Adaptation of the Meuse to the Impacts of Climate Evolutions
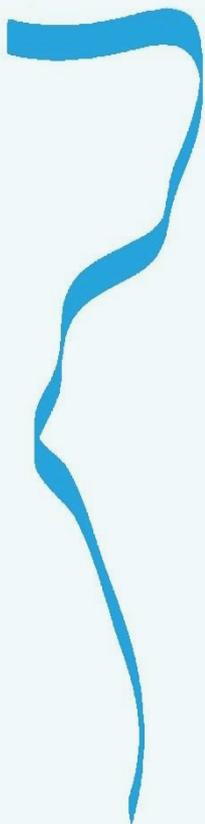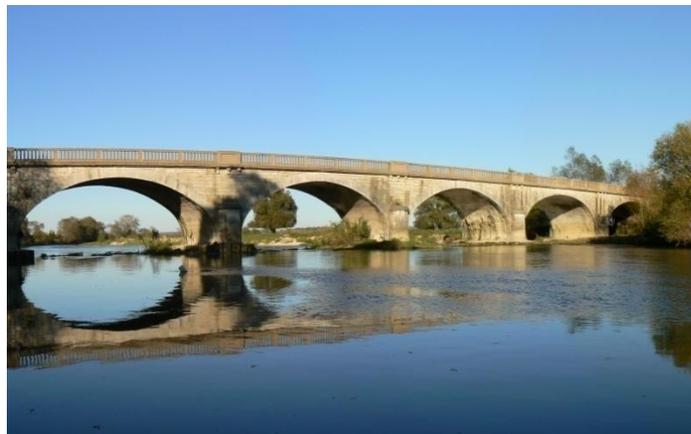
"Fear won't do it"

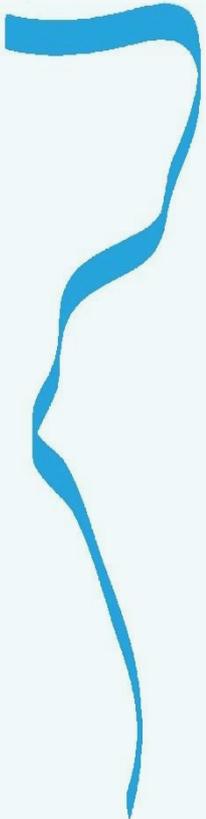Promoting positive engagement with climate change through visual and iconic representations

Saffron O'Neill & Sophie Nicholson-Cole, 2009. Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, University of East-Anglia, Norwich, UK.
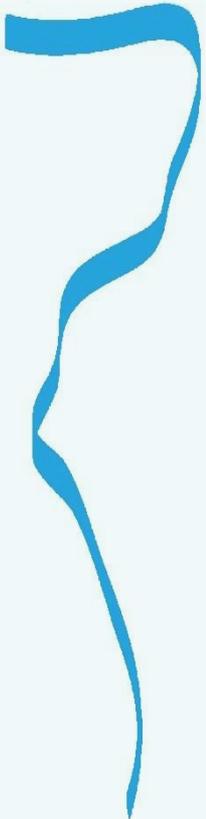
Content of paper

- [ ] General introduction
- [ ] Background and theoretical rationale
- [ ] Method
- [ ] Results and Analysis
- [ ] Discussion

General introduction

- Public engagement with Climate Change;
  - public increasingly recognizes climate change as a reality
  - but fairly superficial engagement
  - mass media most significant channel of information (saturation)
- Why fear appeals?
  - fear appeals are predominant in public domain: climate change is seen as a terrible, immense, and apocalyptic problem;
  - this does not often stem from the science on cc
  - fear is just employed as a communication tool
  - but what's the impact of fear-inducing representations?

Content of paper

- ❑ General introduction
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Background and Theoretical Rationale

- Defining a fear appeal;
- Fear in theory;
- Difficulties of sustaining fear in the long term;
- Individuals may become desensitized to fear appeals;
- Fear may damage trust in the communicating organization;
- Fear messages may produce unintended reactions;
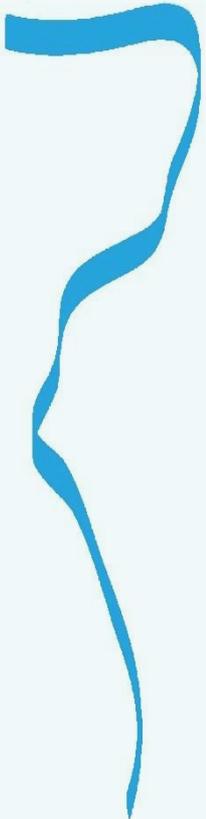- Fear is a good communicator – for other people

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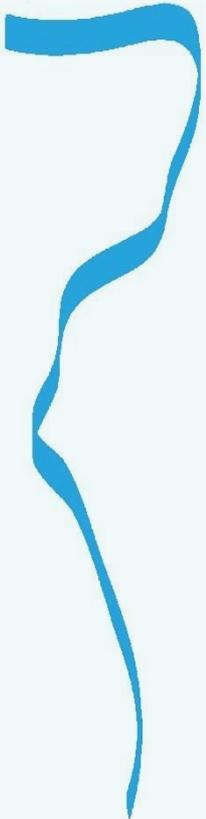
Method

- Visual representations study;
- Iconic representations study

Visual representations study

- 30 participants (10 young mothers from deprived area, 10 young people between ages 26 and 35, 10 high school students; to avoid a wholly middle-class sample)
- (1) Semistructured interviews explored participant's perceptions of climate change in relation to mental imagery that they associated with the issue and their engagement with climate change in terms of their senses of personal salience and efficacy;
- (2) Q-methodology;
  - in this study: 2 image sorting tasks to elicit shared attitude structures concerning
    - (a) the prevailed importance and
    - (b) the personal efficacy dimensions of climate change;
  - task: twice sort 32 full-color images into a grid with 2 extremes
    - o 1st according to how personally important or unimportant the images made climate change seem;
    - o 2nd according to how able or unable the images made them feel to do anything about climate change;
- (3) Focus groups
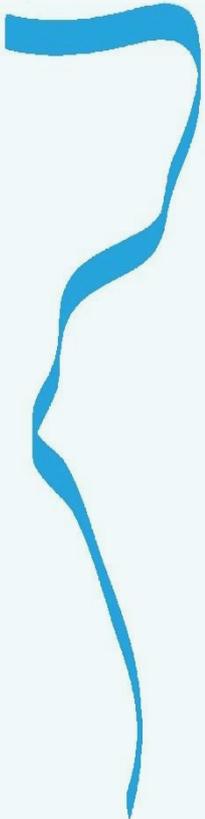
The 32 Climate Change Images Used in the Q Investigation
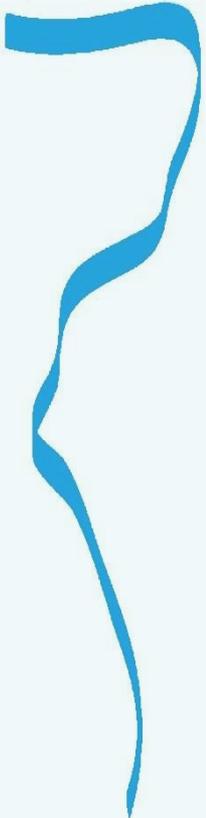
Industrial smoke stacks
Crowded street café
Cartoon 'No ice this winter'
Airplane in flight
Turning down a domestic thermostat
George Bush making a speech
Petrol station
Crowded beach
Coal fired power station and pylon
Dead tree in a desert
Environmental refugees
Flooded suburban house
Fitting a low-energy light bulb
Wind turbines

Forest fire

House falling off a cliff

House with solar panels
Crops being irrigated
Starving children in a famine
Tram in urban setting
Dried-up riverbed with dead fish
People on rainy high street
Cyclist
Biting mosquito
Women at a standpipe in the 1950's
Breaking ice sheet
Field of sunflowers in UK
Building sea defenses
Polar bear jumping across gap in ice
Stormy coastal scene at a quay with crashing waves
Flooded houses and people in Bangladesh
Graph of recorded and projected temperature rise to 2100

Method

- Visual representations study;
- Iconic representations study
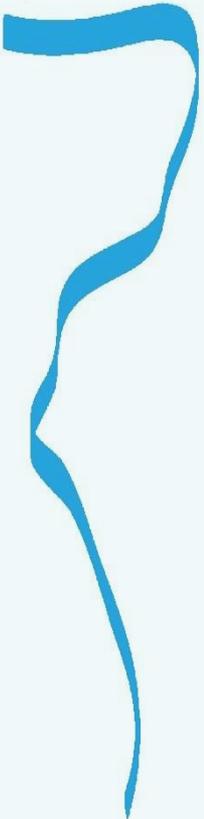
Iconic representations study

▪ Aimed at exploring issues of climate change representation in such a way that it allowed individuals to engage with the issue through their

personal perceptions and values;

▪ Through concept of climate icons: **'tangible entities which will be impacted by climate change, which the viewer considers worthy of respect, and to which the viewer can relate to and feel empathy for';**

▪ (1) focus groups

▪ (2) on-line survey

　▪how is climate change communicated?

　▪how does this affect participants' feelings, understanding and behaviour?

　▪what do participants think would make an engaging icon?

　▪ what is their own personal climate icon?

　▪ what are reasons for selecting that icon?
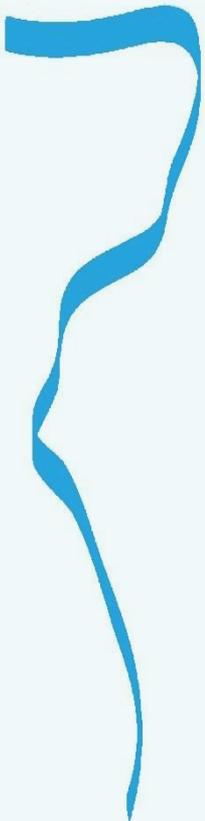
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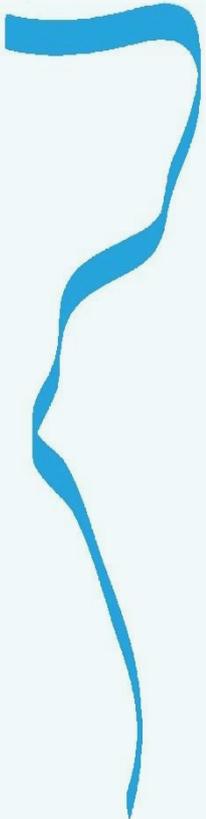❑ Results and Analysis
❑ Discussion
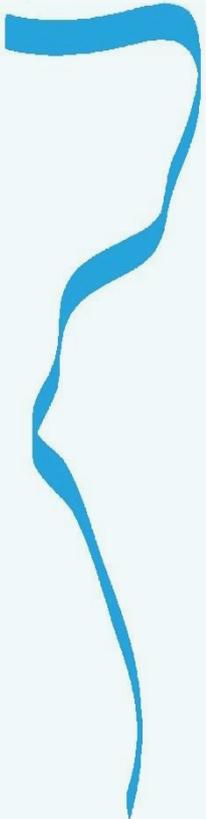
Results and Analysis

- Climate Change can induce fearful emotions;
- Fear inducing representations provoke unintended reactions;
- Fear appeal imagery and its impact on issue salience and efficacy;
- Engaging more meaningfully;

Climate Change can induce fearful emotions

- Most participants were able to describe a broad range of imaginations and mental visions;
- Much of this concerned large-scale impacts of climate change;
- The majority of outlooks on future climate were negative and bleak; also degree of uncertainty;
- Only 3 participants imagined that there might be positive outcomes of climate change;
- Some individuals expressed particularly apocalyptic visions of the end of the world.
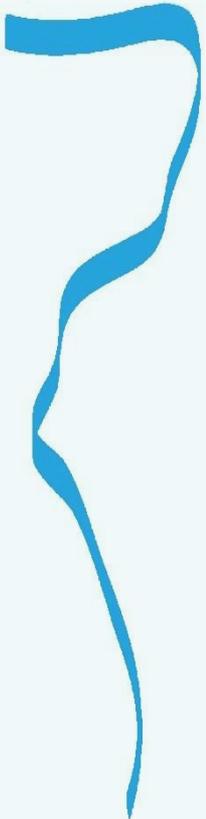
Results and Analysis

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Fear-inducing representation provoke unintended reactions (1)

- Fearful messages can enhance feelings that climate change is a distant issue in both time and space;
- Meaningful engagement approaches must involve some degree of connection with 'the everyday';
- While climate change was seen as a generally important issue, it was not something that participants tended to consider *personally* salient; sense of 'otherness'
- Participants strongly disagreed with using fear as a communication tool; instead: connection with 'the everyday';

Fear-inducing representation provoke unintended reactions (2)

- Fear-inducing approaches were found to enhance a sense of fatalism and thus act to encourage disengagement with climate change rather than positive engagement;
- Participants felt that humans are largely causing climate change and that something should be done about it (but '*a drop in the ocean*' perception of possible individual actions).

Results and Analysis

- Climate Change can induce fearful emotions;
- Fear inducing representations provoke unintended reactions;
- Fear appeal imagery and its impact on issue salience and efficacy;
- Engaging more meaningfully;

Fear appeal imagery and its impact on issue salience and efficacy

▪ Images concerning major impacts of climate change, often involving dramatic visions or human or animal suffering at both local and global scales, made climate change seem *most important*;

▪ Images depicting positive aspects of climate change, skeptical viewpoints, scenes considered ambiguous or unrelated with climate change and those thought to be uninspiring to look at made participants feel that climate change was *unimportant.*
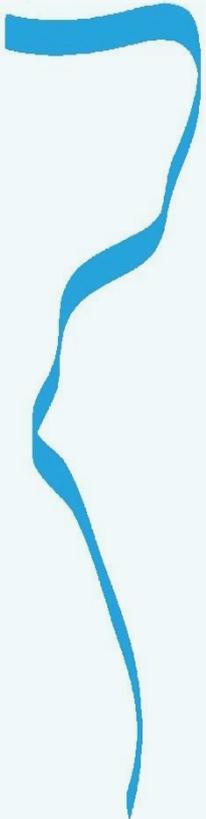
# Strongly ranked images for salience factors and viewpoints

- Images making climate change seem *most personally important* in both studies:
  - starving children, famine;
  - dried up lake with dead fish

- Images making climate change seem *most personally unimportant* (both studies):
  - tram;
  - rainy high street;
  - sunflower field in UK
  - café
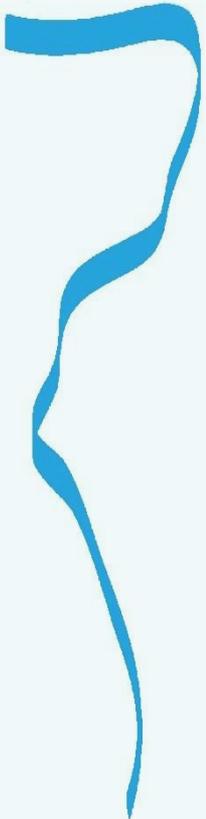
Strongly ranked images for efficacy factors and viewpoints

- Images making participants feel *most able to do something* about climate change:
    - thermostat;
    - fitting low energy light bulb;
    - cyclist;
    - house with solar panels;
    - wind turbines;
    - tram;

- Images making participants feel *most unable to do something* about climate change:
    - industrial smoke tracks;
    - beach;
    - flood in Bangladesh;
   - graph showing temperature rise.
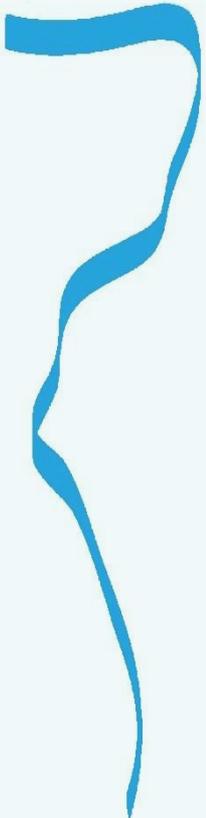
Six images making participants feel strongly or very strongly that climate change is important _and_ unable or very unable to do anything about it

Images making climate change seem _most important_:
- starving children, famine;
- dried up lake with dead fish;
- industrial smoke stacks;
- flood in Bangladesh;
- graph showing temperature rise;
- flooded house.

- Images making participants feel _most unable to do anything about climate change:_
  - starving childred, famine;
  - dried up lake with dead fish;
  - industrial smoke tracks;
  - flood in Bangladesh;
  - graph showing temperature rise;
 - flooded house.
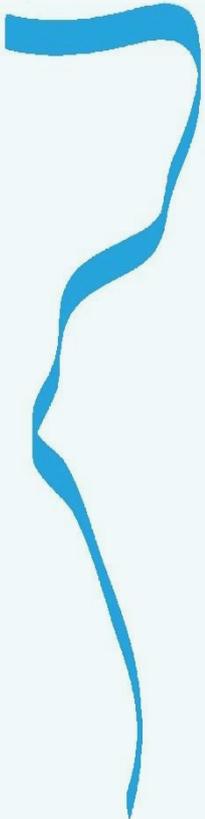
Fear appeal imagery and its impact on issue salience and efficacy

- When presented with these results most participants were initially surprised but they nevertheless agreed with them;

- Participants insisted that:
  - local impact images are necessary in order to communicate local relevance;

  - action images are necessary to make people feel empowered to make a difference;

  - global context should be included, to make the seriousness of the issue resonant though this should be done carefully.
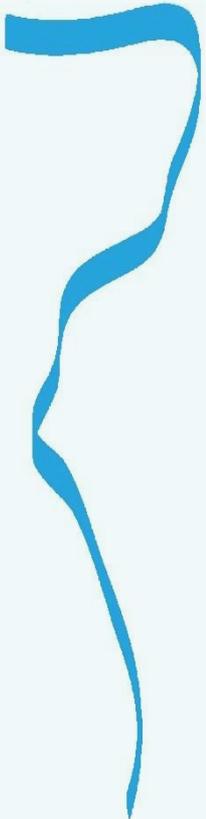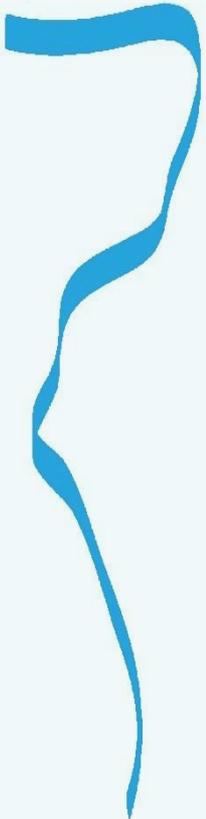
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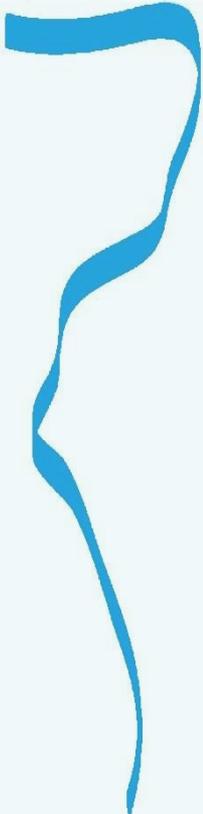- Engaging more meaningfully;
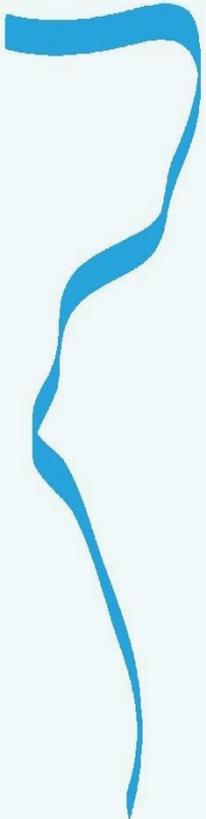
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Discussion

❑ Use fear?

▪ dramatic representations have a common presence in mass media;
▪ they can act as an initial hook for people's attention;
▪ they clearly do not motivate a sense of personal engagement;
▪ they should be used selectively and carefully
▪ and in combination with other kinds of representations that stimulate people to engage in a positive way.