

February 12, 2026



Public Affairs
Council

Storytelling for Advocacy

*Fundamentals of Storytelling: Context, Trends and the
SUCCES Approach*

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL?



PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

1954
founded

14 000
individuals

750+
total members

≈ 120
events/year

**WASHINGTON
BRUSSELS**
office locations

**NONPARTISAN
NONPOLITICAL**
politics

23
total
staff



OUR MISSION

Our mission is to advance the field of public affairs, to bring leaders together and to provide members with the executive education and expertise they need to succeed while maintaining the highest ethical standards.

SPEAKERS



**João
Sousa**

Managing Director
International Practice
Public Affairs Council



**Giulia
Forgnone**

Director of Public Affairs
and Communications
European Aluminium



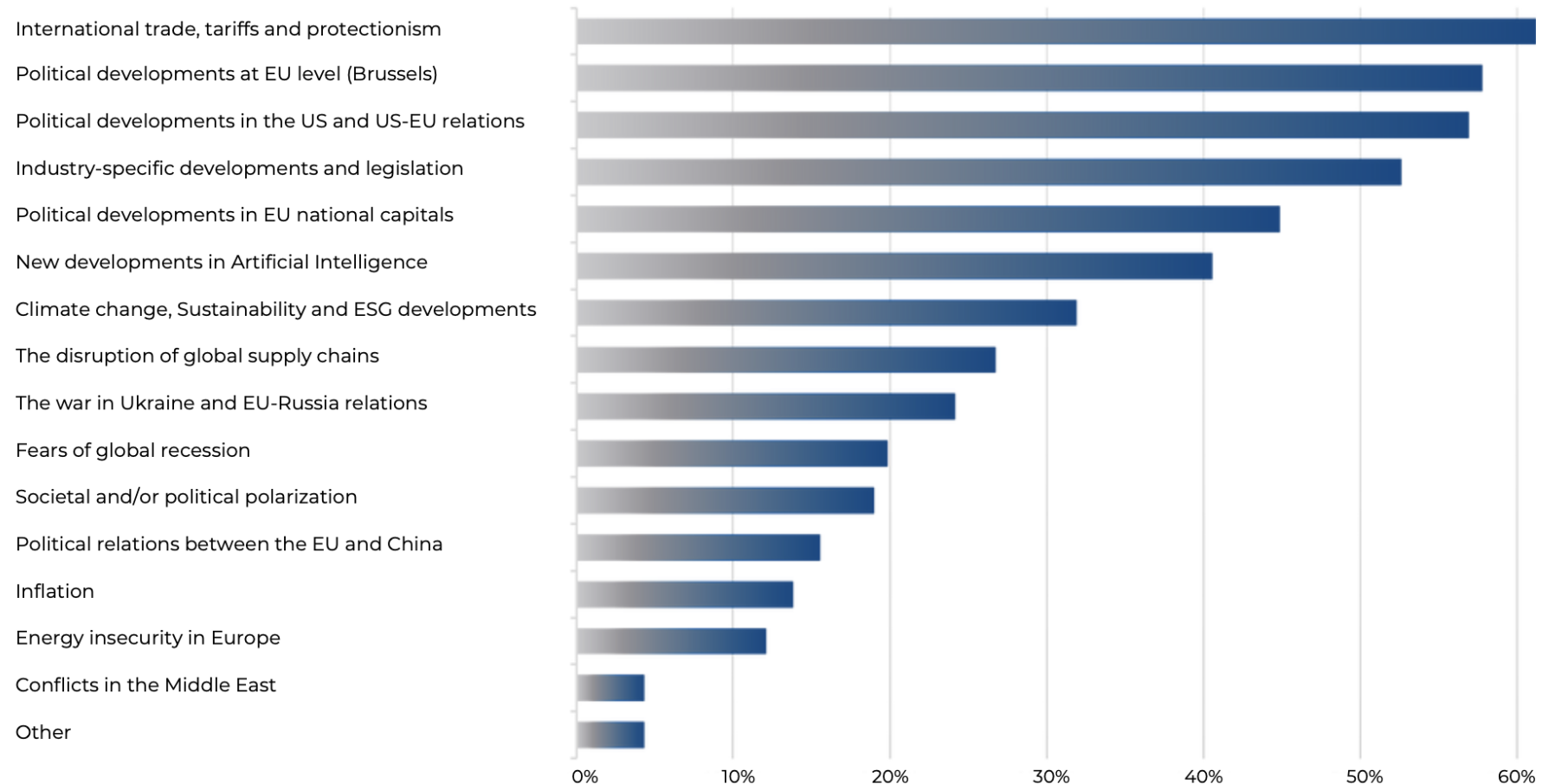
**Mark
Fisher**

Director of Advocacy
Engagement
MDA (Muscular
Dystrophy Association)

CONTEXT

What Worries Public Affairs Teams?

Key Factors Impacting Org's Environment



Source: Public Affairs Council, "Public Affairs in Europe – Trends to Watch in 2026"

What Worries Your Stakeholders?

Active conflicts and wars near the European Union



Terrorism



Cyber-attacks from non-EU countries



Natural disasters made worse by climate change



Uncontrolled migration flows



The EU having to rely on non-EU countries for its energy supply



Drones from non-EU countries operating over or near EU countries



The EU having to rely on non-EU countries for its defence



Non-EU countries trying to influence elections or politics in (OUR COUNTRY)



■ Total 'Highly worried' (7-10) ■ Total 'Moderately worried' (5-6) ■ Total 'Not or slightly worried' (1-4) ■ Don't know
Nov 2025

Source: Eurobarometer, February 2026

Industry Reputation: Trust VS Oversight

Which Industries Are Considered Most Untrustworthy

	2024	2023
Pharmaceuticals	43%	37%
Health Insurance	40%	33%
Energy	32%	27%
Banks and Financial Institutions	31%	25%
Technology	30%	24%
Automobiles	26%	19%
Large Retail	25%	19%
Food and Beverage	22%	15%
Manufacturing	22%	16%

Which Industries Need More Government Oversight?

	2024	2023
Pharmaceuticals	40%	37%
Health Insurance	37%	34%
Energy	33%	30%
Tech	31%	31%
Banks and Financial Institutions	29%	28%
Food and Beverage	27%	21%
Manufacturing	26%	23%
Large Retail	26%	23%
Automobiles	24%	21%

Source: Public Affairs Council, Public Affairs Pulse Report, Oct. 2024

Personal Reputation: How Are You Perceived?

From the following list, what would you say are the positive aspects of lobbying?

	All	AT	CZ	DE	DK	FI	FR	GR	HU	IT	NL	NO	PL	SE	ES	UK	EU
Raising the local & national importance of an issue	50	50	60	74	23	60	53	37	30	70	67	26	50	55	35	72	44
A constructive part of the decision-making process	48	63	50	48	32	40	53	53	67	67	53	61	3	45	45	38	52
Sharing expertise	47	50	50	61	39	63	40	17	30	43	50	61	63	52	48	22	60
Translating technical & scientific information into relevant information	40	50	30	48	29	60	40	53	20	30	17	39	37	39	29	44	58
Providing the right information at the right time	39	75	43	65	26	50	7	33	23	40	47	35	43	26	32	41	38

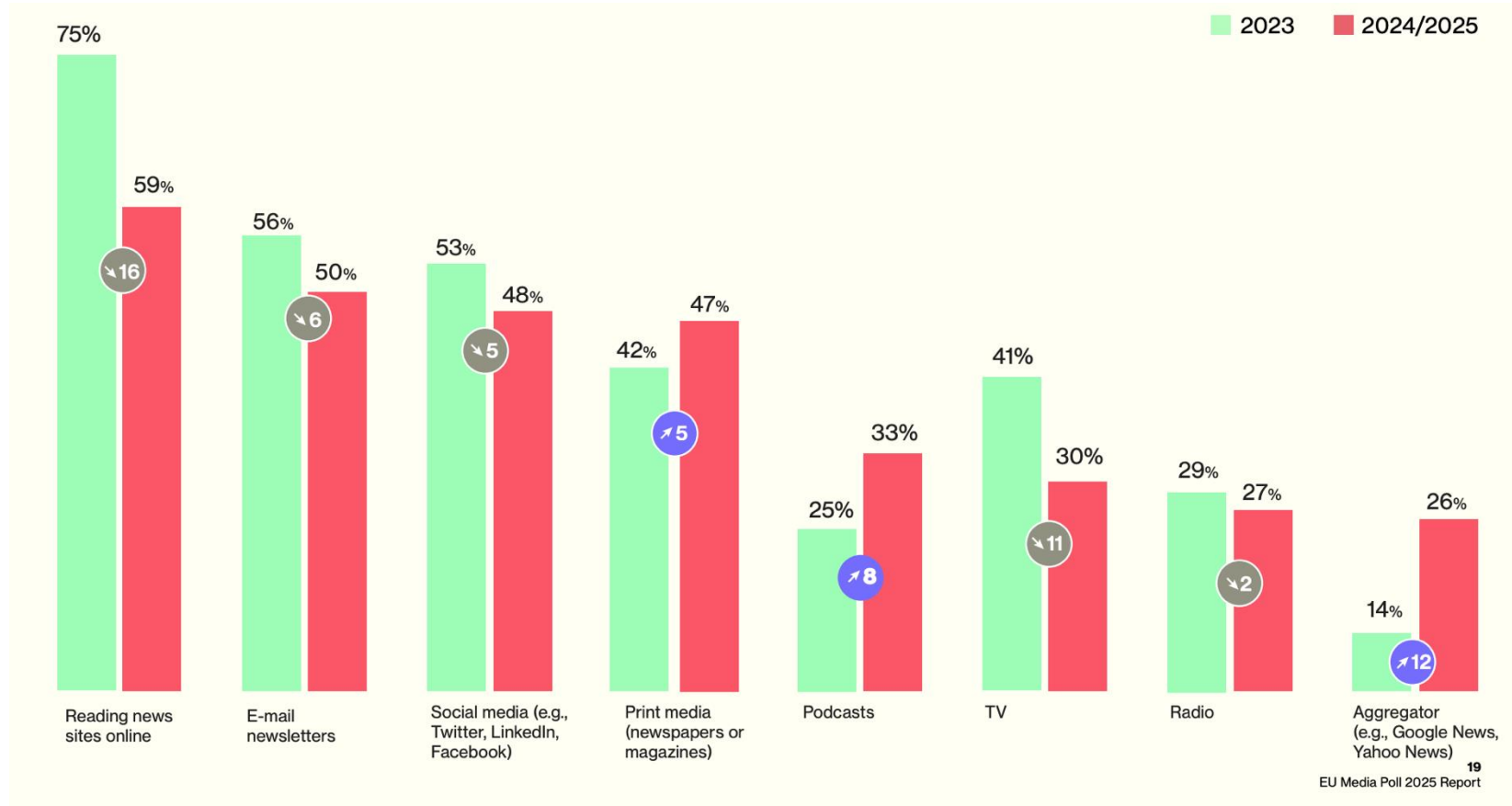
From the following list, what would you say are the negative aspects of lobbying?

	All	AT	CZ	DE	DK	FI	FR	GR	HU	IT	NL	NO	PL	SE	ES	UK	EU
Interest not clearly outlined/lack of transparency	57	50	53	65	39	80	43	37	60	60	67	58	90	65	52	50	48
Not providing neutral information	55	44	73	65	68	47	60	53	30	60	57	58	37	55	45	56	67
An undue influence of the democratic process	23	28	20	58	16	30	30	23	10	20	13	3	10	13	39	41	12
Too many contacts/an annoyance	23	25	37	10	29	30	33	13	10	10	17	26	13	23	13	28	37
Reserved for the elite	20	28	7	23	16	17	20	17	37	27	7	23	10	29	32	22	12
Other (Please specify)	8	13	13	6	6	3	3	7	3	20	10	10	0	16	10	3	4

TRENDS

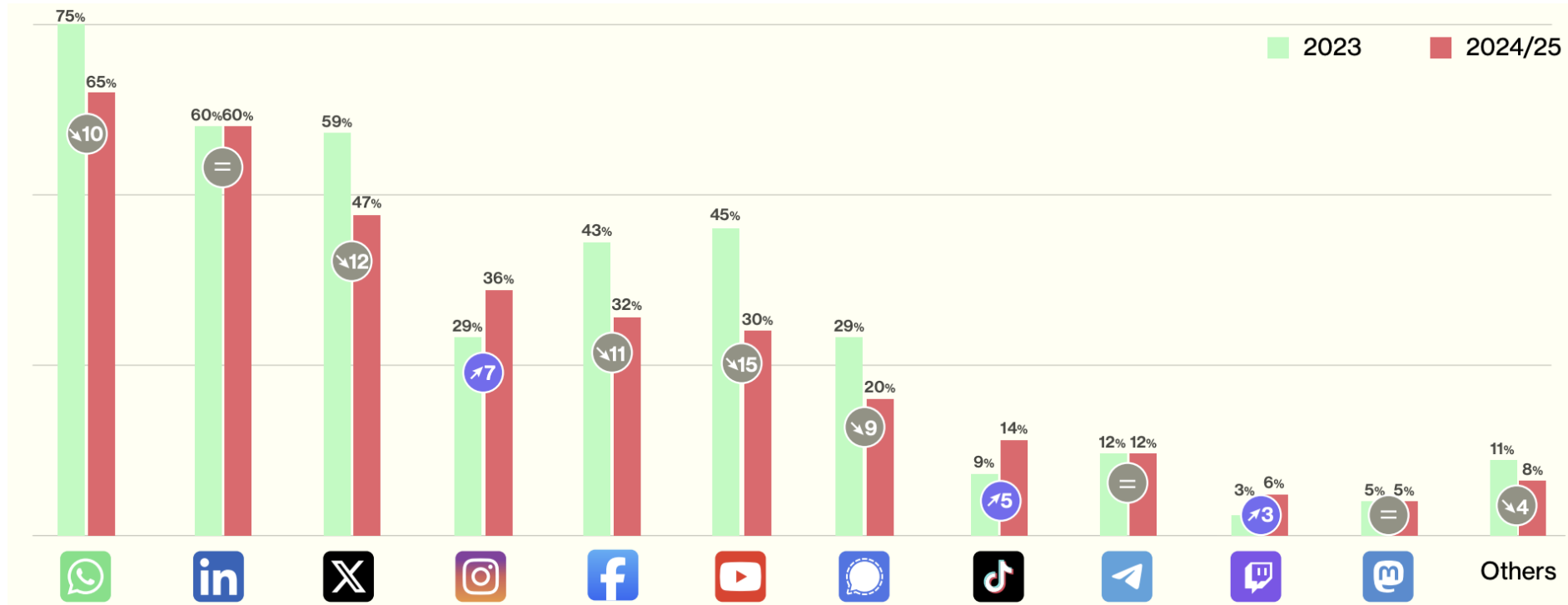
Understanding Your Audience

How Do Your EU Stakeholders Consume Information?



Source: Politico, BCW, Savanta, "EU Media Poll 2025"

Most Used Social Media & Messaging Apps

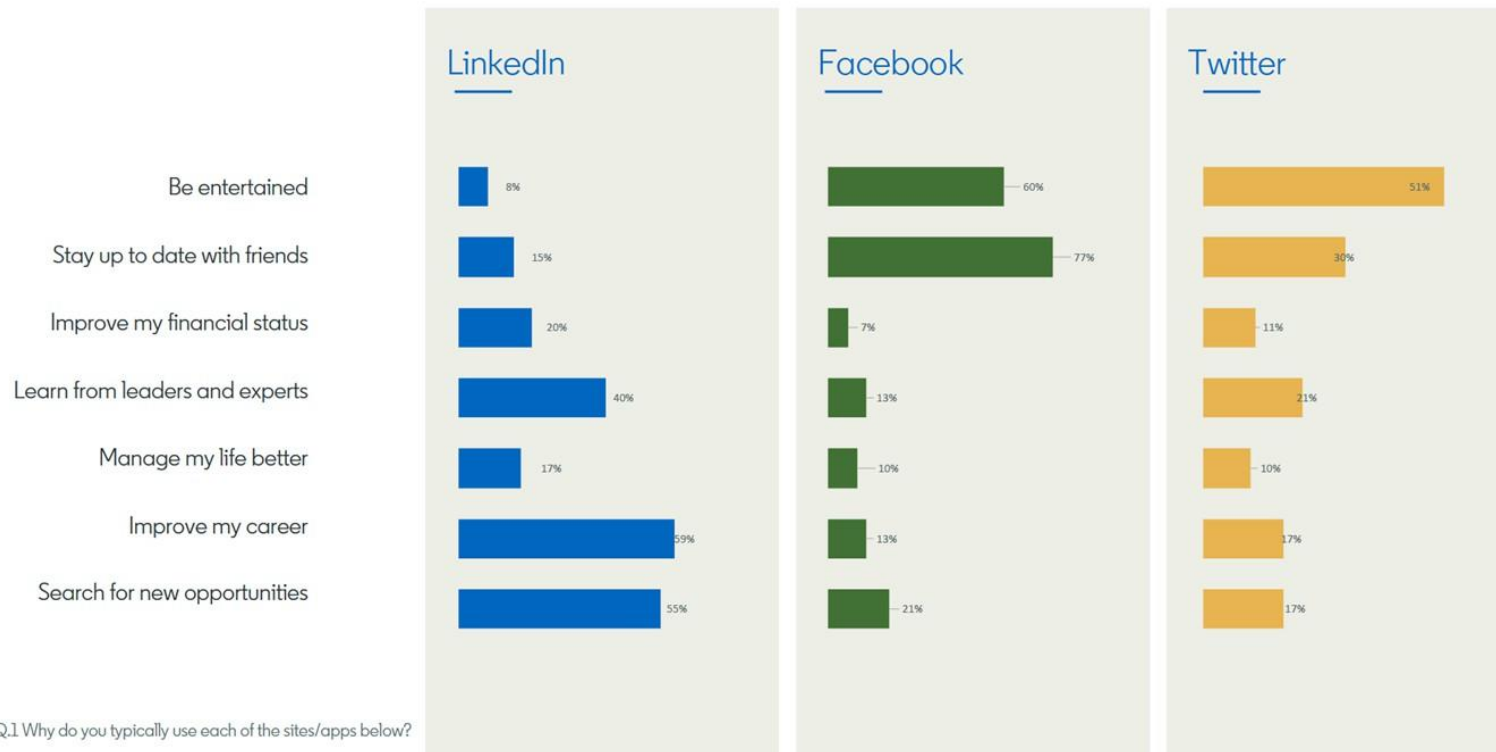


Source: Politico, BCW, Savanta, "EU Media Poll 2025"

How Do Audiences Use Social Media?

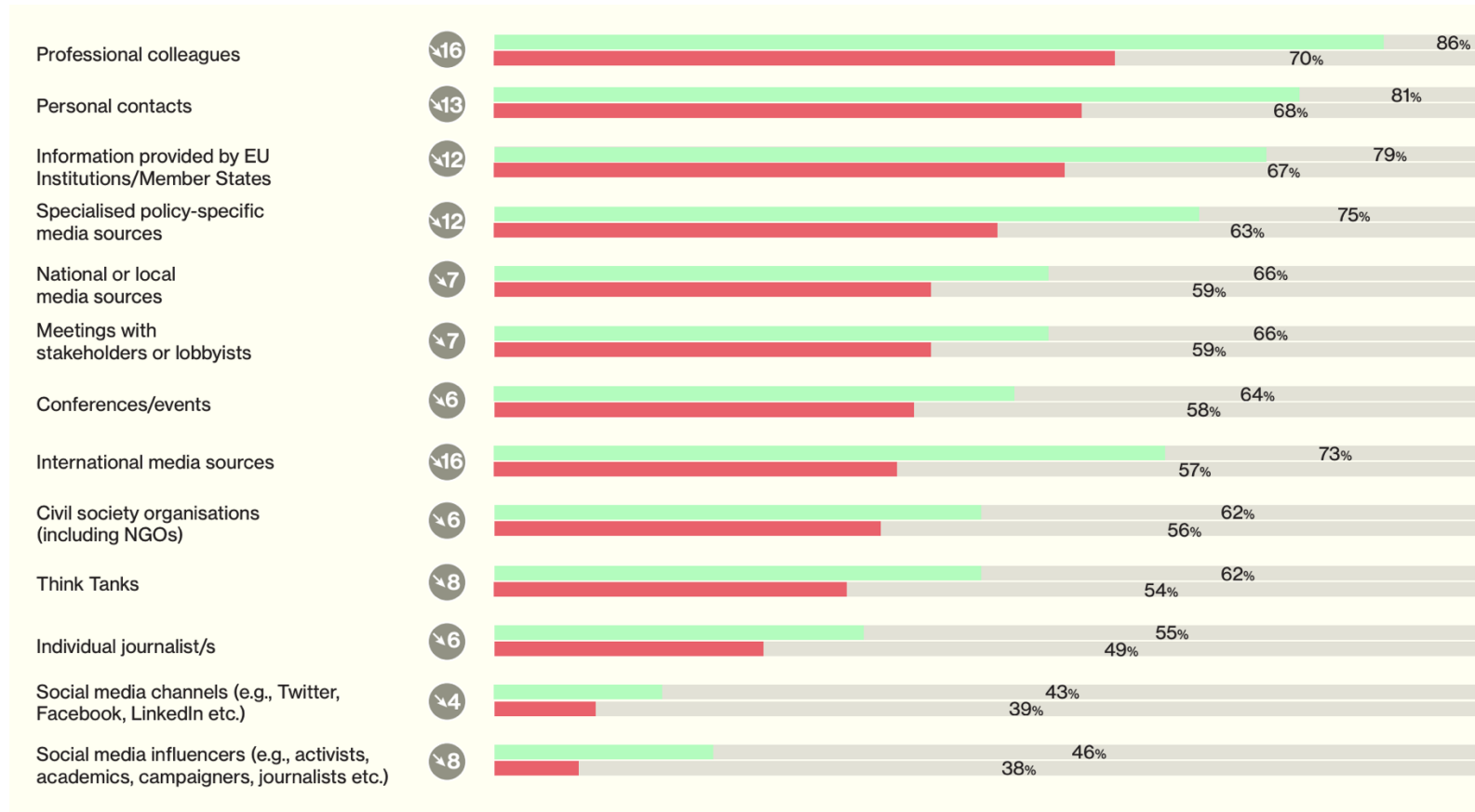
Consumers approach platforms with **distinct intents**

People come to LinkedIn to achieve their ambitions, not just to be entertained



interpret

Other Forms of Influence



Source: Politico, BCW, Savanta, "EU Media Poll 2025"

The SUCCES approach

Emotion VS Reason

- The human brain has evolved to privilege **emotion over reason**, perceptions over data, in decision-making
- If the information you receive does not match your identity or beliefs, your brain will challenge it (**cognitive dissonance**)
- **Facts & science are not enough** to persuade your audiences



You need a NARRATIVE



S.U.C.C.E.S. MESSAGING

the 6 ingredients

SIMPLE
CONCRETE
EMOTIONAL

UNEXPECTED
CREDIBLE
STORIES



SIMPLE

“ The coordination issues inherent in a highly regionalized structure put emphasis on an efficient organization of public governance, as the presence of multiple networks, layers and actors may lead to duplication of structures with weakened governance and higher administrative costs. ”

European Commission

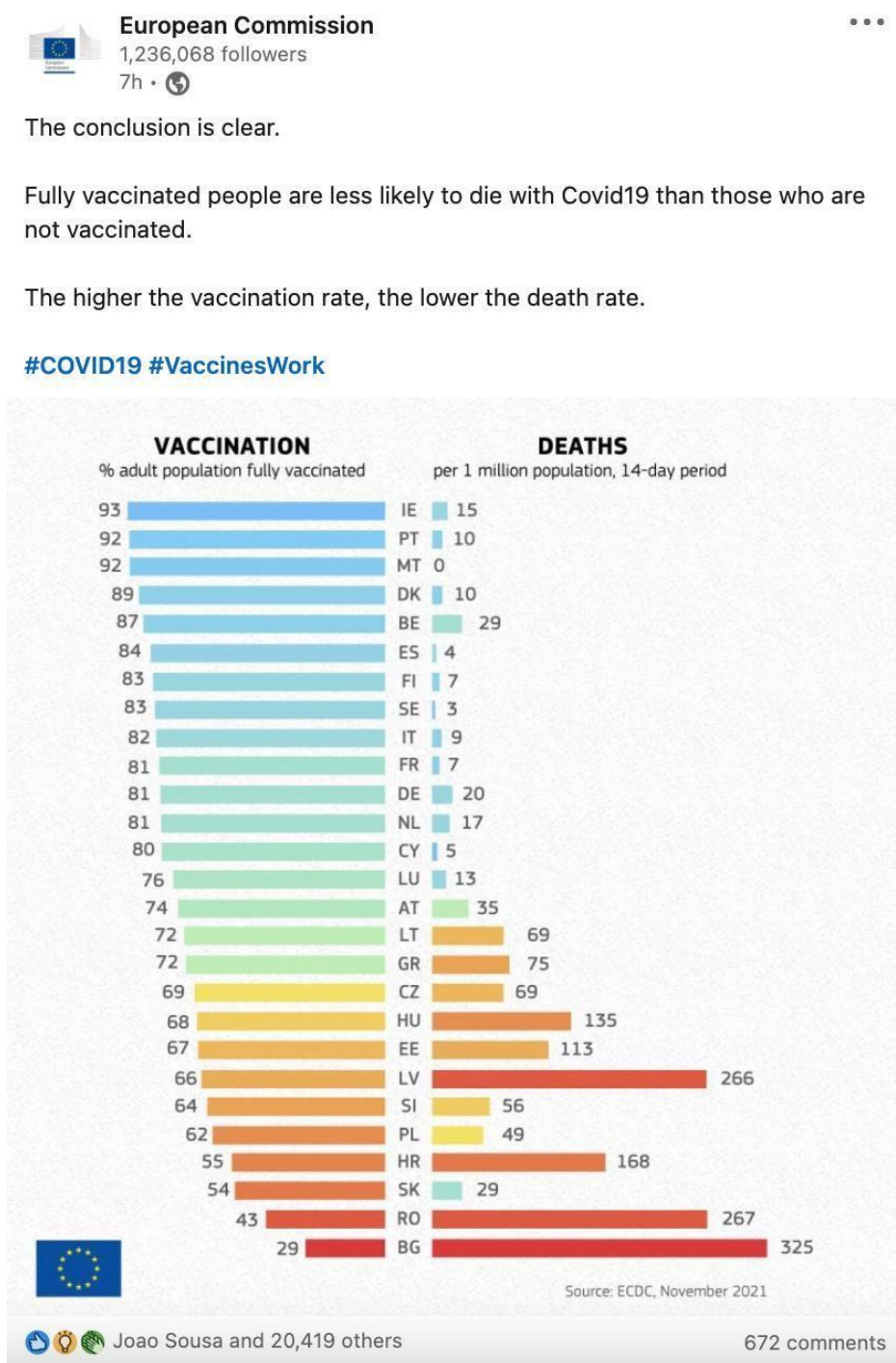


UNEXPECTED

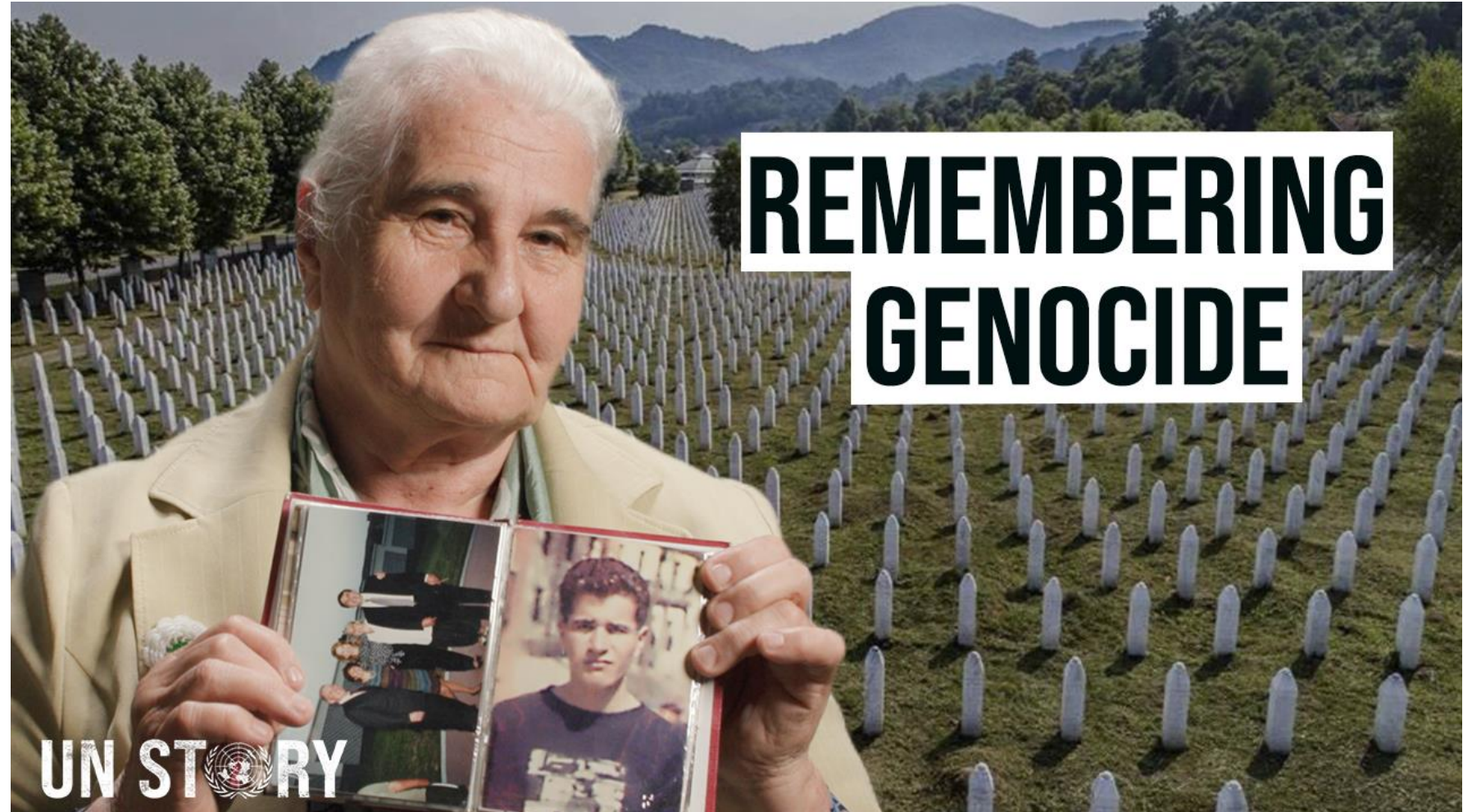


CONCRETE





CREDIBLE



EMOTIONAL



Seal clubbing ban

STORIES



Faces of Ukraine | Video 21 | Tatiana G.

"I'm from Odesa. We never get discouraged. We always smile, no matter what" Tatiana only left her home town because her daughter insisted. Now she wants to go back, "of course, I am going to go back to rebuild Odesa." "I have things to do at home" she says. #StandWithUkraine #FacesOfUkraine

🕒 20.07.2022



Faces of Ukraine | Video 20 | Natalia

"It became clear we had to leave." Natalia is from Irpin. When Russia started occupying nearby cities, she left with her daughter. Her son had to stay. "I count days before I will be able to return home. The fact is that I have no home" she says. #FacesOfUkraine

🕒 18.07.2022



Faces of Ukraine | Video 19 | Alyona

"If we stayed in the bomb shelter, we would be buried inside" Alyona and her family left Ukraine through destroyed streets, witnessing the horrors left behind by Russian soldiers. "A person's heart lingers there where they were born. We are determined to go back" #FacesOfUkraine

🕒 10.07.2022



Faces of Ukraine | Video 18 | Natalya

"I still remember those fireballs falling. The scariest thing is that you don't know where it's coming or where it's flying to" Natalya is from Kharkiv. When bombs started falling, she had to flee. Now she is "learning with the Greeks to enjoy life here and now." #FacesOfUkraine

🕒 07.07.2022

A.I. FOR STORYTELLING

Examples of Use Cases

1. Use cases – Brainstorming & idea generation

The problem/challenge: Your team would benefit from a structured brainstorming session and support turning scattered ideas into a corporate narrative and/or master messages document.

How AI can help:

- Prompt AI to facilitate a messaging brainstorming session for you and your team by asking 20 questions that encourage you to discuss your audience needs and interests, your strategic priorities, key messages, and other relevant points. Ask it to include questions that encourage you to challenge hidden biases and assumptions.
- Record the brainstorming session and use AI notetaker to produce a transcript.
- Prompt AI to convert the transcript into a set of key messages, story ideas and examples of a narrative that you could fine tune further.

2. Use cases – Messaging and alignment

The problem/challenge: You want to update your organization's key messaging to be coherent, up-to-date, and relevant to recent high-level speeches made by political leaders in EU summits, Davos WEF, media interviews, and others.

How AI can help:

- Upload relevant speeches, political decisions, public statements and other relevant texts into the AI, plus your key message documents, and prompt it to create a matrix highlighting key points of convergence and differences between them.
- Ask the AI to suggest tweaks and improvements to your key messages that maintain the original idea while finding points of convergence with the stakeholders' points.
- Ask AI to produce an internal brief summarizing key points and messaging improvements for senior leadership to assess and use in future meetings.

3. Use cases – Testing messaging & focus groups

The problem/challenge: You want to simulate the possible reactions of a group of legislators to your key arguments and messages.

How AI can help:

- Prompt the AI to act as a public policy analyst and summarize the views of relevant policymakers on a specific piece of legislation.
- Based on this first analysis, upload your strategic document onto the AI and ask it to create a matrix summarizing the policy positions of each policy-maker, points of convergence and divergence with your own positions. Identify the policy-makers whose positions are closer to yours.
- Act as a focus group analyst, zoom in on one specific policymaker and prompt AI to ask specific questions he/she might ask, test your messages and suggest talking points.

LET'S CONNECT!

JOAO SOUSA

MANAGING DIRECTOR
INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE

jsousa@pac.org

+32.476.639.503

@joppsousa

U.S. OFFICE

2121 K ST. N.W. SUITE 900
WASHINGTON DC 20037

pac@pac.org

+1.202.787.5950

EUROPEAN OFFICE

SQUARE AMBIORIX 7
1000 BRUSSELS

europe@pac.org

+32.476.639.503

