Climate Images that Click

Engaging climate images on Facebook and Instagram

Contents

SFU MORRIS J. WOSK
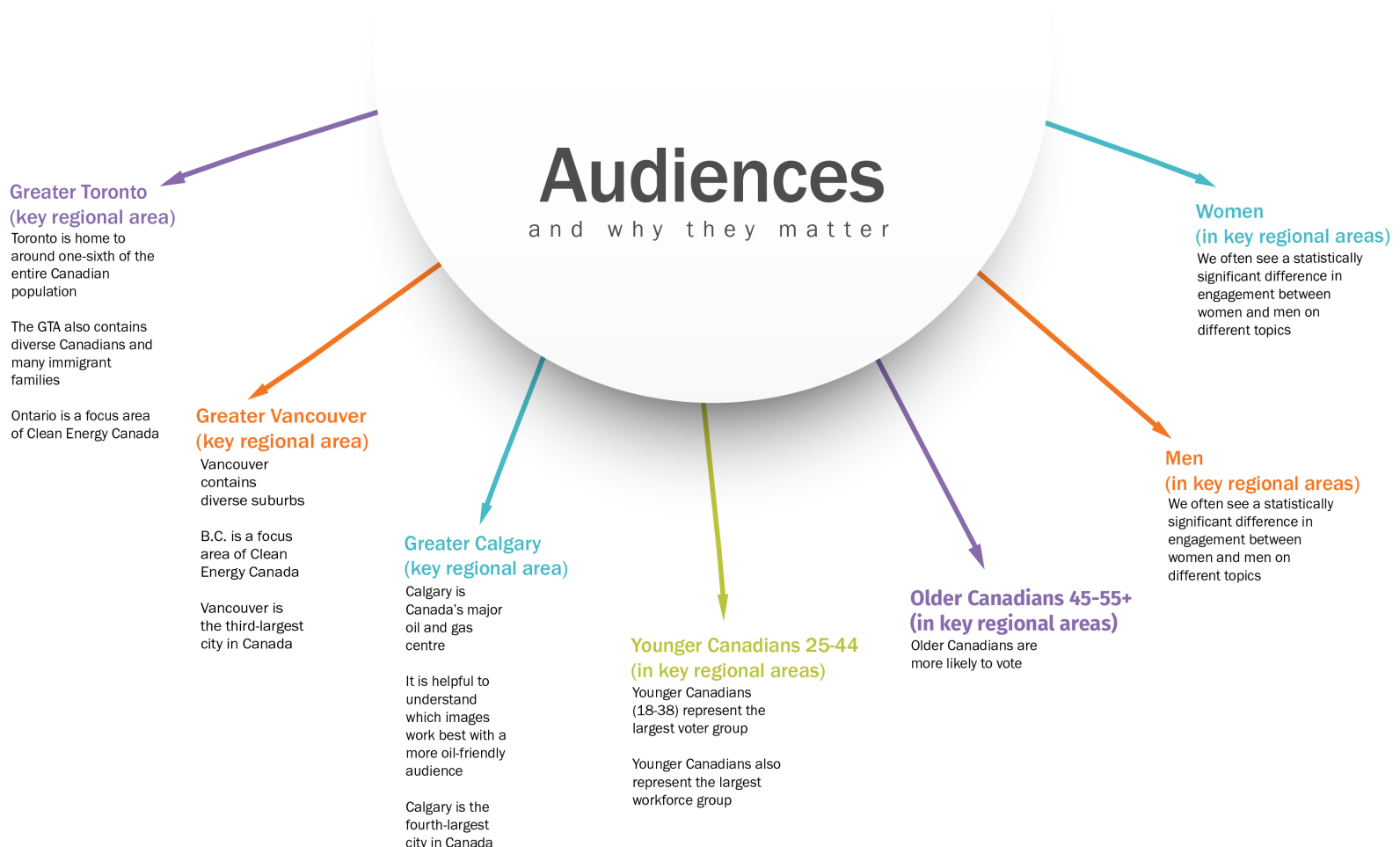CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE

The Power of a Photo

Images are a persuasive and powerful way to communicate, and creating a successful energy narrative will benefit from knowing what imagery best resonates. The goal of this project was to determine what kinds of images are most effective at driving engagement on social media among different Canadian demographics when communicating the energy transition.

We tested in three areas—electric vehicles, the energy transition, and climate change—to determine what images were the most engaging and therefore the most cost-efficient for social media advertising. The tests were conducted in early 2020.

Who We Tested

Audiences
and why they matter

Greater Toronto (key regional area)
Toronto is home to around one-sixth of the entire Canadian population

The GTA also contains diverse Canadians and many immigrant families

Ontario is a focus area of Clean Energy Canada

Greater Vancouver (key regional area)
Vancouver contains diverse suburbs

B.C. is a focus area of Clean Energy Canada

Vancouver is the third-largest city in Canada

Greater Calgary (key regional area)
Calgary is Canada's major oil and gas centre

It is helpful to understand which images work best with a more oil-friendly audience

Calgary is the fourth-largest city in Canada

Younger Canadians 25-44 (in key regional areas)
Younger Canadians (18-38) represent the largest voter group

Younger Canadians also represent the largest workforce group

Older Canadians 45-55+ (in key regional areas)
Older Canadians are more likely to vote

Men (in key regional areas)
We often see a statistically significant difference in engagement between women and men on different topics

Women (in key regional areas)
We often see a statistically significant difference in engagement between women and men on different topics

Segmentation and Spending

Location	Age/Gender
Toronto	25-44, M
Vancouver	25-44, M
Calgary	25-44, M
Toronto	45+, M
Vancouver	45+, M
Calgary	45+, M
Toronto	25-44, F
Vancouver	25-44, F
Calgary	25-44, F
Toronto	45+, F
Vancouver	45+, F
Calgary	45+, F

SPENDING ON ADS

The budget for each ad and segment was the same to ensure an equal comparison.

Duration for each test: 4 days
Test power: 80%+ (how often Facebook expects the same outcome would be repeated)

Total spend on each test category (electric vehicles, the energy transition, and climate change): $1,728

Total overall spend: $5,184

Test 1: Electric Cars

The Question:

Do photos that include a person perform better than a photo of just an EV?

Image 1: EV without a person

Image 2: EV with a woman charging

TAKEAWAYS

● For most male audiences, the image of a woman charging an EV performed better than the image of just an EV 5 out of 6 times.

● For most female audiences, the image of a woman charging an EV performed better than the image of just an EV 3 out of 4 times. (There was no winning ad for older and younger women in Calgary.)

● The image of an just an EV performed better with older men in Vancouver, as well as older women in Toronto.

● The image of a woman charging an EV performed better across audiences than the image of just an EV 9 out of 12 times. It's common belief that adding a human element improves engagement. This test corroborates that assumption.

● While it's clear that the photo with a woman performs better overall, and definitely among younger Canadians, it is less clear that a photo with a human element when tested among older Canadians may have returned different results had the person in the photo represesnted their demographic.

THE LESSON:

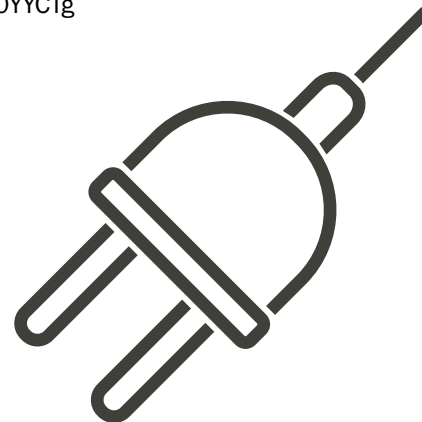**When communicating about EVs, include a person in your image to receive optimal engagement.**

POST COPY:

71% of Canadians see electric cars becoming the majority of vehicles on the road within 15 years.

Going electric cuts fuel and maintenance costs and curbs your carbon footprint. Are you ready to kick gas? http://bit.ly/3OYYCTg

Results (A lower number is better.)

Younger men, Toronto
1.   EV with woman .16
2.   Just EV .19

Test power: 93%

Average cost per engagement: $0.17

Younger women, Toronto
1.   EV w woman .22
2.   EV .25

Test Power: 87%

Average cost per engagement: .23

Younger men, Vancouver
1.   EV w woman .27
2.   EV .42

Test power: 95%

Average cost per engagement: .32

Younger women, Vancouver
1.   EV w woman .39
2.   EV .50

Test power: 90%

Average cost per engagement: .44

Younger men, Calgary
1.   EV w woman .27
2.   EV .33

Test power: 91%

Average cost per engagement: .29

Younger women, Calgary
1. EV .48
2. EV w woman .51

No winning ad determined.

Average cost per engagement: .49

Older men, Toronto
1.   EV w woman .17
2.   EV .19

Test power: 89%

Average cost per engagement: .18

Older women, Toronto
1.   EV .24
2.   EV w woman .25

Test power: 66%

Average cost per engagement: .25

Older men, Vancouver
1.   EV .23
2.   EV w woman .26

Test power: 84%

Average cost per engagement: .24

Older women, Vancouver
1.   EV w woman .33
2.   EV .45

Test power: 95%

Average cost per engagement: .38

Older men, Calgary
1.   EV w woman .19
2.   EV .21

Test power: 86%

Average cost per engagement: .20

Older women, Calgary
EV w woman .36
EV .37

No winning ad determined.

Average cost per engagement: .36

Test 2: The Energy Transition

The Question:

What type of energy transition image receives the most engagement: oil, wind, or solar?

Image 1: Oil

Image 2: Wind

TAKEAWAYS

● The wind image was the big winner, performing best 11 out of 12 times.

● Solar consistently performed second-best, receiving the second-best engagement 9 out of 12 times.

● Oil consistently came in last place, receiving the lowest engagement among audience segments 10 out of 12 times.

● The success of the wind image may indicate that audiences prefer visually pleasing scenic landscape that tell a deeper story.

THE LESSON

When communicating ideas and news around the energy transition, images of wind energy may result in the highest audience engagement, and images related to oil may be the least engaging. In short, show them the clean energy future they want.

In terms of wind versus solar, it's unclear whether a preference for the former stems from an aesthetic preference for turbines or if wind photos simply tend to be more scenic.

Image 3: Solar

POST COPY:

72% of Canadians and 60% of Albertans want Alberta to transition its economy to be less reliant on oil.

"Global demand will change and Alberta will be left behind if the province is dependent on oil." http://bitly/2sJgV2g

Results (A lower number is better.)

Younger men, Toronto
1. Wind .16
2. Solar .17
3. Oil .20

Test power: 77%

Average cost per engagement: .18

Younger women, Toronto
1. Wind .19
2. Solar .24
3. Oil .29

Test power: 95%

Average cost per engagement: .23

Younger men, Vancouver
1. Solar .28
2. Wind .28
3. Oil .38

Test power: 58%

Average cost per engagement: .31

Younger women, Vancouver
1. Wind .33
2. Solar .47
3. Oil .51

Test power: 95%

Average cost per engagement: .42

Younger men, Calgary
1. Wind .21
2. Oil .23
3. Solar .25

Test power: 70%

Average cost per engagement: .23

Younger women, Calgary
1. Wind .29
2. Solar .31
3. Oil .60

Test power: 65%

Average cost per engagement: .36

Older men, Toronto
1. Wind .13
2. Oil .20
3. Solar .20

Test power: 95%

Average cost per engagement: .17

Older women, Toronto
1. Wind .13
2. Solar .20
3. Oil .24

Test power: 95%

Average cost per engagement: .18

Older men, Vancouver
1. Wind .17
2. Solar .22
3. Oil .22

Test power: 95%.

Average cost per engagement: .20

Older women, Vancouver
1. Wind .17
2. Solar .22
3. Oil .32

Test power: 95%

Average cost per engagement: .22

Older men, Calgary
1. Wind .16
2. Solar .18
3. Oil .20

Test power: 79%

Average cost per engagement: .18

Older women, Calgary
1. Wind .17
2. Solar .26
3. Oil .30

Test power: 95%

Average cost per engagement: .23

Test 3: Climate

Image 1: Pollution

The Question:

What type of climate image receives the most engagement: pollution, a wildfire, or wind power?

Image 2: Wildfire

TAKEAWAYS

● Wind power was a clear winner, coming first place for 9 of 12 audiences.

● The wildfire came in second place, appearing as the winning image in 3 of 12 audiences.

● Pollution consistently came in last place, with the lowest engagement among audience segments. It did not appear as the image with the most engagement in any audience.

● Among younger users, the wildfire images performed as well as the wind photos (each won three tests, all of them in Western Canada), while among older users, the wind power photo won universally. This may indicate a greater openness among young Canadians to engage with urgent and negative messaging and a preference among older Canadians to engage with solutions-oriented messaging.

Image 3: Wind power

THE LESSON

When talking about climate change, picturesque images of wind farms and other clean energy landscapes will likely engage the most Canadians, while using images of pollution will not resonate with most audiences.

Among a few location and age segments, wildfires do resonate, and this may be connected to regional concerns regarding wildfires.

POST COPY:

We can't rebuild the past, but we can build a resilient economy with secure jobs. When it comes time to restart our economy, let's invest in Canada's fast-growing clean energy sector—while slowing down climate change. https://bit.ly/34twNEr

Results (A lower number is better.)

Younger men, Toronto
1. Pollution .23
2. Wildfire .02
3. Wind .19

Test power: 52%

Average cost per engagement: .15

Younger men, Vancouver
1. Pollution .43
2. Wildfire .30
3. Wind .31

Test power: 53%

Average cost per engagement: 35

Younger men, Calgary
1. Pollution .35
2. Wildfire .30
3. Wind .35

Test power: 70%

Average cost per engagement: .33

Older men, Toronto
1. Pollution .21
2. Wildfire .20
3. Wind .15

Test power: 95%

Average cost per engagement: .19

Older men, Vancouver
1. Pollution .32
2. Wildfire .31
3. Wind .26

Test power: 84%

Average cost per engagement: .30

Older men, Calgary
1. Pollution .27
2. Wildfire .23
3. Wind .19

Test power: 94%

Average cost per engagement: .23

Younger women, Toronto
1. Pollution .31
2. Wildfire .23
3. Wind .19

Test power: 93%

Average cost per engagement: .24

Younger women, Vancouver
1. Pollution .48
2. Wildfire .36
3. Wind .32

Test power: 78%

Average cost per engagement: .38

Younger women, Calgary
1. Pollution .58
2. Wildfire .35
3. Wind .38

Test power: 70%

Average cost per engagement: .44

Older women, Toronto
1. Pollution .16
2. Wildfire .15
3. Wind .13

Test power: 90%

Average cost per engagement: .15

Older women, Vancouver
1. Pollution .26
2. Wildfire .24
3. Wind .17

Test power: 95%

Average cost per engagement: .22

Older women, Calgary
1. Pollution .58
2. Wildfire .35
3. Wind .38

Test power: 70%

Average cost per engagement: .44

Conclusion

Overall, like the pictures of pollution, images related to oil were the poorest performing. When looking at the broader categories that these images represent—clean energy (wind, solar), climate change (wildfires), and fossil fuels (oil, pollution)—the fossil-fuel-related images were the clear losers across the board. Images showing the impacts of climate change may work more effectively for younger Canadians, especially if the image shows a localized impact (such as wildfires in Western Canada).

Clean-energy-related images, meanwhile, led engagement results and were the clear winners, seeing the most successful outcomes for the money invested. Anyone posting or advertising on Facebook on topics such as climate change and the energy transition should keep this in mind. In short, positivity pays off.

CLEAN ENERGY CANADA

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