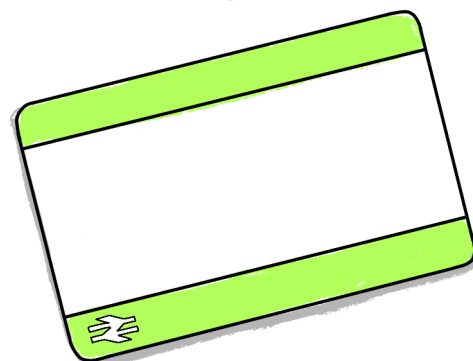
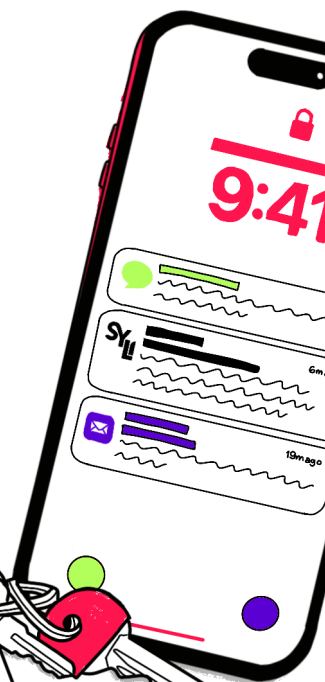
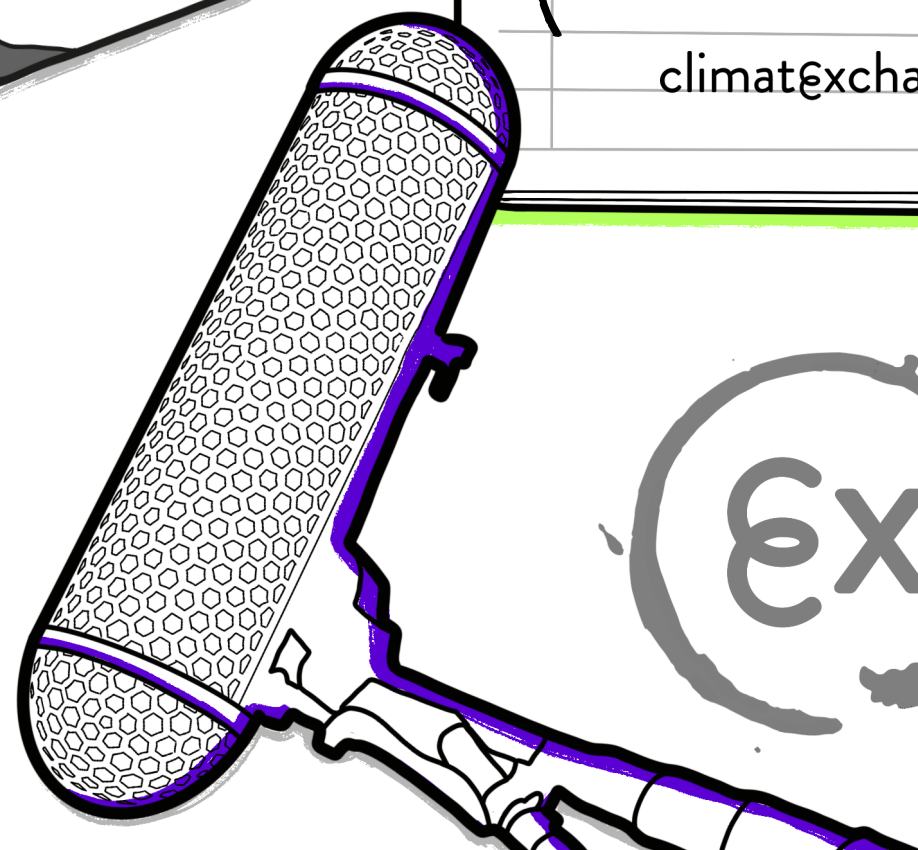


CLIMATE AS CULTURE

A
Journalist's
Guide

climatεxchange



'Climate culture'

The acceptance of climate change as a part of global daily life, ideas, customs, social behaviour, and the embracing of proactive mitigation as a necessary essential.

climateXchange

'Journalism'

The process of gathering, editing, and presenting news to the public.

• *Introduction* • Introduction • *Introduction* • Introduction •

"The media define for audiences what environmental problems are, their causes and consequences, and provide options to act in response."

Internews Covering the Planet Report

Effective journalism that informs and empowers the public on climate isn't easy. It's a seriously tough gig.

Current climate coverage is mostly negative in tone, with some outlets calling humanity's current environmental situation '[the climate emergency](#)'. We use shocking metrics, emotionally-charged rhetoric and inflammatory language in an effort to engage audiences and spur them into action. While this kind of storytelling is critical to put information on record, it does not empower the public. Climate change is not COVID-19: it is a less tangible crisis, seemingly urgent, and has solutions that are challenging to visualise. Its impacts are often indirect and hard to align with the wider global crisis. Its coverage is short-burst and tactical: stamping out the flames, not addressing the reasons for the fire.

Additionally, those that are experiencing its impacts first hand are not often in the position to have their voices heard, thus reducing the volume of relatable human stories in the conversation. Climate news is therefore often too remote and antiseptic to engage a meaningful human response, or else so overwhelming it engenders feelings of helplessness, doom or apathy, sometimes prompting disengagement from news altogether.

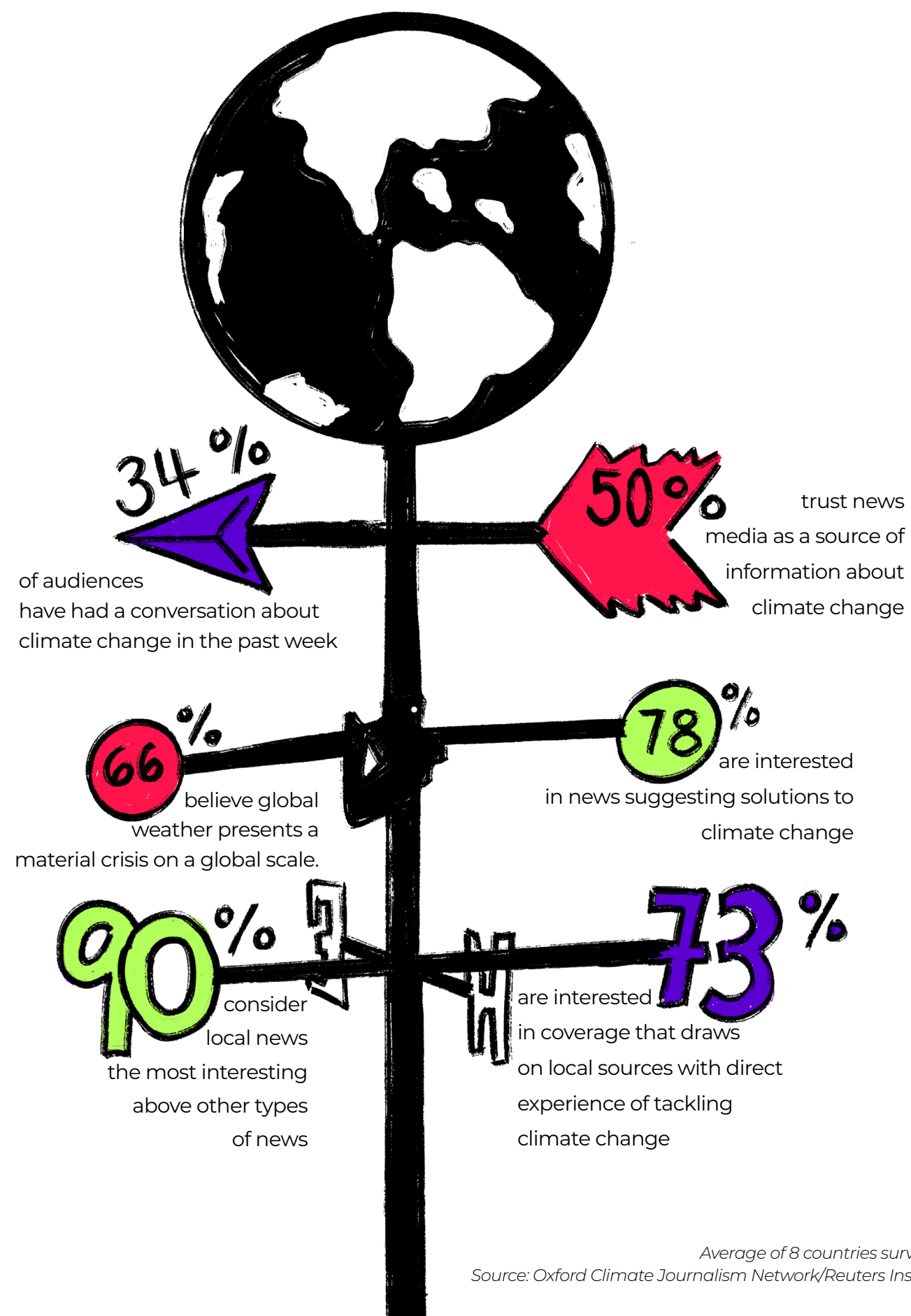
This is a failure, as audiences care about climate, but aren't engaged in a way that encourages meaningful, urgent action in a subject already exposed to misinformation, politicisation and daunting complexity.

The result is a knife-edge between newsrooms and audiences. On one side, a need to empower the public with knowledge to push for the big system changes required to scale solutions to the climate crisis. On the other hand, a need for local, individual action that is achievable, empowering and relatable that doesn't alienate audiences from the subject, can deepen understanding, change behaviour and be beneficial in their daily lives.

In any emergency, the pathway to safety must be presented as simply and clearly as possible, in a way that doesn't cause panic and is easily actioned, whoever and wherever you are. The media's communication of the climate emergency is more nuanced, but ultimately no different.

Climate storytelling needs to become clearer, more relatable and more appealing. A new strategy is needed. climateXchange calls this culture-led climate journalism—or climate culture, for short. Over the following pages, we will break down what this means.

Simon Ingram, Editor, climateXchange



"People struggle with yet another calamity.

Non-stop doom and gloom is difficult...

...[audiences] feel helpless when they read this stuff."

Phil Chetwynd, AFP
EBU News Report 2023

WHAT WE MEAN BY 'CULTURE'

Culture is often described simply as a person or group's particular way of life. But 'culture' is a broad concept that deeply intersects with the ways we consume and process information because of our backgrounds, history, beliefs and experience. Climate, increasingly, has a place in this.

'Culture' is ...

a.

The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group.

also: the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time.

e.g. Popular culture, Southern culture

b.

The set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization.

e.g. A corporate culture focused on the bottom line

c.

The set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic.

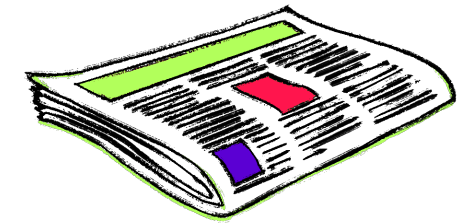
e.g.
Studying the effect of computers on print culture

Changing the culture of materialism will take time...

d.

The integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.

As defined by Miriam Webster



The media recruits elements of all of these definitions.

What we read and the way we consume information, such as buying a newspaper or using social media, feeds our culture—as does the way we conduct our everyday lives, including what we eat, where we buy and how we spend our time (definition a); The way we behave in our home and work lives is culture (b), as are the values we believe in, the heritage we keep and the ways this affects the decisions we make (c). The way we learn, talk, educate, inspire and reflect those things on ourselves and towards others is also culture, and a highly important element—as this dictates the propagation of behaviour (d.)

The media is an expert at cultural storytelling. Every magazine, newspaper section, website and social platform leverages an element of culture to engage its particular audience: from the general interest to the deeply specialist.

All use their knowledge of human behaviour and its emotional and intellectual triggers as a toolkit to appeal to people's instincts: from clickbait curiosities, to listicle countdowns, to the most weighty investigations.



So we all know how to use culture in our work. But how can we help climate become a part of it — and why should we?

CLIMATE: A CULTURAL COURTESY?

Climate change isn't a car, a scandal, a celebrity or a new clothing line. It isn't something that intrinsically excites as a cultural subject on its own. And yet, it is increasingly relevant in the media as its impacts affect the way we live our lives.

We are missing an opportunity as journalists if we don't use it. It needn't be just reporting bad news. In fact, it really shouldn't be. When it comes to climate, remember:

*'Hell doesn't sell.
Solutions do well.'*

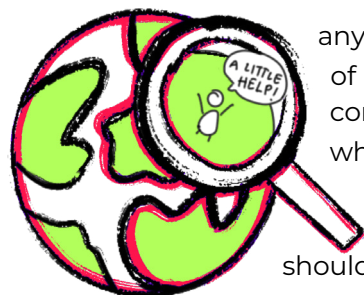
First there is the moral case. It is clear we are running out of time to insulate humanity's future—on a global and local level—against the impacts of climate change. There is no longer any doubt on the fundamentals of this; merely bandwidth-consuming arguments over who, what and how.

Climate-responsible living should be a default presence in the cultural discourse. Working in that 'climate pause', a moment to consider climate responsibility when drafting a story, should be normalised as a collective effort to improve the human situation.

Rather like a social courtesy, in the same way most of us cover our mouths when we cough, or wait our turn in line, or the hesitation when we bin trash we could be recycling. **Climate should be part of this presence of mind in the public. And it's up to us journalists to make it so.**

"Climate change is a slow-moving crisis. It can often seem distant from people's everyday lives."

Helje Solberg, News Director
at Norwegian NRK.
EBU News Report 2023



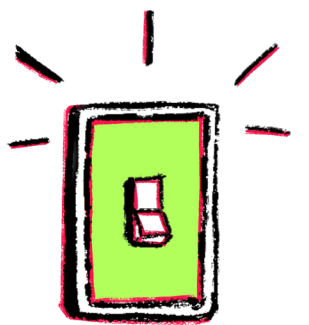
'Planetary inclusion'

Creative absorption of climate into wider media can help it become a part in the daily conversation, as valid and tangible a consideration as the practicalities of travel, clothing choices or recipe ideas. Climate is as important as any of the moral and ethical scruples of relationships and politics. And sustainability should be represented with the same passion as any diversity initiative—call it 'planetary inclusion'.

Many newsrooms still treat climate as an outlier in the conversation. Instead of being integrated, it is shut away in its own space: the new kid at school who sits alone on a gloomy table for one. There could be many reasons for this exclusion: the common ground that will bring them into conversation is hard to find. The risk they won't integrate smoothly may seem unacceptably big. Perhaps they will upset the mix, or bring the mood down. Or just maybe they will be your new best friend with much to offer.

We know this won't happen with the flick of a switch. Climate needs our help to become part of the wider culture. To be brought out of isolation and included, represented, referenced, educated on and considered—however subtly—as a part of every conversation.

And the good news: with a story as universally relevant as climate change comes an enormous opportunity for the many creative ways that story can be told.

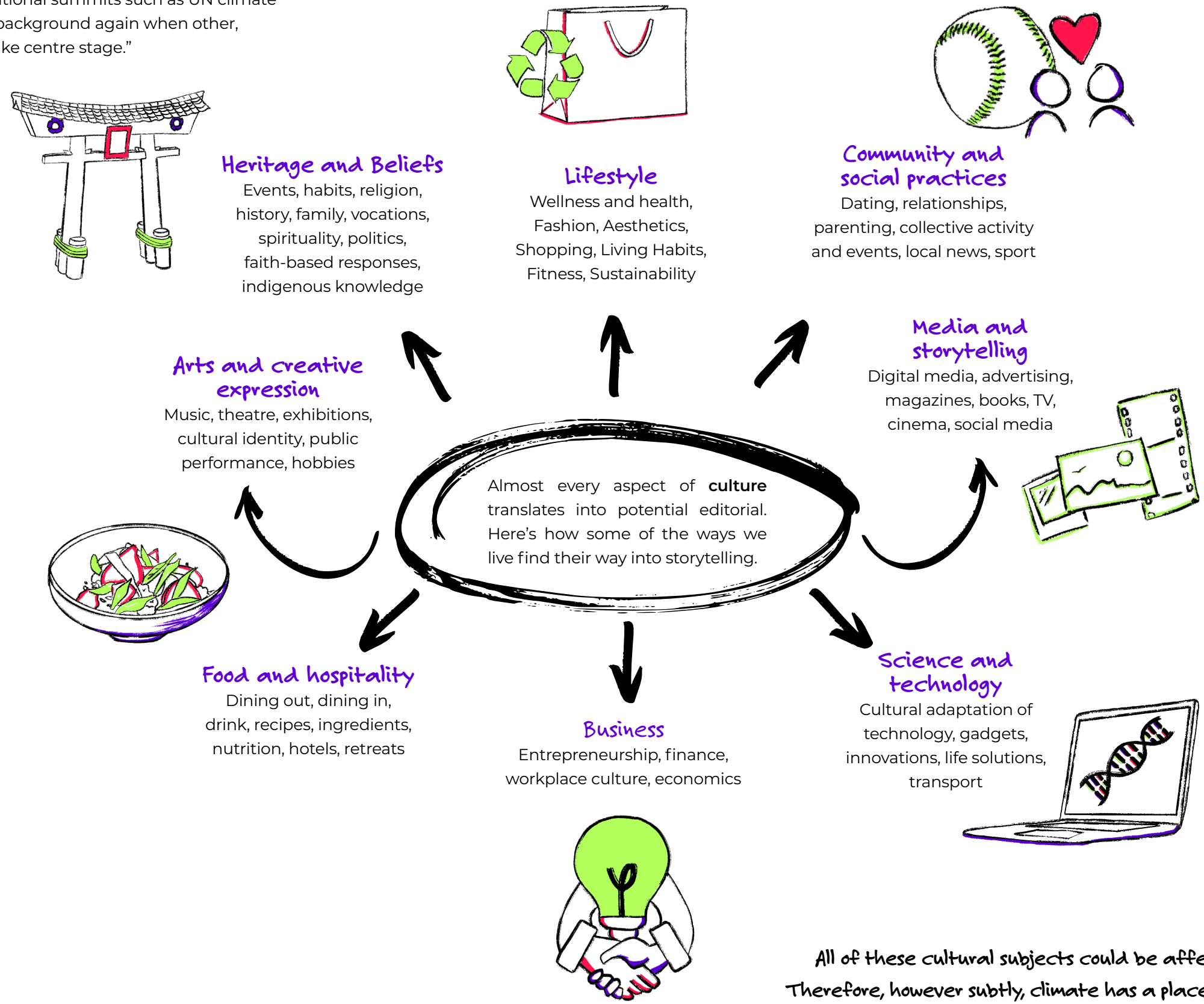


CULTURAL VALUES

EDITORIAL SUBJECTS

“Climate change as a topic seems to be like music in a shopping mall: It’s always in the background, pretty much everyone is aware of it, but you only pay attention when it is interrupted by an announcement. For newsrooms, these ‘announcements’ are either natural disasters, extreme weather events, or international summits such as UN climate conferences... just to fade into the background again when other, seemingly more pressing, issues take centre stage.”

EBU News Report 2023



All of these cultural subjects could be affected by climate, however subtly. Therefore, however subtly, climate has a place in all of these cultural subjects.

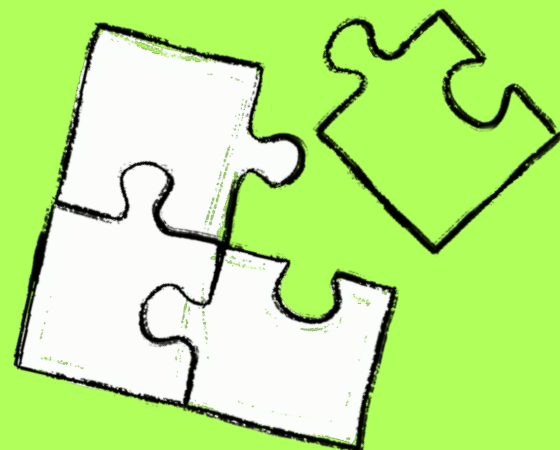
TYPES OF CULTURE-LED CLIMATE JOURNALISM

"When tracking coverage, we settled on five themes: political, economic, scientific, ecological, meteorological, and then cultural. And it's the cultural that we see as a trend."

Max Boykoff - University of Colorado

1. Climate as the angle

Climate needn't be avoided as the principal hook: it is all in the framing. For instance, using immersive storytelling from a credible local voice that interacts with the local community on real-life impacts and solutions is immediately more resonant than objective, extractive coverage of a climate event. Focusing on local impacts, rather than high-altitude global issues is a critical piece of the puzzle when it comes to engaging audiences. Resisting doom reporting to tell solutions-focused, actionable local stories with recognisable impacts can be a strong antidote to less impactful climate reporting.



Case Study: 5 surprising ingredients of flood water

This story is about a climate impact—but approached differently. Instead of simply a warning, or damage report, it digs into the actual constituents of flood water in a listicle format that the curious might click ("Why *surprising*?") and those affected may take useful information from.

The information that floodwater contains debris and rainwater, but also spilled chemicals and pathogens—and may restrict access to the medicine needed to treat them—may have implications for how local communities interact with flood waters after an event. Implicitly, the story also allows opportunities to deliver messaging about the causes and frequency of climate-related flood events, as well as offering embedded solutions that are easily actioned, memorable and relatable, fostering preparedness amongst communities.

- ✗ Making the story solely focussed on news of flood occurrence and impact
- ✓ Finding an angle which allows for practical, useful information
- ✓ Using a curiosity format such as a list or carousel, with a catchy headline
- ✓ Adding actionable solutions with local resonance, information and footage

Should novelists be changing the narrative on climate change? Big names weigh in	Coping in a heatwave: 3 ways to cool off (and 1 way not to)	Building back better: how this community reconnected after disaster
Headline examples:		
What your 'go-bag' says about you	Your take on climate change is a new social flashpoint. Here's how to navigate it	

2. Climate as second-degree news



Not using climate as a direct hook widens the funnel for audiences to get engaged on climate: established interests, whether tech, lifestyle, urban living or travel, engender audience loyalty as they are immediately relatable and relevant to people's cultural interests. But they are also great opportunities to drive awareness of climate issues as a secondary element using complementary, well-packaged facts that are memorable and shareable.

Case Study: How do drone shows work? (Science and Technology)

This technology story that taps into the remarkable phenomenon of the drone show would be as at home in a photography magazine as a weekend tech supplement. Ostensibly it is a dive behind the scenes of a cool cultural event with implications for the future of festivals—but it is also a great opportunity to dig into why drone shows are a sustainable alternative for fireworks, and why fireworks are bad for the environment. Pick a salient fact for impact—such as the fact that airborne particulates harmful to humans can increase up to 600% at ground level during a large fireworks display—that will stay with the reader and inform their later behaviour.

- ✗ Making the story solely focussed on the environmental impact of fireworks
- ✗ Using a negative frame and working positives or solutions in later
- ✓ Using a clicky technology story as a vector to inform and evolve attitudes
- ✓ Using a positive frame in an attractive subject and including impactful facts

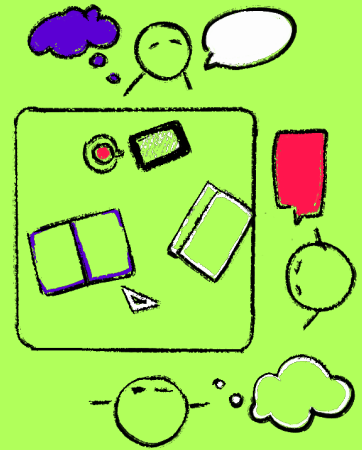
Headline examples:

Why reuse is the new cool	5 traditions that need to go—and why
The home electronics that are costing you money	Meet the architect making 'Swiss-army buildings'

3. Climate as a consideration

Sometimes the omission of climate-negative content is as powerful as the inclusion of climate-positive content. Creating newsroom policies around factoring climate responsibility into editorial decision making, or having style guides that prohibit, for instance, imagery that features plastic cutlery or cups or high-polluting vehicles; namechecks clothing brands with unsustainable environmental practices; or recommends long-haul travel destinations inaccessible without high-carbon transport.

This kind of media-led aspiration building is a powerful tool for shaping attitudes amongst audiences, and the industries that rely on their buy-in. This is a much more subtle approach—but it is the bedrock upon which climate-friendly aspiration can be built, and behaviour change can begin.



Case Study: Seven winter wetsuits for responsible surfers (Lifestyle)

This story makes a point of excluding neoprene wetsuits—which are produced using unsustainable manufacturing methods and are harmful to marine ecosystems—in an otherwise conventional testing scenario of the latest gear for a particular hobby. This is mentioned to subtly educate the reader and enhance the impression that sustainability needn't come with sacrifice, and to indicate what to look for in a wetsuit, or any product. By normalising such a policy, the newsroom denies valuable coverage to environmentally poor products. If enough outlets and retailers did this, the manufacturers would be forced to change their methods—a statement-led approach which would have wider implications for consumer culture.

Headline examples:

7 ideas to celebrate Halloween (excludes fireworks and plastics)	5 hottest new hatchbacks (excludes non-electric vehicles)
Make up trends for Spring 25 (excludes products using petroleum or microbeads)	

Inspiring

Aspirational, original content
that inspires climate-
conscious living

Shareable

Social-first content that delivers
information fast and is amplified easily

IMERCS YOUR STORY

Creating storytelling for impactful climate content,
climateXchange created the IMERCS story formula. To increase
the impact of your stories, no matter the platform, make them:

Memorable

Stories that linger—and create habit
and measurable impact

Credible

Stories responsibly told, without
agenda, from the best sources available

Empowering

The 'why' behind the solutions needed to
make a positive change

Relatable

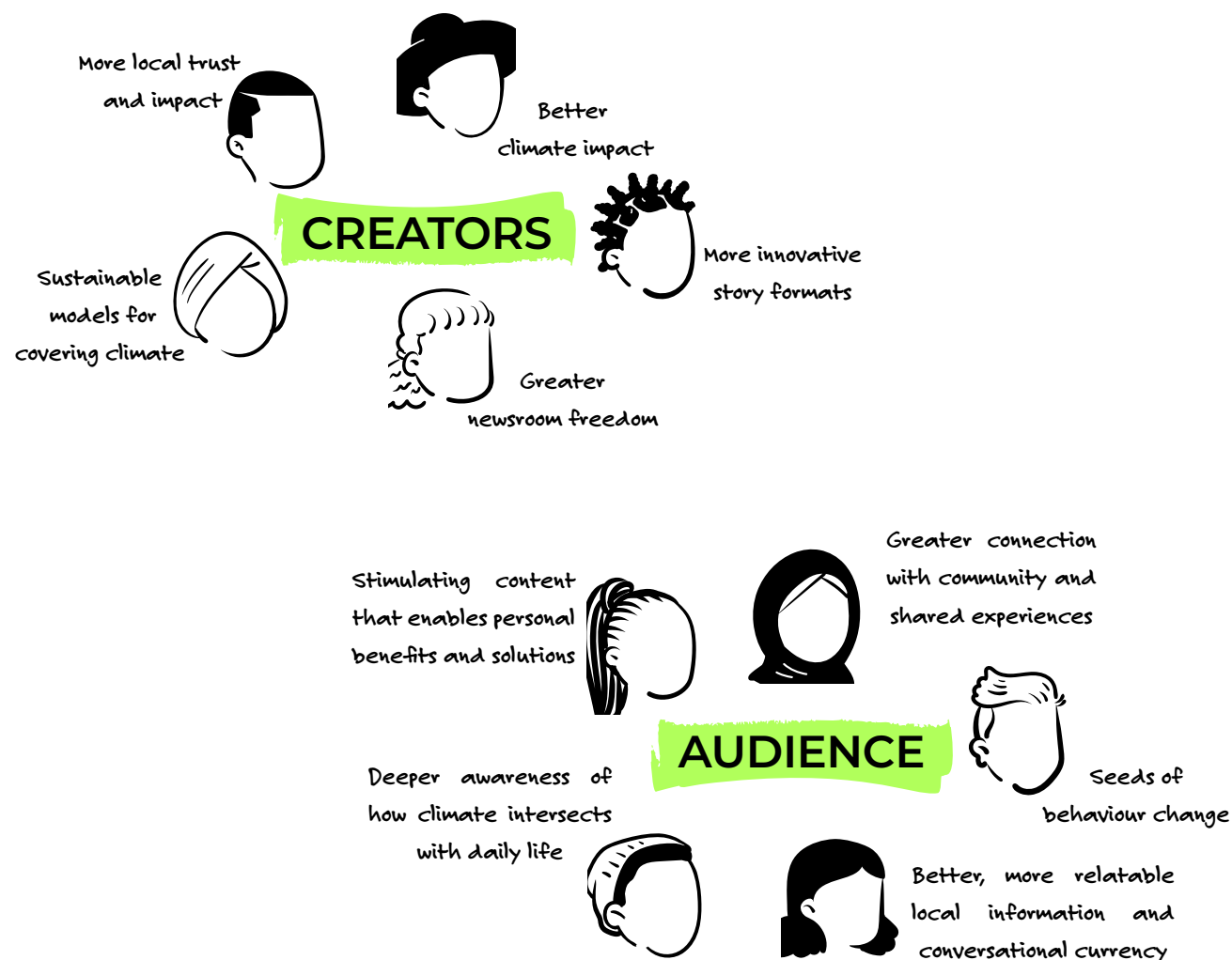
Vivid, tangible outcomes with
everyday applications



WHY PUBLISH CULTURE-LED CLIMATE STORIES?

It's easier just to stick with the status quo; we get it. But we also know regular climate content isn't achieving the impact it needs to, and that things need to change. And there are benefits to both creator and audience. Here's a few:

HERE ARE THE BENEFITS:



How Behaviour Change Begins

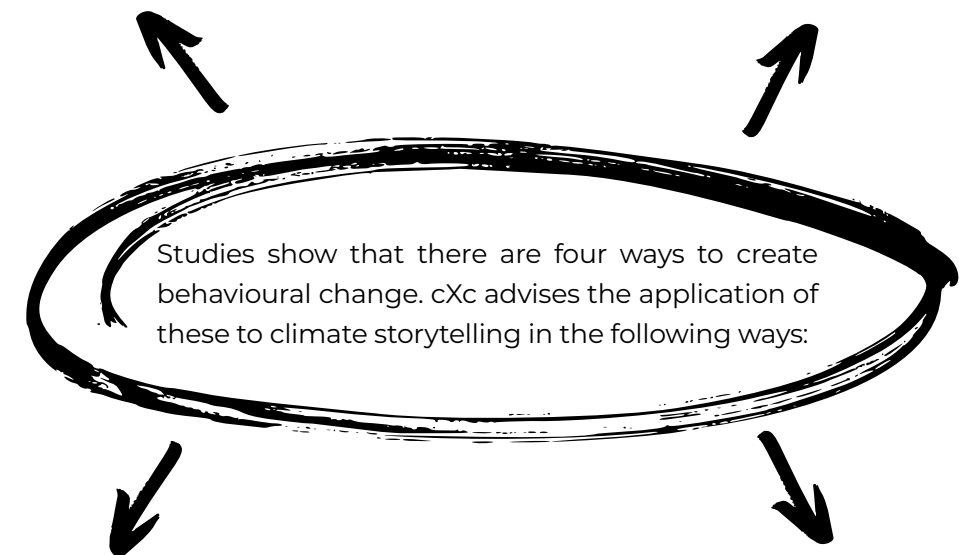
Climate reporting based in doom or dread doesn't create a positive long-term lasting impact. Academic studies show that writing stories that appeal to people's intrinsic values creates change.

For climate impact, those that sit under benevolence — help, honesty, not being resentful, loyalty, forgiving, friendship, and responsibility—create a feeling of belonging and empowerment to act favourably for the planet.



Dispelling the taboos of climate change by providing **culture-based solutions** that reframe the conversation.

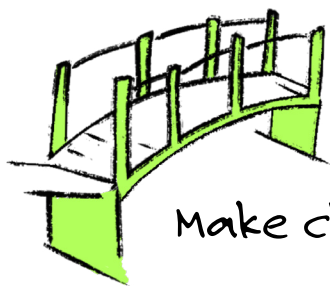
Demonstrating **integrity, trust and honour** through credible and balanced climate news products.



Sharing stories from ancestry, tales, myths, legends about **human's relationship with the Earth and each other.**

Providing regenerative moral and ethical aspects of **climate conscious living** that show there's a different way to live—and it's an appealing one.

9 TIPS FOR CREATING CLIMATE CULTURE STORYTELLING

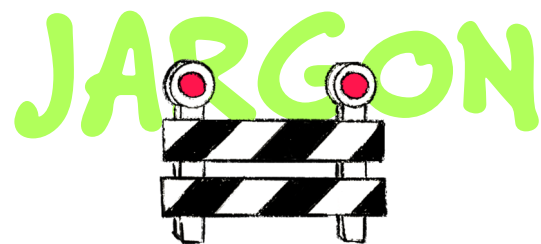


Make climate personally relevant.

Relatability is one of the key problems with current climate output: it's too big, too overwhelming, and happening somewhere far away. By engaging people not just where they are, but where their interests and enthusiasms lie—their culture and its many applications—the relatability gap can be bridged. It helps people understand why a story matters to them and their communities.

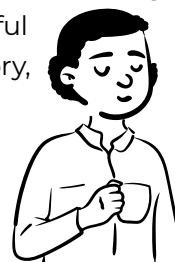
Use accessible language.

Terminology is excluding and doesn't cross borders. Often the people who take most from climate news are those with a limited understanding of the science. Use clear frames of reference, familiar cultural concepts and, if science is needed, use only the most relevant points. Take time to be clear.



Avoid alarmism.

Scaring people can work when a threat is immediate. Otherwise, it can be a pathway to disengagement. Instead of using sensationalist headlines, use skillful framing to attract people to a story, and offer benefits to them and their way of living.



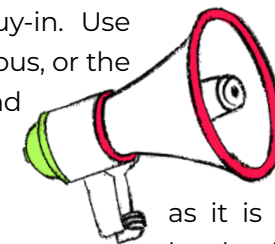
Make climate-positive behaviours sexy.

Ambition begins with aspiration. And consumer culture is fed by both. Create the demand for climate responsible behaviours at a cultural level and inspire consumer habits by showing audiences the personal benefits—as well as telling them why. Individual-level action isn't meaningless: the world's biggest companies rely on consumer habits for their existence, and these start small. Create the demand for change, and change will happen. The media has the power to inspire it.



Don't stop entertainment. Be entertainment.

Leverage interest niches. Use humour. Frame stories that are entertaining and accessible, and have a low threshold for buy-in. Use storytelling that appeals to the curious, or the bored, whilst retaining credibility and usefulness. Be diverting and rewarding: don't annoy with interruptive, sensationalist content. You have far more to gain from spending those extra moments crafting a story than falling back on old tropes.



Use social.

Social media drives culture — and has also grown to be the primary source of news information. In a landscape where misinformation is increasing, newsrooms have the opportunity to be the voice of trust on platforms attracting bigger and bigger audiences, and grow a community of hyper-engaged users. Messaging platforms such as WhatsApp are also becoming critical for community building.



Be real.

Carefully chosen, human-driven imagery is critical for credibility and cultural resonance, with climate content of all kinds often relying on a suite of clichéd imagery. Exercise care when selecting pictures, ensure you use real people in real situations, and ensure you go the extra mile for impact—it is this that often makes the difference between a story being read, and being skipped.



Go (hyper) local.

Local news has the potential to drive the most actionable change as it is unambiguous about who it affects: local voices are relatable, are deeply rooted in culture and speak to specific issues and experiences that inspire trust and recognition in audiences. Wherever possible use local journalists and local voices to anchor your stories.

Be subtle.

Climate is a serious subject, but engaging users with information relating to it can take many forms. Often small amounts of information packaged skilfully within other stories can be more memorable than long investigative pieces. And positive, affirmative pieces can be more effective than chiding, negative exposes. Education by osmosis can be a highly effective way to influence behaviour.



About us



Syli is a CIC non-profit organisation, founded in London by Tom Trewinnard and Fergus Bell. Syli supports mission-driven journalism in service of informed audiences around the world by fostering new and forward-looking concepts, identifying sustainable financial models for journalism, and creating a healthier, more sustainable media ecosystem. More information can be found [here](#).



climateXchange (cXc) is Syli's groundbreaking new global initiative aimed at increasing the impact, reach and sustainability of climate journalism. cXc are reframing the climate conversation as a culture-first narrative is not just a media challenge, it's an opportunity. It's a chance to redefine how we, as a society, relate to the environment and world around us.

cXc stands on *three pillars* of complementary activities:

contentXchange

Upskilling and capacity building that offers co-creation of culture-first climate content and best practice in culture-first climate narrative story kits including our IMERCS editorial methodology.

regionalXchange

Facilitation of cross-regional thought leadership and storytelling. Where we are conduits in cross-regional community meet-ups and networks, host think tanks, and support local market training sharing between regions.

knowledgeXchange

Impact, research and business development. Home of kXc for sustainable business models. Access to Theory of Change Consultancy, and assistance in securing financial support for business development, ideas and story features.