

CU-Boulder prof speaks on mass media role in climate change skepticism

February 22 2010

Mass media have been a key vehicle by which climate change contrarianism has traveled, according to Maxwell Boykoff, a University of Colorado at Boulder professor and fellow of the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences, or CIRES.

Boykoff, an assistant professor of environmental studies, presented his research today at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in San Diego. He spoke during a panel discussion titled "Understanding [Climate Change](#) Skepticism: Its Sources and Strategies."

Boykoff's segment was titled "Exaggerating Denialism: Media Representations of Outlier Views on Climate Change" and discussed prominent pitfalls.

"One problem occurs when outlier viewpoints are not individually evaluated in context," said Boykoff. "A variety of influences and perspectives typically have been collapsed by [mass media](#) into one general category of skepticism. This has been detrimental both in terms of dismissing legitimate critiques of [climate science](#) or policy, as well as amplifying extreme and tenuous claims."

Such claims are amplified when traditional news media position noncredible contrarian sources against those with scientific data, in a failed effort to represent opposing sides, said Boykoff.

Another issue in mass media is the tendency to flatly report on both the claims of contrarians, as well as the accusations made about their claims and motives, he said. The ensuing finger-pointing plays into the conflict, drama and personalized stories that drive news. It also distracts attention from critical institutional and societal challenges regarding carbon consumption that calls citizen behaviors, actions and decisions to account.

"Reducing climate science and policy considerations to a tit-for-tat between dueling personalities comes at the expense of appraising fundamental challenges regarding the necessary de-carbonization of industry and society," said Boykoff.

Among various and ongoing research strategies, Boykoff -- in partnership with Maria Mansfield from Exeter University and the University of Oxford -- has tracked climate change coverage in 50 newspapers in 20 countries and six continents since 2004. Boykoff also has looked at how climate science and policy find meaning and traction in people's everyday lives through work in the United States, United Kingdom and India.

Speakers Stephen Schneider from Stanford University; Naomi Oreskes from the University of California, San Diego; William Freudenburg from the University of California, Santa Barbara; and Riley Dunlap from Oklahoma State University joined Boykoff on the panel.

More information: For more information on Boykoff's research visit http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/about_us/meet_us/max_boykoff/

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder

Citation: CU-Boulder prof speaks on mass media role in climate change skepticism (2010, February 22) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-02-cu-boulder-prof-mass-media-role.html>

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