Communicating about…

Climate Change

Sean Kelly

March 25

Thoughts on Issue Perception

- People are more likely to do things if they see other people doing them, even if it counters what they know is logically correct.

- People are easily persuaded by other people whom they like or respect.

- When it comes to problems, the bigger the numbers, the less people often care.

- People are hardwired to understand our world through emotions and stories, not facts.

- Research shows that guilt or shame is not a good long-term strategy to promote change. It's better to find common ground and start a conversation that could inspire change and highlight opportunity.

- Trust in the info and its source is an important determinant of perception. Perceptions must be resolved before audiences can deal with facts.

Canadian Views on Climate Change

25% Alarmed

45% Passive Concerned

45% agree climate change is a real problem but aren't engaged yet. As a result, public support is often unreliable.

- Three-quarters of Canadians are now making the connection between climate change and extreme weather.

- Over 80% are highly supportive of a shift to cleaner energy.

- Most supporters fall into a 'moveable middle.' Almost half of Canadians are worried about climate change but don't substantially understand the issue or what needs to be done about it.

Canadian Perceptions on Responsibility

- IPSOS Polling
- Canadian perceptions compared to global surveys

The public perceive combatting climate change as a shared responsibility

The public believes that governments, businesses and individuals need to play their part, although they place more emphasis on business and government than individuals

Canada: Overall

68% feel that individuals have a responsibility

Vs Global Country avg 74%

76% feel that businesses have a responsibility

Vs Global Country avg 76%

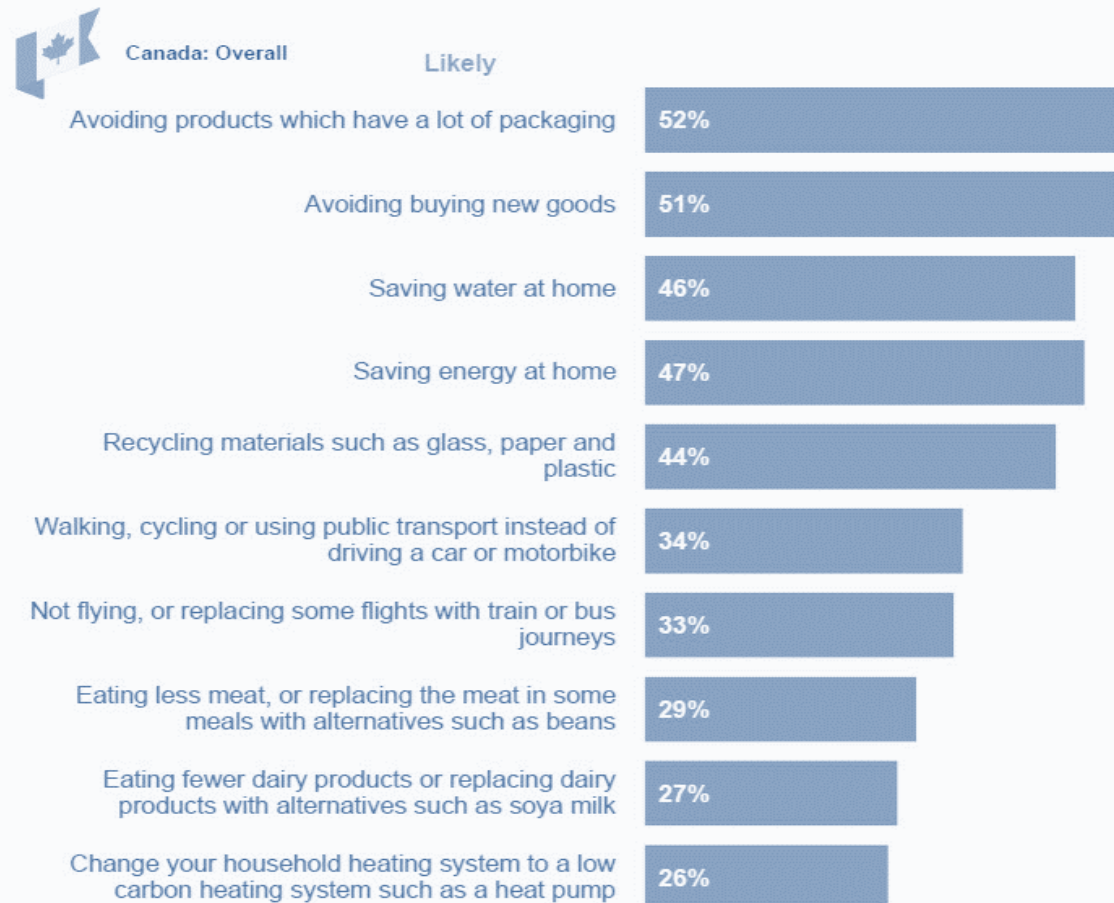76% feel that government has a responsibility

Vs Global Country avg 77%

Canadians and Behaviour Changes

- IPSOS Polling
- Canadian perceptions compared to global surveys

Canadians are least likely to change behaviours which would have the most impact.

Q. Thinking about things you might do in order to limit your own contribution to climate change, how likely or unlikely would you be to make the following changes within the next year?

Canada: Overall — Likely

Behaviour	Likely
Avoiding products which have a lot of packaging	52%
Avoiding buying new goods	51%
Saving water at home	46%
Saving energy at home	47%
Recycling materials such as glass, paper and plastic	44%
Walking, cycling or using public transport instead of driving a car or motorbike	34%
Not flying, or replacing some flights with train or bus journeys	33%
Eating less meat, or replacing the meat in some meals with alternatives such as beans	29%
Eating fewer dairy products or replacing dairy products with alternatives such as soya milk	27%
Change your household heating system to a low carbon heating system such as a heat pump	26%

Challenges in Climate Comms

- A large body of research-based evidence suggests that climate change struggles to overcome human psychological biases against threats that appear to be distant in time and place.

- People often form (and reinforce) opinions based not on the science, but through social interactions with peers, emotive stories, values, etc.

- Harm from climate change engages our 'moral' brain, and many look for 'enemies'. But simplistically, climate change often lacks clear opponents – we all contribute to this problem and all stand to suffer the impacts.

Challenges in Climate Comms

- A large body of research-based evidence suggests that climate change struggles to overcome human psychological biases against threats that appear to be distant in time and place.

- People often form (and reinforce) opinions based not on the science, but through social interactions with peers, emotive stories, values, etc.

- Harm from climate change engages our 'moral' brain, and many look for 'enemies'. But simplistically, climate change often lacks clear opponents – we all contribute to this problem and all stand to suffer the impacts.

Challenges in Climate Comms

- A large body of research-based evidence suggests that climate change struggles to overcome human psychological biases against threats that appear to be distant in time and place.

- People often form (and reinforce) opinions based not on the science, but through social interactions with peers, emotive stories, values, etc.

- Harm from climate change engages our 'moral' brain, and many look for 'enemies'. But simplistically, climate change often lacks clear opponents – we all contribute to this problem and all stand to suffer the impacts.

Challenges in Climate Comms

- The scope of the problem is complicated and overwhelming, and we have to deal with the 'what on earth can my small contributions really do to help' response.

- Stats may be meaningless to many (what does 1 Gwh of power actually mean?). Also, low levels of scientific literacy can diminish understanding of the issues.

- Fear of loss is powerful: loss of jobs, lifestyle, convenience, money, etc.

- If you are in a community facing discrimination, economic barriers, obstacles to political power today… worrying about the future can almost feel like a luxury.

Challenges in Climate Comms

- The scope of the problem is complicated and overwhelming, and we have to deal with the 'what on earth can my small contributions really do to help' response.

- Stats may be meaningless to many (what does 1 Gwh of power actually mean?). Also, low levels of scientific literacy can diminish understanding of the issues.

- Fear of loss is powerful: loss of jobs, lifestyle, convenience, money, etc.

- If you are in a community facing discrimination, economic barriers, obstacles to political power today… worrying about the future can almost feel like a luxury.

Challenges in Climate Comms

- The scope of the problem is complicated and overwhelming, and we have to deal with the 'what on earth can my small contributions really do to help' response.

- Stats may be meaningless to many (what does 1 Gwh of power actually mean?). Also, low levels of scientific literacy can diminish understanding of the issues.

- Fear of loss is powerful: loss of jobs, lifestyle, convenience, money, etc.

- If you are in a community facing discrimination, economic barriers, obstacles to political power today… worrying about the future can almost feel like a luxury.

Challenges in Climate Comms

- The scope of the problem is complicated and overwhelming, and we have to deal with the 'what on earth can my small contributions really do to help' response.

- Stats may be meaningless to many (what does 1 Gwh of power actually mean?). Also, low levels of scientific literacy can diminish understanding of the issues.

- Fear of loss is powerful: loss of jobs, lifestyle, convenience, money, etc.

- If you are in a community facing discrimination, economic barriers, obstacles to political power today… worrying about the future can almost feel like a luxury.

Equity dimensions of climate change

- **Vulnerable locations -** Historically marginalized communities are also disproportionately located in areas that are physically vulnerable to climate hazards, such as storms and flooding.

- **Health -** In North America, many communities of colour are more likely to experience pre-existing health conditions and poor living conditions than their white counterparts.

- **Power imbalance -** A lack of power and representation in political and economic systems makes it difficult for these communities to get the resources build climate resilience, to prepare and respond to extreme events that occur due to climate change.

Comms Solutions

- With an issue as large and far-reaching as climate change, we should emphasize that change is happening in now – and that we, can create concrete solutions.

- We need to recognize moments of proximity that we can take action on. Exploiting bad news opportunities and weather events also create moments of heightened awareness. (Protecting your property – and the people you care about – could be an entry point for conversation.)

- Story-telling about the issue and the solutions is important – humans respond to good stories and relatable profiles.

- Create a narrative of positive change, in which our action on climate change does not just protect what is already here (the status quo) but also opens opportunity for a better society.

Comms Solutions

- With an issue as large and far-reaching as climate change, we should emphasize that change is happening in now – and that we, can create concrete solutions.

- We need to recognize moments of proximity that we can take action on. Exploiting bad news opportunities and weather events also create moments of heightened awareness. (Protecting your property – and the people you care about – could be an entry point for conversation.)

- Story-telling about the issue and the solutions is important – humans respond to good stories and relatable profiles.

- Create a narrative of positive change, in which our action on climate change does not just protect what is already here (the status quo) but also opens opportunity for a better society.

Comms Solutions

- With an issue as large and far-reaching as climate change, we should emphasize that change is happening in now – and that we, can create concrete solutions.

- We need to recognize moments of proximity that we can take action on. Exploiting bad news opportunities and weather events also create moments of heightened awareness. (Protecting your property – and the people you care about – could be an entry point for conversation.)

- Story-telling about the issue and the solutions is important – humans respond to good stories and relatable profiles.

  Create a narrative of positive change, in which our action on climate change does not just protect what is already here (the status quo) but also opens opportunity for a better society.

Framing Theory

- Framing Theory is about how individuals, groups, and societies organize, perceive, and communicate about the reality around us.

- Framing is the collection of anecdotes, stereotypes, and stories that individuals rely on to understand and respond to events or issues.

- People build a series of mental "filters" through biological, cultural, religious, economic influences. They then use these filters to make sense of the world. The choices they then make are influenced by their frames.

- The framing is constructed through education, family, culture, mass media, social media, political or social movements, political leaders, religion, and other actors and organizations.

Comms Solutions

- Relate solutions to sources of happiness, social connections, social identity, and family. Money is sometimes a proxy for something else – progress, comfort, security, etc.

- Build trust. Recognize that solutions aren't always easy. Recognize people's feelings of anxiety. Climate change is a far more complicated topic than most other issues.

- Talk about 'co-benefits' of clean energy: green jobs, less flooding, cleaner air, regional pride.

- Who the communicator is can be as important as the message.

Comms Solutions

- Relate solutions to sources of happiness, social connections, social identity, and family. Money is sometimes a proxy for something else – progress, comfort, security, etc.

- Build trust. Recognize that solutions aren't always easy. Recognize people's feelings of anxiety. Climate change is a far more complicated topic than most other issues.

- Talk about 'co-benefits' of clean energy: green jobs, less flooding, cleaner air, regional pride.

- Who the communicator is can be as important as the message.

Comms Solutions

- Relate solutions to sources of happiness, social connections, social identity, and family. Money is sometimes a proxy for something else – progress, comfort, security, etc.

- Build trust. Recognize that solutions aren't always easy. Recognize people's feelings of anxiety. Climate change is a far more complicated topic than most other issues.

- Talk about 'co-benefits' of clean energy: green jobs, less flooding, cleaner air, regional pride.

- Who the communicator is can be as important as the message.

Comms Solutions

- Relate solutions to sources of happiness, social connections, social identity, and family. Money is sometimes a proxy for something else – progress, comfort, security, etc.

- Build trust. Recognize that solutions aren't always easy. Recognize people's feelings of anxiety. Climate change is a far more complicated topic than most other issues.

- Talk about 'co-benefits' of clean energy: green jobs, less flooding, cleaner air, regional pride.

- Who the communicator is can be as important as the message.

Make Solutions Local

- We need to place negative info in a narrative arc that leads to a positive resolution. Talk about solutions that are "practical, viable, accessible and attractive."

- We don't live in issues or abstract concepts – we live in communities. Belonging is a fundamental and universal human need, and as a result, we often choose to conform to our group. That's why our friends and family have far more influence on our view than do experts.

- Before you talk about clean energy, if you can find out more about your audience – what are their values, beliefs, hopes, challenges? What are the obstacles they deal with? What makes them proud? These are the insights that will help your communications with them.

Thank you for talking about *talking about* climate change

Sean@SeanKellyConsulting.ca