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Visualizing climate change through the eyes of newspaper cartoonists: Five seconds to educate the reader of long term environmental problems

In an increasing global and interdependent world, the visual is assuming greater importance in public opinion and policy decisions than traditional words or text. This perspective is apparent in global audiences observing political conflicts, pandemic diseases, refugee migrations, natural and human-induced disasters, Google, the WWW and social media are playing key roles in informing leaders and citizens worldwide. Global environmental news reports and commentators regularly inform local, regional and global media audiences using photographs about major earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, disease outbreaks and anomalous weather events on all continents. Underlying many of the reports are ongoing and unexpected changes in weather and climate. Scientists, government policy groups, and NGOs are among those alerting local and global audiences about these changes and their impacts. Books, articles, conferences and legislation are products of these ongoing discussions and presentations. The geopolitics of the visual is an important dimension in understanding environmental change. Another professional group informing wide groups of informed citizens and leaders are newspaper cartoonists. Their task is to capture the essence of a problem or situation in a single frame or drawing that can be understood in less than five seconds. Their use of familiar images, few or no words are critical in capturing their message and informing viewers. I examined the content (subject matter, themes and images) of 607 international and national cartoons about climate change from 2010-2017 to illustrate both how they graphically depict under problems, assess the current state of the environment and look at resolving persistent problems. A skillful political and environmental cartoonist is able to assess a tangled and complex problem easily and assess how to move forward.

Biography

Stanley D Brunn has wide ranging research interests in human/environmental intersections including political, social, religion, language, urbanization, cyberspace, geographic futures, innovative cartography and creativity. He has published 20 books and written more than 100 articles and chapters over 50 years.

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