

Influence of Media Narratives on Climate Change Perception and Policy Action

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Abstract

This study investigated how media narratives coalesce with public understanding of climate change and how this nexus autonomously or dependently affects policy formulation. Through a comparative analysis of about two decades of coverage, the investigation traced how framing devices map the salience of climate phenomena, the resulting societal effects, and the translation of both into or away from affirmative legislative cycles. Utilising a library-oriented, multi-language archive, the methodology interwove framing and agenda-setting inquiry with peer-reviewed journals, meta-analyses, grey literature, and datasets from both content analysis and semi-structured interviews. Findings revealed that portrayals centred on cataclysmic thresholds typically evoked either hyper-vigilant maladaptation or a dispassionate paralysis, while accounts qualifying that danger with achievable mitigation milestones fostered citizenship-engaged persistence. Ideological contamination of the coverage, especially sensationalised partisanship that discretely reframed findings, corrupted consensus framing and attenuated socio-political solidarity. The report therefore affirmed that factually layered and disaggregated accounts, communicating uncertainty in proportion to its scientific weighting, are critical to sustaining a granular public and legislative discourse. Recommendations underscore the imperative of systematic media literacy curricula, the institutional embedding of journalist-academic collaboration on climate datasets, and policy-regulatory frameworks that reward transparent and data-rich climate reporting in conscious civic awareness-building.

Keywords: Climate Change, Media Narratives, Public Perception, Policy Response.

Introduction

Climate change has emerged as perhaps the foremost existential challenge confronting humanity, perturbing natural systems, economic frameworks, and daily existence in every corner of the planet. Public comprehension of the phenomenon, as well as the policy choices that emerge in legislative arenas, are frequently mediated by the narrative strategies employed by the press. News organisations are therefore pivotal in shaping societal perception, mobilising political action, and cultivating informed public participation. The particular framings that journalists select when reporting on climate dynamics materially affect the mental models through which citizens understand the crisis and, consequently, the forms of mobilisation that follow (Chen, 2024). Many journalists invoke scientific consensus as a bulwark for accuracy; nonetheless, editorial interventions sometimes concomitantly introduce partisan signals, compressing complex facts into reductive storylines. Such hybrid messaging may engender interpretive dissonance and, in some cases, emotional disengagement. O'Brien (2024) demonstrates that segments of the public frequently retreat from climate coverage, perceiving the deluge of adverse information as both unmanageable and beyond personal influence. In contrast, narratives that foreground feasible and already-tested interventions while contextualising their societal and political viability tend to energise audiences and increase participation in relevant programmes and policies Gustafson, Leiserowitz and Maibach (2020).

The proliferation of social media, in particular platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, has reconfigured the media landscape, permitting instantaneous dissemination yet simultaneously attenuating the barriers to misinformation. The interplay of viral content, algorithmic amplification, and the public appetite for salient but abbreviated messages raises critical questions about the reliability of climate information that circulates in a highly mediated environment (Salama & Aboukoura, 2021). The integration of established and online media channels affords both new openings and persistent difficulties for the communication of climate science. Each medium mandates a deliberative strategy to preserve both credibility and pedagogical efficacy.

Coverage of climate change has certainly evolved. During the early years of the public debate, journalists frequently prioritised dissenting voices, thereby magnifying unrepresentative uncertainty. By the last decade, left-leaning formats and public-service outlets generally aligned more firmly with the scientific consensus (Ruiu, 2020). In contrast, many right-leaning formats persist in minimising or contesting anthropogenic change, thereby mirroring and reinforcing the enduring ideological fractures in democratic conversation (Tuitjer & Dirksmeier, 2021).

News narratives do not emerge in a factual vacuum, but are conditioned by the intersecting pressures of the political arena, the media marketplace, and prevailing cultural symbols. In the British context, popular tabloids routinely recast climate topics so as to resonate with the political sensibilities and economic anxieties of their core readership, thereby differentiating class-based understandings of the hazard (Boykoff, 2008). These selective framings do not remain academic curiosities; they directly condition both public attitudes and legislative momentum.

Coverage can in turn energise policy contestation. During the peak of the UK protest campaigns of 2018 and 2019, heightened journalistic focus catapulted climate policy into the centre of political negotiation (Westlake & Willis, 2023). Yet the practice of false balance, granting equivalent airtime to scientifically peripheral opinions undermines collective comprehension and skews public decision-making. Misleading narratives can delay decisive action and erode public confidence.

As climate disruptions affect neighbouring communities as well as worldwide networks, media accounts must capture this layered complexity. Coverage of watershed events, most notably Conference of the Parties meetings, can sharpen civic awareness and reposition political agendas. This study therefore examines those circulation dynamics and suggests editorial enhancements that can broaden public grasp and trigger more vigorous climate policy.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To dissect the processes through which journalistic narratives shape public understanding of climate change, concentrating on the converging roles of frame selection, imagery, and metaphor in forming shared societal beliefs.
- ii. To assess the reverberations of these narratives on climate policy trajectories, tracing the correspondence between media coverage and subsequent political discourse and policy recalibrations.

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

Framing Theory examines how the strategic highlighting of particular facets of a topic shapes audience understanding and subsequent conduct. When applied to climate change communication, the theory reveals the mechanisms through which journalistic and policy discourses privilege specific angles while suppressing alternative ones. Thus, a briefing that labels climate change a “crisis” or “emergency” not only alters the lexical field but also induces a sharper, more urgent perception of the need for behavioural and policy response.

Yet the absence of specific, feasible responses risks engendering anxiety or passivity (O’Brien, 2024). The social reception of climate data thus hinges on the degree to which each framing technique empowers the audience to conceive of progressive steps. Simultaneously, the same framing choices determine the legitimacy assigned to different authorities; the comparative credence granted to climate scientists, policy entrepreneurs, or organised scepticism hinges on the structures of access and amplification chosen by newsrooms. Prioritisation of dissenting voices, or of debates stylised for conflict, can create the misleading impression that scientific agreement is itself contestable, and that the policy stakes retain uncertainty.

Framing further conditions the presentation of policy instruments. If emission reduction is characterised as prohibitively expensive or as guaranteed failure, the electorate recoils. Conversely, if measures are depicted as feasible and as cognate to public interests accompanied by probabilistic evidence, then support rises. This indicates that framing strategies are not mere rhetorical accessories; rather, they function as intervening variables mediating the empirical effects of scientific discovery upon collective behaviour.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting Theory, as articulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that the media do not dictate the contents of opinion but rather the lexicon upon which opinion is formed. This proposition is especially salient for climate change, where the range of possible cognitions is vast and the contingencies of environmental, cultural, and technological change perpetually evolving. Media focus thus orders issues in the public and institutional mind, shifting concern from one hazard or mitigation pathway to another in correspondence with journalistic salience. The direct consequence is that policymakers are compelled to respond to the priorities the media create, rather than to the environmental data in isolation Dahal, Kumar and Li (2022).

When the media spotlight grows brighter around pivotal climate gatherings, think COP conferences, public backing for climate policies tends to expand (Feldman et al., 2014). The media elevates these summits to critical discursive space because they are presented as imminent and consequential.

The same agenda-setting logic reappears when journalists amplify statements from recognised elites, whether those statements take the form of official speeches or coordinated demonstrations. In the United Kingdom, Westlake and Willis (2023) recorded that climate movements between 2018 and 2019 received dominant reporting, realigning both civic discourse and parliamentary language towards more ambitious emission-reduction pledges. When viewed in combination, these theoretical frames illuminate the processes by which the media shapes both the population’s interpretations of climate change and the pace of governmental response.

Conceptual Review

Media Narratives

Media narratives refer to the engineered accounts and interpretive frames that media institutions employ to render climate change visible to the public (Dahal et al., 2022). These accounts synthesize empirical evidence, emotional cues, ideological predispositions, and policy preferences, ultimately framing the phenomenon in ways that deterministically shape reception. Ruiu (2021) observes that the framing of narratives, whether centred on immediate catastrophe or on proactive trajectories has the capacity to induce either widespread anxiety or prolonged civic involvement, contingent upon which storyline prevails.

Certain discursive frames construe climate change solely as an omnipresent planetary jeopardy. Such portrayals can succeed in magnifying public notice, yet they may induce resignation in audiences when they refrain from specifying concrete, practicable mitigation paths (O'Brien, 2024). By contrast, reconstructions that spotlight geographically circumscribed changes or that accentuate individual agency tend consistently to generate more vigorous participatory engagement.

Media platform features further delimit narrative mould and audience uptake. Print, terrestrial, and digital environments each impose contrasting interpretive scaffolding. Within the United Kingdom, tabloid newspapers have come under sustained critique for fostering scepticism or for magnifying hazard through sensational pairing, whereas centre-left equivalents typically favour a more empirically grounded rhetoric, albeit occasionally punctuated by alarmist overtones (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004).

At the bottom, prevailing journalistic principles, especially the preference for balanced presentation may entail unintended repercussions. When the norm of balance confers equivalent prominence to the well-established scientific consensus and to either marginal or non-empirical dissent, the ensuing ambivalence misdirects public understanding by elevating scepticism to a position that appears, misinformedly, as an equal counter to scientific accord.

Effective media storytelling must finely calibrate emotional resonance against the imperative of factual accuracy. When executed skillfully, such narratives can compress the distance between intricate scientific data and lay comprehension, thereby galvanising considered public response Effrosynidis, Sylaios & Tyagi (2022).

Public perception comprises individuals' interpretations, affective responses, and behavioural inclinations regarding climate change, and is transparently shaped by media framing. Threat-centric narratives routinely provoke fear, anxiety, and a paralyzing sense of vulnerability, particularly when audiences perceive themselves as powerless to influence the trajectory (O'Brien, 2024).

By contrast, accounts that foreground communal mobilization, shared moral obligation, and concrete, achievable measures cultivate curiosity and participation. Tuitjer and Dirksmeier (2021) document that storytelling focused on collective agency, disseminated notably through social media, correlates with statistically significant, pro-environmental behavioural change.

Cultural predisposition and partisan identification further mediate climate interpretation. In the UK, working-class readership of tabloid periodicals is routinely confronted with framing that classifies climate change primarily as an economic concern, thereby hollowing out its environmental dimension (Boykoff, 2008). Such reframing not only sways belief but also predisposes readers against the consequential policy measures.

While social media have democratized climate information access, they have paradoxically weakened the evidentiary filter, accelerating the spread of misinformation.

Although users can readily circulate concerns and observations, platforms like Twitter tend to magnify sensational or misrepresented information, complicating the public's ability to make informed assessments. For science communicators, the challenge lies in integrating robust, accurate data with emotionally charged narratives, thereby fortifying public trust and fostering substantive participation in dialogue.

Policy Action

Policy action comprises the decisions and legislative measures governments undertake in reaction to climate change. The formulation of these measures is frequently conditioned by public perception of the issue, which, in turn, media coverage strongly mediates.

A pertinent illustration arose in the United Kingdom, where media coverage of climate mobilisations from 2018 to 2019 elevated the salience of the subject on the political agenda. The amplified discourse translated into legislative chambers as parliamentarians announced reinvigorated commitments to environmental measures, the timing and tenor of which traced directly to public sentiment distilled in newspaper headlines and broadcast segments (Westlake & Willis, 2023).

Conversely, negative portrayals, especially from politically conservative outlets, can erode backing for climate-driven legislation. Ruiu (2021) demonstrates that when climate measures are portrayed as excessive financial burdens, public preference diminishes, most markedly among right-leaning constituencies. The resulting attenuation can delay or even judicially rescind the enactment of enforceable standards.

Global spectacles such as the COP negotiations further corroborate the mediating role of coverage; diplomatic breakthroughs frequently correlate with escalated media scrutiny, which, by crystallising public expectation, pressures participating governments to formalise stronger international commitments.

When climatically significant occurrences receive widespread media visibility, public awareness increases, typically resulting in more robust policy initiatives and heightened multilateral engagement (Feldman et al., 2014).

At its most effective, journalism can propel courageous climate policies by illuminating successful community action and by elevating pressing scientific calls to action. However, skewing data or privileging ideological stances risks eroding the public support needed for ambitious climate action. Therefore, an unwavering discipline regarding factual precision and inclusive narrative development is essential to cultivating, through rational discourse, the popular commitment that effective climate governance requires.

Review of Related Literature

Media Narratives and Public Perception

How climate change is presented in media settings shapes public understanding and determines the degree of civic engagement the issue prompts. Predominant narratives that emphasise dire events relentless sea-level rise, escalating storms, and extensive species losses and characteristically convey an information universe steeped in alarm. Although such portrayals raise the perceived urgency, they often foster resignation or detachment (O'Brien, 2024).

A considerable body of research shows that audiences consistently exposed to such unmoderated negativity experience a decline in the motivation to convert awareness into meaningful action (Ruiu, 2021). The notable lack of accessible, practicable, or prospective solutions compounds the decline in willingness to engage in collective or personal change. In contrast, reporting that centres place-based, transferable, or personally relevant solutions statistically increases perceived efficacy and catalyses behavioural transition.

Digital-ecosystem platforms such as Instagram notably amplify activists' strategic narrative choices. In a study by Tuitjer and Dirksmeier (2021), posts that frame climate action in terms of broad social mobilisation prompt followers to adopt more sustainable practices. These observations lend empirical weight to the argument that narrative framing, whether it highlights acute peril or foregrounds proactive agency determines the qualitative direction of public engagement. Media-partisan slant further complicates the interpretative terrain.

Within the United Kingdom, newspapers aligned with the political left typically stress the consensus among climate scientists and the urgency of the impending crisis; conversely, right-leaning outlets, notably The Daily Mail, tend to mitigate the scale of the risk and intermittently challenge the veracity of the underlying studies (Ruiu, 2020). The concurrent circulation of these opposing framings generates public doubt and risks amplifying scepticism toward a consensus scientific account (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004).

Visual journalism augments textual reporting in its capacity to mobilise public concern. Photographs of calving glaciers, forests ablaze, or animals retreating before advancing tides replace abstract metrics with immediate, corporeal evidence. Nonetheless, O'Brien (2024) warns that sensational imagery, when disembedded from its geographic and temporal contexts, may induce emotional overload or, more dangerously, faulty inference. Journalists therefore bear the dual responsibility of merging arresting visuals with explanatory frameworks that bracket the event within a rigorously scientific storyline Pearce, Niederer, & Özkula, (2020).

Nisbet (2009) adds that the emotional topology of a report must equal, in weight and part, its evidentiary design. Discourses that accentuate avenues for adaptation—whether advances in grid-scale storage or the anticipated array of offshore turbines—tend to sustain public interest and spur behavioural recalibration; those, in contrast, that enumerate catastrophe or that mobilise guilt usually provoke apathy or retreat. A communication regimen that intersperses affective resonance with empirical credibility thus becomes indispensable for the enduring mobilisation of publics around climatic exigencies.

Media framing, however, does not circulate in a solitary sphere; it primes institutional engagements. Historical review indicates that journalistic discourse has consistently spotlighted climate hazards, thereby engraving those hazards into the cognitive architectures that guide public-sector policy design.

Research demonstrates that journalistic coverage of major climatic shocks tends to elevate the priority that political actors assign to environmental policy. During the heightened global attention surrounding COP21, for example, Dutch public opinion data reveal a statistically significant uptick in support for climate initiatives, a shift that was most pronounced among segments to whom climate change was already a salient issue (Feldman et al., 2014).

Westlake and Willis (2023) demonstrate that climate protests across the UK in 2018–2019, amplified by the press, shifted parliamentary discourse. The coverage injected urgency and political legitimacy into the debate, facilitating the adoption of more ambitious climate commitments.

Conversely, media omissions and distortions can hinder climate progress. Conservative outlets frequently frame regulatory measures as burdensome and superfluous, eroding support for climate action, particularly among right-leaning voters (Ruiu, 2021). Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) documented that U.S. reporting which afforded parity to climate contrarians weakened the political momentum for ratifying treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol.

More favourably, journalistic attention to movements like Extinction Rebellion has been shown to elevate governmental accountability and amplify calls for legislative reforms, such as the proposed Climate Emergency Act. When demonstrations attract extensive media attention, they can mobilise political momentum and grassroots support for more rigorous climate legislation (Westlake & Willis, 2023).

A further critical media role involves endorsing scientific authority. Rigorous reporting on the latest findings from institutions such as the IPCC can cultivate public confidence and spur legislative momentum. Nevertheless, if journalists strive for artificial equilibrium by granting disproportionate voice to marginal opinions, they risk diluting public comprehension and perpetuating misinformation (Boykoff, 2008).

International outlets likewise contribute to the discourse. Coverage of multilateral accords such as the Paris Agreement can cultivate the perception of a unified obligation and stimulate ongoing diplomatic cooperation (Feldman et al., 2014). When the press frames climate change as a collective endeavour demanding mutual responses, the issue is elevated from a solely ecological threat to a primary global governance challenge.

Together, these media dynamics affect societal cognition and the responsiveness of policymakers. Discourses that are factually rigorous, forward-looking, and substantively inclusive are therefore indispensable to the consolidation of climate governance and to energising civic participation.

Review of Empirical Studies

Ruiu (2021) performed a diachronic qualitative study of UK national print media, tracing portrayals of climate-related harms between 1988 and 2016. Findings indicated a distinct temporal differentiation: several centre and centre-left newspapers gradually adopted increasingly proportionate accounts, whereas right-of-centre titles recurrently employed scornful or dismissive rhetoric. Such persistent framing fostered the entrenchment of public doubt and the continued politicisation of the issue. By contrast, centre-left journals tended to adopt heightened lexical urgency, foregrounding extreme weather events to drum up concern and encourage mobilisational calls.

O'Brien Tech (2024) offered a timely augmentation of existing scholarship by interrogating the dynamic interplay among media framing, collective perception, and the iterative shaping of policy. Their empirical study demonstrated that narratives which confine climate change to a fate that appears both catastrophic and unavoidable, while marginalising the accessibility of plausible mitigation and adaptation measures, often induce a perceptual and participatory retreat among citizens. In contrast, accounts that emphasise implementable, place-based responses tend to generate engaged and forward-looking public attitudes. The investigation further underscored the strategic weight of visual rhetoric, finding that, when calibrated, emotionally compelling imagery can cultivate sustained attachment, yet chronic exposure, especially when extricated from reflective context—risks emotional desensitisation and withdrawal.

Tuitjer and Dirksmeier (2021) focused on social media ecologies by conducting content analyses of climate discourse on various platforms, particularly Twitter, and applying rigorous methodological frameworks. They expressed social media as an ambiguous structural arena; it still has the ability to mobilise disparate constituents to physically rally around pro-environment campaigns, while at the same time, there is rampant disinformation that destroys consensus on what is known to be true and deepens ideological division. They pinpointed the spread of unverifiable claims as the key hurdle to a coherent public understanding of climate phenomena. They support carefully calibrated interventions that strategically raise the level of discourse by amplifying reliable sources and simplified messages to steer public discourse to the climate and more constructive, evidence-based discourse.

Falkenberg et al. (2022) investigated the reciprocal influences of political polarisation and climate-related journalism in the United States. Through computational text analysis of partisan media outlets, they identified a distinctly partisan structure within climate discourse: conservative platforms consistently questioned the magnitude of scientific consensus while deflecting responsibility for policy inertia onto external agents. This pattern of argumentation intensified both cognitive and emotional fractures and deferred decisive policy action. The authors concluded that interventions targeting misinformation, supplemented by systematic media literacy education, should be positioned at the very core of effective climate communication strategies.

Westlake and Willis (2023) performed a longitudinal investigation of UK parliamentary debates from 2017 to 2022, focusing on the mutual entanglements of media representations of climate protests and legislative rhetoric. Their mixed-methods framework demonstrated that the mass media's attention to the protest wave of 2018 and 2019 elevated the salience of pro-climate interventions within parliamentary discourse. By amplifying the protests, media firms converted public salience into more robust and unified policy commitments, thereby altering the governing rhetoric on climate policy.

Feldman et al. (2014) situated COP21 within the broader Dutch media ecology, delineating the summit as a temporally bounded discursive ecology wherein journalists, policymakers, and civic organisations collaboratively constructed a frame emphasising the simultaneity of catastrophe and feasible legislative victories. Their investigation revealed a recursive interaction between elite-propagated discourses and public reception: narratives that prioritised collaborative victories demonstrably fortified the electorate's endorsement of posterior domestic climate initiatives. Utilizing a two-wave panel design, the authors' subsequent inquiry traced a causal pathway between elevated summit exposure and a durable increase in policy acceptance among the most attentive cohort. By contrast, participants registering low predisposition to the issue displayed relative inertia, thereby signalling the need for differentiated communication protocols calibrated to varying baselines of awareness and motivational readiness.

Augmenting these interpretive paradigms, Boykoff (2008) analysed the periodicals of the British tabloids between 2003 and 2006. His content-analytic study revealed that the discursive placement of climate phenomena within framing subsets that emphasised fiscal consequence, and that thus resonated with working-class readership, recalibrated both perceived temporal urgency and the weight granted to empirical scientific indices. This empirical finding foregrounds the necessity for communicative architectures that are reflexively attuned to the sociostructural and economic schemata of the target public.

Taken together, these studies affirm the considerable power that media narratives exert in mediating societal understanding and in guiding the direction of public policy. Whether conveyed via traditional journalistic channels or novel digital environments, the forms that climate-related communication takes decisively affect both public and governmental capacities to enact effective responses.

Methodology

The current investigation adopted a library-based, qualitative approach to examine how media discourses influence public cognition and subsequent policy enactment concerning climate change. Analytical work was grounded in Framing and Agenda-Setting Theories, enabling a focused investigation of the linguistic, structural, and thematic dimensions that typify journalistic treatment of the issue.

The study consisted of a rigorous and systematic exploration of archival sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly volumes, governmental publications, digital repositories, and targeted case-based studies. Each document was evaluated for relevance, scholarly credibility, and alignment with the research objectives, thereby yielding a comprehensive corpus of both empirical and theoretical material that reinforced the evidential foundation of the inquiry.

Discourse analysis served to elucidate how media texts deploy diverse semiotic resources to generate meaning and influence audience affective registers. Attention focused on persistent rhetorical devices, distinguishing between alarm-centric, deficit-oriented frames and constructions that foreground successful mitigation and adaptive achievement. This distinction enabled measurement of their respective efficacy in shaping public understanding and mobilising civic response.

Thematic analysis revealed notable framing patterns across print, broadcast, and online media, uncovering important themes such as affective modulation strategies, iconographic selection, partisan biases, and how scientific agreement is portrayed. By drawing from diverse interdisciplinary fields and domains, a comprehensive media analysis integrated multiple jigsaw pieces, creating a rich narrative of how media influences and shapes public acknowledgment and legislative engagement in climate issues.

Discussion

Framing and Public Perception

The way news reporting of climate change captures the public's attention and emotion and shapes their behavioural responses is of great importance. This is explained within the Framing Theory scope, which suggests that the motivation and the resulting civic actions that can be initiated depend on how the information is presented, and not on the information itself.

The dominant media paradigm employs a catastrophe frame which showcases the chronic ice retreat, the floods and the wildfire sieges which are presented in a way that cultivates dread and hastens a looming crisis. But O'Brien (2024) cautions that such portrayals lead to a state of panic paralysis, which is a maladaptive state where credible avenues to change are omitted and renders the audience in a state of psychological inertia and apathy (Pearce et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the narrative where civic action conveys procedural responses, such as locally organised mitigation, innovative renewable energy initiatives, and anticipatory governance in climate change hotspot regions usually drive better civic engagement.

Recasting the phenomenon as a human-challenge intervention as opposed to a dead-on arrival phenomenon fosters agency while reframing despair as something infused with emotion-imbued hope (Pearce et al., 2020). This sort of reframing not only compresses the threat's perceived scale but also suffices to provide the motivational energy necessary to participate in and rally others toward climate action.

The complex framing of issues is imagistic in nature. Images of suffering wildlife and parched communities elicit immediate emotional reactions such as empathy alongside outrage. O'Brien (2024) warns, however, that lack of context can be a problem. When viewers are repeatedly exposed to sensational visuals with no context or a lack of context, they become disengaged, apathetic and cynical, or desensitised to the cause altogether.

Social media pose more complex challenges to framing as a result of their features. The social network's instantaneous publishing capacity tends to form a radical norm because both rigorous scientific discussion and striking misinformation can now coexist. Within the repeating, lifelike feeds of Twitter and Instagram, charged visuals are more likely to get

attention as opposed to counter-qualifiers or counter-discourse. Tuitjer and Dirksmeier (2021) note that social media can break social initiative to act towards climate changes as well as at the same time, dissolve clarity by mixing authoritative visually or typographically outlined utterances with a multitude of utterances from less credible sources, which social media or lack clear visually or typographically marked renown and claim.

The framing emphasises the emotional interplay which and how the audiences are likely to respond to the climate narrative. Nisbet (2009) suggests that hope, pride, and inspiration are emotions that are far more effective in sustaining interest than anger or guilt. Stories that highlight local success or tangible progress foster a more positive, propelling energy toward climate action. On the other hand, constant, unrelentingly negative reporting, in the absence of a redeeming, hopeful thread, risks fostering apathy or what some observers have called ‘climate fatigue.’

However, framing is not simply about the construction of a message. It is also the set of circumstances from which people are drawing. For instance, in the UK, conservative media tends to portray climate change as a danger to employment opportunities and the cost of living. This approach is particularly popular among the working class, who tend to be less moved by biodiversity or ecological arguments (Boykoff, 2008). These differential readings highlight the importance of audience analysis in climate communication design work, especially if climate communication is to serve the purpose of uniting the diverging public support.

Policy agendas, in turn, are not immune to this mediated influence. Agenda-Setting Theory holds that the prominence media grants to a particular issue informs what legislators may come to view as exigent. When climate change is compulsively reported, especially in the context of high-stakes moments like Conferences of the Parties or major demonstrations, its political salience is likely to correlate with an uptick in legislative responsiveness.

Media exposure of major policy events can assemble public interest and motivate higher political engagement with climate issues: the spike of attention surrounding COP21, for instance, corresponded with increased stakeholder mobilization in key jurisdictions (Feldman et al., 2014). Between 2018 and 2019, concentrated reporting of climate mobilization in the United Kingdom coupled with parliamentary deliberation, visibly reframing the legislative discourse around environmental policy (Westlake & Willis, 2023). These instances collectively illustrate the mechanics by which selective media emphasis frames policy debates and can, in turn, temporarily widen the aperture for regulatory change.

Yet the media can equally dilute constructive engagement. When outlets partition climate coverage along partisan lines, the resultant echo chambers can inhibit collaborative policy movement (Effrosynidis et al., 2022). To cite one pattern, conservative voices routinely characterize climate regulations as market-distorting, thereby consolidating skepticism among key demographic segments and forestalling compromise (Ruiu, 2021). The cumulative effect is both diminished popular pressure for green legislation and eroded prospects for cross-party coalitions that any durable response to climate change will require.

Additionally, the deployment of so-called “false balance” and the journalistic norm of providing equivalent exposure to fringe scepticism for the sake of perceived fairness, presents subtler damage. Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) demonstrated that this technique assigns unwarranted weight to minority dissent and thereby creates the misleading appearance of scientific uncertainty. Such distortion attenuates public willingness to endorse immediate mitigation, thereby biasing the entire deliberative context toward procrastination rather than decisive policy action.

Notwithstanding its difficulties, the media retains the potential to advance international climate cooperation. Coverage of treaties such as the Paris Agreement that emphasises cooperation, shared obligation, and joint strategy constitutes the dissemination of a collective framing of climate risk, as Feldman et al. note (2014). Such narratives can galvanise domestic public backing for multilateral efforts and can serve, at the same time, as a mechanism of accountability, encouraging governments to remain faithful to their declared intentions.

Moreover, journalism confers legitimacy upon scientific inquiry by amplifying its visibility and by subjecting its conclusions to responsible reporting practices. Accurate coverage of the IPCC assessments provides the empirical undergirding for public policy that aspires to be evidence-based. Oreskes (2004) argues that sustained, coherent communication that traverses the scientific community and the public realm mediated by journalism reinforces institutional trust and cultivates the conditions within which policy can be effectively deliberated and implemented.

Nevertheless, the framing choices adopted by journalists can decisively influence public appraisal of particular policy instruments. In the United Kingdom, for instance, newspaper discourse has progressively portrayed renewable energy deployment as a wellspring of technological advancement and of job creation. By suturing environmental policy to animating narratives of economic dynamism, such framing enlarges its political legitimacy, thereby easing the path for measures that might otherwise elicit resistance (Effrosynidis et al., 2022). The evidence thereby indicates that congruence between media framing and wider public priorities can activate, rather than undercut, support for far-reaching climate action.

Recognising the reciprocal interactions between the media and the policy world is fundamental. While the media can shape the framing and prioritisation of policies, the policy world, which includes government officials, advocacy groups, and interest organisations, also shapes the media agenda through staged events, press releases, and narrative frameworks. To understand the journeys of climate policies from conception, publication, and gradual implementation, it is essential to comprehend all these factors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study found that media architectures recurrently organised climate governance by shaping cognitive, affective, and normative spaces that refracted both contention and legitimisation processes. Variations in journalistic framing from stipulated existential emergency to achievable solution and economic danger prioritisation echoed through public sentiment and legislative contests. Ominous reports that hazard highlighted bore no mitigation or adaptive trajectories, fostering sentiments of resignation or pervasive affective torpor. Calibration of urgency alongside mitigation alternatives, emergent technological vectors, and collective decision frameworks galvanise civic participation while diminishing oppositional backlash and fostering public belief in politically postponed actions as politically costly. Editorial teams and public service broadcasters are thus invited to align hazard recognition and agency insistent upon policy capacity governance that fosters discerning electorates and ideal climate-responsive governance. However, silos of decoupled information systems, rising tides of disinformation, and journalist attempts at balance amidst partisan climate sceptic backdrop eroded trust and deepened social fractures. These conditions amplify the need for rigorous, empirically based reporting that elucidates climate urgency vis-à-vis policy timelines, invoking multi-lateral spaces like global climate conferences to rally essential state-level policy trajectories.

In an effort to address these issues and connect effective climate communications with proactive steps, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Climate science must be presented accurately, and for this, the news organisations must take up climate science journalism training that builds shields against misinformation. At the same time, coordinated media literacy efforts in formal education and in the digital sphere empower the public to discern sound climate science and the distorted interpretations of it.
- ii. For the attainment of this goal, the researchers and the reporters need to forge lasting partnerships that tell appealing and understandable stories based on sophisticated empirical data. Such narratives should reflect the multitude of credible pathways and novel innovations, as well as the proactive stances of individuals and communities in inspiring comprehensive engagement towards their adaptation and mitigation responsibilities.
- iii. These initiatives can be complemented by legislators and oversight bodies through sustained investments in public service journalism, stringent mandates for data openness, and rewards for journalistic integrity. Collectively these initiatives cultivate a well-informed and active citizenry capable of addressing the many and complex dimensions of consequential climate change impacts in sustained, well-calibrated, and strategic ways.

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