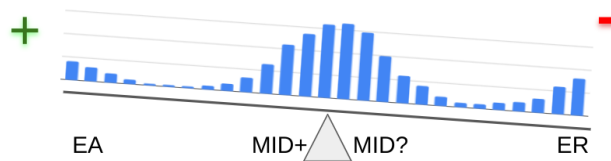


Why don't people pay attention?

In "[1biosphere - the idea](#)" I use this diagram to show our target audience for these stories.



I argue that we need to influence the middle part of the diagram. This is the population that believes there is a crisis in the environment and we should do something about it.

Why, if that is a major part of the population, is there not an overwhelming protest and voting movement to force change?

The question is certainly not new. It has occurred in many other contexts;

- Why did so many people vote the way they did, or not vote at all, when polls indicated they overwhelmingly supported certain measures¹? If they had voted in line with the poll numbers the political landslide would have been enormous.
- Why did (and do) so many people refuse sensible Covid19 measures?
- Why do people continue to buy unhealthy products?
- Why do people not go to church when the downside is eternal hellfire?

The answers are also not new. They have been explored through the ages, by profound thinkers and also breakfast cereal jingle writers (I'm not suggesting that jingle writers can't be profound thinkers - quite the opposite).

Some pertinent explanations may be:

- Confidence that technology will solve the issue
- The problem lies somewhere else - not here. Anyway, my vote doesn't make any difference
- Too many other things to worry about

Let's look at the last of these explanations - (vastly oversimplified, I know)

¹ I refer to the USA in particular, where voting is optional. e.g. "A majority [...63%] of Americans continue to say the federal government has a responsibility to make sure all Americans have health care coverage" - Pew Research, Sept 2020

Similar examples of seemingly counterproductive voting (or non-voting) decisions exist worldwide.

For the EA group - We need stories² to reinforce the need for action, to spread best practices and support each other.

The EA (Environmentally Active) group in the diagram are the converts/activists; they include professionals with secure incomes, retirees, students, people who read the Guardian and/or the NYT, consumers of conservation stories.

For ER - We need stories to counter misinformation

The ER (Environmentally Resistant) group, at the other end of the scale, includes professionals in secure jobs, including some who have become very rich from fossil fuels and others who hope to become very rich from technological solutions.

Also in the ER group are those who live in areas hard hit by economic changes; who work in, or support, extractive industries as the only avenue to a decent income, and to a meaningful life. Their anger is entirely understandable. It is no good telling them there are jobs in renewable energy and retrofitting houses; not when those jobs are across the country, require different skills and pay much less!

Anger in turn allows misinformation to be accepted and spread³.

For MID - We need stories that will create Individual and Political ACTION

Most of all we need stories for the MID groups - whether they be positive about the need for change, or still somewhat doubtful.

These are most of us:

- Wondering how to get through the month.
- Saddled with debt; student loans, house mortgage, car, credit cards.
- Unwilling to add more debt; even at 0% for energy improvements
- Health insurance, the kids teeth, college...the list is unending.
- Threat of bankruptcy through ill health - even with health insurance.
- Both parents need to work to keep up with the payments.
- 40% can't find the money for a \$1000 emergency

No wonder there is no major action on the environmental crisis.

Who has the time or the energy?

² Underestimating the Challenges of Avoiding a Ghastly Future
Frontiers Conservation Science, 13 January 2021
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fcosc.2020.615419>

- “The scale of the threats to the biosphere and all its life forms—including humanity—is in fact so great that it is difficult to grasp for even well-informed experts.”
- “...what political or economic system, or leadership, is prepared to handle the predicted disasters, or even capable of such action.”
- “The science underlying these issues is strong, but awareness is weak. Without fully appreciating and broadcasting the scale of the problems and the enormity of the solutions required, society will fail to achieve even modest sustainability goals.”

³ Greenstein, M., & Franklin, N. (2020). Anger increases susceptibility to misinformation. *Experimental Psychology*, 67(3), 202–209. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1618-3169/a000489>

The need for these CONSISTENT, ACCESSIBLE, RELEVANT and REALITY BASED stories is outlined in “1biosphere - the idea” and does not need to be repeated here.

The key is that the stories need to be concise, punchy and very clear on the action to take. They need to break through the clutter of information. Pointing out the beauties of nature and the losses we will suffer may well be a waste of time. Nor will it help much to point out the bad guys in the game. Educating and informing is no longer the point for the MID groups. They’ve got the message. They may differ in the depth of their belief and there are certainly disagreements about what needs to be done, who should do it and - most important - who will pay. But there is no “ignorance” about the wider picture.

**The MID stories need to describe the action to be taken
AND confirm that the action will have results;
their voices and their votes will make a difference.**

IGNORANCE

In frustration we sometimes propose ignorance as a reason why messages about the Environmental Crisis and the steps needed to resolve it are ignored or outright denied. There are so many tempting quotes one can use⁴...

But I think the reasons for inaction are due much more to the deluge of daily messages preaching consumption, to the instant gratification that comes with consumption and the misinformation spread by political and commercial interests - in addition to the reasons already given above.

⁴ However, I just can't resist:

Charles Darwin: “Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge”

In 1995, the late Carl Sagan warned of a grim future for our country where conspiracy theories, pseudoscience, superstition, and the celebration of ignorance dominated American life and our government...With science and reason sidelined, he warned of a backslide into darkness and decay that begins to undo centuries of scientific advancement and progress

And a cautionary note: We like to use quotes from famous people that agree with our own view. And we don't check them out. e.g. “The only thing more dangerous than ignorance is arrogance.” - is NOT by Einstein. Or “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change” - NOT Darwin.