Department of Psychological and Behavioural Science

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Can creative storytelling enable collective climate action?

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Climate change needs collective action

- The causes and consequences of climate chance arise at different scales, it is a complex and interconnected issue.

- People don’t change their behaviour if others are not doing the same.

- Climate change needs collective action – people choosing to work together to address climate change across scales in many ways.
  - Supporting and demanding greener governmental policies
  - Changing their lifestyles incl. consumer choices and even possibly their jobs in the long-run.

‘Listen to the scientists’: Greta Thunberg urges Congress to take action

Teen climate activists attend a hearing to address the climate crisis and its traumatic effect on the younger generation

Pandemic shows climate has never been treated as crisis, say scientists

Letter also signed by Greta Thunberg urges EU leaders to act immediately on global heating

▲ A climate protest in Duesseldorf, Germany, last week. Photograph: Sascha Steinbach/EPA

Why have we found it so difficult to listen and act on the (climate) science?!

Listening to the (climate) science

- Listening to the science assumes that human beings process uncertain (statistical) information in a logical and analytical matter.

- Yet, decades of behavioural science research has shown:
  - The human brain relies on two qualitatively different processing systems: System 1 (emotional, impulsive, automatic) and system 2 (analytical, rational, deliberative).
  - Attention is a limited resource.

- Forging collective climate action rests on science communication – but statistics and facts don’t always persuade people.

Can creative storytelling and narratives communicate the science?

- Narratives follow a particular structure that describes the cause-and-effect relationships between events that take place over a particular time period that impact particular characters (Dahlstorm, 2014).

- Humans love stories, anecdotes, and narratives: context-dependent, easier to comprehend, more engaging and memorable.

- People already get their information from non-scientific and narrative style sources (mass media) where different stories compete for attention – not all true!

Can creative storytelling and narratives change environmental policy preferences and behaviour?

Can linking human destruction of nature to COVID-19 increase support for environmental and wildlife conservation policies?

Three narratives with three Covid -19 causes

Proximate cause: Animals / nature

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Science & Environment

Coronavirus: The race to find the source in wildlife

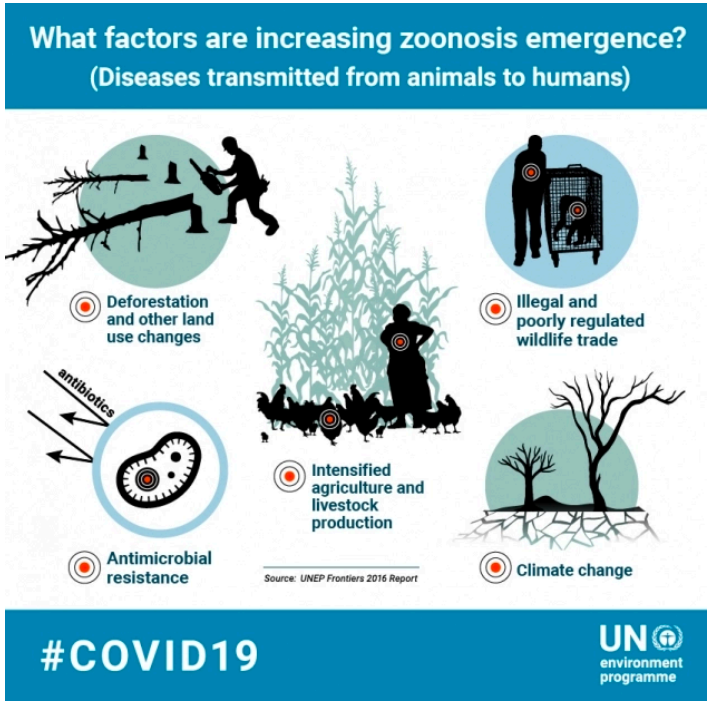
By Helen Briggs
BBC News

25 February 2020 Sha

Coronavirus pandemic

Distal cause: Humans

Coronavirus: 'Nature is sending us a message', says UN environment chief



Counter-narrative cause: Lab

Daily Mail

Beijing now admits that coronavirus DIDN'T start in Wuhan's market... so where DID it come from

1 week ago

Sun

Coronavirus 'did NOT come from animals in Wuhan market' and was 'taken in by someone…

3 weeks ago

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Model shows triangular Caerlaverock Castle

Photograph: HES

A 3D model has been created of a unique Scottish castle. It is a part of the Rae project, named after 19th Century explorer John Rae, which aims to digitally document all of Historic Environment Scotland's sites and objects.

The Caerlaverock Castle is in Dumfries and Galloway. It has a wide moat, twin-towered gatehouse and lofty battlements, making **Caerlaverock a typical medieval stronghold**. It has formidable red sandstone defensive walls – unique in Britain for their triangular shape.

Records show a history of some form of castle on the site dating back to the early 13th Century. For instance, **it was a stronghold of the Maxwell family**, but was captured on a number of occasions. Its siege by Edward I of England in 1300, is commemorated in the contemporary poem, "The Siege of Caerlaverock".

Its fairy-tale appearance means **the castle is also a popular filming location.** Caerlaverock features in The Decoy Bride, a romantic comedy starring David Tennant and Kelly Macdonald.

The images were released to let people continue to enjoy the building's "pleasing geometry" during lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

(A) Control narrative

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Where did the coronavirus come from?

Photograph: WCS

One of the great mysteries of the Covid-19 pandemic is where the new coronavirus came from. Finding the coronavirus source is important for preventing further reinfections and future pandemics.

Scientists believe that the **coronavirus may have come from wild animals**, like bats, but we don't know how it got from bats to people.

It may have **jumped from animals to humans in a market in Wuhan**. Apart from fish and meat, the market also traded wild animals like wolf pups, salamanders and foxes. Different species were crowded together with humans, which may have increased the chances for animal viruses to spread to humans.

In the past 50 years, an **increasing number of infectious diseases have jumped from animals to humans**. For example, Avian flu came from birds, Swine flu came from pigs, and Ebola came from bats.

We may never know with complete certainty which animal was the source of the coronavirus. But currently scientists suggest that wild animals are most likely to be responsible for the source of the Covid-19 pandemic.

(B) Animal-Cause (AC) narrative

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Our destruction of nature may be responsible for animal viruses spreadi to humans. Humans intrude into wild nature by poaching and trading wildlife, farming, logging, mining, and road building. Such intrusions are increasing due to the production and consumption of wild animal and plan products - like pets, bushmeat, leather, palm oil and cocoa - worldwide.

Simply put, the more we intrude into nature, the more likely it is that animal viruses will start infecting us. We may never know with complete certainty which animal was the source of the coronavirus. But our continued destruction of nature suggests the species most responsible for the Covid-19 pandemic is humans.

(C) Animal+Human-Cause (AHC) narrative

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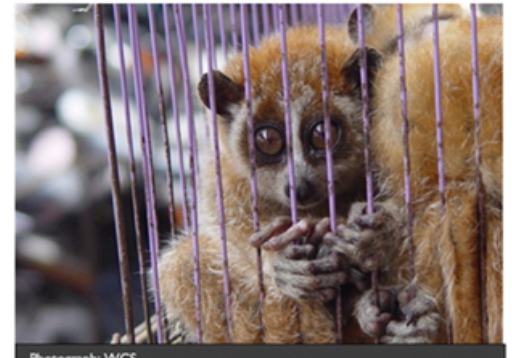
Where did the coronavirus come from?



Photograph: WCS

One of the great mysteries of the Covid-19 pandemic is where the new coronavirus came from. Finding the coronavirus source is important for preventing further reinfections and future pandemics.

US President **Donald Trump suggested the virus came from laboratories in Wuhan**, which the American intelligence is investigating. There is no evidence for this claim currently.

Counter-narrative

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Proximal animal cause

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Distal human cause

(D) Animal+Human+Lab-Cause (AHLC) narrative

We found…

- Animal+Human-Cause narratives increases support for pro-wildlife conservation policies – esp. bans.

- Why? Outrage effect (human vs. nature causes); Stronger feelings that firms and governments are responsible for mitigating extinction (responsibility attribution); and less familiar (more novel).

- Lab counter-narratives or omitting human-cause takes away the effect.

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Linking Human Destruction of Nature to COVID-19 Increases Support for Wildlife Conservation Policies

Ganga Shreedhar & Susana Mourato

Environmental and Resource Economics **76**, 963–999(2020) | Cite this article

Abstract

This paper investigates if narratives varying the cause of the COVID-19 pandemic affects pro-wildlife conservation outcomes. In a pre-registered online experiment (N = 1081), we randomly allocated subjects to either a control group or to one of three narrative treatment groups, each presenting a different likely cause of the COVID-19 outbreak: an animal cause; an animal and human cause (AHC); and an animal, human or lab cause. We found that the AHC narrative elicited significantly greater pro-conservation policy support, especially for bans in the commercial trade of wildlife, when compared to the control group. Possible mechanisms driving this effect are that AHC narratives were less familiar, elicited higher mental and emotional engagement, and induced feelings that firms and governments are responsible for mitigating wildlife extinction.

Ensuing lessons for effective stories…

- Focus on the present (we discount future risks).
  - Current consequences of climate change: pandemics, migration, food security, flooding…
- Frame climate change as an intersectional, cross-sectoral issue (our decisions are influenced by the way information is presented).
  - Not just an environmental issue: Health, economic, labour, racial and justice issue.
  - Gains vs losses: improving health, future-proof employment, revitalising the economy "national reconstruction" post-Covid-19 disruption.
- Communicate where the weight of the evidence lies (we can weight opposing viewpoints equally).
  - Counter-narratives can wipe out effects.

Challenges

- Which stories are impactful – while being true (and not too depressing)? How would you evaluate the impact?
- Is there scope to match the story to the audience? How to diversity and broaden audiences?
- Which modes are impactful – narrative, dialectical, interactive? Theatre, dance, illustrative and visual?
- How to recognise and counter false narratives?

Thank you!