

Seeking the Spotlight: World Wide Views and the U.S. Media Context

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on the development and implementation of various media plans and strategies for World Wide Views on Global Warming (WWV) in the United States. While we aim to consider the U.S. case within the larger context of global media coverage of WWV, we focus primarily on the U.S. for two reasons: first, our participation in the U.S. WWV team provides rich understanding of efforts to attract U.S. media, and second, the U.S. media landscape and norms create particular challenges of garnering media coverage for an event like WWV that may not translate to other cultural contexts. Further collaborative work, beyond the scope of this paper, might allow us to complete a rigorous cross-national and cross-cultural analysis of WWV media coverage on a global scale. We therefore attempt to understand the successes and shortcomings of WWV media strategies in the U.S. and to offer thoughts on how future projects might handle media coverage more effectively.

In further pursuit of a constructive critique, we also pose some questions about the purpose of getting media coverage for a project like WWV and the problems that may arise when organizers rely upon media coverage as a tool for policy dissemination.

Background

WWV planners at the national and international levels paid considerable attention to media and dissemination as goals of the WWV process. WWV planners in Denmark—staff of the Danish Board of Technology (DBT)—requested media plans from all national partners; and national partners at the five American sites (Boston, MA; Atlanta, GA; Denver, CO; Phoenix, AZ; and Los Angeles, CA) all made efforts to secure media attention for their local events. A review of planning documents suggests that, from the perspective of most organizers, WWV should have been a media slam-dunk: there had never been a global citizen deliberation event like this; there was extraordinary hype leading up to the COP15 talks; and citizens were making their voice heard in a new kind of deliberative forum that spanned five continents. This was democracy in action.

Yet, our research on WWV indicates that in the U.S. there was little to no media coverage before the event, some notable but spotty local and national coverage in the weeks immediately following the event, and then a significant drop-off in coverage. While we recognize the stochastic nature of media coverage for any strategic plan, our analysis suggests some insight for understanding the disconnect between hopes and outcomes.

Methods

Telling the story of WWV is challenging, in part because there were over 40 participating sites worldwide, each with a different social, political, and cultural context. Furthermore, U.S. researchers alone have amassed an enormous amount of data, ranging from dozens of ethnographic interviews to hundreds of surveys and questionnaires. Even our narrow focus on media presents significant challenges: to date, an exhaustive list of media coverage across the globe has not been possible to collect; and much of the U.S. coverage has occurred on the internet, creating a somewhat confusing record of the proliferation or replication of blog posts and similar opinion-editorials as they are posted and reposted across multiple sites.

In light of these limitations, the purpose of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive list of media coverage within the U.S. and worldwide (if that were possible), nor do we attempt to perform a complete content analysis of major coverage. Rather, our goal is to tell the *story* of media outreach for the WWV project in the U.S. and interrogate the assumptions we and other project planners made about media coverage and its value. As a result, we rely on personal emails and correspondence with other WWV planners and organizers; notes from the many conference calls the U.S. team participated in during 2009 and 2010; internal newsletters and planning and funding documents distributed by DBT and U.S. organizers; media and dissemination plans from the various U.S. sites, DBT, and some international sites; media artifacts themselves, including articles, blog posts, radio shows, and television appearances; interviews with site and media coordinators; and our own observations and experiences at one WWV site (Denver) and at the COP15 meetings.

We refrain from making claims about the impact the project's media coverage had on policy outcomes, because such causality would be fragile at best. We acknowledge that we may have overlooked some instances of coverage in the U.S. and internationally, but provide evidence to support our claim that, given the media landscape *as a whole*, WWV did not "break through" mass media enough to have prompted or nudged particular policy outcomes. This is not to suggest that media coverage in and of itself is not worthy of pursuit for a project like WWV. As a form of educational or public outreach, it might be quite useful and important. However, we suggest a cautionary approach to placing media coverage as a central strategy to influence policy outcomes.

Programmatic Commitment to WWV Media Strategies

Our data make clear that international and national event planners had media engagement and dissemination in mind from the early planning stages. At the highest level—among the DBT staff who conceived WWV as a project and coordinated the global effort—media was central to all stages of the process. Our interviews with DBT organizers revealed that, while limited by staff and monetary resources, the WWV project manager, executive director, and several interns expended enormous energy in seeking media coverage in Denmark (the host country of the COP15 meetings) and around the world. Specifically, they produced a media-friendly policy report that distilled the results of the WWV citizen deliberations ([Policy Report, World Wide Views on Global Warming: From the World's Citizens to the Climate Policy-Makers](#), 2009); invited ambassadors and press to a meeting at the Danish Parliament on November 19, 2009; organized an official "side event" at the COP15 meetings; held a similar event at Klimaforum, the well-attended alternative conference in Copenhagen during COP15, primarily designed for those NGOs and individuals who lacked access to the official COP15 meetings in the Bella Center; and worked successfully with a Danish television show to produce a significant piece on WWV during a time slot typically viewed by twenty percent of the Danish population. In their role as global project coordinator, DBT also created a forum on the WWV intranet for media strategy; sent out draft press releases to national partners on several occasions; and requested media plans from all national partners.¹

Balanced with this enthusiasm, however, DBT staff acknowledged in interviews two programmatic shortcomings in the WWV media strategy. First, DBT failed to attract an institutional partner with significant access to global media (e.g. major foundations, official United Nations bodies, or major international media such as the BBC). According to DBT staff, this meant that, for all practical purposes, there was "no global media plan." Second, the DBT faces an ongoing struggle to position its work as neutral and non-partisan. Such positioning dampens their ability to make strong claims about issues that would contribute more to an aggressive media plan but resonate more typically with advocacy organizations. DBT staff members acknowledge this tension forthrightly in their historical work for the Danish government in conducting technology assessments, and in particular with respect to the WWV project.

Nevertheless, early planning documents demonstrate that WWV planners saw media outreach as an important part of the dissemination goals of the project. Nearly all early planning and funding documents from DBT and in the U.S. contained the following language: "The WWV views deliberations will be held worldwide during a single 36-

¹ In interviews, DBT staff noted that resource constraints prevented them from providing specific feedback on the media plans or tracking media efforts of the 38 national partners, but they felt that even the act of asking for media plans must have encouraged partners to take media more seriously. DBT staff also noted that some national partners were quite media savvy – fully capable of acting strategically without DBT guidance.

hour period, and publicized immediately via the World Wide Web, building excitement, drama, and media interest throughout the day” (e.g., see ([World Wide Views on Global Warming: U.S. Media and Dissemination Plan](#), 2009). In an “Impact Strategy” document circulated in 2008, planners argued that

Media coverage will bring project results to the attention of everyday people, interest groups, and political decisionmakers worldwide. These people may, in turn, communicate those results to national decisionmakers and COP15 delegates. For instance, it is likely that interest groups involved with climate change will amplify and publicize any WWViews results with which they concur([World Wide Views on Global Warming: Strategy for Achieving Policy Impact](#), 2008).

DBT’s media strategy document implies the same ([Media Strategy for World Wide Views on Global Warming](#), 2009), p.1) and the WWV project timeline features media dissemination prominently ([Time line with tasks for national WWViews partners](#), 2009), p.1).

Discussions at the national level, at least in the U.S., mirrored the DBT’s emphasis on media. As researchers and volunteer staff for the Denver WWV site, we were part of the many meetings and conference calls that took place around event planning in the U.S., and our notes and recollections from those meetings confirm that there was a general sense among planners (including us) that 1) media outreach was necessary and desirable for WWViews as a project and 2) that generating media attention was a fairly straightforward means for getting attention from policymakers involved in the COP15 process.

In sum, WWV organizers at the global and national levels put significant energy into media strategies and activities. While the DBT had some noteworthy successes—among Danish media outlets—U.S. coverage of WWV did not appear to reflect the level of priority that national organizers gave to media strategy. We turn now to the task of explaining this discrepancy.

External Media Context: Climate as Conflict in U.S. Media

Understanding climate change coverage in the U.S. is complex because of the peculiarities of the U.S. media system and its relationship to climate change as an issue. It is well understood that, in the U.S., climate change—as a subject of public and political debate—is a challenging public policy issue for a number of reasons (e.g., see (Hulme, 2009; Leiserowitz, Maibach, & Roser-Renouf, 2010; Moser & Dilling, 2007). Polls and academic studies have revealed that public beliefs about the origins of climate change and, frequently, policy responses to climate change, frequently fall along partisan lines in the U.S. (Dilling & Moser, 2007; [Fewer Americans See Solid Evidence of Global Warming](#), 2009). Furthermore, media coverage of the issue, until recently, has often appeared in the form of conflict-driven narratives that emphasized scientific disagreement over the causes of climate change, political wrangling over policy options, and—particularly in the blogosphere—sometimes vicious ad hominem attacks among those of differing views.²

² There are a number of climate-related blogs that provide evidence of this; perhaps most telling is the ongoing online “debate” between Joseph Romm of the blog Climate Progress (www.climateprogress.org) and Roger Pielke, Jr., whose blog can be found at www.rogerpielkejr.blogspot.com.

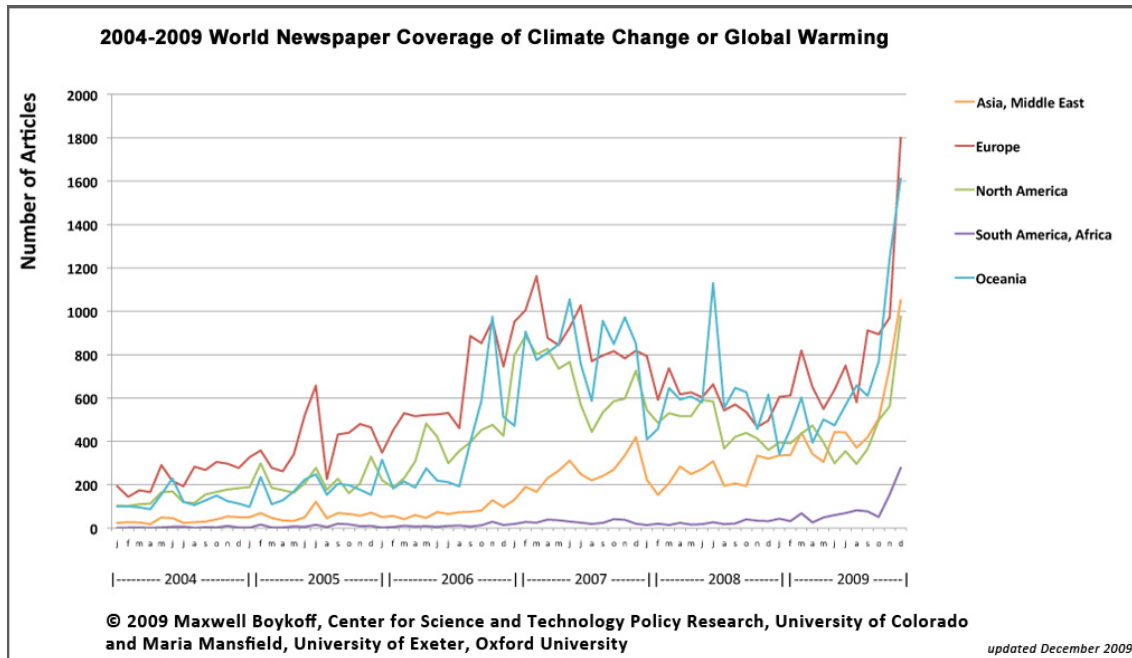


Figure 1: Maxwell Boykoff and Maria Mansfield, 2004-2009 World Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming. Source: (Yulsman, 2010).

Although a thorough review of the politics of climate change media coverage in the U.S. is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worthwhile to try to understand the larger media context in which climate change-related stories appear. Figure 1, produced by media scholars Boykoff and Mansfield, tracks the coverage of climate change in the “prestige press” in multiple geographic locations around the world. The graph suggests a spike in global warming coverage around 2006 and 2007, which may be attributed to the popularity and attention given Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth* and the fact that he and the IPCC were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize shortly after (see Robert Brulle, quoted in (Revkina, 2010)). Another significant spike occurred in December of 2009, most likely due to the climate talks in Copenhagen and “climategate,” a scandal in which hacked emails from climate scientists revealed alleged wrongdoing or at least bias in the climate science community (see Boykoff’s work as quoted in (Yulsman, 2010)).

There are multiple ways to interpret such a graph, but one important lesson for thinking through media coverage of climate-related issues is that coverage most frequently correlates to a key *event* or *conflict*, or the appearance of conflict (Anderson, 1997), p. 121;(Boykoff, 2007; Schneider, 2010). In the case of the 2006 spike, climate-related media coverage increased because Gore received an academy award for *An Inconvenient Truth*, followed closely by the Nobel Prize. Given Gore’s political affiliation, this story neatly fit media norms wherein climate could be framed as a partisan issue or conflict. The fact that fairly respected bodies such as the Academy of Motion Pictures and a Nobel Prize committee recognized Gore also made these items newsworthy and event-driven; such events are routinely covered by national media outlets, and Gore is a celebrity figure of sorts.

Perhaps even more important to understand, however, is the context within which the above graph existed. In Boykoff and Mansfield’s graph, we are only seeing coverage of climate change compared across continents. But how much coverage did climate change-related stories receive compared with all other stories in the U.S.?

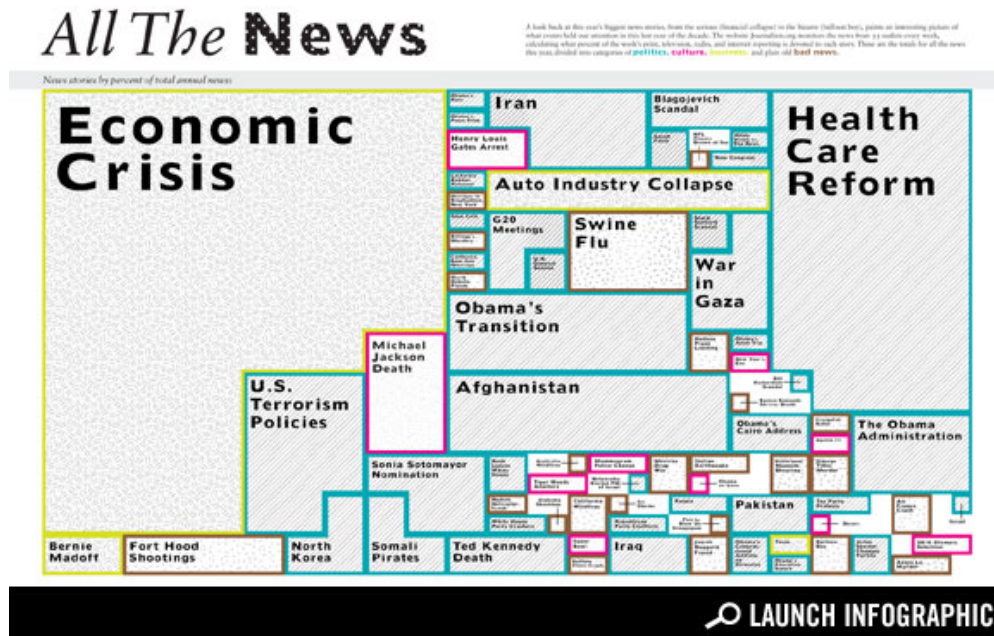


Figure 2: 55 outlets (internet, print, radio, television) monitored by journalism.org are compiled into an interactive map. Stories are represented graphically in proportion to the amount of coverage they received. Climate-related stories are nowhere to be found. Source: (Revkin, 2010).

Figure 2 features news stories tracked by journalism.org, a group sponsored by the Pew Research Center, and it includes stories extending through mid-December 2009, capturing stories related to “Climategate,” but not including a number of stories that followed the close of the COP15 meetings on December 18. It also does not reflect the substantial and ongoing debates over climate change in the blogosphere (Revkin, 2010). Even so, according to journalism.org, climate change only received 1.5% of all traditional news coverage in 2009 (quoted in (Revkin, 2010)). This number would have been lower if not for Climategate. According to Andy Revkin, who writes the influential Dot Earth blog for the *New York Times* and who printed the above graphic on that blog,

There are many out there who blame the news media—either for ignoring global warming or mishandling it—for the failure of the public to engage in an energy revolution to limit climate risks. But my sense is such critics have inflated expectations of what media coverage, without a direct punch from nature, can accomplish (Revkin, 2010).

In other words, climate change is frequently treated as an “environmental story,” and environmental stories receive little or cyclical coverage when examined over time (see Brulle in (Anderson, 1997; Cox, 2006; Revkin, 2010)). Furthermore, as Revkin and many communication scholars have noted, we cannot rely on media to have particular impacts: media exposure cannot predict particular behaviors or attention, whether from the public or policymakers (Anderson, 1997; Cox, 2006).

In sum, the U.S. media context presented a particularly challenging environment for WWV coverage—given the patterns of coverage of climate change and the partisan character of climate change debates.

“Mediagenicity” of WWV in the U.S.

It still makes sense that the WWV planners would have assumed that garnering media coverage would be an important “impact” or “dissemination” goal for the project. The project meets some accepted criteria (known as norms) for being newsworthy in the U.S., and perhaps internationally: size and continuity (Anderson, 1997), pp.118-119). The event was novel because of its size—citizen deliberations had occurred before, but never on the

scale of WWV. The deliberation also met the criteria for continuity: climate change is an ongoing story, and COP15 an important event. According to Anderson, “If an issue or event has already commanded media attention there is a greater likelihood that it will be continued to be viewed as newsworthy” (119).

Unfortunately, the WWV deliberation failed to meet several other criteria for newsworthiness. Environmental communication scholars have done extensive work on environmental “image-events” (see (DeLuca, 2006) and have detailed multiple news “norms” that environmentally-related stories must meet to break through (adapted from (Anderson, 1997), pp.118-119):

1. *Frequency: the extent to which an item fits the news production cycles of a media organization.* WWV events were held on a Saturday, a typically slow newsmaking day for most media organizations in the U.S. Furthermore, it occurred several months in advance of COP15, so reporters and editors did not perceive the event as timely.
2. *Ambiguity: the less ambiguous an event, the more likely it is to be covered.* In comparison to typical efforts by journalists to gauge public knowledge and opinion, WWV offered a more complicated model. Republicans and Democrats screaming at each other at a health care town hall? Unambiguous. A public opinion poll on climate change, conducted by a reputable public relations firm? Unambiguous. A non-partisan, deliberative event in which a group of “demographically representative” citizens receive background materials and gather together to talk, vote, and make recommendations, which organizers then forward on to national delegates to the COP15 negotiations? More complex. We should note that WWV planners in the U.S. eventually overcame this obstacle to media coverage by framing WWV as an “informed poll,” a comparative reference that most journalists understood (discussed below).
3. *Meaningfulness: this refers to an item’s relevance in terms of cultural proximity and its relation to everyday life.* Most scholars who study climate change policy and media point out that this is the significant problem with climate change generally (ref); and Americans especially have trouble seeing how climate change affects them, particularly when they are dealing with other, seemingly more pressing problems such as economic recession or war. For many journalists, WWV may not have passed the meaningfulness test as a potential news story on the margins of climate change, a topic already lacking strong meaningfulness.
4. *Consonance: the more an issue is compatible with preconceived ideas about a nation or social group the greater its chance of being represented in the news media— a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.* Again, climate change is considered by many to be *relatively* unimportant when compared with other issues. Citizen deliberation about climate change may be consonant with American values of democracy and participation, but not with other values, such as individualism, the free market, or resistance to government intervention. WWV, as a novel experiment to tap into global attitudes, was not a particularly “American” undertaking. Furthermore, in 2009 the U.S. fell far short of implementing any meaningful policy on climate change—placing the WWV process and results at odds with the national discourse that still focused largely on whether climate change was even happening or was caused by human behavior.
5. *Unexpectedness: paradoxically with respect to consonance, the more rare or sudden the event, the more likely it is to gain novelty value and grab headline attention.* At its core, WWV was not “news.” Particularly for mass media outlets, “news” has to be new, novel, or event-driven. WWV, from an outsider’s perspective, featured a lot of people speaking respectfully to one another in a room. The crowd did not gather spontaneously; emotional outbursts did not trump the planned agenda; and results mapped loosely onto what one might expect from an initiative driven by the agenda of environmentalists (a perception of WWV that perhaps distorted the project’s motivations, but was widely shared by outsiders in the U.S. context).
6. *Composition: news is produced in such a way as to cover a spread of different sorts of items, while maintaining some common links. Therefore, whether or not a particular news story is selected depends to some extent upon the distribution and character of competing items.* Some news norms or media realities were beyond the control of WWV organizers. Given that media coverage for a

particular story is dependent upon the mix of existing stories, no strategy can guarantee or predict a certain level of success. The system is complex, in the sense of uncertainty and interdependence, making the reliance on media as a strategy of political influence a risky proposition.

Finally, Anderson notes that environmental news items tend to be “event-centred.” She writes, “Several researchers have found the news media to be preoccupied with dramatic events such as oil spills and, to a lesser extent, pseudo events such as publicity stunts” (Anderson, 1997), p. 121. As a result, we would add to the above list the following:

7. *Conflict*: though not always the case, reporters and editors tend to frame the news in terms of conflict. Conflict guarantees emotional stories and ease of presenting “both sides” of an argument so as to showcase the neutrality historically fetishized by the media (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004; Schneider, 2010). WWV was not a conflict-driven event and, in fact, organizers imagined that it would be an event that would “generate media coverage that contests stale ‘pro’ and ‘con’ narratives by presenting the results of deliberations by diverse groups of everyday citizens” (e.g., (Worthington, 2008). Unfortunately, stale pro and con narratives have thus far typified the climate debate in the U.S., and WWV did not meet enough of the other newsmaking criteria listed above to displace this deeply entrenched, conflict-driven framing of the issue.

Breaking Through: The Pew Poll Peg

Despite the challenges posed by the lack of “mediagenicity” of WWV, there was a media “breakthrough,” of sorts, in the U.S. context: the appearance and re-appearances of a blog post by WWV organizer Richard Sclove. Sclove’s post, which was titled “Why the Polls on Climate Change are Wrong” initially appeared in late October of 2009 and then was replicated or cross-posted numerous times on “green” blogs such as Treehugger (www.treehugger.com), the *New York Times* blog Green Inc. (greeninc.blogs.nytimes.com), *Time* magazine online (www.time.com), Common Dreams (www.commondreams.org), and Grist (www.grist.org; for the original post, see (Sclove, 2009a). As the title of the post implies, the story pegged itself (a media strategy term) to a particular narrative that had recently emerged with the release of a Pew Center poll on climate change. Pew’s results indicated that Americans’ interest in or concern about climate change had fallen nearly 20% in two years (Fewer Americans See Solid Evidence of Global Warming, 2009). The Pew poll received significant attention in the mass media and the climate blogosphere, seen by bloggers and others as evidence that climate change was indeed cause for little concern and the public knew it (e.g., (Morano, 2009), or as evidence that we must redouble our efforts to educate the public about the severity of the crisis (e.g., (Hoggan, 2009). Sclove’s opinion piece, originally appearing in the *The Huffington Post* (a blog), pegged WWV to this highly visible poll by arguing that WWV, as an “informed opinion poll,” directly challenged the results of the Pew poll (Sclove, 2009a). This comparison narrative satisfied a number of our previously discussed mediagenic criteria, specifically by reducing ambiguity, increasing consonance and conflict, and providing a neater fit for media composition. Late October 2009 saw coverage in the form of an essay by Sclove that appeared in *Yes! Magazine* online (Sclove, 2009b), an independently written piece by the Worldwatch Institute (Block, 2009), extensive coverage of World Wide Views by Sea Change Radio (How Everyday Folks World Wide View Climate Change, 2009), and a blog post for PRI’s syndicated show “The World” (Grossman, 2009). All are niche outlets that cater primarily to the environmentally-minded, but all have some national and/or international exposure—a breakthrough into one level of media but falling short of the kind of mainstream attention that many WWV organizers had hoped for in the U.S.

After Sclove’s success, other pegs were discussed by national organizers, but none had the same effect as the Pew poll peg and its conflict frame. For example, in an email sent on November 17, 2009, a WWV media consultant (hired after the deliberation but in time to generate the Pew poll peg) discussed sending out press releases on WWV that related the project to the agreement reached by U.S. President Barack Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao on setting greenhouse targets (Worthington, 2009). The email was sent in advance of Sclove’s briefing to the Office of Science and Technology Policy, indicating an intention to use the peg to get media coverage and also to build interest among policymakers directly. Yet this peg, which emphasized citizen calls for action, received little media coverage, perhaps because it lacked novelty or a distinct sense of conflict, or required a greater leap to connect citizen deliberations to presidential negotiations.

If we primarily value quantity of media coverage as a metric for success, the Pew poll peg approach succeeded. More than any other efforts by WWV site organizers in the U.S., the “informed opinion poll” comparison yielded significant attention, particularly in the blogosphere where climate change debates most frequently appear in the U.S. These debates are frequently intensely partisan and hyperbolic; therefore, breaking through so much “climate noise” to feature citizen deliberation was not insignificant.

From a qualitative perspective, however, we also critically analyze the nature of the coverage garnered by the Pew poll peg approach and examine the risks of “breaking through” by emphasizing conflict. Again, we point to an early stated goal of WWV organizers, which was that WWV would “generate media coverage that contests stale ‘pro’ and ‘con’ narratives by presenting the results of deliberations by diverse groups of everyday citizens” (Worthington, 2008). By presenting the WWV as an “informed poll” that stood in contrast to the Pew Center’s “uninformed poll,” WWV’s organizers may have unwittingly re-created a stale “pro and con narrative” in which U.S. citizens were represented as fairly uniformly supporting one policy position, an assumption which is still being debated by communication and other scholars who have examined this issue closely.³ In particular, the Pew poll peg limited the WWV narrative to a single dimension that captured the difference between the “informed” and “uninformed” polls—the degree to which Americans were concerned about climate change—which failed to incorporate the suite of complex questions upon which WWV participants had deliberated (e.g., the relative responsibilities of rich and poor nations for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, institutional requirements for technology transfer and financing transitions to renewable energies). Furthermore, because the Sclove piece and others like it “broke through” on so-called “green” or “liberal” blogs, WWV risked being seen as a partisan event, one in which the rooms of deliberators across the country and around the world were loaded with participants in favor of taking strong action on climate change, a typically “liberal” position in the U.S.

It’s important to note that the “informed poll” peg was not a manufactured one, or one created just out of convenience. Even before the event took place, organizers imagined the WWV event as akin to those organized and executed by James Fishkin, who has organized numerous, massive, “informed polls” on a range of issues around the world (Fishkin, 2009). Yet we would argue that framing WWV as an informed poll was perilous when it came to the media context in the U.S. Although WWV organizers emphasized the goal of achieving demographic representativeness within each deliberation, U.S. organizers did not screen applicants for political affiliation, one key indicator of “diversity” for climate issues in the U.S. WWV may have approximated an informed poll, but we would argue that the majority of those “polled” on the day itself already cared about or understood climate change issues sufficiently to have chosen to be in the room in the first place.⁴ In fact, the experiences of the U.S. organizers suggest that this was a question frequently posed by reporters: can you prove that the results from WWV are representative? In an interview, DBT staff made the compelling argument that opinion polls have their own methodological shortcomings (rarely discussed publicly) and that even national elections do not guarantee “representative” opinions of the population (some groups are more likely to vote than others). Such defenses of WWV did not gain traction in the U.S. context, for perhaps many reasons, and the Pew poll peg likely exacerbated the anxiety over WWV’s ability to be representative, given the direct comparison to a methodology—the public opinion poll—generally accepted to reliably take the pulse of the country on key political issues.

³ For a wide-ranging study of the range of public attitudes toward climate change in the U.S., see the reports from George Mason University’s Center for Climate Change Communication—in particular, their recent report “Climate Change in the American Mind” (Leiserowitz et al., 2010).

⁴ There are certainly exceptions to this claim. After the event, we interviewed a number of climate “skeptics” who had participated in WWV. Though we cannot generalize to all U.S. sites, the skeptics we spoke to did not feel that the event was open to debate concerning their views on the science of climate change. Indeed, WWV project organizers made clear that the scientific uncertainty around climate change was not a focus of WWV; instead, WWV would take for granted the same assumptions that would underlie the COP15 negotiations – specifically the scientific consensus presented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – in order to focus on deliberations over policy responses.

Internal Media Context: Making the Day Happen

In addition to understanding the external media context in which WWV was situated, it is also important to understand the obstacles and opportunities that event planners faced within the project. Generally speaking, U.S. site organizers were an incredibly dedicated and competent group who organized these massive deliberations seamlessly and effectively. They were limited, however, in their abilities to seek and secure media coverage for a number of reasons.

Small Staffs, Small Budgets, Little Time

From the beginning, one challenge faced by site and project organizers was a lack of funding. Initially, planners envisioned up to ten U.S. sites participating in WWV, but the inability to secure sufficient funds cut this number in half to a total of five deliberations. National organizers in the U.S. approached a number of national and regional foundations, and valiant efforts were made to fund media and dissemination activities. Given that many foundations have very specific focus areas that fall outside the scope of the WWV project, and—perhaps more importantly— with the arrival of the financial crisis in the United States and abroad, funding was extremely difficult to procure. Most U.S. partner sites lacked the luxury to fund media outreach; instead, the priority for most sites was simply to get enough funding to make the deliberations themselves happen.

A second important limitation was that most sites were organizing the WWV event with small groups of academics and support staff who received little additional pay or formal recognition. For many academics, organizing any interaction with the public is treated as “service,” which is typically not valued as highly as research and teaching in the U.S. academy. At some universities, WWV sites had only one coordinator, with only graduate students or volunteer help. As one site coordinator put it,

Then the 26th [of September] came, and we were just totally focused on operationalizing that day. And all of us were working on a limited amount of resources. When the economy is bad, all the democratic values get compromised first. So we had to work on a very limited amount of money, and still had to make it happen. We never had time [or a] moment to think about media.

Some U.S. sites had more significant resources to expend on media strategy, but all such efforts were secondary to making the event itself happen.

Furthermore, university public relations offices were frequently at a loss when it came to publicizing such an unusual event. As one public relations employee told us in an interview,

I thought this kind of event lent itself to a lot of social media, you could get something going on Facebook or Twitter. But academics are driving the event, and you're on their timeline and comfort level.... If you're going to make it successful, you want to recruit people, and you want to have a concerted, coordinated marketing effort. You've got everybody working the angles of it with various constituents, outreach going out that touched people already interested in this issue, instead of starting from scratch.

This comment reveals the difficulty media personnel faced in coordinating such a large effort and in trying to package the event in a way that would be palatable to the academics and others involved.

Other unforeseen conflicts arose as well. At one university, the administration actively discouraged the event itself, fearing that it was a partisan effort to promote a particular policy position. They would not endorse the event, made it difficult to find a location for hosting it, and would not send any administrators to welcome the group of citizen deliberators. Another university, concerned about protecting the anonymity of the WWV participants, would not allow cameras or other recording equipment in the room. Such constraints made seeking media coverage particularly difficult.

Lack of Experience and Training in Media Outreach

Reviewing the notes from the DBT-organized April training session and media plans from WWV sites in the U.S. and other countries located primarily in Northern Europe, we found that media plans focused primarily on *who* to contact. The U.S. plans in particular were mostly lists of local, regional, or national contacts—from local newspapers, to CNN, to *New York Times* environmental reporter Andy Revkin—who might be interested in covering an event like WWV (World Wide Views on Global Warming: U.S. Media and Dissemination Plan, 2009). Indeed, WWV organizers and event planners made valiant efforts to promote WWV to these contacts. However, few media plans focused on *how* to get coverage. There was little discussion of how to frame the WWV story and no mention of pegs or “newsholes”—opportunities in the media landscape that might increase the chances of getting coverage. Including the authors of this paper, those writing media plans had little experience with public relations.

The guidance from DBT on media coverage may have inadvertently led to this emphasis on contacts rather than strategic approaches. In a January 2009 internal newsletter, DBT organizers encouraged national partners to make a list of important media contacts, which would then presumably be shared with the DBT, who might coordinate outreach. Most U.S. and many international sites complied with this request. However, DBT organizers also provided the following requirements for media plans, in which site organizers should identify

- your national media team: who is responsible for executing media related tasks and who is the media contact in your organization? Who is responsible for the contact to DBT concerning media tasks and media impact?
- your national media discourse: What is the media debate on climate, global warming and the upcoming COP15 in your country? (Media Strategy for World Wide Views on Global Warming, 2009)

We sense that most organizers in the U.S. (including ourselves) focused primarily on the first bullet point. DBT’s own extensive Media Strategy document emphasizes messaging, framing, angles, and possible audiences, but few of the local media plans did the same. Unfortunately, in the U.S., there were no national media team or experts to implement DBT’s vision. A media consultant was eventually hired in October of 2009, after the event occurred, but before then most site organizers were primarily focused on planning for the day of the deliberation itself. To the best of our knowledge, there was little discussion about the national media discourse and how best to engage it. This seemingly changed once the media consultant was hired: the result was the Pew poll peg and an uptick in coverage.

Also, U.S. organizers were conflicted over what kind of coverage they should seek. During one conference call in August 2009, there was concern that pairing with environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club to ensure more media coverage or dissemination might color the event with a partisan lens. Similarly, in the U.S. Media and Dissemination Plan, organizers wrote,

Joining with an established organization can lend WWViews added legitimacy and existing networks. We must be careful, however, to pursue potential partners keeping in mind WWViews’ intended neutrality. We should begin building multilateral (among all national partners) relationships with any organizations as quickly as possible in order to begin building national attention and developing communication networks (World Wide Views on Global Warming: U.S. Media and Dissemination Plan, 2009).

In fact, these concerns may have turned out to be prescient, as our discussion of the Pew poll peg above suggests.

In any case, most U.S. national partners experienced substantial frustration when the WWV story was not picked up, despite their good efforts. One U.S. site planner seemed to capture the mood of many sites when she told us in an interview,

I wish we had money to [contract with] a marketing firm. If [more funding] had come through.... We need to pay someone to do it because I don’t know how to do this stuff [media outreach]. Even if I had time, I don’t know if I know how to do it. My time would be spent finding someone who knew how to do it, not me doing it. But we don’t have money to pay someone.

At our own site and others, coordinators put in a significant amount of time and effort inviting and encouraging politicians—both local and national—to attend. This met with varying degrees of success across sites, with a few national sites luring in state senators or their staff to the event. The hope in doing so was that these local lawmakers would champion WWV, but also, by their very presence, would draw in the local media to cover the event. In some cases, this strategy worked with limited success, but more often, site coordinators were left feeling as if they were grasping at straws, just trying to get anyone “important” to pay attention to the event so that it would be publicized.

Moving Forward: Media and the Next World Wide Views

While the scope of this paper is primarily limited to understanding media coverage of WWV in the U.S. context, we think it is important to acknowledge that media realities in other countries—like political realities—could have been quite distinct from our own, especially as they related to climate change. Furthermore, we acknowledge the possibility that a number of “policy pathways” for disseminating WWV results may have been more or less available to those in other countries than they were to us in the U.S.

Though we have limited ability to make claims about particular media successes or policy pathways around the world, it might be helpful to briefly draw a global sketch of these as best we can in order to better contextualize our focus on the U.S.: based on a number of informal reports, generally speaking, there was no large-scale, substantive media coverage of WWV in the various host countries or elsewhere around the world. This is not to say there were not notable instances of media stories about the deliberation, nor do we mean to imply that significant efforts to garner media coverage were not made. However, given that climate change generally barely registers a blip compared with other stories worldwide (Figure 2), it is clear that WWV coverage could only have captured a small slice of that blip of climate change coverage. Informal reports from the DBT and self-reports from countries around the world suggest that WWV received similar coverage as the U.S.—in terms of quantity and quality—in Northern European countries and Canada, with a few (albeit notable) “hits” in South America, Australia, and Asia as well.

In retrospect, a few lessons from our experiences with media in the U.S. emerge. The limited media coverage achieved by nearly all WWV partners should give us pause, and encourage us to think about lessons learned from this process, and how we might move forward.

Suggestions for Media Planners: Future WWV Projects

- 1. Identify and secure a “media partner.”** Given the success of one WWV U.S. site (discussed below) in partnering with a group of institutions that focused on different aspects of WWV, the potential for including a media partner in WWV is attractive. Such a partner might range from the modest resources of a science television program (e.g., Nova) to an international news network (e.g. BBC). As noted by DBT staff in interviews, the first WWV now serves as “proof of concept” and might enable a major media partner to engage with future processes modeled after WWV.
- 2. Hire a media consultant.** We realize, again, that it is not always possible to divert funds from event planning and coordination to media coordination, but in the U.S. context, the hiring of a media consultant marked a turning point in the type and amount of coverage. Media consultants can do much of the legwork academics or other volunteers cannot, and they frequently have connections to public relations professionals, reporters, and other media outlets already in place. Perhaps most importantly, they can assist in strategizing appropriate news pegs or story framings.
- 3. Create an “event in a box.”** One of the public relations professionals we spoke to at a U.S. university site suggested that planners come up with a sort of “event in a box,” a mediagenic, sponsored *happening* that could bring attention to the deliberations, because the deliberations themselves were not mediagenic. In an interview with us, she said, with an “event in a box,”

you’re giving someone a visual. Whereas for us, I just threw up my hands at one point, because what I have now are a bunch of people around tables in a room. The press can cover the mayor to make the opening statement, but [...] there’s no visual hook. Even when you’re dealing with print press...there has to be a physical event, a kick-off, and not just handing a report to somebody.... So the question becomes, how do you create *something?* (italics added).

While we would caution against a complete redesign of the WWV deliberations to provide a compelling media hook, we imagine marginal changes to the format or the addition of other activities that would resonate with the needs of mainstream media.

4. Maintain flexibility across national and cultural contexts. At the same time that planners might consider “boxed” events that can garner more media coverage than deliberations, they must always also be mindful of local contexts. If our paper has done anything, we hope that it has exposed the particular media realities that surround climate change in the U.S. Similarly contextualized realities are no doubt important for all worldwide sites, though for different reasons.

5. Involve communication scholars and professionals in event planning. Public relations professionals and communication professionals or scholars with practical experience should all be involved in event planning from the beginning. Although centralized planning was essential to the success of the WWV on global warming, in the future, it might make sense to have mechanisms for media professionals from all sites to provide feedback to DBT (or other planners) from the early stages. Presumably, this might give them more ownership over the project and could improve its chances of receiving coverage.

A Different Model for Media Coverage--Citizen Outreach and Institutional Networking

There is another model for thinking about “success” in terms of media outreach. That model has less to do with “breaking through” into a national media dialogue on climate policy and more to do with citizen outreach and institutional networking. In the United States, this model was embodied by the WWV team that ran the event at the Museum of Science, Boston.

While Boston WWV organizers explicitly sought media coverage (and had greater expertise in media relations than many of the university-sponsored sites in the U.S.), they did so in the context of organizing several events beyond the standard day of deliberations. First, they sponsored a forum the day after WWV at the Museum of Science that included WWV participants and experts to discuss the relationship between WWV and the COP15 negotiations. This forum permitted reflection by WWV participants on their experience, direct interaction with experts, and exposure of the WWV project to museum-goers on that particular Sunday.

Second, as members of the international Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC), Boston WWV organizers held a forum on December 5 that connected their local audience of 60 persons to a similar event held at Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, Paris (a French museum of science and technology) with 400 attendees, and to WWV lead organizers from the DBT in Copenhagen (via webcast). All three sites attracted principal actors in climate change science and policy.⁵

Interviews with a Boston WWV organizer demonstrate that the museum was quite careful in managing media attention—attaching some preference to sending information and releases to trusted sources only, given the severe partisanship that emerged with “Climategate.” National Public Radio showed some interest, although did not attend any of the events, but LeMonde (a French newspaper) and Sea Change Radio did send reporters to the December 5 event. Finally, through a funding organization that helped to sponsor the Boston WWV event, organizers published several short articles about WWV in a blog affiliated with a group of local newspapers (e.g., see (Scammell, 2009).

⁵ The impressive group of participants included: Jean-Pascal van Ypersele (deputy chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) and Trinto Mugangu (COP15 delegate from the Democratic Republic of Congo) in Copenhagen; Sandrine Mathy (president of Climate Action Network) and Stéphane Hallegatte and Jean-Charles Hourcade (representatives from the International Research Center on Environment and Development) in Paris; and Peter Schultz (former director of the U.S. Climate Change Science Program Office), Anthony “Bud” Rock (ASTC CEO and former U.S. principal deputy assistant secretary of state for oceans, environment, and science), Henry “Jake” Jacoby (co-director of the MIT Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Change), and Bob Corell (chair of the Climate Action Initiative and global change program director at the H. Heinz Center for Science, Economics, and the Environment) in Boston.

In contrast to the disappointment felt by some U.S. WWV organizers regarding media coverage, the Boston WWV coordinator for media and outreach expressed great satisfaction for what the Boston organizers had accomplished. With greater attention to direct outreach to citizens and to networking with other significant institutions, not only did Boston organizers “get the word out,” but in recruiting key players to participate in forums, they also gained an audience of the very kinds of decisionmakers that traditional media was supposed to access within the U.S. WWV media strategy.

We note, however, that replicating the Boston WWV model would necessitate a very different framing of media and outreach at the programmatic level, and perhaps the recruitment of other science museums to play the role that universities have typically played in sponsoring deliberative forums in the U.S.

Conclusion: Why Media?

Our dual roles as WWV volunteers on the one hand and as scholars studying the event on the other leads us in this chapter to both identify ways WWV might “do” media coverage better in future events and, at the same time, to question whether “doing” media should be a priority.

One significant reason we have been interested in these questions has to do with how citizen deliberation events recruit participants and instill the events with purpose for these participants. We have been involved in two citizen deliberation events now (including WWV) and have noticed that in both projects similar promises were made to participants about the purpose their involvement would serve. In both cases, participants were told that their work on the project would affect policymaking in some way. WorldWide Views participants were frequently imagined as “citizen advisors” (e.g., see (Sclove, 2009b)). For example, in California’s “invitation to participate,” which served as a template for most U.S. sites’ recruitment strategies, potential participants were invited to

join participants from over 40 nations in a discussion on global warming and share your ideas with the United Nations! Your voice will be added to recommendations being developed for the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December. [...] These global discussions offer participants the opportunity to be a part of an international conversation about environmental policy options that affect us both locally and globally (World Wide Views Invitation to Participants, 2009).⁶

This letter was drafted some months before the event was held, and the amount of dissemination and policy impact was still incredibly uncertain. Yet there were fairly certain promises made here: that participants would be part of a global conversation (which ended up being true, to some extent) and that their voice would in some way be represented at COP15 (which came true in only a very limited sense). If one of the major points of a WWV exercise is to “have one’s voice heard,” then it makes sense that media outreach would seem valuable. If, however, the significant goal of citizen deliberation is the deliberation itself—the entering into a global conversation—then media outreach becomes less important.

This understanding of WWV participants as “citizen advisors” no doubt has roots in DBT’s classic “consensus conference” model (Joss, 1998; Kleinman & Powell, 2007; Sclove, 2000). In that model, citizens are invited by the Danish Parliament to learn about and debate science and technology policy. The citizens’ recommendations on particular policy options are then considered and frequently incorporated into Danish lawmaking. In this context, therefore, small groups of citizens do actually function as advisers to policymakers. But the question of whether that is an appropriate or accurate model for WWV is an open one. What we saw in the process of making WWV deliberations happen in the U.S., in fact, was a tension between wanting citizens to function as “citizen advisors,” as they do in consensus conferences organized by the DBT, and having them simply participate in the event to “make their voices heard,” which is a much more amorphous concept, and one not necessarily connected to particular policy pathways.

⁶ Such language was not confined to recruiting materials and was representative of how the event was publicized. For example, a press release sent out from our own university site claimed, “One hundred Colorado citizens will join over 4,000 citizens from around the world and will give political leaders some hints about what ordinary citizens think of climate change. Coloradans will make their voices heard at a citizen meeting...” (Citizens Advise Politicians on Climate Change 2009).

We would argue, therefore, that the two stated purposes of WWV—the citizen deliberation on the one hand and the policy intervention on the other—may exist at cross-purposes, particularly when it comes to understanding the role of media coverage in the U.S. context. National partners in the U.S. were primarily concerned with making the citizen deliberation itself happen smoothly and with substantive deliberation. However, they did frame the event for participants within the larger policy context of making citizen voices heard at COP15. Unfortunately, as the weeks after the WWV event unfolded, it became clear to the U.S. organizers that having a policy impact in Copenhagen would be neither easy nor straightforward. U.S. delegates to COP15 were first difficult to identify, and then very difficult to contact and interact with. Also, there was no guarantee that they would have taken an interest in WWV if they were contacted. Finally, in hindsight, it is unclear how they could have used this information to impact the discussions at COP15, given that negotiating positions for various countries were determined well in advance.

We should pause here and say that it is both difficult to identify how and to measure whether WWV was disseminated from national partners worldwide to decisionmakers, ministers, or delegates to COP 15. According to some organizers, there were some signs in December 2009 that WWV was “being taken seriously” by a number of ministries in countries around the world. For example, Sclove, a U.S. and international WWV organizer, delivered a one-hour briefing on WWV to the Office of Science & Technology Policy at the White House on November 23, 2009. Yet it is hard to gauge what impact these interventions had nationally and internationally, and whether they impacted COP15 at all. In the waning days of COP15, when the final “agreements” were actually being hashed out, only select delegates were admitted, so it is difficult to estimate the impact of WWV there, or to know if it was even mentioned. Furthermore, it is our sense that most climate policies to be negotiated at COP15 were decided months in advance of that meeting. Making WWV “matter” to delegates there was thus made all the more challenging.

In the absence of having a clear policy pathway for disseminating results to delegates at COP15, therefore, the pressure on media outreach in the U.S. seemed to increase in the months following the WWV deliberation. More efforts were made to reach out to local and national media outlets. But the window of opportunity for gathering media attention was small, and the internal infrastructure needed to build media interest had not been built.

In an October press release, WWV organizers in the US wrote:

The main objective of World Wide Views is to give a broad sample of citizens from across the earth the opportunity to influence global climate policy. An overarching purpose is to set an historic precedent, demonstrating that political decision-making at the global level benefits when everyday people participate ([Press Release](#), 2009).

We want to make it clear that, as participants in WWV on global warming, we support this objective and overarching purpose. When it comes to problems of a particularly global nature—such as climate change—inviting citizen involvement in this way is admirable and worthy. At the same time, WWV organizers may reflect further on the paradoxes of seeking media attention as a policy pathway. Garnering media attention frequently requires a conflict narrative, and emphasizing conflict may itself undermine the deliberative approach of the WWV model. Instead, focusing on more direct policy pathways—such as partnerships with policymakers or institutions, or emphasizing public outreach and education, rather than public attention, *per se*—might serve to compliment the deliberative values embodied in a WWV process.

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