



FROM ALARM TO ACCELERATION

The case for hope in climate communications

A case study by Purpose and the
UN Department of Global Communications
November, 2024

**THE
FUTURE
THANKS
YOU**

THE FUTURE THANKS YOU

In August 2024, we launched The Future Thanks You. Two months later, over 30,000 people around the world shared their hopeful visions for 2045. These visions were varied, expansive, and deeply personal, allowing people to connect emotionally to the idea of a future powered by renewable energy.

Over 50% of those who responded on the website called for an urgent acceleration of the energy transition. Perhaps most notably, the campaign got 39% of people to report increased hope that global warming can be reduced and 17% to increase their support for tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030.



HOW DID WE DO IT?

WITHOUT MENTIONING THE CLIMATE. AT LEAST NOT AT FIRST. INSTEAD, WE LOOKED TO THE FUTURE.

This case study tells the story of how we're thinking differently regarding climate messaging that promotes hope among people based on behavioral science, an understanding of our audience, and a new creative approach, all supported by robust evidence.

If you are a leader of a climate program in philanthropy, the private sector, or academia, we hope that the tools, approaches, and empirical learnings we've included will inspire you to think differently and more creatively about how to connect with the people who might not engage with more traditional climate conversation, so that together we can move the needle towards hope and support for climate action.

If you are a leader who can influence climate policy, we hope that the stories of the thousands of people already hoping for a renewable-powered future will give you the incentive to act now on accelerating the transition to renewable energy - so that in the future, we can all say 'thank you'.

FOREWORD

UN communicators are looking to behavioral science to keep overwhelmed audiences engaged.

Intractable wars, the cost-of-living crisis, runaway climate change, and the dismal state of our world are now prompting [record numbers](#) of people around the world to say they regularly avoid the news.

Pessimism about the future—particularly about the climate crisis—is one reason people are switching off. But what if I told you we already have the solutions right here, under our noses? Would it make you stick around to find out more?

This is what our new campaign, [The Future Thanks You](#), hopes to do. Part of the UN's and Purpose's Verified for Climate initiative, the campaign's message is simple: we can act now on climate. And when we do, our future selves will thank us.

The Future Thanks You campaign seeks to use hope as a lever, rather than guilt or shame. It does so by making people feel more hopeful about the possibilities. When prompted to think positively about the future we heard people talk about pride, joy, community and creativity. Many were subsequently spurred to take further action. The UN has long been drawing on such insights across the board, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when conspiracies, [mis- and disinformation exploded](#), endangering lives and prolonging the emergency. The WHO called this the infodemic.

We knew we had to act. Together with the social impact agency Purpose, we created Verified, a communications model that leverages the power of behavioral science to tackle the [spread of misinformation and disinformation](#).

Studies show [such content](#) spreads wider and faster than facts – simply because it triggers our emotions and feels more exciting. Verified’s [Pause](#) campaign seeks to interrupt that emotional response by encouraging users to stop and breathe before sharing online.

This simple, effective, and easy action boosted what behavioral scientists call self-efficacy—people’s belief in their own capacity to help a group achieve a larger goal—which is a key factor in whether they choose to act.

Another key lesson was to meet audiences where they are, addressing their existing needs, interests, and beliefs with tailored messages appealing to specific social norms—the unwritten rules of a community that guide people’s behavior.

We reflected these insights in local campaigns. [In Brazil](#), we encouraged users to add a “vaccinated” sticker to their Tinder profiles, while a [campaign in South Africa](#) encouraged people to follow public health measures for their loved ones.

But science also tells us that centralized messaging only gets us so far. That’s why we recruit trusted voices – religious leaders, influencers, artists, issue area experts, and celebrities to help spread messages in ways that resonate with our audiences.

We’re now applying these valuable lessons to our climate communications, and more broadly [across the UN](#), to raise awareness of important issues and encourage the spread of important information.

ABOVE ALL, OUR EXPERIENCES WITH VERIFIED SHOW THAT EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS ABOUT SO MUCH MORE THAN THE MESSAGE ITSELF. JUST AS IMPORTANT IN THIS AGE OF OVERWHELM IS HOW WE COMMUNICATE. WITH THE RIGHT TOOLS, WE CAN WIN BACK AUDIENCES THAT MAY OTHERWISE TURN AWAY OR SWITCH OFF.

- MELISSA FLEMING

UN Under-Secretary-General
for Global Communications



THE FUTURE IS BRIGHTER

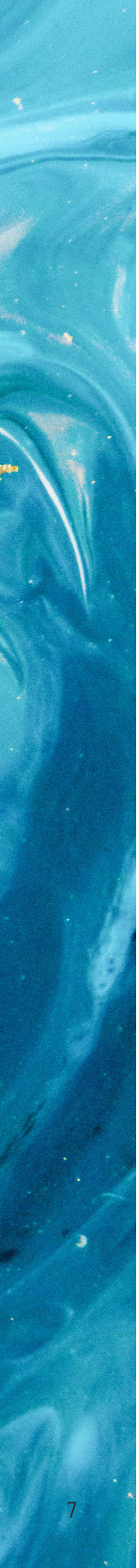
Communicating Climate



2025 is a significant year for climate action. Countries must submit new national climate action plans - which, collectively, will determine greenhouse gas emissions for years to come. To hit the targets of the Paris Agreement to stop global warming from exceeding 1.5 degrees, emissions need to peak no later than 2025.

Despite this urgent moment, climate messaging isn't reaching everyone it needs to. Rampant climate disinformation narratives contribute to doomism, delayism, distraction, and division.

[People who feel hopeful](#) about solving the climate crisis are most likely to support proactive policies like a transition to renewables.



But [doomism is becoming a bigger problem than denialism](#). Doomists are those who don't think anything can be done to solve the climate crisis. Pessimism can cause paralysis when what we need is action from leaders and the support of their constituents. We need to reach these people if we want to achieve mass support for climate action.

Building on [research](#) from Yale University and Potential Energy, we know that effective climate communication is built upon these key insights from behavioral science:

1 ENVISIONING A DESIRABLE FUTURE

By presenting a vision of thriving communities, a healthy planet, and improved quality of life, we can create a narrative that resonates broadly and inspires action.

2 FOCUSING ON HOPE AND PROGRESS

While acknowledging the gravity of the climate crisis, we emphasize positive outcomes and tangible solutions to inspire action rather than despair.

3 EMPHASIZING OUR LEGACY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Framing climate action as a gift to our children and grandchildren taps into a powerful motivator that transcends political boundaries.

4 CREATING EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE FUTURE

Encouraging people to connect emotionally with a positive future makes climate action feel personal and urgent.

5 BUILDING COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

Helping people understand that their individual actions, when combined with others, can lead to significant positive outcomes fosters a sense of shared capability and motivation to address climate change.



APPROACH IN ACTION

The Future Thanks You

IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE TO OVERCOME DANGEROUS NARRATIVES IF THE PEOPLE WE'RE TRYING TO REACH ARE SO DISENGAGED OR ALARMED THAT THEY ARE LIKELY TO JUST SCROLL PAST CLIMATE MESSAGING WHEN THEY SEE IT IN THEIR FEEDS OR BE OTHERWISE TRIGGERED TO EXPERIENCE FEELINGS OF DOOMISM.

We made a bold decision to help us reach those people: **to get people involved without mentioning climate or renewable energy upfront.**

Launching with seven videos filmed on seven different continents (and a partnership, with the Museum of the UN's Global We portals connecting five more countries), our ambition for The Future Thanks You is grounded in a globally representative vision for a better future. Our campaign invited people from diverse backgrounds to visit our website and envision, share, and emotionally connect with their hopes for 2045.

Our mission was clear: to reach these individuals with a message from the future—a message of gratitude for our actions today.

Our hypothesis was simple yet powerful: **If we can get people to feel more hopeful by reflecting on their future and then demonstrating that this future is only possible through renewable energy, they will become greater advocates for climate action.**



People only had to answer three simple questions on [The Future Thanks You](#) website to receive their personalized message:

PICTURE THIS.

YOU WAKE UP IN THE YEAR 2045.

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE! IT'S A BRIGHT, EXCITING FUTURE. A FUTURE FILLED WITH GROUNDBREAKING IDEAS, HAPPY PEOPLE, AND A THRIVING PLANET. LIFE IS GOOD.

ANYTHING YOU CAN IMAGINE IS POSSIBLE. SO, ANSWER THREE QUESTIONS TO TELL US WHAT YOU SEE...

- 1** You're at work.
What is your work day like?
- 2** What ideas and actions are you thankful for that have made the world a better place?
- 3** You're at home. You look out your window; what do you see?

By establishing an interaction based on a personal, emotionally resonant vision of a desirable future, we aimed to bypass many of the mental barriers associated with climate change discussions - while creating a context where the necessity of renewable energy and climate action is both self-evident and individually meaningful.



THE FUTURE RESPONDS

Campaign Results & Insights

The response to our campaign was remarkable, resonating with people across cultural and geographical boundaries, collecting a powerful collection of over 30,679 responses in September and October 2024. These answers were generative, imaginative, and tapped into the hope we were seeking to see. They also demonstrated one of the highest levels of engagement you can expect online - writing elaborate responses and providing names to be shared with the decision-makers.

Without the website mentioning climate change challenges or an energy transition up front, clean air, greenery around them, and the technological solutions we need to inspire were the most prevalent themes throughout the responses—with 47% of people mentioning nature or climate.

In addition to the live campaign, we conducted a randomized control trial with panels of 4,400 from a nationally representative sample in the US and Brazil. These panels enabled us to understand how the campaign changed people's hope, efficacy, and support for concrete renewable energy acceleration policy. The panels excluded anyone who was a climate change denialist, as the campaign was not designed to shift this polarized audience to the other side. Instead, it targeted those in the center of the spectrum as well as climate "doomists."



**THE CAMPAIGN
HAS SHOWN TO BE
VERY EFFECTIVE AT
INCREASING THE HOPES
OF SUCH GROUPS, WITH
AN AVERAGE INCREASE
IN HOPE OF 66%.**

Constructive hope, as defined by Yale, Colorado State and George Mason Universities in their study on How Hope and Doubt Affect Climate Change Mobilization, is “associated with beliefs that humans are capable of changing their behavior or that elected leaders will enact climate change policies. Alternatively, “false hope” [...] refers to the hope that things will improve on their own accord [...] or that someone or something else will fix the problem.”

This research has further supported the fact that the US and Brazilian populations, who believe in climate change to some degree, greatly lack hope in our ability to reduce global warming. Nearly one in three respondents among believers reported feeling hopeless. The campaign has shown to be very effective at increasing the hopes of this group, with 66% of hopeless audiences reporting an increased hope. Even among all the respondents, an impressive 39% reported increased hope that global warming can be reduced.

Of the group that was already at least somewhat hopeful, most experienced ‘constructive hope’, which is associated with the perceived ability of humanity to solve climate change. Of the fewer respondents who experienced false hope, most cited expecting ‘science and technology’ and to a lesser degree ‘God’ to fix the problem. This potentially demonstrates that there is an over-reliance on the technological solutions narratives and not enough on the efficacy of collective human action. This insight is further supported by our finding that only one third of all respondents reported feeling strong confidence that people like them, working together, can affect the decision makers’ response to global warming. Behavioral science stresses the critical importance of building collective efficacy to create behavioral change. The Future Thanks You campaign was able to increase efficacy in 31% of people. This success will be important to replicate and further develop in future campaign iterations.

Another notable insight is that, people who reported experiencing hope that is qualified as ‘false’ were less likely to support accelerated transition

**ADDRESSING
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to renewable energy. In fact, in Brazil they were somewhat less supportive than those who reported being hopeless. Suggesting that false hope could potentially be worse than no hope when it comes to policy support.

Aside from increasing hope, the other core objective of this campaign was to encourage people to send a message to the decision-makers at the UN General Assembly and Climate Week NYC that they support accelerating the transition to renewable energy. This research showed that 70% chose to share such a message with the decision-makers (and over 50% of those were willing to provide their name to put behind their support). This demonstrates strong support not only for the transition to renewable energy in the US and Brazil, which we already knew from the various polls, but also for accelerating this transition (with more support in Brazil than the US). Compared to control groups that did not see the campaign, the campaign audiences were 7% more likely to support accelerated transition. This supports the hypothesis that through hope and future focus, even at existing high levels of support, the campaign could still make further behavioral shifts in its audience toward advocating for an accelerated transition.

Finally, we were curious to see whether we could confirm the findings of other academic research that showed that hope was associated with greater action. Indeed, the panel research showed a positive relationship between hope and respondents' support for accelerated renewable energy transition. This means that addressing escalating hopelessness among the population might effectively increase their support for climate-favorable policies.

We want to thank Antonio Alonso Arechar for the panel research and comprehensive data analysis.





THE CASE FOR HOPE

Key Recommendations

Hope is essential for getting people to advocate for proactive policies and climate action that secures our future. Communications that lead with hope create the biggest shift in those experiencing doomism, so if we want to get people to move from hopelessness to accelerated action, it is vital that our communications bring this to life.

BASED ON THIS CAMPAIGN'S LEARNINGS, HERE ARE THE THREE BEST WAYS TO DO THAT IN YOUR OWN CONTENT AND CAMPAIGNS:



1

SKIP THE CHALLENGE AND START WITH SOLUTIONS

Climate anxiety can come from exposure to fossil fuel mis- and disinformation about what can be done. Mythbusting doesn't usually work, whereas our research confirmed that hope is associated with greater support for climate action. So, we want to combat this anxiety with hope, without repeating the problematic messages. Is there a way that you can get people on board with solutions without reminding them of the disasters that could come if we don't reach them?

If climate challenges cause feelings of hopelessness, it's essential to consider solutions without starting from what they're intended to overcome. Can we steer clear of jargon like 'accelerated transition' and the technicalities of 'solutions' while still getting people to call for precisely those things?

Is there a way to lead with the positive, perhaps not even mentioning climate at all? Avoiding preexisting, deeply held negative beliefs about the climate gives people prone to alarm more of an opportunity to lead with hope and not fear.

2

SHOW, DON'T TELL

Hope is deeply personal and different for everyone.

Getting people invested in a personal future that they can visualize gives them a reason to believe in climate action rather than simply being told it's essential.

Instead of alienating people by discussing things we know they don't respond to because of fear or disinterest, we have a chance to focus more on what people genuinely care about and what they can feel hopeful for—their future and the future of their loved ones.

Many people will make the connection to climate anyway without prompting, which is a central part of any renewable-powered future. Just be sure that the hope you are building is constructive hope, as those who experience false hope, such as believing that God or natural cycles will solve the climate crisis, are significantly less likely to support policies favorable to climate action.

3

GIVE PEOPLE MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVOCATE

The campaign had 31% of people report an increase in their belief that people like them can change the course of global warming. Such collective efficacy is important in driving change.

Giving people the opportunity to take visible action in support of climate policy helps create a sense of meaningful contribution that can be made visible to the decision-makers to act on.

VOICES FROM THE FUTURE



People worldwide support an immediate transition to renewables but haven't had the opportunity to share this before. We're proud to give visibility to the personal futures people hope to experience.

The heart of our campaign lies in the individual stories we uncovered across all seven continents - stories filled with hope, aspiration, and gratitude for the actions we take today.

From urban centers to rural communities, people shared their visions for 2045, each unique yet connected by common threads of sustainability, community, and appreciation for the foresight of previous generations.

**IN ITS FIRST MONTH OF EXISTENCE,
THE FUTURE THANKS YOU GAVE
OVER 25,000 PEOPLE THE MEANS
TO EXPRESS THEIR SUPPORT FOR A
RENEWABLE-POWERED FUTURE.**

Here are just some of those:



Throughout our community, you feel a strong sense of hope. Our environment is being well-protected and preserved. Our rivers flow with clean water, indigenous plants are thriving, animals have returned, and our land has healed itself. Our people are healthy physically, spiritually, and mentally.



STEPHEN ROE LEWIS
Governor of the Community
North America

We've made the world a better place by reforesting our minds. We have preserved the world's biodiversity because we have consulted our ancestors. When we look to the future, we consider the past. We live with an understanding that everything we are is nature.



SAMELA SATERÉ MAWÉ
Climate Activist
South America

The ideas and actions that have made the world a better place are driven by connection. Technology brings people together who are miles apart and allows us to learn from each other. We exchange ideas and bring them together to make a difference.



AMOS KIMUTAI
Founder of 'Run With Amos'
Africa

Nothing but clean, fresh air all around us. There's no pollution. We work and study under vast blue skies and it brings us happiness. We plant so many trees and plants of different shapes and sizes.



NALA APRILA
Climate Activist
Asia

You're in a cold environment and see seals sliding on ice, penguins porpoising through water, birds flying in the distance, and fish swimming under clear water. You see animals coexisting with humans.



MAGGIE DEWANE
Writer & Filmmaker
Antarctica

People do what they enjoy. Songwriting, painting, embroidery...people don't need to work so hard to pay their bills, so they have more time for family, community, and creativity.



LOVE SSEGA
Musician
Europe

For work, I get my hands dirty in the soil, growing food and rewilding the landscape. We get to work outdoors to find new ways to store energy. We do things like swimming with whales and planting seaweed forests.



BELINDA BAGGS
Co-founder Surfers for Climate
Oceania



YOUR MESSAGE FROM THE FUTURE

These visions of a grateful future are only possible if powered by renewable energy.

As leaders, you have a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between these emotionally resonant, aspirational visions and the concrete actions needed to make them a reality.

By aligning your messaging and policies with your constituents' hopes and dreams, you can build the broad support necessary for ambitious climate action and overcome the difficulty of talking to those who believe that it's too late for change.

We can clearly see that people worldwide care deeply about this. It's now your responsibility to lead on action and keep them engaged, building support for an accelerated transition to clean energy.

Your local and global constituents deserve to be able to advocate for their future, regardless of their engagement with the specific challenges and solutions.

By leveraging behavioral science insights and creative messaging techniques, we can build resilience against misinformation, rekindle hope, and mobilize support for an accelerated transition to renewable energy.

**REMEMBER, THE FUTURE IS
THANKING YOU IN ADVANCE FOR
THE BOLD STEPS YOU TAKE TODAY.
LET'S ENSURE THAT GRATITUDE
IS WELL-FOUNDED.**



WHAT'S NEXT?

As a leader, it's time for you to start speaking to everyone in your community about their future and making them feel like there's something to look forward to and work towards.

You can start that conversation by getting people to imagine their hopeful visions of their own futures. The Future Thanks You website is staying live so you can engage your constituents.

This experience works as an opportunity to discuss the necessity of climate action in terms everyone can relate to.

[Download campaign assets and suggested copy to share directly with your networks](#)



The Future Thanks You is just the first step in our collaboration to explore ways to inspire hope for a renewable-powered future. We hope you'll take this opportunity to start new conversations and try new communications tactics to keep this vision going and to be a key part of accelerating the vital global transition to clean energy.

Together, we can create a powerful movement that engages even the most reluctant audiences in climate activism. The future is counting on us - let's give it something to be truly thankful for.

ABOUT Verified AND THE FUTURE THANKS YOU

Verified for Climate is an initiative from the UN Department of Global Communications and Purpose, with support from Fortescue, TikTok and Rockefeller Foundation. Verified for Climate promotes positive, accurate climate information and challenges obstructive narratives to encourage swift energy transitions.

A transition to renewables is empowering our future.

Energy is one of humanity's most valuable tools. It powers our lives, keeps our lights on, and keeps us connected and moving.

Energy is also at the heart of the climate challenge and key to the solution. Most of the world's energy still comes from fossil fuels (oil, coal, and gas), which are by far the largest contributors to the climate crisis, accounting for nearly 90% of all carbon emissions.

Right now, transitioning to renewable energy means a future where energy works for people and the planet, delivering huge benefits for health, nature, and the economy.

In a future powered by natural resources, such as sunlight, wind, or water – we will have more than enough energy to go around, cleaner air to breathe, and more green jobs to fill. A bright future powered by renewable energy is here.

Through collaborative cross-sector partnerships and messenger networks, rapid response campaigning, evergreen content, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation, Verified for Climate aims to drive coordinated action among key audiences to advance climate solutions.

Verified is made possible by its network of trusted messengers, who advocate for our work and campaign alongside us.

THE
FUTURE
THANKS
YOU

RESOURCES

Some resources that informed our strategy:

YALE X POTENTIAL ENERGY – LATER IS TOO LATE

[Click to read this resource here](#)

GREAT TRANSITION: THE PROMISE AND LURE OF THE TIMES AHEAD

[Click to read this resource here](#)

HOW STORIES CHANGE THE BRAIN

[Click to read this resource here](#)

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF CRITICAL THINKING

[Click to read this resource here](#)