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Title: Is efficacy the key for effective climate communication?

Abstract: With each new scientific study, the reality of climate change gets more frightening. How should climate communicators share this news? Our research suggests that a critical dimension of climate change communication is a message of efficacy. In our past studies, we have found that attempts to motivate action by sharing the worst news of climate change can backfire. Rather than spurring concern and action, scary climate stories may cause people to dampen their emotional response. This finding has been called psychological avoidance. Our more recent studies have explored whether sense of self-efficacy ("I can take action against climate change") along with response efficacy ("Collective actions will have a positive impact") can mitigate the tendency toward psychological avoidance when faced with gloomy climate change information. In one study, with 483 US residents, we found a clear impact of self-efficacy on people's emotional response to negative climate news. Participants who experienced an intervention designed to boost their self-efficacy reported stronger feelings of empathy for victims of climate change, and stronger feelings of moral obligation to take action. We are currently conducting a second study examining whether an intervention to boost response efficacy acts similarly to our self-efficacy intervention. This study also tests whether the timing of our intervention makes a difference. Half of our participants receive a response efficacy boost before they read a gloomy climate change story; the other half of our participants receive the response efficacy boost after they read the story. Our results offer important guidelines for those who wish to craft effective climate messages for the American public.