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Influencing Perceptions of Climate Scientist Credibility

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Abstract

Many strategies for changing beliefs about climate change center on information, evidence, and consensus presented by climate scientists. However, perceptions of scientist credibility act as a constraint where a lack of credibility decreases the effectiveness of their communication. Here, we consider the effects of messages on perceived credibility in terms of two components: skill and honesty. Using seven interventions focused on the credibility of climate scientists, we show that beliefs about scientist skill and honesty are core components of a system of related beliefs about human-caused climate change. Additionally, we demonstrate that messages focusing on the skill of climate scientists may be a more promising avenue for increasing the perceived credibility of climate scientists (and thus increasing belief in human-caused climate change). Finally, given the substantial message- and individual-level heterogeneity in effects, we argue that climate messaging may be a promising area for micro-targeting interventions.