

Myths and Misconceptions of Solar Energy: Communicating Solar Energy (Part 2)

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Hugo Lucas Porta Hello, ladies and gentlemen. I'm very happy to welcome you to today's lecture. This lecture is the second part on solar myths, and it is focused on the best practices and communication for the debunking the myths. I would like to thank International Solar Alliance and the Clean Energy Solutions Center who facilitate this webinar series. Some background for me. Before I joined Factor in 2010, I had been director for policy and finance at the International Renewable Energy Agency, IRENA. I was responsible for the Coalition for Action project at IRENA aimed to increase [inaudible] of renewable energy by improving communication. Previously, I was a Spanish civil servant, I had been involved in many national and European regulations for the promotion of renewable energies and energy efficiency.

This training is part of Module 6 and socio-economic aspects of solar energy, and focuses on debunking the solar myths. In this module, we will always start with a brief description on debunking the solar myths. Afterward, we will jump into the main body of the presentation and the best practices to communicate the new [inaudible] in general and solar, in particular. Don't forget at the end of the presentation, you will be given a chance to test your knowledge with a little quiz. The learning objective which this module aims to provide can be divided into two: best practices in debunking the renewable myths, and best practices in renewable energies.

A common misconception about the myths is the notion that removing its influence is as simple as packing more information into people's heads. This approach assumes that public misperception translates to a lack of knowledge and that the solution is more information [inaudible] communication is known as the information deficit model, but that model is wrong. People

don't process information as simply as a hard drive downloading data. Refuting misinformation involves dealing with complex cognitive processes. To successfully impart knowledge, communicators need to understand how people process information, how they modify data system knowledge, and how or why _____ have the ability to think rationally. It's not just people think that matters, but how they think. There is also an added complication. Not only is misinformation difficult to remove, debunking a myth can actually strengthen it in people's minds. Several different backfire effects have been observed, arising from making myths more familiar for providing too many arguments, or from providing evidence that threatens one's worldview. In communication bear in mind the importance of the swing vote in the in the general population. Some will never support renewable energy, some will always do campaigns can affect most the views of those who remain undecided, or can move those already in favor of taking action.

The main body of this module is divided in two parts. In the first one, we will present the best practices on debunking the myths, and, the second one, we will put the focus on complete communication practices and communication campaigns that will support us in debunking the solar myths. But, first, I would like to review some of the concepts that we have already explained in the previous part, in the first part, on what is a myth, what is a public concern, and what are the misconceptions. As discussed in the previous lecture on solar myths, public concepts on solar energy can primarily classify into two groups: those which may be legitimate to address, and those based on misconceptions about _____. Legitimate concerns, even [inaudible] energy can support mitigation of _____ environmental and social impacts originated from conventional energy production and consumption. It is still important to pinpoint that _____ deployment may also generate negative impacts [inaudible]. This is the case, for instance, of [inaudible] deployment or rooftop PV with batteries, how we are going to handle the end-of-life of this equipment. This legitimate concern has to be addressed differently than the myths, and very important that we address this legitimate concern.

Misconception or myths is a view or an opinion based on false understanding, or interpretation of a particular phenomenon. The basis of this group of [inaudible] can be further distinguished between an intentional misinterpretation and an intentional misinformation. An intentional misinterpretation is likely a result of knowledge gap, which may be arising when solar energy is not communicated properly to the public [inaudible] in quality or amount of information. People may believe low-quality information from a non-professional and unreliable sources, which may look relatively easy or convenient to understand what [inaudible] information may be communicated in an unclear or unnecessarily complex way to the audience so that they cannot or are not willing to take it. Misconceptions on solar energy [inaudible] intentional misinformation, which may be provided by vested interests who create [inaudible] and stories about misleading scientific evidence. They may do cherry-picking of evidence while not [inaudible] a full spectrum of facts, extensive efforts for proliferating false claims [inaudible] could be [inaudible] in decision-making.

Debunking the myth is problematic. [Inaudible] any effort to debunk misinformation can [inaudible] bring forth the very [inaudible] one seeks to correct. To avoid these backfire effects [inaudible]. First, the [inaudible] must focus on core facts rather than the myths to avoid the misinformation becoming more familiar. Second, any mention of a myth should be preceded by a specific warning to notify the reader that the upcoming information is false. Finally, the [inaudible] should include alternative explanations that account for important qualities in the [inaudible] misinformation. If we don't follow this advice, then we could reinforce the myth, we could [inaudible] one of the three main backfire effects: familiarity, overkill, and worldview backfire effect. With regard to familiarity backfire effect, when a myth is referred in the communication material [inaudible] for debunking, the reader may become even more familiar with it, reinforcing that [inaudible] belief. The [inaudible] and the content of the material could be better focused on facts, while having the reference [inaudible] embedded within the facts or providing an early warning about the falseness of the myth before [inaudible].

Overkill backfire effect. A simple myth [inaudible] may be [inaudible] more attractive for the reader than overly-complicated evidence or an overwhelming amount of fact. A solution is to keep the content short and easy to read using simple language and select information with graphics.

Worldview backfire effect. For people who have a strong belief that [inaudible] of content [inaudible] may [inaudible] even more. [Inaudible] information makes people feel good and more receptive to messages that otherwise would be [inaudible]. One of the solutions is to frame the conveyed information that are less provocative or threatening to the views of the recipient. Otherwise, it could be better [inaudible] on the majority that those [inaudible] a particular view, rather than [inaudible]. Once the myth is [inaudible] in the recipient's mind, an alternative narrative should immediately replace [inaudible]. It could be better to provide an alternative [inaudible] explanation for why the myth is wrong and why "misinformers" created the myth in the first place.

An effective debunking material requires core facts [inaudible] the facts, not the myths, present only key facts to avoid [inaudible] backfire effects, specific warnings before any mention of myth, as we have already mentioned, not to reinforce these myths with the backfire effect, alternative explanation [inaudible] any gaps left by the debunking myth to be filled. This may be achieved by providing an alternative [inaudible] explanation for why the myth is wrong, and [inaudible] why the misinformers prompted the myth in the first place. [Inaudible] core facts should be displayed graphically, if possible.

On the slide, we have an example on debunking the myths. Related on the meter, there is no [inaudible] consensus about manmade global warming because [inaudible] science [inaudible] is stating that there is no evidence that human activity [inaudible]. In this material for debunking the myths, in the very first beginning, there is a core fact communicated in our headline: 97 out of 100 climate experts agree humans are causing global warming, so there is

not any reference on the myths here. Secondly, there is more information, also giving core facts more detail for people that want to go into this knowledge, and then the core facts report in opening paragraph flesh it out with additional details. Several independent surveys find 97 per cent of climate scientists who are actively publishing peer-reviewed climate research agree that humans are causing global warming. The main part of the material is the graphic. Core facts are reinforced with the graphic. On the bottom part, we have explicit warning cueing readers that misinformation is coming, and indicating the nature of the misinformation when the myth is quoted. Finally, the gap created by this debunking is how can there be a consensus if 35 scientific dissent? This gap is filled by explaining that almost all the scientists are not climate scientists.

[Inaudible] of renewable energy increasingly recognize the importance of addressing public [inaudible] and [inaudible] misconceptions surrounding renewable energy technology [inaudible] to ensure there is [inaudible] and faster deployment, [inaudible] communication initiative to improve public awareness and disseminate relevant evidence have already been [inaudible] out by the best advocates, including renewable energy manufacturers, utilities [inaudible], public [inaudible] society, and communities. In this slide, you will find some recent [inaudible] and material to address and debunk the solar myths. It is apparent that the majority of the [inaudible] efforts on debunking the myths on solar energy target improving [inaudible] of the general level from the [inaudible]. The public [inaudible] dissemination of information and messages. Their efforts range from [inaudible] positive images of solar technologies to responding to the common content by publications of Q&A format information. The conveyed information or message [inaudible] content to summarize more technical knowledge. While such communication essentially tend to flow one way from expert to the unspecified audience, some recent initiative adopt a more interactive approach leveraging the [inaudible] of multimedia tools. For instance, [inaudible] social network [inaudible] Facebook or Twitter.

A review of the [inaudible] on assisting debunking the myth initiative, including those presented in this lecture, best identify the pitfalls they fell into debunking the myths, particularly [inaudible] factors that they have seemingly undermanaged the success in renewable energy knowledge preparation and dissemination public concerns are as follows.

Efforts emphasized on myths, not on legitimate worries. There are many questions on [inaudible] electricity prices or final disposal of batteries and systems that really need to be focus and responding to public concerns. Whereas a lot of our efforts have been put in emphasizing the clean, natural renewable energy, the technology that renewable energy experts tend to discount some important concerns that may be legitimate for the public [inaudible]. Target audience is unclear. The majority of the efforts to disseminate relevant information cover the general audience with [inaudible] generic content, while the aspect of market and community acceptance are largely neglected. Public concerns over renewable energy development at a

specific location cannot always be mediated by the arguments of generic [inaudible] and socio and economic benefits.

Overlapping incohesive efforts. The renewable energy community often fails to represent themselves in a unique [inaudible] efforts have been not only [inaudible], but also overlapping. Research findings quoted in communication materials are even sometimes contradicting. Lack in knowledge relevant to developing countries [inaudible] the developing nation are experiencing a number of implementation challenges in renewable energy deployment that require high-level expertise to overcome. Most knowledge and experience provided by the advocates come from the [inaudible]. It is not easy [inaudible] for understanding and improving [inaudible] for developing nation, for instance, on solar home systems. Media engagement is poor. Even if the same fact is presented, two totally different stories can be reached, one in favor of renewable energy and the other against, depending on how journalists interpret it. Those are called [inaudible]. Advocates have not [inaudible] the opportunities to engage and help media to see the facts in a balanced manner, as well as to provide information and responses quickly at the right time. Opposition is underestimated. The [inaudible] energy industry have [inaudible] by discounting the potential of renewable energy and, thus, stimulating anti-renewal sentiments upon the public [inaudible]. They may emphasize the aspects of renewable energy which [inaudible] or are still in development, while effectively taking advantage of their [inaudible] renewable energy by claiming the cleanest of conventional [inaudible].

The second part of the lecture presents the findings on best practices for communicating renewables. Many governments and other stakeholders have developed communication strategies to improve understanding about renewable energy and communicate facts relating to renewable energy technologies. [Inaudible] of good practices in communication for renewables can be found [inaudible] communication [inaudible] are not the norm. We will now present the best practices in designing and implementing a communication campaign [inaudible].

Partnering and finance. Partnerships broaden the reach of communication and reduce costs, which is crucial in the context of renewable energy communications, which tend to have limited funding. Cooperating with likeminded institutions can increase human and financial resources available for the campaign, which in turn has the possibility of improving its design, reach, and overall effectiveness while simultaneously reducing cost burdens for those involved. Partnering is critical. There is a lack of a unique voice for the solar sector.

Pre-campaign research. Research builds in-depth understanding of target audiences and provides insights into how best to communicate with them, producing more effective communication. Better preparation can also reduce the costs.

Definition of objectives. A renewable energy campaign will only be as targeted, measurable, and successful as its objectives allow it to be. Precise and clearly-defined campaign objectives have a number of advantages. First,

they facilitate a more accurate evaluation of a strategy later on – broad goals, such as that of awareness-raising, are difficult to measure. Second, they generate more precise definitions of target audiences, in turn enhancing a campaign's specific prospects of success, and, finally, carefully defined objectives help the development of tailoring messages needed to convince specific groups.

Time planning and duration. Timing is everything for renewable energy companies. Appropriate timing and duration are keys to a campaign being perceived as relevant by its target audience. Longer campaigns are able to build effective distribution network for their messages.

Audience definition and segmentation. The beliefs, values, needs, the size, and interpretation of renewable energy and the deployment of renewable energy technologies vary widely between [inaudible]. A core principle of marketing is that different people respond differently to how information is presented. More successful communication campaigns are the ones with highly-defined target audiences. Careful identification and [inaudible] of core audiences can avoid wasting time and money on groups and [inaudible] already convinced of the campaign's objectives. [Inaudible] the importance of the swing vote in general population. Some will never support renewable energy; some will always do. Campaigns can affect most the views of those who remain undecided. In addition to addressing the undecided [inaudible] communication campaigns, an important factor is to focus on influencers and opinion leaders, [inaudible] who have the power to bring about change.

Campaign messaging. The most important guiding principles for the development of messaging include messages must be personally relevant and linked to audience concerns to maximize attention levels. Messages provoking emotional responses tend to be more memorable and effective. Messages should motivate individuals to become actively cognitively engaged by means of unusual, unfamiliar and novel presentation of content. Messages should be short, simple, and salient; detailed technical and factual information is less important. Individuals do not make classically rational decisions, which should be taken into account when formulating messages. Individuals tend to value fairness and act pro-socially, particularly if free-riding can be minimized.

Best practices in messaging is also to use behavioral economics. Behavioral economics uses the insights from psychology to increase the [inaudible] of economics and offers insights into how people interpret and respond to information [inaudible]. Individuals have a strong bias against change, and prefer [inaudible] inaction over [inaudible] action. Emphasize in communication on the cost of inaction will be a root to overcoming the [inaudible] bias by emphasizing how harmful inaction can be.

The endowment effect. Individuals attach extra value to goods they already own or services they already receive, and perceive the value of [inaudible] higher if they possess it than if they do not. People with a sense of ownership of local renewable energy resources will value them more highly than those who do not, which may reduce resistance to renewable energy deployment.

Loss [inaudible]. Individuals are more strongly [inaudible] loss than [inaudible] gain. Increased deployment of renewable energy is often [inaudible] with loss of [inaudible] energy and loss of [inaudible], both of which may feed into [inaudible] and foster resistance to renewable energy.

[Inaudible] discount. People are farsighted when planning [inaudible] benefit of [inaudible], but make shortsighted decision if [inaudible] or benefits are emitted. Even the benefit of mitigation climate change will be seen in the [inaudible], and raising energy costs are an immediate cost communicated [inaudible] carefully consider how to frame [inaudible] by focusing on the immediate benefits or reduced reliance on fossil fuels [inaudible] energy security.

[Inaudible] behavior and fairness. Individuals tend to value fairness and [inaudible] raising awareness about the positive action of [inaudible] in relation to renewable energy [inaudible] in this regard.

[Inaudible] campaign creatives. Aiming only to be heard or seen is not enough, particularly in a crowded arena such as energy policy. Renewable energy campaigns must compete with communications about other energy sources, and strive to be remembered and acted upon. Communications messages will be placed into compelling and memorable stories. Simply getting a target audience to hear or see a message is alone challenging, but ensuring they will remember it, let alone absorb it deeply enough to change their perception is another issue altogether.

Campaign channels. Efforts must be made to match audience segments identified as particularly relevant to renewable energy deployment with communications channels they personally value and are exposed to. Successful campaigns should identify or create distribution networks for content, ensuring that each channel is well matched to its intended audience. Poorly functioning mechanisms for distribution content, or the content not being sufficiently compelling to generate impact, resulted in a lack of interest, particularly in some web-based campaigns.

Evaluation. Learning from your mistakes is only an option if you know what mistakes were made. Evaluating communications practices allows organizations to assess whether the communications measures have been successful in meeting their defined objectives, and will provide information that will allow communications strategies to be refined in the future. An important shortcoming of many campaigns is that original objectives were not well defined, so it was difficult to define success for the campaigns. Additionally, evaluations are often not budgeted for, and, therefore, were not carried out.

Proactive response to negative media coverage. There are many misconceptions and negative opinions expressed about renewable energy in the media, and this should be addressed to enhance understanding and perceptions of renewable energy. It was generally observed that the negative media campaigns which have created the need for renewable energy communications activism in some national contexts were never addressed

directly. Renewable energy communications should actively engage with individuals – journalists and politicians – and institutions that publish falsehoods in open [inaudible].

Concluding remarks. We can now conclude that best practices to debunk the solar myths are avoid reinforcing the myths; focus on facts on benefits and advantages; core facts should be presented visually; target the undecided majority rather than unswayable minority; publish arguments according to level of audience; engage specialized media and opinion leaders in briefings and dialogue; finally, proactively participate in public debates.

At this point, we come to the end of the second lecture in debunking the myths. I would like to thank you for your attention. You are invited to test your understanding of the content in the following [inaudible]. Thank you.

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