

Television weathercasters as science communicators: an examination of the advantages of accessing these specialists and explaining why a gender gap persists

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An important but often overlooked aspect of science communication is the potential role television weathercasters may perform. In some cases these specialists may be the ONLY source of scientific information that viewers encounter on a regular basis. Audience research indicates that the weathercast is the most- watched part of the local newscast and the primary reason people choose a local news product. But very little is known about the qualifications of weathercasters as a group and their inclinations as individuals to educate viewers about scientific topics. In this survey, one of the largest ever conducted about television weather, many weathercasters say their programs are appropriate venues for teaching their audiences about science, but not all of them are equally prepared or willing to do so. This research specifically analyzed weathercasters' knowledge, and attitudes and beliefs about climate change, and offers strategies for working with these highly visible scientists about this important global topic.

One perplexing discovery is that women comprise an historically small number of TV weathercasters—a problematic situation in an increasingly diverse world. Possible factors behind the persistence of this gender gap and ideas to mitigate the situation are also considered.

The ultimate goal of this research then is to enhance science communication by creating synergistic relationships with some of the most influential and visible science communicators in modern media—TV weathercasters.