

THE PERFORMANCE OF THE MEDIA

“There becomes a point in journalism where striving for balance becomes irresponsible.” - CBS reporter Scott Pelley

We should not forget that the media’s job is to make money for their owners. They do this by selling "good" stories. If they sell bad or boring stories, circulation drops, and the media outlet goes out of business. In life, most stories are boring, so life does not provide good “copy”. Also, nice news stories do not sell, but “doom and gloom” stories sell very well. Faced with poor stories, the media spins them into good stories and although most of the mundane details (i.e. Names, places, and times) are generally accurately reported, it is pure happenstance this type of good story is supported by the truth and all the facts.

When you realise that the Green’s propaganda machine is also in the business of selling “doom and gloom” stories, the obvious ‘marriage in hell’ between the media and the Green machine is understandable. They feed off one another, and this symbiotic relationship will never be threatened by the media seriously questioning the veracity of the claims made by the Green propaganda machine. Why kill the golden goose?

You think I am being too harsh, and the media’s coverage of the present global warming debate is accurate, balanced, and a professional acquittal of their role?

The Media – One Hundred Years of Misinformation

The following information has been selected from an article called “Fire and Ice”, by R. Warren Anderson¹an American media research analyst. I have collated information from the article and placed it in a table with blue colouring indicating the media reporting on cooling periods, and red colouring representing warming reports. I have also included some of his introduction and his conclusions below. I recommend you read his entire article.

Introduction

“In all, the print news media have warned of four separate climate changes in slightly more than 100 years – global cooling, warming, cooling again, and, perhaps not so finally, warming. Some current warming stories combine the concepts and claim the next ice age will be triggered by rising temperatures – the theme of the 2004 movie “The Day After Tomorrow.”

Recent global warming reports have continued that trend, morphing into a hybrid of both theories. News media that once touted the threat of “global warming” have moved on to the more flexible term “climate change.” As the Times described it, climate change can mean any major shift, making the earth cooler or warmer. The effect of the idea of “climate change” means that any major climate event can be blamed on global warming, supposedly driven by mankind.


Despite all the historical shifting from one position to another, many in the media no longer welcome opposing views on the climate. CBS reporter Scott Pelley went so far as to compare climate change skeptics with Holocaust deniers. He added that the whole idea of impartial journalism just didn't work for climate stories. "There becomes a point in journalism where striving for balance becomes irresponsible," he said.

Pelley's comments ignored an essential point: that 30 years ago, the media were certain about the prospect of a new ice age. And that is only the most recent example of how much journalists have changed their minds on this essential debate.

Journalists decide not only what they cover; they also decide whether to include opposing viewpoints. That's a balance lacking in the current "debate." This isn't a question of science, it's a question of whether Americans can trust what the media tell them about science."

Table 2: - The Media's Flip Flops

<i>Date</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Comment</i>
24 Feb 1895	New York Times	<i>"Geologists Think the World May Be Frozen Up Again." Saying "Canada could be "wiped out" or lower crop yields would mean "billions will die."</i>
10 Dec 1923	Time Magazine	<i>"The discoveries of changes of the sun's heat and the southwards advance of glaciers in recent years has given rise to conjectures of a possible advent of a new ice age"</i>
18 Sep 1924	New York Times	<i>" MacMillian Reports Signs of New Ice Age"</i>
11 Mar 1929	The Los Angeles Times	<i>...the headline: "Is another ice age coming?" on March 11, 1929. Its answer to that question: "Most geologists think the world is growing warmer, and that it will continue to get warmer."</i>
27 Mar 1933	New York Times	<p><i>Today's global warming advocates probably don't even realize their claims aren't original. Before the cooling worries of the '70s, America went through global warming fever for several decades around World War II.</i></p> <p><i>The nation entered the "longest warm spell since 1776," according to a March 27, 1933, New York Times headline. Shifting climate gears from ice to heat, the Associated Press article began "That next ice age, if one is coming ... is still a long way off."</i></p> <p><i>One year earlier, the paper reported that "the earth is steadily growing warmer" in its May 15 edition. The Washington Post felt the heat as well and titled an article simply "Hot weather" on August 2, 1930</i></p>
2 Jan 1939	Time Magazine	<i>"Gaffers who claim that the winters were harder when they were boys are quite right.....weathermen have no doubt that the world at least for the time being is growing warmer"</i>
1950s	New York Times	<i>The New York Times ran warming stories into the late 1950s, but it too came around to the new cooling fears.</i>
1954	Fortune Magazine	<i>... was warming to another cooling trend and ran an article titled "Climate – the Heat May Be Off." As the United States and the old Soviet Union faced</i>

		<p>off, the media joined them with reports of a more dangerous Cold War of Man vs. Nature.</p> <p>Fortune had been emphasizing the cooling trend for 20 years. In 1954, it picked up on the idea of a frozen earth and ran an article titled “Climate – the Heat May Be Off.” The story debunked the notion that <i>“despite all you may have read, heard, or imagined, it’s been growing cooler – not warmer – since the Thirties.”</i></p> <p>The claims of global catastrophe were remarkably similar to what the media deliver now about global warming. <i>“The cooling has already killed hundreds of thousands of people in poor nations,”</i> wrote Lowell Ponte in his 1976 book “The Cooling.” If the proper measures weren’t taken, he cautioned, then the cooling would lead to <i>“world famine, world chaos, and probably world war, and this could all come by the year 2000.”</i></p>
15Nov 69	Science News	<p>.....quoted meteorologist Dr. J. Murray Mitchell Jr. about global cooling worries. <i>“How long the current cooling trend continues is one of the most important problems of our civilization,”</i> he said. <i>“If the cooling continued for 200 to 300 years, the earth could be plunged into an ice age”</i>, Mitchell continued.</p> <p>Six years later, the periodical reported <i>“the cooling since 1940 has been large enough and consistent enough that it will not soon be reversed.”</i></p>
11 Jan 70	The Washington Post	<p>The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970, amidst hysteria about the dangers of a new ice age. The media had been spreading warnings of a cooling period since the 1950s, but those alarms grew louder in the 1970s. Three months before, on January 11, The Washington Post told readers to <i>“get a good grip on your long johns, cold weather haters – the worst may be yet to come,”</i> in an article titled <i>“Colder Winters Herald Dawn of New Ice Age.”</i> The article quoted climatologist Reid Bryson, who said <i>“there’s no relief in sight”</i> about the cooling trend.</p>
1 Mar 71	Science News	 <p>The future looked cold and ominous in this Science News depiction from March 1, 1975.</p>
Feb 74	Fortune Magazine	<p>Journalists took the threat of another ice age seriously. Fortune magazine actually won a “Science Writing Award” from the American Institute of Physics for its own analysis of the danger. <i>“As for the present cooling trend a number of leading climatologists have concluded that it is very bad news indeed”.</i></p>

		<p><i>“It is the root cause of a lot of that unpleasant weather around the world and they warn that it carries the potential for human disasters of unprecedented magnitude,” the article continued.</i></p> <p><i>That article also emphasized Bryson’s extreme doomsday predictions. “There is very important climatic change going on right now, and it’s not merely something of academic interest.” Bryson warned, “It is something that, if it continues, will affect the whole human occupation of the earth – like a billion people starving. The effects are already showing up in a rather drastic way.”</i></p> <p><i>However, the world population increased by 2.5 billion since that warning.</i></p>
24 Jun 74	Time Magazine	<i>“Climatological Cassandras are becoming increasingly apprehensive for the weather aberrations they are studying may be the harbinger of another ice age.”</i>
1975	New Scientist	<p><i>..... cooling went from “one of the most important problems” to a first-place tie for “death and misery.” “The threat of a new ice age must now stand alongside nuclear war as a likely source of wholesale death and misery for mankind,” said Nigel Calder, a former editor of “New Scientist.”</i></p> <p><i>He claimed it was not his disposition to be a “doomsday man.” His analysis came from “the facts [that] have emerged” about past ice ages, according to the July/August International Wildlife Magazine.</i></p> <p><i>The idea of a worldwide deep freeze snowballed. Naturally, science fiction authors embraced the topic. Writer John Christopher delivered a book on the coming ice age in 1962 called “The World in Winter.” In Christopher’s novel, England and other “rich countries of the north” broke down under the icy onslaught. “The machines stopped, the land was dead and the people went south,” he explained.</i></p>
21 May 75	New York Times	<i>“Scientists ponder why World’s climate is changing: A major Cooling widely considered to be inevitable”</i>
28 Apr 75	Newsweek	<i>about the coming ice age fears: “The longer the planners delay, the more difficult will they find it to cope with climatic change once the results become grim” Remember, it was Newsweek Magazine which in the 1970’s proclaimed meteorologists were “almost unanimous” in their view that a coming Ice Age would have negative impacts.” It was also Newsweek in 1975 which originated the eerily similar “tipping point” rhetoric of today.</i>
1979	“The Clash” - London Calling”	<i>“The ice age is coming, the sun’s zooming in, Engines stop running, the wheat is growing thin. A nuclear era, but I have no fear cause London is drowning, and I live by the river.”</i>
22 Aug 81	New York Times	<i>...the Times quoted seven government atmospheric scientists who predicted global warming of an “almost unprecedented magnitude.”</i>
9 Apr 2001	Time Magazine	<i>“Scientists no longer doubt that global warming is happening and almost nobody questions the fact that humans are at least partly responsible”</i>
27 Dec 2005	New York Times	<i>“Past hot times provide few reasons to relax about new Warming”</i>

Anderson concludes:

“Conclusion

What can one conclude from 110 years of conflicting climate coverage except that the weather changes and the media are just as capricious? Certainly, their record speaks for itself. Four separate and distinct climate theories targeted at a public taught to believe the news. Only, all four versions of the truth can't possibly be accurate.

For ordinary Americans to judge the media's version of current events about global warming, it is necessary to admit that journalists have misrepresented the story three other times. Yet no one in the media is owning up to that fact. Newspapers that pride themselves on correction policies for the smallest errors now find themselves facing a historical record that is enormous and unforgiving.

It is time for the news media to admit a consistent failure to report this issue fairly or accurately, with due skepticism of scientific claims.

Recommendations

It would be difficult for the media to do a worse job with climate change coverage. Perhaps the most important suggestion would be to remember the basic rules about journalism and set aside biases — a simple suggestion, but far from easy given the overwhelming extent of the problem.

Three of the guidelines from the Society of Professional Journalists are especially appropriate:

- *“Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.”*
- *“Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.”*
- *“Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labelled and not misrepresent fact or context.”*

That last bullet point could apply to almost any major news outlet in the United States. They could all learn something and take into account the historical context of media coverage of climate change.

Some other important points include:

- ***Don't Stifle Debate:*** *Most scientists do agree that the earth has warmed a little more than a degree [°F] in the last 100 years. That doesn't mean that scientists concur mankind is to blame. Even if that were the case, the*

impact of warming is unclear. People in northern climes might enjoy improved weather and longer growing seasons.

- ***Don't Ignore the Cost:*** *Global warming solutions pushed by environmental groups are notoriously expensive. Just signing on to the Kyoto treaty would have cost the United States several hundred billion dollars each year, according to estimates from the U.S. government generated during President Bill Clinton's term. Every story that talks about new regulations or forced cutbacks on emissions should discuss the cost of those proposals.*
- ***Report Accurately on Statistics:*** *Accurate temperature records have been kept only since the end of the 19th Century, shortly after the world left the Little Ice Age. So while recorded temperatures are increasing, they are not the warmest ever. A 2003 study by Harvard and the Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, "20th Century Climate Not So Hot," "determined that the 20th century is neither the warmest century nor the century with the most extreme weather of the past 1,000 years."*

I believe many non American Media outlets could also learn from this advice.

If you were relying on the fact that the media were accurately reporting the global warming issue to give you additional confidence that we are heading in the right direction, I believe you may be disappointed. As explained in Handout 12-1, accurate reporting is not the primary goal of the Media – it is to sell 'good stories'. They do not care whether it is cooling or hot, or whether it happens or not, they are here to make a 'buck'. We should be sceptical about every Media report, and start from the opposite position held by the Media, before seeking more information to check the veracity of their reports

After reading this short summary of one hundred years of reporting on the climate by the Media, we have to ask ourselves:

“How can we trust anything the Media tells us about global warming?”

Notes:

1. www.businessandmedia.org/specialreports/2006/fireandice/fireandice.asp 1230 AEST, 16 September 2008.