

Making the next wave of environmental social science research more useful on the ground

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Some of the challenges to greater impact

- Well-intentioned efforts that don't provide movement actors/community orgs with actionable, relevant insights
- Top-down approaches assume specific power/social dynamics and oftentimes ignore role of self-determination and local ground-truthing
- Undertheorized linkages between communication/engagement/behavior change efforts and desired outcomes
- Experimental research methods can't account for real-world messiness nor sensitivity of interventions to context, heterogeneity within populations
- Mismatched incentives between researchers and practitioners/organizations
- Scalability, feasibility, cost of proposed solutions oftentimes not considered

What do we do about these (and other) challenges?

1) Clarity of goals and desired outcomes

Intentional, practice-driven identification of desired outcomes is fundamental to successful bridging of research and practice

Oftentimes major disconnect in terms of the outcomes we measure in our studies and the things that actually matter and/or can realistically be targeted in the real-world

2) Design interventions that are grounded in practice

Research designs should be guided by what is already being done in the field by community orgs, movement actors, relevant comms platforms/channels

Doesn't mean we can't innovate and try cool new things, but there has to be significant grounding of those tools and approaches in what is realistic, scalable, cost-effective, ethical, and familiar to practitioners

3) Involve practitioners and communities early and often

Deep, meaningful public/organizational engagement throughout campaign and message development is one powerful tool for promoting greater trust and engagement, while also providing really important insight into identifying what will and won't resonate with particular communities

Many existing models to work from that incorporate true collaboration and multidirectional exchange of knowledge, expertise, experience and ideas

4) Recognize and address diversity

People respond to environmental issues in diverse ways and research is clear on need for tailoring comms and engagement efforts

Research can and should be designed to test what works and doesn't work for different groups, expecting heterogeneity of effects

5) Triangulate insights through diverse methods

Reducing reliance on single-method research designs makes robustness and generalizability of research findings significantly stronger in complex domains of behavior

Build and fund interdisciplinary teams that have expertise to ask similar questions using diverse methods

6) Invest in translation and access to findings

Focus on translating research and providing access not only makes existing work more impactful but also positively impacts future research

Researchers and their host institutions have a deep responsibility to make their discoveries useable and broadly accessible

7) Push back against “smallest publishable unit”

Narrow-scope research is sometimes necessary but it is critical not to lose sight of larger context and narratives into which research findings fit

Really important role for integrative, synthesizing research, both within and across disciplines/domains.

Questions & feedback

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