“Post-Truth” Politics vs. Science of “Post-Truth”

Stephan Lewandowsky

University of Bristol

stephan.lewandowsky@bristol.ac.uk

Twitter: @STWorg
“Post-Fact” World—“Post-Truth” Politics

Word of the year 2016 (Oxford Dictionaries)
Climate Change: Crucible of the “Post-Truth” World
Scientific Consensus

- The climate is changing.
- Humans are causing it.
- It’s a problem.

97.1% agreement in climate literature
97.5% agreement among climate scientists
Public Perception of Consensus

“Balance as bias” media coverage
Overcoming “False Balance”
Inoculation
(Cook, Lewandowsky, & Ecker, 2017)
Inoculation
(Cook, Lewandowsky, & Ecker, 2017)

Inoculation messages—e.g. pointing to tobacco industry neutralizes effects of “false balance”
An Even More Difficult Problem
Worldview and Climate Science
(e.g., Lewandowsky et al., 2013)

Messages may Backfire, further reducing acceptance
Communicating in the “Post-Truth” Era

• Underscore scientific consensus
• Reframe the problem—talk about solutions
• Reframe the cost as foregone gain not a loss
  – “Income will grow to $58,000 instead of $65,000”
  – “Families will lose $7,000”
• State facts first and repeat them
  – we know that we are warming the climate
  – We know that we are warming the climate
  – we are uncertain about how much warmer your backyard will be in 39 years
“Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.”

—Daniel Patrick Moynihan (U.S. Senator)
Action

• “EU should communicate clearly the facts that inform its legislation, but acknowledging where they are uncertain or lacking”