

Telling Climate Stories

A practical pocket guide for including sustainability in any genre

Summary: Telling climate stories

Top five tips for all genres

1

Portray climate action as everyday

We're social animals and learn more by watching others than by being told what to do. Which behaviours are you depicting as 'normal' and which as fringe? What does aspiration look like? Is it low- or high-carbon? And are you focusing on the most impactful actions? Key areas to highlight for individuals are travel, energy in the home, food, nature and consumption. Move beyond recycling and recognise that different actions have different barriers and motivators for different people.

2

Avoid the doom loop and stay positive

While the threat of climate change is real, fear is a poor motivator for taking constructive action. Far more motivating is the prospect of building a better world together. Ground your content in reality by highlighting change that is already happening, rather than in a distant future, and highlight the co-benefits of action (eg cleaner air and saving money). Particularly effective are stories of communities coming together and creating a sense of local pride.

3

Information is key – but how it's presented matters too

Details on the causes and impacts of, as well as solutions to, climate change can be presented in a variety of effective ways. Portraying accurate, evidence-based information is essential, but this can be integrated across genres creatively. Making climate narratives and storylines relatable to the individual increases engagement with the science. Positive portrayals of climate content, particularly solutions, can decrease apathy and eco-anxiety, and increase pro-environment audience behaviour.

4

Be inclusive and collaborate

Don't just appeal to those who are already committed – and tailor the message to your audience. There is no one-size-fits-all approach for climate storytelling, or one silver bullet piece of content. Collaborate with colleagues to think about how themes can work across a portfolio of genres and programmes in the longer term, consistently reaching different audiences in ways that feel relevant and relatable.

5

Show the bigger picture and how we're part of it

As individuals, we don't exist in a vacuum. We make choices based on how easy and convenient they are, determined by government policies, business practices and social and economic norms. We can highlight the 'system', hold government and businesses to account, and speak to audiences not just as consumers, but active citizens, employees, investors and role models in their communities. They can take the conversation out of our content and into the real world to bring about change.

The bigger picture

Climate context

Human-induced climate change is responsible for extreme weather events and is causing irreversible impacts to our life-support system.

Scientists agree that limiting warming to below 1.5°C is the only way to avoid even more extreme – and irreversible – changes to the planet.

It is estimated that the planet has already warmed to approximately 1.2°C.

To avoid warming the planet any further, we must act today.

The role of our industry

As an industry, our TV and film content reaches billions of people around the world.

The stories we tell have the ability to alter perspectives, educate, inspire and shift behaviour on a global scale.

Climate change is a broad, complex and often emotive set of issues. But there is a huge opportunity for content-makers to help audiences navigate these hurdles and galvanise sustainable lifestyle changes.

Behaviour change in audiences

With help from experts in research and academia, BAFTA albert has put together these practical tips for featuring climate content in all genres.

A range of psychological and external factors affect an audience's response to content. Merely providing audiences with information is not enough to change behaviour. We need to tap into their existing values, attitudes and social norms.

Habits are often the most important factor influencing our behaviour. Showing examples of sustainable, high-impact habits can have a positive impact on audiences.

Climate change and audiences

What we know

Even at the current level of warming, there will be major changes to lifestyles and economies*

TV and films are trusted sources of information

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BEIS, 2022, p.9

The majority of people (83%) are concerned about climate change

[View PDF](#)

BEIS, 2022, p.4

Behaviour is already changing – people are saving energy and flying less*

*Information taken from research conducted by Ipsos

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Climate change and audiences

Some of the big challenges

High-carbon lifestyles are currently seen as aspirational

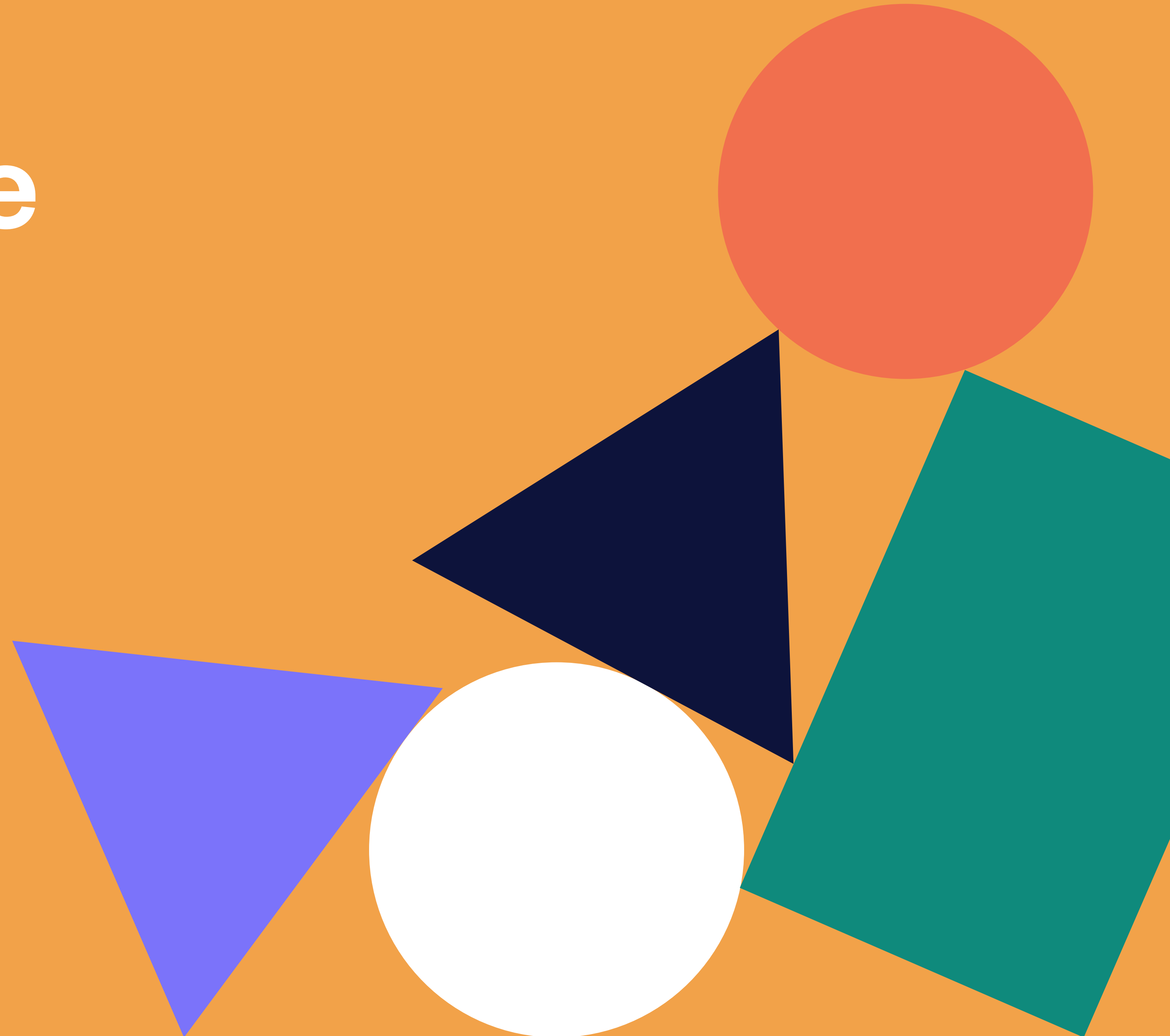
Other issues, like the cost of living, are viewed as competing with the climate crisis

The scale of climate change can induce fear and withdrawal rather than positive action

Understanding the impact of climate action is low
eg recycling is ranked above car use

Telling Climate Stories

Top five tips for all genres



1

Make climate action normal

Audiences are taking more climate action – people are flying less, being more conscious consumers and saving energy at home.

Effective climate content should reflect that climate action is a regular part of people's lives and avoid portraying it as abnormal. Strongly question the glamorising of high-carbon lifestyles with regular flying or unreasonable consumption.

In Series 3 of Happy Valley, the iconic lead character Sergeant Catherine Cawood is seen giving away unused furniture to friends and mentioning Freecycle.

Portraying sustainable behaviours through a character's actions encourages the audience to do the same even if the character isn't perfect.

Happy Valley Series 3, © Lookout Point



2

Stay positive

To combat climate fear and inaction, keep messages hopeful, inspiring, solution-focused – and fun!

You don't always need to include the word "climate". There are many co-benefits to climate action, including to health, finances or happiness.

In 2022, eBay and ITV's Love Island formed a partnership to promote pre-loved fashion on the popular prime-time show. Over half of viewers said they'd bought pre-loved in the past three months, more than double the amount for those who hadn't watched Love Island and been aware of the partnership. This could mean that some 2.7 million people are making more effort to shop sustainably as a result of the initiative!

Love Island x eBay, ITV



3

Show, as well as tell

References to the climate crisis need to be integral and relevant to your content.

This might mean that implicit or visual references are more impactful to the narrative than explicit conversations about the climate crisis.

Whether that be a character driving an electric car, taking a train rather than a flight, being vegetarian, shopping sustainably, or taking pleasure in caring for nature, characters can act sustainably even if they aren't talking about it!

World's Most Scenic Railway Journeys is a travel show that celebrates the wonders of train travel – a form of transport which causes significantly fewer emissions than flying around the world.

World's Most Scenic Railway Journeys, Channel 5



4

Collaborate

Teamwork among broadcasters, productions, genres, policy makers and scientists is key to building a sustainability-conscious audience.

Sharing concrete messaging and visions for a sustainable future will educate audiences on what the climate crisis is, what the solutions are and what a sustainable future will look like. Showing collaboration can build collective pride in climate action by highlighting to audiences that they are acting together towards a common goal.

The BBC's EastEnders and Frozen Planet II joined forces to show the iconic EastEnders map of London with a flooding River Thames prior to the broadcast of the final episode of Frozen Planet II – a visual reminder of how climate change could impact London.

EastEnders + Frozen Planet II, © BBC

5

Show the bigger picture



Individual action alone will not solve the climate crisis, but individuals have the power to influence systems through their roles as citizens.

Often content has focused solely on the isolated actions individuals can take, but content can encourage people to act on the wider social, political and economic systems that require change.

In Joe Lycett vs the Oil Giant, Lycett focused his efforts on energy company Shell in order to hold them to account. He met experts and campaigners in the field,



before making a sensational 'advert' that could never be aired on prime-time TV.

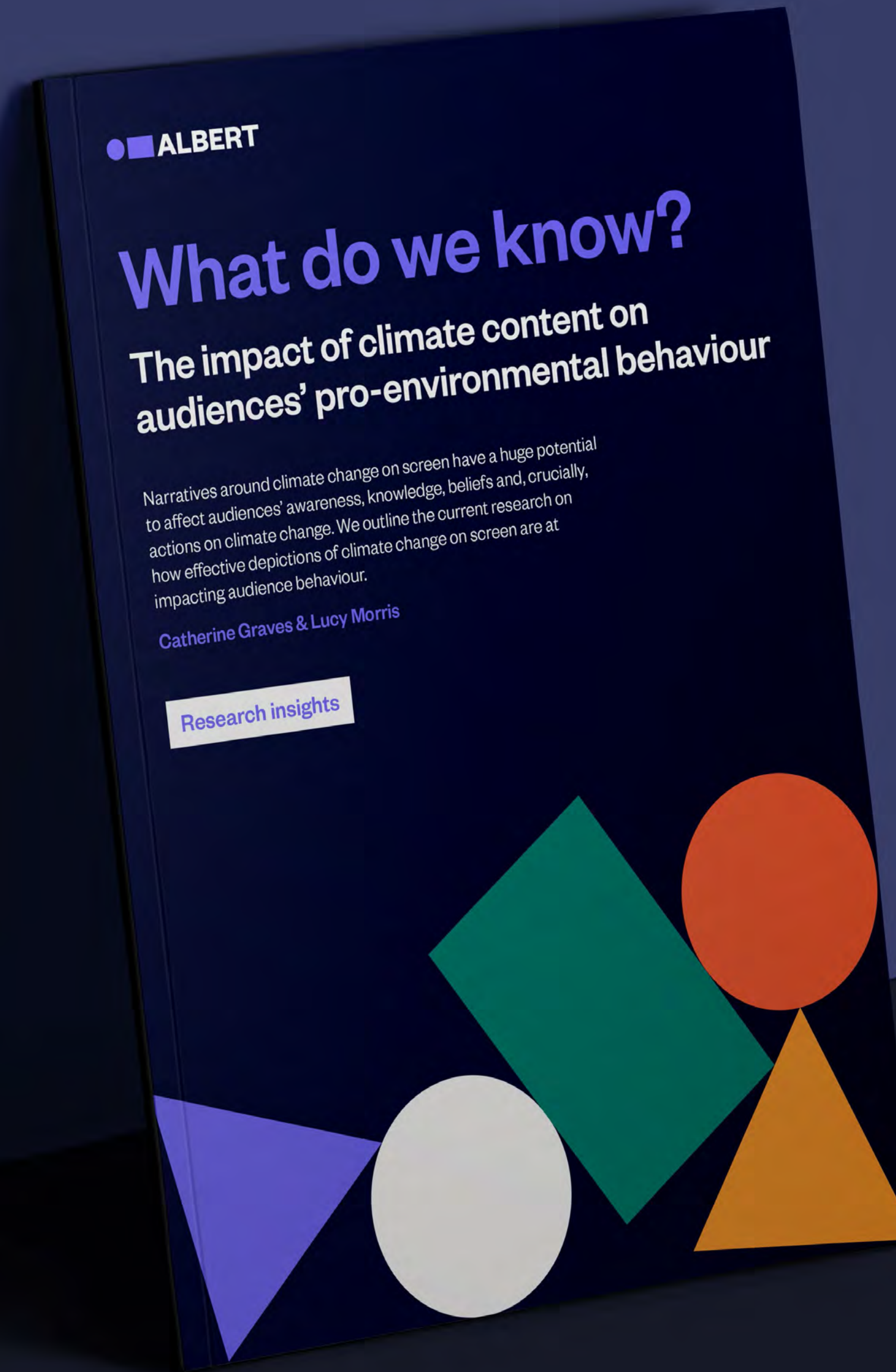
Or in the fictional dimension, the Scrooge-like entrepreneur Carole from Sky's Christmas Carole learns that the pursuit of money at all costs, particularly to the environment, isn't such a great thing. Demonstrating how the individual can take on an existing paradigm empowers audiences to push for change.

Christmas Carole, Sky
Joe Lycett vs the Oil Giant, Channel 4

Further reading

In-depth research on the relationship between climate content and audience behaviour, with exemplar case studies, has been conducted by albert's Catherine Graves and Lucy Morris.

Read the full paper [here](#).



Thank you

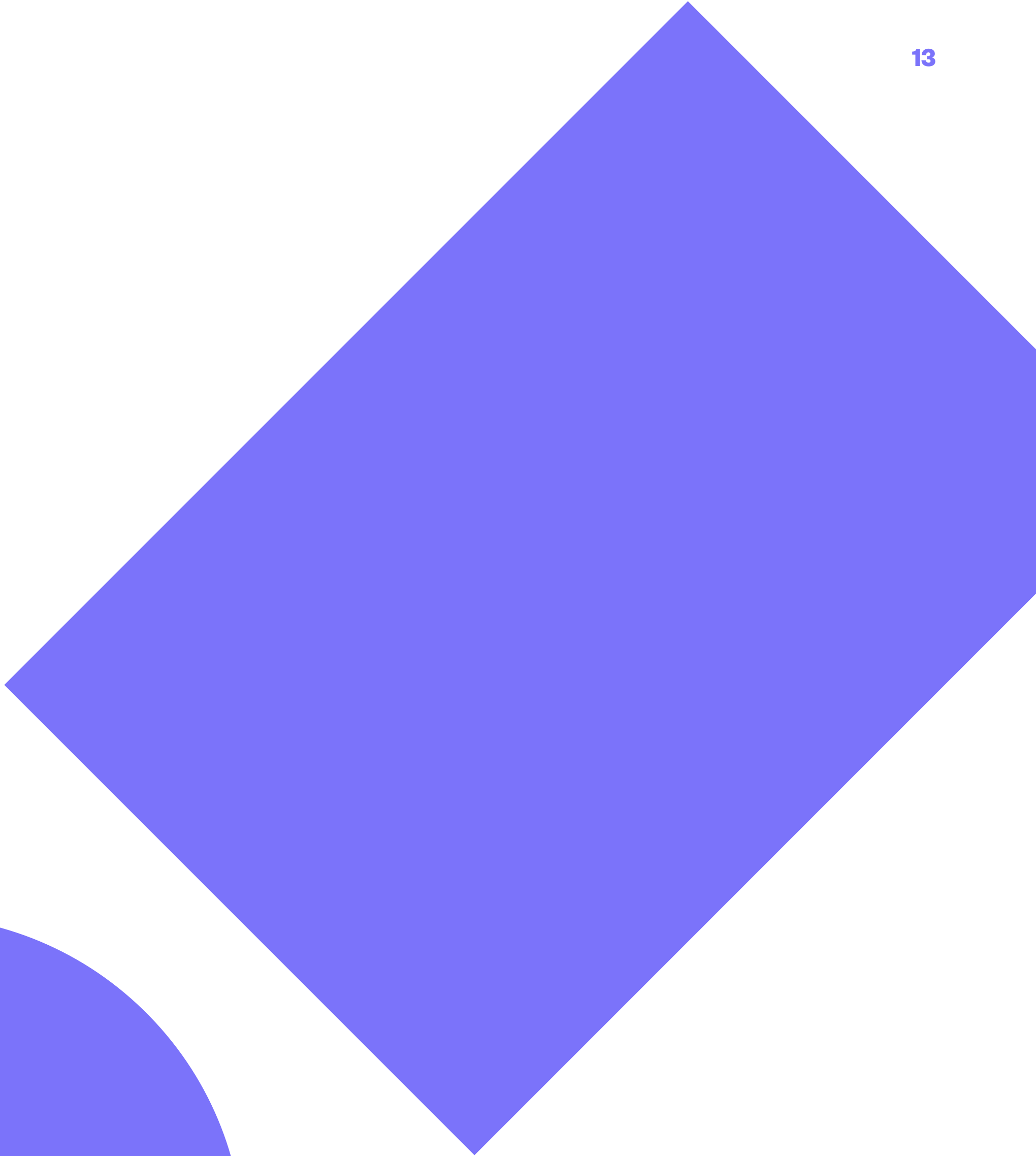
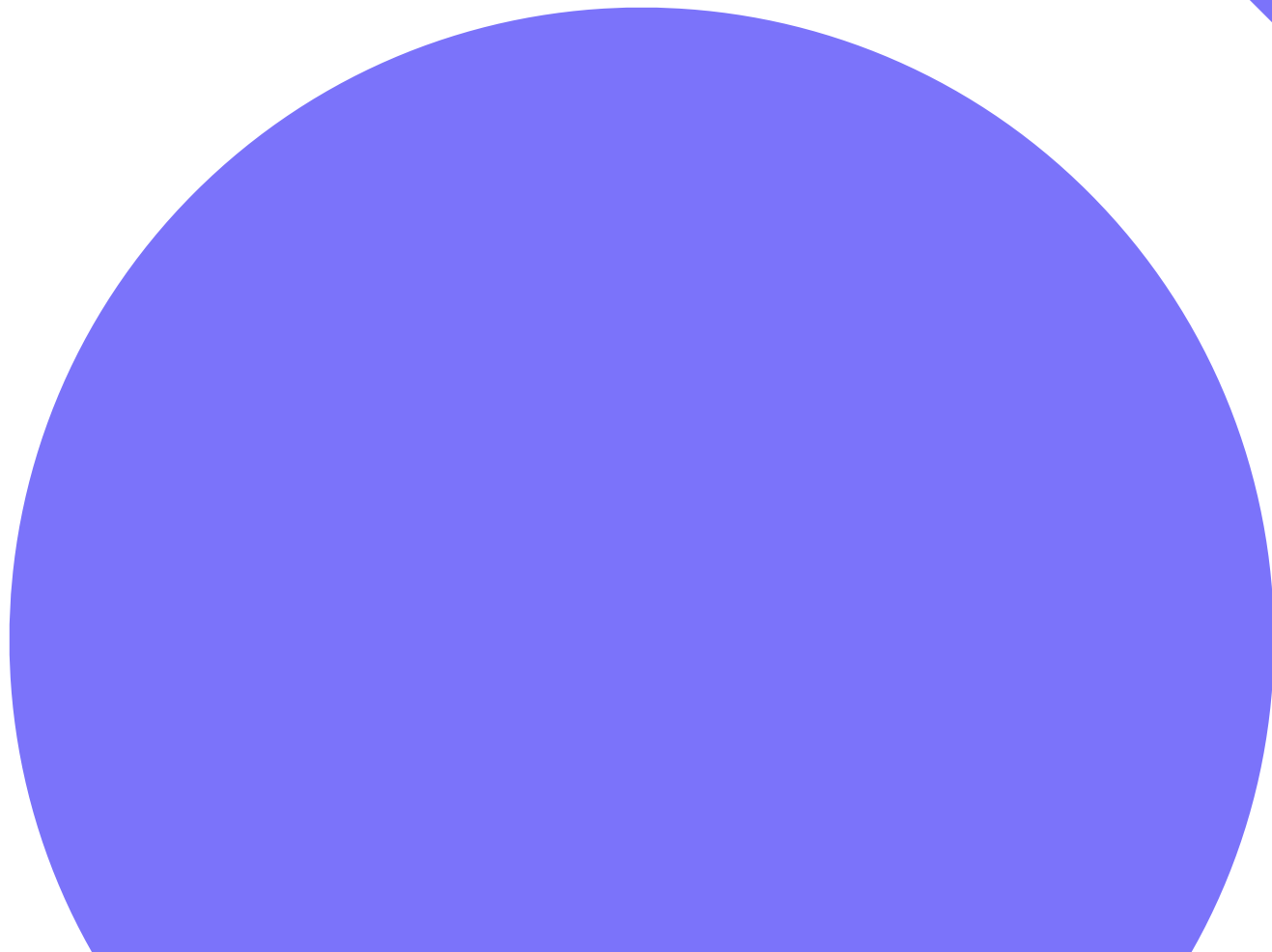
albert is the leading screen industry organisation for environmental sustainability

Founded in 2011, albert supports the film and TV industry to reduce the environmental impacts of production and to create content that supports a vision for a sustainable future.

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The recommendations in this pocket guide have been drawn from research conducted by Ipsos on audience behaviour