

Sustaining Disbelief: Media Pollism and Climate Change

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Too Good To Check ?

“This story,” editor Richard Ingrams once said “is too good to check”. Could it be that for some of the media, the “climate sceptic” story is too good to let go of ? At any event there is evidence that the ‘disbelief’ story is being given a sustained prominence out of proportion to the findings of qualitative and quantitative surveys of public opinion and perceptions. This matters because such ‘findings’ have a feedback effect on the public, and on the willingness of politicians and others to take action to try and curb climate-changing pollution.

A Good Story

For over two decades, the media has been running essentially the same story – “do we” or “don’t we” believe in “climate change” ? For any campaigner or public interest advocate, particularly anyone concerned with an issue of inter-generational significance, or whose solutions require cooperation or collaboration, or where ‘science’ is central to its understanding, the media and political handling of “climate change” provides a rich laboratory.

It all started back in the mid-1980s when a then-obscure network of global-climate scientists compared notes and realised that once different assumptions were removed, their models of the climate showed strikingly similar results. The models suggested dramatic climate change if people kept adding CO₂ and other polluting greenhouse gases to the atmosphere at the rates they were: ‘global warming’ at a pace and scale never experienced by any civilisation. So they alerted governments and the media, and the “climate issue” was born.

Ever since then, the media, scientists and politicians have played the central roles in the ‘climate change’ issue, and its interplay with “the public”. Moreover the basic, rational model laid out by the scientists, politicians and officials for taking action through the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, has provided a central ‘framework’ for reporting and debating ‘the issue’.

Other ‘metaframes’ have emerged - such as ‘green lifestyles’ and, ‘sustainability’ – but none have rivalled the founding frame of analysis and discovery by science, and the handover of the results to politics, government and civil society, to then decide what to do, guided by ‘science’. As soon as the possible implications became clear the ‘issue’ became a playground for campaigners and lobbyists, most notoriously from the fossil fuel industries, trying to push action or to stop it. It’s been Spin Central ever since.

The Science-Social Response Frame

The IPCC itself has traditionally organised its reports into a sequence like ‘the scientific basis’ (what is happening, how does it happen ?), impacts, adaptation and vulnerability (consequences and responses), and ‘mitigation’ (making it happen less, i.e. pollution reduction). The series of questions laid out in the

science-government-society framework create the conditions for debate about the 'climate issue', in which one needs to be overcome before moving onto the next. Debate and the taking of sides takes place at each stage. Because the IPCC thinking has been institutionalised into inter-governmental agendas and processes, with attendant lobbying and contributions by NGOs, think tanks and industrial interest groups, this 'frame' is not simply a concept of a few scientists but has created an entire industry of climate debate and policy-making, determining the expenditure of billions of dollars, the development or not of entire industries and the direction of policies from agriculture to transport. As a result it is the dominant framework for 'the issue' as covered in the media. These stages follow the broad sequence¹:

Existence – could the models be right ? Could large scale human induced climate change exist ?

Consequence – if it did exist, would that really matter ?

Detection – can we find signs that the forecast climate change is really happening – a 'signal' ?

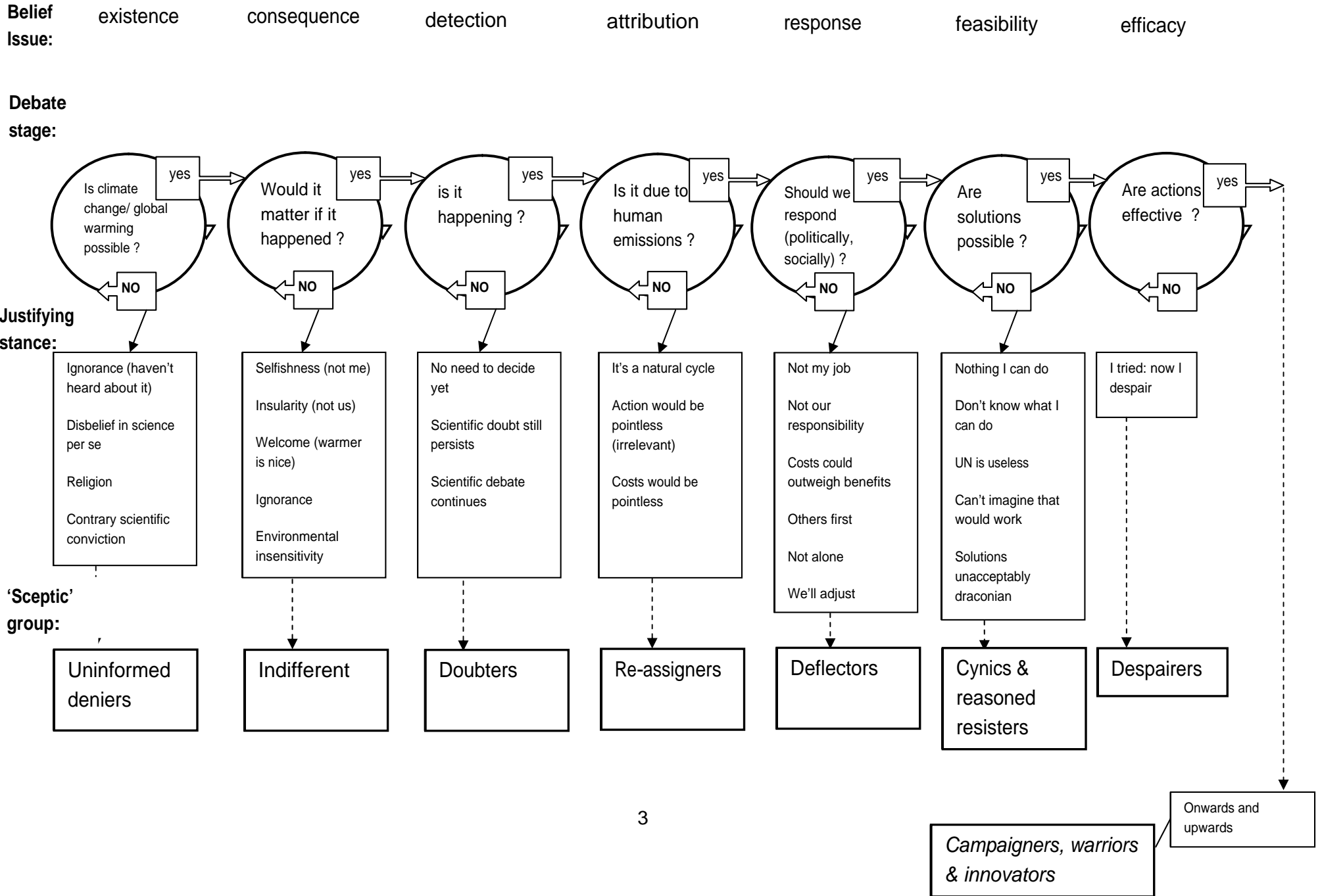
Attribution – if it's happening, can we find a 'fingerprint' of human influence ?

Response – should we respond politically, eg by international government action, and socially and individually, by changing the technologies we use and the lives we lead ?

Feasibility – are the proposed solutions actually doable, technologically, economically, organisationally, politically ?

Efficacy – if we are trying them, are they really working ?

The diagram below shows this chain of scepticism as a linear sequence although it could be shown as a spiral or circle. "Scepticism" can be found at any of these stages although they mean very different things. So the different stages, or issues for debate, create a palette or beliefs and disbeliefs, which are sampled by polling depending on which questions you ask.



As we run to the end of this sequence, the role of ‘climate science’ becomes less and less relevant. We are more and more into the realms of politics, marketing and psychology but because of the mould cast two decades ago, we find climate scientists often still feature in the media, giving their opinions about “what is realistic” for example in terms of energy or transport policy, or how to bring about “behaviour change” among citizens and consumers. An interesting if often dysfunctional example of authority-transfer.

Innumerable ‘opinion polls’ and studies have been directed at charting the ‘public response’ to the climate ‘issue’. These have acted as the social samplers to detect ‘scepticism’ or non-belief along the way. Over the years the general focus of the polls has shadowed ‘the issue’ as the consensus reports of the IPCC have moved on, for example they now often include questions about personal lifestyle action whereas a decade or so they were mainly about whether the climate change existed. None of this is surprising but what is more interesting and more troubling for anyone trying to secure sufficient social change in time to keep climate change within the limits identified by the IPCC as not intolerably dangerous, is the nature of the polling-media coverage of ‘scepticism’.

For example, in April 2007 the New Statesman magazine, almost the house journal of the ruling British Labour Party, publishedⁱⁱ a much publicised article headed “*Climate Change: Why we don’t believe it*”. The ‘we’ in this instance was ‘British public opinion’. The source was an unreferenced IPSOS-MORI Poll hitherto ‘unreported in the mainstream media’. So the bottom line on this story was quite simply outright national disbelief. If true, this would be remarkable, given that other polls showed even 85% of Americans believed that climate change had probably been happeningⁱⁱⁱ, and also according to a 2006 IPSOS-MORI Poll^{iv}, more than half of the British public thought climate change or global warming was the ‘most serious threat’ to the future well-being of the world, 71% though that they knew a great deal or a fair amount about ‘global warming’, and 68% believed they had “personally seen evidence of climate change”.

The strongest convictions arise from personal experience so it would be peculiar if IPSOS-MORI had uncovered a national act of self-disbelief – a majority who believe they had personally seen evidence of something they ‘didn’t believe in’.

Back to the New Statesman. What it claimed to reveal (line one) was ‘an unreported gulf between the pronouncements of campaigners and politicians and British public opinion’. These pronouncements were paraphrased as ‘unless we all take urgent action within ten years, we are all literally doomed to burn up’. New Statesman asked ‘but who else believes them?’

The first evidence New Statesman produced was actions, not words or beliefs. British consumers were still flying driving and buying with ‘unchecked enthusiasm’. ‘The gulf between the pronouncements of our politicians and what the majority of people think and do could scarcely be wider’ said journalist Lois Rogers.

So did Rogers prove her case, or the headline writer’s case? No – because “believing in climate change” as a problem has, sadly, little to do with action. As any competent market researcher knows, belief does not necessarily, or often, translate into action. So a lack of action is not an indication of disbelief about the existence or threat of climate change – it could equally be described as ‘the lethargy issue’. The New Statesman piece went on to discover this with the help of IPSOS-MORI – the ‘ yawning gap between what people say and what they do’, in the next paragraph. But that wasn’t their ‘story’. The story was

'climate scepticism' and that was a 'story' only in proportion to how 'wrong' the advocates of action were; itself implicitly defined as how out of step they were with 'public opinion'. "Most people say they are concerned but fewer act" would not be much of a story. News needs conflict, a dialectic, a tension, a simple polarity, hence the well founded news dictum, 'first simplify, then exaggerate'.

Rogers might say she was the victim of re-coding by the editors who simplified and exaggerated her story in the headline but they were only sharpening an angle she had already constructed. In commissioning its piece New Statesman probably (it was a 'selling' cover story) was looking for a way to ride the wave of topicality created shortly before by a Channel 4 documentary (which it cited) '*The Great Global Warming Swindle*'. A bit of conflation and spinning of an 'undiscovered' IPSOS-MORI poll would have been a cheap way to get in on the act.

Other recent polls show wide public conviction that climate change is real and worrying but often with the same much lower level of action. One for the Energy Savings Trust^v found 'over 80 per cent of people believe that climate change is having an impact on the UK right now and yet 40 per cent of us are doing nothing to reduce our energy use.' In 30 countries 'a large majority of people in all countries polled believe that climate change or global warming is a serious problem. No country has more than one in five saying it is not a serious problem', reported a poll of 33,237 people from all major regions of the world was conducted by GlobeScan in 2005/6^{vi}.

Large polls conducted for the UK government in 2005^{vii} found 95% aware of global warming, 89% saw this as leading to a melting of the polar ice, only 5% disagreed that the worlds climate was changing, and 74% saw changes as due to human causes against 23% 'mainly natural' (IPSOS-MORI found this was 9% natural, 46% human, 41% mixture). As UK government politicians noted, they also found the public was 'confused'. In some cases this is because people were asked about confusion but in others it is because they respond to a series of questions and politicians, pollsters or journalists then judged the answers to be 'confused'.

Sometimes the polls included 'knowledge-testing' questions, for example if global warming caused a hole in the ozone layer^{viii} but in others it was because the politicians, pollsters and media are adopting the much discredited assumption that information ought to be leading to opinion change and that opinion will then be matched by action. Without this assumption, the significance of the 'confusion' often evaporates.

Much more of the 'mixed' picture is due to there being not one climate change debate about 'belief' but several, as shown in the diagram above. If you set out to measure or to find disbelief or questioning, you can garner evidence of it from some or all of these stages. If, as is the case, different parts of the population are 'at different stages', the unless a survey disaggregates them, and segments its results, the 'average' picture of 'the public' will always look confusing, or muddy.

Bases Of Scepticism

A few years ago the Frameworks Institute found^x that many Americans then rejected any proposition about human induced 'climate change' because God had made the climate and therefore mere humans could not change it (campaigns inspired by this finding have probably since changed this reality but it will still have adherents). These are deliberately **uninformed deniers**; others are simply ignorant, somehow they have not heard of it.

"Warmer weather would be nice" is a different basis for 'scepticism' – here the doubt is not about the possible existence of human made climate change but whether it matters – consequence scepticism. This 'narrative' has been described by IPPR's linguistic analysis report 'Warm Words'^x as British comic nihilism or 'warming is good'. Blithely insouciant, these 'sceptics' are **the indifferent**. Other reasons to be indifferent include "well I'm glad I don't live in Bangladesh" and "who cares about polar bears anyway?".

It is of course possible to decide that it might matter a lot but still to 'disbelieve' because you doubt that it's happening. In IPCC speak these **doubters** are sceptical about whether an unequivocal climate signal has been detected. To climatologists this requires a departure (eg in temperature) from a long-term mean – something which NASA scientist Jim Hansen announced in testimony to Congress decades ago. Although now laid to rest among the community of the IPCC in the mid 1990s, this was fiercely debated by 'climate sceptic scientists', often financed by the fossil fuel industry. 'Contrarian exposes' such as the discredited C4 'Swindle' programme tend to resurrect these debates, or those over 'attribution'.

Even if you accept that it's happening, of course it might be down to sunspots, a natural cycle (a favourite at one time of paleoclimatologists) or some other natural process. I call these sceptics **re-assigners** because they assign the cause to something other than 'us'. From about 2000 the scientific consensus shifted to accept that the only explanation for observed temperature increases was human greenhouse gas pollution. Sun spots and dozens of other alternative explanations have gradually been eliminated – see for example New Scientist's *Climate change: A guide for the perplexed*^{xi}. It is "very likely" that human activity is the cause for climate change, said the IPCC in February 2007^{xii}.

It is plain from polls and qualitative studies that most of 'the public' have concluded this is the case. Climate change is real, happening and human pollution is a cause of it. Yet it's still possible to conclude that we should not respond, or at least that our group, country or us as individuals should not respond. Maybe I don't own a 4x4, or maybe it's more the fault of the Chinese, or the developed nations ought to act first – there are a host of examples from the dinner tables of the chattering classes through to international negotiations over 'Kyoto' where the belief issue is about response, and the issue is responsibility. I term these disbelievers the **deflectors**, because they don't doubt that someone should respond – it's just not them.

One might accept that we *are* all responsible (as many polls show) but still be 'sceptical' of calls to action, because you don't think they will work. Why waste time on it? You might reject a UN treaty as a vehicle because (still pretty much the ostensible US position), you don't like the particular UN process. This is feasibility scepticism. Here the failure of imagination, or ignorance of what is possible, often kicks in. It's not unusual to hear 'climate experts' pronounce that we will never get governments to close power stations because of climate change, or 'we'll never get people out of their cars'. History is full of examples of massive changes, especially technological changes, where the 'informed view' was that it would never catch on. ("I can imagine a time when there's one in every town", a US Mayor once

remarked of that new invention, the telephone). After it happens, nobody can remember being a feasibility sceptic.

Some climate scientists have turned to advocate nuclear power because they can't imagine how to persuade people to use less energy. Others reject proposed solutions because they see them as infringing liberties, or because the calls to action don't seem to apply to them. All these can be picked up in polling as rejection and labeled 'scepticism'. This may sound very different from the 'scepticism' about attribution or detection but as writer Fred Pearce showed^{xiii}, most of those 'scientific' sceptics are not scientists but businessmen, economists or politicians with an avowed agenda of promoting small-government and the free-market. The causes of rejection as often as much about psychology or politics as about 'science.' These rejecters of climate solutions might be called the **cynics and reasoned resisters**.

Lastly, although much less well documented than the other groups, qualitative studies, blogs and anecdotal reports are picking up **despairers**. These people have bought the whole picture, accepted the reality of climate change, often been among the first to take action, tried to do all they could and now despair because they can't see how enough can be done.

The trick for any controversialist programme maker or anti-climate propagandist is to sample from across this spectrum to conflate the whole thing into one measure or impression of 'rejection': "climate change - we don't believe it", or "the public rejects global warming". Below I make some suggestions as to what might be done about this in terms of communications strategy, and what significance the different forms of scepticism have but first a few more words about the role of polls.

Pollism

The above phenomena are compounded by an implicit view or framing of polling itself as being a simple reliable read-out of 'public opinion'. This belief in polls, or 'pollism', assumes we are measuring an essentially one dimensional phenomenon – like temperature in a human body. You can then 'take the temperature' and be confident it means something. Doing this 'on an issue' implies it is one issue, though as the 'scepticism menu' suggests, this is not the case with 'climate change'.

It also assumes you are essentially sampling a single entity, like a single body, or the 'body politic'. If you are not then we can't know the significance of any result. This leads to the well-known fallacy of the importance of 'the average'. 'Mr or Mrs Average' are implicitly the important sample. Politicians or the media often like to use 'average view' to discount particular views, on the assumption that the 'average' somehow speaks for the rest. This then excuses or legitimises the averaging effect of many polls and presentation of them.

Where the underlying components being sampled are clear, flaws in the sampling are obvious. Take the case of two men and two apples. One man eats both. On average, they ate one each. The average in this case 'lies' but we only know this if we knew the distribution of apples to start with. In order to decide the significance of polling on 'climate scepticism' we therefore need to know what we are sampling, to have some idea of the underlying dynamics of the issue.

Of course pollsters know this and entire books have been devoted to the significance and shortcomings of polls^{xiv}, both through misreading, construction and deliberate spin. A well known example is the use of 'horse race' polls – chose between named election candidates – which exclude certain choices

altogether. Political parties and media supporting them can use this method to keep smaller parties marginal because they don't look 'worth voting for', or because voters make a mental choice between the two or three they've heard a lot about, and ignore the others they find on the ballot paper once they get into the voting booth.

One can argue that none of this is surprising. Magazines and newspapers are in the business of entertainment: 'contraintainment' – the manufacturing of surprising controversies, can be part of this. Pollsters are in business to make money and media coverage is vital for them: the media are clients and the media coverage helps them get more business. Any polling group like IPSOS-MORI is well aware that most polls can be read both ways, spun, in the most benign case, as a glass half full or half empty. In relation to 'climate change', if you adopt some of the above assumptions, it's a relatively simple matter to use polling to create a story which shows the 'public' not being 'convinced about climate change', despite the mass of evidence to the contrary. This can then be juxtaposed, with simple sleight of hand, with climate-related policies, campaigns or projects, and this mismatch presented as 'news'.

A simple case is where politicians or campaigners say everyone should act locally as well as supporting international agreements, 'yet' a poll finds dog mess and traffic congestion or parking rank higher than 'climate change' in surveys. But these are questions which ask about "local" priorities. The 'local' frame automatically brings in smaller, more manageable and obviously soluble problems and people will tend to select those options, especially if the question appears in any way linked to a messenger or channel connected to local decision-making. People tend not to 'waste' expression of their opinion.

Local also tends to invoke the acute and immediate as opposed to long term and diffuse, and as 'climate' is plainly global not local, it is perhaps remarkable that 'climate change' gets any votes at all when we ask about 'local' environmental issues. Simplified and made more black and white in a headline, this can easily yield "Public Unconvinced On Climate Change" or "Dog Mess More Important Than Climate, Says Public".

One finding from the series of IPSOS-MORI polls mentioned earlier which is seized on to show 'scepticism', eg "new poll suggests public not convinced ... The public remains unconvinced about warnings that the climate is being affected by global warming, according to a new poll^{xv} is 56% who believe there is still a scientific debate going on, whereas in fact there is a massive scientific consensus. This generated the BBC headline^{xvi} "Scepticism' over climate claims'. So what's 'the story' here? If you then did a head-to-head interview between one scientist representing the 'consensus' and one who still expressed doubts – which if you look into any scientific issue in detail can always be found as questioning is the process of science – a broadcast makes it look as if there is a 50:50 view, i.e. 'science' is split down the middle or 'undecided'. Equally, it's always possible to find one of the 10% or 5% or whatever who reject the very notion of human induced climate change and air their views as an 'average Joe', and broadcast or quote them as 'the man on the street' rubbishing the whole notion.

This matters because while simply broadcasting or publishing news stories is a very weak way of driving people to *change* their lifestyles or behaviours, it is a very powerful influence on their opinions^{xvii}, which can be much more important in *stopping* them from changing. So for example after the Channel 4 "swindle" programme there were many reports of 'relieved resisters', effectively saying "well thank goodness, now we know we don't have to change [our holiday, flights, car use etc etc]". Although that programme indulged in deliberate misrepresentation of data and so over-reached itself that it was forensically dismembered and debunked in the media^{xviii}, that process took weeks and received far less

air time or 'mindspace' than the trailers, broadcast and media echo of the film itself. The film undoubtedly had an effect.

More importantly, even the process of better-intentioned coverage and polling can help keep people 'stuck' where they are in the debate, or may even push them backwards. If scientists engaged in climate research pop up in the media, or scientific organisations commission polls, they may be triggering the founding frame "is it happening or isn't it?", in the same way that Lakoff and others have pointed out that for example, policemen signify the presence or threat of crime, or promise of law enforcement.

Pollsters and most of their clients also know that polling is a far from objective process. We can sample, analyse and report the results objectively but push the results in one direction or another by the choice of questions. If I ask you a series of questions about what you might do with your money as investments or purchases, you will be less generous if I ask for a charity donation afterwards than if I had not, and much less generous than if I had first asked you about problems which the charity was designed to relieve. If I invite you to think about the complexity of climate change and then about how certain you are about taking action, will be more likely to feel uncertain, and so on.

To Get Action Against Climate Change We Need To Remove 'Climate Change' From The Frame

If advocates want to move on to changing behaviours and responses, then the 'stories' they generate need to be composed with differences, actions and actors to do with lifestyles (eg rival consumer products, brands and stores, or holiday options and travel correspondents), not belief or disbelief in 'climate change'. More fundamentally we may need to detach the concept of 'climate change' from communications in order to get progress on climate change, because each time the communications is about 'climate change' (cf for example homes standards, or car choices) it becomes about science, and that raises doubts and material for blow-back stories.

Another way to disengage communications to achieve change from the '[science of] climate change' frame is to focus on the local or regional, for example communities, cities, towns or villages 'going green'. The difference in the story then becomes the difference between the performance or measures (eg renewable energy, bus provision) or attitudes in the places concerned, and not disbelief in any aspect of 'climate change'.

Until that occurs, 'climate scientists', politicians or campaigners talking about the 'problem' of people not understanding climate change, or resisting climate change actions, is likely to help keep the issue 'open'. People will notice 'climate scientists' debating, unlikely to pick up the details, and very likely conclude that there must be a debate to be had about 'climate change'. If we need to encourage people to change their lightbulbs then climate scientists (or 'climate campaigners') are not the people to use to do it.

IPSOS-MORI quote^{xix} 'Republican' Pollster Frank Luntz:

"Should the public believe that the issue is settled, their views on global warming will change accordingly. Therefore, you need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a primary issue in the debate".

Luntz is a clever man – anyone concerned with public communications should read his book *Words That Work*^{xx} – and this is the strategic significance of the ‘scepticism menu’.

These days most politicians seek to stay in close step with ‘public opinion’. To detect ‘public opinion’ politicians rely on the media and on polls, while the media do their best to force politicians to take a position on polls. If ‘public opinion’ seems to be ‘rejecting’ climate change as a proposition, most politicians are reluctant to act.

This negative feedback on political action in turn leads to a positive feedback encouraging personal inertia. Numerous studies^{xxi} show the ‘big actor’ requirement: i.e. “if I don’t see big players acting, why should I?” Psychologically, the ‘Security Driven’ Maslowian Group (20% in the UK - see below^{xxii}), always the least likely to change behaviours, are also the group most needing signs from authority that a behaviour is legitimate. Preferably they want to see a law requiring it. The case of rear seat belts, illustrated in the IPSOS MORI report *Tipping Point or Turning Point*^{xxiii}, shows not just the effect of long-term ‘social marketing’ but of making it a legal requirement. Normative reinforcement (everyone is doing it, so I will too), affects particularly this group and also the larger 40% who are psychologically Outer Directed or esteem-seeking: they don’t want to be seen to be ‘out of step’.

On top of this it is well known to qualitative researchers that we tune our views to match our behaviours. This is the root cause of failure in attempts to use information, argument or someone else’s opinion to change the opinion of another in order to change their behaviour. In other words, our stated opinions are tuned to match what we do. So once you get people to adopt a behaviour, their ‘opinion’ changes to justify it. This is the power of starting with small exchanges or actions. It plays both ways: if I’m not doing anything ‘about climate change’ then I will search out a reason to explain that. Consequently the persistent reiteration in the media of ‘climate sceptic’ stories, and the exaggeration of the overall scepticism towards an impression of “outright rejection”, will be providing justification for personal inaction, which in turn deters political action, which in turn inhibits personal action. This ‘treading water’ effect means the climate change debate may have reached neither a tipping point nor a turning point. On the other hand if government were seen to introduce some population-wide mandatory climate related action, with underlying climate opinion in the state it is, a tipping point might well occur, and the mass-market for climate sceptic stories would simply dry up because the mass media will not give prominence to stories which their readers or viewers reject.

A Motivational Insight Into ‘Scepticism’

Opinion polls measure perceptions that are closely linked to what’s in the media or being talked about by people we want to be like, and our current behaviours: these change over a year or so. Marketers concerned with services and products tend to look at ‘lifestyles’ and collections of opinions (attitudes), which change more slowly, say two to five years. Well-known tools for mapping or segmenting people by lifestyle, mostly based on consumer data, lifestage, employment and location, include ACORN and MOSAIC, which divide the population into dozens of ‘types’. ‘Values’ research looks at the underlying psychological needs or motivational drivers: principles, beliefs and motivations, and these change much more slowly, say over one or two decades^{xxiv}. A values mapping system which divides the population into three main ‘Maslowian’ groups and twelve ‘Value Modes’ is run by the company Cultural Dynamics Strategy and Marketing (CDSM).

In 2001 and again in 2007, CDSM conducted surveys relevant to ‘scepticism’ about climate. CDSM asked nine questions about ‘the state of the natural environment’. It analysed the results by age, sex,

social group and other factors including Maslowian ‘values’ – i.e. the dominant psychological needs. (For an analysis of how this motivation-mapping system works see the guide Using Value Modes at www.campaignstrategy.org and see also www.cultdyn.co.uk). Although the questions did not reference ‘climate’ specifically, as ‘climate’ consistently ranks at or near the top of identifiable concerns about the environment, the findings are relevant to this discussion.

Respondents (from large nationally representative surveys) were asked:

Which ONE of these statements comes closest to your own attitude to the state of the natural environment?

- *I’m not concerned, it doesn’t worry me.*
- *The situation is not as dangerous as it’s made out to be.*
- *The situation is dangerous, but it’s not too late to restore the environment through action.*
- *The balance of nature has been upset for centuries to come. It’s too late to prevent serious problems.*
- *Everybody should do something.*
- *We are all responsible.*
- *Government should legislate.*
- *They should introduce an environmental tax.*
- *Companies should be made directly responsible.*

Below are the results from both years. Note that ID = inner directed or ‘Pioneers’ (the people most questioning, innovative and interested in new ideas), OD = outer directed or ‘Prospectors’ (the people most concerned with achieving visible signs of success in life, more interested in new things than new ideas), SD = security/ sustenance driven or Settlers (the people most conservative in terms of picking up any new behaviour, least global in outlook, most fatalistic and most accepting of authority).

The index shows how far the result departs from 100 which is the score you get if that group responds in a random manner, i.e. it doesn’t agree or disagree more than their proportion in the national population would suggest. An index of over 100 means the group agrees more, less than 100 means agrees less. The proportions in the national (UK) population at present are about 20% SD, 40% ID, 40% OD. ‘% chose’ signifies the percentage of the national population taking this option.

Statement and Date	% Chose	ID Index	OD Index	SD Index
I’m not concerned, it doesn’t worry me				
2001	3.1	59	105	136
2007	1.8	46	104	156

Statement and Date	% Chose	ID Index	OD Index	SD Index
It is not as dangerous as it is made out to be				
2001	3.3	97	98	105
2007	8.8	67	88	150

Statement and Date	% Chose	ID Index	OD Index	SD Index
The balance of nature has been upset for centuries to come. It's too late to prevent serious problems.				
2001	5.2	92	103	105
2007	8.4	83	59	158

I'm not concerned, it doesn't worry me

The question “**I'm not concerned, it doesn't worry me**” is close to the indifferent/ uninformed ignorance position discussed earlier. Pat Dade, analyst with CDSM comments: “In both 2001 and 2007 this can be typified as a younger (under 35) down market male orientation among the Sustenance Driven and the Outer Directeds; though in the Inner Directed the profile is much more AB, peaking in the 45-54 age group. All Maslow groups answering ‘yes’ to this question have become more male in 2007.”

In both 2001 and 2007 this point of view was differentiated by values with a massive over-indexing to SD, the security driven Settlers. In other words although the Settlers make up only 20% of the population as a whole, Settlers and especially Settler men, make up a disproportionate number of those adopting this “indifferent/ unaware” position.

Overall this group of ‘utter deniers’ is tiny – down from 3.1% to 1.8% and it has also become more male. Dade says: “We know all these groups well from conducting thousands of interviews and asking thousands of questions that reveal ‘needs’ below the level of specific behaviours – ie the drivers of an outlook on life as a whole. Here we find many male Settlers amongst those who are indifferent to the state of the natural environment. This is a fatalistic, non-self-reflective group of men who are much more likely to feel alienated from the rest of the population than most other groups in society. They are usually not happy with their lives, but are impulsive and up for the next “craic” and seldom worry about the consequences. These are the insular men who tend to get lost in today's world of “getting ahead and looking to the future”. They are solidly rooted in their own chaotic now, quietly confused and just hanging on. The whole complex issue of climate change is vastly irrelevant for their short term orientation to life”.

Dade notes that the shrinkage of this already small group suggests that the “unaware” are continuing to “fall in the culture as the messages about climate change continue to penetrate the national psyche”.

As a group this type of denier is small and marginalized and will continue to be marginalized in the future. They are not likely to create “a voice” in the media unless they are sought out as examples of the untutored ‘man in the street’. The closest they might get to a voice of their own would be their own page on social networking sites (internet 2.0); though even that is problematic because of their

chaotic, apolitical approach to life, i.e. they are unlikely to have a presence on a site and even if they did they would be unlikely to be talking about climate change in a socio-political context.

Given that Pioneers are avid enquirers taking an interest in all sorts of things, and with a lot of opinions, it's not surprising that few of them adopt this view of 'indifference' on a very high profile political and moral issue.

“it is not as dangerous as it is made out to be”

The next basis of 'scepticism' is very different because it has become more prevalent – as reflected in the ISPOS-MORI findings – and is similar to the detection 'doubters' and the 're-assigners' or 'defectors' discussed above. In response to the position **“it is not as dangerous as it is made out to be”**, we find that the total number adopting this viewpoint has more than doubled, although it's still a small part of the population (8.8% in 2007).

However in terms of motivational profile it is now almost identical to the 'unaware' profile (the above question) in 2001. Whereas in 2001 this doubting position wasn't a 'values issue', by 2007 there was a strong recruitment of Settlers (SD index 150), and while the Pioneers as a whole (ID index 67) have moved away from the view (the increase in numbers overall means Pioneers are split – ie a small subset do adopt this view).

CDSM's Pat Dade comments that “at over 1 in 12, this is a quiet voice that just seems to “be there” all the time. CDSM's data shows that In 2001 this orientation was much more upmarket male peaking in the over 45's; very unlike the first group of deniers. Today's demographic profile is still markedly male, but tends to be more prevalent in the over 55's skewing heavily into the over 65's rather than the over 45's – an indicator that the age cohort is still resistant to the message, but it is ageing and taking its opinions with it. However the values change in the make up of this group is bigger than the demographic change”.

So this has become a point of view increasingly owned by the Settlers – socially the least influential group in society¹. Although more of them may be adopting this view, this is a shrinking and ageing group so the growth of this group as sceptics will be limited.

Because of their age this group will have more time to spread their opinions, but will probably have less individual access to traditional media forms, but may have greater access to pressure groups that are sought out as “voices” by many forms of media in the search for the next story in the 24/7 media age. They are less likely than younger age cohorts to use internet 1.0 than other groups and least likely of all groups to use the social network internet 2.0.

¹ Although they do not convert the other groups they can be influential in other ways. For example although hard to rouse they can be very intransigent once mobilised – the Countryside Marches, based on identity and anger, are an example.

I'm not concerned, it doesn't worry me - the balance of nature has been upset for centuries to come, it's too late to prevent serious problems²

This last question shows some differences because in 2001 it was not differentiated by values but now it is. Those selecting **"The balance of nature has been upset for centuries to come, it's too late to prevent serious problems"** now also skew strongly to the Settlers (SD index up from around 100 to 158) with Prospectors, previously average (no bias) now under-score significantly at 59³ while Pioneers now drop to 83.

This is in line with the innate fatalism of the Settlers – "there's nothing I can do about it anyway" is a frequent refrain when faced with almost any issue. The adoption of the 'climate message' by figures such as BBC TV's David Attenborough, an icon to Settlers, may well have encouraged this view: ie "it's real but there's nothing I can do".

More significant for anyone trying to bring about action, the possibility at least exists⁴ that some of the Pioneers adopting this view are 'despairers', who have tried to take action but have learnt enough about the issue to know that major changes are now inevitable⁵, or 'reasoned resisters' with similar knowledge. Communications strategists should pay more attention to this group and try to engage them with evidence of feasibility, not least because these people come from the 'chattering classes' and their views have a wider impact.

An example of such 'despair' are the climate experts who can see no hope of persuading sufficient people to change their behaviours to make a significant difference. Media framing may bring their views repeatedly before the wider public so climate communicators may need to invest time and effort in explaining to them how campaigns or social marketing can make a difference, and the potential of technologies and marketing to create change, for example through product design. Being an expert on climate change does not mean the same person is necessarily an expert in doing something about it.

Conclusions From Motivational Analysis

The above discussion rests only on two sets of data points and there is a real danger of over-interpretation. On the other hand we know great deal about the motivational profiles and can be confident that the strong bias to a Settler (security driven) profile in this 'scepticism' is real and significant.

The Settlers are a small (20%) segment of the population which has consistently shrunk in size over recent decades. The dynamic of change in the population is that Pioneers start new trends of behaviour and if they are taken up, it's the Prospectors, the esteem-driven Outer Directeds, who follow. The Settlers will not be influencing either group.

² In August 2007 the UK Government Department DEFRA released just the headlines of a survey which found amongst other things that '17 per cent, strongly agreed or tended to agree that "Climate change is beyond control – it's too late to do anything about it" – the result looks from their diagram as if about 12% tended to agree and 5% strongly agreed - <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2007/070814a.htm>.

³ It is hard to interpret this result for Prospectors as several explanations are possible and it is in effect a two part question – for example this group tends to be indifferent to 'nature' but would be reluctant to be seen to eschew green concerns if fashionable, avoid controversial views and if they do identify with a view, would be reluctant to be pessimistic. If this survey is repeated it may be possible to investigate them further.

⁴ Because anecdotal reports and qualitative research have uncovered some examples of this

⁵ eg committed climate change

Left to social processes the scepticism revealed by these questions would be expected to gradually die out. On the other hand the small contrarian tendency amongst the Pioneers – motivated by an interest in finding better questions, pragmatic, sceptical, inquisitive and interested in ideas – will be the source of many media ‘exposes’ or challenges to the conventional wisdom on climate change. To validate such media stories, journalists will seek out evidence of scepticism amongst ‘Mr Average’ or ‘the man on the street’, and are likely to find these voices amongst the Settlers. The results show that at a maximum of just under 8% this sceptical voice is, in reality, very small. In terms of communications strategy it is more significant because of the way it is used to stand up media stories with a much greater political and social impact.

Media magnified scepticism deters political action which in turn both allows Settlers to continue business as usual and feeds opportunistic sceptics, such as the ‘relieved resisters’ who are thrown a ‘reasoned’ justification for not changing their lifestyle. This can be expected to play particularly strongly with Prospectors, who are caught in a dilemma between wanting to keep up with the fashion of being green, and avoiding making a social mistake by getting it wrong on the controversies. The idea-joshing Pioneers can use it to excuse inaction by adopting a position of waiting for an answer to their next ‘clever’ question before making a personal change.

The communications answers to these forms of scepticism are different.

The Prospectors may be best dealt with by disengaging ‘climate change’ from offers or asks around behaviours which will help combat climate change. Make ‘going green’ aspirational and a choice of products or services endorsed by high status channels or messengers, and Prospectors can take it up as the ‘right thing’ to be doing. Only don’t connect it to ‘the climate change debate’. In this connection the ‘Concerned Ethical’ (a Pioneer Value Mode) type of climate campaign is a positive hindrance as it constantly reminds Prospectors of connections and implications they don’t want to think about⁶. So isolate the scepticism debate from projects to change Prospectors.

The great majority of the Pioneers disagree strongly with climate scepticism but a small minority positively revel in exploring it. They can be directly challenged by asking them to propose and defend answers – “supposing there is something in climate change, what are you saying we do about it ?” This is hard for them to avoid as they would much rather pose interesting questions than put forward hard and fast views such as “there is no climate change”. The grist to their questioning mill is attempts to close down debate. Instead shift the grounds of the debate to solutions.

The Settlers will eventually come along once leaders in authority – which mainly means government – mandate across the board action with no free-riders, as in recycling.

The despairing Pioneers (and maybe some Prospectors) need what amounts to remedial help, with evidence that change is possible, by taking them inside the worlds of marketing, psychology, engineering and the construction of campaigns. This is summarised below.

⁶ The Concerned Ethical thought is that to make the world a better place you need to be a better person, and only do things for ‘the right reason’

Maslowian group:	Settlers (SD)	Prospectors (OD)	Pioneers (ID)
Bias to climate scepticism:	Higher than average	Average or lower	Much lower
Motivational roots of position adopted:	Fatalistic, disengaged in general and acquiescent	Indifferent if offers or asks do not give the potential to look successful or to be 'doing the right thing'	Contrarian minority: iconoclasm, taking a sceptical approach to conventional wisdom, having a more interesting question to play with; despairing minority: being unable to see feasibility of positive change
Effect of not being engaged in climate action or being sceptical:	No direct effect on views of other groups but feedstock for validation of media on scepticism eg in vox pops	Continue high consumption behaviour and are used by media to show 'climate campaigns are not working'	Affect all other groups by feeding and seeding scepticism, supplying 'questions' and organising media questioning. Despairers cause disengagement of others. [Concerned Ethical campaigners for change alienate Propsectors]

[Note that overall climate scepticism, particularly forms to the left end of the spectrum/chain is low in all groups – this table only refers to the sceptics not the groups as a whole]

Final Thoughts

Lastly, it should be noted that the presence of doubts, denials and controversies around them itself deters action by interfering in the motivational sequence^{xxv}

Awareness > alignment > engagement > action > satisfaction

At awareness we become aware that a problem or issue exists. This won't in itself lead straight to action. To get there at least two further steps are needed. At 'alignment' we need to see the problem and solution in the same way. This where many 'climate communications' have come unstuck – for example juxtaposing the problem of 'global climate change' with switching off your kettle. If we have been told climate change requires global action by global leaders then the kettle is not in alignment.

Too many choices can have this affect, as can the idea that ‘everything is connected’. ‘Climate scepticism’ can inhibit alignment simply by inserting lots of questioning into the debate. It can make people less sure which is the priority or the ‘right thing’ to do and suggest that ‘even experts disagree’.

Even if we pass to the aligned stage where we agree with a ‘message’ that the problem as a whole requires a certain action, then unless there’s a suitable engagement mechanism – the ‘how’ of taking action – nothing will happen. Here the design of the mechanism is all important. For example a Prospector may want a product choice that they can display as a sign of success, eg ‘the right car’. Surrounding choices with controversy may make people uncertain about climate action asks or offers and so cause them not to engage.

Finally, if having acted, we are disappointed that others have not, or the action seems in some way to have been ineffective, we’re unlikely to try it again or encourage others. This ‘unsatisfied’ dynamic can kill campaigns, and may be happening with ‘climate despairers’. People who do act need to be shown that they really have made a difference.

My conclusion is that climate scepticism is marginal and not in itself a significant phenomenon in the UK but that the media magnification of scepticism, especially in relation to polling, is significant. Communicators need to pay more attention to it. Attacking it or arguing with it is unlikely to be effective but some of the suggestions made above might be useful.

ⁱ Obviously this isn’t the only version of the sequence. ‘Progressive’ governments for example moved from existence/consequence to response on a precautionary basis, without waiting for international action, while others are engaged in response, such as the Framework Convention, while still arguing against attribution

ⁱⁱ Lois Rogers, Climate Change: Why we don’t believe it, NEW STATESMAN 23 April 2007

ⁱⁱⁱ Exclusive global warming poll: The buck stops here, 20 June 2007, NewScientist.com news service, Peter Aldhous

^{iv} Presentation ‘Climate Change: Latest Trends in Public Opinion’, John Leaman, Head of Environment Ipsos IPSOS-MORI, www.ipsos-IPSOS-MORI.com/publications/jl/climate-change-conference.pdf promoted at <http://www.ipsos-IPSOS-MORI.com/understandingsociety/us04.html>

^v www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/.../the_uk_s_opinion_on_climate_change_the_first_green_barometer

^{vi} http://www.globescan.com/news_archives/csr_climatechange.html

^{vii} http://www.climatechallenge.gov.uk/communicate/what_do_people_think.html

^{viii} counted as a confusion, although in fact there are connections

^{ix} Talking Global Warming, Frameworks Institute, unpublished www.frameworksinstitute.org, research completed in 2001

^x Warm Words, How are we telling the climate story and can we tell it better? Gill Ereaut and Nat Segnit pub IPPR 2006, www.ippr.org

^{xi} 16 May 2007, NewScientist.com news service Michael Le Page <http://environment.newscientist.com/channel/earth/dn11462>, and <http://www.stwr.net/content/view/1690/37/>

^{xii} <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/6322083.stm>

^{xiii} Meet the global warming sceptics, 12 February 2005, NewScientist.com news service, <http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=mg18524861.500>

^{xiv} See for example the extensive work of Justin Lewis at <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/en/pubs/201/171.html>

^{xv} <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2007/07/374987.html>

^{xvi} Story from BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/sci/tech/6263690.stm> Published: 2007/07/03 00:25:26 GMT

^{xvii} A well known example is the polls eg by IPSOS-MORI and Gallup which regularly ask which is ‘the most important issue facing the country’. Use of the term ‘the country’ triggers a leadership frame so people’s responses are heavily influenced by what national leaders have been saying are important issues. For this question, media coverage of political leaders tends to drive the answer.

^{xviii} Eg http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,2032361,00.html#article_continue

^{xix} Tipping Point or Turning Point: Social Marketing and Climate Change, Phil Downing and Joe Ballantyne, IPSOS IPSOS-MORI Social Research Institute, 2007

^{xx} Words That Work: It’s Not What You Say – It’s What People Hear, Frank Luntz, pub Hyperion, NY 2007

^{xxi} A relatively recent published one is I will if you will - Towards sustainable consumption, by the Sustainable Development Commission <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=367> (2006) but this phenomenon has turned up in qualitative research certainly since the mid 1980s

^{xxii} See also Using Value Modes and Motivating Behavioural Change Affecting Climate Change, Chris Rose with Pat Dade and John Scott, at www.campaignstrategy.org

^{xxiii} Tipping Point or Turning Point: Social Marketing and Climate Change, Phil Downing and Joe Ballantyne, IPSOS IPSOS-MORI Social Research Institute, 2007

^{xxiv} Pat Dade pers comm – pat@cultdyn.co.uk

^{xxv} See How To Win Campaigns, Chris Rose, pub Earthscan 2005