

futerra

report

sustainability communications

Climate Fear v Climate Hope

Are the UK's national newspapers helping tackle climate change?

December 2005

make connections, demonstrate long term thinking, blow myths, be trustworthy, provide transparency, give real facts, be sexy, mainstream, non-patronising, brave – stand out! join a massive worldwide change, start positive conformity, join a success, empathy and emotions are powerful, use stories to hold people's attention, sustainable development is achievable, avoid too much guilt, break stereotypes, use inclusive language and images, push mass ownership, introduce icons to emulate, relate big ideas to everyday life, give them a familiar context. sustainable development makes you a great person and we love you for it.

Fear versus Hope

Reading articles about climate change in the national newspapers (when you can find them) is a depressing exercise. Like terrorism, the looming pension crisis or asteroids hitting Earth, climate change is portrayed as a 'big nasty' to worry and feel guilty about, but not to take action on. This may be a true reflection of the gravity of the situation, but it doesn't inspire much motivation to change.

Futerra is the communications agency that designed the new Climate Change Communications Strategy on behalf of Defra, DTI, Carbon Trust, Energy Saving Trust, Environment Agency and UKCIP –launched on 1 December 2005¹. The extensive research for that strategy² shows us that creating fear without providing solutions won't motivate change; it will simply increase the already generous helpings of apathy in the UK.

“Climate of Fear”

The Sun

This report provides a clearer picture of how the national newspapers are covering the climate change story: is it in a fear laden and negative way, or in a positive way that introduces and promotes solutions?

This study does not discuss the media's impartiality or where their responsibilities lie. It simply holds up a mirror to the current situation so that we can critically examine the potential impact of media coverage on public attitudes to climate change.

The study

We reviewed 320 UK national newspaper stories on climate change published between August and November 2005. Each story was given a rating between one and five, with one being the most pessimistic and five the most optimistic. Stories with a balance of positive and negative messages scored three.

Key findings

Most newspaper readers are seeing very few stories about climate change. The vast majority (76%) of UK national newspaper readers purchase tabloids and middle market newspapers, and see only 16% of the stories concerning climate change.

Most of the stories we surveyed (59%) focused on the negative effects that climate change brings, with no mention of potential or even current solutions.

It isn't an entirely gloomy picture; some journalists are working hard to raise awareness of climate change. For example, Fiona Harvey of the *Financial Times* is not only the most prolific national newspaper writer on climate change by a long way (she has written three times as many articles as anyone else), she is also the most positive.

The media has the power to significantly influence the public's attitudes on climate change. All those who recognise the danger of an unstable climate must seek ways to move from reporting that induces apathy towards that which inspires action.

¹ Please see www.climatechallenge.gov.uk

² Futerra, *The Rules of the Game*, February 2005 www.defra.gov.uk

“The Bells of New Orleans Toll for the Whole Planet”

Independent on Sunday

Findings

Total Coverage

Fear is winning:

- > 59% of stories are “negative”
- > 15% of stories are “balanced”
- > 25% of stories are “positive”

Coverage by the Daily Newspapers

The *Financial Times*, *The Independent* and *The Guardian* are the three daily newspapers publishing the most stories about climate change. The *Financial Times* also has the highest Fear/Hope Rating, meaning that its coverage is the most balanced among the dailies.

The Sun – with over three million readers - accounts for only 1.5% of climate change coverage in daily newspapers and is also the most pessimistic with a low Fear/Hope Rating of 1.25.

Table One: Top 10 Climate Change Daily Newspapers

Rank	Newspaper	No. of articles published over 3 months	% of total articles (to nearest 0.5%)	Average Fear/Hope rating*
1	<i>Financial Times</i>	63	23%	2.7
2	<i>Independent</i>	60	22 %	2.2
3	<i>Guardian</i>	49	18 %	2.2
4	<i>Times</i>	35	13 %	2.3
5	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	28	10 %	2.4
6	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	13	5 %	2.1
7	<i>Daily Mail</i>	10	3.5 %	2.6
8	<i>Daily Express</i>	8	3 %	1.9
9	<i>Sun</i>	4	1.5 %	1.25
10	<i>Daily Star</i>	1	0.5 %	2

* (5 = wholly positive, 3 = balanced, 1 = wholly negative)

Coverage by the Sunday Newspapers

The Sunday newspapers overall have a better record of balancing negative messages with positive news.

The Observer, *The Sunday Times* and *The Mail on Sunday* all achieved a Fear/Hope Rating on the “hope” side of “balanced”. In contrast, none of the daily newspapers managed an average positive rating.

The Independent on Sunday publishes almost a quarter of all climate change articles in Sunday newspapers, but its coverage is rather fear-biased.

The Observer is the second biggest Sunday publisher of climate change news and focuses far more on solutions to the problem.

“Biomass energy urged for public buildings”

The Financial Times

Table Two: Climate Change Sunday Newspapers

Rank	Newspaper	No. of articles published over 3 months	% of total articles (to nearest 0.5%)	Average Fear/Hope rating*
1	<i>Independent on Sunday</i>	12	24 %	1.7
2	<i>Observer</i>	9	18 %	3.3
3	<i>Sunday Times</i>	8	16 %	3.25
4	<i>Sunday Telegraph</i>	6	12 %	2.7
5	<i>Sunday Express</i>	5	10 %	2.4
6	<i>Mail on Sunday</i>	4	8 %	3.5
7	<i>News of the World</i>	3	6 %	1.3
8	<i>Sunday Mirror</i>	2	4 %	1.5

* (5 = wholly positive, 3 = balanced, 1 = wholly negative)

Coverage by the Daily and Sunday Newspapers Combined

When the results for the daily newspapers are combined with their Sunday counterparts, we can see that *The Independent* and *The Independent on Sunday* together feature the most climate change articles. However, *The Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday* strike the best balance between fear and hope in their coverage of the issue.

The Sun and *News of The World* publish the fewest climate change stories. Those they do publish are the most negative and fear-driven.

Table Three: Climate Change Daily and Sunday Newspapers Combined

Rank	Newspaper	No. of articles published over 3 months	% of total articles (to nearest 0.5%)	Average Fear/Hope rating*
1	<i>Independent & Independent on Sunday</i>	72	22 %	2.2
2	<i>Financial Times</i>	63	19 %	2.7
3	<i>Guardian & Observer</i>	58	18 %	2.4
4	<i>Times & Sunday Times</i>	43	13 %	2.5
5	<i>The Daily Telegraph & The Sunday Telegraph</i>	34	10 %	2.5
6	<i>Daily Mirror & Sunday Mirror</i>	15	5 %	2.1
7	<i>Daily Mail & Mail on Sunday</i>	14	5 %	2.9
8	<i>Express & Sunday Express</i>	13	4 %	2.1
9	<i>Sun & News of the World</i>	7	2 %	1.3

* (5 = wholly positive, 3 = balanced, 1 = wholly negative)

Table Four: Top Climate Change Journalists

Ranking	Newspaper	No. Articles	Average Fear/Hope rating*	Journalist
1	<i>Financial Times</i>	28	2.90	Fiona Harvey
2	<i>The Telegraph</i>	8	2.13	Charles Clover
= 3	<i>Guardian</i>	6	2.00	David Adam
= 3	<i>Guardian</i>	6	2.33	John Vidal
= 3	<i>The Independent</i>	6	2.50	Michael McCarthy
= 3	<i>Guardian</i>	6	1.17	Paul Brown
7	<i>The Independent</i>	5	1.40	Steve Connor
= 8	<i>Financial Times</i>	4	2.00	Jean Eaglesham
= 8	<i>The Telegraph</i>	4	1.50	Roger Highfield
= 8	<i>Guardian</i>	4	1.50	Tim Radford

* (5 = wholly positive, 3 = balanced, 1 = wholly negative)

Fiona Harvey of the *Financial Times* is the most prolific climate change writer and also the most positive.

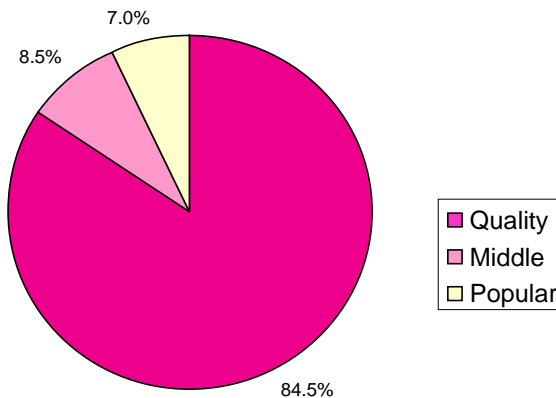
Coverage by Newspaper Category

The majority of climate change coverage is read by a minority of people.

Table Three below shows that the vast majority of climate change coverage (84%) is being published in the quality category of newspapers. However, the quality newspapers make up a minority of total readership: just 23%.

Most of us (47%) read the tabloids and therefore only see 7% of climate change coverage.

Table Five: Climate Change Coverage by Newspaper Category



“Fill your tank with nature's goodness”

The Sunday Times

“All in a day's work: Saving the planet from the comfort of your desk could be easier than you think”

The Guardian

What next?

The British media gets a bad press (no pun intended) for being sensationalist, celebrity-obsessed and aggressive. But they are the ‘gatekeepers’ to the public, and if you are a government minister, business leader or climate campaigner your message must pass through the media to reach your audience.

Bad news sells better than good news. However, the media *will* cover solutions if they are engaging, interesting and – most importantly – new. Those of us eager to inspire change must constructively engage with the media. This survey brutally demonstrates the desperate need to engage with the popular tabloid media with stories focused upon solutions.

Over the coming months, Futerra will publish guidance on media engagement for climate change, and initiate dialogue with key editors. We hope to make a contribution to turning the atmosphere of climate fear to one of climate hope.

Please contact us at www.futerra.co.uk if you’d like to be involved.

About Futerra

Promoting sustainable development is our core business

Futerra is a new type of business: communications agency, think-tank and campaigner. We founded Futerra to address the need for high quality, effective communications to promote sustainable development. We are one of the only specialist consultancies to focus solely in this area.

A new way of thinking

There are some tried and tested ways of getting a message across, but for sustainable development and corporate social responsibility, lateral thinking is a must. Unfortunately, selling sustainability isn't like selling a brand of soap – it's like convincing people to use soap in the first place.

We are experts in new ideas and big challenges, and specialise in creative communications, training, communications, media, strategy and research.

Please visit www.futerra.co.uk to find more of our work, or let us know what you think.