

Climate scientists want to interact more directly with the public

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Climate scientists need to interact more directly with the public through blogs and social media, researchers from the University of Bristol, the University of Reading and the Met Office argue in a commentary in this week's *Nature Climate Change*.

Dr Tamsin Edwards of Bristol's Cabot Institute and colleagues believe that scientists should engage in 'many-to-many' communication with the public on platforms like blogs and [social media](#) sites, where they can present their research frankly and directly to the public.

Dr Edwards said: "It's no wonder the public can get confused about such recent phenomena as the slowdown in global surface warming – and [climate science](#) more generally – when they almost always hear about it second hand from sources that have their own particular angle or that over-simplify. We think as many climate scientists as possible should get out there and tweet, blog, or talk to the media directly so our science is communicated in the most accurate way it can be."

Since it was first proposed, the idea of global warming has remained a controversial topic, generating differing opinions from proponents and sceptics. Claims like 'global warming has stopped' and the popularisation of the term 'global warming pause' by the media are considered to underplay the potential role of the natural variability of the [global climate](#), which may pass misinterpreted messages to the public and cause confusion.

In their commentary, the scientists point out that there is no unanimous conclusion to be drawn from current climate models, and no model can fully predict the change that will happen.

They refer to discussion of the slowdown in [global warming](#) which was a relatively small part of the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 5th Assessment Report (AR5) but was reported prominently in the mainstream media. While much of the coverage accurately reflected the views of scientists, some was less aligned with the conclusions of the IPCC.

Dr Edwards said: "This media attention was perhaps predictable given the long-term sceptical narrative about the pause. For the past seven or eight years, there has been a pervasive trend in some parts of the media, especially in the UK, to prominently highlight the slowdown and suggest that climate models are 'running too hot'. As [climate scientists](#), we need to ask ourselves whether we did enough to accurately communicate the slowdown, and how we could do it better in future."

Maintaining direct communication with the public through tweeting and blogging comes with certain costs and risks, Dr Edwards and colleagues acknowledge. However, they believe this may be the best way to convey the true complexity and uncertainty of climate and demonstrate the real process of [climate science](#) research.

More information: "Pause for thought." Ed

Hawkins, Tamsin Edwards, Doug McNeill. *Nature Climate Change* 4, 154–156 (2014) [DOI: 10.1038/nclimate2150](#). Published online 26 February 2014

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