

## **Global Warming's Six Americas: Implications for Public Engagement**

The premise of our research is that people differ, and therefore the best ways to engage them will likely differ too. The six Americas differ substantially with regard to what they currently understand about global warming, how they are – or are not – acting on their understanding, and with regard to the fundamental values and beliefs that shape their interpretations of its importance, causes and solutions.

Optimally, because of the importance of the issue, a set of substantial public engagement initiatives should be developed for -- and targeted to -- each of the six audience segments described here. Below, we provide some perspective on how such initiatives could be tailored for each of the six Americas.

### The Alarmed

The Alarmed are the easiest audience segment to reach, given their strong attention to climate change and their heavy consumption of science and environment-related news coverage. Yet, leveraging their considerable personal engagement in the issue into constructive actions, including active support for wise policy choices, will likely require some very specific public engagement strategies.

First, the Alarmed are looking for a more aggressive response from elected officials at all levels of government, yet currently only about 1 in 4 express their point of view directly to their elected government officials. Most members of the Alarmed don't believe that contacting their elected officials will make a difference. This is distinctly at odds with what public officials and advocacy professionals typically report, namely, that outreach to elected officials is one of the most powerful means of supporting wise policy choices. Therefore, engagement strategies for the Alarmed should focus on motivating and empowering them to use their voice as citizens. For example, this might come in the form of "success stories" – profiles of citizens who are successfully engaging with their elected officials to advance wise policies.

Second, the Alarmed are also seeking a more aggressive response from the businesses that they support. Yet, the vast majority do not know which businesses are making solid progress, and which are not. In short, the desire of most members of the Alarmed segment to express themselves as consumers is currently thwarted by a lack of relevant information. Filling this information need is likely to have a significant impact on the subsequent actions of the Alarmed as consumers.

Third, many of the Alarmed appear interested in personally playing a role in sharing information about global warming with the people they know. Given that friends and family are seen as trusted sources of information about global warming by members of virtually every audience segment, the opinion leadership of the Alarmed is a source of education and social influence that can – with the help of specially designed communication tools – be helpful in engaging members of other audience segments.

Fourth, like members of all other segments, the Alarmed appear to be up against some significant barriers with regard to further embracing energy efficiency and conservation. While members of all segments appear relatively highly motivated to adopt these money saving measures, the Alarmed appear to have the added motivation of knowing that these are important steps they can take to minimize their own personal contribution to global warming. As new energy efficiency options become more available and more affordable, the Alarmed should be targeted as likely early adopters. Their actions, in turn, can provide the social proof necessary to cultivate adoption by members of other audience segments, especially insofar as their adoption can be made visible to friends, neighbors, and even strangers. In other words, energy efficiency social marketing programs targeting the Alarmed, combined with their potential broader social influence, offers important opportunities to advance the adoption of energy efficient technologies and conservation behaviors.

Finally, it will be important with members of the Alarmed to emphasize both a sense of hope and feelings of personal and collective efficacy. Three out of four members of the Alarmed believe that humans can limit global warming, but they feel it's not yet clear if we will. This uncertain sense of collective efficacy by the Alarmed, in the face their dire sense of the future, could easily contribute to a corrosive sense of despair. Helping the Alarmed focus on – and achieve – short-term objectives is a powerful way to promote productive engagement, optimism, as well as longer-term progress.

### The Concerned

As the largest of the six Americas, by far, the Concerned are a particularly important audience segment. Diffusion of innovation theorists would call the Concerned the “early majority,” meaning, once they begin to take action and strongly support wise policies, their beliefs and actions will initiate a powerful set of social diffusion processes that tend to bring the remainder of the nation along with them.

Unlike the Alarmed, however, the Concerned do not yet appear poised to take action in large numbers. Although highly supportive of seeing the problem addressed and solved, they themselves remain largely passive. This appears to be driven, in large measure, by their lack of personal engagement in the issue; for the Concerned, the issue appears to be abstract, impersonal, not here, and not yet. Several strategies may prove useful.

First, to heighten their sense of personal engagement in the issue, it will likely be helpful for members of the Concerned to see concrete manifestations of climate change in the here and now. A heightened understanding of -- and clear visual imagery associated with -- how climate change is already changing their community, and the other places they care most about, may provide that bridge to personal engagement.

Second, again because of their enormous size, the Concerned are a potentially important “market mover.” They express relatively high interest in using their power as consumers to encourage companies to take action, yet 80 percent of the Concerned don't know which companies to reward, and which to punish. As we suggested above, filling this information gap is likely to influence the consumer actions of a significant number of the Concerned.

Finally, again because of their potential as market movers, social marketing programs that remove important barriers to energy efficiency actions – such as cost, convenience, and lack of know how – for members of the Concerned will have an appreciable impact on the nation as a whole.

### The Cautious

In many ways, the Cautious are like the Concerned -- in that they lack a personal connection to climate change, it's abstract to them, and it's not seen as today's problem, here -- only more so. In addition, the Cautious appear to have paid significantly less attention to information about global warming; they feel less knowledgeable and less certain as a result, and they are more likely to hold important misperceptions (e.g., believing that climate change is caused mostly by natural changes in the environment).

First, as is the case with the Concerned, it will likely be helpful for members of the Cautious to see concrete manifestations of climate change in the here and now to heighten their sense of personal engagement in the issue. A heightened understanding of -- and clear visual imagery associated with -- how climate change is already changing their community, and the other places they care most about, may help provide that personal engagement.

Second, it appears important to make special efforts to cover some of the basics with the concerned: global warming is real, human-caused, and harmful to people. While many of the Cautious know these things already, and to some degree already support a strong societal response to correct the problem, they appear to have insufficient certainty in their knowledge to be confident in their opinions.

Finally, the Cautious are open to saving energy and money, but the upfront financial costs associated with energy efficiency measures are a significant barrier to action. Social marketing programs that lower these upfront costs are likely to be well received by members of the Cautious.

### The Disengaged

The Disengaged are remarkable primarily for their success in having thus far avoided learning about or thinking about global warming. Although less educated, less well off financially, and less likely to be working, the Disengaged share many qualities with both the Cautious (e.g., saving money is a strong motivator, visual images more helpful than words in understanding major news events) and the Concerned (e.g., egalitarian values). They are not easy to reach – either through the media or through civic organizations – but they are the audience segment most likely to say that they could easily change their mind about global warming.

Playing an unexpected card – for example, making the case that green jobs will revitalize America – may be the best way to gain their attention and open the conversation. Keeping the conversation positive by focusing on benefits, to self and to America, may be the best way to keep the conversation going with the Disengaged. Finally, finding ways to introduce them to some of the basics – that global warming is real, human-caused, bad for people, and solvable – is likely to be helpful as well.

### The Doubtful

In certain important ways, the Doubtful are the most diverse of the six Americas that they are equally likely to believe that global warming is real, or not, and equally likely to believe they need a lot more information on the subject, or not. Regardless, it is clear that the Doubtful are not motivated to engage in conversation about global warming, or to pay much attention to the issue in the media. Their motivations are less political than practical, however, which creates a number of opportunities to pursue shared objectives.

First, the Doubtful are strong supporters of an energy-independent America. They are likely to embrace public policies that promote energy independence and more efficient use of energy. The environmental benefits of these actions are largely irrelevant to the Doubtful, but the economic benefits are clear and compelling.

Second, the Doubtful also appear quite willing to embrace energy efficiency and conservation measures in the context of their own lives. The value they derive from these actions involves saving energy and saving money, not saving the environment. Promoting environmental benefits to the Doubtful may actually be counter-productive; their relative reluctance to use CFLs – despite the obvious economic benefits – may be evidence that the CFL's strong environmental symbolism undermines its perceived economic benefits.

Finally, although they are unlikely to seek out global warming information or dialogue on their own, the Doubtful appear at least moderately willing to listen and consider. On the whole, they recognize that they don't know much about the issue, and they don't appear to have a strong ideological predisposition to reject information that runs counter to their current beliefs. In short, the Doubtful present a unique opportunity to learn how to have thoughtful dialogue with an audience that is not motivated to engage in such dialogue. This is an opportunity that should be actively embraced.

### The Dismissive

More interested in convincing than in learning, the Dismissive appear to have a strong ideologically-motivated need to reject global warming as an issue worthy of societal response. The Dismissive are actively engaged in dialogue about the issue, and they do actively attend to media coverage of the issue, but they are not open to the possibility of changing their mind about the issue. Therefore, the Dismissive appear to be an unproductive target of public engagement efforts.

There is, however, an important consideration regarding the Dismissive. Attempting to refute their arguments (which are often factually incorrect) has a tendency to inadvertently reinforce the persuasiveness of their arguments in the minds of others (especially in the minds of audiences who are not well informed about the facts). Among certain highly motivated audiences such as journalists and policy makers, it may be helpful to clearly identify the factual errors made by the Dismissive communicators, but with regard to public engagement efforts in general, it is best not to repeat the erroneous assertions of the Dismissives, even if for the purpose of setting the record straight.