

Real News, Fake News

Media's Influence of the Public's Opinion on Climate Change

Sydney Taylor and Grace Johnston
(Longwood University, Cormier Honors College)

Introduction

People's opinions on climate change are influenced by the media they consume -- news outlets on TV, online journals, social media, etc. In an attempt to study the degree of how extreme this correlation is between the public's opinions and the media's influence, we searched for both scholarly and non-scholarly sources online to congregate into one place. Our goal in this research was to inform people of what sorts of bias to watch out for in the news, and exercise caution in attempting to find trustworthy sources to draw information from.

Methods

We conducted research on previous research that has already been done on media impact on the perspective of global climate change. We searched the follow terms to conduct our research: News media, Journalism, Perspective, Opinion, Climate Change, Influence, People



Discussion

- Big businesses and federal governments typically dominate the media, leaving smaller businesses and individuals with fewer chances to add what they believe is important to know, or their specific agendas, in the media¹
- There is no one person or group who gatekeeps what gets shown to the public -- the federal and local governments, advertisers, groups with certain political agendas, etc. typically all contribute to what gets filtered through to the public¹
- Past research suggests that there's a general lack of knowledge regarding climate change. Media reports on skeptics more often than they should be²
 - Social media can encourage further education on climate change and its issues, but at the same time, encourages skeptical people to debate the topic in favor of denial³
 - There is a discrepancy between people who believe in climate change and people who believe it is a hoax online, and it is likely due to social media platforms creating spaces for likeminded individuals to come together, rather than set the stage for a proper debate between both sides³

Results

Our research has largely confirmed our original argument that the media and news outlets do indeed attempt to persuade the public into believing one thing or another. The public consumes what they originally agreed with, and sometimes, those who are constantly consuming only what they believe in will become an extreme form of this belief. We encourage all people to stay watchful and unbiased when finding information about climate change, because without caution, misinformation and opinions without research run rampant.

References

1. Dispensa, J. M., & Bruelle, R. J. (2003). Media's social construction of environmental issues: Focus on global warming - A comparative study.
2. Jones, Michael D. (2011). Leading the Way to Compromise? Cultural Theory and Climate Change Opinion.
3. Anderson, A.A. (2017). Effects of Social Media Use on Climate Change Opinion, Knowledge, and Behavior.

Table 2
Ideology, Cultural Types, and Climate Change, OLS Estimates

	BELIEF IN CLIMATE CHANGE	HUMAN-CAUSED CLIMATE CHANGE	PERSONAL RISK	SOCIOTROPIC RISK	NEED FOR ACTION	NUCLEAR ENERGY	CAP AND TRADE	RENEWABLE ENERGY
<i>Individualism</i>	-.051	-.128**	-.085*	-.086*	-.116**	.134**	-.066	.067
<i>Hierarchy</i>	.103*	.176***	.165***	.090*	.111**	.044	.105	.095
<i>Egalitarianism</i>	.092*	.171***	.146***	.222***	.244***	-.049	.180***	.021
<i>Fatalism</i>	-.032	-.079	.000	.002	-.150***	-.025	.080	.009
Ideology	-.483***	-.671***	-.637***	-.414***	-.542***	-.056	-.485***	-.305*
Education	-.025	.025	.238	.146	.055	.102	.203	-.137
Gender	-.331	-.369	-.050	-.370	-.355	.768*	.548	-.814*
Climate Change Knowledge	.339***	.239*	.089	.216*	.308**	.113	-.104	-.009
Adj. R²	.180	.388	.324	.361	.395	.060	.235	.061
n	262	262	263	263	263	244	252	255

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 (one-tailed)
Due to space and journal content considerations, standard errors, constants, and F-statistics are not reported. Please contact the author for this information.

Figure 1: Table depicting the different common ideologies and their beliefs on the matters of climate change²