Ethical vetting of group 2’s project

Funding of Swedish climate deniers: where does it come from?
Research project

(...) research aims at finding any possible links or economic ties between the Stockholm Initiative and the oil industry and/or free market think-tanks. Through our research, we also aim to expose to the general public the nexus between the climate denier groups and oil companies.

The first step in this project would be to make a list of key figures of the Stockholm Initiative and learn about their history in propagating the ideas of climate denial. This would then be followed by two of our team members conducting in-depth interviews with these “selected” climate deniers to know the arguments they put forth to support their case. (...
Ethical problems

- No control group to compare results (research groups that are funded by oil companies that are not climate change deniers?)
- Targeting only climate change research groups funded by oil companies
- Sample size too small (only 3-4 people proposed)
- The questionnaire is not fully described so we can't make a full ethical judgment
- No evidence is given that the conclusions can be drawn from the proposed method (other experiment with similar type of deduction from the questions)
- Bypassing peer review and publish the results directly on a newspaper
What to do? -- Publish the results as is

- **Researchers**
  - They get to do the research they want
  - High impact results with faulty methodology (increase or decrease in reputation)
- **Interviewees**
  - Negative impact in their professional and possible private life
- **General public**
  - Short-term: Decrease influence of climate change deniers
  - Long-term: Potential increased influence of climate change deniers (results are easy to attack)
- **Scientific community**
  - Decrease publications denying climate change
  - Could impact the public's trust in scientific results
- **University**
  - Increase media exposure and publicity
  - Might acquire a bad reputation
What to do? -- Increase and diversify the sample

- **Researchers**
  - Requires more time (and funding)
  - Results are more significant
- **Interviewees**
  - Less exposure (due to proper anonymization)
  - Negative impact on their professional life
- **General public**
  - Message of the researchers might be diluted
  - Information published is more solid
- **Scientific community**
  - Better validated research
- **University**
  - Increase media exposure and publicity
  - Research is more expensive
What to do? -- Don’t disclose the interviews

- **Researchers**
  - Easy to make results accessible
  - Community can’t validate their results
- **Interviewees**
  - Less exposure
- **General public**
  - Decrease influence of climate change deniers
  - Less impact on climate change deniers due to problems with the research quality
- **Scientific community**
  - Ethical integrity preserved
  - No way to validate results
- **University**
  - Increase media exposure and publicity
What to do? -- Validate where money comes from

- **Researchers**
  - Results are better validated
  - Takes more time

- **Interviewees**
  - Negative impact in their professional and possible private life

- **General public**
  - Decrease influence of climate change deniers

- **Scientific community**
  - Reduced biased research
  - Scare away possible sources of funding

- **University**
  - Decrease influence of climate change deniers
What to do -- Don’t publish the research

- **Researchers**
  - The research is not conducted

- **Interviewees**
  - No impact

- **General public**
  - Doesn’t encourage misconceptions
  - The public doesn’t get potentially essential information

- **Scientific community**
  - Important information is not published

- **University**
  - No impact
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publish as it is</th>
<th>Researchers</th>
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Final decision

- We recommend the project to **NOT** be conducted

- Identified problems of the research proposal:
  - Small sample size; fact deduction from questionnaire not clear; bypassing peer review
  - The results of this project could potentially be very harmful for the involved individuals and requires therefore high standards in the proposed methodology

- Project targets a very specific group
  - Exposé on a particular institution
  - Project seems to be investigative journalism and not a research project