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"Strategic Communication" for the Sustainable Climate Action

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Abstract

In the 6th IPCC report, the climate crisis has now been proven as a scientific fact. As such, many international and social conflicts are also appearing. Carbon neutrality can be contributed by science and technology. But what leads to people's climate action is another area of discussion. This paper is a discussion from the perspective of communication studies for a sustainable climate action. The sustainable climate action requires well-designed deliberation sphere and procedures for bringing people to the public and how to keep them engaged.

Keywords: Climate Change; Strategic Communication; Climate Action; Carbon neutrality

Abbreviations: SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals; UN: United Nations; MDGs: Millennium Development Goals

Introduction

A book entitled "How to Avoid a Climate Disaster" has recently emerged as a bestseller. In it, the author Bill Gates offers breakthrough solutions for climate change. He also stresses that climate change is no longer a danger but a disaster [1]. However, there was someone who already foresaw the climate disaster from a scientific view three decades ago. That person is the renowned Atmospheric scientist, Richard Anthes. He argued that overpopulation, unsustainable economic growth, hunger and poverty, and environmental destruction are the four disasters that the global society is facing [2].

Overpopulation started in the 1900s, when the global population grew exponentially. Subsequently, a noticeable increase of energy usage and depletion of resources was inevitable. The first report by the Rome Club, "The Limits to Growth" [3], forecasted early on that economic growth is not sustainable. Approximately 1.1 billion people are currently living in extreme poverty, suffering from hunger and destitution. That means that one out of six people are dying of starvation and poverty. Environmental destruction is a result of human activities. Alongside climate change, unprecedented natural disasters such as typhoons and tsunamis are on the rise. Biodiversity is in serious decline due to the extinction of species.

Many scientists are publishing research results about the seriousness of climate change as much as overpopulation. It is now agreed that climate change will have negative consequences for the survival of all mankind [4]. International communities such as UN agencies, EU, World Bank are also responding immediately to the problem. The United Nations (UN) has announced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In the SDGs, 'Climate Action' was set as the 13th goal. And the Paris Climate Agreement adopted in 2015 has emphasized the importance of education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and cooperation at all levels on the climate change topics addressed in the Agreement [5].

As such, in order to solve the problem of climate change, various stakeholders are required to make joint efforts. European and international NGOs have been dealing with this issue in fierce debate. They are also demonstrating and campaigning to urge governments and industries to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts [6,7].

Climate crisis, risk society, and reflective practice in science

The modern knowledge society is exposed to a world where time and space have become dramatically shortened and compressed (Figure 1). Science and technology are developing at an equally rapid speed. Such developments have without doubt benefited our lives. Every day we face a flood of civilization full

of new scientific theories and innovations. The development of science and technology overwhelm us with new knowledge and information. We need not count the number of scientists and technicians, which has increased tens of times in the past century, to recognize this. Our society and our lives are now that much more complicated.

Figure 1: The Main Contents of the Paris Agreement [8].

We are defenselessly exposed to the results of climate change (whether it be negative or positive). Innovative climate solutions to prevent danger are continuously offered, like those by Bill Gates or scientists. But a question follows this statement. Are science and the progress of technology not at all responsible for this dire situation? What about the desire of human beings and the development that followed? We must examine the dangers of climate change from this context. Problems like climate change require a fundamental reflection by the entire global society [8]. We are, in the words of German Sociologist Ulrich Beck, a "Risk Society." It is now high time that we contemplate on modern science and discuss reflective practice in science.

Centuries ago, people at least understood how the wagon they made or used worked. They probably tried various things with the wagon to make it easier to maneuver - perhaps trying to tie it to a horse. Another question comes up, then. How many people in contemporary society actually understand how their smartphones, their inseparable devices, work? In this world where time and place seem to have become irrelevant, how much knowledge, outside the circles of experts, have we then accumulated compared to the past? Excess always seems to be the problem. The explosion of communication and networks make us focus on social arguments rather than the essence of a problem. Perhaps that is why we believe that this society is full of danger. Thus, a contemplative attitude and communication are more important than ever. Communicating through a reflective practice of science allows us to get closer to an ecological approach. We cannot think and act from an ecological approach without being exposed to the problem. And therefore, the most basic step towards climate action is becoming aware of the problem. Only after we are exposed to the problem can we focus our attention, and only then can we enter the cognitive process of solving the problem.

Carbon neutrality and effective communication for breakthroughs

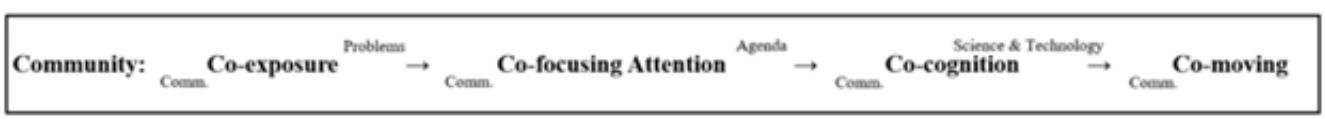

Figure 2: Public Engagement with a Problem or an Issue Relative to Science (PEP/IS) Model [10].

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Carbon neutrality and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) have become hot potatoes throughout our society lately. They are at the same time matters of governmental policy and business management. The two keywords not only greatly increased global communication and numerous networks, but they also became political and economic issues. As such, even Bill Gates is striving to solve the problem (Figure 2).

Leading citizens to climate action through a "strategic communication" is just as important as political slogans or stressing economic profit [9]. The environmental pollution, especially air problem, is a global challenge that not only threatens public health, but also takes away lives. Strategic communication, in other words, public relations, is an essential way of tackling air pollution and managing the risks involved.

As discussed, addressing the challenge of climate change requires international collaboration based on full implementation of policy on global agenda, openness, mutual solidarity, and cooperation. And engaging global citizens into the public sphere requires the building of a sense of collectivity and duty on achieving climate mitigation. Strategies and policies on an international scale that are based on the theoretical framework (Behavior Procedure Model) and focus on leading citizens into the mature and unified collectivity during the observance of the UN International Days related the Climate and Environment as the Environment, Water, Clean Air, etc. are crucial.

It we are to urge people to act on climate change, we need to expose them to accurate and true information. This stage is necessary to move on to the next step when the targeted public start to pay attention to the problem before moving on to solve the problem. By appropriately going through each stage of the communication process, finding solutions to the problem of climate change is possible. Song et al. argue for the public engagement for the carbon neutrality [11]. "Now is the time when we need the wisdom to identify problems together and collaborate instead of focusing on competition and conflicts for the long-lasting journey toward the carbon neutrality."

Conclusion

Notably, many high-growth developing countries have inevitably found itself at the crossroad between economic growth and environmental protection, and has even been observed to be pursuing a passive response to the environmental pollutions. The key communication strategies are supported by the three goals, which include: expanding existing communities and building a new collectivity, supporting international solidarity and individual member state activities, and implementing systems and structures.

In conclusion, effective communication must be precedented to bring out climate action for carbon neutrality [12]. Now it needs to separate problems from agenda and issues. Then the appropriate management becomes possible. It is important that we find the right target public and communication goals that must be met. Let us focus not on speed but on "correctness," deploying a strategic communication that could solve the civil communities' problems. If so, we will be able to promote the breakthrough climate solutions that Bill Gates proposed.

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