

Through *whose* looking glass?



How the news media affects the environment

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the news media is filtering out
the natural environment.

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Abstract

The news media filters information about the natural environment. This can have a dramatic affect on human interaction with the environment.

Introduction & Purpose

The news media filters information about the natural environment. This can have a dramatic affect on human interaction with the environment.

There are many different ways that people directly and indirectly harm the environment. When people are knowledgeable and informed about the environment or how they may be damaging it, they usually take the necessary steps to help protect it. The predominant source of information for adults in America is the news media. The news media reaches most people on a daily basis and has a large influence on people's opinions and actions.

This paper will investigate how the news media affects the natural environment. The general concepts required to understand and analyze the correlation between the news media and the environment are presented in the background section. Compiling the information presented in the background leads to the idea of analyzing information through a filtered information flow. Understanding how information can be filtered and how the news media acts as a filter helps the news consumer analyze the news and in the case of environmental issues, become conscientious and informed about the environment.

To illustrate and support how the environment is affected by the news media, the news media's coverage of global warming is used as a case study. This paper will investigate news media reports and film documentaries to illustrate information filtering and bias in reports about global warming.

Executive Summary

Humans are responsible for the stewardship of the environment and the earth, yet human actions are the main cause of damage to the natural environment. Much of the damage done to the environment is done through ignorance, as opposed to malicious intent.

The news media is the main source of information for adult Americans and heavily influences their opinions and actions. The news media business relies on sponsors to pay their bills. This connection between the news media and its sponsors causes a conflict of interest when the news media is going to report on environmental issues or violations of a sponsor.

Science and scientific discoveries are heavily filtered by the news media. There have been many instances where scientific evidence or discoveries have been suppressed by the news media. Much of this suppressed information is a result of businesses or public relation firms (PR firms) using the news media to their advantage.

Journalists, unlike scientists do not have specific tests proofs or peer-reviewed journals to verify data. It's the journalist's job to report on news accurately and more importantly, in a quick and entertaining manor, this can easily cause the news media to report inaccurate or false news.

The scientific and academic community publishes the most accurate information but lacks the entertainment value of the news media, and therefore has a much smaller audience. The news media publishes heavily filtered information, some of which begins in a business, then gets filtered through a PR firm, then is presented by the news media as news, instead of as a commercial for the company. The more filters that information goes through the likelier that it will be falsified or inaccurate. Using qualified, informed, objective filters can help ensure that information is accurate.

Global warming has recently (January, 2007) become an extremely hot issue not only in the news but also in government and business. In the few previous years the news media has been heavily filtering the science and scientific discoveries related to global warming. The scientific community is in general consensus that global warming exists, and that human activity is the overwhelming contributor to its cause, and to its recent acceleration.

Scientists showing ties to major greenhouse gas emitting companies have actively campaigned against the evidence presented by the scientific community by using the news media as a major source of spreading their agenda. Much of the news media has been presenting global warming as a 50/50 issue, when in fact in the scientific community the issue is spread more like 99/1 with the 99 believing that global warming exists.

Some companies are using the media attention that global warming has generated to advertise their products as “green” and use the trend to increase profits without actually taking the necessary steps that would require them to be a “green” company. Other companies are using the knowledge of global warming to actually try to make a difference and make their companies truly “green” and environmentally friendly.

Reports and new stories have been studied from BBC, NPR, CNN, MSNBC, HBO, The Discovery Channel, An Incontinent Truth, The New York Times, and Fox News. The study found that there was significant bias in many news outlets when dealing with the global warming issue, much of which was found to be directly connected to environmental business practices.

As the global warming issue is coming to a close, it has become clear that the scientific evidence was accurate, and that greenhouse gas emitting companies used the news media to fight the scientist’s call to action. The tactics used were identical to those that were used by the cigarette companies when health officials were trying to inform people about the dangers of smoking. Knowledge of the facts about global warming have set into motion an international change in peoples opinions and actions to help slow down and

prevent human the effects of global warming. Some of these actions include major cut backs in the use of petroleum to help curb CO₂ emissions, which will cause a loss in profits for the petroleum industry, who was a major campaigner against the original scientific evidence that supported global warming.

Background

What is nature?

Nature is the environment of physical phenomenon that we observe, experience, study, and live our lives in. *The whole of nature* includes all naturally occurring phenomena, from the mysteries of space, to the smallest, most seemingly inconsequential plant or rock. This also includes humans and all of the manufactured objects that we have produced. [1][2]

Different from *the whole of nature* is the *natural environment*. The *natural environment* consists of everything that has **not** been directly influenced or produced by humans. Unfortunately most all of the *natural environment* has already been affected or influenced by humans in some small way, leaving almost nothing that fits this exact description. The *natural environment* is constantly seeking equilibrium and reached some sort of chaotic balance independent of modern man. All phenomena that naturally seek this equilibrium are what will be considered the *natural environment*. [3]

For the scope of this paper when using the terms “nature” or “the environment” they are referring to the *natural environment*, or nature, as it would exist independent of human interference.

What is the media?

The media is the collaboration of newspapers, magazines, cinema films, radio, television, the World Wide Web, billboards, books, CDs, DVDs, videocassettes, computer games and other forms of publishing whose function it is to transfer and present information. The media offers a wide variety of information and entertainment for people. From the most fantastical and fictional adventures to the daily newspapers and Internet blogs, the media enables you to escape from reality or become more informed about the world around you. [4]

The most accepted source of supposedly *true* information is the *news media*, which will be the focus of this paper.

The news media, or “mass media” was designed to reach, inform, and entertain a very large audience. With the power of communicating to such a large audience the *news media* has the responsibility to present *accurate* information to its *consumers*. [4]

According to a January 2006 Harris Poll “Seven in ten U.S. adults say they watch broadcast news at least several times a week.” This is a very clear picture of exactly how far reaching and influential the news media is, and that is only television. [5] Combined with many other forms of communication, the news media communicates *to* most every American, as well as much of the world.

I would like to emphasize that the news media communicates *to* people and not *with* people because most people have no interaction with the news media other than consuming the news, it is a one-sided conversation. **It is the consumer’s choice whether or not to communicate with the news media outlets.**

The news is created by journalists whose job it is to quickly and accurately report information of interest to its consumers. Unlike scientists, journalists do not have specific tests, proofs, or peer-reviewed journals to verify data. Instead a journalist can only check their sources, proofread, and edit, therefore the truth can be harder to find initially. This allows for immediate reporting on events, but also can lead to the news media presenting inaccurate or false information by reporting rumors, using bad sources, phony experts, relying on inaccurate information, or most commonly, not checking their sources to begin with. In the fight to be the first news outlet to report on an event, the media can be easily fooled to report something that is false, as truth. [6.a] Phil Graham of the Washington Post called the news and journalism the “first rough draft of history”.

People often attempt to use the news media for their own personal gain, whether it’s for attention, money, or to further a cause. Many news outlets have had to come forward and

admit to having been the victim of hoaxes and media stunts and that they reported the misinformation that was given to them as the truth. This has happen to *every* major news outlet including FOX News, the New York Times (NYT), CNN, Reuters and the Associates Press. [6.b]

Repetition of false news stories in major news outlets has instilled in some people a distrust of the news media. **With the amount of false or inaccurate reports that are presented daily, the modern news consumer must be as conscious about the news that they watch, as the food that they eat.**

A trend among savvier, and especially younger news consumers is that they will not rely only on one news source but will seek out other supporting articles. [8] This still has its problems as will be illustrated later.

The news media business

Most major news outlets are corporations, they function as a corporation, and they make money like a corporation, and are driven by their stockholders as a corporation. To fund their business news media outlets are required to sell advertising space during their broadcasts and on their pages. This clearly illustrates how business bias can be present in much of the news media.

This monetary dependence gives the advertisers certain power over the news media, because in reality, they write the checks that make the news media money. If the a news media outlet is planning on running a report about how a sponsor is polluting the environment, the sponsor may threaten to stop advertising with that news outlet, this would cause the media outlet to lose it's stockholders money. It is the responsibility of that corporation to its shareholders **not** air the story. [7]

The old slogan "if it bleeds it leads" has always been a good illustration of how the visual impact, or the news's "consumability" is more important at times then the actual content

of the report. If a business is to succeed it must cater to its consumers and make a more desirable product to keep and expand its audience. The news media is no different, they publish reports that may not be very important but are stimulating to the consumer. The news media will usually choose to run the story that will give them the highest ratings as opposed to running a more important yet less stimulating story.

This is not always the case, but when the news media is replacing stories such as important scientific advances or issues with the most recent bloody car crash or celebrity break up, it means that the news media is failing to accurately inform our system and is failing to serve its purpose.

Wire services

Wire services are run by news agencies and are where most of the news originates. A news agency is an organization of journalists whose job it is to supply news media outlets with stories. [9] Many of these stories are ready to air or publish without any editing needed; others are used as background information for a story. The media outlet is expected to take that story, do further research, and publish their report.

Most news outlets are subscribed to one or more wire services. This can be dangerous for many reasons. If a wire service publishes a story that is inaccurate or incorrect, which can and has happened many times, all of the news outlets that received the story may, and most likely will, republish it as fact. This is one of the reasons that checking sources is so imperative for journalists. [6]

Balanced reporting as bias

Every journalist and news media outlet strives to be fair and accurate, but no longer is the word “objective” used as much, and was recently removed from the Society of Professional Journalist’s ethic code.

Bias in the news media is very clearly illustrated by “balanced reporting” being represented as 50/50 coverage on paper or on the air. When empirical and sound scientific evidence shows that an issue is not quite 50/50, but is more like 99/1, is it objective to present the issue as a 50/50 issue? This is done consistently in the news media. The news consumer must be aware of the scientific evidence involved in an issue especially if it is being discussed as a 50/50 issue.

A popular segment in news media is the “dueling scientists”. The news outlet will have two scientists with conflicting views about an issue on and have them debate. It is easy for news outlets to arrange for one of the scientists to be a much more skilled debater than the other, or many times this happens by chance. The imbalance may cause a scientist who may not be correct, but is a better debater, appear correct in the issue. [10]

Who controls the mainstream news media?

The mainstream news media is controlled by a small group of people. It takes much of its news from a small number of wire services; this causes much less variety in news programs. The few mainstream media outlets are owned and funded by a small number of large business, which are all controlled by a small number of people. This small number of people’s jobs and decisions are based in the business world of capitalism, where to be successful you must profit and grow, adapt or die.

Daily in the news media profits and ratings take precedent over responsible or objective reporting. Ratings make profits, but no company would advertise on a station that is exposing a negative side of their business, or that will cost them money by exposing an environmental hazard. [6]

The media’s connection to government and big business

Governments as well have the ability to control news media. The news is a tool that governments can use to communicate to the population. The government most commonly

uses the news media for public service announcements, warnings or to inform the public of their actions.

But the ways that the government is directly tied to big business helps advance the profit motive capitalist system. While this is not necessarily bad, the profit driven system has a history of putting things such as the natural environment second to efficiency and profits, and not working toward a sustainable future. [15]

The government has put minimal restrictions on journalists, and allows them to publish and say things that may not be completely true, but are supportive of the government or governmental policy. Those who have chosen to fight and disagree with the government and news media have consistently found little or no support from the mainstream news media. The Internet is helping change this trend and is giving more people access to information, and a voice.

How does the news media affect humans?

From the time that people are infants, the mass media is trying to earn their attention, loyalty and trust. The news media is the same way, people who are raised watching the news and are taught to trust the news will continue to follow blindly into the future. The majority of people get their news from only a few major news outlets, this gives the news media some ability to control and shape public opinion.

The news media has done extensive studies that have helped them understand how to win and keep you as a consumer. The uneducated news consumer has little chance of fighting the advanced techniques that are used by the modern news media. The news consumer will not be able to see and understand the bias or inaccuracy in some news reports. People like this make perfect consumers for the news media; they follow without question and consume the information that is presented to them as truth. [12]

A news consumer who is educated on how to breakdown and analyze news reports will stand a much better chance of finding and understanding the truths in a report even though the truth might be contrary to what is presented. Although the media is widespread and powerful, intelligent news consumers and consumer choices can help level the uneven playing ground. [6]

The news media's interaction with science

The news media and science have always had a rough relationship. Science is about discovering and reporting observable phenomenon as accurately as possible, the news media is about discovering and reporting the facts that it finds or are presented to it as quickly and accurately as possible. The news media's job is to accurately report, not always to understand. Good scientific studies have ways of proving their claims by using scientific methods such as double blind/placebo, randomization, control for outside or irrelevant variables and control groups, journalism does not. [6.c]

When a person in the academic or scientific community publishes a discovery, they are expected to not only understand what they have published, but also that they have used the proper methods, checks and proofs so that they are certain that what is published is true. In the past there have been instances where people in the scientific community have released false information. Sometimes this inaccuracy is just a mistake in the study. Other times the scientists will alter the truth, or the results of their study for their own or an affiliate's personal reasons.

In 1999 scientists from the Lawrence Berkley national Laboratory published that they had created the three heaviest elements ever seen. The scientists claimed that they had created elements with 114, 116 and 118 protons in their nuclei and that they were semi stable for a short time. Many major news outlets reported on this exciting scientific study.

By 2002 other researchers found that they could not replicate the data that was originally found and soon found that results had been fabricated and were false and the original

researchers were charged with “scientific misconduct” and were fired. This error was barely reported on by the news media and only reported in a few scientific journals.

Anyone who consumed and believed the original reports of the scientists or news media, which were widely reported on, would be very likely not to consume the correction to this report, which was not widely covered at all by the news media. This example shows how false scientific information distributed by the media can easily become accepted knowledge for the public. Even if the truth is found, chances are it will not be widely reported on by the news media. [6.d]

Because of the process of peer-reviewed journals for the scientific community it makes it very rare that a scientist is able to publish inaccurate information. It is much more common that the news media will alter scientific information or misrepresent scientific information to the general public for personal gain. The Monsanto case, as well as the global warming case, clearly illustrates how the news media has knowingly aired inaccurate or falsified scientific information. The objective criticism of peer-reviewed journals that helps ensure that the scientific community publishes accurate information is completely missing from the field of journalism. The main source of journalistic “peer-review” in journalism is the editor. The editors have the ability to not only check journalist’s stories for accuracy but also to edit them for the gain of the news media outlet.

PR firms and how they influence the news media

Public relation firms build and mold the public’s opinion for the benefit of its clients. Corporations hire PR firms to polish their image and make the corporation appear as a good, safe, legitimate business, even if it is not.

PR firms produce direct advertising like we are used to seeing, but they also produce “news” stories that are sent for free to many major media outlets. These manufactured news stories classically came in print, but the modern PR firms will use Video News

Releases (VNRs). VNRs are news stories with a specific purpose, to make the PR firm's client (generally corporations, though politicians or anyone looking for publicity can hire PR firms) look as positive as possible to the public. These "news reports" are nothing more than commercials which are disguised as news so that you will consume them as you would a news story but not hold the bias that you would if you knew that you were being sold something. News outlets love using VNRs because they don't have to spend any money producing them; all they have to do is press play. The convenience of VNRs makes them very popular, some news outlets will just play the VNR as it was sent; others will disguise it as their own reporting and use the supplemental content that is sent with a VNR to flesh out the report. [11]

The Center for Media and Democracy published a report in 2006 in which they tracked 36 VNRs from three major PR firms. [13]

Investigators captured 77 television stations actively disguising sponsored content from companies including General Motors, Intel, Pfizer and Capital One to make it look like their own reporting. More than one-third of the time, stations aired fake news stories in their entirety as their own reporting. [13]

The FCC is currently investigating this issue and the punishments could include fines or license revocation. [14]

This is a clear example of how PR firms influence the news media and use it to influence and advertise to news consumers for free.

[How corporations utilize PR firms and the media](#)

Corporations are renowned for being ignorant to or ignoring the natural environmental implications of their processes or products. Corporations almost never purposely harm the natural environment but it is a natural side effect for much of the business that

corporations take part in. Informed people treasure our natural environment and generally try to harm the environment as little as possible.

When a corporation has an environmental problem and they believe that the public will find out, or has already found out, it is time for them to call the PR firms for disaster management. One specialty of PR firms is helping corporations keep face and profits in the time of an environmental problem or disaster.

Monsanto developed a bovine growth hormone (BGH) Posilac that is injected into milk cows to increase their production. To get Posilac onto the market Monsanto had to convince university professors, “experts”, reporters, the public, and the FDA that it was a safe product.

When Monsanto conducted the studies on BGH they used only minimal testing as to its effects on humans, then either misreported the results to the FDA, or the FDA did not look into Monsanto’s studies.

Canadian Health Protection Branch Study showed “... Monsanto’s engineered growth hormone did not comply with safety requirements it could be absorbed by the body and therefore did have implications for human health. Mysteriously, that conclusion was deleted from the final published version of their report”

~ITN News, UK

Fox News channels “The Investigators” Steve Wilson and Jane Akre researched and produced a report on RBST and other BGHs and were prepared to air it. Just before the report aired a Monsanto lawyer faxed the Fox News station a letter that said that the story was “...of great concern to Monsanto...” so they put a hold on the story to double-check the facts, no errors were found.

One week later a second letter arrived that said there would be “dire consequences for Fox News” if the report aired. Fox News was very worried about being sued or losing the advertising money for the 22 television stations that are owned by Rupert Murdoch. This would be a huge loss of advertising money for Fox.

The general manager of Fox called the journalists up to his office and said, “What would you say if I killed this piece? What if it never ran?” following later with “...look, would you tell anybody?” The journalists insisted they could not knowingly lie in their report.

One week later the journalists were told to make specific edits to their report. The journalists attempted to present the evidence that all of the claims were completely true. The general manager responded with “I don’t care about that.” “That’s what I have lawyers for just write it the way the lawyers want it written.”

The journalists pushed and said, “This is news, this is important, this is stuff people need to know.” Which the general manager responded, “We just paid three billion dollars for these television stations. We’ll tell you what the news is. The news is what we say it is.”

The general manager threatened that if the journalists did not make the changes to the report, which would make it inaccurate, they would be fired. The journalists said they would go to the FAA if they were fired

One week later... the response was “How about if we pay you some money and you just go away.” The journalists were offered the rest of the year’s salary as long as they agreed not to talk about what Monsanto had done, and not talk about Fox’s corporate response in suppressing the story and to not talk about the story, not talk about BGH again anywhere, not to take the story to any other news organization. The journalists responded with “ok write it up.”

Fox News did write it up but the journalists did not sign. Fox then asked them how to “get the story on the air in a way we can all agree on.” Edits such as replacing the word

“cancer” with “human health implications” as well as removing or minimizing all criticism of Monsanto or its products were just some of the changes that Fox asked for. They edited 83 separate versions of the piece and delayed it until the journalist’s contracts ran out, and then they were fired.

The journalists claimed that this gave them whistleblowers status when they discovered that Fox News had fired them for refusing to do something that they believed was illegal. After a series of court dates, the court of appeals judged that “**Falsifying news isn’t actually against the law.**” and overturned the case. “Canada and Europe have upheld the ban on RBGH.” [Example taken from 15 (The Corporation), 11]

This example clearly shows the control that big business can have on the news media.

Putting it all together

Filtered information flow

Anytime someone, who is not completely knowledgeable about a subject, repeats information they run the risk of repeating it inaccurately. This is perfectly illustrated in the children's game "telephone". Every time someone takes in information then attempts to repeat it, they may misunderstand it, or incorrectly repeat it. Some people will purposely repeat information incorrectly or create false information and attempt to pass it off as true for their own personal benefit.

Carefully choosing where you get your information or news from counts for much of how accurately it will be presented. It most likely will be less "entertaining" but the content will be the most accurate. Scientific and academic publications are the safest and most informative, but they lack the entertainment factor of the mass media. Scientists can spend decades trying to prove a theory, but a journalist must report on that same subject extremely quickly and sometimes instantly. This superficial knowledge or personal bias can easily slant or falsify sound scientific information.

There are many levels that information can be filtered through. For the scope of this paper we will focus on the information that is relative to the natural environment.

The scientific and academic communities, the government, big business and corporations, PR firms and lobbyists, and the many different media forms including the news media, all are positioned at different levels of information flow.

The most important thing to remember is that for every level of information filtering it stands another chance of distortion.

Where you get your information about the natural environment from will determine your opinion of the natural environment and how you interact with it. People, who experience

the natural environment first hand regularly, will be much more in tune with nature than someone from a city, who only sees the natural environment in a picture or on a television. It is much more difficult to experience the “awesomeness” of nature from your living room. You may get a glimpse of the natural environment through the media but the first hand experience of it will make much more of an impact. [12]

Because the corporate model has no empathy for the natural environment, corporate decisions consistently harm the environment. With very little money to be made in reporting a sponsor’s environmental violations, there is very little money to be made for the news media to report on many environmental issues. The news media gives many people much of the information and opinions that they have of the environment. These problems regularly inadvertently cause the news media to curb public opinion in a way that is detrimental to the natural environment.

The Monsanto example illustrates clearly how corporations and the media can change public opinion or censor information about important environmental issues. The VNR example shows how corporations use the news media to advertise for environmentally hazardous products for free, and pass it off as news.

Description and diagram of information flow

Have you ever heard a story third or fourth hand, then later spoken with the person it happened to, and the true story was very different? This perfectly illustrates how much of the news media is reported. The news media chooses what to report on and attempts to inform and entertain you with these reports. This filter is working very similar to your friend who is telling you the story, though they might not be trying to tell you inaccurate information in the story has been processed and retold so many times that it has fallen prey to the “telephone game” affect, becoming altered from the truth. With seven in ten people receiving their information from the news media daily that adds up to quite a bit of information that is inaccurate, but is being believed as the truth.

The more filters or bias that information passes through the more likely it will be inaccurate or that it will have been manipulated for a purpose. As presented in the VNR example, if you watched the news and viewed one of the VNRs that was aired on the news, you would have believed it as a viable news story and true. If that VNRs had been about Monsanto you would have believed information that had been either poorly found or misreported on by scientists, then edited by Monsanto, then given to a PR firm and twisted and presented to profit Monsanto, then reported in the news media for free as the truth.

Not only did this example start with bad information, but also the filters changed it to profit Monsanto, even though BGH had been found not to be as safe as they had claimed. To be a responsible news consumer you must analyze all information before accepting it as truth. Understanding the origin of information as well as the amount of filters it has passed through can help you analyze the news and understand when the news is not presenting accurate information.

Through *whose* looking glass?

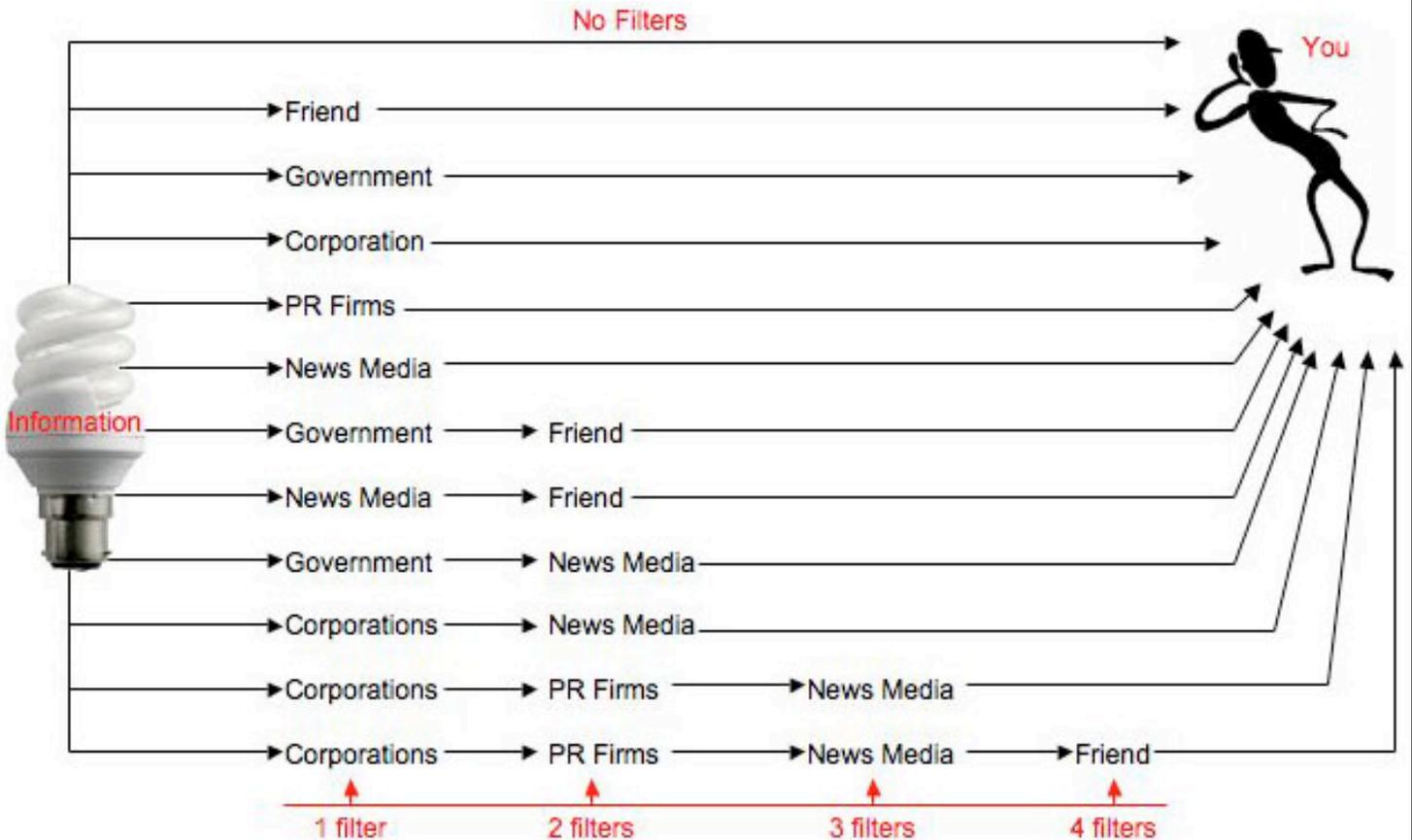


Figure 1 (Information Filtering)

Figure 1 shows the many filters that information can travel through before getting to you. The use of “friend” can mean any person who you get information from second hand. The more filters, the more likely that the information will be incorrect. Major news outlets rarely report any information that hasn’t gone through at least one filter previous to them reporting on it. When news outlets get their stories from other news outlets or from a wire service, the same filtering effect can happen to the information.

News and information about the environment is extremely susceptible to being edited or cut completely by news outlets. Much of the important environmental news is either detrimental to a corporation or simply does not make entertaining news. Either of these things get a report heavily edited or cut completely.

Now many corporations are attempting to use the current environmental “trend” to make money. They do what is called “greenwashing”, which will make a corporation appear more environmentally friendly to the public in an attempt to increase sales and opinion.

Audience size vs. information filters

Seven in ten people get their daily news from the news media; this is a very large percentage of a population to be receiving heavily filtered information daily. Currently the scientific and academic communities have the smallest audience and the least influence when compared to the government, corporations and the mass media. Currently the groups that are reporting the least filtered information have the smallest audience and the groups with the largest audience are reporting heavily filtered information.

The mass of filtered information that reaches the population is not helping the natural environment. Scientists reporting important environmental inventions or discoveries are not receiving the wide spread distribution of information that the news media has access to. The news media is generally not willing to lose millions of dollars in advertising just to run a report that the corporations or government do not find imperative. By not distributing certain information, and by presenting many minor arguments against the opposing viewpoint, the news media can influence people’s opinions and downplay or even bring into question the validity of the information in a scientific report. If it comes down to a dispute between the scientific community and its small audience and the massive audience of the news media with the millions of dollars at stake from the corporate world, the news media will report what the corporations want.

Global Warming: Case Study

The issue

Whether or not the earth is warming significantly due to human actions and if immediate action needs to be taken.

Whether the weather be hot, or whether the weather be not, we'll weather the weather whatever the weather, whether we like it or not.

Global warming is a popular natural environmental issue that has recently received a good deal of news media attention. Much of what people believe comes directly from the news media, and “some people say” the news media is not giving you the whole story, and that the media outlets are not properly alerting the public to the dangers that global warming presents.

In 2006 there had been a flood of “investigations” and “special reports” by the news media on global warming, its effects, its cause, who is responsible, and what can be done to fix it or avert its effects.

If a person only got their information about global warming directly from the news media they would not only have conflicting ideas about the issue, but they would believe that its existence, as well as its cause, is a huge debate in the scientific community; this is simply not true.

The concepts presented above will be applied to illustrate the news media's role and effects on global warming.

The scientific community's consensus

Many groups including the *Union of Concerned Scientists*, the IPCC, the *Board on Atmospheric Sciences and Climate*, and the Earth and Life Studies have scientific evidence and are in general consensus that the climate is warming, the recent acceleration in warming is due to human activities, and that immediate policy changes and public action must be taken to avoid global catastrophic events.

The global warming debate that is being presented by the media is very different from the debate that is *not* taking place in the scientific community. The scientific community is past debating whether global warming exists and they have been working diligently to find out how much it is warming, what the effects will be, and what are some solutions.

The few scientists who claim that global warming is a hoax, or not a significant threat, have shown monetary ties to industries that would be most affected if the effects and causes of global warming are true. If the skeptical scientists can shed any doubt on the scientific facts that are presented by other climate scientists, then they are doing their jobs. Even if you aren't correct, if you can prove the opposition *might not* be correct, then you can win a debate by cleverly using the news media. Those who oppose the threat of global warming have been using this tactic constantly and effectively in the debate, especially focusing on the margin of error that is applied to the scientific data.

The government's stance

The US government and the EPA have acknowledged the existence and effects of global warming as was found and published by The National Academies.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the predicted effects of global warming are many and various, both for the environment and for human life. Changing regional climates could alter forests, crop yields, and water supplies. Global warming could also affect human health, animals, and many types of ecosystems. For example, deserts may

expand into existing rangelands, and features of some of our National Parks may be permanently altered. [20]

With a statement like this the U.S. government should be making major policy changes to fight the threat of global warming. On the contrary the U.S. government's policies have not been doing much to fight global warming, in fact they have been making it easier for many of the industries who are major contributors of global warming to thrive in this critical time. Policies such as not signing the Kyoto Treaty, which would force the U.S. to decrease our CO₂ emissions, contradict the stance of a government that claims that there is serious climate change and that human activity is the cause. [21]

Effective and constructive environmental policies must be put into place by the US government as well as all governments to help minimize global warming so that collectively as stewards of the earth we can minimize the negative effects that global warming will have on the earth.

How corporations are involved

There are many corporations whose products or processes contribute heavily to the increase in global warming. None of these products were designed to purposefully contribute to global warming but do so as a side affect. Many industries will suffer financially if they are forced to meet environmental requirements that were not originally considered but would help to minimize the effects of global warming. It is the responsibility of the corporations to attempt to influence policy and opinion to protect and maximize profits. It is therefore in the interests of the affected corporations to attempt to minimize the negative monetary impact due to global warming that governmental policy or environmentally friendly choices would make.

The close connection between the oil industry, one of the largest contributors to global warming, and the US government is no secret. Many powerful people in politics are closely connected to the oil industry. Phillip Cooney was the chief of staff for President

Bush's Council on Environmental Quality until he was fired among accusations that he heavily edited scientific reports to downplay the possible catastrophic effects of global warming. Prior to this job, Cooney was a lobbyist for the American Petroleum Institute, and soon after he was fired he went to work for the oil giant, Exxon/Mobil. [22] The connection is evident when the US government's policies benefit the oil industry, but do not take the effects of global warming or the environment into account. The U.S. government's handling of the Kyoto Treaty is a good example of this connection.

Recently, with all of the attention that global warming is receiving some corporations see this as a moneymaking opportunity. Some corporations are attempting to "do the right thing" and are genuinely concerned about the natural environment. They try to offer an environmentally friendly product for the consumer, especially for the environmentally conscious consumer.

Some corporations are using the "environmental fad" to profit from consumers who are concerned about the environment, even though there is little actual effort on the part of the corporation to clean up its processes. A common maneuver is to make a small portion of the corporation environmentally conscious and friendly, then to advertise that small section as the image and policy of the whole corporation.

A report by the Union of Concerned Scientists in January of 2007 detailed how Exxon/Mobil was guilty of using tactics to raise doubt about global warming similar to those used by the tobacco industry when the health issue arose about cigarettes. These tactics included:

- raising doubts about even the most undisputed science;
- funding a variety of front organizations to create the appearance of a broad platform;
- recruiting a number of vocal climate change contrarians;
- portraying its opposition to action as a quest for "sound science" rather than business self-interest;

- using its access to the Bush administration to shape federal communications and policies on global warming.[29]

PR firms and lobbyists

To keep the public image of the industries that are the major sources of global warming “green”, PR firms have been hired by corporations to influence their public image and combat the negative image that the effects of global warming would have on business. Industry lobbyists are also hired to affect governmental policy and to combat any negative policies.

PR firms are paid by greenhouse gas emitting industries to fight the negative public opinion that global warming is having on them. Front groups such as the Global Climate Coalition (GCC) was set up by Burson-Monseller and is used to curb public opinion about global warming. By casting doubt upon the facts and using seemingly “sound science”, experts, and studies, the PR firms influence the news media to report the agenda of the industry as a dissenting scientific opinion to the widely accepted science of global warming.

With the global warming issue coming to a close, the clear evidence is that it exists and that we are the leading cause, it is easier to see how in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s PR companies battled the scientists who were coming forward with evidence. In this time the greenhouse gas emitting industries paid millions of dollars to PR firms to battle the evidence of global warming. [21]

The bias of media sources

To understand how news media sources report on global warming, several case studies will be used to illustrate different views that are presented in the news media.

Objectivity and accuracy are key proponents of a good journalist. In the news media's coverage on global warming objectivity and accuracy have been and are being compromised from economic and political agendas.

These case studies will focus on the different claims that are present in news media outlets about global warming. Different media outlets focus on different aspects from different views of global warming, some focus heavily on the probable scientific prediction, others such as Fox News focus heavily on using the possible, yet much less probable predictions to help to discredit the unfavorable probable scientific predictions. Most news outlets are heavily influenced by economic and political agendas, and many are open about their bias toward one side of an issue.

BBC

In 2006 BBC's Panorama aired a special report about global warming and presented BBC's take on the global warming issue.

BBC affirms the scientific consensus that global warming exists and that it is caused by human actions. BBC's report on global warming focused on what was preventing the world from receiving clear and accurate information about the issue.

BBC's main point of focus was the US Republican Party and the Oil Industry and how they are editing scientific papers and altering data to cast skepticism on the validity of global warming and its causes. BBC stresses that the US Government silenced the scientists who were researching global warming and finding that humans were the cause and immediate action needed to be taken.

BBC's other main focus was the connection between global warming and increase extreme weather conditions. They go into depth about the connections between global warming and the destructive storms, using Katrina as a gruesome illustration of how destructive global warming can be.

The BBC places hard blame of global warming on the Republican Party and the oil industry. It does not investigate the core science of the issue but investigates the political and economic issues that relate the US Republican Party and the Oil Industry to global warming and the silencing of the scientific community. [23]

NPR

NPR has done extensive coverage of the global warming issue over the past few years (03-06). NPR provides many reports that support the science that points to humans as the cause of excessive global warming. Much of the evidence presented by NPR is related to the earth's melting ice and permafrost and the changing arctic climate. They also reported and critiqued Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth." They validated the scientific evidence that was presented in the film.

The debate on global warming has shifted. Worldwide, tailpipes and smokestacks spew 25 billion tons of carbon dioxide every year, and there's no longer doubt that this gas is heating the Earth. The new questions center around how much will our climate change, and how fast. NPR examines the issue. [16]

CNN

One billion people in 212 countries can watch CNN making them one of the largest and most influential news outlets in the world, second in viewers only to Fox News in the US.

CNN has done some reporting on global warming and recently ('06) ran an investigative reporting special about global warming. Though their responsibility to accurately inform news consumers about the other environmental issues has waned.

I searched CNN's website using the term "Global Warming" and received 84 results.

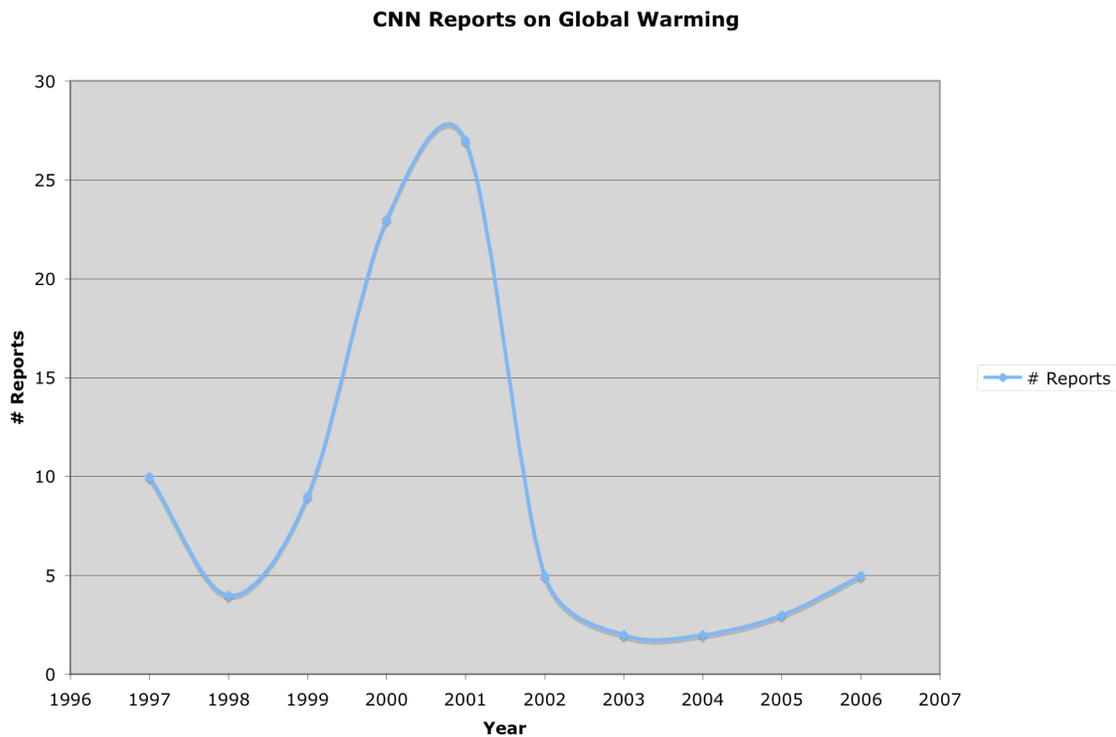


Figure 2 (CNN Web Search)

When the articles were separated by year and plotted, Figure 2 clearly shows that around the turn of the millennium and prior to 9/11 global warming coverage was at it's highest. After 9/11 global warming coverage dropped significantly and did not begin to rise until very recently in late 2005 when the threat of global warming became more immediate.

[17]

Now (late '06) the global warming issue is at a critical time, and CNN is not informing news consumers enough about the issue.

MSNBC

MSNBC has been actively following and reporting on the global warming issue. Though the environmental reports are not presented prominently on their website and is not present in their links, a quick search reveals an entire section of their website to environmental issues as well as a section for global warming.

MSNBC has recently ('06) been reporting the scientific claims that global warming is caused by humans and that immediate action needs to be taken. MSNBC has done extensive coverage on the global warming issue and has produced thousands of reports related to global warming in the past few years.

Unfortunately, even with their excellent coverage of the global warming issue MSNBC fails to highlight the importance of the critical environmental time that we are in, and focuses the headline news on other issues. [18]

HBO

In 2006 HBO produced and aired a special about global warming entitled "Too Hot Not To Handle". HBO clearly and completely presented the scientific concepts of global warming. HBO clearly illustrated the scientific concepts of how human emissions of greenhouse gasses are causing global climate change.

HBO presents the scientific facts pertaining to global warming and its connections to the extreme weather conditions that have been occurring in the past few years. The report stresses the interconnectivity between global warming and the many different global effects that it will have. HBO shows how global warming will affect each individual

person and the little things that they will slowly notice before they are affected by some of the disastrous effects of global warming. HBO presents many of the possible negative effects that global warming could cause, such as increased hurricane power and heat waves.

To follow the problems, HBO then offered some solutions to the global warming crisis. They highlight hybrid cars that run on the gasoline infrastructure already in place but lessen the greenhouse gas emissions. Other possible solutions such as ethanol and bio-diesel are also presented.

HBO shows some examples of companies that are making environmentally friendly changes to minimize their energy use to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Efficient energy use cannot only lessen a company's strain on the environment but can also save a company a substantial amount of money. Energy alternatives like wind and solar power are presented as solutions to reduce and eventually eliminate greenhouse gas emitting non-sustainable energy production that will help create a sustainable global climate. [24]

The Discovery Channel

In 2006 The Discovery Channel aired a special, "Global Warming: What You Need To Know" with Dan Rather The key question: "What changed recently to make global warming a more pressing issue?"

Discovery presents the recent scientific evidence of global warming. They show the ice and glacial melt, they show how polar bears and other species migration or extinction is caused by the global climate change.

Discovery presents that some possible effects will be drought, growing deserts, and uncontrollable wildfires. The Arctic and Antarctic ice melt will cause the ocean level to rise and will flood large areas of human civilization. Extreme weather conditions such as stronger and more frequent hurricanes that are caused by warmer seawater will cause

immeasurable destruction when combined with the rising sea levels. Discovery highlights Katrina to show what the effects global climate change could have on coastal civilization.

Discovery presents the scientific correlation between CO₂ levels and temperature levels. They investigated climate modeling and climate model predictions. Though predictions are very difficult, the models have worked perfectly for climate prediction from geological events. The current climate models are all now in agreement and accurate in their predictions of the global climate and its changes and is showing that humans are responsible.

Alternatives to energy production are presented by Discovery as solutions to minimize greenhouse gas emissions and slow climate change. Hybrid cars and green architecture are parts of the solution that are presented. Having every person monitor and limit his or her CO₂ emissions is presented as a way to collectively help fight global warming. If we as a society worked together to minimize out CO₂ output it would make a major difference in the preventing the disastrous effects of global climate change. [25]

An Inconvenient Truth with Al Gore

An Inconvenient Truth (AIT) presents the general scientific concepts of global warming simply and clearly focusing on greenhouse gasses. The way that AIT is presented makes it highly entertaining and easy to understand. As a documentary it doesn't feel like news, and goes much more into depth about the science of global warming.

Al Gore presents the correlation between CO₂ and temperature levels on earth. He showed that with the recent increase in CO₂ levels the temperature could become dangerously warm. Melting glaciers, ice, Arctic and Antarctic are presented as the "canaries in the coal mine" and are clear evidence of global warming.

AIT is very personal at times, it focuses partly on Al Gore the person, and presents the process that he went through to understand the scientific data and the concepts involved with global warming.

AIT claims that global warming warms seawater, which causes larger storms and hurricanes. Hurricane Katrina is highlighted as an example of a storm and the negative effects extreme weather conditions may have had on the world. AIT presents many recent natural disasters that are the result of odd weather tied to global warming. The melting ice caps near the poles and the changing ocean currents will cause sea levels to rise and flood coastal areas and major changes to the natural cycles and migration.

AIT claims that there is a complete scientific communal consensus that global warming exists and that it is caused by human activity. Al Gore claims that the oil companies and the U.S. government were actively campaigning against acknowledging global warming and what was causing it. He presented environmental reports that were edited to present false information by the U.S. government.

AIT stresses responsible and innovative use of technology in the future. Al Gore urges people to make conscientious environmental decisions and purchases and to minimize energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. [26]

The New York Times

In addition to extensive coverage of global warming, the NYT has a section on its website dedicated to global warming. The NYT has published the following statement:

The average surface temperature of earth has increased more than 1 degree Fahrenheit since 1900 and the rate of warming has been nearly three times the century-long average since 1970. Almost all experts studying the recent climate history of the earth agree now that human activities, mainly the release of heat-trapping gases from smokestacks,

tailpipes, and burning forests, are probably the dominant force driving the trend. The gases add to the planet's natural greenhouse effect, allowing sunlight in, but preventing some of the resulting heat from radiating back to space. Drawing on research on past climate shifts, observations of current conditions, and computer simulations, many climate experts say that without big curbs in greenhouse gas emissions, the 21st century could see temperatures rise 3 to 8 degrees, weather patterns sharply shift, ice sheets shrink and seas rise several feet. [19]

Fox News

Fox News reaches 85 million households and is the most watched news channel in the U.S. On May 21st 2006 Fox News aired "Global Warming: The Debate Continues" hosted by David Asman. This was Fox News' "fair and balanced" report on global warming. The report opens with:

Global warming, most Americans believe it exists and a majority think it's a problem if not a crisis. But is that true?

Fox begins by acknowledging that global warming exists but claims that there is no clear scientific consensus. Asman interviewed Senator James Inhofe (R) of the U.S. Senate Committee Environment & Public Works CHMN who claims that global warming is a complete hoax, citing when scientists in the 70's claimed that an ice age was coming. (Which it is, just not for another 50-100 thousand years.)

Fox presents scientists who use language to cast doubt upon the science of global warming. One major focus is on the error in the sampling of ice cores and in climate model data. They focus on casting doubt on the current scientific predictions but do not clearly present the science that it is based on.

The climate is a very complex system, and it's one we barely understand.

The questions in Asman's interviews were worded to make the people who believe in global warming appear as extremists who do not understand the science.

What is the most outrageous claim you have heard about global warming?

Fox News praises the U.S. government administration for their work in taking steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They highlight how much more support the Bush administration is giving to the environment using the Clinton administration as its measuring stick, and does not take into account the increase in urgency of the environmental issues.

Fox News explores many of the alternatives to help minimize out energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. They highlight hybrid cars, ethanol, hydrogen, gasification and nuclear power. Fox News went into depth about the Kyoto Treaty, citing economic reasons as why Kyoto would not work for America and supported the U.S. government's stance on the Kyoto Treaty.

Fox News explores the connection between increased extreme weather conditions and global warming. They present skepticism about the increase of storm and hurricane power being related to warming seawater from global warming. Fox claims that there is not enough clear scientific evidence to make this connection. [27]

Conclusion of case study

The news media outlets mostly presented the same information and all urged news consumers to make environmentally conscious choices and purchases. Alternative energy sources and hybrid cars were both hot topics of news media investigations.

The HBO and Discovery Channel documentaries presented the scientific evidence clearly and with the least apparent bias. They focused on collecting and presenting the scientific

evidence as accurately and with as few information filters as possible. Al Gore in *An Inconvenient Truth* presented the scientific evidence extremely clearly in a highly entertaining film. Al Gore's obvious bias against and criticism of the Bush administration is apparent in *An Inconvenient Truth* but the film attempts to keep an objective viewpoint of the issue.

Fox News and the BBC both presented the scientific information about global warming but focused more on other aspects of the issue. Both of the news media outlets showed bias when reporting on the global warming issue. The BBC was exceptionally critical of the Bush administration and the U.S. Oil Industries, placing much of the responsibility of global warming on their shoulders. Fox News presented the scientific evidence of global warming but focused mostly on casting doubt about the predicted catastrophic effects of global warming. Fox News, the most watched news channel showed extreme bias when reporting about global warming. Fox News openly supports whatever stance the U.S. government takes and is always quick to point out whenever the Bush administration surpasses the Clinton administration. In the interviews, David Asman asked many "loaded" questions to invalidate the evidence of global warming. The scientific experts in the Fox News report are all from the almost non-existent dissenting scientific minority. This kind of bias reporting directly contradicts Fox News's pledge of "fair and balanced" reporting.

This case study illustrates how scientific information about global warming that has been filtered through the news media can be presented inaccurately due to corporate bias.

Update: In late 2006 when a large ice chunk fell off of the Canadian coast due to warm weather all news outlets were quick and accurate to reporting the event.

Results & Conclusion

The news media is responsible for presenting accurate information to its consumers. In some instances the news media has failed to meet this requirement, and better environmentally conscious business practices must be put into place. When presenting environmental news, the news media does not give the environment the widespread coverage that is required to properly educate consumers about many of the environmental issues at hand.

The global warming case study illustrates how information filtering and bias can affect the news media's coverage of environmental issues and what the news consumers believe to be true. How people see and experience the environment determines how they interact with it, therefore some of negative effects that humans have on the natural environment are caused by misinformation presented by the news media.

Conscious and careful manipulation of environmental information filtered through the news media is used to shape the news consumer's opinions, and in turn, the consumers interaction with nature. It is easy for information to be accidentally falsified by an information filter, and then internationally presented to the news consumers as the truth.

Becoming an educated savvy news consumer can help consumers identify when the news media is presenting misinformation. Understanding and seeking out the source of information is critical when analyzing possible environmental news media misinformation.

Appendix

Figures

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Case study articles and documentaries:

- NPR: Global Warming
(<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5394326>)
- CNN.com Search “Global Warming”
(<http://search.cnn.com/pages/search.jsp?query=Global%20Warming>)
- MSNBC (<http://www.msnbc.com>)
 - Warming expert sees 10-year window - Environment - MSNBC.com
(<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14834318/>)
 - Nation's parks under heavy pressure - Environment - MSNBC.com
(<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13363560/>)
- Global Warming- Science - The New York Times
(<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/science/topics/globalwarming/index.html?8qa>)
- EPA : EPA Global Warming Site
(<http://yosemite.epa.gov/oar/globalwarming.nsf/content/index.html>)
- Exxon Mobil hires former Bush environment aide – MarketWatch
(<http://www.marketwatch.com/News/Story/Story.aspx?guid=%7B03CA702F-7BB4-46C5-ADB8-CF5D44E3063A%7D&siteid=google>)
- BBC: Panorama, Global Warming (Video)
- HBO: To Hot Not To Handle (Video)
- The Discovery Channel: Global Warming: What You Need To Know With Dan Rather (Video)
- An Inconvenient Truth (Video)
Starring: Al Gore, Director: Davis Guggenheim

- Fox News: Global Warming: The Debate Continues (Video)
May 21st 2006
- Scientists' Report Documents ExxonMobil's Tobacco-like Disinformation Campaign on Global Warming Science
- (http://www.ucsusa.org/news/press_release/ExxonMobil-GlobalWarming-tobacco.html)

Tables

Table 1

CNN.com "Global Warming" Search Results

Year	# Reports
1997	10
1998	4
1999	9
2000	23
2001	27
2002	5
2003	2
2004	2
2005	3
2006	5

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(http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=644)
6. Don't Believe It!: How Lies Become News
by Alexandra Kitty (Paperback - Mar 1, 2005)
 - a. p.009
 - b. p.014
 - c. p. 262
 - d. p. 268
7. Outfoxed
by Robert Greenwald (July 13, 2004) The Disinformation Company (DVD)
8. BBC/Reuters/Media Center Poll: Trust in the Media (conducted by Globescan)
(http://www.globescan.com/news_archives/bbcreut.html)
9. News agency - From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News_wire)
10. Journalistic Balance as Global Warming Bias – Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting
(FAIR)
(<http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=1978>)
11. Toxic Sludge is Good For You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry
by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton (Paperback - Sep 1995)
12. Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World And the Way We Live in It
by Thomas De Zengotita (Paperback - Feb 21, 2006)

13. Fake TV News: Widespread and Undisclosed;
by Diane Farsetta and Daniel Price, Center for Media and Democracy April 6, 2006
(<http://www.prwatch.org/fakenews/execsummary>)
14. Fox news - FCC Questions TV Stations on 'Fake News'
(<http://www.foxnews.com/wires/2006Aug15/0,4670,FCCFakeNews,00.html>)
15. The Corporation
by Jennifer Abbott, Mark Achbar, Mikela J. Mikael, and Pope John XXIII (DVD)
16. NPR: Global Warming
(<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5394326>)
17. CNN.com Search "Global Warming"
(<http://search.cnn.com/pages/search.jsp?query=Global%20Warming>)
18. MSNBC (<http://www.msnbc.com>)
 - a. Warming expert sees 10-year window - Environment - MSNBC.com
(<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14834318/>)
 - b. Nation's parks under heavy pressure - Environment - MSNBC.com
(<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13363560/>)
19. Global Warming- Science - The New York Times
(<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/science/topics/globalwarming/index.html?8qa>)
20. EPA : EPA Global Warming Site
(<http://yosemite.epa.gov/oar/globalwarming.nsf/content/index.html>)
21. Trust Us We're Experts: How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles with Your Future (Paperback)
by Sheldon Rampton, John Stauber
22. Exxon Mobil hires former Bush environment aide – MarketWatch
(<http://www.marketwatch.com/News/Story/Story.aspx?guid=%7B03CA702F-7BB4-46C5-ADB8-CF5D44E3063A%7D&siteid=google>)
23. BBC: Panorama, Global Warming (Video)
24. HBO: To Hot Not To Handle (Video)
25. The Discovery Channel: Global Warming: What You Need To Know With Dan Rather (Video)

26. An Inconvenient Truth (Video)

Starring: Al Gore, Director: Davis Guggenheim

27. Fox News: Global Warming: The Debate Continues (Video)

May 21st 2006

28. Unspeak: How Words Become Weapons, How Weapons Become a Message, and How That Message Becomes Reality (Hardcover)

by Steven Poole; Grove Press (April 28, 2006)

29. Scientists' Report Documents ExxonMobil's Tobacco-like Disinformation Campaign on Global Warming Science

(http://www.ucsusa.org/news/press_release/ExxonMobil-GlobalWarming-tobacco.html)