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A psychological tool for helping the public feel invested in climate change.

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Talking to audiences about climate change in a way that helps them feel empowered is a challenge that many geoscientists feel ill-equipped to tackle. In this presentation, I demonstrate how using a blend of reverse psychology and cognitive dissonance can lead to an audience feeling highly activated and motivated.

I used data and presentation techniques to trick an audience into firmly believing that climate change is a hoax - and then revealed the hoax. I was able to use the initial anger and frustration to elicit highly positive states of mind and feelings of personal empowerment. Audiences report a much higher degree of climate literacy and a greater sense of awareness of their role in the fight against climate change. This strategy also appears to be effective in convincing 'climate sceptics' that they are mistaken.

Questionnaires collected after 24 of these presentations reveal 100% of participants left feeling 'invested' in climate change. 95% additionally felt 'motivated to learn more and take action'. When asking sceptical audiences, 85% said that the presentation had forced them to re-evaluate their pre-existing beliefs. 60% said they now felt anthropogenically driven climate change was likely a reality. 100% of sceptics wanted to learn more.

The neurophysiology of our brains explains this data. When paired with strong emotions - positive or negative - information is more likely stored in memory centres. Audiences that already understood climate change to be a threat switch from anxiety/anger /confusion to relief/happiness/wonder. Such a large jump in emotional state triggers a strong dopaminergic system response. By forcing the audience to consider why they were susceptible to the hoax in the first place, the positive mindset makes them feel empowered and eager to learn more.

In the case of climate sceptics; by mirroring their own arguments, I demonstrate empathy by appreciating their perspectives. Whilst the resulting cognitive dissonance of having the hoax 'unmasked' is deeply uncomfortable, I am able to convert this strong negative emotion into a positive one. I do this by a) empathising with the discomfort b) showing solidarity with them c) being open about why I used the strategy I did.

In summary, by marrying geocommunication with brain science, we can look forward to exploring

more innovative strategies that make members of the public feel more invested and activated.