

## Re-Communicate Renewable Energy: Communication Campaign Parameters

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Renewable energy (RE) is energy that is derived from natural processes (e.g. sunlight and wind) that are replenished at a higher rate than they are consumed. Common sources of RE are solar, wind, geothermal, hydro1, and biomass [9].

Today, progress in the use of RE depends not only on factors related to technology, institutions, regulation, and finance. It is also a matter of perception and awareness among the key groups who determine the fate of renewables: policy-makers; industry; and the public. The increased deployment of RE technologies has sparked professional and public debate about the impact, cost, and efficiency of RE sources. Where the public discourse is characterized by misconceptions or misinformation, a lack of accurate information may increase public resistance to RE and thus constitute a barrier to efficient, effective, and rapid RE deployment [6]. Thus, accessible, evidence-based communication is needed to increase support for proven technologies and promote stability in the political environment.

The study presents an analysis of ten case studies of government, private sector, and civil society RE communication campaigns in Europe, the UK, and Asia. Although the examples of good practice were observed, well-planned and properly evaluated communication strategies were an exception to the total.

The development of RE campaigns strategies should be approached as a process with clearly defined stages, each of which must be completed to achieve maximum effectiveness and impact. The analysis allowed us to identify the following crucial parameters of modern RE communication campaigns that contribute to their success and efficiency:

1. Thorough pre-campaign research. The case studies showed that pre-campaign research was often used to develop an understanding of public attitudes to RE but was not used to the extent which it could have been undertaking detailed targeting and segmenting of audiences. Thus, this obvious first step in any strategic communication campaign has to be re-communicated.

2. Targeted, measurable objectives. More precise and clearly defined campaign definitions help facilitate a more accurate post-campaign evaluation, such as that of “awareness-raising”, which were often seen in the case studies, are difficult to measure; generate more precise definitions of target audiences; and help the development of the tailored messages needed to convince specific groups.

3. Time planning. Appropriate timing and duration affect how campaigns are perceived as relevant by their target audiences. Longer campaigns were able to build effective distribution networks for their messages.

4. Target audience segmentation. The interpretations of RE and the deployment of RE technologies vary widely between audience segments [8]. In the case studies, we found little evidence of audience segmentation. Well-identified and segmented core audiences can avoid wasted time and money on non-relevant groups (e.g. unconcerned, already convinced).

5. Partnerships. We found several examples of effective partnering in the case studies but also many where this option went unused. The lack of funding resources represents a significant barrier to effective RE communication strategies, and partnerships broaden the reach

of communications and reduce costs [2]. Cooperating with like-minded institutions can increase human and financial resources available for the campaign, which in turn has the possibility of improving its design, reach, and overall effectiveness.

6. Insights from behavioral economics, maximize messaging. Often case studies targeted the “general public” or “the media” without further differentiation and did not take behavioral economics findings into account (i.e. people with a sense of ownership of RE will value it more highly; people are far-sighted when planning if both costs and benefits occur in the future, but make shortsighted decisions if costs or benefits are immediate; and individuals tend to value fairness and act pro-socially, particularly if free-riding can be minimized) [1]. Behavioral economics findings could maximize campaign impacts on awareness-raising, influencing attitudes, and changing behavior.

7. RE storytelling. The primary method of communication in the case studies was the presentation of facts rather than emotional narratives or engaging revelations. RE campaigns must compete with communications about other energy sources, and strive to be remembered and acted upon [5]. Audio-visual content as campaigns’ cornerstone: tremendous storytelling capabilities and easily consumed and shared. Innovative and emotive messaging elicit more positive responses.

8. Communication channels. In some of the case studies, poorly functioning mechanisms for distribution of content, or the content not being sufficiently compelling to generate impact, resulting in a lack of interest, particularly in some web-based campaigns. Successful campaigns should identify or create distribution networks for content, ensuring that each channel is well-matched to its intended audience [3, 4]. Decisions taken early on in the campaign, including audience segmentation and the development of campaign messages, will inform the selection of campaign channels and contribute to the impact of the campaign. The allocation of sufficient resources to access effective communication channels is key to a successful campaign.

9. Ongoing and post-campaign evaluation. An important shortcoming of many case study campaigns was that original objectives were not well-defined, so it was difficult to define success for the campaigns. Additionally, evaluations were often not budgeted and therefore were not carried out. Evaluating communication practices allows assessing whether the communication measures have been successful in meeting their defined objectives, and will provide information that will allow communication strategies to be improved in the future.

10. Proactiveness in responding to negative media coverage. There are many misconceptions and negative opinions expressed about RE in the media, and these should be addressed to enhance understanding and perceptions of RE [7]. It was generally observed that the negative media campaigns which have created the need for RE communication activism in some national contexts were never addressed directly. RE communicators should actively engage with individuals (e.g. journalists and politicians, bloggers) and institutions that publish falsehoods in open forums. Increased communication with the media helps avoid misrepresentation of the facts.

RE communication campaigns strategies based on the above parameters could improve understanding of RE and communicate the facts about RE technologies more efficiently. More targeted and effective RE communication campaigns are possible through the use of consistent and comprehensive approaches to pre- and post-campaign development. The proposed suggestions on how to better communicate RE and how to optimally organize such campaigns could help overcome some of the barriers renewables face today.

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