

Nature Based Solutions and Cleaner Environment Advertising Campaign Testing

Executive Summary

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Signed:



Anita Pollak, President
Sage Research Corporation

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Background and Objectives

Natural climate solutions embrace the power of nature to reduce the effects of and adapt to climate change all while supporting biodiversity. For example, forests, wetlands, grasslands, and oceans have the ability to absorb and store large amounts of carbon (CO₂), reduce the effects of climate change, keep our air and water clean, and provide habitat for wildlife.

Public opinion research indicates that “nature-based solutions” and the relationship between nature and the fight against climate change is not well understood by Canadians. Findings from 2021 polling by Nature Canada and the David Suzuki Foundation found that 40% of Canadians hold an inaccurate definition of “nature-based climate solutions”, many believing it is related to actions such as using natural products and recycling.

The objective for Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)’s planned advertising in 2023 is to improve Canadians’ understanding of the role nature plays in addressing the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Three alternative conceptual approaches for the campaign were developed for evaluation:

- *Everyday people changing everything*
- *Nature at work*
- *See nature as something new*

For testing purposes, these were produced as 30-second animatic videos.

The objectives of the research were to:

- Assess the communication effectiveness of each advertising campaign concept
- Identify which of the concepts is strongest overall in communicating the intended messages
- Identify possible revisions to each concept that might improve communication effectiveness

Research Methodology

To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was undertaken. A total of eight two-hour online focus groups, split by community size, were conducted between November 18th and November 24th, 2022. Specifically: six English-language sessions were conducted, two in each of the Ontario/Atlantic region, the Prairies and the West. And, two French-language sessions were held with participants from Quebec and New Brunswick. Participants received an honorarium of \$125. Qualified participants were individuals 18 years of age and older who were at least somewhat concerned about climate change. In each group, there was a spread of ages and a mix of men and women. There were some participants in the sessions who represented Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs).

This report presents the findings from the study. Caution must be exercised when interpreting the results from this study, as qualitative techniques are used in marketing research as a means of developing insight and direction, rather than collecting quantitatively precise data or absolute measures. As such, the results provide an indication of participants' views about the topics explored, but cannot be statistically generalized to the full population, with any degree of statistical confidence. It is the insight and direction provided by qualitative research that makes it an appropriate tool for exploring reactions to the campaign ad concepts.

Key Findings

All three concepts were perceived to be about addressing climate change and the role of nature in tackling climate change. The understanding of the role of nature varied by ad concept, that is participants mostly perceived the messaging to be about the specific aspects of nature shown in the ad:

- The *Nature at work* concept was perceived to be a message about trees
- The *See nature as something new* concept was perceived to be a message about the importance of wetlands
- *Everyday people changing everything* was perceived to be about a broader range of activities involving nature

While participants rarely relayed back the specific phrase *nature-based solutions* as the message of the ads, most did intuitively understand the connection between nature and tackling climate change based on the three ad concepts.

There is no clear winner among the three ad concepts. First place preference was split about equally between *Everyday people changing everything* and *See nature as something new* with each having strengths and weaknesses to consider. Notably, though, reaction to *Everyday people changing everything* was more polarized, as participants ranked it as their least favourite more often than *See nature as something new*. The *Nature at work* concept was the least preferred of the three.

Nature at work: The message that trees are beneficial and have a role to play in addressing climate change was clearly understood and participants liked that it was a simple, easy to understand message and one that they could relate to. Executionally, the pacing made it easy to follow.

There were two main issues with *Nature at work*, including:

- Quite a few participants said they/"everybody" already know what trees do, and that trees are important to the environment, and so did not perceive the ad as telling them anything new. Thus, the ad was not perceived as improving people's understanding of the role nature can play in climate change.
- In this regard, some perceived it as more aimed at children, to teach children about what trees do – that is, it's a science lesson for children.
- Many said the ad does not say what one is supposed to do – it was basically perceived to say that trees are important but not what people can do or what the government or industry are doing.

Everyday people changing everything: The ad clearly conveyed the message that individuals and communities should do their part in addressing climate change and can do so at the local level. The activities shown were perceived for the most part to be concrete, doable things that people and communities can actually do to help tackle climate change.

Everyday people changing everything was the strongest concept in getting interest to go to the website, because the ad was perceived to be all about what people and communities can do. That created the impression for some participants that the website would indeed contain information about what people and communities can do or have done.

There were three main perceived issues with *Everyday people changing everything*:

- There was a significant perceived executional issue, in that the ad was perceived by quite a few participants to be difficult to follow. The pacing of the ad with a lot of changing scenes and voices was hard to follow and the voice-over did not match the super on the screen, resulting in attention being divided.
- The opening voice-over says, “*If you want to take on climate change – forget about the world.*” The phrase “*forget about the world*” was noticed, and it got attention. This was both a positive and a negative. The positive was that it got attention early in the ad. Some also said they realized that this was a way of setting up the message about the importance of local action. However, the majority, often including those who said it was attention-getting, reacted negatively. They reacted negatively because climate change is seen to be a global problem, requiring a global solution.
- Some perceived the ad as putting the onus on individuals and communities to deal with climate change, and downplaying the role that government and industry need to play.

See nature as something new: The main perceived message is that wetlands can help in dealing with climate change, and for some also that government is doing something to help wetlands – albeit it is not clear whether government is protecting or creating wetland areas. Executionally, the first 15 seconds of the ad were attention-getting and motivated people to continue to watch because of the simple white text on black screen, good pacing with time to read the text, and the statements shown:

- States the problem, *The world is experiencing a climate change crisis*, which acknowledges that climate change is a global issue and includes the word “*crisis*”, which about half of participants preferred as a term to describe their perception of the current status of climate change.
- The statement “*There is hope*” and the inclusion of the statements “*A marvel of environmental science*” and “*Capable of capturing up to 200 metric tons of carbon*” also generated interest in the rest of the ad.

There were three main perceived issues with *See nature as something new*, including:

- The biggest perceived issue with the *See nature as something new* ad concept was that it does not say anything about what a person or community can do – that is, there was no perceived “*call to action.*”
- After the big dramatic build-up, some felt the reference to “*wetlands*” was a letdown. That is, they think all that’s being done to tackle climate change is something to do with wetlands.

- The ad was perceived to imply government is taking action on wetlands, but does not give any indication of what that action might be.

“Climate Change” versus Alternatives: The tested concepts used the phrase *“climate change”*, albeit with one notable exception in *See nature as something new*, which also uses the phrase *“climate change crisis”*. When presented with alternatives to *“climate change”*, preference was split between using *“climate change”* and *“climate crisis”*.

- Those who favoured staying with *“climate change”* felt it is a widely known and familiar phrase and should be used in order to appeal to a broader audience, and also not to turn off people who are skeptical of the seriousness of climate change.
- Those who favoured *“climate crisis”* did so because they believe it is a crisis and should be called as such, and that the *climate change* has been around for a long time and they believe it has lost emotional impact. *“Climate crisis”* is better at evoking an emotional response and a sense of urgency.