

# Effective or provocative?

## Public engagement with climate messages

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Dr Jacqueline Akhurst

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# Poll on climate change

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- ❑ 60% of Britons think that it would be best tackled at a global level.
- ❑ Just under 1 in 10 people in the UK (9%) think global warming would be best tackled by individual households.

BBC/ICM, July 2004, poll on climate change, at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/28\\_07\\_04\\_climatepoll.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/28_07_04_climatepoll.pdf)

# The Copenhagen summit video

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- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzSuP\\_TMftk&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzSuP_TMftk&feature=related)
- What are your initial responses?
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTLCsuWHfAg> (from 1:44)

# Traditional approach

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- Themes:
  - Individual focus
  - Shock tactics
  - Middle class target audience
  - Top down approach (the ‘voice of authority’)

# Responses

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- Fear
- Guilt
- Individual responsibility
- Does this make viewers want to act and change behaviour or does it make viewers want to avoid and deny the problem?

# The result of these messages is...

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○ Incoming messages



# Evidence that shock tactics don't work

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- ❑ Raise anxiety levels but no action (Sherr, 1990)
- ❑ No increase in learning (Rigby *et al.*, 1989)
- ❑ May appeal to one type or group of people but alienates others (Dean, 2005)
- ❑ Outcomes of shock tactic ads are not long lasting and have variable degrees of **success** (Thornton & Rossiter, 2001)

# Fear responses ...

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May lead to **helplessness, denial, and rejection** of the message

**On the other hand** in other domains (eg health protection) **fear appeals are known to influence attitudes and behaviour** particularly IF

- Perceived personal vulnerability (does it affect me?)
- Self-efficacy (what can we do and will it work?)
- Social support (community engagement)
- Trusted sources (Scientists, Doctors)

# Contributions from participants ...

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- Chat in 2' s or 3' s:
- What thing(s) have helped you to think or act differently in relation to environmental issues?

# Possibilities for more effective communications

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- ❑ A vision for the future
- ❑ Encourage, support & celebrate community action and participation
- ❑ Less blame & guilt
- ❑ Less shock tactics
- ❑ Consistent and clear facts & messages
- ❑ Tailoring the message to specific groups of people & communities.

# Some research evidence (Pidgeon, 2010)

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- GAIN FRAME

“By mitigating climate change, we can prevent further increases in winter floods in maritime regions and flash floods throughout Europe.....”

- LOSS FRAME

“Without mitigating climate change, we will see further increases in winter floods in maritime regions and flash floods throughout Europe.....”

- Presenting communications in terms of the benefits most effective

- Increases positive attitudes towards mitigation
- (Marginally) increases perceptions of severity of impacts

# Alternatives...

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Perhaps, rather than constantly reminding people of the problems and blaming, should we not be communicating a vision of possibilities and encouraging engagement?

For example ...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkHkTGJIIS4&feature=channel>

# Participation

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**“It’s time to support a new breed of people committed to changing the world”**

Paul Cotterill (2006)

Development director at Light for Life, a charity in Southport working with homeless and socially excluded people

# References

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