

Nations Unies

Conférence sur les Changements Climatiques 2015

COP21/CMP11

Paris France



Communicating to drive action and inspire hope

Dr Gabi Mocatta, Deakin University & University of Tasmania

Communication for transformation

The science on climate change is settled.

It's public understanding of the gravity and urgency of the climate situation that's now needed to drive policy change.

We need engaging climate communication of all kinds that understands the challenges of communicating climate change – and can illuminate pathways for transformational change.



**“Saving our planet is now
a communications
challenge.”**

David Attenborough, 2020.



What makes communicating climate change so challenging?

Challenge #1: Climate change (and climate science) are complex and uncertain

Challenge #2: Climate Change is a long-term threat

Challenge #3: Climate change is 'bad news'

Challenge #4: Climate change makes us feel powerless

Challenge #5: Climate change is "invisible"

Challenge #6: Climate change has become politicised

Challenge #7: Climate change has become subject to misinformation



Most people develop their understanding of climate change from the media..

Public discourses on climate have been problematic..

Much media coverage has fallen short of presenting the causes, scale, impacts, urgency and complexity of climate change.

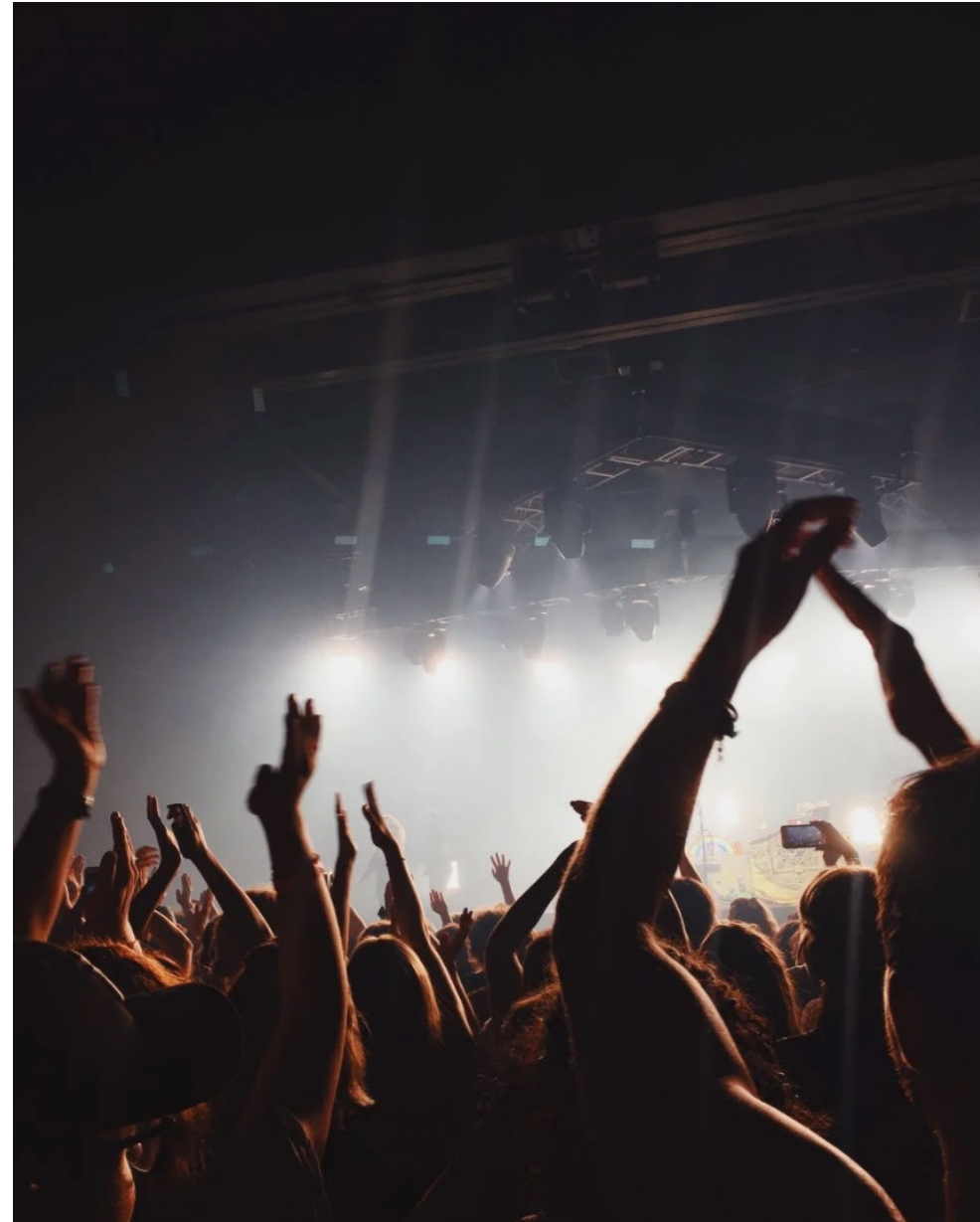


The media's:

- profit-orientated priorities
- Issue-attention cycle
- Reproduction of organised misinformation
- Vulnerability to fossil fuel industry lobby

And the nature of climate politics (in Australia especially)

...have led to low levels of climate literacy and efficacy...(despite high levels of concern)



Decades of research gives us a detailed picture of more productive directions for communicating climate change....

..and we are all climate communicators..



What works for climate change communication?

- Tell stories about climate change in *local* environments that people are familiar with.
- Focus on climate change impacts now - not just in the future. Communicate urgency.
- Ask: who is responsible? (Fossil fuel industry accountability, consumption beyond planetary boundaries)
- Consider imagery: while disaster images have their place, locally relevant images of climate change solutions and images of people with clear narratives are most engaging.



What works for climate change communication?

- Recognise the limits of fear-based messaging. Focus on efficacy (concrete actions) and *solutions* to climate change where possible.
- Focus on the “climate majority” not persuading the minority of climate deniers.
- Storytelling is an effective technique for climate communication. Most people understand the world through anecdotes and stories, not statistics and graphs. Aim for a narrative structure. Tell ordinary people's stories to depict a global problem at person-scale.



What works for climate change communication?

- Be aware of misinformation and how to counter it. (eg: “inoculation theory”)
- Use novel ways to communicate climate (eg: “fact-based dreaming”, virtual and extended reality).
- Make it clear that we have all the technologies that it takes *right now* to decarbonise and avoid the worst effects of climate change. We don't have to wait for future technological innovation.
- Don't shy away from communicating that lifestyles must change.
- “Everyone, everywhere, all at once”: change is needed on individual, communal, national and global level. Everyone can use their talents. Every fraction of a degree matters.



What works for climate change communication?

- Acknowledge and express emotion in communicating climate change. Anger can be productive. Climate grief and eco-anxiety are real – and can help galvanise change.
- Connect with what matters to your audience. Research shows that people's values and political views have a bigger influence on their climate change attitudes than their scientific knowledge. Connect with widely-shared public values. Regard for the audience's worldview should underpin all climate change communication.



In summary

Climate change is not a problem that can be communicated better simply with *more* science data.

Climate change is a social problem that demands *social* understanding and social solutions.

Understanding audiences and communicating for transformation is at the heart of this.

Effective communication on climate change may dictate how – or whether - we take the action needed in the next decade to avoid the worst extremes of climate change.

