

Strategic Communication for Policy Change

The Media Landscape

WHAT IS STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Strategic communication is the deliberate planning and execution of communications activities designed to engage target audiences, change behaviours, shape narratives, and drive action toward a specific advocacy, social, or political goal.

WHY STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION MATTERS

Policy change at the government level does not occur in a vacuum. It is influenced by:

- a) an issue being in the public sphere and registered as a concern
- b) the level of concern and engagement being sufficient to outweigh the counter lobby, e.g. industry

Public-facing communications can create a social mandate for government and policy action. Most campaigning is based on the principle that, at key moments, it will need to show sufficient 'concern' to attract a politician, industry or stakeholder's attention and convince them that action is necessary.

Communication is the essential discipline for achieving this.

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

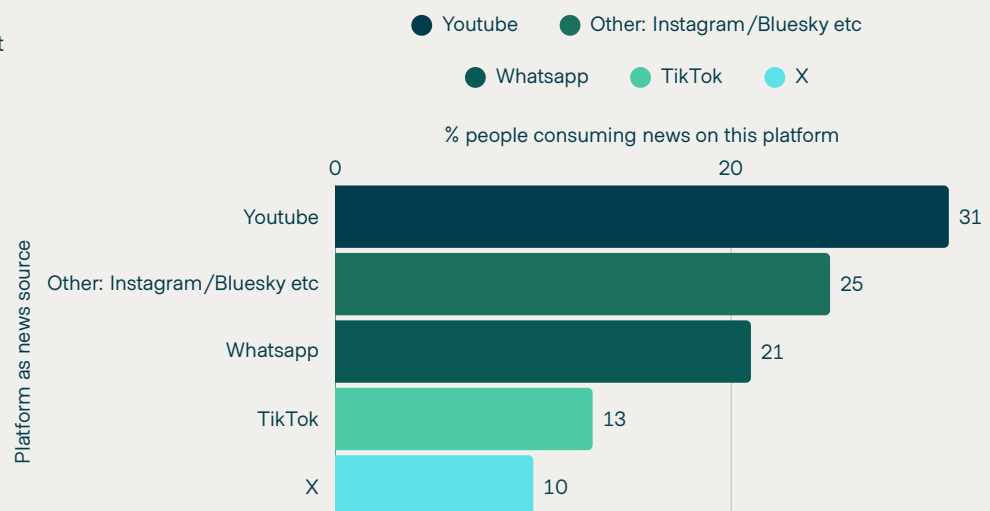
The landscape for communications and achieving policy change has changed rapidly over the last years and accelerated in the last few months. It is now harder to reach decision makers and the people who influence them.

Here's why:

FRAGMENTATION

Social media channels are more fragmented than ever and leaning towards echo chambers. It is no longer possible to reach large numbers of people with messages effectively:

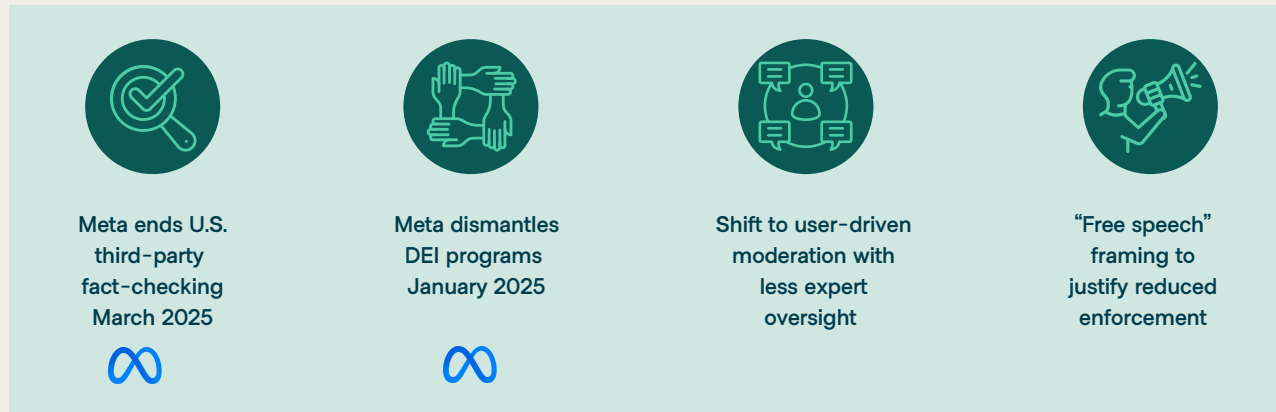
2024 Reuters Institute report tells us that **more platforms** now deliver news.



MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

There has been a noted rise in the sharing of misinformation and a reduction in the role that social media channels are willing to take in fact checking and accuracy control.

The WEF Global Risks Report 2024 identifies misinformation and disinformation as the **most severe short-term global risk** over the next two years.

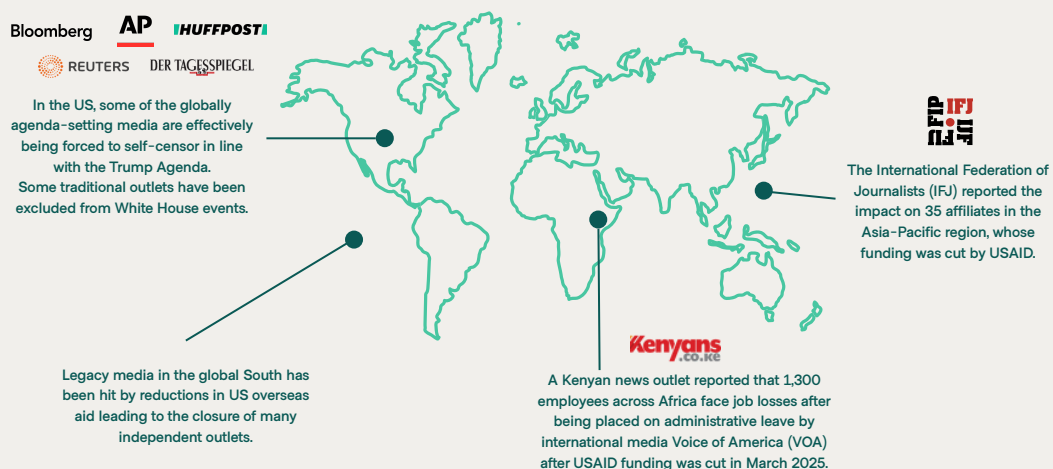


In addition to needing to work with the **uninformed**, NGOs increasingly need to communicate with the **misinformed**. There are legitimate concerns that this will be exacerbated by eg Meta platforms and X through changes in the algorithms which do not favour topics deemed 'woke' or an anti-Trump agenda.

MEDIA CENSORSHIP

There has been a noted rise in the sharing of misinformation and a reduction in the role social media channels are willing to take in fact checking and accuracy control.

In addition, traditional media in the global South has been hit by reductions in US overseas aid leading to the closure of many independent outlets.



TRUST

Trust in news channels, social media, politicians is at an all-time low and attacks on the veracity of scientists and NGOs by the influential US Administration threatens to further erode this. The public are becoming less likely to trust the spokespeople and channels which NGOs rely on.



The 2024 IPSOS Global Poll ranks politicians bottom, with only 15% across 32 countries saying they trust them.



The Reuters Institute's 2024 report, puts the current trust level of 40% in media – among the lowest in 9 years and only 30% trust social media.



News fatigue is rising – 4 in 10 people globally report disengaging from issues including climate change and ongoing conflicts.



PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE OCEAN

Reaching audiences today requires more effort across diverse channels, with tailored messages and styles. It's increasingly difficult to turn public concern into pressure on decision-makers using traditional methods.

To be effective, campaigns must invest in audience understanding to move us towards precisely targeted campaigns. Data plays a vital role in shifting perceptions and behaviour by revealing how people relate to and value the ocean.

Case study:

New data from a France survey, administered by Focalddata and supported by ACTeon and Communications INC between January and May 2025, is part of a larger global initiative – the Ocean & Society Survey. A collaborative team of research, communication, and ocean literacy professionals, coordinated by the Canadian Ocean Literacy Coalition, aims to administer the survey in 100+ countries by 2030.

Below highlights the key findings and demonstrates widespread public concern about the state of the global ocean and a strong desire for more ambitious action to protect it.

- 72%** of French respondents believe the global ocean is in crisis.
- 74%** of French respondents think governments should take responsibility for addressing threats to the ocean.
- 76%** say industry and big businesses should play a role.
- 71%** say they would be willing to change their lifestyles in the next year if it would help protect the ocean.



To date, the Ocean & Society Survey (OSS) has been administered by *FocalData in 12 countries (UK, Sweden, USA, Canada, Brazil, France, Finland, Spain, Norway, Ireland, Cyprus and Bulgaria) captures current public understanding, attitudes, and behaviours regarding ocean health and conservation.

The OSS is a collaboratively designed global tool, coordinated by the Canadian Ocean Literacy Coalition, to better understand how people think and feel about the ocean, helping us to see patterns and changes in public attitudes and behaviours over time. As data from different countries and regions is collected, the OSS creates a standard way of measuring the impacts of ocean literacy and ocean conservation initiatives on public understanding, empathy, and engagement.

Average level of agreement of respondents across 12 countries

(UK, Sweden, USA, Canada, Brazil, France, Finland, Spain, Norway, Ireland, Cyprus and Bulgaria)

80% agree countries should work together on ocean protection even if they disagree on other issues such as trade or security

74% agree their country should strengthen its commitment to ocean protection

57% agree protection and climate change should take priority, even at the cost of economic growth and jobs

There is clear support for a whole of society approach, with all groups seen as having some level of responsibility, but highest levels of perceived responsibility were with government and industry:

82% Say government have significant or much responsibility

37% Trust government to take action to address ocean threats

81% Say industry and big businesses have significant or much responsibility

30% Trust industry and big businesses to take action to address ocean threats



The findings demonstrate there are still core values shared by the global community. Ocean protection could serve as a bridge across national borders, cultures, politics, and class.

When such a diverse group of people agree so emphatically on an issue, their leaders would do well to listen. Rarely are there such moments in politics when a public mandate and foreign policy agendas align so closely.

These findings can be used to:

- Establish Baseline Metrics – Track opinions and monitor change
- Generate Campaign Insights – Design more targeted, relevant strategies
- Drive Messaging & Advocacy – Create strong narratives, media hooks to influence policy

Research methods:

Representative samples were obtained for each country, with a total sample of 11,450 respondents between 08/01/2025 and 13/05/2025. Data was weighted to be representative of the public by age, gender and region in all countries other than Cyprus where a general population quota was used.