



Universität Hamburg

DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

The Role of the Mass Media in Climate Communication

Mike S. Schäfer

Dept. of Journalism and Communication Sciences / KlimaCampus

University of Hamburg



I will talk about ...

why climate change communication is important

... but at the same time difficult

why mass media are important in this communication

... what they can and can't do

and what other communication channels may also be useful

Why CC communication is important ...

- climate Change has or might have multiple social consequences on different geographical scales and with different time horizons
 - might lead to „degradation of freshwater resources“, „decline in food production“, conflicts and „environmentally induced migration“ (WBGU 2007) ...
 - „expected annual cost of achieving emissions reductions, consistent with an emissions trajectory leading to stabilisation at around 500-550 ppm CO₂, is likely to be around 1% of GDP by 2050“, „poorest developing countries will be hit earliest and hardest“ (Stern Review 2006)

Why CC communication is important ...

- climate Change has or might have multiple social consequences on different geographical scales and with different time horizons
 - might lead to „degradation of freshwater resources“, „decline in food production“, conflicts and „environmentally induced migration“ (WBGU 2007) ...
 - „expected annual cost of achieving emissions reductions, consistent with an emissions trajectory leading to stabilisation at around 500-550 ppm CO₂, is likely to be around 1% of GDP by 2050“, „poorest developing countries will be hit earliest and hardest“ (Stern Review 2006)
- politicians, companies, NGOs and others increasingly act upon CC



... but at the same time difficult

- climate change is difficult to grasp for most people



... but at the same time difficult

- climate change is difficult to grasp for most people

	both the scientific description of the phenomenon	and the social and political measures to deal with it
are complex		
are unobtrusive		
are contested		

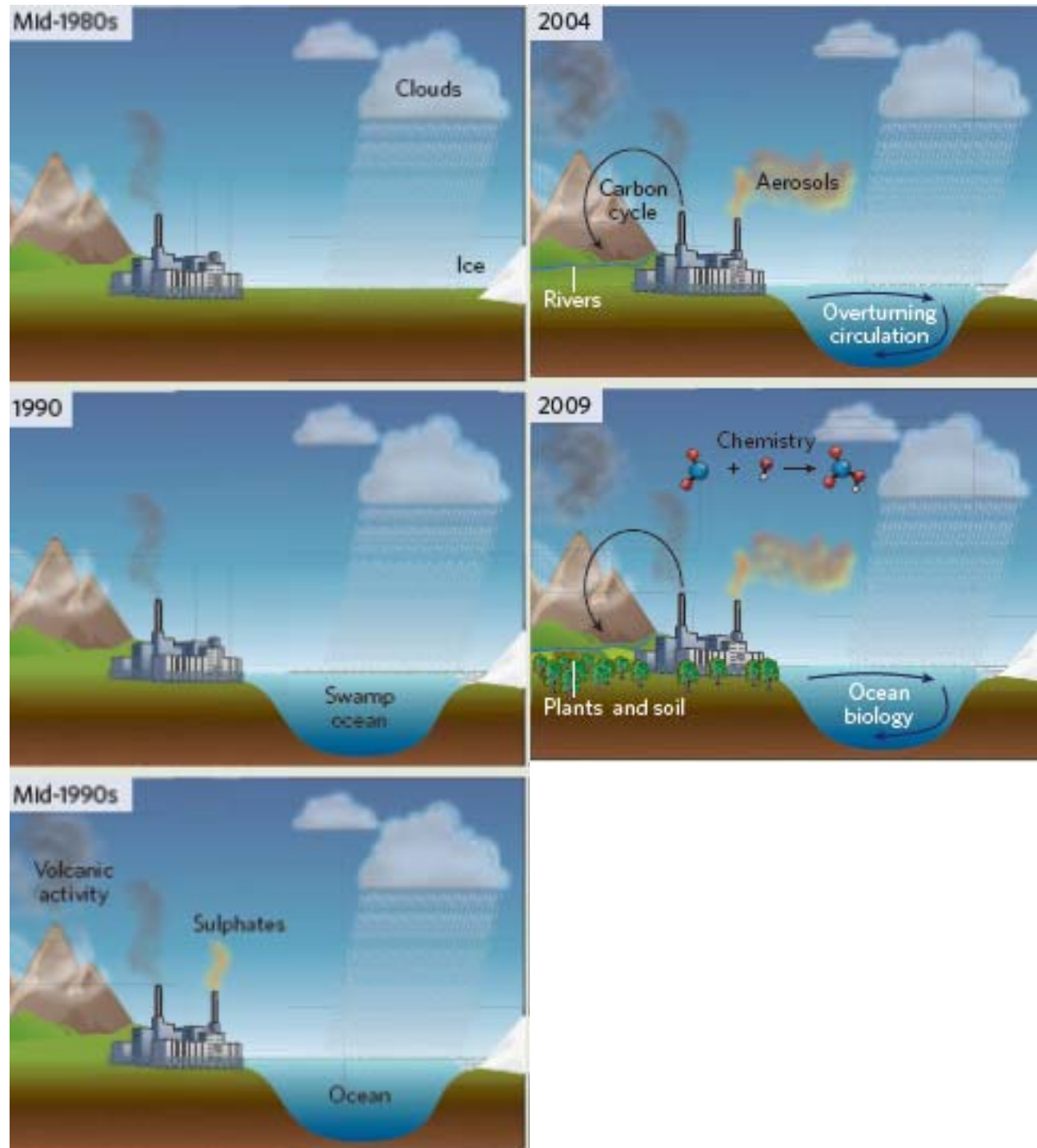


... but at the same time difficult

- climate change is difficult to grasp for most people

	both the scientific description of the phenomenon	and the social and political measures to deal with it
are complex	multi-disciplinary models, differing predictions	
are unobtrusive	long-term global change	
are contested	varying degrees of certainty	

multi-disciplinary,
complex models
(Heffernan 2010,
Nature)



... but at the same time difficult

- climate change is difficult to grasp for most people

	both the scientific description of the phenomenon	and the social and political measures to deal with it
are complex	multi-disciplinary models, differing predictions	diff. causation claims & cost calculations
are unobtrusive	long-term global change	act now for invisible and uncertain future benefits
are contested	varying degrees of certainty	varying justice principles, many participating parties



... why mass media are important in CC communication

- it is important but difficult to communicate CC
- mass media are particularly suited



... and what mass media can and can't do

- it is important but difficult to communicate CC
- mass media are particularly suited
- but they don't work as a “transmission belt” or “translator”
- show issues according to their own logic, which on CC is

... and what mass media can and can't do

- it is important but difficult to communicate CC
- mass media are particularly suited
- but they don't work as a “transmission belt” or “translator”
- show issues according to their own logic, which on CC is
 - complex → to reduce complexity and uncertainty (Jensen 2008, Collins, 1987, Olausson, 2009)

Sonnabend 29/5
3. Februar 2007 0,50 €

Bild

UNABHÄNGIG · ÜBERPARTEILICH
HAMBURG

www.bild.de

GOLDENES CHANCE
137 180 290 320 352 400 407 19905514

SCHOCKIERENDER WELTKLIMA- BERICHT

UNSER PLANET STIRBT!

GEHEIMER KLIMA-BERICHT

Wir haben nur

noch

13

Jahre...



...um die Erde zu retten!

Wir dachten, er hätte sich um die Erde um die Klima- katastrofe zu retten! Das heißt der noch gebotene Tod der Klimare- ports. Wie bis 2025 positiv sein muss, damit unser Planet nicht zerstört wird. - Seite 3

... and what mass media can and can't do

- it is important but difficult to communicate CC
- mass media are particularly suited
- but they don't work as a “transmission belt” or “translator”
- show issues according to their own logic, which on CC is
 - complex → to reduce complexity and uncertainty (Jensen 2008, Collins, 1987, Olausson, 2009)
 - not directly perceivable / large scales → perceivable, small(er) scale manifestations

OCTOBER 3, 2005

www.time.com AOL Keyword: TIME

POLITICS OF CRONYISM ■ GENERATION JIHAD ■ NEIL YOUNG SINGS

TIME

ARE WE MAKING HURRICANES WORSE?

- THE IMPACT OF GLOBAL WARMING
- THE COST OF COASTAL DEVELOPMENT
- PLUS: CHARTING THE GULF COAST DESTRUCTION

DER SPIEGEL

© 2007 C
Nr. 33
45. Jahrgang DM 4,-
17. August 2005



Ozon-Loch, Pol-Schmelze, Treibhaus-Effekt: Forscher warnen

DIE KLIMA-KATASTROPHE

... and what mass media can and can't do

- it is important but difficult to communicate CC
- mass media are particularly suited
- but they don't work as a “transmission belt” or “translator”
- show issues according to their own logic, which on CC is
 - complex → to reduce complexity and uncertainty (Jensen 2008, Collins, 1987, Olausson, 2009)
 - not directly perceivable / large scales → perceivable, small(er) scale manifestations
 - potentially severe *future* consequences → potential action now



May 2006



Feb 2007



March 2007



April 2008



Dec 2009

... and what mass media can and can't do

- it is important but difficult to communicate CC
- mass media are particularly suited
- but they don't work as a “transmission belt” or “translator”
- show issues according to their own logic, which on CC is
 - complex → to reduce complexity and uncertainty (Jensen 2008, Collins, 1987, Olausson, 2009)
 - not directly perceivable / large scales → perceivable, small(er) scale manifestations
 - potentially severe *future* consequences → potential action now
 - uncertainties → interest in novelty and controversy (Nelkin 1992, 1995, Lewenstein 1995)

 <p>Koalitions-Krach Warum Kanzlerin Angela Merkel so lange schweigt</p>	 <p>Der Zauberfüßler Mesut Özil über Finanzen, Fasten und Führungsrolle</p>	 <p>Handelskrieg Wie sich Aldi & Co. gegenseitig zerfleischen</p>
--	---	---

DAS MODERNE NACHRICHTENMAGAZIN www.focus.de

FOCUS

Nr. 2 11. Januar 2010 € 3,20

Fehlende Sonnenaktivität könnte eine neue **Kalt-Zeit** auslösen



30p GET YOUR DAILY EXPRESS FOR JUST 30p
SAVE 50p A WEEK ON YOUR DAILY & SUNDAY EXPRESS

DAILY EXPRESS

Clooney's amazing mother



FREE £5 SPEND AT WHSmith FOR EVERY READER

Iran threatens serious action against sailors

THE BIG CLIMATE CHANGE 'FRAUD'

Do E-Mails Reveal Scientist Claims On Climate Change are...

BUNK?





... and what mass media can and can't do

- setting issues on the audience agenda
 - mass media set environmental issues (Borstedt et al. 2010, Ader 1995) and CC (Sampei/Midori 2009) on the audience agenda and influence problem awareness (Arlt et al. 2011)

... and what mass media can and can't do

- setting issues on the audience agenda
 - mass media set environmental issues (Borstedt et al. 2010, Ader 1995) and CC (Sampei/Midori 2009) on the audience agenda and influence problem awareness (Arlt et al. 2011)
- delivering factual information and „framing“ the issue
 - media provide factual knowledge about CC details and potential options for action (Stamm et al. 2000, similar findings in Zhao 2009, Taddicken/Neverla 2011, Ryghaug et al. 2010)



... and what mass media can and can't do

- changing peoples' opinions
 - substantial changes in opinions can not be shown (Taddicken/Neverla 2011); only directly after media use, more people state they *want* to change lifestyle (Arlt et al. 2011), but also these effects decrease strongly over time (Lowe et al. 2008)
 - persuasive potential of mass media „very low“ - media content interpreted against personal experience, attitudes, political orientations, and social context, and if it does not match them, rather questioned/rejected than accepted (Peters/Heinrichs 2005)

... and what mass media can and can't do

- changing peoples' opinions
 - substantial changes in opinions can not be shown (Taddicken/Neverla 2011); only directly after media use, more people state they *want* to change lifestyle (Arlt et al. 2011), but also these effects decrease strongly over time (Lowe et al. 2008)
 - persuasive potential of mass media „very low“ - media content interpreted against personal experience, attitudes, political orientations, and social context, and if it does not match them, rather questioned/rejected than accepted (Peters/Heinrichs 2005)
- triggering action
 - mass media influence knowledge about options for action (Stamm et al. 2000), but decisions – e.g. for energy investment – do not depend on mass media coverage (Arlt et al. 2011)



Universität Hamburg

DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG



... what other communication channels may be useful

alternative ways of CC communication might add to mass media communication and circumvent some their limitations

... what other communication channels may be useful

alternative ways of CC communication might add to mass media communication and circumvent some their limitations

- addressing community opinion leaders
 - interpersonal communication > media communication (Taddicken/Neverla 2011)
 - address “opinion leaders” or “network hubs”

... what other communication channels may be useful

alternative ways of CC communication might add to mass media communication and circumvent some their limitations

- addressing community opinion leaders
 - interpersonal communication > media communication (Taddicken/Neverla 2011)
 - address “opinion leaders” or “network hubs”

- social web communication



I tried to point out ...

- that mediated communication on CC is necessary and without alternatives
- that the mass media's potential should not be exaggerated
- that they are able to set CC on the agenda and frame it
- but not so much to change opinions and trigger action
- so that other ways of communication should be tried



Universität Hamburg

DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG



Thank you for your attention!

www.klimacampus.de/mccc.html

