

Exploring the Organizational Influences on Environmental Journalist's Efforts to Include Scientific Sources in Green News Stories.

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Source credibility is an important component to consider in the messaging of mass communication when it comes to attempting to persuade and change people's behaviors. Research has shown that sources with high credibility such as scientists has an effect on persuasive efforts of a message. In the realm of environmental research, source factor studies are currently an under researched area that needs to be expanded upon. However, before we can study how source effects can persuade an audience, we must first know if high credibility sources are being included in an adequate manner. Working to follow on the findings by Curtin and Rhodenbaugh's 2001 study that compared the information subsidies provided by Public Relations firms and news tip sheets provided by the Society of Environmental Journalists, this study attempts to explore the institutional and personal reasons on what source material a journalist would be more inclined to use in their news stories about the environment and why they ultimately decide to include these materials.

In relationship to campaigns on green advertising, this study can also provide some more insight on the hurdles someone may have to go through if an environmental campaign needs to utilize news organizations to be effective. It also provides insight into what problems green campaigns may run into if they choose to use high credibility scientific sources in a campaign that is fast paced and driven by a tight deadline. An example would be in if an organization wants to get a campaign up and running shortly after an environmental disaster when the issue is more salient in the minds of the audience. Another example could be that a campaign or environmental agency has a blog or newsletter that needs to be constantly updated and providing new, highly credible information to their audience. Knowing the challenges involved in including high credibility scientific sources in the messaging of advertisements and other public relation material would allow campaigns to adequately prepare and make sure they are included in order to have a stronger persuasive effect.

Curtin and Rhodenbaugh concluded that tipsheets contained more news value, but that the public relations material contained more meaningful information that journalists could utilize to greater effect. This presents the problem of whether or not enough effort is being

made to include scientific sources in articles about the environment and if the institutional structure of the news industry lends itself to excluding scientists due to the time constraining and deadline driven nature of the industry.

Through a series of in depth interviews, environmental journalists who are members of the Society of Environmental Journalists were asked questions about the effort they go through to reach out to scientists and make sure they are included in their news stories about environmental issues. They were also asked what limiting factors about their working conditions could potentially hinder this outreach, and if these limiting factors could ultimately lead to scientists being more likely to be excluded from outreach altogether, or being cut from narrative altogether.

It was discovered that the need to meet tight deadlines and the slow response time of scientific sources prevented them from being adequately included in environmental news stories due to the limiting time constraints. It was also discovered that journalists due attempt to make significant efforts to reach these sources for clarifications on tipsheets, or to obtain more knowledge about environmental issues. However, because of the short turn around time of news stories, the likelihood of defaulting to public relation material increases.

Understanding that the news industry itself doesn't lend enough credence to include these sources due to the fast paced nature of mainstream news, efforts can now be made by both journalistic and scientific community to work together towards being included in the narrative. By understanding the personal and institutional issues that environmental journalists must resolve in order to perform on the job, we can begin thinking of solutions to make sure that credible scientists are represented in our news stories. In relation to how this information is useful for environmental campaigns, these findings are a key thing to know in advance. Environmental campaigns would want to make sure they adequately prepare in advance have their scientific sources on hand as they progress through their campaigns. This could also potentially allow environmental groups to launch campaigns that are more fast paced and immediate with short turn around times through the messaging process or even incorporate scientific resources in other campaign initiatives with short turn around times such as blogs and newsletters.