

PS 1.2

CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATION

| BACKGROUND

Background

Already in 1902, there was an article published in the *Selma Morning Times* in US attributing a theory to the Swedish Nobel laureate Svante Arrhenius that coal combustion could cause global warming that eventually may lead to human extinction. In recent decades the evidence base on climate change has become stronger and the awareness in terms of its health impacts has increased. Approaching the UN General Assembly in September 2021, BMJ and more than 200 medical journals published a joint editorial concluding that science is unequivocal, urging world leaders to act on climate change, “A global increase of 1.5°C above the pre-industrial average and the continued loss of biodiversity risk catastrophic harm to health that will be impossible to reverse”. The climate crisis affects everybody, and urgent mitigation action is needed i.e., to cut greenhouse gas emissions, the drivers of climate change, and adaptation, i.e., actions taken to manage unavoidable impacts and new conditions.

How climate change is communicated may have a decisive impact on the ability to create awareness, inform and motivate decision makers, civil society, and different stake holders for both far reaching climate mitigation and extensive resources for adaptation. The central role of communication in such processes has constantly been emphasized by researchers in recent years, but it has not been reflected in the space given in scientific debates.

Climate change communication closely relates to health communication. The importance of incorporating health communication insights into climate change communication has been emphasized. Health communication has developed over a far longer period than climate change communication, with focus on encouraging behavior modification and social change. There is vast experience in health communication of intervening, framing, and segmenting different audiences on relevant factors needed for tailored communication, to engage, empower, influence individuals and communities.

Climate communication emerged as a research area in the beginning of the 1990's. For a long time, it mostly focused on awareness raising regarding climate change. During the last decade it has included aspects such as motivation, capacities, enabling, empowerment, civic engagement and public participation, organizational strategies, and persuasive strategies to affect attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Social marketing, widely used in public health interventions for decades, has also been more frequently used in climate change public engagement. There has also been growing attention to how climate change messages are framed to foster greater engagement. It has been suggested that communicating health effects could be a way to motivate people to change to low energy lifestyles. This potentially could occur in several ways; from avoiding negative direct health effects from climate change to embracing health benefits from mitigation and adaptation activities. Climate change communication has a lot to learn from health communication and by strengthening the knowledge base the power of communication can lead to greater impact regarding climate change action on both individual and societal level.

Previous research on agenda setting has shown that the amount of media coverage a topic receives correlates strongly with the public's opinion of how important the topic is. Though, in the social media era there is also a social media agenda to consider in agenda setting processes when discussing factors that could mediate change. The rapid increase in the use of social media in recent decades has led to an increase in mis- and disinformation. From the 1950s, the tobacco industry organized campaigns as part of a cohesive strategy, the so called “tobacco strategies” to raise doubts that smoking could be harmful to health and hereby delay regulations and legislation. It has frequently been reported how the fossil fuel industry uses the tobacco strategies for the same purpose. The main lesson from tobacco history is that delay in agreeing on international policy and poor implementation will cost countless lives. Today, climate change is one of the topics that has been most subjected to organized disinformation. Social media networks are also fertile ground for misinformation. It circulates online, is disseminated to the public and discussed in established media, and in the worst case it can influence decision-makers.

| OBJECTIVES

Objectives

- Describe what climate communication is and explore how climate communication can produce engagement and action in decision makers, the general public and other stakeholders.
- Discuss how the risks of climate change can be communicated to provide change and action instead of creating passivity making people lose hope.
- Share knowledge how climate change can be communicated to different audiences (i.e., different countries, different levels of education, generations, etc.).
- Explore the role of health in climate communication.
- Show examples of how messages can be formulated and framed to create engagement.
- Discuss climate change misinformation and disinformation, specifically on social media and how risks can be counteracted.



Speaker

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Kathie Treen is a final year PhD student at the University of Exeter, UK. Her PhD topic is: "Online misinformation and climate change". Whilst data science is central to this topic, the research is interdisciplinary, incorporating relevant research in quantitative social sciences, communications science and environmental politics.

During her PhD Kathie has published a review paper on Online Misinformation about Climate Change (<https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/wcc.665>) and a second paper published in Environmental Communication investigating climate discourse on Reddit (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17524032.2022.2050776>). She is currently researching climate change misinformation on YouTube.

Kathie has an MBA from Exeter and prior to that undertook a BSc Mathematics at Durham and an MSc in Operations Research at Lancaster. In addition to her academic qualifications Kathie has 15 years of industry experience working primarily in Reporting and Analysis / Operations in a range of organisations including QinetiQ, BAE Systems Detica, Amazon (Audible) and most recently Crowdcube.

Kathie's dissertation for her MBA was titled Measuring the Business Benefits of Social Initiatives and was undertaken with Sony Europe and won the Hutton Prize for Excellence at Exeter.