needs to feel to trust you and be open to influence:

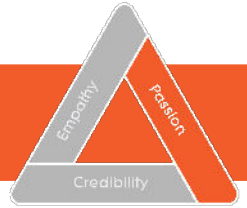
Empathy: This person understands that people have different perspectives. They're not lecturing me, or talking down to me.



Passion: This person really cares about this issue and they're clear why they're talking about it.

Credibility: I believe this person knows what they're talking about. They're not just making this up on the spot.

Image credit: SolStock



Passion

This person really cares about this issue. They're clear why they're talking about it, and passionate about connecting with their audience on this.

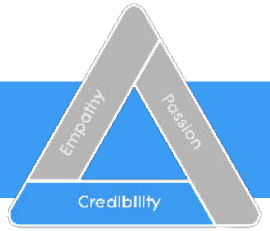
> *It was just that flatness in her voice, (...) she wasn't kind of hitting it for me. It wasn't like, 'oh wow', do you know what I mean? That there was just no passion there. There was no kind of real connect there."*

Progressive Activist

> *Yeah, I think he seems quite trustworthy and believable. I think just because of how passionate he is, he seems like he genuinely cares about it. So for that reason it seemed that he doesn't have an agenda and he actually is concerned about the topic he's talking about."*

Loyal National

Credibility



I believe this person knows what they're talking about and they're not just making this up on the spot. They don't have to be a leading expert, but I trust that they take this issue seriously and they'll be honest about what they do and don't know.

> *She's outlining all the facts that she got. The specialist who she has mentioned, she mentions names, she mentions, I mean she just has all the facts and she seems like she's been guided by specialists in the field and she's making that speech because she believes that the facts she has been given are correct."*

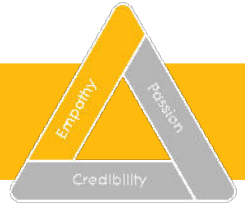
Disengaged Traditionalist

> *I think for me there needs to be some sort of receipt, so that, of credibility (...) There needs to be something of note that I can back and that I can understand so that I'll listen to it. But yeah, but it is difficult to find because as we've sort of pointed out, what can you trust at the moment?"*

Loyal National

Image credit: SolStock

Image credit: SolStock



Empathy

This person is aware that people don't automatically know what they know and believe what they believe. They're not lecturing me, or talking down to me.

> *It's another one of those things that they're telling me what we need to do and how we need to do it. And how many times can you be told?*
>
> *We're all doing our best, but I feel it's never good enough."*

Disengaged Battler

Example 1: You're part of a local group trying to create a space for face-to-face conversations about the possibility of a community energy project.

- **Passion:** What is your motivation for creating these spaces? What prompted you to become engaged in this area? Are there specific experiences, people or stories that inspired you? Your answer to this question is not incidental but crucial if you want to be seen as trustworthy by the people you're inviting to attend. Once you've identified your own and your group's motivation, you can better explain your 'why' when communicating your idea.

- **Credibility**: Do you have experience or skills to show that you are competent to discuss your community energy idea with others? Have you been involved in a similar project elsewhere and if not, can you invite external speakers along to share their experiences, online or in person? Acknowledge that you might not be the experts on this issue but demonstrate that you're relying on expert knowledge to build credibility with your audience.

- **Empathy**: Does your engagement format and the language you're using to invite people reflect your respect and empathy for them? A face-to-face conversation space on community energy is likely only going to attract audiences who are already interested in environmental issues, who have the time to attend and means to get to your venue and who are comfortable discussing issues with strangers. Can you think of ways to make your idea seem more welcoming for new audiences who might not already fulfil those implied 'prerequisites'? Are you explaining what a community energy project is for those who don't already know the term? Through your communication, show that you're welcoming people where they're at – not just where you'd like them to be.

Example 2: You're working for a local authority wanting to build trust and policy support for pedestrianising the town centre.

- **Passion:** Show that you have your residents' best interests at heart by emphasising the issues you're trying to fix and the solutions that pedestrianising the town centre offers to local people: reducing air pollution and traffic noise, fewer road accidents, creating spaces for people to meet and be social, supporting local businesses by creating outdoor spaces for cafés and restaurants, etc. Clearly state the positive outcome you're after as your rationale and motivation for introducing this scheme.

- **Credibility**: As a local authority, your audiences will likely believe that you have the authority to implement change but they might question your ability to do so effectively or **fairly**. Do you have evidence from other areas in town where your traffic schemes have resulted in improved quality of life? Or can you point to examples from other councils where pedestrianising the town centre has been successful and share testimonials of local people who have benefited from this?

- **Empathy**: Does your communication reflect that you're aware of the changes that will come with your scheme? Are you holding Q&A sessions for local residents or businesses, for example, to talk through how this will affect them personally and what support you're offering? Can you offer to adjust your plans based on what you hear about how they'll affect people?

Example 3: You're a communications manager at a large environmental organisation, working with a celebrity ambassador who supports your rewilding campaign and wants to get involved but hasn't spoken out about this issue previously.

- **Passion:** What prompted them to become engaged in this area? Why this issue, and why now? Explore these questions together, asking follow up questions to understand what's driving them deep down. Listen to the answer and try to sum up, together, what this is all about and why it matters for them. Be open to a different set of reasons to yours for wanting to engage, and be prepared to work together to express this publicly.

- **Credibility**: This isn't about your celebrity ambassador suddenly needing to become a deep expert in the science of rewilding – or know all the facts and statistics. It's more about being able to reflect on their experience and a genuine interest and curiosity in this area. Have they noticed something, looked into or researched an issue and from there become aware of your organisation that specialises in rewilding? Emphasise that it's OK for them to be new to this and still want to talk about it – being clear that it's a journey for us all.

- **Empathy**: Who is the celebrity ambassador's usual audience? What do they like about them? What do they expect from them, their communication and their content? Where might they have concerns, or pushback? Trust that they know their audience best and use that to increase the appeal of their communications.

4

Two questions to ask yourself if you want people to trust your communication

1 What's motivating you to communicate?

Audiences will rapidly draw their own conclusions about a messenger's motivation. When we talk publicly about climate action, people instinctively ask themselves 'why are they saying this, what's driving them?'.

People are on hyperalert for artifice and disingenuousness. Focus group participants quickly dismissed the messengers whose communications "sounded like an advert". They were ready to dismiss that which felt 'off'.

Great communicators will let their audience know what's driving them at a deep level: the values and motivations they bring to whatever they're talking about. They "know their 'why'" and let their audience in on it so people don't have to guess, or jump to an inaccurate conclusion.

So, if you want to be more persuasive, first ask yourself what's driving you – and be honest with yourself about the answer.

If you're seeking to 'raise awareness' or share certain facts, ask yourself why, and to what end.

For instance, scientists are often motivated by the idea that their research can help solve societal problems and address issues they care about. It's important to say this. How would you complete the sentence "I'm talking about this issue today because…"?

Image credit: SolStock

This perceived motivation is especially true for certain topics. For example, people tend to be highly suspicious of messengers talking to them about meat-eating, so trust is essential to influence in this space. Rather than leading with an ask (eat less meat), start with the why.

It might sound something like this: you've seen the problems mass production creates and you're worried about its impact on climate and nature. You're trying to personally make a difference, even though it can be hard to know what's the right thing to do.

And now you want to talk to other people about how they think and feel about this tricky issue.

> *Well I think you buy into people's conviction, I think if you think they really believe and also they back it up with some facts and you think, yeah, that sounds plausible. You buy into that. And I think that both of those individuals have that passion and that inner conviction that what they're saying is they truly believe it and you are more likely to believe someone if you think they believe it themselves."*
>
> **Civic Pragmatist**

> *I feel like it's a sales rep. It just comes across as someone's trying to sell something. Either wanting me to subscribe to something or do something that I would need to pay money for."*
>
> **Disengaged Traditionalist**

2 Be empathetic: Do you have a genuine interest in understanding where your audience is coming from?

It's essential to know who our audiences are and where they're likely to be coming from. Some questions we can ask ourselves are:

1. What are they likely to think and feel about climate change? Our research can help. So can listening to the people you wish to influence, and reflecting on why they might not already or automatically agree with you or trust you.
2. What might they think about the organisation or group we represent? Have they had prior negative experiences?
3. What do we think of them? Consider whether you have negative assumptions about your audience. Communication that talks down or dismisses people's beliefs or perspective is unlikely to succeed in connecting and influencing.

> *Personally, we've had the similar thing* [consultation by the local council] *where I live and I turned up, as the majority of my neighbours did, but the agenda was already set* [...] *ultimately whatever we wanted didn't actually materialise because they were going to put these things in place regardless. It was almost like a paper exercise.*
>
> *So I'm always very sceptical when they do these things because if you have an agenda, it's more likely than not you are going to do what you want to do, but just make it appear that you're actually listening to members of the community."*
>
> **Backbone Conservative**

5

Three things climate communicators can do

1 Find common ground and talk with, not at, your audience

Try to find and occupy shared ground, instead of speaking from the high ground. Find a way to show that you are on the side of the people you're talking to.

This isn't just about meeting people where they're at or even endorsing or repeating unhelpful ideas or inaccurate beliefs just to create an immediate connection.

It's about finding something or several things that allow you to connect with an audience on a deeper level. It could be a personal story that people will relate to. Or a widely shared belief or motivation, like the importance of passing on a healthy planet to children and grandchildren.

Image credit: SolStock

Image credit: 10'000 Hours

Convey your passion and motivation as well as your credibility

2

Influential people are described as passionate and inspiring.

Audiences will trust you if they think you're genuine, **and** you know at least a little bit about what you're talking about.

For most people pure passion doesn't trump lack of knowledge. But equally expertise doesn't influence by itself.

3 Make sure the messenger fits the message (and vice versa)

The context and particular circumstances affect whether or not people trust a messenger in any given moment. For instance, a famous tennis player is unlikely to be a trusted spokesperson on public transport schemes if they can't remember the last time they were on a bus or a train.

When designing communications strategies, try to draw on existing positive associations that people will have between a particular issue and a relevant communicator. For instance, a local restaurateur or chef can talk about the appeal and scope of a planet-friendly diet more authentically than a business liaison officer with no connection to food.

Image credit: SolStock

6

How to build trust and influence with the 7 British segments

People form, rely on, and lose trust and influence in various, but often similar ways as described throughout this report.

However, our research also unearthed some differences between the **7 British segments** in how they talked about trust and influence, how trust manifests in daily life, and what trusted people can – and can't – inspire them to do.

The following section lays out some of these key emerging differences between the segments, along with possible ways for communicators to leverage these insights in their work.

Progressive Activists

Three things we heard from Progressive Activists about trust & influence:	Possible ways for communicators to navigate this:
Progressive Activists **tend to heavily scrutinise** a lot of the information they consume and are **looking for credible evidence** to examine the trustworthiness of a messenger. They are particularly **put off by messengers that appear 'staged'** or whose intentions appear murky.	**Avoid any sign of possible hypocrisy** (incl. perceived greenwashing) from the messenger. Establish credibility and motivation by clearly stating why you care about an issue at the start, so as not to let your audience draw the wrong conclusion.
Evidence that can build trust and influence for Progressive Activists often involves **lived experience** and the **expertise** linked to that, like nurses having witnessed the dangers of extreme heat for their patients.	**Centre the lived experiences** of those affected by the climate crisis or **showcase the personal stories of people trying to implement solutions**, including successes and failures.
Genuine passion is a particularly powerful way to signal authenticity for Progressive Activists. They tend to trust people they perceive as **empathetic, (com)passionate and kind**.	Share the stories of **people who visibly care** about the issue they are talking about. Even without leaning into overly emotive appeals, genuine passion often comes across.

"*I think someone who knows what they're talking about and doesn't fall apart under questioning as it were* [is someone who would be influential]. *If they're trying to deliver as an expert on something, they need to be able to answer questions about what they're talking about.*"

Progressive Activist

Civic Pragmatists

Three things we heard from Civic Pragmatists about trust & influence:	Possible ways for communicators to navigate this:
In a trusted person, Civic Pragmatists particularly value **reliability and consistency of actions** over time. For them, a genuine person tends to be a 'stand-up person' that 'stays in character', whose actions one can predict and depend on.	Attempts to "stick a messenger" onto your message are likely to fall flat. As trust building takes time, **think of ways in which to journey Civic Pragmatists** step by step, so that your calls to action don't appear too rash or out of character for the person doing the communicating.
Throughout the focus group discussion, Civic Pragmatists' general preference for messengers who are engaged in their local community came through strongly. **Local relevance and familiarity** are strong drivers of trust for this segment and increase the likelihood for them to respond positively to calls to action.	Draw on **local connections** – like a local café owner or litter-picking group – to increase the relevance of your issue/appeal for this segment and demonstrate that you have their and their community's best interest at heart.
In our focus groups, Civic Pragmatists were the only segment to describe **trust as a "gut feeling"**. Trust also seemed related to the way in which someone spoke and came across: language and mannerisms that convey **passion, charisma and conviction** are viewed positively by Civic Pragmatists.	**Don't be afraid to show emotions** as messengers, as long as they're genuine and don't feel 'over the top'. Civic Pragmatists will likely be looking for these in speech and gestures as indicators of passion and charisma.

"You trust someone and you generally trust something about them or their way, their values and their morals and they generally need to be consistent. They suddenly do something completely out of character. It does knock your trust and your confidence."

Civic Pragmatist

Established Liberals

Three things we heard from Established Liberals about trust & influence:	Possible ways for communicators to navigate this:
In addition to mentions of **family**, the **trusted people** this segment talked of in the group discussions were **those who they have regulated relationships with**, through contracts or professional relationships. Trust was seen as more **transactional** in that sense.	**Be clear on the offer you are making to Established Liberals** to play into their more contractual relationship with trust, in terms of a **give and take**: what will you do for them? If you're recommending they swap their car to an EV, how can they expect to benefit from making this change in return?
In our focus groups, Established Liberals **tended to view trust in a much more information-centric way.** In line with what we already know about this segment, they were **actively looking for credentials and evidence** to indicate whether or not to trust a person and their message.	**Bring information and knowledge to this segment.** Backup your messages with clear evidence and answer any detailed questions this segment might have. If you don't have the expertise or knowledge on a certain topic, then think about collaborating with someone who does.
Established Liberals **tend to be more trusting** than other segments, in part because they often have the means to soften the blow when somebody breaks their trust. However, they still **need to be convinced that your issue is actually relevant to them** in order to listen in the first place and be open to being influenced by what you have to say.	Put in the work to make your issue relevant to Established Liberals and their lifestyles. **Talk about how the transition will affect *them* positively.**

"Someone I trust quite a lot is, we've got someone who looks after our dog whenever I go to work, so they do doggy daycare, so the dog's a, kind of a first born child prior to the baby we've just had. So, heavily trust them just to look after her and make sure she's taken care of and if there was ever any problems they're always able to talk to us.(...) I trust the cleaner that comes into the house and things like that. So they're the kind of people I trust."

Established Liberal

Backbone Conservatives

Three things we heard from Backbone Conservatives about trust & influence:	Possible ways for communicators to navigate this:
Backbone Conservatives tend to have **comparatively high general and institutional trust**. That means that they are more likely to trust formal affiliations and titles than other segments.	Don't be afraid to **stress institutional and professional affiliations** of your messengers, as these can **increase their credibility** for this segment.
Backbone Conservatives' **strong sense of societal embeddedness and belonging** means that they have an **innate trust that they have a role to play in** issues relating to British society, including **the low carbon transition**. However, they see climate action as a cross-societal endeavour and want to see that people, institutions and businesses on all levels of society are doing their bit towards it.	**Showcase and celebrate the positive change that's already taking place**, especially on issues close to the hearts of Backbone Conservatives, even if this change is only incremental. Tell **authentic stories of how actions of everyday people are creating change** and **how large actors are using their influence to create tangible benefits** (economically and socially) for British society.
As a more financially secure segment, Backbone Conservatives are **generally more willing to trust in longer-term processes and promises** of communicators. As such, they tend to be more forgiving of short-term changes as long as communicators stick to the long term objective.	**Build trust in your mission by laying out your** long term plans and your positive **vision for people and nature**. Throughout implementing your plans, provide updates and demonstrate how you're meeting milestones on the way.

"I've got loads of friends that I served with from school, et cetera. But I would say right off the top of my head is Big Martin. He's not a young lad, he's 30. I was a Marine, he was a para. (...) He's a guy I've come to rely on a hundred percent. I trust him a hundred percent. People often give me keys to houses to go and do stuff and I'm quite happy. I know I could give them to Martin and say 'Go and do this' or 'Go do that' and spot on, he'll turn up every time."

Backbone Conservative

Disengaged Battlers

Three things we heard from Disengaged Battlers about trust & influence:	Possible ways for communicators to navigate this:
Disengaged Battlers can find it **difficult to trust many people outside of their very close circle** of family and friends. Compared to other segments, they also mainly used **family-oriented wording** ("family", "foster carer", "loyalty", "a bond") when talking about trust.	Be **mindful of what to expect in terms of trust** from Disengaged Battlers. Bring in this family-oriented focus by **stressing your dedication to** your cause in terms of **the people** you are campaigning for and with.
Similarly, this segment sees people they are close to and have known for a long time as more 'influential'. Knowing about someone's **background and experiences of what they have been through** seems to make them more trustworthy and influential for Disengaged Battlers.	As a comparatively time-poor segment, Disengaged Battlers first **need to be convinced of how your issue is relevant to their busy lives** before even considering whether or not you are trustworthy. Try **sharing some of your background and experiences** before launching into your "pitch" to be seen as a 'real' person.
Disengaged Battlers are **particularly attuned to tuning out any communication that appears like an advert**. They can be quick to draw a conclusion that communicators are trying to sell them something, which is likely to put them off.	**Avoid anything that feels like an advert or sales pitch** where you can. Instead, clearly state your (positive) motivation for communicating to avoid inviting false misconceptions from your audiences.

"I know people personally who were influential, who have been through a lot and now they've come out the other side and I think that's quite a big thing. I think famous people, you can look up to them but you don't actually know them, do you, they can say the right things, but I think people who are in your own circle of friends have been through a lot in their life and how they've dealt with it, and I think that's always a really good influence to have on your own life when you're trying to deal with things as well."

Disengaged Battler

Disengaged Traditionalists

Three things we heard from Disengaged Traditionalists about trust & influence:	Possible ways for communicators to navigate this:
In focus groups, this segment talked about trust fairly literally. **Trust is very 'all or nothing' for Disengaged Traditionalists** – if people don't follow through with what they said they'd do, that makes them dishonest and untrustworthy.	Focus on **honesty** and **show** this segment they can trust you. Make sure your messages **emphasise what you will do, and then follow through with real action**. Build this trust and only then ask this segment to follow suit.
Relatedly, for this segment, **trust comes from someone proving themselves – a 'show don't tell' mindset** when it comes to trust. Disengaged Traditionalists have more trust in people that have helped them out in some way and thus proven that they have their best interest at heart through action.	Pass the mic to **everyday people who have experience with the topic you are talking about**. For example, allow heat pump users to talk about the benefits of heat pumps.
It is **tricky to build trust** with Disengaged Traditionalists if they feel the messenger has **an agenda of trying to 'sell' them something**. Where a motive is not stated, it can easily be misinterpreted.	**Avoid any messages that indicate any profit-seeking/'selling' agendas**. Stress that your messengers do not have any personal gain from sharing their stories. **Build trust first before talking about costs** and how you're going to address this segment's concerns around that.

"Say that they do what they say they're going to do because if someone doesn't do that then it's a lie, isn't it? It feels like, 'oh well you didn't mean that, you're a liar, you're not a genuine person'. It goes against everything that you would trust in somebody.

When I think of someone to trust, one of the people I think of is Martin Lewis who gives real sound financial advice for everyone and just him as a person. He's so genuine, he's there, nothing in it for himself, he's there to help others, give them hints and tips and improve people's financial positions. Which, let's face it, in this current climate I think everyone would appreciate more than ever. So I think of someone like him as trustworthy."

Disengaged Traditionalist

Loyal Nationals

Three things we heard from Loyal Nationals about trust & influence:	Possible ways for communicators to navigate this:
In focus groups, **trust came across as much more instinctual** to this segment. Compared to other segments, Loyal Nationals were less proactive in seeking out additional information to assess whether someone was trustworthy or not.	**Lead with messengers who hold the common trusted characteristics and who 'wear these on their sleeves'**: being reliable, consistent, honest, transparent, genuine, loyal and able to show they have this segment's best interest at heart.
During focus group discussions, **messengers putting across an agenda from a wider group, institution or party generally led to lower trust** among this segment. Loyal Nationals are more likely to wonder **why** a certain messenger is talking to them about a subject.	**Ensure you involve messengers who are acting in their own right** and on behalf of their own passion and personal agenda, even if that means they won't be repeating your points word for word. **Trust that they know best how to build trust** with their audiences.
As Loyal Nationals tend to have comparatively lower trust in institutions, there are some topics **that are much more difficult to build trust around with this segment**. For example, Loyal Nationals are very concerned and passionate about tackling river pollution from sewage but are much harder to engage on actions such as diet change or signing petitions to the government.	Reflect on the topics you want to engage Loyal Nationals on and what their starting points are likely to be. **Can you journey them along? Think of people who are best placed to talk to Loyal Nationals at every step of that journey.** Where you can show expertise and passion for a topic in an authentic way then talk about it, and where you can't, pass the mic to someone who can.

I think a lot of people wrongly trust the media because you should live in a world and in a society where the news is factual and you should be able to turn on BBC news or Sky News or wherever or read a newspaper and they give you the facts and they give you the truth. But every place is biased.

Even the BBC, that's not supposed to be, we know that there's issues of impartiality. You've got certain news channels that are catered to certain views. You've got newspapers that are all kind of bankrolled by billionaires…"

Loyal National

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Conclusion: doing things differently

To earn trust, we may need to do things very differently.

It can be difficult for any of us to reflect on who may or may not trust us, and why. We feel that we are good people with an important message, but that doesn't mean everyone's ready to hear it or trusts our motives. But listening and reflecting on how we come across, and how we might appear to people who aren't like us, is essential to building trust.

There are changes we can make to what we say and how we say it - and doing these things can go a long way in building trust. But there might be times when we're not the right communicators for a particular audience. We need to ask ourselves if that's the case, why it might be so, and if there are different ways to build trust.

And we need to remember that trust is a two-way street. We need to be able to empathise with and learn from the people we're talking with. If we do that, they might start to reciprocate.

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References and annexes

References

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Annex 1: Research Methodology

- Dec 2023 - Jan 2024: Desk review of key resources on trust and influence (peer-reviewed articles and grey literature)
- Jan - Feb 2024: 6 interviews with experts from academia and think tanks and a practitioner roundtable with climate communications and engagement experts
- Mar 2024: Experimental online focus groups with each of the 7 British segments (6-8 participants each, with a mix of ages, socio-economic groups, gender, ethnicity, from across England, Scotland and Wales)

Focus group methodology:

In addition to some general discussions on trust, influence and trusted people, the focus groups included video elicitation and hypothetical scenarios to understand what made climate messengers trustworthy for participants, and 'how far' their trust in those messengers could stretch when it came to persuading participants to take part in various calls to action.

Each focus group saw four short video clips, selected from a long list of seven videos overall. Each clip was tested with four different segments and presented a mix of in-group and out-group messengers for that segment.

The follow-up questions for each video centred around what the participants thought of the messenger, whether they were influenced by them and how likely they would be to take part in a specific, imagined call to action related to the video, if this messenger asked them to. The project team selected the following set of 7 videos, based on a mix of expert/non-expert messengers, different climate/environmental issues, emotive/factual appeals and impacts/solutions messaging. Each video or a snippet thereof was shown for between 30 seconds and appr. 1 minute.

- Musician Feargal Sharkey talking about sewage pollution of British rivers and seas
- Forest Green Rovers footballer talking about changing to a plant-based diet to recover from illness
- Former Conservative Party advisor talking about the need for Britain to invest more in renewable energy to compete globally
- Climate justice activists talking about changing business as usual for the fast fashion industry towards a system that cares for people and planet
- Cornish pensioner talking about the benefits of insulating her home and having a heat pump installed
- Former miner's son talking about heading up the world's biggest offshore wind farm off the North East coast of England
- Grassroots campaigner Rosamund Kissi-Debrah giving a TED Talk to raise awareness about the danger of air pollution

Annex 1: Research Methodology *continued*

In the final part of the focus groups, the participants discussed four hypothetical scenarios, which were read out by the moderator. These were selected to represent a spread of the type of messenger, context and call to action (CTA).

- Scenario 1: Health/wellness/exercise person on social media talking about recipes with a low environmental impact, asking viewers to try one of them
  - Messenger: Social media influencer
  - Context: Algorithm-curated social media content
  - CTA: Individual behaviour change at home
- Scenario 2: Local litter picking group organising to pile up rubbish in front of a Local Authority office to raise awareness about litter, asking participants to spread the word about it
  - Messenger: Personal but weak connection
  - Context: Spontaneous, unplanned meeting
  - CTA: Spreading the word about localised, collective environmental action with a protest feel to it
- Scenario 3: TV advert by a big climate NGO asking people to sign an online petition to protect wildlife and nature
  - Messenger: "Faceless" but recognizable climate/environmental NGO
  - Context: Paid, uncurated mass information provision (national scale)
  - CTA: Personal political action to be taken from home
- Scenario 4: Local authority poster inviting people to a town hall meeting about new walking and cycling routes
  - Messenger: "Faceless" local council, some level of transactional connection
  - Context: Uncurated mass information provision (local scale)
  - CTA: Collective political action to be taken with unfamiliar others in public place

Scenarios 1 and 2 were changed slightly to this final form, based on a review after trialling them in the first focus group with Backbone Conservatives.

Annex 2: The 7 British segments

The seven British segments are featured in Climate Outreach's Britain Talks Climate, and More in Common's Britain's Choice. This values-based segmentation is based on More in Common's Core Beliefs model. There are seven distinct audience segments across Britain, differentiated by values, core beliefs and identities.

Britain Talks Climate and the seven British segments provides a shared and strategic understanding of the British public and identifies ways to engage across the whole of society.

The seven British segments reveal a public that is fractured but not deeply polarised, with climate change emerging as an issue that offers the possibility of hope and reconnection.

Introducing the seven British segments:

Progressive Activists – Vocal and passionate, politically active but pessimistic about the direction society has taken, climate change is central to Progressive Activists' identity and politics. They are despairing about governments' moral failings on the issue, which they believe will make all other challenges and inequalities worse.

Backbone Conservatives – Conservative, patriotic and optimistic, Backbone Conservatives take pride in tangible success stories about British environmental achievements and care deeply about food, farming and the rural economy. But they are more sceptical about grand claims of global leadership, or the 'virtue signalling' of (what they sometimes see as) symbolic lifestyle changes.

Annex 2: The 7 British segments *continued*

Disengaged Battlers – Feeling unheard and unrepresented, Disengaged Battlers are nevertheless broadly convinced of the need to take action on climate change. However, they do not yet believe the transition will benefit them, and are too busy surviving from day to day to give it more of their attention.

Disengaged Traditionalists – Disillusioned and sceptical, Disengaged Traditionalists recognise tangible environmental risks like air pollution, but are far from 'sold' on the need for action on climate. They are more likely to see it as a problem for foreign governments to deal with.

Loyal Nationals – Traditional and proud to be British, Loyal Nationals feel threatened and are galvanised by issues such as crime, immigration and terrorism. They believe the UK is already living with the reality of climate change, but they understand it as an issue linked to localised (rather than global) inequality and environmental degradation. Their relatively high political participation is driven by moral outrage about a system that supports corporate greed over everyday working people.

Civic Pragmatists – Moderate and tolerant, Civic Pragmatists are anxious about the future, with climate change contributing to that fear. They try to follow a low-carbon lifestyle, but feel demotivated by a lack of political ambition on climate change and other social issues. Reflecting their pragmatic nature, they are likely to look past their opinion of the government of the day and support progressive climate policies when they see them.

Established Liberals – Confident and comfortable, Established Liberals have a global outlook driven more by their professional networks than a sense of solidarity with communities around the world. They don't necessarily view climate change as something that will affect them personally, but they do want to hear how low-carbon solutions will drive economic resilience and growth.

Thank you for reading.

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