

A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF CLIMATE CHANGE MEDIA COVERAGE: ANTECEDENTS AND REGIONAL PATTERNS

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This paper analyses levels of public awareness to climate change as measured by relative levels of perceived media salience. The study utilizes a worldwide sample across 41 different countries for the year 2008 to analyse if various antecedent constructs impact the sustainability-related media agendas of 112 leading national broadsheet newspapers. A cross-sectional regression model is used to identify whether a range of factors including country affiliation, regional affiliation, Human Development Index (HDI) scores, or individual characteristics of the newspapers and their editors-in-chief, can serve to explain the sustainability-related media agendas reflected by respective coverage levels. The findings of this research can thus serve to shed light on generic sustainability-related values and priorities in different national contexts.

Global warming has firmly been established as a key global challenge. After a prolonged phase of controversy about scientific evidence, in particular in the popular media, the existence of anthropogenic climate change is now commonly acknowledged across the globe. However, policy approaches are still in a state of emergence, and vary widely across countries and regions. Growing public awareness and support are considered as key drivers for new policy measures directed at combating climate change. The lack thereof can therefore be seen as a major impediment to effective solutions for this challenge. The mass media, and in particular broadsheet newspapers, have a crucial role to play as agenda-setters and as mirrors of public concern about climate change. Up to this point, few systematic studies have emerged focusing on the extent to which climate change is covered in different countries and regions, and the factors that drive media coverage and, ultimately, public awareness of climate change.

There is little comparative work across more than three nations (e.g. Anderson, 2009; Boykoff and Boykoff 2004) to investigate the impact of different socio-economic, political and cultural contexts on climate change reporting across the world. Existing studies have largely been restricted to OECD countries, with single country studies focusing on a specific country (McComas & Shanahan, 1999; Trumbo, 1996), or comparative studies on two or three OECD countries (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Brossard et al., 2004; Dispensa & Brulle, 2003). Anderson (2009) stresses the need for research on different levels of coverage in different countries, the nature of this coverage and the views of developing countries. Recently Shanahan (2009) catalogued the lack of studies exploring the media coverage of climate change within the Global South, illustrating the vital need to extend research across a multicultural, geographically diverse domain.

Utilizing a sample of newspapers from across 41 countries in the years 2007-2009 this study assesses levels of public awareness of climate change as measured by relative levels of perceived media salience. The study utilizes a worldwide sample across 41 different countries in the year 2008 to analyse how country and region of origin as well as levels of socioeconomic development impact the sustainability-related media agendas of 112 leading national broadsheet newspapers. A cross-sectional regression model is used to identify whether a range of factors including country affiliation, regional affiliation, Human Development Index (HDI) scores, or individual characteristics of the

newspapers and their editors-in-chief, can serve to explain the sustainability-related media agendas reflected by respective coverage levels. The findings of this research can thus serve to shed light on generic sustainability-related values and priorities in different national contexts.

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