

Winning the Conversation: Framing and Moral Messaging in Environmental Campaigns

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Tom Crompton’s “Weathercocks and Signposts” is an important call for new directions in environmental communication. As Crompton aptly argues, campaigns that narrowly seek to promote sustainable consumer choices and personal behavior may “serve as dangerous distractions from the serious business of getting in place policy frameworks that are sufficiently ambitious” (p. 13) in addressing climate change, energy insecurity, and related problems. As Crompton explains, environmental campaigns need to better assess different publics relevant to an issue, deploy a broader vocabulary in making the case for change, and enable a greater diversity of voices to express and demonstrate their support for action.

In this chapter, drawing on research from the social and behavioral sciences, we analyze campaign efforts in the United States to mobilize public demand for policy action on climate change, elaborating in detail on the themes and conclusions offered by Crompton. We describe methods for reframing climate change in ways that are more personally engaging, for creating a moral foundation that compels greater participation, for localizing the issue and switching policy focus, thereby diffusing political polarization, and for using opinion-leaders as community-level connectors and recruiters.

Public Participation: Processes and Barriers

Public participation relative to climate change, energy insecurity, and related environmental problems can take multiple forms, and these forms mirror how individuals participate in public life more generally. They include “political participation,” defined as expressing political opinions and preferences to decision-makers and to peers while also recruiting others to become involved; “civic engagement,” defined as working with others to collaboratively address complex problems and challenges in local communities and regions; and “political consumerism,” which includes rewarding and punishing businesses and organizations for their products or practices and encouraging peers to do the same (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009).

From a social change perspective, research suggests four major reasons why these forms of public participation matter to challenging the status quo on environmental problems, especially in relation to climate change. First, public participation rewards and punishes societal decision-makers (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). As environmental groups admitted following the defeat in 2010 of U.S. cap and trade legislation, the lack of public pressure in support of the bill, especially in key states, contributed to defeat. “The community that tried to move a climate bill fundamentally lacks political power and doesn’t have the ability to either deliver punishment or reward to members of Congress who don’t vote for us,” said Kathleen Welch, a Washington-based philanthropy adviser (Samuelsohn, 2011).

Second, public participation can build trust and collaboration. Not all forms of participation involve political activity. Research has shown that various forms of community involvement, such as church attendance or volunteering, build trust and social capital among participants (Putnam, 2000). If civic involvement focuses on defending and protecting local communities and people from climate change impacts, some participants may eventually be recruited into political activity on behalf of national policy action focused on curbing emissions or investing in new energy sources.

Third, public participation has the potential to improve the quality and perceived legitimacy of policy action. Experts and policymakers do not have all the answers, and nationally derived one-size-fits-all approaches to regional and community problems often fail. Members of the public offer their own forms of expertise based on professional training and personal experience that can and should inform policy approaches to climate change. Studies also show that when members of the public feel as if experts and decision-makers have genuinely listened to them, public participation helps diffuse polarization and builds consensus for eventual policy actions (Einsiedel, 2008).

Finally, public participation serves as a moral force in society. Public activism and expression can alter society's overall "quasi-statistical sense" of what the culture expects, accepts, and believes to be just. This is especially the case when those who are the most vocal are perceived by other individuals to be part of their "in group" and are able to frame the reasons for action in moral terms (Noelle-Neumann, 1995).

Pathways to Public Participation

Those individuals most likely to become involved in public life typically benefit from greater time, money, organizational and communication skills; are more politically interested, knowledgeable, opinion-intense, efficacious, and trusting; and receive a greater number of requests to become involved from peers and groups (Verba et al., 1995; Nie, Junn & Stehlik-Barry, 1996). However, social settings and information sources play an important role above and beyond these background factors and are especially important in the context of developing successful communication campaigns.

Social settings such as church, work, and volunteer groups serve as "networks of recruitment," where individuals receive requests to become involved on issues like climate change (Goidel & Nisbet, 2006). Studies show that the more requests a person receives in these types of settings, the higher the level of their participation (Verba et al., 1995). These social settings also indirectly

provide the hard and soft resources needed to participate. Examples of hard resources include a space to meet and access to computers, photocopiers and phones. In terms of soft resources, Robert Putnam's work on social capital highlights the role of trust in institutions, group membership, and time spent interacting with others in one's community as primary motivators of civic participation (Putnam, 2000).

Church groups, for example, often rely on strong interpersonal bonds and norms of stewardship to encourage their members to participate in activities that they otherwise would be unlikely to engage in. These networks are further strengthened by the moral and political framing of issues by church leaders, the conversations that church-goers have with others, and information provided directly when at church (Goidel & Nisbet, 2006). Requests to participate and conversations that individuals have at work serve similar functions (Scheufele, Nisbet, & Brossard, 2003). At work, many individuals serve in leadership positions with this experience making them more effective as political participants and peer recruiters (Nie et al., 1996). Higher education also often translates into greater leisure time and membership in a greater diversity of community groups. In turn, these translate into a greater number of weak ties and connections (what Putnam refers to as "bridging" social capital), important resources for recruiting and relying on others to become involved on an issue (Putnam & Campbell, 2010).

Building on studies examining socio-economic background and social settings, communication research has examined the connections between these factors and forms of media, Internet, and mobile technology use as well as interpersonal conversations and social media interactions. This research finds that forms of media use and different types of conversations promote participation by providing "mobilizing information" that tells individuals how to get involved and who to contact and by defining issues in personally relevant ways (Campbell & Kwak, 2010; de Zúñiga et al., 2010; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000).

Psychological Barriers to Public Participation

If the basic mechanisms shaping public participation on an issue can be reduced to socio-economic status, recruitment through social settings, and mobilization through information sources, why hasn't public involvement on the issue been greater, given the amount of resources devoted to climate change communication in recent years?

To begin answering this fundamental question, researchers have identified and explored numerous psychological and social processes that shape how and to what extent individuals engage with climate change. Many of these mechanisms act as barriers to public participation, either by directly weakening motivation to participate or else indirectly by inhibiting perceptions of climate change as an important, real, and serious problem that requires action (Gifford, 2011). Communication and campaign efforts that do not take these factors into account and address them are unlikely to be successful.

Most Americans are still not yet actively engaged with climate change—cognitively, emotionally or behaviorally (Pew, 2010). Increasing and diversifying forms of public participation on climate change issues will involve overcoming behavioral inertia and individuals' deeply engrained and well-practiced habits, since participation relative to climate change, much less public affairs more generally, is an uncommon occurrence rather than a top-of-mind habit for most individuals.

Further depressing motivation to engage with climate change, many Americans' perceive, correctly, that the worst consequences of the problem will accrue to other people living far away both in time and space. Because people strongly discount events that are psychologically distant, such perceptions generally act to decrease motivation to participate (Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). Moreover, because climate change may be a distant, abstract, probabilistic, scientific and personally "un-experiencable" phenomenon, people lack naturally strong emotional reactions to the issue (Weber, 2006). Much research in the behavioral sciences now

points to the critical role that such affective processes play in shaping both our short- and long-term decision-making.

Climate change also involves uncertainty relative to its ultimate consequences, timing of events, and severity of outcomes. In turn, uncertainty tends to promote the belief that individuals do not hold a personal responsibility to respond, since people are generally predisposed to be overly optimistic about personal risks (Weinstein, 1980). As a result, many individuals are likely to interpret information about climate change in ways that allow them to maintain a positive outlook on life. When people do recognize the severity of the threats posed by climate change, they are likely to respond either by denying those consequences or else by feeling helpless to respond (Norgaard, 2011). Alternatively, attempts to educate people about the threats through fear-based appeals can actually increase skepticism about climate science when individuals hold a strong belief that the world is a just, fair, and stable place (Feinberg & Willer, 2011).

Feelings of inefficacy also pose a significant barrier to greater levels of public participation, especially when individuals are told that there is little that can be done to stop the worst outcomes of impending changes (a message that is increasingly coming from both climate skeptics *and* the most ardent climate advocates). Similarly, when individuals lack trust in existing institutions and actors do not have either the capacity to respond effectively or the motivation to do so, personal motivation to engage with the issue is dampened, since feelings of reciprocal sacrifice are important motivators of participation.

Political Barriers to Public Participation

As political leaders and activists have increasingly packaged almost every policy debate in terms of clearly defined ideological differences, party labels have become brand names, each standing for a distinct set of conservative or liberal positions. Partisan elite cues—as political scientists call them—cut down on the amount of information highly-educated and politically engaged Americans need to form an opinion about a topic, enabling strong Democrats

and Republicans to bundle their opinions in an ideologically consistent direction across issues. Politically attentive Democrats tend to consistently take a strong liberal position on issues, and politically attentive Republicans tend to take an even stronger conservative position (Abramowitz, 2010). Over the past decade, as elected officials and political leaders have diverged on climate change, the public voices on the issue have tended to reflect a deeply polarized minority, while moderate voices have become increasingly less visible, reinforcing policy gridlock, and creating barriers to wider participation on the issue.

Strengthening the tendency to ideologically bundle their opinions, highly motivated partisans tailor their media consumption to sources that reflect their ideological outlook (Mutz, 2006). On cable television, Fox News, MSNBC and CNN offer viewers equally one-sided presentations on the issue of climate change, though with different slants. A majority of segments at Fox News dismiss the need for action on climate change while a strong majority of segments at MSNBC and CNN strongly endorse reasons for action. Predictably, among Republicans, heavier viewers of Fox are more dismissive of climate change than their lighter-viewing counterparts. Yet those few Republicans who watch the other cable networks are more similar to Democrats in their views about the issue. An implication is that it may be possible to engage Republicans on the issue of climate change if the issue is recontextualized in a persuasive and compelling way, a topic we return to later in the chapter (Feldman et al., 2012).

With Obama's election in 2008, among Republican and conservative-leaning Americans, skepticism of climate science became a stand-in for opposition to a climate policy that Republican leaders and conservative commentators defined as damaging to the economy. According to Patrick Moynihan and Gary Langer (Moynihan, Langer, & Craighill, 2010), directors of survey research at Harvard University and ABC News respectively, during this period, when Republicans in surveys increasingly answered that they did not believe in man-made climate change, their an-

swer served as “a vehicle to express antipathy toward the solution, not to voice firm belief in the existence of the problem” (p. 15).

Consider also how this polarization process has shaped views on government investment in wind and solar energy sources. When President Obama took office in 2009, more than 80 percent of Republicans and Democrats favored government investment, reflecting consistent elite cues from leaders of both parties advocating on behalf of the promise of solar and wind. Yet as Obama began to make clean energy a major part of his domestic policy agenda, Republican leaders shifted their position, a shift reflected in discussion at conservative media outlets. The divergence in elite cues on the issue spiked in the wake of the Solyndra bankruptcy inquiry. By late 2011, support among Republicans had dropped to 53 percent, a 30 percent gap with Democrats (Pew, 2011).

Recent experimental work by Yale University’s Dan Kahan and colleagues (2007) supports the conclusion that perceptions of climate science are policy dependent. In these studies, when conservatives read that the *solution* to climate change was more nuclear power, their skepticism of expert statements relative to climate change decreased and their support for policy responses increased. In contrast, when the solution to climate change was framed as stricter pollution controls, conservatives’ acceptance of expert statements on the causes of climate change decreased, whereas that of liberals increased. A major implication is that effective public engagement on climate change will depend on the policy actions proposed, with some actions such as tax incentives for nuclear energy, government support for clean energy research, or proposals to defend and protect local communities against climate change impacts more likely to gain support and participation from both Democrats and Republicans.

Breaking Barriers: A Moral Foundation for Action

Historically, advocates and their campaigns have defined climate change as an environmental problem that threatens ecosystems and wildlife, often in remote polar regions or other countries. Similarly, calls for policy action and the public to become involved have

been focused on the national and international level, defined relatively narrowly in terms of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. As a consequence, outside a committed base of environmentalists and progressive activists, the public still lacks strong moral intuitions about climate change with appeals to participate lacking moral weight. Rather than identify the issue as one that involves considerations of right and wrong, blame and responsibility, many people understand climate change in scientific, technical, political and economic terms (Markowitz, 2012). If they do perceive a moral dimension to climate change, it is likely relative to care for the environment, an intuition that is easily overlooked in the context of economic concerns.

As Crompton urges, in the following section we discuss the need for environmental organizations to broaden and deepen their moral vocabulary, a shift that is likely to diversify and intensify forms of public participation. We describe the promise for reframing climate change in terms of public health and local-level actions that protect people and communities from climate change impacts.

Framing and Moral Intuitions

Frames are interpretive storylines that set a specific train of thought in motion, communicating why an issue might be a problem, who or what might be responsible for it, and what should be done. Framing a policy problem or issue endows certain dimensions of the complex issue with greater apparent relevance than they would have under an alternative frame. Audiences rely on frames to make sense of and discuss an issue; journalists use frames to craft interesting and appealing news reports; policymakers apply frames to define policy options and reach decisions; and, experts employ frames to simplify technical details and make them persuasive. As interpretative packages for an issue, frames are instantly translated by way of catch phrases (green jobs), metaphors (comparison to the Space Race), and visuals (construction worker retrofitting a house) (Nisbet, 2009; Scheufele, 1999).

Frames are often most effective when they appeal to morally relevant intuitions that are strongly held by an individual or seg-

ment of the public. “Part of what it means to be a partisan is that you have acquired the right set of intuitive reactions to hundreds of words and phrases,” explains University of Virginia psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2012) in his best-selling book *The Righteous Mind*. “Within a few seconds or less of encountering phrases like pro-life or pro-choice, your intuition has already started to lean one way, and that lean influences what you think and do next” (p. 58). In his research, Haidt draws on surveys of tens of thousands of individuals to develop and validate a typology of six commonly held moral foundations, which include:

- *Harm/care*—concerns about the caring for and protection of others
- *Fairness/cheating*—concerns about treating others fairly and upholding justice
- *Loyalty/betrayal*—concerns about group membership and loyalty to one’s nation and community
- *Authority/subversion*—concerns about legitimacy, leadership, and tradition
- *Liberty/oppression*—concerns about personal freedom and control by others
- *Sanctity/degradation*—concerns about purity, sanctity and contamination

Liberal advocates and environmental leaders tend to communicate about issues in ways that mostly activate the *moral foundations of harm/care, liberty/oppression, and fairness/cheating*. This reflects their own intuitive lens in how they make sense of issues and the vocabulary they share with like-minded colleagues, friends, and supporters. Yet to intensify and diversify public participation on climate change, a successful campaign needs to also appeal to a greater bandwidth of moral foundations and to be fluent in a variety of “moral languages.”

From *An Inconvenient Truth* to Repower America

Historically, environmentalists and climate advocates have displayed a relatively narrow moral palette, speaking only a few mor-

al languages in their efforts to intensify public participation or in some cases failing even to offer a moral argument for action. In the 2006 film *An Inconvenient Truth*, former vice president Al Gore dramatized the climate crisis for viewers by emphasizing specific environmental impacts, including hurricane devastation or famous cities or landmarks under water due to future sea-level rise. This framing strategy activated the *moral foundation of harm/care*, though much of the focus was on harm to nature or the environment rather than humans. The film, as captured in its title, had a heavy focus on holding industry and conservatives accountable for inaction (Nisbet, 2009), activating the moral foundations of *liberty/oppression* and *fairness/cheating*.

In 2008, Gore announced in a *60 Minutes* interview that he would embark on a three-year, \$300 million “We Can Solve It” advertising campaign, designed “to recruit 10 million advocates to seek laws and policies that can cut greenhouse gases.” Gore conceived of the WE advertising campaign as addressing the problem of donor confusion and overlapping competitive strategies among environmental groups. “Everyone is faced with a continuing struggle of funding from donors. And the more this issue rises, the more it is used in all the appeals, and that’s fine in a way,” Gore told environmental leaders in 2007. “But the message is chewed up and ends up not feeding the growth of a truly mass movement” (Pooley, 2010, p. 25).

The WE campaign marked a shift in communication strategy for Gore. He would no longer be at the forefront of media messaging, and the framing focus would be recast to focus on national unity. In the first TV ads framed around the theme of “We Can Solve the Climate Crisis,” the issue was characterized as a solvable and shared moral challenge, activating the *moral foundation of loyalty*. The ads paired unlikely spokespeople such as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi with former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich.⁴ In ads titled “America Does Not Wait,” action on global warming was compared to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, the

⁴ The Pelosi ad is on YouTube at: <http://youtu.be/VaZFfQKWX54>.

United States' role in aiding allies in World War II, and the recovery from the Great Depression.⁵

In 2009 and 2010, as cap and trade legislation was debated, Gore's campaign was recast again, this time around the theme of "Repower America," as TV ads featured actors as ranchers, construction workers, and autoworkers, stressing the economic benefits of action on climate change.⁶ The Environmental Defense Fund—as the chief group behind the cap and trade policy approach—ran similar ads in Midwest swing districts and cities. The ads were framed around the theme of "cap = jobs." Narrated by Braddock, Pennsylvania mayor John Fetterman, the ads featured images of tough steel workers and told viewers: "We need a cap on carbon pollution. It'll create jobs making things like solar panels and wind turbines. There's two hundred tons of steel in wind turbine. You guys can handle that, right?" The ad then flashed the slogan: "Carbon caps = Hard hats."⁷

A Failure to Mobilize. Yet at a time when public participation was needed the most, the Repower America and "cap = jobs" campaigns lacked a strong moral foundation. The campaigns offered the promise of economic benefits but did not build a case for why we should act and why we have a responsibility to do so. The emphasis on economic benefits in the context of the recession also turned the debate into "some economic benefits" as claimed by greens versus "dramatic economic costs" as claimed by opponents, a balance that, given the economic context, favored the opposition.

The table below summarizes the moral foundations that were activated by various recent climate change campaigns. In 2006 and 2007, *An Inconvenient Truth* (ACT) focused on moral intuitions that engaged a liberal base, and when *harm/care* was activated, the focus was more on the environment than human welfare. In 2008, the We Can Solve It (WE) campaign expanded to

⁵ The "America Does Not Wait" ad is on YouTube at: <http://youtu.be/1fMgTD92nYk>

⁶ The Repower America ad is on YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1Qc9Kj15NM&feature=relmfu>

⁷ The Cap = Jobs ad is on YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaJE1sjqEt4>

include a focus on loyalty. In 2009 and 2010, as cap and trade was debated, the Repower America and cap = jobs campaigns lacked an obvious moral call to action, focusing instead narrowly on economic benefits.

Table 1. Moral Foundations Activated by Climate Campaigns, 2006–2010

Campaign	Held by Liberals and Conservatives		
	Harm/ Care	Fairness/ cheating	Liberty/ oppression
ACT	***	✓	✓
WE	***	--	--
Repower	--	--	--
Cap = Jobs	--	--	--
Campaign	Held Mostly by Conservatives		
	Loyalty/ betrayal	Authority/ subversion	Sanctity/ degradation
ACT	--	--	--
WE	✓	--	--
Repower	--	--	--
Cap = Jobs	--	--	--

*Note: *** Predominant focus was on harm to environment rather than human health or well-being.*

The lack of moral urgency and context is reflected in public opinion surveys. In January 2010, even after the House had passed cap and trade legislation and the Senate had taken up debate, 60 percent of Americans said they had not heard of cap and trade. Among the 40 percent who had, when asked what came to mind about the bill, 15 percent said nothing. Even among the 13 percent of Americans who could be categorized as genuinely “Alarmed” by climate change, when cap and trade legislation was specifically explained for them, their support remained soft. Moreover, among this Alarmed group, only 30 percent answered that they had engaged in any form of political action such as contacting an elected official (Revkin, 2011).

Local Action to Protect Innocents

In response to the failure of the climate bill, environmental leaders called for new approaches to communication, asserting that with national policy stalled, now was the time to invest in building networks and partnerships in the Midwest and other regions. “We will have to reach out to new partners, make new allies and engage new constituencies,” wrote the Environmental Defense Fund’s Fred Krupp (2010) at *The Huffington Post*. Moving forward, several points of evidence suggest that campaigns that reframe climate change in terms of public health and the harm to innocents may be the type of innovation needed to intensify and diversify public participation.

The public health frame stresses climate change’s potential to increase the incidence of infectious diseases, asthma, allergies, heat stroke, and other salient health problems, especially among the most vulnerable populations: the elderly and children. In the process, the public health frame makes climate change personally relevant to new audiences by connecting the issue to health problems that are already familiar and perceived as important (Nisbet, 2009). The public health frame may also be especially effective because it can link climate change with humans’ deeply-engrained disgust response, a powerful motivator of ameliorative action (Pizzaro, Inbar & Helion, 2011). The frame also shifts the geographic location of impacts, replacing visuals of remote Arctic regions, animals, and peoples with more socially proximate neighbors and places across local communities and cities. Coverage at local television news outlets and specialized urban media is also generated. In each case, the public health frame activates the moral foundation of *harm/care* with a focus on people, rather than the environment (Nisbet, 2009).

Research suggests that by focusing communication on the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of local-level action, even those doubtful or dismissive of climate change support local policy actions, a starting point for building support for eventual national policy (Maibach et al., 2010). Other research suggests that recasting action in terms of benefits to public health activates

positive emotions of hope among those disengaged on the issue while diffusing common reactions of anger among those otherwise dismissive (Myers, Nisbet, Maibach, & Leiserowitz, 2012).

Focusing on the public health risks to innocents also binds together support for action while stigmatizing opponents. One of the critical turning points in the effort to combat smoking in the U.S. involved morally stigmatizing tobacco companies and smokers by shifting the focus from personal health effects to the negative effects of smoking on innocent bystanders, namely children. Once smoking became more than just a personal consumption choice or an industry regulation issue, anti-smoking advocates were able to catalyze greater public demand for bans on smoking in public spaces, cigarette taxes, and restrictions on tobacco sales and marketing (Brandt, 2007).

Efforts to protect and defend people and communities are also easily localized. State and municipal governments have greater control, responsibility, and authority over climate change adaptation-related policy actions. In addition, recruiting Americans to protect their neighbors and defend their communities against climate impacts naturally lends itself to forms of civic participation and community volunteering. In these cases, because of the localization of the issue and the non-political nature of participation, barriers related to polarization may be more easily overcome. Moreover, once community members from differing political backgrounds join together to achieve a broadly inspiring goal like protecting people and a local way of life, then the networks of trust and collaboration formed can be used to move this diverse segment toward cooperation in pursuit of national policy goals.

A leading example of the public health message strategy is a TV ad in the 2012 “Beyond Coal” campaign sponsored by the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, and the American Lung Association. The ads emphasize the risks to innocents while stigmatizing opponents to action. Depicting asthmatic kids walking the halls of Congress with inhalers, the TV ad tells viewers: “If every lobbyist in Congress were a severely asthmatic kid, then maybe lobbyists wouldn’t be telling Congress to gut clean air

standards...support the President's and the EPA's clean air standards, and support our kids.”⁸ In combination with these TV ads, using grassroots organizing strategies, the Beyond Coal campaign has mobilized volunteers around efforts to shut down local coal power plants, actions that more easily translate into local benefits such as cleaner air and water and a transition toward innovative industries and energy sources that create higher quality jobs (Hertsgaard, 2012).

Breaking Barriers: Winning the Conversation

When Gore re-launched his Repower America campaign in Fall 2011 as the Climate Reality Project, he argued that people “needed to win the conversation” on climate change much like the public did on racism and civil rights during the 1960s. Across the next two decades, it became publicly unacceptable to make racist comments and to engage in racist acts. The same, argued Gore, needs to happen relative to statements denying the reality of climate change or action opposing social change (Huffington Post, 2011).

Research across several different disciplines has consistently shown that individuals frequently monitor their social environment and conform their opinions and decisions to the perceived majority norm. Research also shows that people have a “faulty quasi-statistical” sense in that they are often not very good at determining what the true opinion of the majority might be (Noelle-Neumann, 1995). Instead they rely on media portrayals and are often persuaded by the most vocal group or readily memorable example. Importantly, what individuals often pay closest attention to is the perceived opinion among people like them, in other words their direct reference group (Scheufele & Moy, 2000).

In this context, Gore's principle is correct, but it will take more than environmentalists evoking climate change as a moral imperative to widen and diversify the issue public on climate change and to intensify public demand for action. Instead, the identification and recruitment of opinion-leaders across reference groups are

⁸ The Beyond Coal ad can be watch at YouTube: <http://youtu.be/GbrNZjRqfmQ>

needed, voices that can activate specific moral foundations that compel feelings of responsibility and obligation. Opinion-leaders are everyday individuals who have a stronger motivation for public affairs content or information specific to climate change and who have a special ability as a trusted source to share that information with others. Opinion-leaders rarely hold formal positions of authority and instead prove influential by way of their greater attention to a topic, their knowledge, and their strength of personality and experience in serving as a central go-between for information among their large network of core and loose ties.

As a combination of these traits and behaviors, opinion-leaders not only help draw the attention of others to a particular issue, action, or consumer choice but, perhaps most importantly, signal how others should in turn respond or act. This influence may occur by giving advice and recommendations, by serving as a role model that others can imitate, by persuading or convincing others, or by way of contagion, a process where ideas or behaviors are spread with the initiator and the recipient unaware of any intentional attempt at influence (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009; Shenk & Dobler, 2002).

Opinion-Leaders as Recruiters and Connectors

For a number of reasons, opinion-leader identification, recruitment, and coordination are likely to be central to climate change campaigns, especially those seeking to spark greater levels of local-level participation.

First, at church, work, or in other face-to-face social settings, opinion-leaders are typically the major source originators of requests to get involved and participate among their peers and co-workers. By modeling civic and political participation on climate change, opinion-leaders also increase perceptions of efficacy among their peers, i.e., that they too can successfully become involved. They also signal that civic commitment to climate change is socially normative and desirable. Similar modeling takes place surrounding consumer choices and the adoption of new energy-related behaviors.

Second, opinion-leaders also bridge online audience gaps by passing on and sharing news and information about climate change that their peers would otherwise never be exposed to. This is especially important in coordination with major climate change-related focusing events such as the release of a new government report; a local event or political decision; a pending national decision; or within the context of a primary or general election.

Third, through conversations and social media, opinion-leaders can additionally serve as direct peer-educators, informing and instructing their friends and family on how to engage in different forms of participation. They can also break down competency gaps in the use of digital technology by modeling the use of mobile and hand-held devices or by teaching others how and where to access information and digital tools (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009).

Previous research suggests three types of opinion-leaders that are likely to be important depending on the goal and focus of a climate change campaign. Survey scales have been developed to reliably and validly identify these categories of opinion-leaders. Shortened versions can be embedded in email or web surveys by organizations.

Climate Change-Specific Opinion Leaders. These individuals are unique in that they pay very close attention to news and information about climate change and energy and otherwise share similar traits with “influentials.” These types of opinion-leaders are best suited to recruiting individuals from among segments of the public already predisposed to be alarmed or strongly concerned by the issue of climate change. Many activists in past and current climate change campaigns exhibit strong issue-specific opinion-leader traits (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009).

Influentials or Public Affairs Generalists. To widen the appeal and recruitment potential of a climate change campaign, so-called “influentials” should also be a strong focus of recruitment. These opinion-leading generalists track public affairs news and issues more closely, have overall higher levels of civic involvement, social capital, and political participation as measured by group membership and involvement and tend to score higher in terms of strength

of personality (Weimann, 1994). These types of opinion-leaders are ideally suited to recruiting people to participate politically or civically from among audience segments normally disengaged or doubtful about the importance of climate change and less trusting of environmental groups.

Market Mavens and Communicative Adopters. Consumer behavior research has identified “market mavens” as a special class of consumers who take pleasure in shopping, follow closely the release of new products as well as sales and discounts, and enjoy sharing this information with others (Feick & Price, 1987). Communicative adopters are not only generally first generation purchasers of new products and technologies, but they also evangelize and recommend the product to others (Venkatraman, 1989). Across segments of the public, these opinion-leaders are likely to be especially important for promoting forms of political consumerism, rewarding and punishing companies.

Examples of Opinion-Leader Campaigns

Several past campaigns offer useful examples of how opinion-leaders were integrated into recruitment and mobilization strategies.

Bush 2004 Campaign. In this example, campaign organizers sent an email questionnaire to their national list of seven million volunteers, asking four specific questions about how willing volunteers were to write letters to the editor, talk to others about politics, forward emails, or attend public meetings. Based on answers to these questions, the Bush team segmented out two million opinion-leaders.

Contacted on a weekly basis by email and phone, these two million self-designated opinion-leaders were asked to talk up the campaign to friends, write letters to the editor, call in to local radio programs, or attend public meetings staying on message at all times with nationally coordinated talking points. These supporters were used as grassroots information brokers, passing on interpersonally to fellow citizens the themes featured in political ads, news coverage, and in presidential stump speeches.

The Bush campaign reinforced their volunteers' commitment by providing personal access to VIPs such as a local Congressman or national campaign spokespeople. "Life-targeting" databases also allowed the campaign to match up their opinion-leaders with local voters who shared similar consumer preferences and product tastes, correlates that the campaign would use as proxy measures for predicting the effect of issue specific appeals. For example, an opinion-leader tagged as a "terrorism moderate" would be asked to call other "terrorism moderates" living in his/her surrounding county (Fournier, Sosnick, Dowd, 2006; Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009).

The Bush campaign specifically targeted churches as recruitment contexts, sending recruited opinion-leaders door-to-door in their surrounding neighborhoods. As part of this "friendship Evangelicalism" strategy, volunteers were simply asked to tell their neighbors why they backed Bush—to, in effect, witness their support for the president. Neighbors would then be invited to a house party of several dozen others from the community to watch a video about Bush, to have dinner or drinks, and to socialize. In contrast to the opinion-leader strategy of the Bush campaign, the Kerry campaign and aligned Democratic groups bused in paid canvassers to battleground states and districts, offering scripted and targeted appeals to voters that were often ineffective (Bishop, 2008, p. 264).

Obama 2008 Campaign. The My.BarackObama.com platform, launched in 2007, was a Facebook-like site that not only helped the campaign communicate with supporters and raise money, but it was also designed to help supporters connect with one another and organize events in their local community. Perhaps the most innovative strategy for combining digital tools and face-to-face opinion-leadership was the campaign's creation of an iPhone application. The interface organized friends and contacts by key battleground states, encouraged users to call their friends on behalf of Obama; provided information on local events; and included videos and issue backgrounders that users could reference or show during face-to-face conversations with friends. The application also provided feedback data to the campaign, such as the number of phone

calls successfully completed (Shankland, 2008; Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009).

In training opinion-leaders, the goal was not to have them tell Obama's story to others but to persuasively narrate their own personal stories about why the campaign mattered to them. In designing a movement-themed campaign, the Obama team applied a philosophy to opinion-leaders that created a "structure that allows all members of the team to make [a] campaign his or her own." The Obama team believed that a campaign must go beyond "simply assigning volunteers to tasks to instead allow well-trained supporters to have ownership within the campaign (Berman, 2010, p. 124).

The We Can Solve It and Repower America Campaigns. Most of the TV advertising in the We Can Solve It and Repower America campaigns asked audiences to visit the campaign's web site, the main platform for putting into action recruited opinion-leaders. The major "ask" at the site was for visitors to sign up to be part of the campaign's action e-mail list so that "your voice can be heard." Immediately, for visitors, the most visually prominent feature of the site was the pop-up projection of a video of a volunteer PowerPoint presenter from Gore's Climate Project, telling visitors in his or her own words why they need to get involved and/or explaining a feature of the site. Also prominent on the front page of the site was statistical information on the number of people to date "who want to be part of the solution" on climate change (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009).

The WE and Repower America sites also featured a social networking component like Facebook, where visitors could create a profile, friend other people, write blog entries and letters to the editor, create groups, and attempt to organize local events in their community. These action alerts were coordinated with either a major vote in Congress, a major speech by Gore, or, for example, the launch of a new commercial during the August 2008 Olympics broadcast. As an incentive for contacting other citizens, participants who successfully encouraged 40 friends to sign up through word of mouth, forwarded emails and/or other social media actions

were named a “WE leader” and given “access to special information.” The campaigns also launched their own Facebook application, where participants (referred to as Climate Champions) who signed up fellow Facebook friends could earn points that donors would then match as financial contributions to the campaign (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009).

Face to Face Versus Online?

The We Can Solve It and Repower America campaign were likely limited because of an almost exclusive emphasis on online interaction and influence. Relying on digital connections and recruitment is appealing because of the relative ease in which organizers can develop metrics to measure success. Yet ease in tracking data does not equate to effectiveness, and we urge caution in over-relying on digital networks, especially in place of face-to-face influence. There are several trade-offs and problems with relying too heavily on social media forms of opinion-leadership.

First, surveys show that Americans still prefer their recommendations via verbal interaction, and there still does not exist strong research on whether or not the self-selection biases of the Web can be overcome within digital networks. Moreover, to date, by all accounts the success of the digital organizing efforts of the WE campaign has been relatively modest at best. Second, with strong selectivity bias online, exclusively relying on digital interaction might also result in ideological reinforcement and intensification of beliefs about climate change, which may eventually limit the willingness of recruited opinion leaders to compromise on pragmatic policy solutions.

Third, if the “weak ties” of digital interactions lack the strength of traditional opinion leader influence, then time and effort spent online by digital opinion-leaders may be far less effective than traditional face-to-face influence. The danger of relying too heavily on digital organizing is that it might create a false sense of efficacy among participants, with activists believing they are making a difference on climate change, when impact may be limited at best (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009).

Given these many dimensions of online influence, the goal for both researchers and practitioners is to figure out under what conditions or with which demographic segments digital opinion-leaders can be effectively used on climate change campaigns and in which ways online interactions can build on real-world ties. Combining digital organizing with face-to-face interaction by using hand-held devices such as the iPhone, as was done in the Obama campaign, is a strategy that future climate change efforts should explore.

Conclusion

The call for new directions in Crompton's "Weathercocks" report is consistent with principles and conclusions derived from research in the social and behavioral sciences. In this chapter, we have elaborated on several specific areas where research points to additional insights and strategies. A first step for environmental organizations and their allies is to recognize the function and importance of different forms of public participation in creating the demand for societal change. A second step is to focus more specifically on framing the relevance of climate change and related challenges in a manner that activates a broader palette of moral intuitions, tailoring these appeals to specific segments of the American public.

Particularly promising are strategies that redefine climate change in terms of public health, the harm to innocents, and local level actions that can protect and defend people and communities. By focusing on these localized, incremental policy actions, networks of trust and collaboration are forged that can then translate into forms of participation that advocate on behalf of national policy action. Also highly relevant to successful campaigns are sophisticated and well-resourced strategies that employ opinion-leaders across audiences, empowering opinion-leaders to serve as trusted communicators, connectors, and recruiters.

However, formative research and ongoing evaluation are likely needed to refine and implement these strategies in ways that are useful to campaign professionals and organizers. Most notably, re-

search on framing and climate change remains inadequate and limited. To date, the only framing approach to climate change that has been examined in a rigorous way has been work on public health appeals. In addition, formal research does not exist on how different framing strategies map to specific moral foundations and how this connection might apply differentially across segments of the public.

Research is also needed to develop efficient, valid, and trustworthy methods for identifying different types of opinion-leaders specific to different forms of public participation, along with methods for training and using them effectively in campaign work. The internet has given campaigns new opportunities to collect massive amounts of data about their supporters that could be useful to opinion leader campaigns. For instance, once supporters register as a volunteer on the Obama 2012 campaign website, the campaign reserved the right to collect information about how volunteers used their website, such as what they click on and which pages they view; data about how they interact with campaign email messages; and personal information they submit as part of blog comments, interactive forums or contests and games on the campaign's websites. The growing use of Facebook authentication to let supporters log in to campaign websites also gives campaigns the ability to access a supporter's name, profile picture, gender, networks, list of friends and any other information they have made public (Beckett, 2012). While such data-mining techniques could prove beneficial, they also raise questions about privacy. And as we noted earlier, any online strategies need to be paired with face-to-face organizing and recruitment. In addition to examining the utility of this information to opinion leader campaigns, future research should also investigate the potential for this kind of data collection to compromise the trust of valuable campaign supporters.

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