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George Mason University
Center for Climate Change Communication

Environmental Health Communication: Message Strategies from A Climate Change Perspective

Partnerships in Environmental Health

March 6, 2012

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Topics

1. Why we need an audience-focused approach in environmental health communication
2. How audience research improves communication
3. How to communicate with low-involvement audiences
4. The importance of importance of including efficacy messages when describing environmental threats
5. The importance of social norms & how to incorporate them into messaging



The Information-Deficit Model

We teach people what we believe they need to know.

People learn the information...

Their attitudes change...

Their behaviors change.

Knowledge → Attitude → Behavior



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The information-deficit model fails due to...

- ***Selective exposure*** – i.e., people attend to information that interests them & is congruent with their existing beliefs & behaviors
- ***Motivated reasoning*** – i.e., when confronted with information that conflicts with their beliefs & behaviors, people counter-argue
- The ***ability & motivation*** to process information varies
- ***Contextual & normative influences*** shape people's actions, to a great degree – often more than beliefs and attitudes.



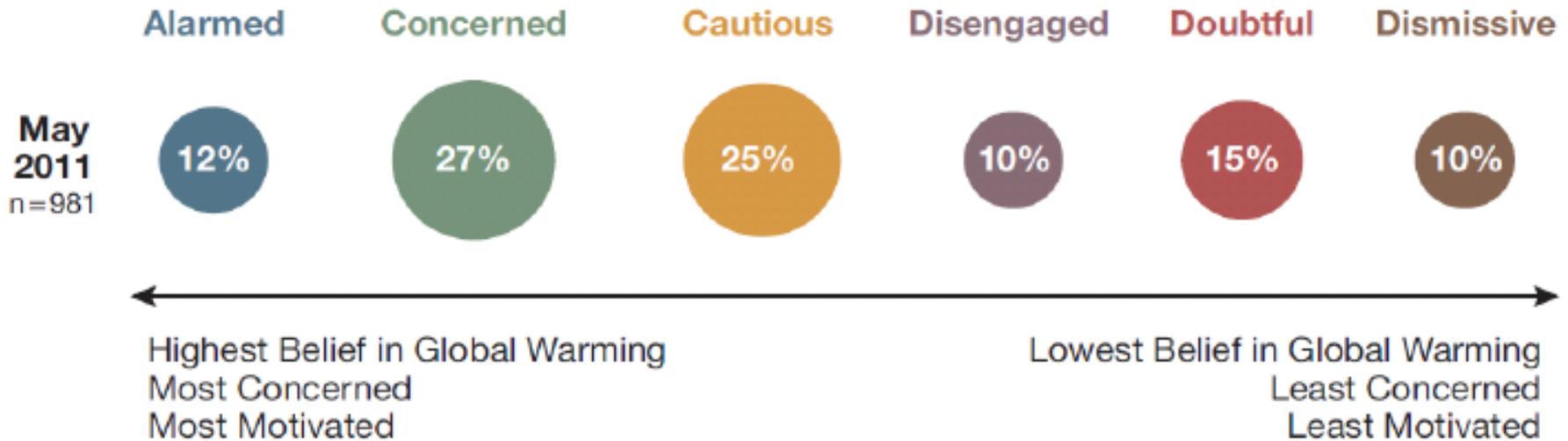
Decisions about what to communicate require audience research

- What to say is determined by the *needs & interests* of your audience, not simply by what you are most eager to say.
- Use audience research to identify:
 - What people currently know & do
 - What they want to know
 - How willing they are to invest mental effort into your issue
 - Which media channels they use
 - Who they trust as a source on your issue
- Icing on the Cake: This yields useful data for evaluating your impact later



There is no such thing as “the public”

Example: Global Warming’s Six Americas

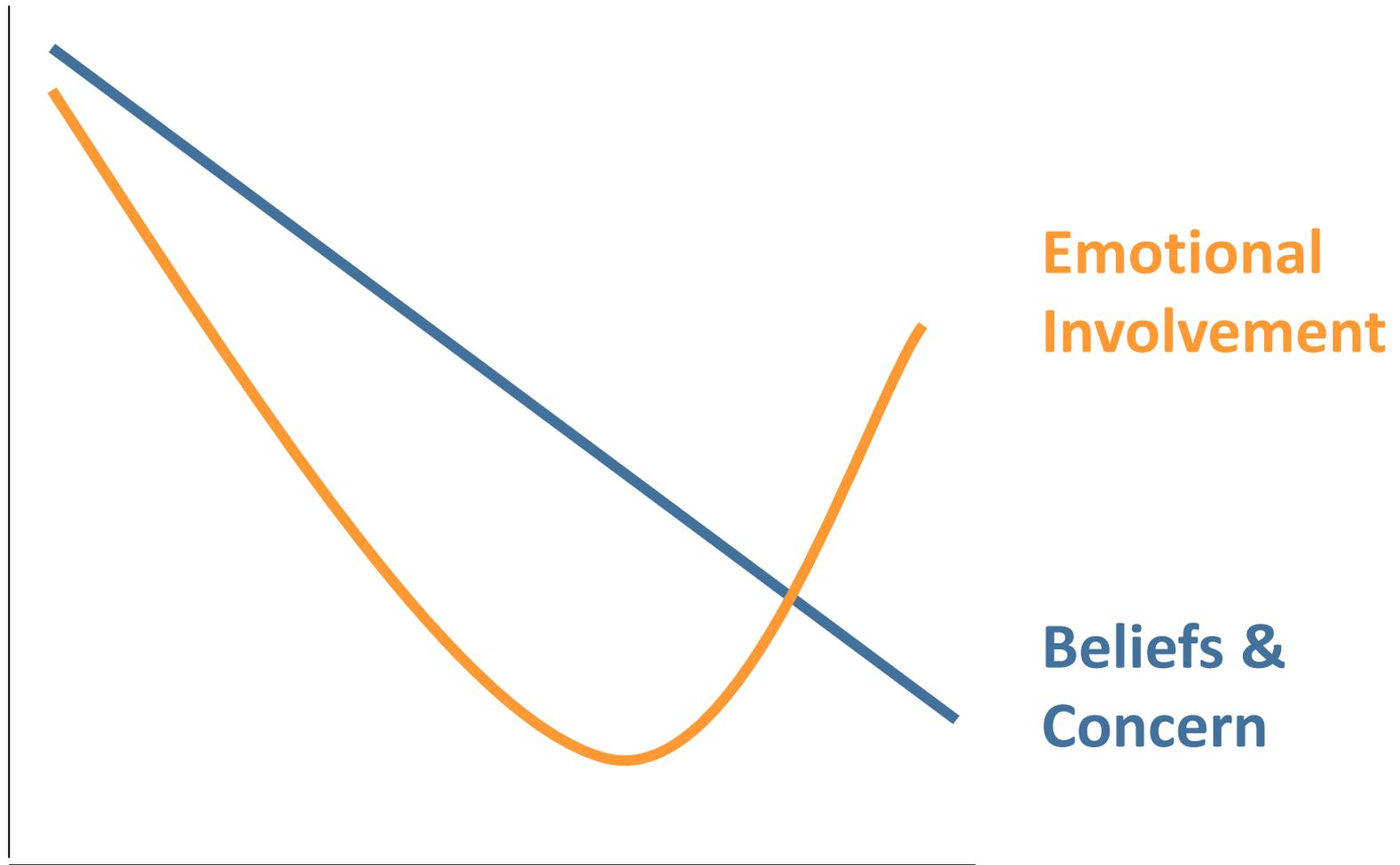


Proportion represented by area

Source: Yale/George Mason University



Primary Differences between the Six Groups

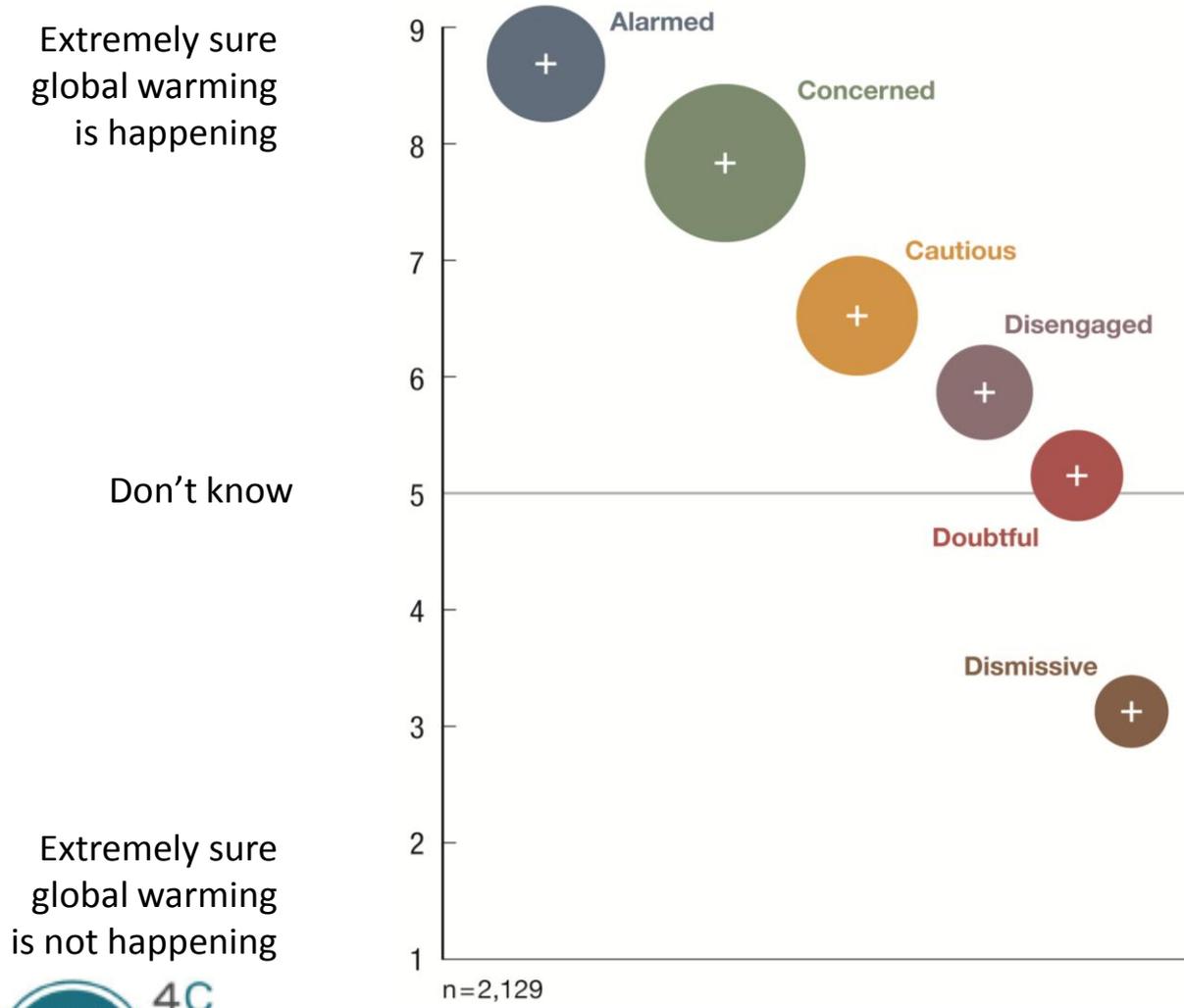


Alarmed Concerned Cautious Disengaged Doubtful Dismissive



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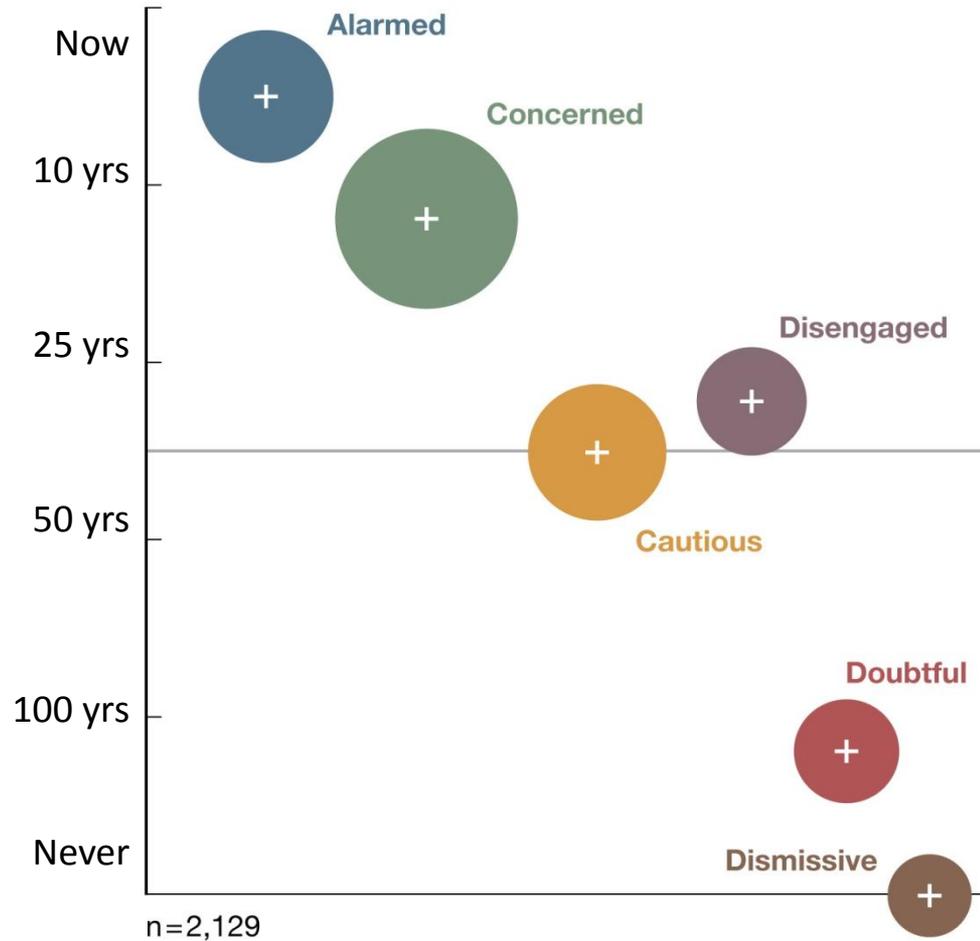
Do you think that global warming is happening? How sure are you?



George Mason 2008



When do you think global warming will start to harm people in the United States?



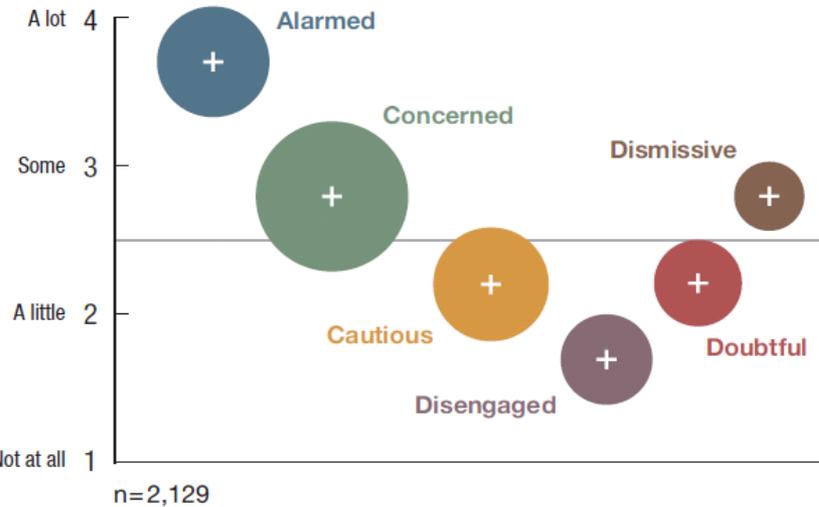
Yale & George Mason, 2008;
n=2,129



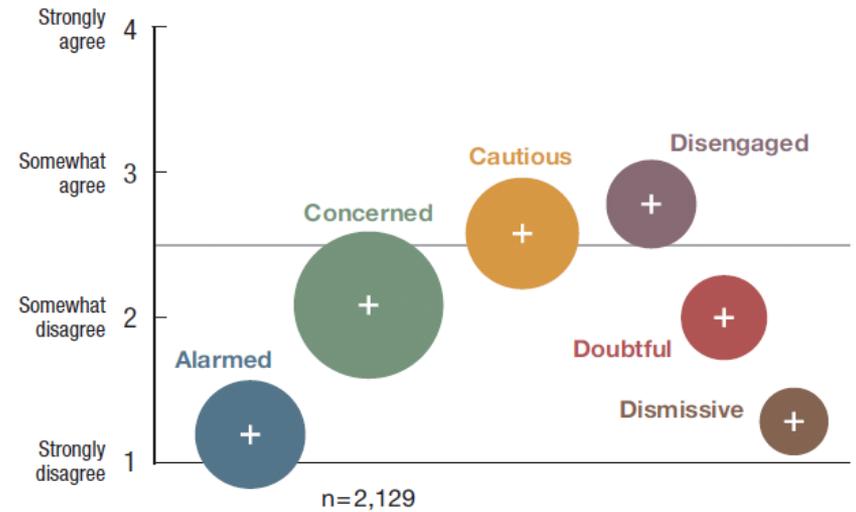
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Issue Involvement

How much had you thought about global warming before today?

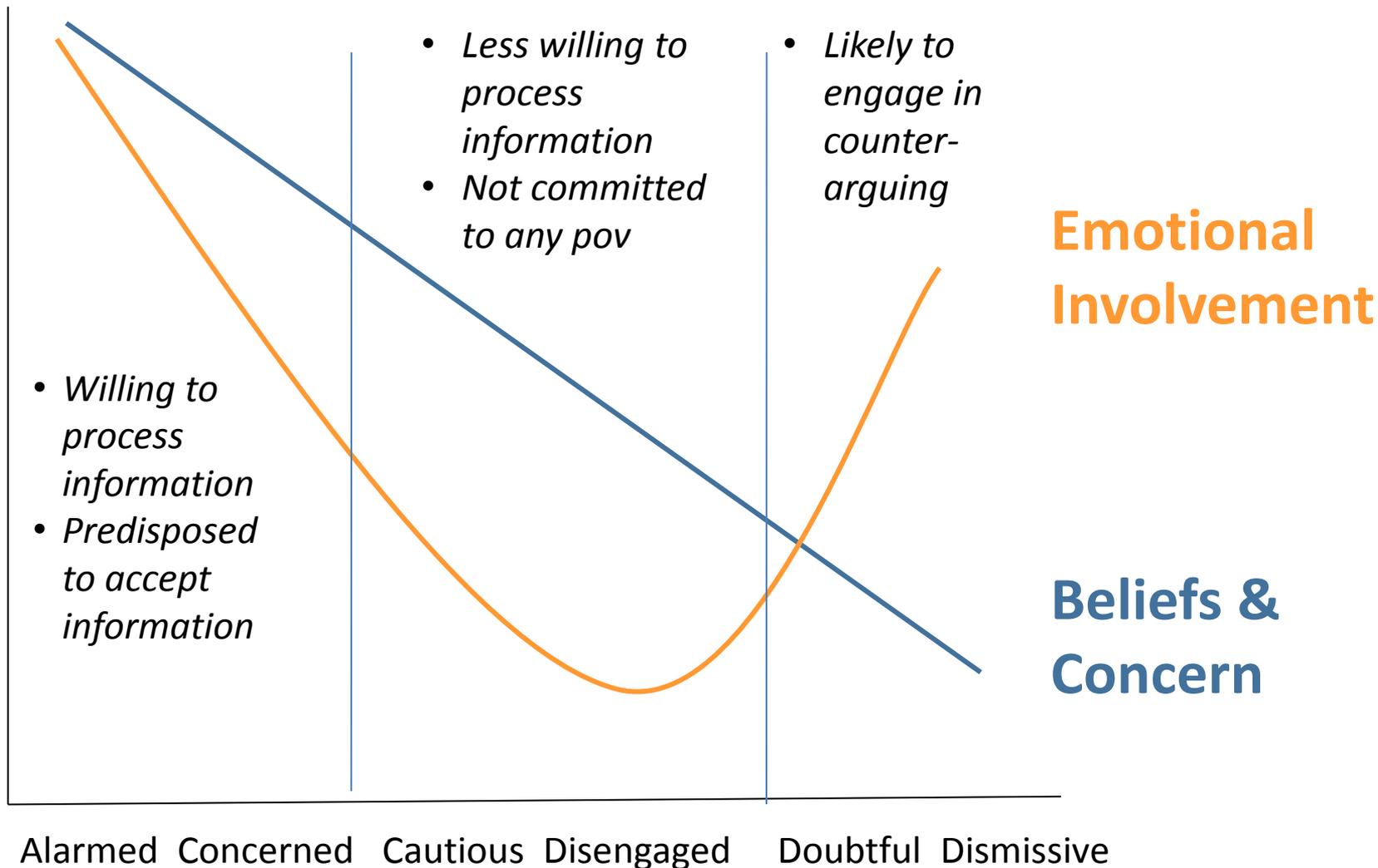


“I could easily change my mind about global warming”



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Primary Differences between the Six Groups



Barriers to Communicating about Global Warming

	Alarmed	Concerned	Cautious	Disengaged	Doubtful	Dismissive
I have difficulty understanding news reports about global warming.	23%	39%	44%	77%	35%	19%
In general, I don't like to read or hear anything about global warming.	10%	28%	37%	59%	57%	72%
News reporting about global warming is biased.	57%	58%	72%	68%	91%	96%

Yale/George Mason, Jun 2011; n=1,043



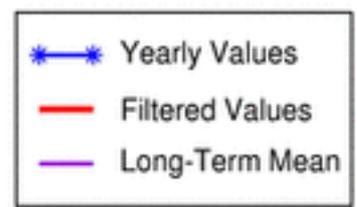
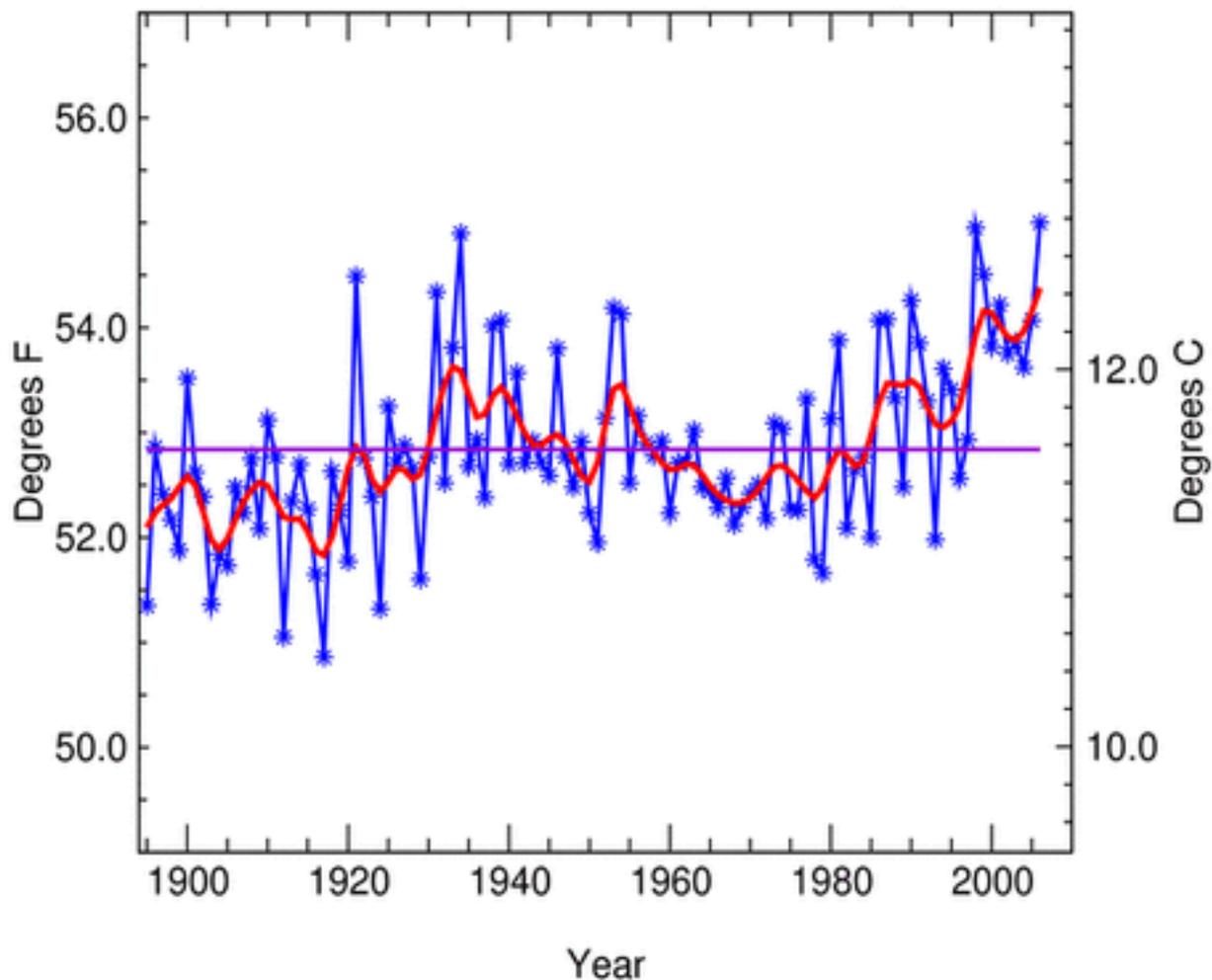
For Low Involvement Audiences...

- Sources are extremely important
- Emotional, vivid content is more effective
- Narratives with characters they can identify with can help them engage with the issue
- Broadcast media will reach them; print is less effective
- They're looking for cognitive short-cuts to help them make up their minds without putting much effort into learning or understanding
- ***Simple messages, repeated often***



Abstract

National (Contiguous U.S.) Temperature 1895 - 2006



Concrete



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Use narratives with characters they can identify with to build emotional involvement with the issue



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The Information the Groups Are Seeking Differs

“If you could ask an expert on global warming one question, which question would you ask?”

What can the US do to reduce global warming?

What harm will global warming cause?

How do you know that global warming is occurring?



Who takes action in response to personal & societal threats? The people who....

- Recognize and understand the threat & its urgency: *risk perceptions*
- Believe that action to reduce the threat will be effective: *response efficacy*
- Feel motivated and empowered to take personal action: *self-efficacy*
- Believe their community can work together to reduce the threat: *collective efficacy*



Key Beliefs as Drivers of Activism

<i>Key Beliefs Held</i>	<i>Proportion that Have Engaged in Political Advocacy</i>
No Key Beliefs	2
Certain Climate Change is Occurring	1
... AND High Risk Perceptions	2
... AND Human Causation	16
... AND Humans Can Solve (<i>Collective Efficacy</i>)	20
Certainty, Causation, & Efficacy, BUT Low Risk	8

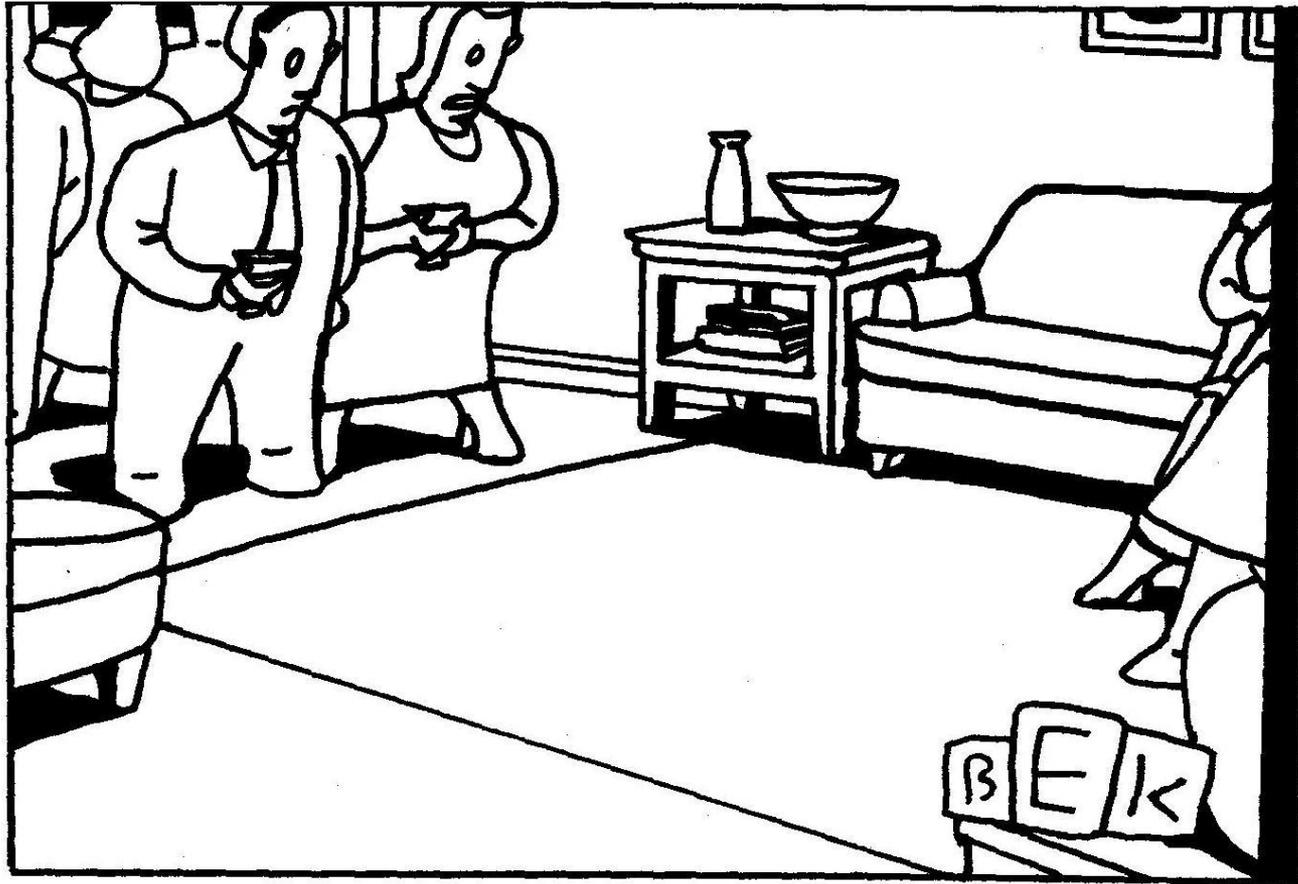
Roser-Renouf, et al., 2011; Fall 2008 data



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Social norms

Suggest that the beliefs and behaviors you wish to promote are prevalent, admired and trendy.



“Oh God, here they come—act green.”

The Petrified Forest



-- Cialdini, 2003



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Don't Make A Costly Mistake

Sunset Crater Volcano
Walnut Canyon • Wupatki
National Monuments



Don't move or collect
pottery or artifacts

Minimum Fine \$250



Don't write on, or otherwise deface,
natural or archaeological features

Minimum Fine \$250



Don't walk off trail
or climb on walls

Minimum Fine \$50



Don't collect plants, animals
rocks, or any natural objects

Minimum Fine \$250

*Protecting national parks and monuments is everyone's job. If you see someone breaking the law,
fill out this card and turn it in to any park facility or call park dispatch at (928) 638-7805.*

We can't afford to lose the things that make these places special. Enjoy it! Don't destroy it!

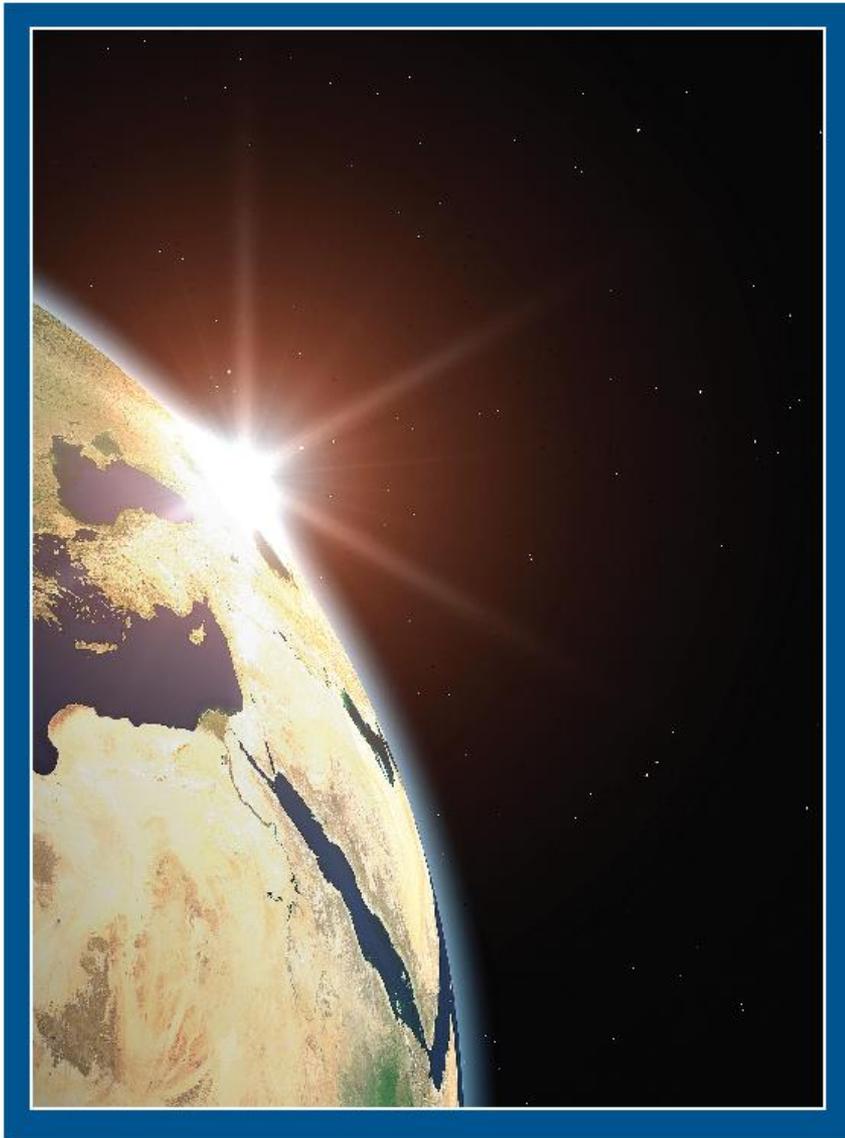


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Summary & Conclusions

- Conduct audience research to identify the information needs & willingness to attend of your target audience(s)
- Communicate the part of your message that they are ready to hear through channels they use & sources they trust
- Combine efficacy messages with risk to avoid scaring off the audience
- Emphasize positive social norms
- *Simple messages, repeated often from a variety of sources are most effective*





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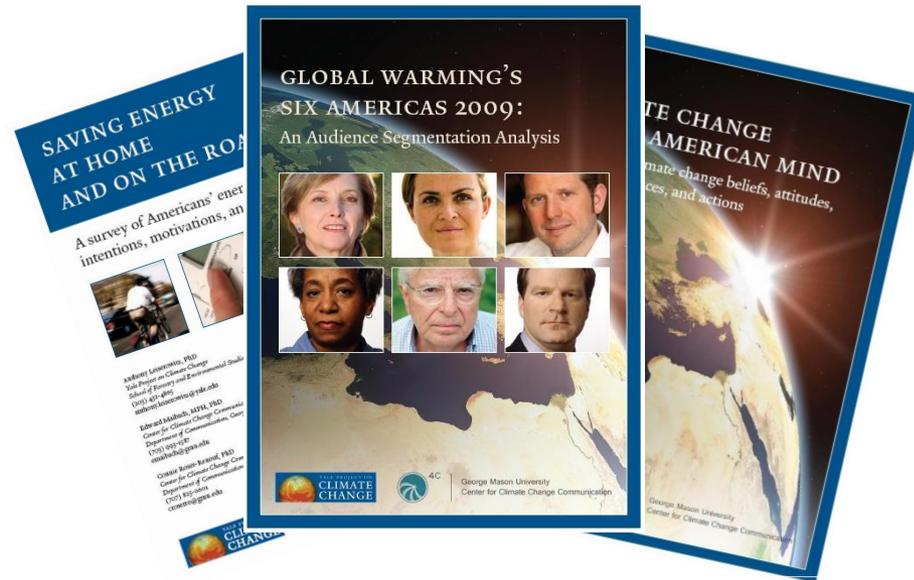
<http://climatechange.gmu.edu>

<http://research.yale.edu/environment/climate>

croserre@gmu.edu

All 4C reports can be downloaded at:

Climatechangecommunication.org



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Age Distribution among the Six Americas

	Alarmed	Concerned	Cautious	Disengaged	Doubtful	Dismissive	Total
75+	3%	4%	4%	6%	9%	6%	5%
65-74	15%	13%	9%	15%	17%	22%	14%
55-64	26%	23%	24%	26%	23%	21%	24%
45-54	21%	20%	17%	16%	18%	21%	19%
35-44	13%	16%	15%	16%	14%	13%	15%
25-34	13%	13%	15%	13%	9%	10%	12%
18-24	9%	12%	17%	9%	11%	6%	12%

Yale/George Mason, May 2011; n=1,010



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Race/Ethnicity Distribution among the Six Americas

	Alarmed	Concerned	Cautious	Disengaged	Doubtful	Dismissive	Total
2+ Races, Non-Hispanic	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	4%	2%
Hispanic	14%	11%	11%	11%	7%	6%	10%
Other, Non-Hispanic	4%	4%	5%	1%	2%	2%	3%
Black, Non-Hispanic	9%	9%	12%	20%	7%	3%	10%
White, Non-Hispanic	71%	73%	70%	66%	81%	86%	74%

Note: It bothers me that Knowledge Networks doesn't have any category here for Asian Americans. Don't know why.

Yale/George Mason, May 2011; n=1,010



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Education Distribution among the Six Americas

	Alarmed	Concerned	Cautious	Disengaged	Doubtful	Dismissive	Total
Bachelor's degree or higher	36%	31%	27%	12%	25%	36%	29%
Some college	24%	32%	34%	26%	35%	29%	31%
High school	30%	30%	29%	40%	30%	29%	31%
Less than high school	9%	7%	9%	21%	10%	5%	10%

Yale/George Mason, May 2011; n=1,010



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Gender Distribution among the Six Americas

	Alarmed	Concerned	Cautious	Disengaged	Doubtful	Dismissive	Total
Female	55%	56%	51%	69%	43%	43%	52%
Male	45%	44%	49%	31%	57%	57%	48%

Yale/George Mason, May 2011; n=1,010



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