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Should journalists campaign on climate change?

*What happened when journalists in a global media organization
turned climate change activists*

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Introduction

As a young journalist, a web editor in a newspaper I was working for banned me from using the word “climate” in any headline. “It scares people off”, he said. “We see an immediate drop in clicks”.

I turned this into almost a calling: I would work hard to find ways to report on climate change that I thought would “trick” people into reading about it (and thus assuming, some would say arrogantly, that they didn't know about it or, if they did, that they were wrong in not caring).

But I was also conflicted. On the one hand, I knew that this web editor knew more than me about what people wanted – after all, his job was to constantly improve headlines and leads on our stories after what made people click on them and – hopefully – read them and engage with them. On the other, I was trained to believe that part of our job as journalists is to inform people about what they should know about, even though they might not want to hear it.

Maybe I was overreacting, maybe this was mostly a question of wrapping and not content. But I couldn't shake off the bigger, looming questions I thought it represented: Are journalists here to mainly mirror society and what people care about, or should we also *make* people care? And if the answer to that question is the latter, will it really help just telling better stories?

In other words: How do you make journalism on climate change that engages the public? And what is the role of journalists in addressing, or even helping to solve, this planetary crisis – if any?

This study

This paper will seek to address these questions through studying what is arguably one of the largest and more controversial journalism endeavours on the issue of climate change in a mainstream media outlet in recent times: The Guardian's campaign “Keep it in the ground”.

“Is there a way to make people care?” was precisely the question Alan Rusbridger posed as a challenge to his team at the end of his editorship of the Guardian in 2015. On climate change, “journalism has so far failed to animate the public to exert sufficient pressure on politics through reporting and analysis”, [he wrote](#) (Guardian 2015a), and as an answer he launched the campaign “Keep it in the ground”. It was a journalistic series on the causes and consequences of climate change, but also a cooperation with the NGO 350.org in an effort to rally the public to convince two foundations, Wellcome Trust and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to divest from fossil fuel companies. Adding the latter element, the Guardian dived into contested waters of journalistic norms on impartiality, objectivity, trust and public service, raising important questions on the role of journalism in tackling an

issue with such profound social and moral consequences as climate change does arguably have. The lessons from that project may be useful for journalists and newsrooms elsewhere, but has not yet been thoroughly studied. This paper will study some of the lessons made.

To operationalize the larger questions mentioned above, the main question this study seeks to answer is: *What are the benefits and disadvantages of advocacy journalism on climate change?*

In order to answer this question, the following subordinate questions are posed:

1) Did the Keep it in the ground-campaign succeed in what it intended to do?
How/why/why not?

The campaign had two stated goals. The literal goal, of making two foundations divest from fossil fuels, has a yes/no-answer. The overarching goal, of engaging the public in the issue of climate change, will be examined through interviews with core actors in the campaign.

2) Did the campaign lead to monotonous coverage and reduce the scope of a) ideas/perspectives on the topic of divestment and/or b) other climate change topics?

One of the criticisms against advocacy journalism in general, and this campaign in particular, is that it will narrow the range of perspectives offered to the public, and in worst case not tell the whole truth. This will be examined by comparing the climate change coverage in the Guardian to the coverage in a comparable newspaper in profile and reach, the New York Times, at two different intervals within the campaign period. The two periods chosen are two of the first weeks of the campaign in March 2015, and the two weeks at the end of the first part of the campaign in June 2015. The selection is limited to two short periods, and to text only, because of restrictions in time and scope for this study.

3) To what extent did the campaign break the journalistic norm of objectivity – and did it matter?

This will be examined by interviews with core actors inside and outside the campaign, and by examining media coverage of the campaign at the time, specifically looking at whether the campaign was received differently in the US than in the UK, where historically the ideal of journalistic objectivity stands stronger among both the journalistic community and the public.

4) Did the campaign lead to any lasting change in the newsroom and its coverage of climate change issues?

This will be measured by interviewing core actors at The Guardian who participated in the campaign.

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The “kryptonite” for journalists

World leaders often call climate change the most important challenge of our time. If the role of the press is to hold those leaders to account, you should think then, that the press covered the topic of climate change broadly and thoroughly. Yet covering climate change has proved to be a great challenge for journalism. There are several reasons for this.

Some scholars have blamed the lack of sufficient coverage on cuts in the number of specialist journalists covering the environment, as many newsrooms face increased financial restraints. Yet Moser (2010), amongst others, argues that there are also specific features to its nature that makes climate change more difficult to communicate than other environmental or political problems: Firstly, it is invisible – you cannot see, smell or sense the greenhouse gases causing the problem. Similarly, the consequences of climate change are spread out in time and space, leading to a disconnect in our understanding of cause and effect, and a lack of felt immediacy. This also makes it harder to see the benefits of action to reduce climate change, especially if the actions proposed are painful in the immediate sense, whereas the benefits are received globally somewhere in the future.

Connecting local weather with climate change is one of several strategies that have been proposed to increase concern and action: In a study from the UK, Spence et al (2011) show that those with experience of flooding express more concern over climate change, see it as less uncertain and are more likely both to think that their actions will have an effect on mitigation and to undertake such action. Similarly, Halperin and Walton (2018) find that place-based communication of climate change may catalyze action by making it more relevant to people, but also that this is more likely to work with those already concerned and when the scale of intervention matches the scale of action (communication of local consequences encourages local action).

Still, Moser (2010) argues that the mere complexity of the issue, and the uncertainties embedded in it, makes it hard to explain and engage with – and also makes it easier to argue for a delay in action or to sow doubts about its gravity. Concerning the latter, there are powerful self-interested forces in play to retain the status quo, Moser argues:

“This self-interest ranges from the unintentional, unconscious intent of the vast majority of people in western and westernized societies to defend the comforts of their modern lifestyles (.), to the understandable, if misguided, and sometimes deliberately misleading, efforts of special interests to secure their financial fortunes” (2010:36)

All of these factors contribute to climate change failing the standard requirements for most news stories. As columnist [Jonathan Freedland puts it](#): “For the media, climate change is

Kryptonite. It fails to tick almost every one of the boxes that defines a story” (Guardian 2015b).

Berglez (2011) studied how journalists have tried to tackle climate change nonetheless. He found that environmental journalists engaged with media logic in three different ways when reporting on the issue. Working *within* the media logic, the journalists would work creatively to find surprising, moving and catching angles to the story of climate change, fitting it into the profit-oriented model of mainstream journalism. This is different to working *outside* media logic, where the creativity of journalists would entail finding ways to convey the complexity of climate science, without necessarily adapting it fully to the media logic. In the last option, working *beyond* media logic, journalistic creativity meant changing the way reporting on climate change is done in the first place, by bridging the divides between traditional distinct areas of reporting – ultimately changing journalism itself. Berglez suggests, perhaps hopefully, that a shift in journalism “seems to be underway” (2011:461): that the interconnected and complex nature of climate change will force journalists to break out of the compartmentalized ways of looking at the world in mainstream journalism. As we will see later in this study, working across departments was precisely one of the strategies the Guardian used in their campaign.

Importantly, precisely because it is so abstract, complex and ungraspable, the media is the main source of information about climate change for lay people – and for decision-makers (Schafer and Schlichting 2017 in Burglez 2017) – making it imperative for journalists to engage with it. Although the amount of media coverage varies in time and between regions, often peaking with big events like the international climate negotiations before it recedes again, there has been an overall growing amount of media attention for climate change worldwide in the last decades (Schmidt et al 2013).

Indeed, surveys show that when it comes to climate change, the problem is not any more lack of information or knowledge about the issue: 85% of the public worldwide thinks climate change is a serious problem ([Spring 2015 Global Attitude Survey](#), Pew Research Center). 80% agrees that climate change is largely a result of human activity ([2016 Ipsos Global Trends](#)). Which begs the question: If we know, then why are we not acting on it to the extent that the science tells us we must?

Model broken: Information not enough?

Of course, that is a question with multiple and complex answers. One of them, relevant to this study, concerns our inefficiency in translating concern into action. The assumption that ‘information leads to change in attitude leads to change in action’ has been largely rejected by a wide range of research, which suggests that also social, material, cultural and institutional factors influence our consumption patterns and choices (e.g. Shove et al 1998, Wilhite et al 2000) and our response to humanitarian or social crises (Maier 2015). From this perspective, consumption or civic action will not change if approached only at an

individual level, because it is embedded in a larger system of social norms, cultural values, material conditions and institutional infrastructure.

If information is not enough, then what does it take to “engage” the public? And how does the media play a role in that reaction? To understand this, it is useful to first look at how media can contribute to the opposite, namely what the literature calls *compassion fatigue* – when the public is presented with so much suffering to care about that they effectively stop caring at all. Maier (2015) summarizes research on how mass media contributes to this “psychic numbing” by its “emphasis on the sensational, incessant bad news, lack of context explaining the underlying crisis, and presentation of problems but not solutions” (2015:702). Compassion fatigue, Maier argues, “helps explain society’s reluctance to deal with climate change, famine, poverty, disease, and other global challenges” (ibid). He then studies the application of four journalistic strategies that have been studied and proposed to counteract compassion fatigue and help readers engage in difficult and remote social concerns: “story personification, focus on triumph over adversity, minimal use of statistics, and call for action” (2015:703).

To the disappointment of those who hope for a single recipe to overcome compassion fatigue, Maier finds that none of these strategies necessarily elicits significant positive response amongst readers. McIntyre and Sobel (2017) find similar results in their experimental study of comparing the journalistic techniques of either shocking audiences into action or providing them with solutions to inspire action: Neither technique led to increased empathy with the victims, understanding of the issue or desire to share or act. Yet, the solution-focused stories did leave readers feeling more positive and more likely to read more about the topic. Likewise, Spence and Pidgeon (2010) also find that focusing on the gains of climate change mitigation make people more positive towards contributing to it, as opposed to focusing on the losses of not mitigating. Noteworthy though, these are all studies measuring the effect of specific stories at one point in time. There are few, if any, longitudinal studies on how journalism changes the way people think or react to journalism on a specific topic like climate change over time.

Solution-focused stories thus seem to have the potential to increase engagement somewhat. Is there more journalists can do? Moser (2010) separates between three forms of communication purposes. One is essentially to inform and educate people about climate change. Much of mainstream journalism will arguably fall under this category, as it views its role as to provide the public with information for them to make informed, but importantly *their own*, decisions. In line with this view, it is not the role of the press to tell people what to think or do. Thus, you have a different purpose of communication if you want to “achieve some type and level of social engagement and action” (2010: 38), which is how Moser describes the second category. Your purpose is then not only to inform, but also to facilitate active behavioural engagement – be it consumption related, or political/civic. Typically, campaigns on specific topics run by NGOs, political parties or other actors will fall under this category. The third category is communication with a purpose of deeper,

more long-term change, aimed at changing social norms and cultural values. The two former purposes of communication are the most relevant to this paper because the Keep it in the ground-campaign arguably made the Guardian venture from the first into the second. This is not however a common practice for journalists, nor is focusing on solutions. Why not? As an interesting parallel, we can look to the new research agenda set out by Fazey et al. (2018) for climate researchers, which argues that “the most critical question for climate research is no longer about the problem, but about how to facilitate the transformative changes necessary to avoid catastrophic climate-induced change” (2018:55). Furthermore, the authors argue that one of the key reasons for academia’s limited engagement with the how-to is a “dominant culture in science where implementation is viewed as political, normative and future oriented and hence not amenable to scientific analysis” (ibid:56). Although academic research is different to journalism in many ways, there are some clear parallels here: Journalism has also been mainly engaged in describing the problem of climate change, even though we know that most people are aware of it (Spring 2015 Global Attitude Survey, Pew Research Center). But for journalists to engage in the how-to of solving the problem, they too quickly run up against their own dominant culture, and one of the mainstream norms of journalism: objectivity.

The role of journalists

Many studies have been done on how journalists perceive their function in society, often called their role conceptions. Role conceptions are formed both by your individual held beliefs and opinion, and the organizational environment you are part of (Tandoc jr and Takahashi 2014). Although often interpreted differently, a set of shared norms and values are widely accepted within the profession of journalism: a dedication to public service and an adherence to truthfulness, accountability, transparency, autonomy and objectivity (Hunter 2015). The latter is especially relevant to this study.

To understand it better, it is useful to split *objectivity* it into “three distinct, but closely related ideas: (1) truthfulness, a commitment to reporting information that is factually correct; (2) neutrality, striving for fairness, balance and impartiality; and (3) detachment, separating ‘fact from comment’” (Calcutt and Hammond in Hunter 2015:276). Advocacy, on the other hand, is often seen as the opposite, and said to be what distinguishes journalism from public relations: The former is seen as “scrutiny *of* interests” opposed to the latter, “advocacy *for* interests” (Kevin Moloney in Fisher 2016, my highlight).

Yet, there is a long tradition of advocating within journalism, ranging from openly advocating a cause or point of view to selecting and highlighting certain voices and sources over others. No journalism is completely neutral. The notion that it could be has been debunked by a large body of research, all finding that a range of influences, from personal factors to shared beliefs and values within the sector and/or ones society, will affect the journalistic outcome no matter how committed the journalist is to a professional ideology

of objectivity (Hallin and Mancini 2004). In fact, there is no journalism without elements of advocacy; rather, it is a question as to what degree (Fisher 2016).

Scholars have also pointed out how striving for not taking a stance in itself becomes taking a stance, effectively ending up preserving the status quo and reinforcing traditional power relations (Eide and Kunelius 2010). When it comes to journalism on climate change specifically, a vast body of research has shown how the norm of objectivity contributed to what Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) coined as “fake balance”: In the quest for “the other point of view” to ensure objectivity and impartiality, sources disputing the evidence of human-made climate change was for long given as much space in articles as sources supporting this evidence – even though the latter represented an overwhelming majority of the world’s scientists. In effect, journalists gave the impression that there was a conflict in science over whether or not climate change is largely human made, when in fact, there is not.

The point of departure for the rise of the norm of journalistic objectivity is often understood to be the commercial penny press in the US, 19th century, when news organisations saw a commercial opportunity in producing political neutral news that could “appeal to everyone and capture the largest audience” (Hunter 2015:276). An increasing professionalization of journalism is also often credited (ibid). The norm has since then slowly made its way across and into journalistic communities around the world. It has recently been challenged by a changing media landscape in many countries, where new actors challenge the bigger, legacy players and choose to play by different rules to carve out their niche. Even technological changes itself may challenge the stronghold of objectivity, as David Weinberger (2009) argued when he coined the phrase [“transparency is the new objectivity”](#) in a digital world. How much journalists see it as their role to influence the public opinion thus varies between media systems and in time (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

Most relevant for this study is the UK, where the Guardian is based. An important characteristic of British newspapers is their strong, distinctive political orientations – both in their content, and in their readership (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Unlike their broadcast counterparts, they have no legal restrictions on overt partisanship. The ideology and political perspective of British newspapers is in fact a major driver of how they cover climate change generally, and of the prevalence of voices sceptical to climate science specifically (Painter 2011). Whereas the majority of the British newspapers are placed on the political right, The Guardian is a paper at the political left of centre – and also read mainly by those who vote accordingly. Studies of The Guardian’s coverage show that it typically gives great weight to scientific evidence, includes few sceptics and favours state intervention to solve climate change (ibid).

Another and related characteristic of British newspaper journalism relevant to this study is its tradition for running campaigns. The term is often used loosely to describe intensified media coverage of and engagement with an issue, but in UK newspaper tradition it is more than this: It is a deliberate focusing of an outlet’s resources in an exercise of power,

signaling its “intention to mobilize public opinion, challenge government and influence policy change” (Howarth 2013:50). In contrast to adhering to objectivity, UK newspaper campaigning is rooted in norms of “historic struggles against control (...) contributing to a predisposition in the British press towards adversarial journalism and campaigning” (ibid:40), developed over time as a result of “a mix of moral principle, commercial imperative and journalistic values” (ibid:43). In fact, unlike the Northern American notion of journalistic professionalism as political objectivity, in much of the Central and Northern European press having a distinct point of view was, and to a degree still is, intimately connected with the notion of journalistic independence and journalism as a public trust (Hallin and Mancini 2004:41).

This is precisely what Alan Rusbridger, in an interview for this study, says was one of the rationales for the Keep it in the ground-project:

“If journalism was based on public importance as opposed to what sells newspapers or what people read, most rational people would say climate change is so important we got to get it right. That means: give it due prominence, treat it rigorously and in a way that will win trust. (...) Now, what will it take, if you want people to trust you on this issue? I mean, you could argue that campaigning is counterproductive, that what you need to do is establish very reliable sober reporting that is proportionate to the subject”.

Or you could argue, he continues, that taking a political stance, being transparent about it and giving readers the opportunity to act is what you should do. For his last project as an editor, he chose the latter. He viewed it as an experiment, “especially in an age of information chaos”, he said:

“Climate change is a useful way into saying: If journalism deserves to survive, is it about time we start trying to define what it is?”

In societies where the trust in media is falling ([Edelman Trust Barometer 2018](#)), is the right strategy to go “back to basics” and be as neutral and objective as you possibly can to win trust - or is it to see transparency as the new objectivity, and thus seek trust by being transparent and open with everyone about your political views and the values guiding your reporting? The answer to this question will depend on the context and media environment of the journalist or editor that poses it.

The Guardian: A campaigning newspaper

To understand the Keep it in the ground (KIITG)-campaign, we thus need to understand the culture of the Guardian. Starting out as a regional, daily newspaper with liberal opinions in Manchester in 1821, the Guardian has grown into a leading global provider of digital news and analysis (Küng 2015). Although it has travelled far from its origins in terms of outreach, it has adhered to its liberal outlook and to its unique form of corporate governance: The Scott Trust was set up in 1936 to secure the Guardian’s editorial and

financial independence “in perpetuity”. This gives the editor more liberties and authority in relation to its business than at many other publications.

In her study of innovators in digital news, Lucy Küng (2015) points out some key characteristics of The Guardian which are helpful to understand how it is set up and how it views itself and its role in the world: Firstly, the Guardian provides free access to its content online – editors have publicly stated there will be no pay wall. This reluctance is explained by being owned by the Scott Trust and its “public-service-leaning news values” (2015:16), but also as a matter of survival in a home market where one of the biggest players, BBC, competes on the basis of free content online. Thus, the main strategy has been to increase the number of users online exponentially, in order to attract advertising money.

The need for growth in audience numbers embedded in its business model helps us understand the global expansion efforts of the Guardian. The target has been to create “a global community of liberal intelligent people” (Rusbridger quoted in Küng 2015), and offer a “newspaper of protest, an outsider brand (...) with a liberal view of the world” (ibid). Küng notes that the paper has thus invested in and committed to investigative journalism, which has resulted in a number of global scoops like the Snowden revelations, establishing its brand on the global scene. Around the same time as the KIITG-campaign though, as this “single bet on the future” (2015:16) in form of ads was proving to falter, the paper would in addition start to develop and adopt a membership strategy where readers are asked to voluntarily contribute to its journalism in return for some benefits.

Relevant to this study, Küng also notes that the target audience of the paper is more likely to get engaged and involved in the journalism and commentary of the site. This ties into another key value, and strategy, of The Guardian, which is to be “open”. In this lies not only being transparent about its processes and cultivating a non-hierarchical governance structure, but also encouraging and facilitating participation and engagement among its audience. It is also worth noting that The Guardian is amongst the newspapers that cover climate change the most, and by far has invested the most resources “of any UK media outlet dedicated to covering the topic” (Painter 2013:119).

All of this suggests that, if there was any newspaper that decided to do a campaign like KIITG, it might not come as a surprise that the Guardian was it.

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Case study: Keep it in the ground

The campaign had an almost religious delivery: It started with an e-mail from Alan Rusbridger to around 20 colleagues on Christmas Eve 2014. He proposed a “dramatic project” ([Guardian podcast, ep. 1](#)). Rusbridger had been inspired by a meeting with Bill McKibben, the writer and activist, who told the Guardian editor that the paper should stop putting climate change in the “environmental ghetto”. Climate change, McKibben argued,

should not be treated as just an environmental question any more: Because it is a result of human action, it comes down to politics and economics. This was not reflected in media coverage, he argued. In addition, McKibben explained the global campaign he was already running on divestment called “Keep it in the ground”. This is what the Guardian ended up launching a campaign to back, mid-March 2015.

When Rusbridger stepped down in June 2015, the campaign changed focus. Asking their readers what the new focus should be, the majority of responses were that people wanted to hear more about solutions to the problems caused by climate change. Thus, solutions became the editorial focus of the campaign up until the international climate negotiations in Paris in November 2015. When the negotiations ended, the Guardian’s campaign did too.

For this study I focused on the first part of the campaign, on divestment. I conducted semi-structured interviews with former editor Alan Rusbridger and four other Guardian journalists that were deeply involved in the campaign: James Randerson, Adam Vaughan, Emma Howard and Aron Pilhofer. I also interviewed Andrew Revkin, an American journalist reporting on climate change for decades, and a critic at the time of the campaign. In addition, I sifted through what I could find of debates on the campaign in the media at the time, including two recorded live debates – one in London and one in Paris. A Guardian podcast reporting on the internal process and development of the campaign as it was happening also gave me valuable insights into the internal discussions at the time – although keeping in mind the caveats you should always consider when someone reports on themselves.

In addition, I did a comparative content analysis of the Guardian’s coverage of climate change at two different periods in the campaign, and compared the coverage with that of the New York Times (NYT). The choice of NYT was made for two main reasons: Firstly, it is a paper of similar profile and reach. Secondly, it is an American newspaper rooted in a media system and newspaper tradition where the norm of objectivity is stronger than in the UK, which is valuable for this study’s research questions. One limitation of the comparability is that the Guardian at the time had a much bigger team devoted to climate change reporting than the NYT. Indeed, my search results show that the Guardian published about three times the number of articles on climate change than the New York Times in this period. Thus, to ensure that the same number of articles from each paper was coded, a principle of choosing every third article from the Guardian, in chronological order, was applied.

This paper will first present findings for each of the four research questions posed, before it summarizes and discusses these findings.

Did the Keep it in the ground-campaign succeed in what it intended to do?

The campaign had two stated goals. A literal goal of making two foundations divest from fossil fuels and an overarching goal of engaging the public in the issue of climate change.

First goal first: Neither of the two foundations had divested from fossil fuels when the divestment part of the campaign stopped in the summer of 2015. The Wellcome Trust engaged with the campaign in an op-ed, defending their chosen strategy of active ownership instead of divestment. The Gates foundation chose not to interact or comment at all. Both foundations later made moves on investment into renewable energy and the Gates foundation also divested some fossil fuel assets, but it is hard to know whether or not the campaign is to credit as neither will say anything publicly about it. Several of the Guardian journalists interviewed for this study do think that their campaign played a part in these decisions, but they have no evidence for that and they admit that their campaign target was not reached. One reason many highlighted was the short time span:

Aron Pilhofer: “It put an automatic clock on it. The objective was to have these two foundations to divest, but they both knew Alan would be leaving, and so they simply could, and probably did, just wait it out.”

Adam Vaughan: “If you are going to do campaigning you need a long-term commitment, and as a newspaper it was always going to be hard for us to sustain that. I think realistically, if we had looked at it a bit more carefully, it would be obvious to us that a long term financial decision was never going to happen in a six months newspaper-friendly time frame.”

Another reason was lack of strategy. James Randerson notes that in hindsight it could have been wise to choose other targets more likely to divest than the two foundations. He also thinks they would have gotten better results if they had engaged more in dialogue with their targets beforehand:

“We didn't have a lot of experience in campaigning and so we were making it up as we went along. One of the mistakes was not having enough time to plan properly: to map out better how you are going to create change. What are the buttons to press, how do we press them and how do we prepare them [the two foundations targeted] for what's coming. We tried to get a meeting with Wellcome Trust before the campaign to tell them about it and maybe persuade them to move before the barrage hit them, but because of unfortunate diary clashes and not having enough time in the first place, we didn't have the meeting before after the campaign started, and then they were in fight-or-flight mode. We could have been smarter on the campaign side of it.”

“That's the issue with a newspaper running a campaign: the infrastructure isn't there, the way of thinking isn't there”, agrees Emma Howard. She now works at Uearthed, which is editorially independent from, but based at, Greenpeace UK. “Some times people here will sask me: what's the difference really, between journalists and activists?”, she says and continues: “But there's a huge difference!”:

“Many journalists don't really get the idea of strategy. At the Guardian, to most people, running a campaign meant pumping out tons of stories on the same subject. Which is very different to thinking like activists: Who are the targets, what are their interests, what do they care about, who do they know, what are the power dynamics, what are the barriers to them changing, who are the people

who matter, what is the long game, etc. The appetite of a news organization changes so fast. We [journalists/news sites] can prioritize an issue, but that's different to a campaign that has a strategy”.

Importantly, she does not think that it *is* the role of journalism to think strategically for political ends, but:

“In a situation where you decide to run a campaign and you say we want to achieve x, y, z - and you genuinely want to achieve x, y, z - then you need a strategy to get there. And we didn't really have that, to the degree that an activism organization has that. We didn't have the skillset at the Guardian, and you wouldn't expect us to either, nor to employ a lot of campaigners. Which was why it was important to work with 350.org, who has that skillset.”

A limitation of this study is that I did not speak to either of the two foundations that were the targets of the campaign. Yet even from the Guardian journalists' point of view the campaign in its most narrow sense was not successful.

Even though the Guardian failed to get their two targets to divest, the journalists do claim a larger effect on the divestment movement. Several of them speak of it as “turbocharging” the movement.

Emma Howard: “I think it did shift the narrative. Bernie Sanders had a legal proposal a year afterwards called Keep it in the ground, and Macron tweeted earlier this year with #keepitintheground – so it got through to the elite of elite”

Alan Rusbridger: “It took something that was fringe concern and hadn't penetrated the mainstream, it took it out of realm of activists and into the heart of financial and political establishment”.

As evidence, he points to that both Christiana Figueres, the chief of the UNFCCC negotiations in Paris, and UN general secretary, Ban Ki Moon, called Rusbridger to offer their support for the campaign and thanked the Guardian. UK's climate minister Ed Davey spoke out in support of the campaign publicly, as did Prince Charles. Even the CEO of Shell, the oil company, thanked the Guardian for its “leadership in this space”. Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, spoke publicly about the risk of stranded assets for investors and based his assessment on the same figures as the Keep it in the ground-campaign was rooted in – yet he did not mention the campaign specifically.

A material outcome was also that the Guardian Media Group, which owns the Guardian, decided to divest from fossil fuels. As the business and editorial branches of the company are independent this was not a matter of course. The newsroom had discussed the potential hypocrisy of putting pressure on others to divest, if their own company would not.

James Randerson: “We were worried that they would cut us under our knees and say “sure, go ahead and do your editorial project, but we think it's a bad business decision, thank you very much””.

It would have made the campaign look less credible, but the Guardian still launched the campaign without knowing what GMG would decide – effectively putting pressure on its own owners.

On the second goal, of engaging people in the topic of climate change, the journalists interviewed for this study all judge the campaign to be more of a success. A limitation of this part of the study is that I did not have access to audience data on readership and engagement, so I have not been able to verify or triangulate findings, nor get an understanding of *who* the readers were in terms of previous interest in climate change. Still, I will argue there are some interesting lessons to be drawn from the experiences of the journalists involved.

One of the ways the journalist tried to engage readers, was to make a conscious and early decision to do the editorial reporting “in a different and new way”:

James Randerson: “We were playing with a lot of different ways to get across to different types of people. We did events like having Dalai Lama on stage at Glastonbury, and we did a series of 60 seconds animated videos we thought would appeal to a younger audience. We also did huge megaproductions where we sent reporters and film-makers to far-flung locations, and then used innovative digital design to create an online experience that looked quite amazing. We invited a designer who works with the online game Minecraft to create a futuristic city as a way of engaging with a completely different audience. We made a podcast to report on ourselves while the campaign was going on. We also had a poet curate a series of original poems on climate change from different poets, and then we got celebrities to read some of them. So: We were trying lots of different and exciting ways to get into the topic for people with different interests, finding that point of contact between their interests and the story of climate change”.

The Guardian also initiated the Climate Publishers Network, a group of publications from various countries that would allow republishing of each other’s climate stories free of charge in an effort to boost coverage ahead of the Paris negotiations (after which it was dropped). They also put their investigative team to work on scrutinizing the conduct of some of the biggest players in the fossil fuel sector, and the links between the British government and oil giant BP. Generally, the Guardian poured resources into the campaign. According to James Randerson, the project leader:

“In the core team we were eight people full time, and then four external people came in on contract as well. Another 20 people were pretty heavily involved in the project, and on top of that 22 more people had some involvement. I was never given a budget, but you can judge for yourself it was resource-heavy.”

They also tried to make the campaign impossible to ignore for readers. This included consciously prioritizing it on the front page of the newspaper and the website regularly during the campaign, but also even more radically for the launch: to wrap the whole newspaper in the campaign for the first day, and similarly online, where they programmed a take-over-homepage. This meant that if you entered the Guardian’s website, your screen would immediately be filled with oil dripping down over the whole screen. The message in both print and online that day was effectively: There is something more important than the news today.

Aron Pilhofer: “We were trying to think of what we could do, using the global platform we have, to put this issue front and centre in some unusual ways. It is jarring to have your browser high jacked

like that. I think it was incredibly effective. We got both positive and negative reactions, but that was the point – at least you got the message”.

Outreach in numbers? According to James Randerson: 6.1 million page views, 4.9 million visits and 3.4 million visitors (unique users) for all content that was tagged as part of the campaign and appeared on the Guardian website for the first 6 weeks after launch (there are more page views than visits because people sometimes click on more than one article per visit – the number of page views is basically the cumulative number of clicks on content part of the campaign). For comparison, the Guardian’s website had 7.3 million daily visitors at the time, and the Guardian’s environmental coverage got more than seven million unique views each month (CJR 2015).

Regarding the campaigning part: In [an article](#) (Guardian 2015c) directed at the readers when the second part of the campaign was about to start, Randerson took stock: “More than 226.000” people had signed up as supporters of the campaign from over 170 countries, he wrote. “Hundreds” of the public [wrote “moving and well-informed” letters](#) to the Wellcome Trust board requesting divestment, and “many took part in a [video appeal direct to Bill Gates](#)”. People of Gates’ hometown Seattle also started their own campaign, led by the former mayor, to convince Gates to divest.

All of the Guardian journalists interviewed saw the engagement with and participation of their readers as one of the key take-aways of the campaign. Adam Vaughan says it “broke down barriers”, and that he had not engaged with readers to the same extent before.

Aron Pilhofer: “I was surprised of how quickly we were able to build momentum and community around the campaign (..), and of how quickly it could scale: It was in 10.000s very quickly and quickly became one of the largest email-lists the Guardian had”.

Also the other interviewees describe more readers than usual reaching out to them, and describe them as “excited” and “wanting to take part”. The journalists even let the readers in on the process of what makes the news, which as discussed earlier is rare in mainstream media:

James Randerson: “They were suggesting to us what to cover, and we did listen to them to make our coverage better. They also engaged directly in the campaign, they wrote personal letters to the foundations and they sent us personal videos directed at Gates that we used in a story”.

Aron Pilhofer: “It hinted at a potential that news organizations may or may not, but almost certainly are not, tapping into - that being the passion and enthusiasm of their readers. News reporting tends to still be a very one-way street, but this was different”.

Pilhofer also warns though:

“When you do commit to something like this, you have to be clear with people, and I’m not sure we really were, about the length of the commitment, what happens when the campaign is done and what do you do with that community. When we did shut down the first part of campaign, we still had this very large community of people that were excited. Some of the feedback we got later was a bit on the

negative side: “Look, you got everyone involved and excited, here we were, and then you decided to shut it down and we never heard from you again and that’s not awesome””.

The campaign was also criticized for its focus. John Gapper, the chief business commentator at Financial Times, [called it](#) “inconsistent”, “impractical” and a “political campaign for carbon taxes and green laws in financial disguise” (FT 2015). Myles Allen, a climate scientist at the University of Oxford, [argued that](#) the campaign’s framing of fossil fuel companies as evil is unhelpful: “Rather than disengaging with the fossil fuel industry, concerned activists should be engaging with them to promote the kind of technologies that are going to be needed to use fossil fuel in a way that won’t be endangering the climate in the future” (CJR 2015). This paper is however not concerned with whether or not divestment is an effective means to curb climate change and will not discuss this part of the critique any further. Rather, it is the ethical and professional questions on the role of journalism that were raised by critics we are interested in.

“If the Guardian’s aim with its KIITG campaign is to draw attention to the issue of fossil fuel divestment, then they have already succeeded”, [writes Myles Allen](#) in an op-ed (Guardian 2015d). He points to the fact that the financial community are increasingly discussing the merits of divestment vs. engagement and are “keen to be on the top of this issue”. But he also criticizes the paper for devoting all its energy to the divestment issue instead of something “more relevant to preventing dangerous climate change than whether or not a couple of charities hold shares in some not-very-profitable coal companies”. Here he touches on one of the core criticisms of the campaign, and of advocacy journalism in general: that it leads to monotonous coverage and excludes a plurality of perspectives and the fuller picture – some would say even the truth - on an issue.

Did the campaign lead to monotonous coverage and reduce the scope of a) ideas/perspectives on the topic of divestment and/or b) other climate change topics?

Richard Black, director of the non-profit Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit, also criticized the Guardian on precisely this notion: “The beauty of having a season of articles is that you don’t have to put everything in one article. You have more room, many more opportunities to deal with all the complexities. I guess that is the opposite from advocacy, where the approach is to be very simple and most articles go along the same lines” (CJR 2015).

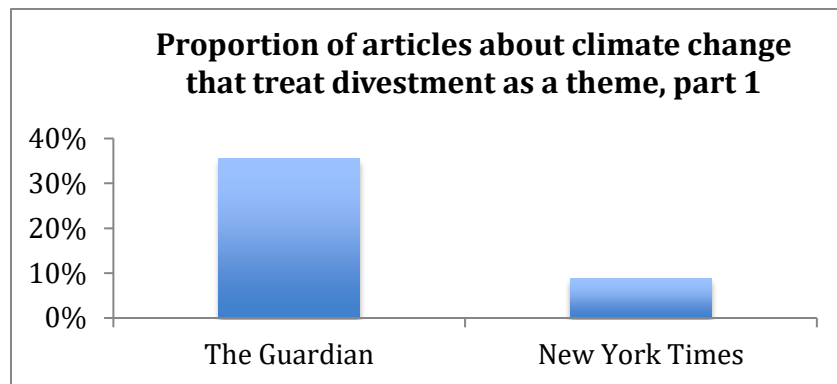
Andrew Revkin, climate reporter then at the New York Times, [argued similarly](#) in a debate during the international climate negotiations in Paris, November 2015:

“There are opportunity costs: Everything you’re doing, means there is something else you’re not doing, so what are you *not* covering when you put your resources into one thing? And if that one thing is divestment and finger pointing one approach to the problem, you’re not looking at the full spectre of ways societies needs to explore to decarbonise a complicated and global economy, and journalism ideally to me is keeping track on the whole picture and in context with history.”

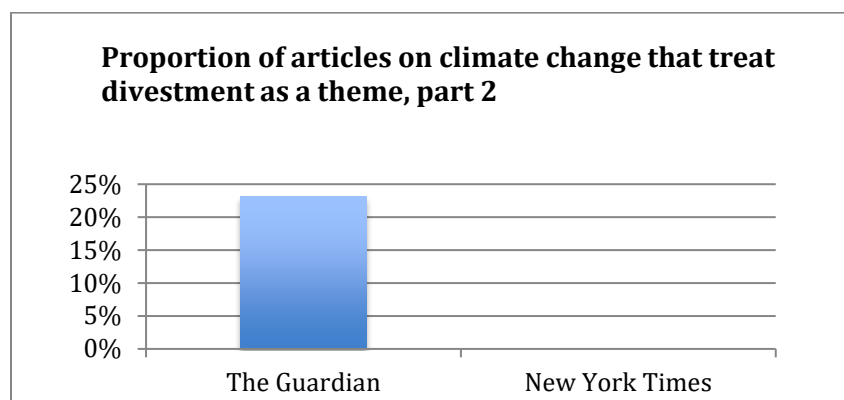
To make an assessment over whether or not this was actually the case with the Guardian campaign, I did a content analysis. I used Factiva and searched for all articles including “climate change” or “global warming” in their print and online archive for the Guardian and the NYT, in two different two week-periods. The first period was in the start of the campaign, one week after the launch, from 22.03.2015 to 05.04.2015. The second period was set to three months later, at the very end of the divestment part of the campaign, from 17.05.2015 to 31.05.2015 (Rusbridger stepped down on 1st of June). Where the topic was mentioned only as background or not a major part of the story, it was discarded (example: A story on Clintons candidacy mentions that she agrees with Obama on many topics, amongst others climate change – this is not regarded as a story on climate change). After also all duplicates were discarded, the result was 25 articles in the NYT and 112 articles in the Guardian for the first period, and 26 articles in the NYT and 104 articles in the Guardian for the second period. To not skew the content analysis, a principle of coding every NYT article, but only every third of the Guardian articles, was applied (attachment 1).

One finding in itself is thus that the Guardian covered the topic massively more than the NYT. Some of that coverage is likely a result of the amount of resources poured into the campaign, but the Guardian also has a record of putting more resources and staff on the environmental beat than its competitors in general – and at this point in time particularly the NYT had recently dismantled its environmental desk (this was reversed in 2017, when the NYT set up a new climate change desk and ramped up their coverage of the topic).

Regarding whether or not the campaign led to monotonous coverage, the analysis shows that the Guardian did write much more about divestment than a comparable paper, the New York Times. In the first period of analysis, over one third of the articles on climate change in the Guardian concerned divestment, compared to under 1 in 10 in NYT.



You could argue that it's not very surprising though, as they had just launched the campaign. In the second period, the Guardian's divestment coverage was down to under 1 in 4 articles, but in the same period the NYT did not write about it at all – meaning that the Guardian still wrote a lot more about divestment than NYT.

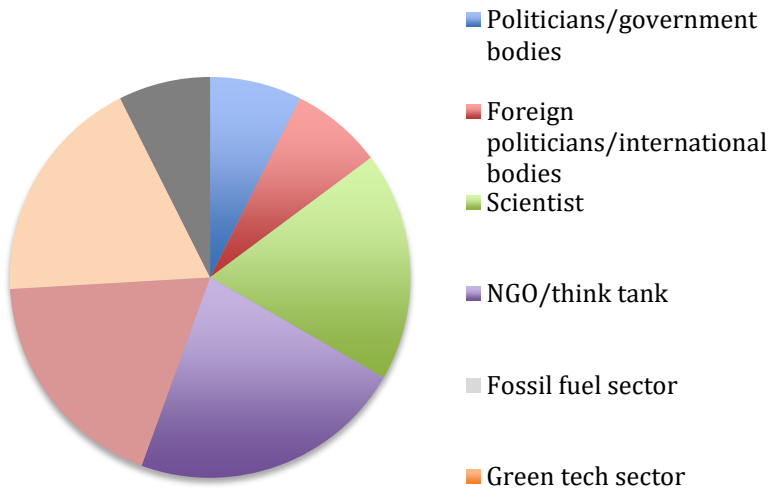


The analysis thus shows that although the campaign contributed to the Guardian reporting much more on climate change than its competitor(s), it also led to what you could see as a skewed attention towards divestment in the paper’s climate change coverage.

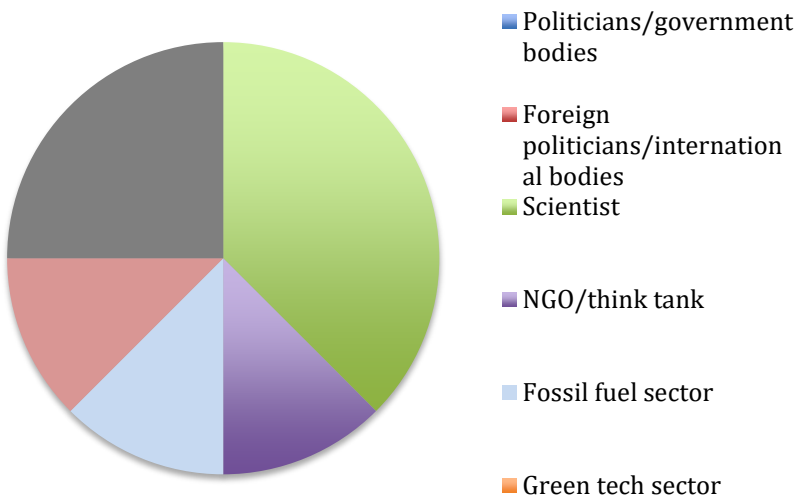
Yet, that is also implying that the NYT coverage was more diverse just because it didn't cover divestment as much. Studying it more closely, we see that the majority of climate change articles in the NYT concerns local effects of climate change in the US, like flooding and draught. So it is not necessarily more diverse, it is just skewed towards another dominating topic. Another observation from studying the articles more closely is how divestment is very little on the radar for the journalists at the NYT. Not only is it not covered very much as a topic in itself, but even when the paper’s journalist write about topics where it could be relevant to mention the movement, they do not. For example, in the first period analysed, the NYT wrote several stories on the US moving from coal to renewable energy, but did not mention the divestment movement as one of the relevant factors in this development. Similarly, when US museums were asked by scientists and environmental groups to cut its ties with the fossil fuel industry, the Guardian covered the event as one linked to the divestment movement, whereas the NYT, reporting on the same event, did not even mention it. To make the point even clearer, in a long interview with an environmental professor titled “What can we do about climate change” published in the NYT and covering a range of possible measures to mitigate climate change, divestment is not mentioned by neither the journalist nor the professor. You may argue that this is a result of NYT not giving the movement as much attention as it deserves, but you might just as well argue that it shows how marginal the movement still was at the height of the Guardian’s campaign, outside of the Guardian’s pages.

A way to measure whether the coverage of divestment itself was monotonous is to look at the sources prevalent in the stories. Which voices are heard and given prominence in the debate? From the first period of analysis, where both papers wrote about divestment and thus it is possible to compare the coverage, I made these two charts:

Guardian: Divestment articles where one or more present of



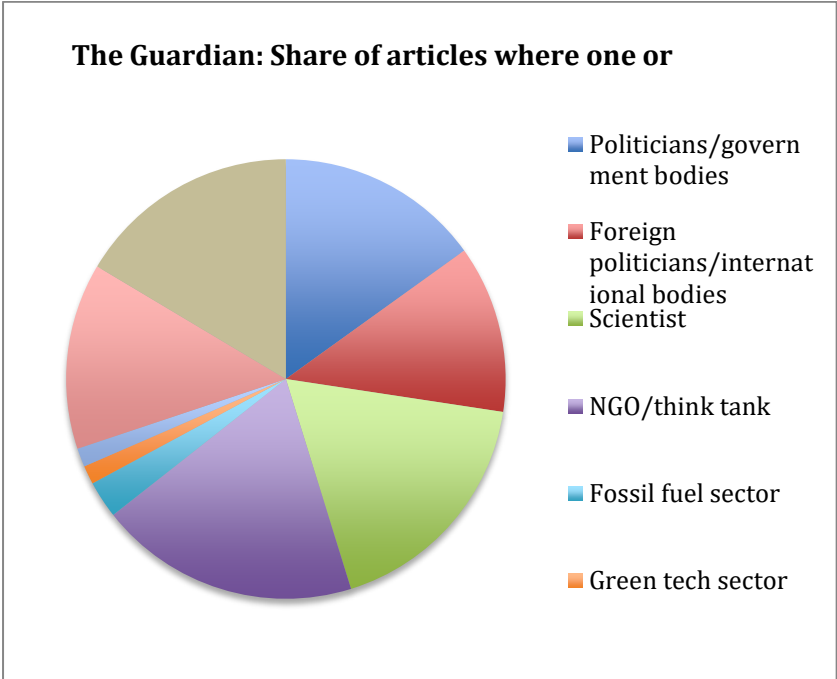
NYT: Divestment articles where one or more present of

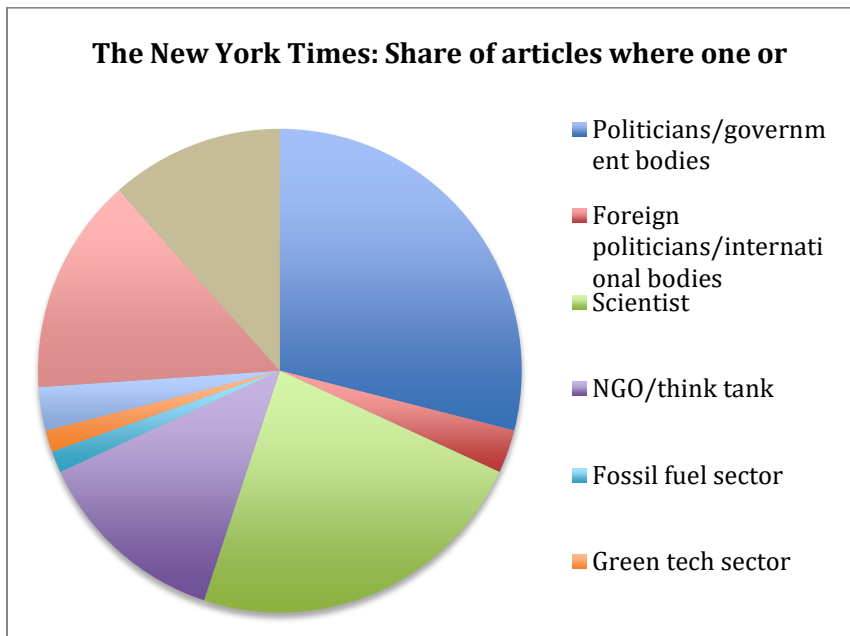


There are several interesting observations to make of comparing these two charts, but we also need to be careful in drawing definitive conclusions based on them, for reasons I will return to shortly. But let us study the charts first. The Guardian's divestment articles show

a larger plurality of voices compared to the NYT. Interestingly though, none of the Guardian articles on divestment analysed in this campaign period features a source from the fossil fuel sector. Also interestingly, a large share of the articles uses Guardian’s own journalists as a source on the topic. Often, these are articles on how the campaign itself is received and perceived. The NYT divestment coverage is to a larger extent dominated by scientists, and features none of their own journalists. Unlike the Guardian, none of the sources are politicians. This indicates that while the Guardian views divestment as a political issue (hence the campaign), the NYT does not. Also unlike the Guardian, the NYT coverage does feature a source from the fossil fuel sector. Importantly though, the number of articles on divestment in NYT was so small (only three articles in total), that the chart might give a skewed impression – there was only one fossil fuel source in total. Also, since only one in every third of all climate change articles in the Guardian was analysed, we cannot exclude the possibility that some of the non-analysed articles treated divestment and did include a source from the fossil fuel sector. And again, only articles of text were analysed for this study, excluding other forms of mediums that the Guardian used in the period. Still, it is interesting that the fossil fuel sector gets so little say in the articles of the Guardian.

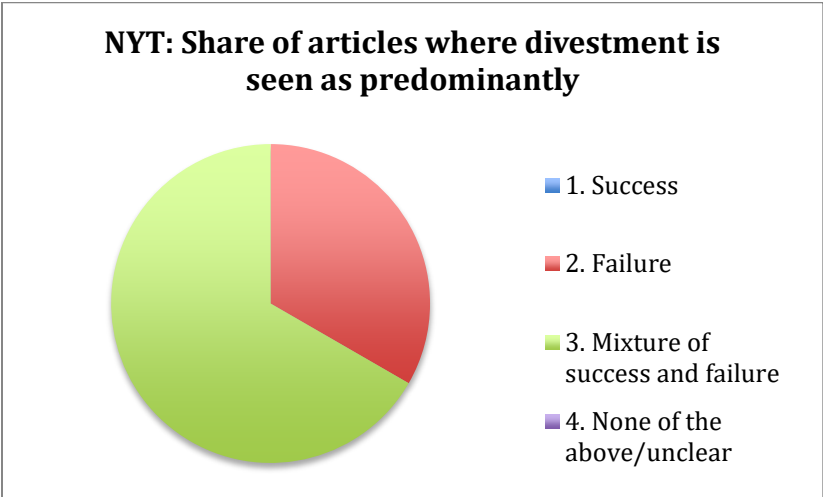
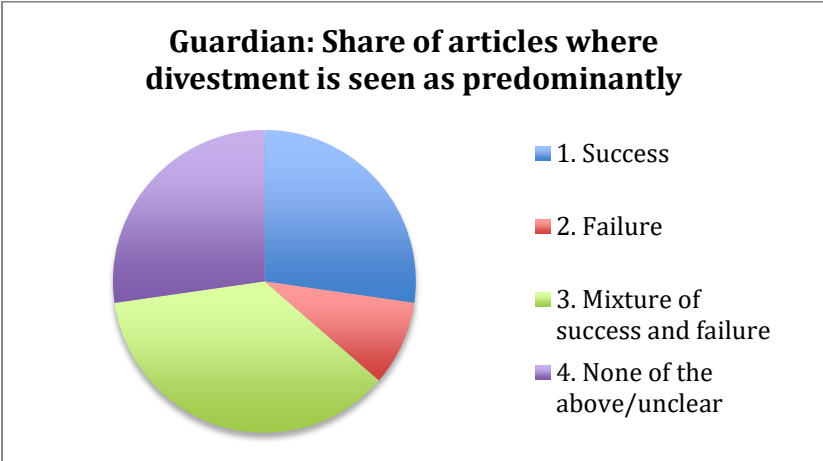
To give us a fuller picture of whether the divestment coverage is monotonous, it may also be interesting to compare its plurality of voices with that of the total coverage of climate change topics in the two papers in the same period. From analysing all the articles on climate change in the first period, I made these two charts (note that the category “papers own journalists” is included in the category “other” in these two charts, because the only articles where the Guardian did use their own journalists as sources, and thus it made sense to single them out, were in their articles on divestment):



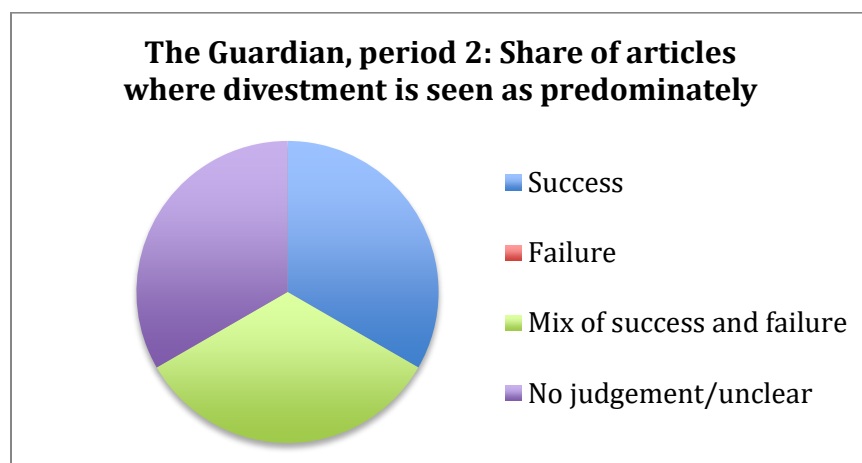


These two charts are more alike to each other than the two charts representing the papers' divestment reporting. This is probably partly a result of the larger number of articles that these two charts represent, but it may also tell us something particular about the divestment coverage. Some observations: The NYT gives somewhat more space to scientists than the Guardian does, and the Guardian gives somewhat more space to NGOs than the NYT does. This resembles the findings from analysing the papers' divestment reporting. Unlike their divestment coverage, the NYT does give space to political sources in their general climate change coverage. The NYT strongly prioritizes national politicians and official sources over foreign leaders and international bodies, whereas the Guardian has a more international outlook. The NYT more often interviews common people than the Guardian. And, in contrast to their divestment coverage, the Guardian gives somewhat more space to the fossil fuel sector in their climate change reporting than the NYT – which makes it even more special that they seemingly do not do so in their divestment reporting.

Lastly, another way of measurement is to look at how divestment is judged in the coverage of it. From the first period, the analysis shows the following:



Although the selections are small and we must remember the limitations this entail, these graphs make an interesting comparison. In the NYT's coverage of the divestment movement, none of the articles view divestment as a success. In the Guardian's coverage, almost a third of the articles do so. It is hard not to see this as the campaign affecting the reporting. In the second period studied, the NYT did not cover divestment at all, but the Guardian did. Interestingly, the view of divestment is as positive, maybe even more positive, as when the campaign first launched:



Again, as for all of the findings in this section, we do have to remember that the unit of analysis was excluded to text only, so they can only give us a limited impression.

To what extent did the campaign break the journalistic norm of objectivity – and did it matter?

I now turn to the third research question posed, concerning the journalistic norm of objectivity. In the Guardian’s podcast chronicling the campaign, there is a recording of one of the very first meetings of the project, where Rusbridger has gathered around 30 colleagues in his office to discuss what this big project on climate change should be. What comes across in the recording of the meeting, and was confirmed by the interviewees to this study, was that one of the core discussions within the newsroom was over the role of journalism in confronting an issue like climate change: Should journalists become advocates - or not?

In the podcast recording, one Guardian journalist argues that the Guardian's power in “shaping the discourse” lie more in “the questions we ask and not the answers we provide” (Guardian podcast, ep. 2). Similarly, another journalist argues: “I am really nervous about the idea of us having a campaign in which we write all the answers and produce the solutions, because I don't think we can and I'm not even sure it is our role. Our campaigning role is to report in a way that shocks people, wakes them up, tell them something they don't know” (ibid).

Emma Howard was at the time a young journalist with campaigning background:

“There were still some very traditional journalists that said we shouldn't run a campaign. But I think Alan was very keen on it, because he wanted to make a statement.”

The word “traditional” alludes to established journalistic norms, such as objectivity. Howard however justifies the breach of the norm on the basis of strong evidence that climate change is serious and so, she argues, it “doesn’t seem like a particular radical thing”

to say that governments, corporations and individuals are “not taking action on the level that needs to be”. That’s why Guardian can and should “put our flag in the sand and say on this issue we will cross that line and we will run a campaign”.

Alan Rusbridger argues along the same lines:

“We moved beyond journalism. It is something I almost never did, because usually I thought the greatest service to truth is to give people both sides – and thus not to campaign. This felt different. The science is settled. Journalism wasn’t rising to the challenge”.

Still, it was not just climate science generally the Guardian embraced in its campaign, but a specific policy proposal – and this was met with criticism at the time. Yet Alan Rusbridger argue that it is acceptable for editorial objectivity to be suspended on matters which has such profound moral and social consequences as climate change arguably does have, and he likened it with apartheid and tobacco:

“You can view this in two ways. One is that this is a moral issue, like tobacco and apartheid - you should not have your money with these companies, as they are irresponsible. Or you can argue that it is financially recklessness - these are stranded assets and if you are investing in a long-term perspective you are being irresponsible. We are not going to be neutral about that, or impartial about that – this is a campaign and here is what you can do”

His latter point was one of the key arguments for running the KIITG-campaign: the perceived benefits of offering people an actionable alternative. The journalists in favour argued it would make the project stand out from normal journalism on climate change where you are mainly just offered (more of the same) information, and also it was argued it could break the feeling of hopelessness that they thought the public (and even many of the journalists themselves) were feeling when reading about climate change. “The advantages of a news organisation stepping into an advocacy role is that you provide a mechanism for taking action”, says Aron Pilhofer. “A campaign gives people agency and ownership and something that they can touch”, argued James Randerson.

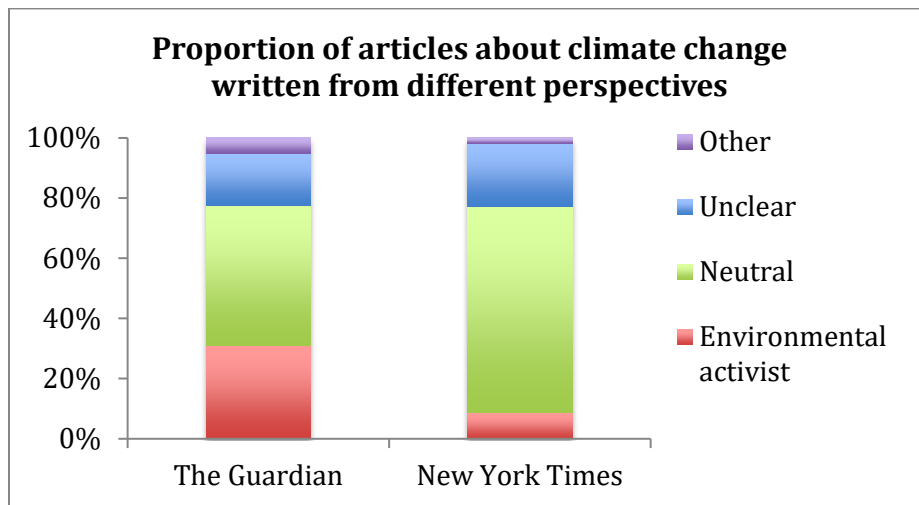
They also tried to alleviate potential negative consequences:

Emma Howard: “I can see how people would think it muddles the water between fact and opinion, potentially. But you just have to be very explicit about when you are campaigning and when you are reporting - draw a very clear line. I think we did that, we said: We are taking a policy position on this very specific thing, but not on anything else.”

Adam Vaughan: “Especially our energy correspondent was worried initially that the campaign might damage his access to, and contacts within, all the fossil fuel companies. But he reported that it had mostly a positive effect. Well, Exxon refused to talk to us about anything because we had taken a partial position. But Shell, their chief executive came in and talked to the editorial morning meeting, and then gave us an hour interview, which is really unusual. So interestingly the campaigning also gave us access we probably wouldn't have got - I think they took the view of “keep your enemy close””.

When asked about the fact that Exxon Mobile refused to answer questions from a Guardian journalist and stated the campaign as reason, the Guardian journalists interviewed do not

see this as especially problematic and claim that the company has “never been very interested in speaking to the press anyway”. Environment editor Damian Carrington even called it “a badge of honour” during a [public debate](#) at the international climate negotiations in Paris in November 2015, reasoning “they accused us for lack of objectivity, but from a company that has funded denialism, I think it is fairly laughable” [referring to that Exxon Mobile has funded think tanks that has produced material questioning climate science]. To understand this stance, it helps to remember the opinionated and partisan newspaper landscape the Guardian is a part of. In fact, analysing and comparing the reporting in both periods we see that the Guardian’s climate change coverage is more environmentally activist than that of the NYT:



Notably, the few articles in the category “environmental activist” in the NYT were all opinion pieces. The majority of the Guardian articles in this category were either opinion pieces or articles directly related to the KIITG-campaign (e.g. coverage of their own campaign efforts), although there were also a few examples of other climate change articles where the perspective of the journalist was deemed activist (see attachment 1).

After the Guardian had decided to do a campaign in the first place, there was also some disagreement within the newsroom over whether or not divestment should be the focus of the campaign, and if so, who should be their targets. One journalist in the podcast (ibid) recording argues:

“Pragmatically, if you want to do a classic newspaper campaign where we wave around, make people feel good and get something that looks concrete, divestment is great. It doesn’t actually change the balance sheets of the companies and will do very little to keep it in the ground”

It becomes clear pretty quickly though, that the point of the campaign is not as much material as it is political: To delegitimize fossil fuel producers. Damian Carrington, the environmental editor, also confirmed this at the mentioned [debate](#) in Paris in November 2015: “Divestment is a political campaign, not a financial campaign”. And as one of the

Guardian journalists says in the podcast: “If the weight of the Guardian (..) could swing behind this, we might actually manage to change the political climate” (Guardian podcast, ep. 1). This is interesting because it says something about how Guardian journalists view their role in the world. At one point, George Monbiot says (ibid, ep. 2): “If we want to change the world, and I think that's why Alan brought us together today” (he goes on to argue why the campaign should aim for politicians and the Paris agreement, not foundations and consumers - but the important point for this study is his role conception as a journalist in the Guardian).

As if choosing to do a campaign and choosing a deeply political and polarized question for that campaign was not challenging the objectivity norm of journalism enough, the Guardian also chose to cooperate with an NGO for the campaign. The Guardian's view on climate change was well known, but a partnership with an activist organization [“is unprecedented to my knowledge”, said Bud Ward](#), editor of Yale Climate Connections (Mashable 2015).

The Guardian's rationale for the cooperation was twofold: The Guardian lacked the experience and resources to run the type of campaign they were planning, and they also wanted to build on an existing movement.

Adam Vaughan: “The reactions [to this] were bigger in the US. It was alien for them, (...) they were questioning why we were partnering with 350.org, the answer to which was: they provided the infrastructure to do the e-mail stuff. We were not set up for that. They had no editorial influence, but we needed management structure and experience. We had a big FAQ on why they were involved and were up front with people on how it worked”.

Emma Howard was partly in charge of the partnership with [350.org](#), and says that there was also some scepticism internally to the cooperation:

“There was a certain amount of anxiety in the Guardian about partnering with a campaign organisation: How tied are you to them and what they say and do, and how quickly will they be able to move”.

This led to some tension:

Adam Vaughan: “I remember we ran a story about the Wellcome Trust rejecting the idea of divestment early on, and we put it out quickly, because that's what we do. The campaigning team was really annoyed about it, saying it was not very helpful. We were like “Why wouldn't we just put it out? It's news”, but if you are campaigning you should think more carefully about what goes out I guess, even if it is only about timing and not the content”.

Alan Rusbridger also notes the difference between the “old” and “young” journalists that Emma Howard alluded to earlier, and argues that “there is no one, single journalism any longer”:

“If you're a middle-aged journalist who has always written articles, and you are put together with young people who say things like: “Why don't we make our readers make films?” I mean, they would make something that wasn't journalism, but more like an ad or a campaign, and go: “We could do this!” You could see the journalists thinking: “Oh my god, I didn't think we could”. (...) It was good to challenge the conventional journalists.”

Also 350.org had concerns. According to Emma Howard, these were specifically around what happens when the Guardian would stop the campaign, to ensure that 350.org would be able to keep it going with the supporters who wanted to and not lose that enthusiasm and momentum: “What happens to the data for example - can 350.org continue to use the e-mail lists of people who signed up with the Guardian?”

The way the Guardian solved this was to give people who signed the petition and signed up for the campaign the choice to link up with only the Guardian, or also 350.org – there was one box to tick for each organisation.

Emma Howard: “Once you put in an extra box it acts as disincentive for people to sign up. But you have to balance that against the wish for the campaign to live on outside the Guardian. We wanted to turbocharge a movement that already existed, so we didn't want it to exist in isolation only at the Guardian - because in terms of real world impact that is just silly”

All the interviewees agree however, that a campaign like KIITG is something news organisations should do sparingly. “Partly because it itself would be tiresome, if everything became advocacy, then people would also switch off”, says Alan Rusbridger. Aron Pilhofer sees campaigning as on the high end of an advocacy spectrum, where further down on that scale is solution journalism and participatory forms of journalism. As an American, he thought he would “have great deals of discomfort with campaigning for specific things, but actually I found it liberating”, he says, but does think news organisations “should do it very cautiously”:

“The risk is that you, almost by definition, lose and give up your position of not being a participant. You become a combatant. The risk is then that you give people on the other side ammunition to dismiss your journalism. Also, people who might be predisposed to your argument and are convincible, might be more difficult to get on board, because they see your reporting as biased and driven by the objections of campaign - even though that's not the case. So you have to weigh these things. In the case of KIITG it made sense, because it fit our mission and our role in the world”.

On the question of whether the Guardian should do more of this type of campaign, Adam Vaughner thinks the paper should rather concentrate on reporting:

“I think it does raise questions over where we can best make change. Basically we were trying to use the public to put pressure, which is a different type of campaign to writing great stories about badly treated British citizens, like we now do with the Windrush stories [referring to a series of articles by the Guardian revealing that immigrants to the UK, many from the so-called Windrush generation, has been wrongly detained and deported]. (...) I think my personal view is that probably that is where we are best pushing, rather than trying to get people to sign petitions and write letters. There are others better at doing that. It requires such a different time scale, different ways of communicating with people and managing, different modus operandi, and that's why you have campaigning groups to do that. It was interesting at time, and because we picked this goal of trying to get these institutions to divest it was understandable that we used that medium and approach, but I don't know if its necessarily one for us to replicate it in the future. That's my view. I just don't think it's necessarily what we are best at.”

He does not regret the Guardian doing it though:

“It was a great learning curve, and it made me much more open-minded and more closer to readers. We talk a lot about openness, but doing something like that is when you actually act on it”

Did the campaign lead to any lasting change in the newsroom and its coverage of climate change issues?

All of the Guardian journalists interviewed saw the crossover cooperation between departments in the newsroom as one of the key lessons of the campaign. The journalists with experience from the environmental desk particularly highlighted that this resulted in a beneficial “unboxing” of climate change.

Adam Vaughan: “Rather than it [climate change coverage] being a specialist desk equivalent to the environmental ministry - which everyone says is very important and pays lip service to, but of course, in the end you are not the treasury or the ministry of finance – the big positive thing coming out of the campaign was bringing people in from around the building, people that would not normally write about this stuff, because they took it away to their day-to-day reporting and that’s where this stuff needs to be: ingrained in everything. It spread the seed of climate change around the building.”

The learning was reciprocal: Non-environmental journalists also brought fresh perspectives and ideas to the environmental desk, “stuff you don’t necessarily think about because you are too close to the glass”, he says.

Yet he also admits that climate change “by and large” now has gone back to being a specialist beat in the paper: “I say by and large because I think some of it has spread around the building and stayed there, but the majority of the climate stories is lead by the environmental desk, that’s still the nature of it.” As an example, he points to the coverage of climate change in the spring of 2018, the time of this study:

“I think the only time it was on the front page of the newspaper this year was when we had the cold weather, where we wrote about climate change tangentially only (...) It feels like it has faded into the background”.

James Randerson highlights a different lesson from the cross-departmental cooperation that might have contributed to a more lasting change in the newsroom:

“I heard David Pemsel [CEO of the Guardian] say on the Media Masters podcast recently that they will now regularly set up task forces of both editorial and commercial staff to solve particular problems. He didn’t say that this came out from KIITG, and the idea was not novel when we did it, but it had not been done much before to my knowledge and we learned a lot from it. And now it seems like the Guardian does it more widely”.

In addition to the crossover between different departments, a key lesson all the interviewees mention is the level of engagement with and participation of the audience. Is this something that continued after the campaign was over?

Adam Vaughan: “Personally not so much, but occasionally. It is partly that the subject matter I write about doesn’t lend itself easily [finance]. Also there is lack of capacity and time. With the campaign,

the number of people and resources meant we could do all the things we should be doing, like proper community engagement - but in day-to-day journalism it is harder”

But also here, some of the interviewees suggest that there might be a larger take-away:

James Randerson: “We showed how powerful it can be journalistically to use that relationship [with readers]. We learned a lot about the practicalities of doing that, including the need for regular communication with supporters and the need to keep thinking of new ways to get them involved”.

Aron Pilhofer: “Look at the Guardian membership efforts: although its content-oriented, not campaign-oriented, we do see spikes of donations and memberships around topics people are passionate about, which shows the potential of longer term engagement strategies with readers”

Pilhofer was part of the team that was tasked with coming up with a new business strategy to bring back to the new editor and the CEO of the paper in the fall of 2015:

“Membership was a core piece of that proposal. Indirectly, we drew lessons from KIITG, although I cannot draw a direct line from KIITG to the whole membership strategy”.

Thus structurally, the Guardian seems to have drawn some lessons from the campaign that have more or less informed their later work, although this study is too limited in its scope to study this closely. There also seem to have been changes on an individual level, as several of the interviewees speak of the experience as transformative in some regard.

Emma Howard: “Personally I had never been that interested in doing journalism on climate change before I started the campaign. It made me push my boundaries. It also changed my view of what journalism on this might be.”

Alan Rusbridger: “I can’t remember anything we’ve done where all journalists just wanted to join and be involved. It’s so easy to be cynical about journalism. You do something like this, and people feel like they can use their skills to something good.”

Discussion

The first research question posed by this paper was: Did the campaign succeed? The answer to that is, as it often is, muddled. The campaign failed at its target of getting two foundations to divest from fossil fuels, a result of lack of strategy, set-up and former experience in this type of campaigning. Yet the campaign did arguably have a big influence on the wider debate on divestment and climate change mitigation, and gave the divestment movement exposure and legitimacy. It also engaged readers to an extent the journalists report to never have experienced before. This study does not have access to data on whether they reached out to new audiences, or mostly to readers already engaged in the topic of climate change. Although it would have been interesting to study whether it did engage new audiences, the explicit goal of the campaign was to reenergize the ones who had “stopped caring”. Drawing on the literature on compassion fatigue, we see that the Guardian applied proposed techniques such as focusing on solutions and calling for action. They translated a complex and abstract problem (global climate change) into an action on a

personal level (push these two named foundations to divest from fossil fuels), and facilitated that action (sign this petition). In this way they encouraged increased engagement among readers - although this study was not able to measure the material effect of such engagement, or whether or not it also disengaged others.

The second question posed was whether the campaign led to monotonous coverage and reduce the scope of a) ideas/perspectives on the topic of divestment and/or b) other climate change topics. First of all, this study finds that the Guardian wrote about climate change three to four times more than a comparable newspaper, the New York Times, in the selected periods of analysis, indicating that the campaign increased the climate change reporting in the paper. It did also write three to four times more about divestment, a finding indicating that the campaign affected what was reported. The campaign also seems to have affected the view of divestment portrayed in the reporting, as more successful than what was reported in the NYT. The campaign did not seem to lead to a serious lack of plurality of voices on the subject, although with the exception of giving little space to the arguments of the fossil fuel sector. The Guardian also framed divestment as a political issue to a much larger extent than the NYT. Although there are many limitations to these findings mentioned above, they indicate that the campaign did influence the way divestment was portrayed in the Guardian, as more successful and more important than in a comparable newspaper. Yet it also increased the general coverage of climate change in the newspaper.

The third question posed was to what extent the norm of objectivity was breached, and what the consequences were. Regarding its effect on access to sources, the company Exxon Mobile refused to talk to the Guardian, stating as a reason that the paper was not treating the fossil fuel sector fairly. This can be a problem for any newspaper that wants to cover a topic according to journalistic norms and standards of impartiality and plurality of voices. Other companies though, like Shell, seem to have seen the Guardian's prioritization of covering fossil fuels as a reason to engage more with the paper, to explain their view. The Guardian did also include voices sceptical to their own editorial stance in their coverage. The content analysis shows that the Guardian's overall coverage of climate change (including opinion pieces) was more environmentally activist than that of a comparable newspaper in reach and profile, the New York Times. However this, and the very campaign itself, must be understood in light of the media system and environment the Guardian is rooted in: The partisan, opinionated newspaper culture in the UK. The Guardian also did not try to hide the fact that they, in Rusbridger's words, "went beyond journalism" with this campaign. They were unusually transparent in letting readers in on the newsroom discussions around the practice and boundaries of journalism and advocacy through their podcast. This ties into a broader and on-going discussion within media circles on the utility of the norm of objectivity and whether or not transparency should be "the new objectivity". Different outlets will conclude differently on this, depending on the media landscape they are embedded within, but the Keep it in the ground-campaign is an example of the latter strategy.

The fourth question posed was whether there was any lasting change in the newsroom from the campaign. Interviews show that the campaign helped move climate change out of “the environmental ghetto” and enrich the coverage of climate change. This is in line with what Berglez (2011) in the literature conceptualized as working *beyond* media logic; changing the way reporting on climate change is done by bridging the divides between traditional distinct areas of reporting. As mentioned earlier, Berglez suggested back in 2011 that the interconnected and complex nature of climate change would force journalists to break out of the compartmentalized way of looking at the world in mainstream journalism. Although this campaign arguably led to this happening in the Guardian, according to the interviewees climate change is mostly back to being treated like an environmental topic again in the paper. It will probably take more than one campaign to break a powerful logic. The campaign did however seem to have an influence on both strengthening the focus on membership strategies, reader engagement and cross departmental collaboration in the paper, although this study cannot conclude on how big of an influence it was. Lastly, all interviewees report that the campaign had an influence on their individual careers and gave them lots of ideas and experience on how to do journalism on a complex topic like climate change. In the words of Emma Howard: “I learned that a lot of people really care about this issue. But it *is* hard.”

Conclusion

All together, and as summarised above, the Keep it in the ground-campaign offers some interesting lessons on the role of journalism in this space moving forward.

Inspired by the research agenda set out by Fazey et al. (2018) for climate researchers mentioned earlier, one can argue that the most critical question for journalism is no longer about solely informing about the problem of climate change, but about engaging in the how-to of transformative changes necessary to avoid catastrophic man-made climate change. The Guardian’s campaign is one way of tackling this challenge.

Yet engagement can be done in several ways. While the campaign makes a powerful case for journalism to engage more in a reciprocal dialogue with the public, adhering to its core value of public trust, but also because a newspaper needs an engaged public to survive - it also makes the case for sticking to what journalism knows best: newsrooms are not set up to campaign like a campaigning organisation. Yet there should be room for experimentation and various ways of doing journalism, especially in a time where new solutions and models are in demand as the old ones crumble. The Guardian deserves credit for daring to do so, and for being transparent in the process.

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Attachment 1: Coding sheet used for content analysis

Inspired by, and adapted from, coding sheet used in the study “Something old, something new: Digital media and the coverage of climate change” by Painter et al (2016).

Look at both online and print versions of the media organisations. Use Factiva. The search words are ‘global warming’ or ‘climate change’. Select only results of text, not looking at photos/videos/audio - the text article is the basic unit of analysis.

If an article only mentions the search word(s) as background, without it being central to the text, the arguments or the content, it should be discarded (eg: A story on Hillary Clintons presidential candidacy included a sentence about that she agrees with Obama on many topics “amongst others climate change”, but then discusses this no further – this is not regarded as a relevant story).

All very short articles equal to, or less than a couple of sentences long, should also be discarded, including trails. Don’t include comments at the bottom of stories, letters from readers or corrections. Do include blog posts, opinion pieces, book/art reviews and editorials.

You should not code links to other articles embedded in the text (for example, a link to a science report or other news articles).

We will look at two periods: from 22.03.2015 to 05.04.2015 (one week after the launch) and from 17.05.2015 to 31.05.2015 (at the very end of the first part of the campaign). Search results show that the Guardian published about three times the number of articles on “climate change”/“global warming” than the New York Times in both these periods. To ensure that we code the same number of articles from each paper, a principle of choosing every third article from the Guardian, in chronological order, was applied.

There are additional notes of clarification at the end of the coding sheet.

1. Media Organisation

2. Date (xx/xx/15)

3. Headline of story

PART ONE (formats)

4. Which of the following options does the content mainly consist of?

Content should be classified as 1 if there is a by-line from a reporter, or mention of the media organisation. It should be 2 if it is an agency report (s).

1. An original news report
2. Reports clearly identified as only coming from other sources such as agencies
3. Blog post or opinion piece
4. Long-format interview or reportage
5. Other

5 Length/size

If you can, use a simple word count. If this is not doable, estimate.

- a. If predominately a text format or a mixture, is the story:
 1. Small (less than 300 words)
 2. Medium (300-600 words)
 3. Large (more than 600 words)

PART TWO (Content)

6. Divestment

This theme includes divestment and disinvestment efforts for pulling money out of the fossil fuel industry, that is oil, gas, coal. Also include stories on other forms of cutting ties with fossil fuel industry, eg excluding fossil fuel companies or related actors from being donors/having other types of influence over government bodies/charities/organizations

- a. How much did the story include discussion or mention of the theme?
 0. Not a topic

1. Minor topic
2. One of the main topics
3. The only mentioned topic

b. How did the theme appear in the story? (code only the strongest variety - see note 2)

- 0 Not at all
- 1 General, unsourced statements/remarks/descriptions
- 2 Sourced statements or direct quotations

c. Is divestment predominately seen as a:

0. None of the under5
1. Success
2. Failure
3. Mixture of success and failure

7. Scientific background

This theme includes specific reference(s) to the climate science which underpins the need to keep global warming to below 2 degrees C. Indicators of the theme would include scientific reports from such bodies as the IPCC, or policy reports from the IEA or World Bank where the scientific context is clearly mentioned. New reports on the science which are published would also be indicative of this theme.

a. How much did the story include discussion or mention of the theme?

0. Not a topic
1. Minor topic

- 2. One of the main topics
- 3. The only mentioned topic

b. How did the theme appear in the story? (code only the strongest variety)

- 0 Not at all
- 1 General, unsourced statements/remarks/descriptions
- 2 Sourced statements or direct quotations

8. Disaster/Catastrophe:

The disaster/catastrophe theme consists of descriptions or statements of possible negative, (often dramatic) impacts or effects of global warming, such as sea level rises, more extreme weather events such as floods, water or food shortages, population displacements, damage to the coral reefs, diminishing ice sheets and so on. This would include reports from affected populations or individuals. (see note 2)

a. How much did the story include discussion or mention of the theme?

- 0. Not a topic 5
- 1. Minor topic
- 2 One of the main topics
- 3. The only mentioned topic

b How does the theme appear in the story? (code only the strongest variety)

- 0 Not at all
- 1 General, unsourced statements/remarks/descriptions
- 2 Sourced statements or direct quotations

9. Opportunity/Solution

The opportunity theme includes content that refers to advantages of doing something to reduce the risks from greenhouse gas emissions such as the advantages of any move to a low-carbon system, business opportunities, health benefits, energy security, etc.

a. How much did the story include discussion or mention of the theme?

0. Not a topic

1. Minor topic

2. One of the main topics

3. The only mentioned topic

b. How does the theme appear in the story? (code only the strongest variety)

0 Not at all

1 General, unsourced statements/remarks/descriptions

2 Sourced statements or direct quotations

10. Climate Justice

The justice theme means content which explicitly refers to the different historical responsibility for emissions and differentiated burdens between countries relating to mitigation, adaptation or alleviation of the consequences of climate change. It would also include mention of any of the many moral and ethical issues that surround the climate change theme, including the responsibility of the current generation to future generations. A story which is mainly about marches or demonstrations organised by NGOs who are in favour of climate justice would have to include explicit references or quotes about justice, fairness or similar concepts.

a. How much did the story include discussion or mention of the theme?

0. Not a topic

1. Minor topic

2. One of the main topics

3. The only mentioned topic

b. How does the theme appear in the story? (code only the strongest variety)

0 Not at all

1 General, unsourced statements/remarks/descriptions

2 Sourced statements or direct quotations

11. Other themes

What wider elements of the climate change story were included in the content? Please include relevant number if at least one sentence included mention of these elements (see note 3). (0=no, 1=yes, multiple answers are possible).

Economics/Business/Finance

Health impacts

Food security

Migration/displacement

International dispute (e.g. over Arctic)

International negotiations (COP)

Moves to renewable energy

Local connection to the causes or consequences of climate change

Protests, rallies, marches

Technology initiatives to reduce emissions

Fossil fuel sector

Uncertainty (that is, scientific uncertainty/climate change denialism)

PART THREE (Voices)

By 'voices' we mean people who are quoted either directly or indirectly. We only code when a person with a name is mentioned (or also if entitled "the prime minister said" and it is clear who is meant). Institutions appear in the coding only when their representatives talk. So a

mention of e.g. an IMF report without mention of a named spokesperson, author or representative would not be coded. The voice of staff writers at a media organization is not coded. Thus, in opinion columns by staff writers, in editorials and in reportages and features, we only code the 'voices' that the journalist or writer quotes.

12. Which voices appeared as interviewees in any part of the story?

(Answer No (0), or Yes (1) for each category. For all categories, if the answer is 'Yes', please add number of such voices in the follow up variable, e.g. in 14a number. Code as 99 in 'number' column if no voices).

- a. Politician from reporter's home country
- b. Politician from another country
- c. Representative of Fossil fuel sector
- d. Representative of Green tech sector
- e. Other business person
- f. Scientist or representative of a science research centre
- g. Representative of NGO, think tank, lobby group or policy research centre
- h. Representative of international body (IPCC, UN, World Bank etc)
- i. Common Person (this could be a climate activist who is not a representative of a NGO)
- j. Religious leader
- k. Other (please specify)

PART FOUR (tone or style)

13. Would you say that the tone of the story was mainly:

- 1. Funny/Entertaining
- 2. Straight
- 3. Shocking
- 4. Hopeful

5. Other

6. Mixture

14. Would you say that the language of the story was mainly:

1. Formal

2. Informal, chatty

15. Would you say that the author's perspective towards climate change was mainly:

See note 4

0. Unclear

1. Environmental activist

2. Neutral journalist

3. Other

NOTES

Note 1. By 'sourced statement/direct quotations', we mean a statement or quote which is clearly assigned to an individual, institution, body or report.

Note 2. An example of a 'disaster' headline would be 'more wild weather on the way, UN climate panel says'; an opportunity headline, 'The silver lining to Arctic global warming'; of a climate justice headline, 'future generations need a climate deal'; of a 'divestment' headline, 'Rockefeller brothers: Its our moral duty to divest from fossil fuels'; and of a 'science' headline, 'leading US scientists says science demands a deal'.

Note 3. Here we are trying to get a snapshot of what other themes are included in the coverage. An economics or business angle would be mention of discussion of the possibility of securing economic growth and emissions reductions at the same time, the business opportunities, the risk to business ('stranded assets'), and so on. 'Local' refers to any explicit reference to the causes or impacts at a national level, or subnational level (cities, regions) where the publication is mainly aimed.

Note 4. Here we are trying to determine the tone or perspective of the journalist and the story as it comes across to readers. 'Environmental activist' refers to pro-environment

opinion pieces, stories defined by (overt) commentary or clear intent to change policies in a pro-environmental direction, including a lack of voices from the non-environmental movement. 'Neutral journalist' refers to stories that may have a clear angle/conclusion, but where all sides of the argument get to speak and which asks critical questions to all sides. 'Unclear' refers to articles where it is hard to discern. 'Other' should be rarely used, but is a category for where the question of perspective does not apply to the form, e.g. if the article in question is a poem.