

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW: DIGITAL MEDIA AND THE COVERAGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

JAMES PAINTER ET AL

**SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW:
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CLIMATE CHANGE**

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Executive Summary

New digital-born media players, and particularly three of the largest – Huffington Post (HuffPo), Vice, and BuzzFeed – offer a substantial body of coverage about the environment and climate change, in which they provide a richness of format and thematic diversity which might otherwise not exist. They are very different to each other, but together they give room to societal voices which are under-represented in legacy media; they make room for alternative viewpoints which often do not come to the forefront; and they allow for informal and entertaining modes of discourse which are scarce in legacy media.

These three media organisations, which have gained a large number of users based on providing news via social media and the internet, have all become serious competitors to legacy media for news provision and consumption, particularly among younger age groups. In addition, they have invested heavily in different language sites and/or country-specific sites. In some countries their reach has overtaken established brands like the *New York Times*, CNN, and the BBC.

New data show that users most interested in environment news are more likely to turn to brands such as Huffington Post and BuzzFeed, with their popularity rivalling (and often exceeding) that of traditional news brands. Particularly in the UK and the US, the new digital players are amongst the most popular online news sources for those who are highly interested in environment news. In the USA, the Huffington Post has become the most popular online news destination for this group of ‘highly interested’, more popular than Yahoo, CNN, and Fox News online.

This study has concentrated on identifying the differences and similarities both between these three new players and established legacy media, and between themselves, in their coverage of climate change, which included news and commentary, video, images, and textual formats. In a detailed case study, it analysed how they covered the 21st

UN climate change conference, known as COP21, which took place in Paris in November and December 2015.

A sample of more than 500 articles from five different media organisations (one legacy left-leaning, one legacy right-leaning, Huffington Post, Vice, and BuzzFeed) in France, Germany, Spain, the UK, and the USA was analysed in detail by a group of researchers. In Poland, around 60 articles were also examined, but of these, only one was from a new player (Vice).

The new players already have a strong presence in English and French, but in Germany and Poland there was very little digital-born coverage of climate change. In Spain too, Vice and BuzzFeed had very little coverage of the summit, compared to legacy players. Indeed, within our sample, traditional media organisations still accounted for about two-thirds of all the coverage of the summit.

In general, a complex picture emerges. On the one hand, the new players publish a lot of what they are renowned for doing: Huffington Post relies heavily on blog posts, Vice on ‘personal narration’ immersive video, and BuzzFeed on listicles, quizzes, photo galleries, and irreverent content. On the other hand, however, they all do a lot more than that, including a significant amount of straight reporting along similar themes and with similar sources to legacy media.

The three new players do not form a monolithic entity. Their offerings partly overlap with the legacy media’s coverage. In the Huffington Post in particular, but in the other two as well, many articles can be found which mirror legacy media coverage in their thematic focus, approach, tone, set of voices, and themes. Our main findings on the differences are the following:

1. **Volume of coverage (news and commentary):** In many countries, the Huffington Post has a similar volume of coverage to legacy media. In the US, UK, and France, Huffington Post has a large presence, providing a considerable share of COP21 coverage and significantly more coverage than legacy players like *USA Today*. In contrast, BuzzFeed and Vice News play a more complementary role to the information provided by legacy media. Their volume of coverage is lower, in part driven by their editorial and business approach.
2. **Main focus areas:** Huffington Post paid particular attention to the *opportunities* provided by taking action against climate change, such as discussions of the economic advantages of investing early in renewable energies and in developing a ‘green economy’. This was the second most important theme in HuffPo, appearing in nearly

half of its articles. This is in line with Huffington Post's emphasis on positive news or news that changes people's minds. The theme of *climate justice*, i.e. discussions of historic responsibilities with regards to climate change and fair burdens for different countries in the future, was most strongly taken up by Vice, where it was mentioned in more than half of all articles. Vice also devoted by far the most attention to covering protest and rallies, which appeared, on average, in every second Vice article. The historically common media theme of *disaster and catastrophe*, emphasising the negative consequences of climate change such as floods, droughts, heatwaves, or heavy rainfall, was distributed across all media relatively evenly. The new players also do not differ much from legacy media in their attention to the *scientific background*.

3. **Amount of scepticism:** There was little *climate scepticism* in any of the coverage, and no sharp difference in the amount of attention given to it or the wider theme of *scientific uncertainty*. The theme received the most attention in right-leaning legacy media, where it has historically been most present. But even there, it appeared in less than every fourth article. Left-leaning legacy media, Vice, BuzzFeed, and the Huffington Post did not pay much attention to it. Vice and BuzzFeed, when mentioning climate scepticism, even made fun of it in different ways. Overall, during COP21, climate scepticism was clearly subordinate to sociopolitical themes, and in some media and countries, it was practically absent from the debate. Even in the Anglophone countries, scepticism was not the major topic it has been at other moments of media attention.
4. **Visuals:** Visuals, and particularly the use of videos and photos, played a very important role in the coverage of COP21, for both legacy media and new players. The format of a piece of text illustrated by photos was the most common one for all of the types of media organisations included in this study. However, the new players were generally more visually oriented than legacy media. Vice and BuzzFeed in particular published more articles which were mainly based on photos. Also, the new players tended to include a higher number of photos in these articles. BuzzFeed relied on photos more than any other media: it maintained by far the lowest percentage of text-only articles (only 2%) and the highest of articles that were mainly photos. Moreover, BuzzFeed used a wider range of formats than the other players, like listicles, audio, and quizzes. This variety of

formats was clearly an innovative element. However, in our sample, BuzzFeed did not publish any content that was mainly video. It did include video in about one-eighth of its articles, but this was a lower number than that of legacy media. Vice was the medium with by far the highest percentage of articles mainly based on video (15%), and was also the one which published more articles that included video (21%). Vice's videos were especially innovative. Its series of six episodes called 'Climate Emergency' followed an immersive style, where the reporter took the audience on a journey, through which the events could be experienced from a similar position to that of an eyewitness.

5. **Opinion and commentary:** Over half of Huffington Post's content were opinion or commentary pieces found in blog posts. This was linked to the finding that almost half its coverage of the summit was from an environmental activist perspective. The stream of blog posts were often written in the first person and advocated a particular point of view or course of actions. In contrast, in all the other media or media types, the activist perspective accounted for 12% or less of the articles analysed.
6. **Sources quoted:** There was a surprising similarity between legacy media and new players as to the voices they quoted. Politicians, both domestic and foreign, as well as NGOs, scientists, and representatives of the business sector were used in similar distributions. Vice was the stand-out exception to this pattern: it most frequently quoted NGOs and common people – far more than the other media organisations, although it also frequently quoted scientists and politicians. NGO voices were commonly cited in all media, legacy and new. This supports previous scholarship that finds today's journalists increasingly depend on international activist non-profits and NGOs to provide content and agenda-setting information. The voice of business representatives was low compared to NGOs. This may appear surprising, given the business implications of the COP21 agreement and the strong presence of various business groups in Paris, but their presence in the media was probably higher than at other COP summits.
7. **Tone and language of coverage:** The tone of the coverage was overwhelmingly 'straight' across all media organisations, including Huffington Post and Vice. BuzzFeed's coverage was the exception, as roughly a quarter of articles were funny or entertaining and another

13% employed a mixture of tones, often funny and straight. Indeed, over one in three of its articles were either overwhelming funny, or had an element of humour in them. BuzzFeed was also the exception in terms of the language of its content. Nearly a third of its articles were chatty and informal, compared to a little over 10% for Vice and Huffington Post, and just 2% for legacy media.

In conclusion, taking into account HuffPo's greater emphasis on opportunities and renewable energy, Vice News' engaging style of reporting, and BuzzFeed's innovations with formats and content, a strong case can be made that their collective presence is beneficial for public debate about complex issues such as climate change, particularly at a time when specialist correspondents on the environment are being reduced in some media organisations. It is possible that the new players fare better than their established counterparts in searching for new angles and new ways of covering the 'old' theme of climate change and, thus, in sustaining its relevance and interest to a wider public, and particularly to younger audiences.

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A preliminary set of results from our research was presented at a conference in Oxford on 13 May 2016. Lucy Küng, Nic Newman, and Martin Moore were among the presenters at that conference, and we have drawn on their insights extensively for this book. On the same day, a public meeting was held on the future of environment reporting with Helen Briggs, Science and Environment journalist, BBC; Fiona Harvey, Environment Correspondent, the *Guardian*; Kelly Oakes, Science Editor, BuzzFeed UK, and Alister Doyle, Environment Correspondent, Thomson Reuters. Again, we are very grateful for their observations, some of which appear in this book.

Particular thanks go to the interviewees for their time and insights, and to Professor Matthew Nisbet and Dr Rasmus Nielsen for their helpful corrections and comments.

Any remaining errors are those of the authors.

Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BINGO	Business and Innovation NGO group
CBS	Columbia Broadcast System
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CNN	Cable News Network
COP	Conference of Parties
EU	European Union
FAZ	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i>
FT	<i>Financial Times</i>
GHG	Greenhouse gas
HuffPo	Huffington Post
INDCs	Intended Nationally Determined Contributions
IP	Internet Protocol
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
RISJ	Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism
SZ	<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i>
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USA	United States of America
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

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1

Introduction

James Painter

πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει.
Nothing is fixed but change
(Heraclitus, fifth century BC)

The year the research for this book was carried out, 2016, was on course to be hottest year ever recorded, beating 2015, which in turn had beaten 2014. According to climate scientists, the probability of having three consecutive record-breaking years without the effect of climate change is one in a million.¹ Other records broken throughout the year included the lowest extent of Arctic sea ice in May, the hottest day ever recorded in India, and the highest proportion of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere since humans existed.

Such has been the devastating impact of humans on the Earth's atmosphere, oceans, and wildlife that some scientists now argue that the planet has been pushed into a new geological epoch, called the 'Anthropocene' (first coined by Paul Crutzen), bringing an end to the Holocene of the last 12,000 years (Waters et al., 2016; Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000). Anthropogenic climate change is seen as the most serious challenge facing the world this century, both in itself and as adding an extra layer of stress to other environmental risks such as ocean deterioration, biodiversity loss, and sustainable food and water ecosystems,² as well as to other social risks such as resource scarcity, migration, and armed conflict.³

What most people know about the environment and climate change comes from the wide variety of mass media – television, printed newspapers, the internet, and increasingly, social media. These are more important than individuals' direct interaction with friends or family members, or more

¹Damian Carrington, 'Scientists Sound Alarm (Again) as Tumbling Records Put 2016 on Course to be Hottest Year', *Guardian*, 18 June 2016.

²https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg2/ar5_wgII_spm_en.pdf

³Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change IPCC (2007), *Fourth Assessment Report* (AR4).

public fora like school classes or workshops (Schäfer, 2015). However, a revolution is going on within the world where information about the environment circulates.

We use the word ‘revolution’ judiciously. As has been well documented, the last few years have witnessed sweeping changes in both developed and developing countries in the way news and information have been created, distributed, and consumed, essentially due to the collapse (in many countries, but not all) of the advertising-funded business model for printed newspapers and the impact of two waves of digital disruption caused by the rise of the internet and social media.

The major developments across the world have been well documented by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ) (Newman et al., 2015, 2016) and other media researchers (Pew Research Center, 2016; Ofcom, 2015; WAN-IFRA, 2015). The first is that the role of social media as a source of news is increasing everywhere, and in many countries has overtaken printed newspapers by a considerable margin. This happened in the USA for the first time in 2014, but the general trend is the same for most of the 26 countries included in the RISJ’s 2016 *Digital News Report*. Around one in ten survey respondents (12%) say social media are now their main source, of which Facebook is by far the most important network for finding, reading or watching, and sharing news.

The generational divisions in how people consume news is very marked. Most people use a variety of sources, and in addition to online sites, regularly access news via TV, radio, or print newspapers. However, as data in Chapter 3 will show, for people aged under 45, online news is now more important than television news. For 18 to 24 year olds, social media (28%) come out ahead of TV (24%) for the first time, with print lagging behind at just 6%. Indeed, since 2012, television viewing in general has declined by an average of 3–4% a year in the UK and USA, and television news bulletins in particular are of declining importance there and in other countries as a source of news, especially for younger viewers (Nielsen and Sambrook, 2016).

The second major change has been the very significant growth in the use of smartphones as a way of accessing news. This has doubled in many countries in just three years between 2013 and 2016, reaching between 40% and 50% of the population. In developing countries, the growth is expected to be so rapid that 80% of the world’s population is predicted to have a smartphone by 2020 (Newman, 2016).

The third major change is the growing importance of providing video

news to smartphones and other platforms as a priority both for traditional and new media companies, in part driven by better connectivity (Newman et al. 2015; Kalogeropoulos et al. 2016). Some estimates suggest that video is expected to grow more than ten times within the next five years and account for 70% of mobile network traffic by 2021 (Newman, 2016). Video news, of varying lengths, styles, and content, is just one of an array of new formats to emerge, which can both be integrated into news websites and function successfully on social media. The visual formats include picture stories and infographics, while listicles and live coverage are also becoming more common (Newman et al., 2016).

These three developments (and others) underpin the rise of digital-born media brands, and particularly what have been called ‘second-wave’ digital companies, who unlike the ‘first-wave’ do not mainly aggregate news from multiple sources (like Yahoo), but produce their own content. To different degrees, but more than traditional media, these companies place huge importance on metrics and social media platforms, and particularly Facebook, for driving traffic (often at the expense of editorial merit), on visual representations of news and information, and on making the information accessible to, and used by, a younger target audience. For example, the Huffington Post (HuffPo) and BuzzFeed News, although different in many respects to each other, have enjoyed considerable success by focusing on distributing their content through social media, using sophisticated technology to identify popular subjects, optimising formats and tracking what gets shared (‘virality’). Around 75% of BuzzFeed’s global traffic of 200 million unique visitors a month comes via social links on more than 30 social media platforms where it has a presence (such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest), and more than 70% occurs on mobile devices.⁴

Vice is the third digital-born company which many analysts predict will have a strong future. Partly, this is because of the high levels of investment it has received, mostly from traditional media companies like Rupert Murdoch’s 21st Century Fox, A&E networks, and Walt Disney Co., which doubled its investment in Vice in December 2015 to US\$400m, giving Vice a value of more than US\$4bn. Amongst Vice’s many activities is its multimedia portal for news stories called Vice News, which it launched in early 2014. Mainly based on video content, Vice promises an ‘immersive journalism’ aimed at younger audiences, with a particular subjective reporting style and a focus on under-reported international stories. According to official figures, Vice News reached over 400 million views on YouTube in 2016, and

⁴ BuzzFeed official statistics, via email Sept. 2016.

across its entire network (all digital channels plus television), its audience was ‘hundreds of millions of young people a month’.⁵

All three players are now global media players, as they have invested heavily in building up a strong presence in several languages and countries around the world. Table 1.1 shows how far these news players have come in recent years, measured by weekly reach in January 2016.⁶ HuffPo in particular, since its launch in May 2005, has successfully overtaken traditional brands like CNN and the BBC in some countries. The table also shows that BuzzFeed already enjoys a larger weekly reach than the *New York Times*. Huffington Post and BuzzFeed are performing best in English-speaking markets. In the US, Huffington Post comes only second to Yahoo news, while BuzzFeed is the eighth most consulted online news source. In the UK in 2016, Huffington Post now beats all newspapers apart from the *Mail* and the *Guardian* in terms of online reach. BuzzFeed News has already jumped to seventh most popular in the UK, since its launch in late 2014. It rose by 4% in the UK compared to 2015, and 6% in the USA. Vice is doing less well, despite operating in about 30 countries. It reaches a smaller section of online news users, but twice as many under-35s.

The picture is different in other countries, but this may well change in the near future as more original country-specific content is provided by

Table 1.1. Selected digital-born brands’ weekly news reach compared with selected traditional brands

	HUFF POST	BUZZFEED	VICE	BBC	CNN	NEW YORK TIMES
USA	25%	16%	4%	10%	21%	14%
UK	14%	9%	2%	51%	2%	2%
FRANCE	13%*	4%	2%	3%	2%	2%
GERMANY	8%*	2%	1%	4%	3%	2%
SPAIN	14%*	3%	3%	6%	7%	-

Source: Newman et al., 2016: 91. Question asked was ‘which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week?’

* Joint ventures or former joint ventures

⁵ Vice official statistics, via email Sept. 2016.

⁶ Weekly reach is attained by taking the total number of those who said they had used a particular brand to access news in the last week, and dividing it by the total sample size in each country (of around 2,000 people in each country, both urban and rural). The surveys were carried out using an online questionnaire, and the sample was reflective of the population that had access to the internet. Newman et al., 2016: 6.

BuzzFeed and Vice. In Germany, where television and traditional brands online or offline remain very strong and social media are less popular overall, Huffington Post (8%) and BuzzFeed (2%) are yet to establish themselves strongly despite the availability of a German-language version. Huffington Post is doing better in France where it has formed a partnership with *Le Monde*, and has a weekly reach of 13%, making it the seventh most used online site for news. It reaches a similar percentage in Spain (14%), where it is in partnership with *El País*. By contrast, BuzzFeed reaches less than 5% in both countries.

Regarding news about the environment specifically, Huffington Post is doing particularly well. As we shall see in Chapter 3, according to the metrics and methodology used in the RISJ *Digital News Report*, it is now the single most widely used news source in the US among those highly interested in environmental news. And in the UK and the USA, other new players – such as BuzzFeed and Vice – are also more popular with the ‘highly interested’ segments of the audience than many traditional newspaper and TV brands. This may be in part due to the amount of editorial priority given to environmental issues, including climate change, by these three players.

Vice News’s first environment editor, Robert Eshelman, was one of the first editors to be appointed when Vice News was launched in April 2014. BuzzFeed UK appointed a science editor in September 2013, which was seen at the time as the first new science editor to be appointed within the UK media for several years. This was followed by the appointment in late 2014 of a London-based senior writer with a focus on science topics, and then in 2016 a specific environment and climate change reporter based in the US. Huffington Post has long given priority to environment stories, and runs a topic-specific index on its site called HuffPost Green.

There are some important caveats to the importance of these new players. One is that traditional brands remain very trusted sources for serious news in most countries as they have built up a strong reputation over time, and are widely read by an influential set of decision-makers, including elected officials, business leaders, and other journalists. The new brands and platforms are mostly used as secondary sources and for softer news subjects. In the UK, for example, 70% of BBC users say it is their main source of news, compared to only a small percentage of BuzzFeed or Huffington Post users (both 13%) (Newman et al., 2016). Another caveat is that the new players may become victims of the rapidly changing market, technological, and media landscapes that helped to create them.

Doubt has been cast on the long-term robustness of some of their business and revenue models, particularly in the face of declining revenue from display ads and the difficulty of scaling up sponsored and branded content. Google and particularly Facebook are taking a huge share of the online advertising market which is causing severe problems for the new and traditional players alike. This was estimated at 85% of every new dollar spent on online advertising in the first quarter of 2016.⁷ HuffPo did not register a profit in 2015,⁸ Vice laid off 20 of its employees as part of a global restructuring in 2016,⁹ and BuzzFeed was reported to have missed its 2015 financial targets and cut its 2016 revenue target in half, from \$500 million to \$250 million.¹⁰

However, the major developments outlined above do provide the essential context for this study, which we place firmly at the intersection of rapidly changing media landscapes and the provision and consumption of information about the environment, including climate change (Freedman, 2015). Previous studies or reports specifically on the new players have tended to focus on aspects of their strategy (e.g. Lichterman, 2016), their culture and business models (Küng, 2015), or their editorial standards (Riordan, 2014). Very few studies have provided detailed examination of the content the new players provide (e.g. Beaujon, 2014, and Newman, 2015, focus only on BuzzFeed's cat videos and coverage of the 2015 UK elections, respectively). No one, as far as we are aware, has scrutinised their coverage of climate change.

As we shall see, Huffington Post, Vice and BuzzFeed all say they are different to the news and information provided by legacy media. Indeed, they make it a virtue. But what exactly are the differences? For example, do they lie in their approach to editorial content, the sources they go to, the formats they prefer, or the tone they adopt? We take the UN Paris summit on climate change – the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – in November and December 2015 as a highly relevant case study to delve more into the possible differences. The summit was a seminal moment for governments finally reaching a wide-ranging agreement for curbing greenhouse gas emissions. But it also generated a huge amount of interest both from the media and the general public. One metric for assessing this

⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/18/business/media-websites-battle-faltering-ad-revenue-and-traffic.html>

⁸ <http://adage.com/article/media/huffington-post-broke-146-million-revenue/299293/>

⁹ <http://uk.businessinsider.com/vice-news-cuts-jobs-in-global-restructuring-2016->

¹⁰ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/26ebf992-00c4-11e6-99cb-83242733f755.html#axzz4CKSkfC3c>

is Google Trends, which shows that worldwide public interest in climate change spiked in December 2015 after a steady decline since the last major UN climate change conference in Copenhagen in 2009.¹¹

Accordingly, we will analyse to what extent and how legacy media and the three new online players who are arguably the most important ones currently – HuffPo, BuzzFeed, and Vice – covered COP21. Chapter 2 will look in more detail at the new players, focusing on their origins and culture, different business models, editorial priorities, approaches to covering the environment, and their presence in different countries including the six in our study (France, Germany, Poland, Spain, UK, and the USA). Chapter 3 gives detailed information and analysis of the levels of interest around the world in environment news, and in particular how the new players are faring in the six countries we focus on. Chapter 4 provides the background to the importance of studying UN summits on climate change in general, and the Paris 2015 summit in particular. It also introduces the methodology and details of our six-country study on how the summit was covered. Chapter 5 focuses on the differences between new and legacy players in terms of the volume and themes included in their coverage, Chapter 6 on the differences in how they use visual content, and Chapter 7 on the differences in sources and tone, language and perspective. Finally, Chapter 8 draws together some of the main conclusions of where the main differences and similarities lie, and their importance for the wider issues of the provision, content, and consumption of news about climate change, the environment, and beyond.

¹¹ <https://www.google.co.uk/trends/explore?q=Climate%20change&date=1%2F2008%20101m&cmpt=q&tz=Etc%2FGMT-1>

2

New Players and the Search to be Different

James Painter

The decline of the advertising-based business model for print newspapers and the two waves of digital disruption outlined in Chapter 1 have had a profound impact on the public provision of science and environment information (Dunwoody, 2014). There are important country-to-country variations in how pronounced these trends have been over the last few years due to technological differences, national specificities and cultural variations. But in most of the countries included in our study, the most obvious impact has been on the number of full-time professional newsroom jobs in print media, and the accompanying decline in the number of specialist beats, including those of science and environment reporting.

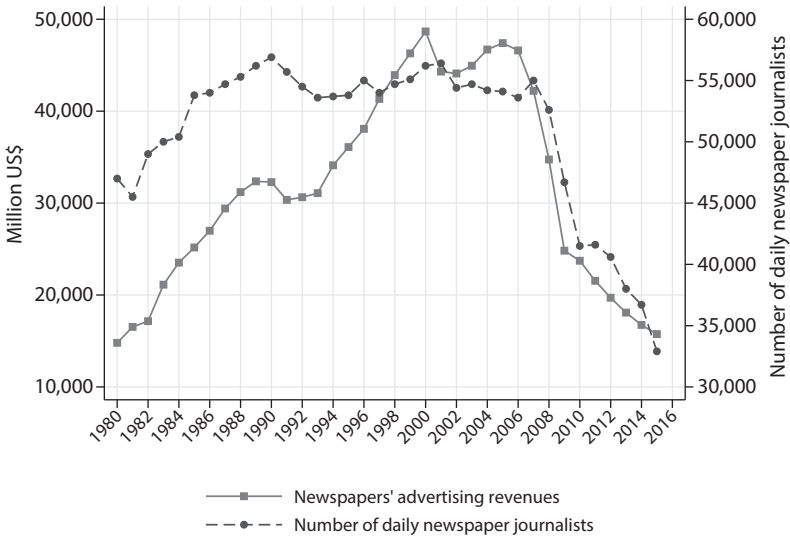
In the USA for example, the number of journalists working for daily newspapers has dropped from a peak of around 57,000 in 1990 to around 33,000 in 2015. As Figure 2.1 shows, this decline, particularly since 2007, closely follows the drop in advertising revenues. This precipitous drop in the number of print journalists is driven more by the declining numbers of journalists per newsroom (from an average of 39 in 2001 to 27 in 2013), than by a decline in the number of media outlets (Cagé, 2016).

In France too, the number of professional journalists (defined here as those issued with a press card) has started to decline after a long-term growth since 1940 and a peak of around 37,000 in 2009 (Cagé, 2016). In Spain, 11,000 jobs were lost in traditional media outlets from 2008 to 2015 as a result of the economic crisis and digitalisation.¹² In the UK, the number of self-defined journalists recovered from a low of 58,000 in 2009 to 70,000 in 2013, but declined again after that to 64,000 in 2015.¹³ In Germany, the

¹² FAPE, *Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodística* 2015. <http://fape.es/informe-de-la-profesion-periodistica-2015-se-frena-la-destruccion-de-empleo-y-crece-la-facturacion-de-los-medios-y-la-inversion-publicitaria>

¹³ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/6000-drop-number-uk-journalists-over-two-years-18000-more-prs-labour-force-survey-shows>

Figure 2.1. Daily newspaper journalists and advertising revenue, USA



Source: Angelucci and Cagé (2016).

number of journalists grew from 46,000 in 2001 to 77,234 in 2011,¹⁴ but the numbers of freelancing journalists and unemployed journalists rose as well.¹⁵ At the same time however, there has been a steep rise in the number of new jobs amongst digital players. For example, in Spain, around 600 new media organisations started up between 2008 and 2012.¹⁶ In the USA, in the decade before 2014, around 500 online sites took on nearly 5,000 full-time workers (Pew Center, 2014). In the UK, since 2012 the proportion of journalists working in newspapers has fallen from 56% to 44%, while the proportion working wholly or partly online has risen by an estimated 30,000 from 26% to 52% (Thurman et al., 2016). But in general, it is unlikely that these new jobs have compensated for the drop in the number of journalists in print media.

It is usually assumed that one of the main fall-outs from the print job losses has been a parallel decline in specialist or beat reporting, including science or environment correspondents (Boykoff and Yulsman, 2013; Ashe,

¹⁴ DFVJ – Deutscher Fachjournalistenverband: Berufsbild: <https://www.dfjv.de/beruf/journalismus-als-beruf/berufsbild>

¹⁵ Die Zeit Medienkunde, *Journalistinnen und Journalisten in Deutschland*. Hamburg: Zeit Verlag, 2011, 150–1.

¹⁶ FAPE: see n. 12.

2014; Friedman, 2015). However, it is difficult to have a precise picture of the situation in each country. In Spain, environment correspondents at legacy media are now thin on the ground.¹⁷ In the USA, in 2014 it was estimated the number of science sections in print media had decreased from 95 in 1989 to 19 in 2013 (Dunwoody, 2014: 29), and that the total number of environment reporters left at the top five US newspapers did not amount to more than a dozen.¹⁸

However, in recent years the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and Bloomberg have all bolstered their staff in environmental reporting.¹⁹ In the UK, the last detailed attempt to map science reporting found that between 1989 and 2005 there were significant increases in the number of science, health and environmental journalists in the UK national media (leaping from 43 to 82.5), but this was largely due to the BBC's expansion from two to 30 specialists in this area (Williams and Clifford, 2009). Since then, the BBC has lost at least one environment correspondent and other specialist positions. Indeed, a more recent RISJ report (Thurman et al., 2016) found that while just over half of all UK journalists were specialists, with the most populous beats being business, culture, sport, and entertainment, there were 'few politics, science, or religious specialists'. One important exception is the *Guardian*, which in recent years has assigned up to eight full-time staff to the environment beat.

As with other specialist beats, it is difficult to define a science/environment reporter and to map accurately the changes in their number and practices. Moreover, the environment beat is sometimes part of, and sometimes separate from, the science beat. What is more certain is that the digital revolutions have added pressure on the journalists who remain. There has been a significant enlargement in their scope of duties, in the amount they have to produce, and in the variety of platforms they are expected to produce material on. Technical and computing skills are increasingly required, as well as more interaction with the (digital) audience. These extra demands on journalists and the numerical decline of specialist environment beats in many legacy media have raised questions about the provision of reliable information about the environment to the public, particularly at a time of proliferation of non-expert opinion about climate change found in blogs and partisan sites and the political polarisation of the issue in the USA and the UK.

¹⁷ Bienvenido León, presentation at RISJ Conference, 'New Players in the Provision of Science and Environment Information', Oxford, 13 May 2016.

¹⁸ Curtis Brainard, paper presented at RISJ research workshop, 'Changing Media Ecologies and their Impact on Environment Reporting', Oxford, 20 June 2014.

¹⁹ <http://publiceditor.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/10/07/like-sea-level-times-environmental-coverage-on-the-rise>

On the positive side of the digital revolution, several types of new web-based start-ups (niche sites) have emerged which specialise in environment or climate change reporting. These may partly compensate for the loss of legacy media coverage, at least for those who are seeking in-depth information about these topics. Many of these sites are based in the USA and the UK, and have moved from just aggregation or commentary to original reporting; some offer environment stories as part of a specialist (investigative) approach, some are university-based, and others are more advocacy-orientated.²⁰ Some are staffed by former environment journalists at legacy media (e.g. in the USA, the Pulitzer Prize winner InsideClimate News, and in the UK, Carbon Brief, Climate News Network, and the Energy and Climate Change Intelligence Unit). So in general, more information is more easily available to science and environment reporters today than in the past, and underlines the positive development that, with appropriate resources, the potential for improved science and environmental reporting remains high.

The second positive development has been the arrival of major digital-born players who dedicate considerable resources to general news coverage or analysis, and within that, to science, the environment, and climate change. Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight has a science and health section as one of its five main indexes on its front page. Upworthy, which in early 2014 was the most shared news site in the USA with up to 60 million people a month but has since declined, declared climate change an editorial priority for its young followers along with income inequality and human rights.²¹ The Science Forum on Reddit, an entertainment, social networking service and news website, is a minor part of the Reddit offer, but in 2014, was reported to have 4 million subscribers (which was twice the number of (paying) subscribers to the combined digital and print versions of the *New York Times*).²² Climate change is one of a series of complex topics that writers at Vox.com regularly try to explain with in-depth backgrounders, often enlivened by Q and As, graphs, and slide shows (Benson, 2016).

As outlined in Chapter 1, we are choosing to concentrate on three of these new players, the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice, for the following reasons:

²⁰ Brainard, 'Changing Media Ecologies'.

²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/mar/16/sxsw-2014-grumpy-cat-gaga-google-10-things-we-learned>

²² <http://grist.org/climate-energy/reddits-science-forum-banned-climate-deniers-why-dont-all-newspapers-do-the-same>

- As we shall see in the next chapter, all three are making the most inroads as favoured sources for news, particularly for younger age groups.
- All three give editorial priority to environmental issues.
- All three have invested heavily in language sites, and/or country-specific sites.
- All three are ‘digital natives’, with heavy interest in the efficacy of different formats, and particularly video.
- None of these three have been studied in detail for news content in general, or the environment in particular.

However, as we shall now argue, these three do not form a homogeneous group, and if anything, their differences are more pronounced than their similarities.

Differences and Commonalities

Lucy Küng’s path-breaking book on innovators in digital news (Küng, 2015) has identified the elements common to several legacy and digital-born players which have underpinned their success in digital markets. BuzzFeed and Vice, similar to the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*, have a clear vision of what they are trying to do, an equally clear strategy embedded in a coherent business model, strong leadership, a digital workforce combining journalistic, technical, and commercial imperatives, a digital culture, and an organisation that is able to innovate and adapt (Küng, 2015: 106). Although the Huffington Post was not included in her case studies, it exhibits many of the same attributes.

Indeed, Huffington Post and BuzzFeed shared the same visionary leader and founder, Jonah Peretti, a graduate of MIT described as a ‘quintessential nerd genius.’²³ Having co-founded HuffPo in 2005, he set up BuzzFeed a year later as a side project. He ran both until 2011, when AOL bought HuffPo (for US\$315m), and when he started to focus more on BuzzFeed. Vice has a similarly strong and visionary leader in Shane Smith, who has overseen its expansion from a small street magazine, *The Voice of Montreal*, founded in 1994, to a global business based on providing (often provocative) video content to young audiences. Smith famously once told Rupert Murdoch ‘I

²³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/jonah-peretti-and-at-number-one-on-buzzfeeds-list-is-8891785.html>

have Gen[eration] Y, I have social, I have online video. You have none of that. I have the future, you have the past.²⁴

Both HuffPo and BuzzFeed focus on distributing content through social media, and particularly Facebook, and use complex algorithms to assess the virality of content. However, whereas HuffPo was founded as a politically driven commentary and news outlet, according to Küng, BuzzFeed is ‘essentially a tech company with a media layer on top; data science underlies everything – there’s a perpetual loop of analysis, interpretation, and experimentation.’²⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 1, in September 2016 around 70% of BuzzFeed’s traffic was coming from a distributed network of 30 social media platforms where it publishes content, and a much lower figure directly from its website. The equivalent figure for visits to Huffingtonpost.co.uk from social media platforms was 43%.²⁶

Another difference is that HuffPo’s strategy is more based on volume of content than BuzzFeed’s. In 2015, it was publishing around 1,900 stories a day worldwide, many of them blog posts, to be able to drive up the number of likes and shares, and therefore ads and revenue.²⁷ BuzzFeed is more selective in the content it produces, focusing on fewer stories (about 220 pieces of content a day²⁸) but more on virality. Vice has a similar main target audience to that of BuzzFeed (younger audiences under 35), whereas HuffPo is aimed at a much wider general audience. However, Vice’s documentary series partnership with HBO, which is provided via laptop and mobile platforms free of charge by Comcast, the US’s largest cable provider, has allowed Vice to reach an older, more upmarket, demographic. Vice’s content and reputation has, historically at least, been built on innovative video. It is less driven by analytics and shareability than BuzzFeed.

The business models, and main sources of funding, of all three of these new players are also different. Both HuffPo and BuzzFeed depend on income from online advertising, and particularly branded or sponsored content. BuzzFeed is heavily reliant on so-called ‘native advertising’ and 35% of these revenues came from video in 2015, up from 15% in 2014 (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016). In contrast, Vice has a more diversified income structure

²⁴ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/61c51d64-4a9c-11e2-968a-00144feab49a.html>

²⁵ Lucy Küng, presentation at RISJ conference, Oxford, 13 May 2016.

²⁶ The figure is for June 2016. Email correspondence with Jack Riley, Huffington Post, July 2016.

²⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/05/magazine/arianna-huffingtons-improbable-insatiable-content-machine.html>

²⁸ <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/05/how-many-stories-do-newspapers-publish-per-day/483845>

with multiple revenue streams: online advertising, sponsored content, and revenue from various TV deals producing material with HBO and Disney broadcast on traditional television and cable channels. Its sponsorship-based video production generates considerable income, to such an extent that *The Economist* looked closely at this aspect of its business model when it set up its own video team.²⁹

Vice has received millions of dollars of investment from legacy media companies such as Disney, Fox, and A&E, whereas BuzzFeed, initially at least, was funded by tech companies. These two organisations were described in 2016 as ‘the major winners in the first round of new media monopoly’ and ‘the global news media companies of the 21st century’ (Newman, 2016). In the same year, BuzzFeed was valued at US\$1.5bn, and Vice at more than US\$4bn. In 2015 HuffPo was unofficially estimated to have a value of around US\$1bn, although it was struggling to generate any profit despite ten years of existence and huge traffic to the site.³⁰ In contrast, Vice had an expected revenue of US\$1bn in 2016 alone.³¹

One area of commonality is the growing importance of videos, in their different formats, lengths, and styles, as an essential part of both their editorial content and business models. Videos generate significant amounts of revenue from adverts placed around them. In part, this was also driven by the fact that young people are watching less television, but more video content. The details of these developments are complex, but have been well-documented (Newman, 2016; Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2015, 2016; Küng, 2015; Maymann, 2015). It is sufficient to point out here that in 2015/16:

- **Huffington Post** was expanding its video operations through content partnerships with companies like NBC, and developing Outspeak, its platform for user-generated video journalism.
- **BuzzFeed** was investing in a 250-person strong video production unit based in Los Angeles called BuzzFeed Motion Pictures to experiment with short (and long form) content, and new formats such as vertical and commentary-less videos, all of which are tested for virality.
- **Vice’s** laying off of 15 US staffers in 2016 was in part due to a desire to bolster its daily offer of video across the world.³²

²⁹ Tom Standage, deputy editor at *The Economist*, RISJ seminar, June 2016.

³⁰ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/is-huffington-post-worth-1-billion-1434101405>

³¹ Küng, presentation at RISJ conference, Oxford, 13 May 2016.

³² <http://www.poynter.org/2016/digital-media-layoffs-continue-this-time-with-vice-news/413547/>. According to Vice, Vice News made over 40 new hires in the first part of 2016, including hiring a new London Bureau Chief. Information by email, Sept. 2016.

However, it is important to stress that some of these video initiatives were not based on news provision. BuzzFeed for example, has launched new lifestyle channels such as a cooking channel called Tasty, which was the number one video publisher on Facebook in October 2015 with 1 billion views.

A second major caveat is that there was some evidence in 2016 that online news video growth was stalling as users expressed dissatisfaction with the pre-roll adverts, preferred other formats for news consumption, complained about download time, or felt that video was not adding much to written stories (Newman et al., 2016). The growth seems to have been largely driven by technology, publishers, and platforms, rather than strong consumer demand (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016). Evidence suggests that only a small proportion of time spent on news sites is spent on video (an average of 2.5%), although breaking news did offer a greater pick-up of video news. We shall return to this theme in more detail in Chapter 6.

Global Presence

The levels of outside investment in BuzzFeed and Vice have allowed both of them to expand operations across the world. HuffPo too has placed considerable emphasis on global expansion, in part to achieve scale to generate advertising. The key points here are that first, BuzzFeed and Vice are still in their early stage of development in many countries (with the exception of the USA and the UK); secondly, their reach and the originality of their language content vary from country to country in part due to the levels of country-specific investment, and thirdly, the new players are all making progress but with varying results. The Huffington Post has made the strongest inroads into non-English-language markets, at least measured by reach³³ (in part because it started first). As we shall see in the next chapter, both the Huffington Post and BuzzFeed have the greatest reach in English-speaking countries, although both gained audience shares in other countries including France and Brazil from 2015 to 2016. Despite being present since the mid-1990s, Vice's reach for all age groups was still only 4% for the USA and 2% for the UK. (See Table 1.1.) It was seen as the main source of news by 5% of its users in the UK and 8% in the USA.

The extent of their global ambitions can be illustrated by a simple list of the international presence of the three organisations in 2016:

³³ Nic Newman, presentation at RISJ conference, 13 May 2016.

- **HuffPo:** Languages: Arabic, Portuguese (Brazil), French, German, Greek, Italian, Spanish, English, Japanese, Korean (total 10).
Versions: USA, UK, Australia, Canada, Brazil, Maghreb, Greece, Italy, India, Spain, Germany, France, Arabic, Korea, Japan (15).
Recent launches: India, December 2014; Australia, August 2015.
- **Vice News:** Languages: English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Portuguese, Flemish, Czech, Chinese, Danish, Greek, Japanese, Dutch, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Serbian (17).
Versions: Australia, Brazil, Belgium, Canada, Czech R., China, Colombia, Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Holland, Sweden, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, USA, UK (25).
Recent launches: Italy, March 2014; France, November 2014.
- **BuzzFeed:** Languages: English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Japanese (6).
Versions: Australia, Brazil, Canada, UK, USA, France, Germany, 'Spanish', India, Japan, Mexico (11).
Recent launches: France, end of 2013; Canada, June 2015; Spain, November 2015; Japan, 2016.

For all three organisations, the core of their staff is based in the USA and UK. For example, HuffPo in the US employs 260 full-time editorial staff.³⁴ Most of BuzzFeed's 460 editorial staff (in 2016)³⁵ are also US-based, but by September 2016 it had expanded to 18 offices and 1,300 staff across the world. For example, its UK office has grown from eight people working in a small shared office in London when it launched at the end of 2013 to more than 50 editorial staff in 2015. In 2016, Vice had a total staff of more than 2,200 full-time employees worldwide, although their geographic distribution and division between technical, advertising, and editorial is not clear.

There are many other differences in how the new players operate outside the English-speaking world: HuffPo has focused on partnerships with traditional news providers such as *Le Monde* in France, *L'Espresso* group in Italy, and *El País* in Spain and many others around the world, in a desire to share content across countries.³⁶ For example, in France, *Le Monde* manages the marketing and advertising, while the technical aspects are handled by the parent organisation, HuffPo US. Editorially, HuffPo France has to

³⁴ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/huffington-post-union_us_5697d72be4b0b4eb759d79fc

³⁵ <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/05/how-many-stories-do-newspapers-publish-per-day/483845>

³⁶ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/tags/jimmy-maymann>

differentiate itself from *Le Monde* (a serious general news provider with a straight tone), by producing more exciting, more ‘concerned’ content. Its tone is apparently inspired in part by the infotainment TV show called *Le Petit Journal*, which is seen as being impertinent, fresh, and able to speak to young audiences about politics in a different way.³⁷ About five to ten articles per week are translated from HuffPo US, but the rest is original content.

According to BuzzFeed official figures, in 2016 more than 90 million of its 200 million monthly unique visitors came to BuzzFeed.com from outside the US. Unlike HuffPo, it does not normally form partnerships with local media companies, although it has linked up in a joint venture with Yahoo in Japan, and on specific editorial projects with legacy players like the BBC in the UK, and NBC Universal’s Telemundo in the US. Where it has moved abroad, it has initially focused on setting up small satellite offices and translating content. The amount of original content is very much driven by the amount of local staff employed. For example, in France, where it launched at the end of 2013, the staff numbers grew from two to ten by 2015, half of whom were producing or translating general material for BuzzFeed, and half for BuzzFeed news.³⁸ In Canada, in 2016 ten editorial staff were dedicated to producing a mixture of original serious and lighter material for a Canadian audience, whereas previously Canadians were dependent on BuzzFeed’s US material. In contrast, in Spain, where only four people were working in 2016, the team there was only adapting or translating material from the UK or USA to a Spanish audience. In all three countries, the challenge was to find content that was discrete in the local market, and when humorous, to adapt it to local sensibilities.

For Vice, a big driver of its global audience has been its international content. According to one report in 2015, about half of its overall traffic came from the company’s channels abroad, including in Germany, Mexico, Brazil, and the UK.³⁹ In June 2016 it announced it had struck deals with seven groups across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, to give it a presence online, on mobile, and TV in 55 territories.⁴⁰ These included a partnership with the Times Group of India. It had previously announced the launch of 20 TV channels across the world along with six more digital networks (Spangler, 2016). This was in addition to the eleven owned and operated channels it already had, a new US cable channel Viceland launched in February 2016,

³⁷ Interview conducted by Alan Ouakrat with Grégory Rozières, head of the ‘C’est Demain’ section, Huffington Post France, 19 Jan. 2016.

³⁸ <http://www.journalismfestival.com/programme/2016/buzzfeed-international-strategy>

³⁹ <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/vice-ceo-shane-smith-touts-823552>

⁴⁰ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/ff91c1da-37f3-11e6-9a05-82a9b15a8ee7.html>

and 24-hour terrestrial channels in 18 countries. Viceland was expected to launch in over 44 countries by the end of 2017. However, locally produced video content in local languages remains limited. For example, as we shall see in Chapter 6, their video coverage of the Paris climate change summit in languages other than English was slim. In French, it was based on adapting the footage already available in English. In German, Vice produced one original 19-minute video on coal, but did not produce a video on the summit itself.

The Importance of News

Huffington Post was always driven by news content and comment with a left-leaning slant, much of it aggregated and much of it written by a huge array of bloggers. As Michael Shapiro, a professor at Columbia Journalism School, summed up HuffPo back in 2012,⁴¹

The homepage's 'splash' headline ... reflected a left-of-center perspective; it had thousands of bloggers, famous and not, none of them paid; and while there was ever more original content, especially on the politics and business pages, the site was populated overwhelmingly with content that had originated elsewhere, much of it from the wires (in fairness, an approach long practiced by many of the nation's newspapers).

However, for Vice and BuzzFeed, it was a conscious decision to move into news, not so much to make money but to add reputation and credibility to their brands. In other words, Vice News (launched in March 2014 with investments of at least US\$50m) and BuzzFeed News (whose news app was launched in June 2015) form *part* of the wide variety of the content they offer to consumers. Vice News, for example, is just one of a large array of channels that Vice.com offers via its website, apps, or other platforms. As Lucy Küng explains about BuzzFeed's content,⁴²

In its present form, BuzzFeed has four content pillars: editorial (news, 'Buzz' and lifestyle), native, video and distributed. The recent focus on news surprised many analysts because it was never a foundational mission of the company. It certainly gives BuzzFeed a new gravitas in the media landscape, transforming them into a player, but the longevity of that news

⁴¹ http://www.cjr.org/cover_story/six_degrees_of_aggregation.php

⁴² Küng, presentation at RISJ conference, Oxford, 13 May 2016.

function is uncertain.

This gravitas has been enhanced by a number of scoops achieved by BuzzFeed's news and investigative team, which Jim Waterson, the UK political editor, has described as 'more important than stories that go viral'.⁴³ These have included a major story in 2016 around match fixing in tennis, in a historic partnership with the BBC.⁴⁴ This caused a considerable stir in the run up to the Melbourne Open, in part because Novak Djokovic, although not implicated in any way, said he had been offered thousands of dollars to throw matches early in his career.⁴⁵ As has been well-documented as an indication of its serious intent to cover news, BuzzFeed has employed a host of experienced journalists from legacy media, including Janine Gibson from the *Guardian* as editor-in-chief of BuzzFeed UK and a swathe of world-renowned reporters (Küng, 2015: 65; Sweney, 2015).

The hiring of editors and reporters from top journalism schools and away from legacy outlets is not peculiar to BuzzFeed. For example, Vice's first environment editor, Robert Eshelman has a degree from the top US journalism programme, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, while David Freeman, HuffPo US's senior science editor formerly worked for CBS interactive. Vice UK appointed Rebecca Nicholson, previously features editor at the *Guardian*, as editor-in-chief in September 2015. However, despite the presence of legacy media journalists, the new players are all in a constant search to find a discrete editorial identity, in content, style, or tone, which is different to both legacy players and other new players.

Vice News's journalism has been variously described as 'no-holds barred and edgy',⁴⁶ 'authentic',⁴⁷ and 'highly personal, visually stunning, and "immersive"' (Benson, 2016). As part of its mix, it is clearly interested in 'Gonzo scoops' (stories that 'punch you in the face'⁴⁸) that appeal to its core young demographic. Examples are videos of life with the Islamic State in Raqqa in Syria, of travelling in North Korea with former basketball player Dennis Rodman, and of internet millionaire John MacAfee on the run in Belize. Vice also covers more traditional topics, however. In June 2016, Vice News broadcast a 30-minute video report based on unique access to the

⁴³ Jim Waterson, RISJ seminar, Oxford, Mar. 2016.

⁴⁴ https://www.buzzfeed.com/heidiblake/the-tennis-racket?utm_term=.rnn9kVdX8D#gm7NGaYqzD

⁴⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/jan/18/novak-djokovic-match-fixing-tennis-australian-open>

⁴⁶ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/ff91c1da-37f3-11e6-9a05-82a9b15a8ee7.html>

⁴⁷ <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/battle-authenticity>

⁴⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/mar/23/shane-smith-vice-interview>

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, but it was presented in a highly personalised (and engaging) manner by the reporter.⁴⁹ Like BuzzFeed, it is clearly looking for a distinctive content, tone, and style. One detailed examination of 25 Vice News videos from 2012 to 2015 showed a consistency in subject matter, tone, treatment, and editorial style, which gives them a clearly identifiable brand (Rao, forthcoming).

The views of Kevin Sutcliffe, head of news programmes for Europe for Vice News, about his company's distinctiveness were summarised like this:

*[Vice News] promote themselves as an alternative to packaged and scheduled conventional storytelling on news television. Their motto is to be 'immersive' and on the ground; their reporters use the language that young people understand; and their news items do not have to be crushed into a two minute story.*⁵⁰

The search to be distinctive is also evident from BuzzFeed's approach in the UK. Its political editor, Jim Waterson, clearly does not want to be running the same stories, or angles on those stories which legacy media have already covered:⁵¹

So this basically sums us up: we're focusing on story selection, not doing stories just because we feel they should be done. I personally would look at the BBC website if I wanted a digest of what I needed to know that day. There's no point in putting our limited resources into trying to do exactly the same job that's being done very well already on 10 different sites. If it's a story or angle that you haven't seen before, if it's something that has a slight edge to it, and if it's something that is presented in a way that you wouldn't normally see it presented and makes you think, then we'll probably do alright.

This was true of its coverage of the 2015 elections in the UK, where BuzzFeed set out to write stories that were 'different, funny or shocking', including an irreverent webcast with David Cameron. But they were not alone. Vice UK also sought to avoid the 'dull stranglehold' of mainstream media coverage, and focused on what was fresh and different for a younger audience, away from the predictable press conferences, battle buses, and

⁴⁹ <https://news.vice.com/video/jeremy-corbyn-the-outsider>

⁵⁰ <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/battle-authenticity>

⁵¹ Waterson, RISJ seminar, Oxford, Mar. 2016.

stage-managed phone calls, and free from legal requirements to be balanced (Newman, 2015).

The search to be different is one of the drivers of Huffington Post's editorial approach, although the degree to which it is adopted probably varies between country offices which are keen to be distinctive in their local markets. In early 2015, Arianna Huffington, CEO and editor-in-chief of HuffPo, announced a new editorial initiative called 'What's Working', as an addition to the relentless diet of negative stories usually found in the media. This was in part prompted by their analysis that people liked sharing 'good news' stories. As she explained it,

to be clear, I'm not talking about simple heartwarming stories ... What I'm talking about is consistently telling the stories of people and communities doing amazing things, overcoming great odds and coming up with solutions to the very real challenges they face. And by shining a light on these stories, we hope that we can scale up these solutions and create a positive contagion that can expand and broaden their reach and application.⁵²

The product head for Huffington Post, Julia Beizer, went further, by stressing that she wanted HuffPo readers not just to read their stories, but to take action on them.⁵³

Science and the Environment

This search to be different also underpins the new players' approach to covering science and the environment. All of them place considerable emphasis on the environment, as measured by the prominence of environment stories and indexes on their websites, their recruitment of specialists in these areas, and their editorial priorities stated by senior editors. They all believe that their younger audiences are particularly interested in environmental issues. Huffington Post follows its well-honed mix of blogs, videos, and news stories often based on agency material. It has a separate index under 'Environment' on the front page of its UK site, and a separate section 'HuffPost Green' on its US site. At times, it

⁵² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/whats-working-all-the-news_b_6603924.html

⁵³ <http://www.niemanlab.org/2016/06/the-huffington-posts-new-product-head-wants-to-help-readers-take-action-on-the-stories-they-read>

also follows a solution-oriented agenda to climate change, in tune with its wider approach to more positive news stories. As David Freeman, HuffPo's senior science editor, says, 'We're always looking for stories to tell about companies, individuals, organisations, that are doing something tangible to help mitigate climate change.'⁵⁴ In similar fashion, in the run-up to the 2015 Paris summit, Arianna Huffington spelt out that their coverage was based on 'highlighting the many solutions that if scaled up, can help avert a major disaster. These range from innovations in renewable energy and transportation to new economic models, such as the circular economy.'⁵⁵

At Vice, CEO Shane Smith is known to take a particular interest in the environment and climate change and has done several reports of his own from Greenland and elsewhere.⁵⁶ Like HuffPo, Vice runs an environment index on its website. In general the environment is a key priority for Vice News, as its former environment editor, Robert Eshelman, explains:

*Vice News hired an environment editor before a politics editor or a business editor. There's two reasons for that. One is that the leadership of the company values very much covering the environment. If you think of the Vice content on HBO's show, each season there's segments on climate change or environment issues. It's also an issue obviously that has resonance amongst our readers, so there was this sense that it was a good subject area to stake out and to start developing quickly.'*⁵⁷

Much of the tone of the Vice reporting is urgent about the scale of the problem and the need for action, and as we shall see in Chapter 7, a close physical identification with environment protestors often gives the impression of a strong identification with their cause.

In contrast to HuffPo and Vice, BuzzFeed says it does not follow a campaigning or political stance on most issues, including climate change.⁵⁸ In general, BuzzFeed provides a lot of straight news-based science reporting, but tries to find innovative ways of presenting the information as explainers or including many short quotes from a random number of scientists on a particular topic,⁵⁹ which apparently get shared on social media a lot. But

⁵⁴ Interview with Adrienne Russell, by Skype, 15 Mar. 2016.

⁵⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/business-and-climate-paris_b_8633798.html

⁵⁶ http://www.vice.com/en_uk/video/greenland-is-melting-bonded-labor-000

⁵⁷ Interview by Adrienne Russell, by Skype, 17 Mar. 2016.

⁵⁸ Interview by James Painter with Tom Chivers, science writer at BuzzFeed UK, London, June 2016.

⁵⁹ https://www.buzzfeed.com/tomchivers/paul-nurse-is-not-impressed?utm_term=

according to Kelly Oakes, science editor at BuzzFeed UK, they also try to be different in their science coverage:⁶⁰

We don't cover a story just because we know everyone else will be. We are always thinking about what gets shared. If someone can say something about themselves or their identity by sharing, that makes them more likely to share, which is why quizzes do well, but also posts like the science of drinking coffee or getting enough sleep. Also posts that debunk other science stories make you look smart by correcting them. We have done debunking stories on climate change.

In summary, it is clear that the new players seek and offer different approaches to covering news, and environment news in particular, which is partly a function of their emphasis on shareability, their business models, and their strategic priorities. They may be helping to fill the gap left by the cuts in legacy media. It is also clear from even a cursory glance at their posts, articles, and videos that they offer a wide variety of content on the environment, with different shades of seriousness and humour, different political perspectives and different formats. It is true that they do a lot of what they are renowned for doing: Huffington Post relies heavily on blog posts, Vice on 'personal narration' immersive video, and BuzzFeed on listicles, quizzes, photo galleries, and irreverent content. But they all do a lot more than that. In Chapters 4 to 7, we delve into where the main differences lie between them and legacy players, and between themselves, when they cover a fixed news event like a climate change summit, and whether the differences lie more in the formats, sources, and tone or perspective than in the actual content. But before that, we examine to what extent they reach audiences in different countries with content about environmental issues.

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⁶⁰ Interview by email by James Painter, 15 June 2014.

3

The Public and News about the Environment

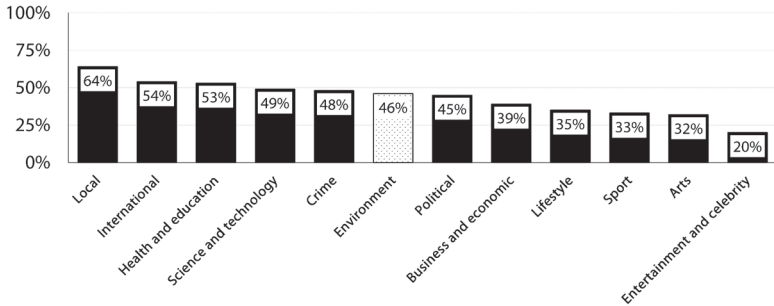
Richard Fletcher

This chapter will examine the audience's levels of interest in environment news, and the consumption of it, with a particular focus on the three digital-born news brands (Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice) and their presence in the six countries of our study. First, we focus on the levels of interest in environment news in 26 different countries, based on data collected as part of the 2016 *Digital News Report* survey (Newman et al., 2016). The online survey, which was commissioned by RISJ and carried out by YouGov in January and February of the same year, had over 50,000 respondents.⁶¹

The purpose of the survey was to gather comparable data on all aspects of digital news consumption. To measure interest levels, we asked each respondent 'how interested are you in news about the environment?' and gave them a choice of five options ranging from 'not at all' to 'extremely' interested. Those who selected either 'extremely' or 'very' interested are hereafter referred to synonymously as those with high interest, or as highly interested. Across all 26 countries, just under half (46%) of all respondents said that they are either very or extremely interested in environment news. To make sense of this number, we can compare it to the figures for other news topics (see Figure 3.1).⁶² When we do this, we see that interest levels for environment news are somewhere in the middle: in-between the related topics of politics (45%) and science and technology (48%). Nearly two-thirds of respondents are highly interested in local news (64%). In general, more respondents said that they are equally interested in what we might call 'hard' news topics (Reinemann et al., 2011), with fewer reporting an interest in soft news topics like sport (33%), arts (32%), or entertainment and celebrity (20%).

⁶¹ More details about the methodology used for the survey can be found at: www.digitalnewsreport.org

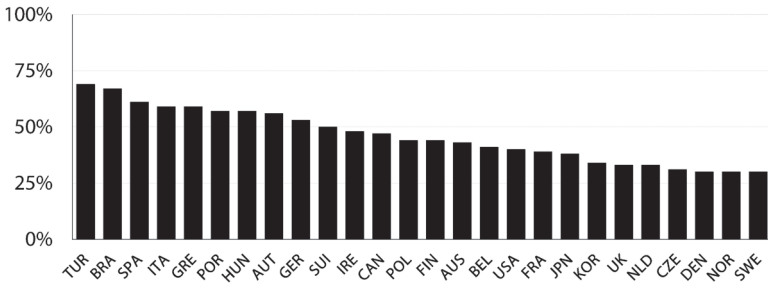
⁶² The questions behind the results in each figure in this chapter, and the sample sizes, can be found in Appendix 3.

Figure 3.1. High interest in environment news across 26 countries

Interest in environment news varies from country to country. As shown in Figure 3.2, the majority in Brazil and Southern European countries – including Spain (61%) – are highly interested, but relatively few in Scandinavia, the US, and the UK. Of the other countries that are the focus of this study, 53% of those in Germany are highly interested in environment news, compared to 44% in Poland, 40% in the US, and 39% in France. Just one-third (33%) in the UK reported that they are highly interested, a clear 14 percentage points lower than our population-weighted EU figure (based on 17 of the 28 countries within the EU, which together account for over 90% of the EU population) of 47%.

It is important to acknowledge that, because these results are based on an online survey, samples from countries with lower internet penetration are likely to be skewed towards more affluent, highly educated respondents who live in urban areas. We might reasonably expect these respondents to be more interested in environment news for a number of reasons. However, it should be noted that interest levels in environment news are linked to interest levels in the news as a whole, which are lower overall in some countries. Even if we control for this by comparing interest in environment news to interest in other hard news topics – such as political, economic, and international news – the basic pattern still holds, with interest in environment news comparatively higher in Brazil and Southern Europe, and lower in Scandinavia, the US, and the UK (see Appendix 3). In addition, evidence from international opinion polls on climate change, which have measured levels of concern or threat perception, suggests that Brazil and Turkey tend to score highly, Germany, France, and Italy higher than the UK, and Scandinavian countries (perhaps surprisingly) low.⁶³

⁶³ Ipsos-Mori Global Trends 2014, <http://www.ipsosglobaltrends.com/environment.html>; Gallup Poll 2007–8, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_change_opinion_by_country; and Pew Center (2015).

Figure 3.2. High interest in environment news by country

It is not the aim of this chapter to attempt to uncover what might cause interest in environment news. Suffice it to say that many different factors are likely to influence this to varying degrees, both at the national level and at the individual level (Gifford and Nilsson, 2014). Nonetheless, it is possible to identify some of the variables that are associated with high levels of interest to get a sense of the respective respondents' socio-demographic profile, and later, news consumption.

Across all 26 countries surveyed we see differences based on political orientation, age, and education. As part of the survey, we asked respondents to place themselves on a seven-point scale ranging from 'very left-wing' to 'very right-wing'. In summary, well over half of those on the left (58%) – who identified themselves as either 'very left-wing' or 'fairly left-wing' – are highly interested in news about the environment, compared to just 37% of those who identify as either 'very right-wing' or 'fairly right-wing'. Perhaps more surprisingly, older people are more likely to be highly interested, with 49% of over-45s indicating this compared to 43% of under-45s (and only 38% of 18–20 year olds). In terms of education, differences are perhaps smaller than expected, with 43% of those educated to school level (or below) highly interested, compared to 48% with a degree or professional qualification.

We can also use the data to drill down to the national level for the six countries of interest here: France, Poland, Germany, and Spain, the US, and the UK. Typically, we see that the same patterns are evident. The strongest association is between politics and interest levels. In most countries, those who place themselves on the left are much more likely to be highly interested in environmental news, with those on the right less likely to be highly interested than those who place themselves in the centre.

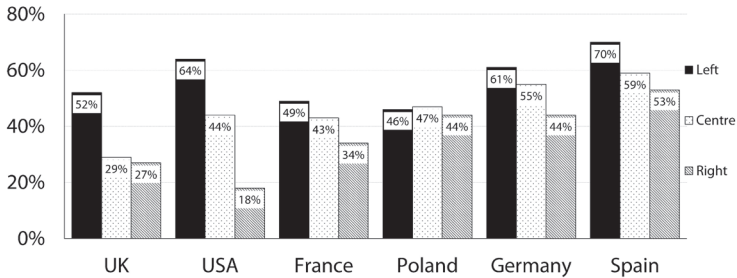
Figure 3.3. High interest in environment news by political leaning

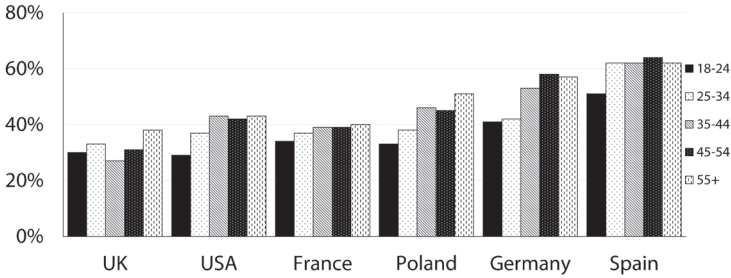
Figure 3.3 shows that the difference is particularly stark in countries like the US and the UK, where we see a high degree of polarisation. In the US, less than one in five (18%) of those on the right are highly interested in environment news, compared to nearly two-thirds (64%) of those on the left.

Older people are more likely to be interested in news about the environment. This is in contrast to interest in lifestyle news, which tends to decrease with age, and interest in science and technology news, which does not vary. It should be noted that for environment news the effect of age is weak compared to political leaning, and does not reach statistical significance in Spain and France.⁶⁴ In the US, 29% of 18–24s report a high level of interest, compared to 43% of those 45 and over (see Figure 3.4). The impact of age is similar in Germany and Poland. In the UK, the effect of age is weaker, but nonetheless points in the same direction. That older people are more interested in news about the environment may seem a little counter-intuitive, but within the data older people are more interested in hard news topics generally, and ‘the environment’ as a news topic can refer to issues associated with agriculture, conservation, and rural affairs, as well as climate change.

Thirdly, in most countries those who have been educated to school level or lower tend to be less interested in environment news than those with university or professional qualifications (see Figure 3.5). Perhaps

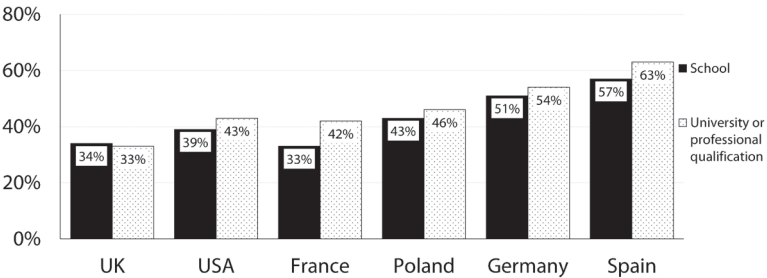
⁶⁴ Unless otherwise stated, all relationships described in this section were found to be statistically significant following a chi-squared test ($p < .05$). However, we did not introduce control variables into the analysis because the primary purpose was to establish a demographic profile, rather than to imply causation. Nonetheless, we are aware that this is a complex area, and the relationships described here could potentially be subjected to more robust statistical analysis.

Figure 3.4. High interest in environment news by age group



contrary to popular belief, the difference in most cases is very small, with the difference not statistically significant in the UK, Poland, and Germany.

Figure 3.5. High interest in environment news by education level



Other socio-demographic variables, such as gender and income, do not have a consistent or significant correlation with interest in environment news. It is also worth noting that the demographic profile (using the same data set) of those highly interested in news about science and technology – which overlaps to some extent in terms of content with news about the environment – is quite different, given that those more likely to be interested in this topic tend to be younger, relatively affluent, men.

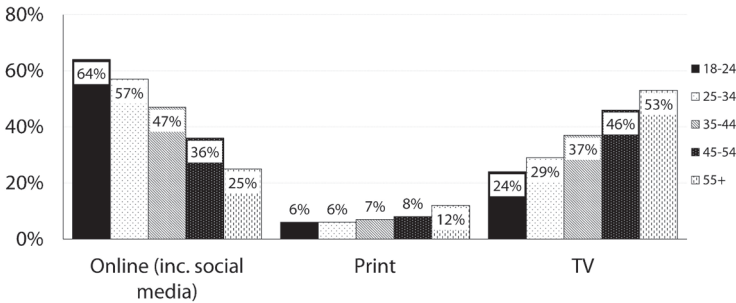
The Growth of Online as a Source of News

Interest in different types of news is likely to shape how people consume it. This also needs to be understood within the context of the broader changes in news consumption habits. As we saw in Chapter 1, recent years have been marked by a sharp decline in newspaper circulations (Cagé, 2016), a slower but significant decline in television news viewing (Nielsen and Sambrook, 2016), and the rapid growth of online news consumption (Newman et al., 2016). In parallel, there has also been a subtler but arguably more consequential shift in the relative importance of these sources in the eyes of consumers. In short, the number of people who say that online is their main source of news is growing, and in some countries now rivals TV. As Table 4.1 (in the next chapter) shows, in the UK and the US, although TV was some way ahead in 2014, the proportion saying in 2016 that online is their main source of news is the same as TV (around 40% in each case). In Spain, 38% now say that online is their main source of news, with 31% saying the same in Poland. In Germany and France, where patterns of news consumption are broadly more traditional, TV is still considered more important than online; but the gap is clearly closing as well. Perhaps most striking is how few people – no more than one in ten in each country – say that print media (which also includes news magazines) are their main source of news. However, this does not take account of the fact that much online news content is provided by newspaper brands, and that they are considered by many to be the main drivers of the news agenda.

As the 2016 *Digital News Report* made clear, the top-level figures for the main source of news mask very sharp differences between age groups. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of 18–24s (across all 26 countries) said that online is their main source of news, compared to under a quarter (24%) for TV, and just 6% that said print (see Figure 3.6). Online remains ahead of TV among all respondents under 45. But when we look at over 45s, we see that the balance tips in favour of TV, with over half (53%) of those aged over 55 saying that TV is their main source, compared to a quarter (25%) who said online. Even amongst over 55s, only around one in ten (12%) said that print is their main source of news.

In parallel to the growth in online news consumption – particularly for younger people – many digital-born brands have also increased their online reach for news. If we focus specifically on the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice, we can see this development more clearly. These brands are

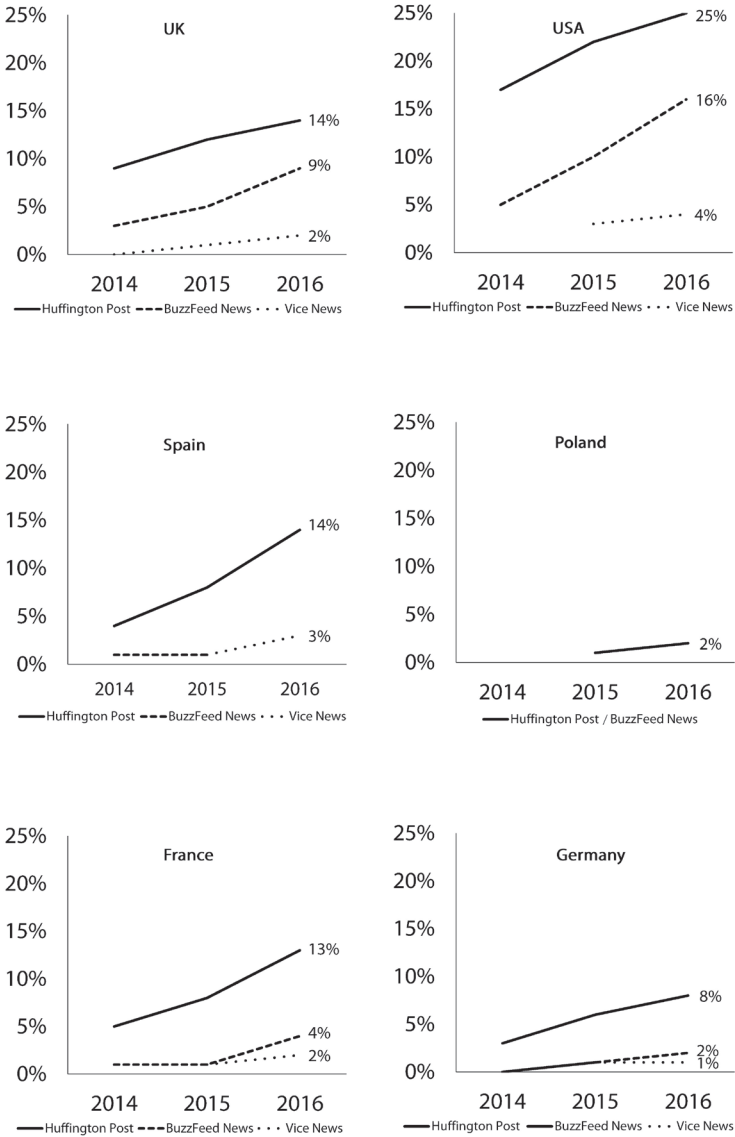
Figure 3.6. Main source of news by age group



most widely used for news in the US and the UK, probably because they started off providing English-language coverage. Their popularity is slightly lower in Germany, France, and Spain, but localised versions that have been established recently are clearly starting to make a difference. However, in Poland, where domestic digital-born news brands such as Onet and WP have captured a large share of the news market (Fletcher et al., 2015), Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice are not widely used.

Looking at each brand specifically, in all six countries, the Huffington Post is the most widely used for news of the three (see Figure 3.7). A quarter (25%) of all those surveyed in the US said that they used it for news in the previous week, with 14% saying the same in both Spain and the UK. The Huffington Post is slightly less widely used in Germany (8%), and reaches only 2% in Poland. BuzzFeed is also most popular for news in the English-speaking countries, with no more than 5% using it elsewhere. Vice is the least widely used of the three for news, with a reach of 4% in the US, and lower figures everywhere else. Crucially, with almost no exceptions, all three have expanded their news reach since 2014, with the Huffington Post achieving remarkably sharp growth everywhere other than Poland, with a similar pattern true of BuzzFeed in the US and the UK.

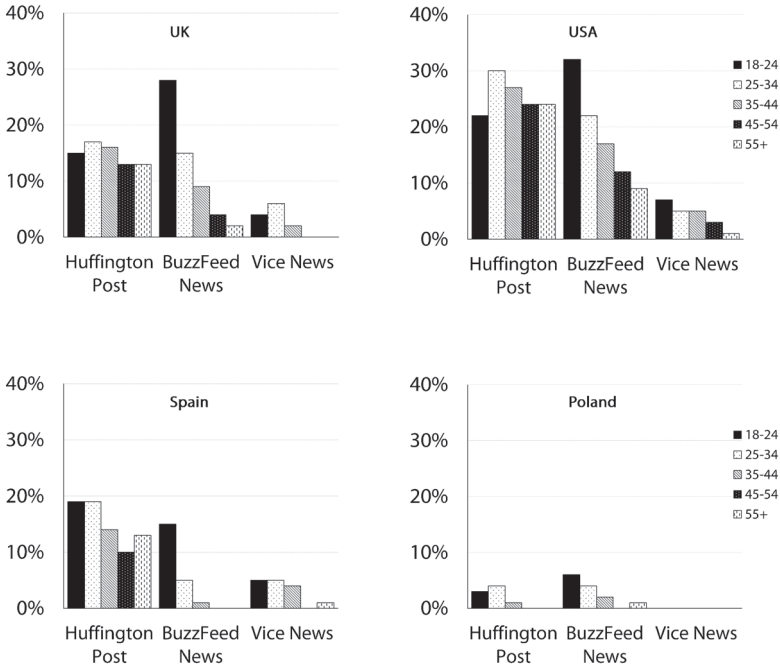
Figure 3.7. Percentage of respondents who used Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice for news in the previous week 2014–2016

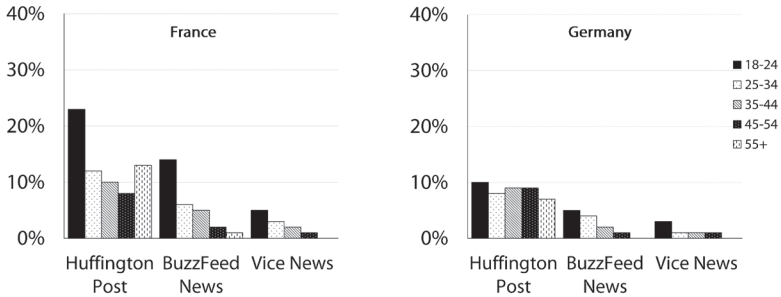


Note: Responses about Vice were only collected in the UK for 2014, and Poland has never been sampled for Vice usage.

Similar to the main news sources, the reach of these new players differs strongly between age groups. As is clear from Figure 3.8, the Huffington Post has broadly the same reach amongst all age groups, with this broader appeal putting it ahead of the others overall. However, it is more popular with the young in both Spain and France. BuzzFeed is heavily skewed towards younger users in every country. This is particularly true in English-speaking countries, where it reaches 28% of 18–24s in the UK, and 32% of 18–24s in the US, and is more widely used than the Huffington Post within this age group. In line with its stated aims, Vice is also skewed towards younger users, reaching very few over 35s even in English-speaking countries.

Figure 3.8. Percentage of respondents who used Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice for news in the previous week by age



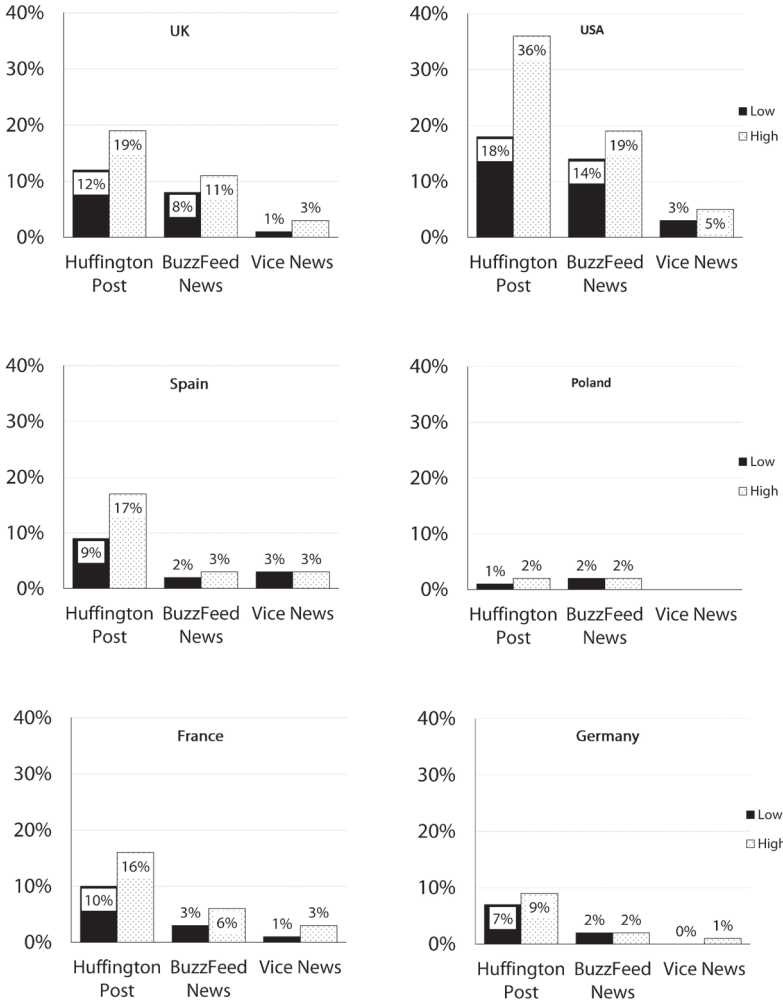


Online News Consumption and Environment News

We do not have data available on where people get their news about the environment specifically. But if we combine the data on digital-born brands with the earlier data on respondents' interest in environment news, we can see how the two combine to affect general usage, of which environment news will be a part. People who say they are highly interested in news about the environment are in almost every case more likely to use each of the digital-born brands (see Figure 3.9). This is despite the fact that, as we have already seen, older people are both more likely to have high interest in environment news and are less likely to use each of these brands. Figure 3.9 reveals that the differences are particularly large in France, the US, and the UK, and are noticeable for all three brands. In the US, 36% of those with high interest in news about the environment use the Huffington Post, compared to 18% with low interest. In Spain, those with high interest in environment news use the Huffington Post more, but not BuzzFeed or Vice. In Germany and Poland the differences are too small to be significant.

Some of these numbers for online news reach may appear small, but as is clear from Figures 3.10 and 3.11, they are similar to the figures for some traditional print and broadcast brands online. In the UK, over half of online news users access news from the BBC on a weekly basis, making it by far the most popular news brand online (see Figure 3.10). But below this, we see that the Huffington Post is used by just under one-fifth (19%), and among those with a high interest in news about the environment, is as popular as both the *Guardian* (18%) and MailOnline (18%). BuzzFeed news is less popular (11%), but among those with high interest in news about the environment is nonetheless as popular (if not more so) than Sky News (10%) and the *Telegraph* online (6%). Vice has a small news reach (3%), but online

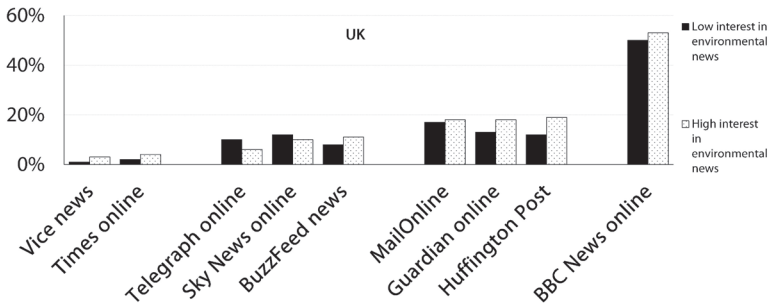
Figure 3.9. Percentage of respondents who used Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice in the previous week by interest in environment news



it is comparable to that of *The Times* due to the impact of their paywall (4%).

As Figure 3.11 shows, the picture is similar in the US. But crucially, the Huffington Post (36%) is *the* most popular online news destination among those with a high level of interest in news about the environment; more

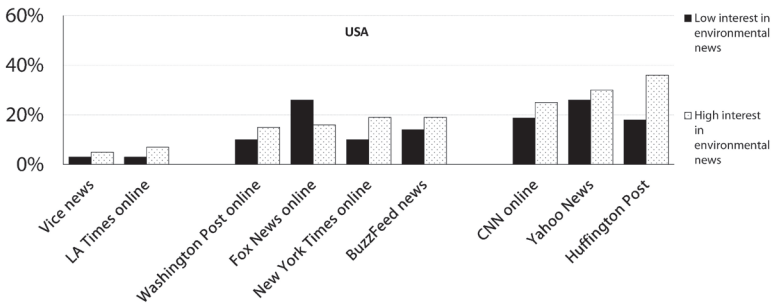
Figure 3.10. Percentage of respondents who used selected news brands online in the previous week by interest in environment news – UK



popular than Yahoo (30%), CNN (25%), and Fox News online (16%). BuzzFeed (19%) reaches as many as the *New York Times* (19%) and the *Washington Post* (15%) each week, but once again, Vice (5%) is smaller but comparable to some well-known newspaper brands.

Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice have a much smaller reach outside of the US and UK, despite now maintaining dedicated regional versions in some cases. But even in Spain, Germany, and France, the reach of the Huffington Post in particular is not so different from the online reach of providers like *Le Monde*, *Die Welt*, or any of the public service broadcasters

Figure 3.11. Percentage of respondents who used selected news brands online in the previous week by interest in environment news – USA



from these countries (see Newman et al., 2016). Although it is not possible to use the survey data to pinpoint the reasons for these national differences, they are likely to be partly rooted in the fact that these brands are relatively new entrants to these markets. Current trends suggest that both the reach and importance of these new players will increase in the future.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown, first, that levels of interest in environment news vary from country to country. But across the six countries examined here in detail, those who are older, more educated, and left-leaning are more likely to be highly interested. Secondly, and in line with shifts in the relative importance of online news, the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice have all become more important news sources for consumers since 2014, with particularly strong gains in the US and the UK. Taken together, these developments have produced a situation whereby those most interested in environment news are significantly more likely to consume news from these brands, with their reach among this group rivalling (and in many cases exceeding) that of traditional providers.

Of course, it should be kept in mind that people use lots of different news sources when they are online, and as we already mentioned in Chapter 1, only a minority see Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice as their primary news sources (Newman et al., 2016). It is possible that if respondents were asked about their preferred or most trusted source of environment news, they may have reported a preference for legacy news brands, assuming that they select news brands in terms of their coverage of specific topics at all. Even if this were the case, there would still be a certain amount of incidental exposure to their coverage of the environment whilst respondents used them for other things. One limitation of cross-sectional survey data is that its power to prove causal relationships, e.g. between interest in the environment and the use of digital-born news brands, is limited. Those who are highly interested may turn to them because of their coverage of the environment, or alternatively, those that use them might become more interested in the environment as a result of their coverage. But in both cases, it merits a closer look at how digital-born brands present environment news.

4

The Media, COP Summits, and Paris 2015

James Painter

The annual UN summits on climate change, otherwise known as COPs, started in 1995 in Bonn. They have attracted a considerable amount of media and academic interest, mainly because they combine several features in one global event: knowledge production, lobbying, activism, political bargaining, and decision-making on an issue of huge international significance (Kunelius and Eide, 2012). The best attended COP took place in Copenhagen in 2009, when around 4,000 journalists from 119 countries were present, which was probably the single political event most attended in recent history outside the inauguration of President Obama as the first black president of the USA in January 2009 (Painter, 2010: 26).

Just prior to the Copenhagen summit, thousands of emails were hacked from the University of East Anglia in the UK, which prompted considerable media coverage of what appeared at first as attempts by climate scientists there to manipulate or hide data (Pearce, 2010). This was seen as a ‘climate spoiler’ orchestrated by climate sceptics to undermine the need for an international agreement. Equally interesting from a media perspective was the fact that these were published online first, and then made their way into legacy media, thus showing even then the importance of online communication, and the greater presence of dissident voices there.

Copenhagen was largely perceived as a failure by the media, partly because of the high expectations before it. It did not lead to a legally binding follow-up agreement to the Kyoto Protocol, but it produced the Copenhagen Accord, by which for the first time developed and developing countries agreed on the importance of cutting emissions. After the Copenhagen summit, the number of journalists attending fell sharply to about 2,000 at Cancun in 2010 and 1,500 in Durban in 2011. The drop was particularly noticeable in developed countries, as many journalists were asked to report the summits from their home base, in part to save money (Arevalo, 2012). By the time of the COP20 summit in Lima in 2014, the number attending had fallen further to 900.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ <http://www.cop21paris.org/about/cop21>

In the political sphere, a climate of cautious hope had been created in the run-up to the December 2015 COP21 summit in Paris. Broadly speaking, the US and China had come on board in support of an international agreement, the price of renewables had dropped by half, and the vast majority of countries involved in the negotiations had already pledged voluntary emission cuts, known then as INDCs.⁶⁶ The prospect of a deal was one of the reasons why media interest rose again to the level shown in the Copenhagen summit six years before. Official UN figures show that 3,411 journalists were registered to attend. This figure may be an underestimate as many journalists covered the summit without being registered, either from the Paris streets or from their home country. However, the figures show sharp contrasts between countries (with e.g. more than a thousand French journalists and only two from Poland), and between legacy media and new players (with e.g. 14 from the *Guardian* or nine from the *NYT* compared to four from *Vice* and one from *BuzzFeed*).

Charts mapping the trends in the volume of climate change coverage by traditional media around the world indicate that the Paris summit prompted a spike in December 2015. The best-known of these charts produced by the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research at the University of Colorado, Boulder, tracks coverage in 50 newspapers from 25 countries.⁶⁷ It suggests a significant increase during that month to 534 articles – not as high as the Copenhagen summit (714 articles), but higher than at any other time since 2004.⁶⁸

Given the high level of media interest in COP summits, academics and other researchers have studied them extensively, concentrating on a number of different analytical questions. Longitudinal studies of the volume of coverage suggest that COP summits in general are important drivers of media coverage despite the variation in the number of journalists attending. For example, one study of the amount of climate change-related coverage in two leading newspapers in Australia, Germany, and India from 1996 to 2010 showed that societal activities such as international climate summits and the agenda-building efforts from international NGOs were more important drivers of media attention than weather and climate characteristics (Schäfer et al., 2014).

⁶⁶ See e.g. Fiona Harvey, 'As we Prepare for the UN Climate Talks, a Look at What's Changed since Copenhagen', <http://ensia.com/features/as-we-prepare-for-the-un-climate-talks-a-look-at-whats-changed-since-copenhagen>

⁶⁷ http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/icecaps/research/media_coverage/world/index.html

⁶⁸ For a possible explanation of why the Paris summit did not reach the volume of coverage of the Copenhagen summit, see <http://www.climate-matters.hamburg/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Watchblog.pdf>

Particularly notable has been the work of the MediaClimate Network,⁶⁹ which has brought together researchers from around 20 countries to look in detail at the coverage of the COPs both before and after Copenhagen. The Network's second edited volume (Eide and Kunelius, 2012) was underpinned by a desire to address the role and responsibility of journalism in communicating 'the global challenge of the 21st century' and the 'global attempt to solve it' (p. 9). The volume examines a wide range of issues including dominant discourses about climate change in different countries, professional practices, and the media portrayal of different actors in the negotiations. One of the main conclusions is that journalists from individual countries provide what is called a 'domestication' of climate change, bringing the issue 'close to home' but restricting their angles and frames to domestic issues and concerns despite the global nature of the challenge. This idea was developed further by the authors in their study of the Copenhagen summit. They distinguished between, on the one hand, journalists taking an active part in 'constructing and mediating a normatively based, cosmopolitan discourse that demanded a conclusive, multilateral agreement', and, on the other hand, journalists producing 'a detached and partly nationally grounded discourse of power realism' (Kunelius and Eide, 2012: 266).

A more recent study (Wessler et al., forthcoming) has looked at the print coverage of four COP summits from 2010 to 2013 in five countries (Brazil, Germany, India, South Africa, and the USA) to see if major differences in the dominant themes could be identified. The researchers included a large number of photo-illustrated articles as well as text-based articles, and identified four clearly discernible dominant news frames used by the media in those countries: 'global warming victims', 'civil society demands', 'political negotiations', and 'sustainable energy'. The first focuses on all the possible consequences of climate change; the second on the full range of potential remedies; the third is self-evident, and the last emphasises an expansion of clean energy and the expansion of a new binding treaty. The researchers concluded that the distribution of the four frames was relatively similar, despite the sharp country differences in levels of economic development and vulnerability to climate change. This was particularly significant as about 85% of the articles with both text and photos within them were written by staff journalists and not taken from agency copy.

The authors drew on other work by scholars to suggest that the similarities are largely explained by the news production context of such global staged events, which typically 'feature uniform media access rules and similar

⁶⁹ <https://mediacclimate.net>

information supplies as well as strong interaction between journalists from different countries and between journalists and other actors' (ibid.) such as government delegations, NGOs, experts, and lobby groups. The limited spatial and time context for such conferences combined with the historical building up of mutual acquaintances can lead to what some authors have called a 'camp feeling' where professional roles are temporarily blurred (Wozniak et al., 2016). This work has been further developed to examine the different types of 'co-production networks' which have emerged between journalists and communication workers from environmental NGOs which partly account for the similar interpretations of such summits (Lück et al., 2016).

Other studies support the view that journalists do indeed work very closely with environment NGOs, as measured by the high number of quotes from NGO sources, compared to other sectors such as the business community or scientists. At the Copenhagen summit, for example, one study of more than 400 articles in two print media in 12 countries concluded that, even on the theme of climate science, NGOs were quoted almost as much as scientists despite the presence there of 2,000 members of 250 universities around the world, including 280 professors (Painter, 2010; Eide and Kunelius, 2010). The most likely explanation was the large deployment of media workers from leading NGOs. Similarly, at the end of the summit, NGO representatives represented 18% of those quoted (the largest proportion being governments), considerably more than scientists (4%) and business sectors (hardly at all). Similar findings have been made from other studies, including that of the Bali summit in 2007, where NGOs had a more significant presence in the media than scientists and business sectors (Eide and Kunelius, 2010) prompting discussion in some quarters about the excessive influence of NGOs with a clear political agenda (Painter, 2010: ch. 5).

What is common to virtually all of these studies of summits prior to COP21 is that they have concentrated on textual and/or photographic content in legacy media, and usually the print and not online versions. However, the media landscapes changed dramatically between Copenhagen 2009 and Paris 2015. As we have seen in Chapter 2, there have been rapid changes in the way people, and particularly those under 35, consume news, new players have eaten into the audiences of legacy brands, and a number of niche sites specialising in climate change have proliferated. New formats like live blogs, videos, photo galleries, and infographics have become an integral part of the offer online. And within some media, such as the Huffington

Post and the *Guardian*, top-down efforts had been made to include many more positive stories about opportunities and solutions compared to what was seen as the often negative presence of doom and gloom and disaster themes. In the social and political world, new campaigning NGOs like Avaaz, working exclusively online and using social media sites, have enjoyed considerable success, including on the issue of climate change. Business sectors and some scientists had become very vocal in the run-up to the Paris summit about the need for a deal.

An initiative by Climate Matters⁷⁰ coordinated out of Hamburg University showed just how much the focus of university researchers had moved on to reflect these changes. An edited volume of blogs by 27 academics on the Paris summit⁷¹ included three separate contributions on Twitter trends, and others on the impact of data journalism, the discussion of climate change on Reddit, the use of photographic images to raise awareness, the coverage of the protests by new players, and Google trends, as well as the need for new narratives about climate change. One of the blogs which examined Twitter trends clearly showed just how much of a global event the COP summit had become, as Twitter users from almost 200 countries could be identified.⁷² Around 16% of the users were identified from the USA, 15% from France, and 9% from the UK.

What follows in Chapters 5–8 is an attempt to draw on the body of existing research mentioned above on such issues as media attention, the similarity of themes or discourses in event-related coverage, and the use of different sources and formats, and then to update it by focusing on the particular differences between the online content offer of legacy media and new players. This is what has been absent from previous research. If researchers are right that a fixed international event such as a COP leads to a convergence of similar types of coverage, then identifying any differences is all the more interesting.

⁷⁰ <http://www.climatematters.hamburg>

⁷¹ <http://www.climatematters.hamburg/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Watchblog.pdf>

⁷² <http://www.climatematters.hamburg/2015/12/two-weeks-on-twitter-cop21-smoking-heads-and-tweets-from-outer-space>

The RISJ Six-Country Study

In our study, we concentrated on the coverage of the COP21 summit published online by five media organisations in each of six countries. Our focus was on ‘content’, i.e. we were most interested in what is known as the second stage of the communication cycle, rather than the first stage (the way it is produced, including the use of journalistic sources) or the third stage (consumption of the content by audiences). However, we went beyond what many studies do, by focusing on different modalities of content such as text, images, and video. We also supplemented our content analysis with semi-structured interviews with several journalists from the legacy players and new players. This gave us insights into the ways these journalists approached climate change coverage in general, and the Paris summit in particular. (See Appendix 2 for the list of interviewees and the broad areas of questions.)

The six countries chosen were France, Germany, Poland, Spain, the UK, and the USA. The five European countries were selected as being representative of a diversity of characteristics significant to climate change coverage, including public attitudes, media treatments, media landscapes, the political context including the presence or relative absence of sceptics, energy diversity, and role in international negotiations (see Table 4.1). Poland was included as a representative of a former Soviet Bloc country, which had played a major role in the EU in blocking more ambitious emission reduction targets, and had a long history of being very resistant to reducing its dependence on coal. The USA was added mainly because this is where the three new players started out and have enjoyed major successes in securing a considerable audience.

As we were particularly interested in the differences between legacy players and new players, we chose to examine an example of one right-leaning and one left-leaning or liberal legacy media in each country, and the three new players Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice.⁷³ We are aware that in some countries, like the USA, the newspaper market is less politically polarised. But we included the *New York Times* and *USA Today* as the nearest equivalents or ‘stand-ins’ for left-leaning/liberal and right-leaning. We only looked at the online versions of the two legacy media. We selected

⁷³ We initially included a niche player in each of the six countries, but these were left out from this analysis, as they varied too greatly from country to country in terms of their editorial focus, volume of coverage, links to legacy media and available resources. These were Reporterre (France); Klimaretter (Germany); Naukaoklimacie (Poland); EFE Verde (Spain); Carbon Brief (UK); and Climatewire (USA).

Table 4.1. Country profiles

	FRANCE	GERMANY	POLAND	SPAIN	UK	USA
Climate Vulnerability						
Climate Vulnerability, 2010–2030, General	Low	Low	Moderate	High	Low	High
Climate Vulnerability, 2010–2030, Specific	Severe (economic stress)	Moderate (economic stress)	Acute (economic stress)	Acute (habitat loss/economic stress)	Moderate (economic stress)	Acute (habitat loss)
Climate Risk Index (1995–2014) [†]	19th	18th	61st	33rd	58th	25th
Public Attitudes						
% who think 'global warming is a serious problem'	56%	55%	19%	53%	41%	45%
% who 'support international action on limiting emissions'	86%	87%	63%	91%	78%	69%
% who are highly interested in news about the environment	39%	53%	44%	61%	33%	40%
Ideological polarisation*	-21	-1	2	-14	-19	-38
Media profiles						
Media system	Polarised Pluralist	Democratic Corporatist	Hybrid	Polarised Pluralist	Liberal	Liberal
Presence of new media players [‡]	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	High	High
Internet penetration	84%	88%	68%	77%	92%	87%
Main source of news (2016): online (including social); television; print	31:52:5%	26:51:8%	31:56:3%	38:44:10%	42:40:10%	42:44:5%
Presence of scepticism in media	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	High	High

† Position in ranking of more than 180 countries, where 1st is the most impacted by climate change

* Difference between right- and left-wing respondents to whether global climate change is a serious problem. The higher the negative score, the higher the degree of polarisation.

BuzzFeed, Huffington Post, and Vice only

Sources: Climate Vulnerability: <http://daraint.org/climate-vulnerability-monitor/climate-vulnerability-monitor-2012/>

Climate Risk Index: <https://germanwatch.org/en/cri>

Public Attitudes: rows 1, 2, and 4: Pew Center (2015). Row 3: Newman et al., 2016

Media Profiles: row 1: Hallin and Mancini, 2012; row 2 and 4: Newman et al., 2016; row 3: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/>; row 5: author's own assessment.

the three new players for the reasons outlined in Chapter 2. The full list of selected media organisations in each country can be seen in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Media organisations selected for study

	FRANCE	GERMANY	POLAND	SPAIN	UK	USA
New Players	Huffington Post	Huffington Post		Huffington Post	Huffington Post	Huffington Post
	BuzzFeed	BuzzFeed		BuzzFeed	BuzzFeed	BuzzFeed
	Vice	Vice	Vice	Vice	Vice	Vice
Legacy Player 1 (left-leaning)	<i>Le Monde</i>	<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i>	<i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i>	<i>El País</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
Legacy Player 2 (right-leaning)	<i>Le Figaro</i>	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Z.</i>	<i>Rzeczpospolita</i>	<i>El Mundo</i>	<i>Telegraph</i>	<i>USA Today</i>

The search methods and engines used to identify the articles published on the online sites between 25 November 2015 (the Wednesday five days before the start of the summit) and 16 December 2016 (the Wednesday four days after the summit) are fully described in Appendix 1. Some of the methodological challenges encountered in identifying the samples for Vice and BuzzFeed, and the coder reliability scores, are also discussed there.

The full sample identified by the search method was nearly 2,400 ‘articles’ across the six countries. ‘Articles’ included news and opinion/commentary pieces, video reports, photo essays, blog posts, audio pieces, infographics, listicles, and quizzes. Due to the high volume of coverage, the number of articles was reduced to roughly similar and manageable amounts for the content analytical coding. The method for doing this can be found in Appendix 1. This resulted in a total of 527 coded articles, broken down into 146 from the left-leaning legacy media and 122 from the right, giving a total of 268 legacy media articles, 129 from the Huffington Post, 68 from Vice, and 62 from BuzzFeed. These 527 articles were then coded by researchers in each of the six countries, following the coding sheet found on the RISJ website at <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/new-players-environmental-reporting>. It was designed to capture four broad areas of the coverage: its format, content, the appearing voices, and its tone/style. All types of article including videos and photo essays were coded, although

photographs illustrating texts were not separately coded. The format categories included the use of photos, videos, and infographics. The content categories were pre-selected, according to themes and frames commonly identified by previous research into the general coverage of climate change, or those more linked to the coverage of summits. The major themes were divided into six: negotiations, scientific background, disaster/catastrophe, uncertainty, opportunity, and climate justice. Several minor themes were also included such as business and economics, health impacts, protests, and moves to renewable energy. The same article could contain one or more themes. Details of the indicators of the various themes can be found in the coding sheet.

The voices were divided into ten categories, namely politician from a reporter's home country, politician from another country, representative of the UNFCCC, representative of another international body such as the IPCC, scientist, representative of a NGO, business person, common person, religious leader, and other. Finally, an assessment was made of tone (essentially straight or amusing), language (essentially formal or informal), and perspective (essentially that of a neutral journalist or of an environmental activist).

A large amount of data were captured in the coding sheets for each country. For the purposes of this publication, a decision was taken to concentrate on four key metrics in order to capture the main differences between legacy players and the three new players in countries where there were sufficient data. We had to leave out Poland from most of the analysis as the sample size from the new players was just one article (from Vice). A country chapter on Poland with detailed results and analysis can be found on the RISJ website.⁷⁴

The first set of metrics were volume of coverage, and particularly content, as we aimed to get a sense of whether the new players concentrated on different aspects of the Paris summit. For example, how much attention did Vice and BuzzFeed pay to the course of the negotiations compared to legacy players? How much did Huffington Post give a positive approach to climate change to its articles, by focusing on solutions and opportunities? Did the new players give more or less scientific background on climate change, or more or less coverage of the protests? Other issues such as the different treatments of the outcome of the summit and country differences were not explored as fully. A full analysis of the content differences can be found in the following chapter.

⁷⁴ <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/new-players-environmental-reporting>

The next key metric was the degree to which different media organisations were driven by the desire to visualise some or most of their coverage. This covers such questions as whether the new players, partly motivated by the urgency of achieving a presence and shares on social media platforms, showed important differences to the legacy players whose online presence is also increasingly driven by similar considerations. We also sought answers to what types of visualisations were most common, and within that, what types of video content such as long-format, short-format, or simple backgrounders. These issues and others will be explored in Chapter 6. Other differences will be identified and analysed in Chapter 7. These include tone, language, and perspective, and the use of different voices quoted in the articles. The type of questions addressed is the extent to which BuzzFeed, for example, adopts a more amusing or irreverent tone compared to legacy players, the way Vice may be more attracted to the voices of protestors and NGOs, or the way Huffington Post is dependent on giving a voice to the various forms of environmental advocates through its numerous blog posts.

5

New Players and Old: Volume of Coverage and Themes

Mike S. Schäfer, Silje Kristiansen, and Alan Ouakrat

Introduction

The media can present an event like COP21 in several different ways. They can portray it as more or less important (e.g. Schmidt et al., 2013), give a voice to different individuals or institutions (e.g. Boykoff, 2011), interpret and ‘frame’ the event as a scientific, political, or economic one (e.g. Nisbet, 2009), or illustrate it with different amounts and types of visuals (e.g. O’Neill and Smith, 2014).

This chapter will concentrate on two dimensions of the differences and similarities in the countries we have analysed. First, it looks at *volume* as a simple, but important measure of media coverage (Schmidt et al., 2013). Due to restrictions on time and space, journalists and editors can only give a finite amount of attention to any given issue. The amount of space they eventually devote to information about an issue or event is the outcome of a competitive process of issue evaluation and selection, and it reflects how relevant the issue is perceived to be within the newsroom. In turn, the volume of coverage also has agenda-setting effects (cf. Shah et al., 2009): it can affect the awareness and knowledge of the general public about the issue (Sampei and Aoyagi-Utsui, 2009; Stamm et al., 2000) and also of parliaments and governments (Liu et al., 2011; Newig, 2004).

Second, we will look at the different *themes*, i.e. the different facets of climate change, its causes, effects, and potential remedies which the media mention in their coverage of COP21. Since climate change and climate politics are complex, multifaceted phenomena (e.g. Moser, 2010) which can be seen in very different ways (e.g. Hulme, 2009), analysing the prevalent themes shows how the media present an issue to their audience. On the one hand, such media presentations may differ between countries.

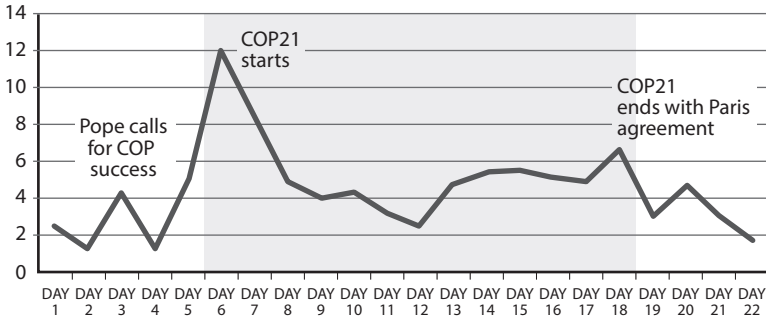
Scholars have demonstrated, for example, that climate change scepticism plays a considerably stronger role in Anglophone countries compared to continental Europe, India, or China (Grundmann and Scott, 2014; Painter, 2011; Painter and Ashe, 2012), and that scientific uncertainties concerning climate change are highlighted to different degrees as well (Painter, 2013). In turn, studies have shown a stronger focus on societal implications and, particularly, political and social solutions in continental Europe (Ivanova, 2015; Konieczny, 2014). Other studies have revealed that collective action to mitigate climate change is presented differently in different countries (Olausson, 2009) and that these differences may be particularly strong between the global North and global South (Billett, 2010; Shanahan, 2009). Furthermore, climate change is put in the context of other issues like security concerns and migration in very different ways (Oels and Carvalho, 2012; Schäfer et al., 2015). Apart from country differences, research has also shown differences between legacy media and online communication concerning the themes that are highlighted and used to interpret climate change (for an overview see Schäfer, 2012). Uncertainty and scepticism tend to be more pronounced in some online formats, particularly in social media (e.g. Elgesem et al., 2015; Gavin and Marshall, 2011), and in legacy and online media, basic interpretive frames like ‘settled science’ or ‘uncertain science’ are pronounced to different degrees (O’Neill et al., 2015).

In other words, climate change is presented and contextualised differently in different countries and media, and these different presentations are linked to different audience responses (e.g. Bickerstaff et al., 2008; Nisbet, 2009). Therefore, this chapter explores the volume and themes of COP21 coverage in new and legacy media in different countries.

High Volume Coverage with Large Country and Media Differences

The 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) took place in Paris from 30 November to 12 December 2016 (see Figure 5.1). Over these two weeks, it entered a crowded news cycle, as it had to compete for media attention with a large number of other high-profile events. The most notable of these was the 13 November terrorist attacks in Paris whose aftermath could still be felt clearly when COP21 started. Subsequent security preparations and concerns in the French capital affected the COP21 conference itself, and the ensuing manhunt for one of the attackers went on during the time of the

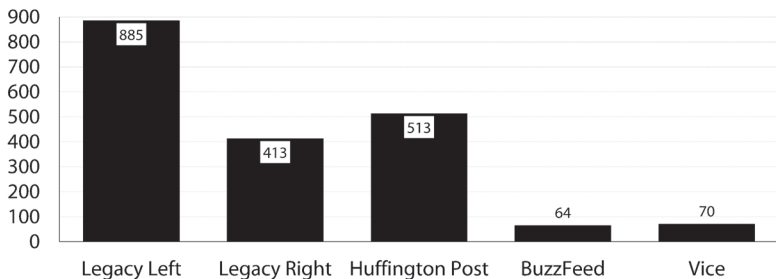
Figure 5.1. Intensity of COP21 coverage before, during, and after the Conference



Note: The graph shows the percentage of the entire coverage of all analysed media per day. For France, Germany, Poland, Spain, the UK, and the US, one left-leaning and one right-leaning newspaper were included, as well as the respective domestic versions of BuzzFeed, Huffington Post, and Vice.

conference as well. Other international events at the time were the advances of IS fighters in Syria, Iraq, and neighbouring countries, the pondered responses of Russia and Western countries like the UK and France, the refugee crisis affecting Eastern and Central Europe and the Middle East, as well as sports scandals surrounding potentially doped Russian athletes and corruption in the world football association FIFA. Domestically as well, several of the countries analysed in our study had turbulent weeks, influenced by, for example, the presidential caucuses in the US, national elections in Spain and regional elections in France, the budget statement and floods in the UK, and the rise of right-wing populism in Germany.

Figure 5.2. Volume of COP21 coverage in legacy and new players



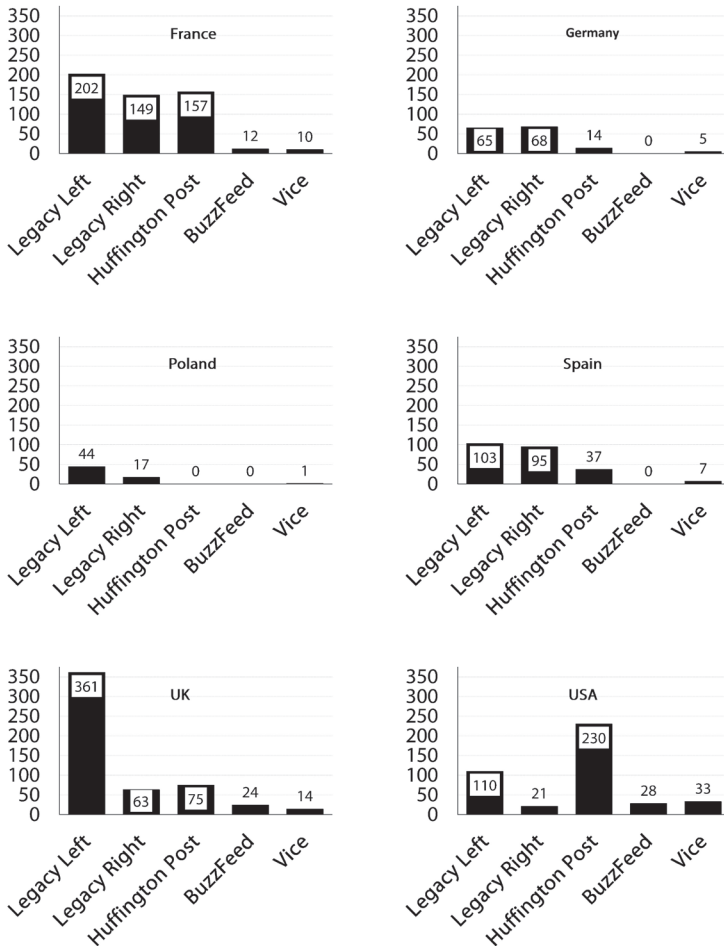
Note: The graph shows the total number of articles published by French, German, Polish, Spanish, UK, and US news outlets in our sample.

Despite this competitive news cycle, COP21 received a considerable amount of media attention, even though it varied strongly between media outlets and countries. To measure the volume of coverage, we counted the total number of articles mentioning climate change or global warming together with COP21 or Paris between 25 November and 16 December 2016. These included news and opinion/commentary pieces (see Appendix 1 for details). During the 22 days of analysis, a total of 1,945 articles were published online in the media in the six countries we analysed (see Figure 5.2). This amount of coverage seems to equal the volume of coverage the highly reported COP15 conference in Copenhagen received in 2009, even though comparative numbers are only available for a few legacy media, and clearly exceeds media attention for COP13 in Bali 2007 (for the respective figures see Eide and Kunelius, 2010: 20ff.).

Even though the overall number of articles covering COP21 was relatively high, the volume of coverage varied strongly between countries (see Figure 5.3). The conference received most attention in the British and French media, followed by the US. This mirrors the findings of previous studies in two respects. First, it shows that Anglo-American countries – where the existence and impact of climate change are more intensely debated in politics, in the media, and in the general public, and where opinion about the necessity of measures to fight it is considerably more divided (e.g. Dunlap and McCright, 2011) – cover climate change more extensively than continental European countries like Germany, Poland, or Spain (e.g. Grundmann and Scott, 2014; Schmidt et al., 2013). This holds true in our study as well, even though COP21 still received a relatively large amount of media attention in Spain and in Germany, where it constituted the high point of climate change coverage together with COP15 (Schäfer, 2016). Secondly, it underlines the finding that the coverage of climate summits is particularly high in the respective host countries (Eide and Kunelius, 2010; Jorgensen et al., 2010; Schmidt et al., 2013). French coverage of COP21 – like Danish coverage in COP15 in Copenhagen before – outnumbers that of all other countries.

Apart from divergences between the six countries, differences between the analysed media are visible as well (see Figure 5.2). In general, legacy media cover COP21 more extensively than the new players, likely due to their larger editorial teams: 1,298 of the 1,945 news pieces included in our analysis, equivalent to more than two-thirds of all articles, appeared in legacy media. This difference is even more pronounced when the length of the respective articles is taken into account.

Figure 5.3. Volume of COP21 coverage in legacy and new players: country comparison



Among legacy media, left-leaning, liberal outlets covered the conference more than conservative ones, which is understandable as climate change is more of a left-liberal issue and has been shown to receive more attention in their respective media (e.g. Carvalho, 2007; Howard-Williams, 2009).⁷⁵ This difference along editorial lines is most pronounced in the UK, where the

⁷⁵ The only country which is an exception in this respect is Germany, where the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* covered COP 21 more than the liberal *Süddeutsche Zeitung* – but this difference is very small and statistically insignificant.

coverage of the *Guardian*, well-known for its emphasis on environmental issues and climate change (e.g. Painter, 2011), outnumbers that of the *Telegraph* by a six-to-one ratio. It is also visible in the US and in Poland, whereas it plays a less significant role in Germany, Spain, and France, where climate change is a less politicised issue (see Table 4.1). Among the new players, the Huffington Post is clearly the one which devoted most attention to COP21. But also here there are large differences between the different country editions, with the US and French edition devoting much more editorial attention to the summit compared to those of other countries. In total, the Huffington Post's 513 articles clearly outnumber the BuzzFeed and Vice News coverage, which mirrors the strong editorial focus of the Huffington Post on sustainability and environmental issues in general, and climate change in particular. In an interview with one of the authors, the Huffington Post's David Freeman declared that climate change is 'a big focus of ours, and we have focused a lot on sustainability coverage, in general'.⁷⁶

HuffPo's attention to climate change particularly stands out in France and in the US (see Figure 5.3). In France, apart from producing its own content, the Huffington Post also served as a platform for numerous external contributions by bloggers which provided in-depth coverage of important issues around the summit, such as scientist Michel Loreau writing about biodiversity impacts, or sociologist Stefan Aykut analysing the future of climate politics. In the US, the role of the Huffington Post is most pronounced. Out of our US sample, it provided the most coverage of the conference by far, perhaps making use of the space opened up by the particularly strong collapse of the legacy news media industry in the country (e.g. Benson, 2016). Therefore, the US is the only case where new online players – or more specifically, the Huffington Post – take on a major role in COP21 coverage, providing a large amount of news coverage on the summit in a situation when legacy media perhaps have less resources compared to previous years. In contrast, new players play a more complementary role in all other countries, in that high issue attention in legacy media is mirrored by an intensive, but less pronounced coverage in new players and vice versa. The regional differences are also significant, which are also a reflection of the amount of resources available in different countries. For example, BuzzFeed had some coverage in English and French, but nothing in German and Spanish despite having sites in those languages (see Figure 5.3). Vice had some coverage in all languages, but the volume varied considerably from country to country. Poland had only one article published by the new players, which was a piece by Vice.

⁷⁶ Interview by Adrienne Russell, by Skype, 15 Mar. 2016.

Plural Debates, Little Scepticism – Analysing the Themes

As outlined in Chapter 4, from the overall body of 1,945 articles, a subsample of 527 articles was drawn, of which 122 were from the legacy right-leaning media, 146 from the legacy left-leaning media, 129 from HuffPo, 68 from Vice, and 62 from BuzzFeed.⁷⁷ The sample size ranged between 81 (Germany) and 125 (USA) for each country. Within these, the themes which the media used to make sense of COP21 were then coded. Six themes were identified:⁷⁸

- The *negotiations* theme, which included any descriptions and analyses of the negotiating process and of any progress that was made, and discussed whether COP21 had to be seen as a success or failure - visible, for example, in article headlines like ‘Despite the fatigue, COP21 goes into extra time’ (*Le Figaro*, 11 Dec. 2015), ‘Last hours to find a global climate deal’ (*Le Monde*, 11 Dec. 2015), or ‘Merkel wants a price for carbon dioxide’ (*FAZ*, 1 Dec. 2015).
- Discussions of the *scientific background*, i.e. of climate science’s descriptions of the characteristics, causes, and effects of climate change, including the Assessments Reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other reports (example headlines being ‘What scientists really know about climate change’ (*SZ*, 29 Nov. 2015) or ‘As a scientist, I am ashamed at how little we are doing about climate change’ (*Telegraph*, 30 Nov. 2015)).
- Mentions of any *uncertainty* around climate change and climate science, including both descriptions of the ‘normal’ uncertainties embedded in any scientific knowledge as well as different kinds of climate change scepticism or denialism relating to the existence of global warming, its anthropogenic causes, its outcomes, or the effectiveness of potential countermeasures. An example of scepticism would be ‘Paris climate conference: 10 reasons why we shouldn’t worry about “man-made” global warming’ (*Telegraph*, 1 Dec. 2015) or ‘Global warming: what should we believe?’ (*Le Figaro*, 27 Nov. 2015).
- Descriptions of *disasters or catastrophes* linked to climate change,

⁷⁷ We omitted the Poland sample for the analysis in the rest of this chapter, as the sample size from the new players was too small.

⁷⁸ In addition, a number of minor themes were assessed in less detail. These included mentions of the economic implications of climate change, of impacts on health, food security, migration, local connections to the causes or consequences of climate change, as well as protests and technology initiatives.

focusing on possible negative, catastrophic, or disastrous effects of climate change such as extreme weather events, increasing food shortages, or a general sense of urgency or a ‘climate emergency’ (HuffPo France, 11 Dec. 2015).

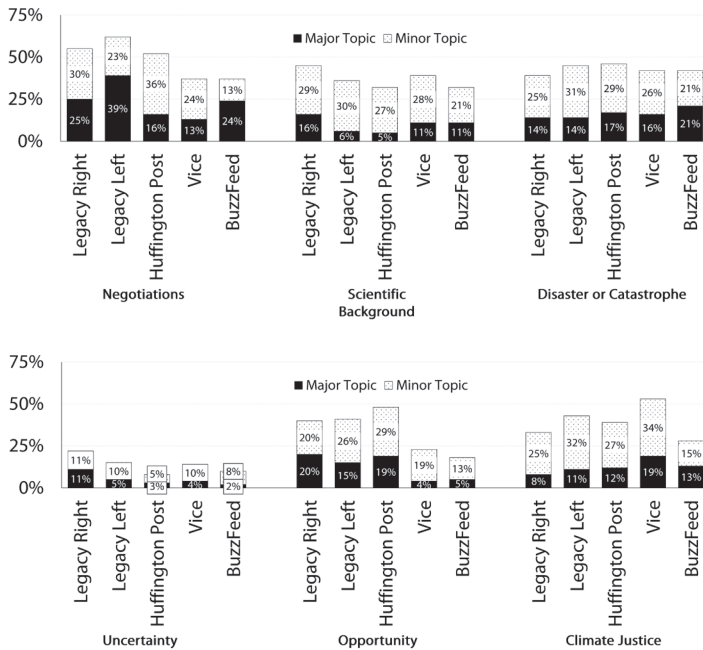
- Emphasis on the *opportunities* provided by taking action, such as discussions of the economic advantages of investing early in renewable energies and in developing a ‘green economy’ (e.g. *Le Figaro*, 29 Nov. 2015), or of the advantages of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and moving to low-carbon energy technologies for future generations, for example with an article about the ‘Paris climate summit and solar energy’ (*El Mundo*, 28 Nov. 2015).
- Considerations of *climate justice*, i.e. discussions of the different historical responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions and, as a result, for differentiated burdens between countries relating to mitigation, adaption, or alleviation of the consequences of climate change. An example would be ‘The People of Melbourne’s People’s Climate March’ (Vice UK, 1 Dec. 2015) or ‘We are increasingly making the connections between environmental stakes and social inequalities’ (HuffPo France, 27 Nov. 2015).

We will first present how these themes were covered and look at the differences between media outlets. In a second step, we will highlight the main country differences.

The Importance of the Themes and Media Differences

The media coverage of COP21, overall, was plural in that the media we analysed used different themes to a considerable degree to interpret the conference. Most often, they employed the *negotiations* theme (see Figure 5.4), which describes and interprets the proceedings at COP21 and, in so doing, provides the traditional journalistic documentation of the event. Accordingly, the theme is most strongly represented in legacy media both right (covered in 55% articles) and left (62%) and in the Huffington Post (52%), where it is the most covered theme, respectively. Again, this indicates notable differences among the new players. The Huffington Post seems to be more similar to legacy media than to the other two new players. Vice (37%) and BuzzFeed (37%) use the negotiations theme less often. This likely has to do with their perception that the negotiations might seem ‘bureaucratic and technocratic’, especially to young readers. It may also be caused by

Figure 5.4. Themes covered by the different media



Note 1: Legacy right, n=122, legacy left, n=146, Huffington Post n=129, Vice n=68, BuzzFeed n=62, Total n=527.

Note 2: The graphs show the percentages of articles containing the above mentioned themes among all analysed articles.

their employment of a different journalistic approach than legacy media, looking for 'unique' angles on traditional themes, as former Vice editor Robert Eshelman put it.⁷⁹ Vice, for example, found an original angle on the negotiations by profiling two bloggers from New Zealand who published an open Google document on those aspects of the climate talks where press access was denied.⁸⁰ BuzzFeed covered the same story.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Interview with Eshelman by Adrienne Russell, by Skype, 17 March 2016.

⁸⁰ Vice FR and US, 9 Dec. 2015, 'meet the young people who have held a public Google doc about closed meetings at the COP21', https://news.vice.com/fr/article/rencontre-avec-les-deux-jeunes-qui-ont-tenu-un-google-doc-public-sur-les-reunions-huis-clos-de-la-cop21?utm_source=vicenewsfrfb

⁸¹ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/jimdalyrupleii/climate-change-in-gifs>

The second most important theme overall was the *disaster and catastrophe* theme, emphasising the negative consequences of climate change such as floods, droughts, heatwaves, or heavy rainfall. It represents one of the longstanding themes in climate change communication that has been employed since the 1980s in many countries, and has served as a reference point for media reporting (e.g. Schäfer, 2015). The theme is distributed across all media relatively evenly. It ranked second in the left-leaning legacy media (45%), the Huffington Post (46%), and Vice (42%), and was still relatively important in right-leaning legacy media (39%) and in BuzzFeed (42%).

The third theme focuses on *climate justice*, i.e. on discussions of historic responsibilities with regards to climate change and fair burdens for different countries in the future. This theme, overall, is the third most covered one. It is most strongly taken up by Vice, where it is mentioned in more than half (53%) of all articles and is the theme that is focused on the most. The fact that normative discussions of justice involve very different parties, with developed countries and the ‘global south’ taking strongly divergent positions (Schmidt and Schäfer, 2015), makes climate justice a spectacular, contested angle of COP21, one which is closely related to protests and NGO activities (Dawson, 2010). This theme enables Vice, therefore, to convey ‘a sense of the level of passion towards climate change’ and the emotion associated with it, as Robert Eshelman, formerly of Vice News, argued. Vice senior producer and reporter Milène Larsson underlines this, pointing out how discussions of contested justice issues enable her to ‘take people on the journey’ and provide ‘immersive pieces in the crowds’ at protest rallies.⁸² Fittingly, the results of our analysis also show that Vice devoted by far the most attention to covering protest and rallies, a minor theme which appeared, on average, in every second Vice article. Vice’s interest in climate justice, therefore, could be seen partly as an opportunistic one, especially since protests and NGO actions often are visually spectacular (see Chapter 6). Apart from Vice, the climate justice theme is also important in left-leaning legacy media (43%), where it fits with the political slant of the outlets, and in the Huffington Post (39%), which again puts HuffPo close to the left-leaning legacy media. In right-leaning legacy media (33%) and BuzzFeed (28%), climate justice is less important, but still appears in every fourth article.

The *opportunity* theme, referring to advantages of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapting to climate change, was the

⁸² Interview with James Painter, by Skype, 18 Feb. 2016.

fourth most covered theme overall. To some extent, this mirrors the tone the French presidency wanted to set at COP21, which, especially after the Paris terrorist attacks and the limited success of previous COPs, stressed the hope for success and framed the summit as the ‘COP of Solutions’. The *opportunity* theme received different degrees of attention from the different media, however. In the Huffington Post, it was the second most important theme (48%), particularly in connection with renewable energies – in line with HuffPo’s emphasis on positive news or news that change people’s minds. In their COP coverage, HuffPo strived to showcase opportunities and success stories, following the ‘solution-driven’ approach prioritised by Arianna Huffington in her editorial just before the summit, mentioned in Chapter 2.⁸³ It was also underscored by senior science editor David Freeman in an interview.⁸⁴ He said that they tend to focus on sustainability coverage and described the ‘What’s Working’ initiative, also mentioned in Chapter 2, which runs through various sections and beats and focuses on success stories – stories about companies, individuals, organisations, that are doing something tangible to help mitigate climate change. Apart from HuffPo, the opportunities theme was almost equally important in left- (41%) and right-leaning legacy media (40%), where it was the fourth most important theme. BuzzFeed and Vice, on the other hand, devoted significantly less attention to this theme. Vice covered it in 23% of their articles and BuzzFeed in 18%.

The fifth theme focused on the *scientific background*, e.g. on discussions of climate science, IPCC reports, etc. This theme, overall, was the second least covered, and if it was taken up, it was mainly mentioned as a minor, subordinate topic in the respective articles. Again, however, there are significant media differences. To right-leaning legacy media (45%), considerations of the scientific background are most important, as they are the second most covered theme in these media overall. All other media mention the theme in approximately every third article: Vice in 40% of its articles, left-leaning legacy media in 36%, BuzzFeed in 32%, and the Huffington Post in 32%. This shows, on the one hand, that the new players do not differ much from legacy media in their attention to the scientific background. Particularly in the UK and in the US, where they have a longer, more established presence and have developed a higher degree of expertise and specialisation, they have invested heavily in science coverage. This may have strongly influenced why Vice US mentioned the scientific

⁸³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/business-and-climate-paris_b_8633798.html

⁸⁴ Interview by Adrienne. Russell, by Skype, 15 Mar. 2016.

background theme in half of its stories, and BuzzFeed US in a third of its pieces. On the other hand, this also shows that discussions of the scientific background generally take a backseat in COP21 coverage. This seems to be a recent phenomenon however. While COPs have always been primarily political events, coverage on earlier summits focused more strongly on climate science (e.g. Eide and Kunelius, 2010). This focus has eroded over time, potentially pointing towards an increased consensus on the basic characteristics and implications of climate change among journalists in different countries (as also shown recently in Brüggemann and Engesser, 2014).

This finding is further underlined by the sixth and last theme, the theme of *uncertainty*, which covers all uncertainties surrounding climate change and climate science including the various dimensions of climate change scepticism (e.g. Painter, 2011). By far, this theme received the least attention overall, and it is least often mentioned as a major, important topic in the respective articles. This is also true for all analysed media types: both legacy media and new players used the uncertainty theme the least. It received the most attention in right-leaning legacy media (22%), fitting their ideological positions. But even there, it appeared in less than every fourth article. Left-leaning legacy media (15%), Vice (14%), BuzzFeed (10%), and the Huffington Post (8%) did not pay much attention to the theme at all.

Connected to this, very little climate change scepticism can be found in the analysed media. Furthermore, of the few instances of scepticism that are mentioned, several are used by the journalists to make fun of sceptics, e.g. in a BuzzFeed article offering ‘The worst climate sceptics quotes made into posters for your bathroom’ published on 9 December 2015.⁸⁵ Among the few exceptions, where climate change scepticism did occur, are a small number of blog or opinion posts from right-leaning legacy media. Generally, the low interest in covering uncertainties and scepticism might be a sign of media coverage assimilating the increasingly homogeneous scientific findings on climate change. At least during COP21, climate change scepticism was clearly subordinate to sociopolitical themes, and was in some media and countries practically absent from the debate. Even in the Anglophone countries, scepticism was not the major topic it has been at other moments of media attention.

⁸⁵ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/tomschembri/les-pires-citations-climato-sceptiques-transformees-en-poste>

Country Differences

Apart from differences between the media, the prevalence of the different themes also varies between countries (see Table 5.1). France, being the host nation of COP21, represents a specific case. Media coverage on the summit is relatively extensive, both in right- and left-leaning legacy media and in the Huffington Post. This coverage focuses mostly on the process and the outcome of the *negotiations* and on their interpretation of them as a success or failure – which is a strong point of emphasis in legacy media and, particularly, in HuffPo, and also resonates with the strong investment of the French presidency to make COP21 a success. Coverage also focuses on the theme of *climate justice*, in which fair solutions are being debated. Vice, in particular, takes up this theme in its coverage. In addition, the *disaster and catastrophe* and *opportunity* themes play a relevant, albeit less important role in French media. Often, they underline the necessity of finding a globally acceptable solution and a successful agreement at the end of COP21 in order to prevent problematic consequences. In turn, the *scientific background* and *uncertainty* themes only play minor roles in the country.

The other European countries – Germany, Spain, and the UK – show many similarities between them in their coverage. First, they all strongly focus on the *negotiations* theme, mentioning it even more often than French or US media. This shows that all of them are heavily involved in the ongoing debates in the summit. Secondly, media in all three countries discuss climate change and COP21 broadly, focusing on a wide set of themes. *Disaster and catastrophe*, *opportunity*, and also *scientific background* themes all receive considerable attention. Thirdly, media in Germany, Spain, and the UK publish comparatively long, dense articles which discuss several themes together. And finally, *uncertainties* surrounding climate change and, particularly, climate science do not receive much emphasis in any of these countries, with the exceptions of the right-leaning *Telegraph* in the UK and Vice in Germany which, however, had little coverage overall and mentioned climate change scepticism partly to make fun of it (e.g. publishing an article about ‘the most stupid conspiracy theories about global warming in a check for facts’). This was also true of Vice UK.⁸⁶ Apart from these similarities, differences between the three countries exist as well. In Germany and the UK, the *climate justice* theme is comparatively strong, when it is not in Spain. And in the UK, the Huffington Post’s total coverage outnumbers that

⁸⁶ <https://news.vice.com/video/cop-outs-and-denial-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-4>

of the *Telegraph*, which differs from the German and Spanish cases where legacy media provide the bulk of COP21 coverage.

Finally, the US case differs from the other countries in several ways. While the country's legacy media devote less attention to COP21 compared to the other countries, new players in the US have partly taken the lead in covering the summit. As we have already seen, it is the US edition of the Huffington Post which provides most coverage, and just as interestingly, the new players cover many themes as extensively, or more extensively, than legacy media. Regarding specific themes, the US media focus considerably less on *negotiations*. The *disaster and catastrophe* and *scientific background* themes receive more attention, and compared to the other countries, the *uncertainty* theme is most prominent in US media. The smaller amount of US coverage of the *negotiations* might have to do with the fact that US media in our sample did not have many journalists registered for the summit compared to other countries (one from *USA Today*, five for HuffPo USA, compared to 19 for *Le Monde* and 14 for the *Guardian*). The exception was *NYT* which had a relatively large team of nine at the summit, but often opted for background pieces in addition to covering the negotiations.

Conclusion

COP21 took place in a congested news cycle, and still received a considerable amount of media attention in the analysed countries. This is testament to the high expectations and high importance that the media associated with the event. In line with previous studies, Anglo-American countries like the US and the UK as well as host nation France covered the event most extensively. And in all countries apart from the US, legacy media provided the most coverage on COP21.

Fittingly for COP21 as a political event, but dissimilar to media coverage on earlier COPs, the coverage focused mostly on sociopolitical themes. Most of the media emphasise the *negotiations*, *disaster and catastrophe*, and *opportunity* themes, and partly also the *climate justice* theme. In contrast, the *scientific background* theme receives less attention, and *uncertainties* surrounding climate change or climate science including outright climate change scepticism is mostly absent from the debate. COP21 seems to be indicative of a shift in media coverage from a science-centric and critical debate towards one highlighting, and at times advocating, political action.

When comparing the different media, results clearly indicate that the new

Table 5.1. Themes covered by different media by country

	Medium	France	Germany	Spain	UK	USA	Media average	Theme average
Negotiations	Legacy Right	37%	81%	36%	88%	35%	55%	52%
	Legacy Left	53%	61%	77%	73%	41%	62%	
	Huffington Post	50%	79%	62%	60%	13%	52%	
	Vice	40%	20%	43%	43%	34%	37%	
	BuzzFeed	0%	-	-	50%	39%	37%	
	Country average	42%	69%	58%	64%	33%	-	
Scientific background	Legacy Right	23%	55%	52%	56%	40%	45%	37%
	Legacy Left	23%	35%	46%	38%	41%	36%	
	Huffington Post	17%	29%	27%	40%	52%	32%	
	Vice	0	40%	57%	36%	50%	40%	
	BuzzFeed	0	-	-	42%	36%	32%	
	Country average	17%	42%	41%	42%	44%	-	
Disaster or catastrophe	Legacy Right	27%	35%	44%	50%	45%	39%	43%
	Legacy Left	27%	45%	38%	57%	55%	45%	
	Huffington Post	33%	64%	49%	44%	52%	46%	
	Vice	20%	60%	43%	50%	44%	42%	
	BuzzFeed	10%	-	-	46%	50%	42%	
	Country average	26%	46%	44%	50%	49%	-	
Uncertainty	Legacy Right	17%	19%	12%	31%	40%	22%	14%
	Legacy Left	10%	13%	12%	16%	23%	15%	
	Huffington Post	3%	7%	11%	0%	22%	8%	
	Vice	0%	40%	43%	7%	13%	14%	
	BuzzFeed	10%	-	-	8%	11%	10%	
	Country average	9%	16%	14%	12%	20%	-	
Opportunity	Legacy Right	30%	42%	48%	50%	35%	40%	38%
	Legacy Left	23%	35%	54%	68%	14%	41%	
	Huffington Post	20%	86%	35%	76%	52%	48%	
	Vice	20%	20%	43%	21%	22%	23%	
	BuzzFeed	10%	-	-	21%	18%	18%	
	Country average	23%	46%	44%	52%	27%	-	
Climate justice	Legacy Right	10%	61%	24%	63%	10%	33%	39%
	Legacy Left	47%	42%	23%	65%	23%	43%	
	Huffington Post	33%	64%	35%	48%	30%	39%	
	Vice	60%	20%	14%	71%	56%	53%	
	BuzzFeed	0%	-	-	25%	39%	28%	
	Country average	30%	52%	27%	53%	34%	-	

Note. The numbers show in what percentage of the articles a particular theme was mentioned. It does not take into account whether it was a minor or major theme.

players do not form a monolithic entity. On the one hand, the Huffington Post mirrors the coverage of legacy media in terms of volume and thematic focus in many countries, complementing their coverage with a more positive, 'constructive' tendency overall. In the US, however, HuffPo seems to play a major role, providing a considerable share of COP21 coverage in the country. BuzzFeed and Vice News play a more clearly complementary role. Their volume of coverage is low, and their thematic foci differ more clearly from the legacy media and HuffPo. They report less on the details of the negotiations – partly out of their assessment of audience interest, partly they assume the legacy media to cover these aspects anyway – and in the case of Vice, focus more on protests and climate justice. As a result, these new players offer a richness of form and thematic diversity that might otherwise not exist in the respective countries.

6

A Climate Summit in Pictures

Bienvenido León and María Carmen Erviti

The Images of Climate Change

Academic research indicates that the images used by the media to represent climate change are of immense importance to communicate its salience and promote people's engagement (O'Neill and Smith, 2014). Climate change impacts (e.g. polar bears, melting ice, etc.) are more frequently used than causes (e.g. smokestacks), both in print media (Smith and Joffe, 2009) and TV (Lester and Cottle, 2009; León and Erviti, 2015). Images related to climate summits, like politicians at meetings and protests are also frequently represented (León and Erviti, 2015).

However, some of these images do not transmit the importance of this phenomenon and the need for urgent action at the same time. Most extensive research has shown that 'perceptions of climate change visuals are largely consistent cross-culturally' (Metag et al., 2016: 197). Studies conducted in several countries have discovered that negative impact images (such as melting ice or rising sea levels) increased audience members' perception of the salience of climate change but, on the other hand, did not promote longer term engagement with the issue, whereas those depicting sustainable personal or community-based actions helped efficacy, i.e. they encouraged people to do something to combat climate change. For example, images that promote engagement are those of clean energy and of personal action like reducing meat consumption or saving energy in the home. According to these researchers, there are not many images that work at the same time and in the same direction. For example, images of 'talking heads' – mostly politicians and occasionally celebrities – are often used by the media, although they are ineffective (O'Neill et al., 2013; Metag et al., 2015). In addition, Leiserowitz (2006) maintained that the low priority of climate change in the United States was connected to a lack of concrete and personally relevant images.

This chapter explores the visualisation of COP21, with a special focus on video, which is regarded as a key format for digital players. By 2020, IP video traffic is expected to represent 82% of all internet traffic, up from 70% in 2015 (Cisco, 2016). This growth, which is also influencing news content, is mainly driven by the current market logic, where video is a crucial element to attract advertising. In the specific area of news, recent research (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016) indicates that ‘publishers and technology platforms are pushing online news video hard for commercial reasons’, although ‘most consumers are still resistant’ and three-quarters of the audience say they still mostly rely on text (*ibid.*, p. 7). However, ‘interest in video news does increase significantly when there is a big breaking news story’ (*ibid.*, p. 5).

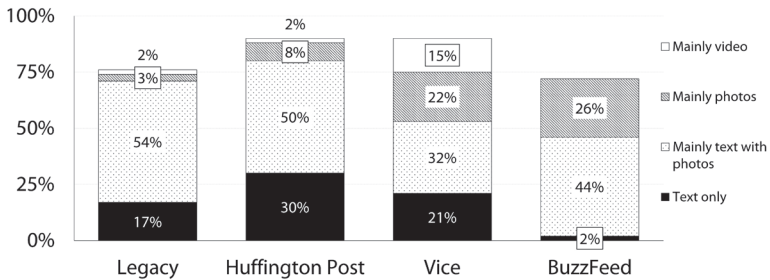
Furthermore, it seems clear that social networks are key engines for video news consumption and have a strong influence on the content and tone of news coverage. ‘The most successful off-site and social videos tend to be short (under one minute), are designed to work with no sound (with subtitles), focus on soft news, and have a strong emotional element’ (*ibid.*, p. 5).

As we saw in Chapter 2, new players seem to be especially interested in video news. For example, BuzzFeed and Vice are experimenting with lots of different formats, in order to test what types of videos are more shareable (Lichterman, 2016).

The Images of COP21

The results from our content analysis indicate that online coverage of COP21 was strongly visual, since ‘text-only’ articles – which were mainly blog posts and opinion articles – were not very frequent. On the contrary, visual formats were more frequent, both among legacy media and new players (Figure 6.1). This fact underlines the importance of visual elements in digital news and seems to be a clear strategy for all media.

Another important similarity among legacy and new players is that ‘text and photos’ is the prevailing format for all of them. Furthermore, if we add this category to that of ‘text-only’, together they clearly exceed the sum of the other formats in all media. Considering ‘text and photos’ and ‘text-only’ are the two main traditional news formats, this can be interpreted as a sign that digital media still rely, to a great extent, on legacy formats, while new formats that digital technology enables are still in the minority.

Figure 6.1. Main formats in legacy and new players

Notes: Legacy, n = 268, Huffington Post n = 129, Vice n = 68, BuzzFeed n = 62, Total n = 527; percentages do not add up to 100 since the least frequent formats have not been included, for the sake of clarity.

But Figure 6.1 also shows a relevant difference between legacy media and the three newcomers: the new players, particularly Vice and BuzzFeed, published more articles which are mainly based on photos. Moreover, although this is not shown in the Figure, in general, the new players tend to include a higher number of photos in those articles. For example, several articles published by Vice and Huffington Post included ten or more photos. Therefore, it seems clear that the new players are more visually oriented than the legacy players.

As far as the use of video is concerned, there is no evident distinguishing pattern between legacy media and newcomers. On the one hand, Vice is the medium with a higher percentage of articles that are mainly based on video (15%, Figure 6.1), and is also the one that published more articles that included video (21%, Figure 6.4). On the other hand, BuzzFeed published no content that was mainly based on video. Huffington Post published the same percentage as the legacy media (Figure 6.1). As regards articles that included video, HuffPo and BuzzFeed published less articles of this format than the legacy media (Figure 6.4).

Recent research findings may shed some light on this ambivalent picture. According to an RISJ report, both legacy and new players are beginning to 'embrace online news video', but 'most news organisations are in an experimental phase' (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016: 5).

This shows once more that new players cannot be regarded as a homogeneous group. Apart from the above mentioned difference regarding

the use of video, Figures 6.1 and 6.4 show other data that lead to the conclusion that each new player follows a different format pattern.

As mentioned before, Vice uses video frequently and it is also the medium with a more balanced distribution of different formats (Figure 6.1). This means that, for Vice, all formats seem to have a relatively similar importance, whereas for other media some of the formats are very rarely used.

BuzzFeed’s coverage of COP21 can be labelled as ‘multimodal’ (Wozniak et al., 2016), employing different modalities of presentation in its coverage of COP21. First, it relied on photos more than any other media: it maintained by far the lowest percentage of ‘text-only’ articles (2%) and the highest of ‘mainly photos’ (26%) (Figure 6.1). Moreover, BuzzFeed used a wider range of formats than the other players, even some formats that no other medium used, like ‘listicles’ (3%) and ‘audio’ (5%) (Figure 6.4). Quizzes represented 6% of all of its articles, but just two articles in the left-leaning legacy media. This variety can be interpreted as an innovative element, since it provides some new formats, compared to the traditional ‘text-only’ and ‘text and photos’ (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2. Two examples of BuzzFeed’s ‘multimodal’ coverage

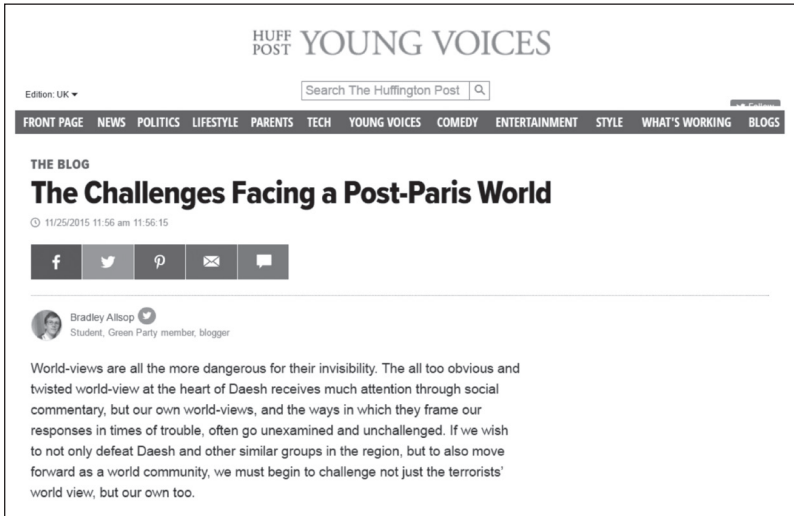
Source: Left: BuzzFeed France, 10 Dec. 2015. https://www.buzzfeed.com/anaissbordages/99-choses-qui-vont-nous-manquer-si-la-cop21-foire?utm_term=.vc9RmdYayW#.ddxgBPKoRM

Right: BuzzFeed France, 1 Dec. 2015. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/assmamaad/les-moments-les-plus-genants-de-la-cop21>



The Huffington Post followed a format pattern that, in some regards, is similar to that of the legacy media, since the percentages of the different formats are similar (Figure 6.1). However, the Huffington Post is also characterised by an extensive use of blogs (Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3 Example of Huffington Post's blog post



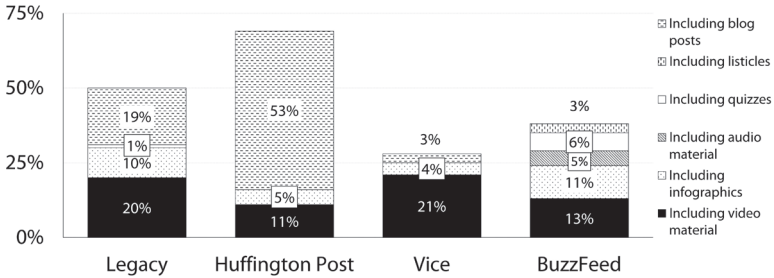
Source: The Huffington Post (UK), November 25, 2015. URL: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/bradley-allsop/paris-attacks_b_8642002.html

The fact that 53% of the articles were blog posts (Figure 6.4) must be regarded as a general characteristic of the medium's structure rather than a distinctive sign of its COP21 coverage. However, the high percentage of blogs clearly influenced the way the summit was covered, especially in terms of perspective, since, in the Huffington Post, contrary to the other media, the 'environmental activist' prevails (see the following chapter).

Interestingly, the legacy players used more infographics than the new players (Figure 6.4), which could be related to the availability of resources. Infographics are usually produced by specialised journalists who are more likely to hold a position in large newsrooms more characteristic of legacy media.

Only 17 pieces of content in the whole sample were 'mainly video', 13 of which were published by the new players (see Table 6.1 in Appendix 3). Vice published 11 videos, making it the most prominent outlet in this

Figure 6.4. Other formats in legacy and new players



Notes: Legacy, n = 268, Huffington Post n = 129, Vice n = 68, BuzzFeed n = 62, Total n = 527; percentages do not add up to 100 since the least frequent formats have not been included, for the sake of clarity.

format, while the Huffington Post published two. Vice’s coverage of COP21 included a short video (1’37”) from Sky News, on the protests in Paris, one episode of the series ‘The People Speak’ and a documentary originally produced for the German edition of Vice: ‘Der Kampf um die Kohle’ (‘The fight for coal’). But the main part of its video output was six episodes of the series ‘Climate Emergency’, which will be analysed in the next section of this chapter. Vice also produced other videos on the summit, like a series called ‘Climate Talks’, that were part of text-based articles.

The Huffington Post’s two videos are difficult to ascribe to any of the traditional audio-visual formats. One of them is a statement by Annalena Baerbock, a German Green Party politician, which was recorded by herself with a mobile phone. The other video explains the meaning of some acronyms related to climate change management, by means of an animation on a Scrabble board.

BuzzFeed did not publish any information using the ‘mainly video’ format, which is rather surprising considering the company has an increasing interest in video news, to the extent of creating a new production team in the US that is devoted to testing new video formats (Lichterman, 2016). However, as Tom Chivers, science writer at BuzzFeed UK, explains,⁸⁷ although, in general terms, video is a priority, they try to use the format that they think will work best in each case. Therefore, this decision may have been determined by editorial or resource reasons.

⁸⁷ Interview by James Painter, London, 30 June 2016.

The legacy players were well behind in the use of video: in our sample, the ‘mainly video’ format was only used by *Le Monde* (3) in France and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* Online (1) in Germany. *Le Monde* produced a video of a demonstration in Paris, and two more based on interviews with climate activists. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* Online produced a short video on climate change impacts.

As far as the topics are concerned, negotiations – especially activists’ points of view – and protests were the main topics of the videos, both in legacy media and the new players. Climate justice was also relevant, since it was mentioned in nine videos (eight by Vice, one by the Huffington Post). In view of these topics it is not surprising that activists were the prevailing voices, well ahead of politicians and scientists.

Finally, the style of the videos, both in legacy media and new players, is far from the classic ‘expository mode’, based on a ‘voice of God’ narration. Most videos can be ascribed to the ‘observational’ or ‘participatory’ modes (Nichols, 1991), where the story is told by a selection of ‘characters’ involved in the event, who appear on screen as interviewees.

The Innovative Approach of Vice Videos

As we saw in Chapter 2, Vice’s success story has been largely built on a reputation as a provider of innovative video (Küing, 2015). Its distinctive tone and style makes Vice a particularly interesting case study, as it exemplifies some of the news visualisation trends of the new players in the digital arena. As we saw in Chapter 2, some of Vice News’s stories are ‘Gonzo Journalism’ that ‘punch you in the face’ and are particularly appealing to its core young audience. This approach is regarded as a sub-genre of the ‘new journalism’ movement, in which the journalist plays a fundamental role and even gets to the point of becoming part of the story. The ‘Gonzo’ approach is closely related to other trends that have been labelled as ‘immersive journalism’ and ‘experiential journalism’.

Some of the videos produced by Vice News as part of its coverage of COP21 seem to fit well into this model of journalism. In particular, the series ‘COP21 Climate Emergency’ includes several videos where the young host – Milène Larsson – draws the viewer into several hot points of the Paris summit, like the hidden place where a group of activists print the posters they will later display in the city downtown, the convention centre where

NGOs gather, or a demonstration in the streets of Paris.⁸⁸ This focus fits well with ‘immersive journalism’ where the reporter often takes the viewer on a journey with him/her, but it also has resonances with the ‘bad boy’ content, counter-culture approach to news that Vice has shown (Küng, 2015).

The videos were produced as a key element in Vice’s coverage of COP21. The negotiations were mainly covered with text and photos, while other events in Paris were portrayed in video, likely because these events were considered to be more dynamic and therefore more appropriate for visual storytelling. According to Robert Eshelman, former environment editor at Vice News, ‘video definitely conveys emotion a lot more than text can ... and also the video pieces really gave a sense of the level of passion towards climate change.’⁸⁹

Emotions seem to be playing an increasingly relevant role in online video news. As social networks gain importance as a consumption tool, some producers ‘look for an emotional angle to drive the narrative of almost every video because sharing and liking means it is more likely to be picked up by the Facebook algorithm. This raises questions about whether social video with an emotional slant may ultimately change the nature of news itself’ (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016: 17).

For example, when reporting on the Paris demonstration, far from the traditional neutral position, Vice’s presenter becomes part of the demonstration, to the extent that the viewer can almost ‘breathe’ the smoke thrown by the police at the activists (Figure 6.5). In the words of Milène Larsson:

*You go to a place, and you want to take people on a journey to experience what is happening on the ground, from the perspective of the people who these events are affecting. In the demonstration we did an immersive piece ... we were in the crowds. ... Getting squished, not able to go to the toilet, nor to find water, and not knowing what was going on. Experiencing it, seeing the reactions of people is helpful in order to understand what drives them onto the streets to protest.*⁹⁰

⁸⁸ <https://news.vice.com/video/police-clash-with-protesters-in-paris-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-1>

⁸⁹ Interview by Adrienne Russell, by Skype, 17 March, 2016.

⁹⁰ Interview with James Painter, by Skype, 18 February, 2016.

Figure 6.5. Vice's immersive style



Source: Vice (UK), 1 Dec. 2015. <https://news.vice.com/video/police-clash-with-protesters-in-paris-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-1>

The style of this video is certainly different to that of other media covering the demonstrations in Paris during the summit. For example, *Le Monde* displayed a video on the same demonstration that maintained the traditional journalistic approach, showing the event from outside.⁹¹ This video, that has no voice-over but just images and text, adopts the style of explanatory journalism that mainly tries to provide some contextual information on the event that is being shown.

In contrast, the ‘COP21 Climate Emergency’ videos usually do not give as much context. Rather, they try to take the viewer to a front-row position, in what can be regarded as a new form of the traditional rhetoric figure of *evidentia*, which tries to amplify the effect of a discourse by taking the audience to the position of an eyewitness, by means of a detailed vivid description of the elements of a situation. This style is clearly connected to the documentary ‘participatory mode’, where the author plays the role of an anthropologist who lives with a social group to conduct his/her research (Nichols, 1991).

⁹¹ http://www.lemonde.fr/cop21/video/2015/11/29/video-contournements-d-interdiction-de-manifester-a-paris_4820020_4527432.html#UeB1yRcEgRkQbXB1.99

Another defining characteristic of Vice's videos is an informal style. The presenter seems to maintain an improvised conversation with the people she meets, rather than formal interviews. This fits very well into the immersive approach, since it helps the young audience to explore the summit's fringe in a casual way. According to David Meseguer, senior editor at Vice's branch in Spain, one of the keys to reaching a young audience is to adopt a style of proximity where 'the information is presented in the same way as you would tell it to a friend.'⁹² This is also consistent with the style that is usually used in the social networks, where many of Vice's videos are viewed.

This editorial approach is supported by a visual style based on hand-held camerawork that creates dynamic pictures – even shaky sometimes – that reinforce the sense of a spontaneous coverage. A similar style is frequently used in online videos due to the influence of vlogging and user-generated content in platforms like YouTube. The videos shot in this manner distinguish themselves from traditional broadcasting by using a 'transparent amateurishness' that brings a sense of authenticity (Tolson, 2010: 286).

Summary

In sum, visuals played a very important role in the coverage of COP21, for both legacy media and new players, although the new players published more articles that were mainly based on photos. There were clear differences between the new players as to how much video they used, and in what style.

Vice's videos were especially innovative. They followed an immersive style, where the host takes the audience on a journey, through which the events can be experienced from a similar position to that of an eyewitness.

⁹² Interview with David Meseguer, senior news editor at Vice Spain, Barcelona, 10 Feb. 2016.

7

Similarities and Differences in Sources, Tone, and Advocacy

Adrienne Russell and Candice Howarth

This chapter outlines our findings about the presence of different voices as well as the tone, language, and perspective used in the analysed media's COP21 coverage. It interprets the results with the aim of better understanding the differences between legacy and new media outlets in our sampled countries, and whether this points to different practices and values.

The voices included in a news article combined with its tone, language, and perspective are all shaped by styles and practices that reflect the values and goals of a news organisation, and the larger national or transnational context in which it functions. Journalism scholars have long suggested, for example, that news stories heavy with quotes from elite sources and with a strictly neutral point of view have a tendency to amplify the values of the status quo (Glasser, 1984; Hallin, 1992; Schudson, 2011). On the other hand, more irreverent satirical news tends to promote critical engagement with news by making it the object of scrutiny and critique rather than a set of truths delivered by experts (Baym, 2005; Boler and Turpin, 2008).

The practices being taken up by new and legacy journalists are crucial in both exploring how climate change is being communicated in the media and understanding changes taking place in the news media environment. Indeed, porous boundaries between older and newer media create a mingling of the two, while simultaneously various actors and institutions in the expanded field of journalism maintain and defend particular internal practices. Thomas Gieryn (1983) calls this *boundary work*. While contests over the boundaries of journalism are not unique to the digital environment, they have intensified as the field expands and becomes at least partially separate from institutions and codified norms (Carlson and Lewis, 2015). As boundaries shift, new practices are adopted, some of which challenge existing journalistic practice and corresponding notions of what journalism

is, and what it ought to do for the public. Some changes extend and bolster the existing functions of legacy journalism.

Boundary work in the coverage we examined is most evident in the tension between neutrality and engagement, which is also the topic of much recent scholarship. Journalists covering environmental issues have historically struggled between journalistic objectivity and environmental advocacy, sometimes facing clashes between their individual stances and organisational expectations (Tandoc and Takahashi, 2104), or veering away from traditional norms of neutrality and objectivity in favour of engagement with the issue by becoming advocates of a particular course of actions or amplifying the voices of those who do (Russell, 2013). Indeed, today's journalists increasingly depend on international activist non-profits and NGOs to provide content and agenda-setting information, with NGOs' press releases, for example, identified as strong and systematic drivers of media attention on climate change (Schäfer et al., 2014). This is partly due to news outlet resources having diminished and partly because these types of organisations are becoming better at making media and producing news outlets of their own, serving up news to supporters and to millions of potential followers, who may become supporters. The views and values that shape these groups' news products increasingly bleed into, and alter, the wider news space (Powers, 2014; Papacharissi, 2014).

NGOs and other politically minded groups are raising issues and moving them into the mainstream – issues or concerns that might well have been otherwise ignored. This is particularly true in coverage of COPs, where according to some scholars (Lück et al., 2016), the complexity of climate issues, along with the 'camp feeling' that develops among those covering it, creates a temporary blurring of the professional boundaries between environmental NGOs and climate reporters. This, Lück et al. argue, leads to collaboratively produced interpretations of the event and surrounding issues. The reported disastrous outcome of COP15 in 2009 was characterised by noticeably misaligned (and at times conflicting) messages from NGOs. As a result, NGOs have since increased collaborative activities to ensure better alignment of messages, strategic delivery of public campaigning activities, and coordinated approaches to mobilise publics. This more sophisticated collaborative process led to a less divided narrative around COP21 and its anticipated outcomes.

Findings and Analysis

Our analysis of voices, tone, language, and perspectives in COP21 coverage has to be understood against this backdrop of increasingly professional, media focused, and collaborative activists and NGOs, and shifting norms and boundaries of journalism.

Each voice quoted in a story, i.e. each individual or institutional speaker having the opportunity to express himself or herself in the respective article on the issue at stake, was coded by a specific category (see codebook item 15).⁹³ In addition, we analysed (1) the tone of the article, i.e. whether it was funny/entertaining, straight, and other (which included, e.g. a shocking or unusual tone); (2) the language of the article, with the coding options being formal or informal/chatty; as well as (3) the author's perspective, with the coding options being environmental activist, neutral journalist, or other (see codebook items 16–18). The results are divided into four: legacy media, Huffington Post, Vice, and BuzzFeed.

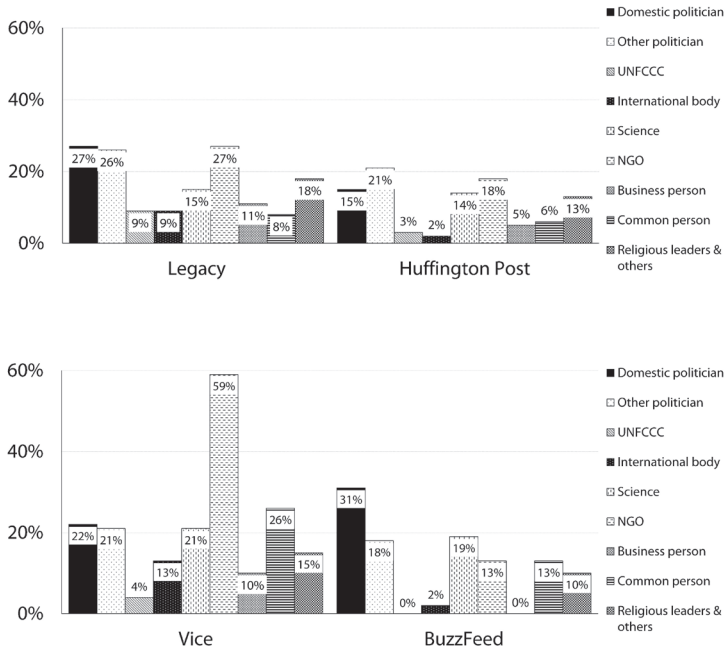
Voices

As Figure 7.1 shows, legacy media most frequently quoted politicians, both domestic (27%) and non-domestic (26%), as well as NGOs (27%) and scientists (15%) in their articles. BuzzFeed and Huffington Post followed a somewhat similar distribution. For example, BuzzFeed most frequently gave a voice to domestic politicians (31%), other politicians (18%), and scientists (19%). Huffington Post had far fewer quotes from these stakeholders in general due to its reliance on blog posts, but while the overall percentage figures were lower, the distribution was similar: politicians (domestic (15%) and other (21%)), NGOs (18%), and scientists (14%). Vice was the stand-out exception to this pattern. It most frequently quoted NGOs (59%) and common people (26%) – far more than the other media organisations, although it also frequently quoted scientists (21%) and politicians. The voice of business was relatively infrequent in our sample, showing up in 11% of legacy stories, 5% of Huffington Post stories, 10% of Vice News stories, and not at all in BuzzFeed.

This similarity of voices across legacy media and new player coverage, and across various countries as well, suggests that there are universal norms

⁹³ Found at <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/new-players-environmental-reporting>

Figure 7.1. The presence of different voices in legacy and new media



Note: Legacy, n = 268, Huffington Post n = 129, Vice n = 68, BuzzFeed n = 62, Total n = 527.

of sourcing that have been taken up across legacy and new player outlets, and across national contexts. As Vice News’ Robert Eshelman put it:⁹⁴

I would challenge you to look at pieces say, from the Washington Post or the New York Times or any traditional media and really point out them being very different ... You’re going to see the administration cited. You’re going to see environmental groups cited. You’ll see the oil and natural gas industry cited. Those are fundamental elements of journalism, and those are part of every one of our stories.

Contrary to recent research that suggests that news stories linked to geopolitics are becoming not ‘solely domestic or foreign news’ (Berglez 2008), but instead circulate within, and help foster, a broader, global public sphere (Volkmer 2003), domestic political actors were, for legacy media

⁹⁴ Interview with Adrienne Russell, by Skype, 17 Mar. 2016.

and BuzzFeed, the most prominent voices in COP21 coverage. Vice was the interesting exception as domestic political actors were only the fourth most quoted. This tendency among journalists to highlight domestic political voices in COP coverage has been well documented (e.g. Eide and Kunelius 2010) and suggests that, despite the fact that global actors and news organisations play a central role in covering the summit, coverage is largely seen through the lens of the national political elite, especially when these are vocal.

NGO voices remain very important for all media, legacy and new. This supports the previous scholarship that finds today's journalists increasingly depend on international activist non-profits and NGOs to provide content and agenda-setting information (Powers, 2014; Grundmann and Scott 2012; Lück et al., 2016; Russell, 2011), for the reasons outlined previously, and also the finding that NGOs are investing heavily in online communication (Schäfer, 2012). Furthermore, voices of everyday people were very prominent in Vice (26%), fairly prominent in BuzzFeed (13%), and not common in legacy media (8%) and Huffington Post (6%). This was by design, according to Milène Larsson, a senior reporter for Vice News, who says: 'What we want to do is look at who does not have a voice and who might be interesting for our audience.'⁹⁵

It is also common practice to highlight the voice of climate scientists over so-called 'climate deniers' – consistent with the marginalisation of climate change scepticism as a theme described in Chapter 5. Indeed, mainstream climate scientists were quoted consistently across all outlets in about 20% of all articles. The absence of sceptical voices is particularly noticeable in the French, Spanish, and German media, where the science of climate change (to warrant international political action) is rarely questioned. There was some quoting of sceptics in the UK and US legacy samples, in particular, in the *Telegraph* and *USA Today*, which continues to give space to sceptic commentary.⁹⁶ Given Arianna Huffington's decision not to give space to climate deniers,⁹⁷ it is unsurprising that none were to be found in blogs in the Huffington Post. BuzzFeed also offered no space to them. Vice covered the meeting of the sceptic Heartland Institute in Paris at the time of the summit, but the tone of its video report was noticeably unsympathetic to the speakers at the meeting.

⁹⁵ Interview by James Painter, by Skype, 18 Feb. 2016.

⁹⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/paris-climate-change-conference/12025836/Paris-climate-conference-10-reasons-why-we-shouldnt-worry-about-man-made-global-warming.html>; <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/12/13/climate-deal-president-obama-lamar-smith-editorials-debates/77253390>

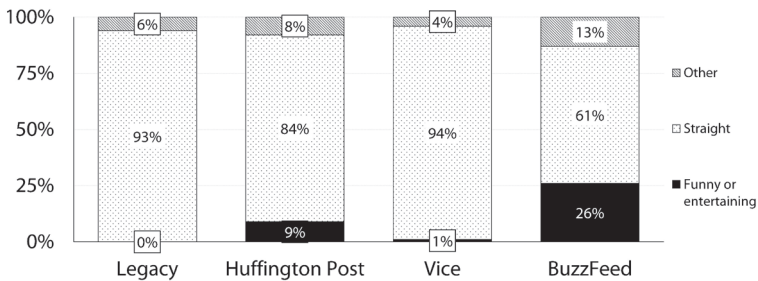
⁹⁷ <http://www.niemanlab.org/2012/04/why-the-huffington-post-doesnt-equivocate-on-issues-like-global-warming>

The voice of business representatives was low compared to NGOs for example, at around 10% across most outlets. This may appear surprising, given the business implications of the COP21 agreement and the strong presence of various business groups at the summit. According to UNFCCC official figures, the Business and Innovation NGO group (BINGO) represented 14% of all the NGOs present at the COP (a total of more than 8,000). However, this was still a noticeable increase since the Copenhagen summit of 2009, where business voices were virtually absent from the media (Painter, 2011; Eide and Kunelius, 2010).

Tone and Language

In coding for tone, the category *funny or entertaining* was given to stories that were light-hearted, while stories that took on the tone employed by more traditional stories of authority and neutrality were categorised as *straight*. Perhaps surprisingly, the tone of the coverage was overwhelmingly straight across all players (see Figure 7.2). BuzzFeed’s coverage was the exception, as roughly a quarter (26%) of articles were funny or entertaining and 13% employed a mixture of tones, often funny and straight. Indeed, 23 of the 62 articles (37%) were either overwhelming funny, or had an element of humour in them. The predominance of the straight tone was also consistent across countries, with the exception of BuzzFeed France, where 80% of articles contained a funny or entertaining tone. BuzzFeed France’s break with the pattern of other outlets is a likely reflection of the fact that no one from the

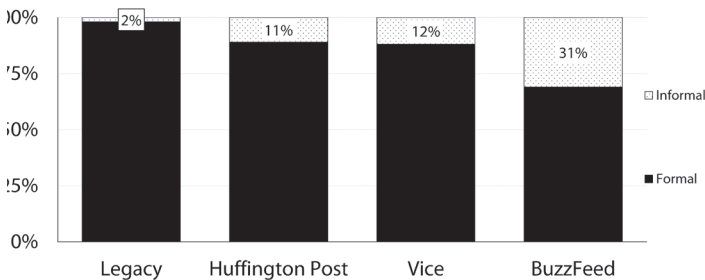
Figure 7.2. Dominant tones in legacy and new media



Note: Legacy, n = 268, Huffington Post n = 129, Vice n = 68, BuzzFeed n = 62, Total n = 527.

French edition of BuzzFeed was officially accredited for COP21; the website used the negotiations as a hook for general coverage on the proceedings at COP21, but offered no in-depth coverage of the negotiations or even of climate change. For example, one story with the headline ‘These things have truly happened at COP21’ (‘Toutes les choses qui se sont complètement passées à la COP21’)⁹⁸ included a series of images of world leaders with captions like ‘no one knew where the bathrooms were’ and ‘Prince Charles forgot to remove his dentures before kissing the ring of Ségolène Royal.’

Figure 7.3. Formal and informal language in legacy and new media



Note: Legacy, n = 268, Huffington Post n = 129, Vice n = 68, BuzzFeed n = 62, Total n = 527.

Stories written in casual language and style were coded as informal, while those that used more traditional news-style were coded as formal. As Figure 7.3 shows, the language category determined whether stories were presented in a formal or more informal/chatty tone. Across all media and countries examined in our sample, the majority of stories were presented in a formal rather than informal way. These combined numbers also reflect the individual country coverage tendency towards formal rather than informal language. The amount of articles with informal language is higher in coverage by all three new players. The stand-out example is BuzzFeed, where nearly a third of its stories (31%) adopted an informal tone, thereby adding a new dimension to the COP21 coverage. A typical example of this would be the article titled ‘Meet the people trolling the fuck out of the Paris climate talks.’⁹⁹

For the new players, the overwhelmingly straight and formal coverage

⁹⁸ <http://www.buzzfeed.com/assmamaad/les-moments-les-plus-genants-de-la-cop21>

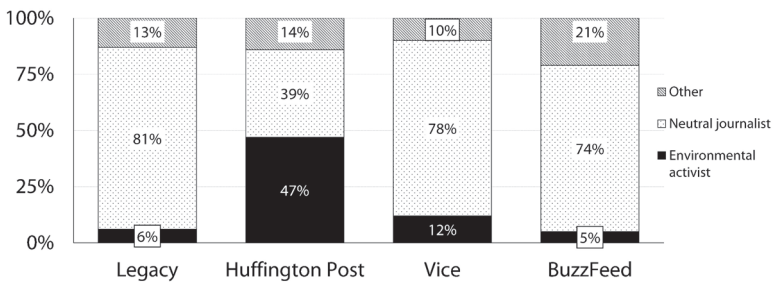
⁹⁹ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/jimdalyrmplei/meet-the-people-trolling-the-fuck-out-of-the-paris-climate->

may be in part due to the tension between popularity and credibility. On the one hand, a more informal tone may make a story more entertaining and thus for the new players more shareable, but a straighter and more neutral tone may give it an air of seriousness and thus credibility, which as we have seen in Chapter 2, the new players are also seeking in their news coverage. In addition, the relatively controlled context of the COP—with daily events, press conferences, official experts—in addition to the ‘camp mentality’ (Lück et al., 2016) may also play a role in the uniformity in tone and language.

Perspective

In broad terms, ‘neutrality’ referred to a tone and content that was characterised as balanced or objective, while ‘activism’ included articles that advocated a solution or course of action to combat climate change in their tone or content, something which manifested itself, e.g. in an overwhelming selection of environmentalist NGOs as sources. As Figure 7.4 shows, the majority of coverage on COP21 in our sample is neutral. The stand-out finding is that almost half (47%) of the coverage of Huffington Post was from an environmental activist perspective. This was mostly due to the fact that they ran a stream of blog posts which were written in the first person and advocated a particular point of view or course of actions. For instance, the piece titled ‘It Really is Time to Choose’, authored by filmmaker Charles Ferguson, concluded with a clear activist argument by the author: ‘The battle

Figure 7.4. Dominant perspectives in legacy and new media



Note: Legacy, n = 268, Huffington Post n = 129, Vice n = 68, BuzzFeed n = 62, Total n = 527.

to stop climate change is entirely winnable. Only a very small number of people stand in the way. But they are very wealthy, powerful, corrupt people, and the hour is growing late. Do we let them win? It's #TimeToChoose.¹⁰⁰ In the legacy press and among new players in Spain, and in legacy press in the US, the activist perspective is prevalent in a fair amount of the coverage because of a high volume of editorials, op-eds, and blogs.

While the majority of Vice stories had a neutral perspective, they ran a higher percentage of stories with an activist perspective (12%) than legacy media (6%) or BuzzFeed (5%). The immersive style of reporters like Milène Larsson at times blurred the line between journalist and activist. In the 'Climate Activism Under Attack'¹⁰¹ video, for example, Larsson gives an impassioned critique of the French government's ban on protests, which was issued due to security concerns connected to the Paris terrorist attacks. She herself explains the thinking behind her engaged and immersive approach to coverage like this: 'If I care a lot about it, hopefully somebody else will, too.' She goes on to explain: 'What I want to do is try to make people understand the human condition, not just give them information ... "act as an avatar" ... you get to experience things from the perspective of another body.'¹⁰² However, there were many Vice stories about protests that maintained a neutral tone. For example, another video by Larsson follows traditional reporting standards of interviewing various sources involved in the story including the organisers, people on the street, and both the inspired and more violent factions of the protest.¹⁰³

The activist content also plays to the way these sites rely on social media virality. The higher emotional content not only makes a post more likely to be shared, but NGO groups and others devote considerable resources to sharing and promoting news and opinion stories that reflect and promote their point of view, hence driving traffic to these digital native sites.

The predominance of a neutral perspective across outlets and countries is perhaps explained by the fact that, as we saw in Chapter 2, many reporters and editors at the new players have a background in traditional journalism. Their professional training and backgrounds likely shape the coverage of their new employers, too. Here it is interesting to note that BuzzFeed's coverage was less 'activist' than legacy media. Its reporter at the summit,

¹⁰⁰ http://www.huffingtonpohst.com/charles-ferguson/it-really-is-time-to-choo_b_8681710.html

¹⁰¹ <https://news.vice.com/video/climate-activism-under-attack-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-2>

¹⁰² Interview by James Painter, by Skype, 18 Feb. 2016.

¹⁰³ <https://news.vice.com/video/police-clash-with-protesters-in-paris-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-1>

Jim Dalrymple, came from a print background. As one of its other science and environment writers, Tom Chivers, who also comes from a print background, emphasised in an interview, both in general and in their coverage of the Paris summit, they did a lot of straight reporting, which consciously does not follow an advocacy position.¹⁰⁴

Summary

The data presented in this chapter show that similarities of voice, tone, language, and perspective between legacy and new players are more striking than their differences. These similarities may be heightened because of the nature of the summit, where all journalists have a fairly predictable and contained combination of voices, events, and outcomes at their disposal. If anything, the larger differences lie within the new players, where Huffington Post gives a lot space to advocates, Vice quotes more NGOs and ‘common people’, and BuzzFeed experiments with a more entertaining or informal language and tone.

The voices covered by both the legacy and new player outlets in our sample provide a snapshot into today’s culture of journalism. As discussed above, the voices of politicians were most prominently covered during COP21, but a heavy reliance on NGO voices for content and quotes was also apparent, mirroring the efforts made by the NGO community to better coordinate themselves to communicate consistent messages (e.g. Lück et al., 2016). Previous research, using a different methodology, has shown that NGO voices at COP summits mostly came in at under 10% of articles in different countries (Eide and Kunelius, 2010), so our research suggests that the NGOs have significantly increased their presence in the media to around 27% of all the articles in our sample.

Individual citizens are generally under-represented in legacy media coverage on many issues – especially in countries with strong institutional or corporatist cultures like Germany or France (Ferree et al., 2002). On the specific issue of climate change, previous research suggests they are not strongly represented compared to politicians, NGO representatives, scientists, and sometimes celebrities. The new players offer a unique, and complementary, contribution here: Vice in particular, but also BuzzFeed, showed a greater desire to represent the common voice, and thereby provide

¹⁰⁴ Interview by James Painter with Tom Chivers, science writer at BuzzFeed UK. London, 30 June 2016.

broader coverage by including those who may not have previously had much presence. Business voices were under-represented given the recognition by business sectors of the importance of climate change to them, but this is not a significant departure from previous COPs.

One other important conclusion is that new players do seem to be taking up the notion of the journalist role in serving the public interest largely held by legacy news. While in some cases the coverage is pure entertainment (France BuzzFeed, for example), across the vast majority of countries and outlets journalists are trying to balance the public's need to know whilst sustaining its attention. David Freeman, senior science editor at the Huffington Post, and Robert Eshelman, Vice News' former environment editor, both expressed the view that the job of the journalist is not exclusively about giving people what they want but more importantly about what they need to know, alongside what a journalist is interested in. For example, Eshelman elaborates:¹⁰⁵

The Obama administration has put out regulations on limiting methane emissions from existing oil and natural gas facilities. Our readership is not beating down the door to know what's going on with methane. But it's incredibly significant in terms of combating climate change, and it's contentious politically, and so I wouldn't hesitate for an instant to assign a story on that.

As with many of the findings presented in this chapter, Eshelman's description of making editorial decisions based on public interest suggests that the values and goals reflected in new player coverage are consistent with those of legacy media, while at the same time introducing new practices and pushing the boundaries of how public interest is best served.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Adrienne Russell, by Skype, 17 Mar. 2016, New York.

8

Conclusions

James Painter

Conferences of the Parties to the UNFCCC – like COP21 in Paris in December 2015 – are peculiar events. They are highly relevant for international climate change politics, are visited by elite decision-makers, hundreds of business, NGO, and lobby group representatives, are observed by a considerable press corps and serve as catalysts for media coverage on climate change around the world. At the same time, with their closed environment and high proximity among participants, the COPs provide contexts for news production which are largely similar for all journalists in terms of voices, proceedings, and outcomes. Accordingly, media around the world focus their climate change coverage on these events, and, as previous research has shown, tend to focus on the same themes and the same sources at these summits (Wessler et al., forthcoming; Lück et al., 2016).

But recently, the media landscape has diversified. As we saw in Chapters 1–3, social media have become an increasingly important news source, and have overtaken printed newspapers in many countries. Digital-born media brands – the so-called ‘second-wave’ digital companies like the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice – in particular have been successful in expanding their market shares and reach, especially among young audiences. And they have done so by, in part, emphasising an alternative style of news reporting, focusing, for example, on video, informal tonality, immersive perspectives, and advocacy journalism.

But how far does their reporting differ from legacy media? What similarities or differences can be found in volume or topical focus of coverage, in the voices appearing in the articles, in their tone, perspective, language, or visualisation? And to what extent is this similar across countries? These questions lay at the core of this book. We have analysed how legacy media as well as the digital-born BuzzFeed, HuffPo, and Vice covered COP21 in Paris in November and December 2015. In doing so,

we focused on five countries characterised by different media systems and with different status of online media, affected by climate change to varying degrees, and differently engaged in international climate politics: France, Germany, Spain, the UK, and the US.

Chapters 5–7 have gone into the granular detail of the many similarities and differences between the different countries' and media outlets' coverage of COP21, which included news and commentary pieces. One of the overarching points to emerge is that it was something of an artificial dichotomy to have split our sample into 'legacy' and 'new' players. The new players show little homogeneity. By several metrics, the Huffington Post has more in common with legacy media like the *Guardian*, the *New York Times* or the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, who are addressing the new world of social media, smartphones, visuals, and distributed content with a similar level of intent. In contrast, we saw in Chapter 2 how different Vice and BuzzFeed are to each other and other media organisations in their general editorial approach, and this has been corroborated by the results of our content analysis.

With that important caveat, some interesting differences stand out. As we found in Chapter 5, Huffington Post's coverage is similar to that of legacy media in terms of volume and thematic focus in many countries, but puts more emphasis on a more positive 'solutions-based approach'. The volume of articles (230) on their US-facing site alone about the Paris summit was second only to the *Guardian* in our sample (321), and exceeded that of legacy media bastions like *Le Monde* (202) or the *New York Times* (110). In the French version, HuffPo's coverage (157) roughly mirrored that of *Le Figaro* (149) and *Le Monde* (202). They published three or four articles a day, many of which, like legacy media organisations, had been prepared months in advance. But it is highly indicative of HuffPo's general approach that of the 230 articles published on the US site, more than half were blog posts, mostly by people or organisations who care deeply about the environment and sometimes adopt an activist perspective.

Vice News and BuzzFeed offer considerably less content, in part because, at least in the case of BuzzFeed, they are less interested in volume and more selective about publishing stories that get shared. Where Vice News stood out most was for its innovative series of video reports, called 'Climate Emergency Dispatches', where a young reporter clearly took her viewers on a journey of activism and outrage, outside the main location of the summit. BuzzFeed did do some listicle-style reporting ('10 Adorable Animals That

Climate Change is Killing Off’,¹⁰⁶ ‘11 Insane Ways The World is Dealing With a Hotter Planet’¹⁰⁷), offered a quiz on climate change called ‘Do You Know More About Climate Change Than The Average American?’ based on a Yale University survey,¹⁰⁸ and included plenty of irreverent and witty language.¹⁰⁹ But perhaps what was unexpected was the amount of straight reporting these outlets offered as well, at times providing in-depth accounts of the conference and its proceedings or relevant background that would not have been out of place in legacy media.¹¹⁰

Country differences are clearly important though. First, they are very visible in the volume of coverage. The conference received most coverage in the Anglo-Saxon countries – the UK and US – as well as in the host country France. And in some of these countries, the new players, and particularly HuffPo, played an enormous role in covering COP21, and in the case of the USA a significantly larger one than the analysed legacy media. However, in Germany and Poland, there was very little digital-born coverage of the summit. In Spain too, Vice and BuzzFeed had very little coverage of the summit, compared to legacy players.

Secondly, country differences are visible in the themes the analysed media used to interpret COP21: in France, the media focus mostly on the process and the outcome of the *negotiations*, whereas the topical spectrum is broader in Germany, Spain, and the UK. In these countries, the *negotiations* theme is complemented by the *disaster and catastrophe*, *opportunity*, and *scientific background* themes and – albeit only in Germany and Spain – a focus on *climate justice*. In the US, the *negotiations* theme is less important, whereas *disaster and catastrophe* and *scientific background* themes as well as the *uncertainty* theme receive more attention. Thirdly, country differences are visible in other dimensions of media content, too. For example, BuzzFeed France did little more than its more traditional recipe of listicles and quizzes. Both BuzzFeed and Vice are very constrained by the amount of resources they have available to create original content that will work for different countries or languages.

Our content analysis shows that most of the legacy media in our sample gave considerable editorial weight to the summit. Indeed, within our sample, traditional media organisations still accounted for about two-thirds

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/annierosestrasser/sorry-we-ruined-it-for-you>

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/virginiahughes/11-crazy-climate-adaptations>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/peteraldhous/climate-change-quiz>

¹⁰⁹ See e.g. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/jimdalyrupleii/meet-the-people-trolling-the-fuck-out-of-the-paris-climate>

¹¹⁰ See e.g. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/jimdalyrupleii/historic-global-climate-change-agreement-nears-reality>

of all the coverage of the summit. Most of them dedicated a lot of resources to it and offered more in-depth coverage than the new players (with the exception of HuffPo in English and French). The *Guardian*, for example, had a team of more than ten journalists and editors in Paris and elsewhere covering it.¹¹¹ The one exception was Poland, where coverage was slim compared to the other five countries. Indeed, as Table 4.1 showed, Poland is exceptional by a variety of metrics, and this is explored in a separate essay.¹¹² The legacy media also offered a (more) differentiated set of themes and voices than the new players, and did so in a journalistic professional, i.e. neutral or straight, way.

As Chapter 7 found, the ready availability of NGOs and politicians at these summits provide an abundant source of quotes for journalists from all of the media organisations we analysed. This finding is common both to research of previous summits (Lück et al., 2016) and to a separate study of all the UK media's coverage of the Paris summit, found in Appendix 4. In this study, which looked at more than 1,500 articles from the UK's top 22 online sites, governments or political spokespeople represented 56% of all those quoted, NGO representatives 21%, scientists 8%, and industry or company representatives 8%. The relatively low level of scientists and business representatives, and the general distribution of voices found in the wider UK study, is not dissimilar to the findings of our five-country focus. The one stand-out difference between media organisations that we found is Vice News, which quotes a lot more NGOs and common people (often activists), driven largely by their reporting from the street and at activist meetings.

As we saw in Chapter 2, the approach of Vice News and BuzzFeed News is in part driven by the need to be different to legacy media, whether this is in editorial focus, tone, use of images, or formats. As Table 5.1 showed, they both reported significantly less than the other media on the details of the negotiations – partly due, perhaps, to their assessment of what their younger audiences likely care about and/or share, partly because they wanted to be different, and partly because they see themselves as complementary to legacy media instead of substitutive. Vice News included the theme of the protests and climate justice more than any media organisations, whereas BuzzFeed included climate justice less than legacy media, and covered protests about the same (and

¹¹¹ Interview with Fiona Harvey, London, Feb. 2016.

¹¹² Found at <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/new-players-environmental-reporting>

less than the *Guardian*, for example). As BuzzFeed journalists point out, they do not see themselves as a campaigning media organisation on climate change.¹¹³

The new players' innovation with new formats was perhaps not as wide-ranging or as different to legacy media as we had expected. As we saw in Chapter 6, a combination of text and photos was by far the most common format for all of our five media organisations. However, in general BuzzFeed and Vice were much more visually oriented than the others, measured by several metrics including how many articles they published that were photo-led. As we have mentioned several times, Vice's heavy use of videos either as the main element of a report or as a supplement to other formats was the most notable.

Another area of commonality across media and, largely, across countries, was the treatment of climate sceptics. As we have pointed out throughout the book, the Paris summit was noticeably different to that of the Copenhagen summit in terms of the low amount of space given by the media to the various types of climate scepticism. As was to be expected, right-leaning newspapers in the UK and the USA offered some space to sceptic viewpoints, particularly in their opinion columns. However, the three new players were all hostile to sceptics. As we saw in Chapter 5, BuzzFeed France published a piece called 'the worst climate sceptics quotes made into posters for your bathroom',¹¹⁴ HuffPo gave publicity to the campaign by Avaaz against the sceptics participating in the meeting of the Heartland institute¹¹⁵ and posted a guest post critical of it,¹¹⁶ and as described in Chapter 7, one of Vice's emergency dispatches was about the same meeting.¹¹⁷ Milène Larsson, the Vice reporter there, explained that they covered the sceptics' conference in part because Vice 'has always been interested in the absurdity of the modern condition'.¹¹⁸

So there is clearly 'something old, something new' in the way new players, with all their differences between them, covered the Paris summit. However, when we consider HuffPo's greater emphasis on opportunities and renewable energy, Vice News' engaging style of reporting, and BuzzFeed's innovations with formats and content, it is clear that the new players

¹¹³ Interview with Tom Chivers, London, May 2016. Kelly Oakes at RISJ conference, Oxford, 13 May 2016.

¹¹⁴ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/tomschabri/les-pires-citations-climato-sceptiques-transformees-en-poste>

¹¹⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/avaaz-wanted-posters-paris_us

¹¹⁶ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nick-surgey/climate-deniers-paris-eve_b_8739236.html

¹¹⁷ <https://news.vice.com/video/cop-outs-and-denial-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-4>

¹¹⁸ Skype interview with James Painter, 18 Feb. 2016.

offer a substantial body of coverage, a considerable richness of thematic diversity, and alternative approaches and viewpoints to the coverage of climate change that might otherwise not exist in the respective countries. A strong case can be made that this is beneficial from the view of public sphere theory, particularly at a time when specialist correspondents on the environment are being reduced in some media organisations, and from a context where journalists are constantly searching for new angles and new ways of covering the 'old' theme of climate change in order to sustain its relevance and interest to a wider public.¹¹⁹

As has been long-documented, climate change is a difficult topic to cover at the best of times, given its usually long-distant and long-time horizons (Revkin, 2007), but this is particularly true of a long climate summit, where technical details of the negotiations, the impenetrable language of the negotiating texts, and lots of negotiators (often men in suits) are huge barriers to engaging an audience. New players break these barriers, at least partly, and may engage audiences which are not easily reached and interested in events like the COPs. And, partly unwillingly or even unconsciously, they fulfil demands of deliberation and empowerment which have been made by theorists of the public sphere (Ferree et al., 2002; Wessler, 2008): they give room to societal voices which are under-represented in legacy media; they make room for alternative viewpoints which rarely come to the forefront, and they allow for informal, entertaining, sometimes even biting modes of debate which are scarce in established legacy media.

We may have arrived at different conclusions if we had widened the study to examine not just the climate summit, but how the legacy players and new players cover climate change or the environment in general. While legacy media focus their coverage strongly on COPs and a few other high-profile events such as the presentation of the Assessment Reports of the IPCC (Schmidt et al., 2013), the new players analysed here may provide a more steady stream of environment news. After all, as we saw in Chapter 2, all three of them dedicate considerable editorial resources to the environment, and in their different ways bring considerable innovation to making the issue come alive and relevant, particularly for a young audience. HuffPo on its green index¹²⁰ includes a wide variety of environment, lifestyle and nature topics, way beyond climate change. Some of Vice News' video reports on the environment do exceptionally well: of a recent selection of 25 of their

¹¹⁹ Alister Doyle, environment correspondent for Thomson Reuters, speaking at Oxford event, 13 May 2016.

¹²⁰ <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/green>

videos, three of them on environmental issues scored very highly compared to other topics as measured by views (Rao, forthcoming).¹²¹ BuzzFeed News clearly provides an engaging, often science-based, variety of material about the environment way beyond their reputation for listicles and quizzes.

A common theme underpinning this book, as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, has been the rapidly changing media landscape in all the countries we examined, driven largely by changes in social media consumption. At the time of writing, the fragility of advertising-based business models, exacerbated by Facebook's capacity to attract an ever larger portion of the advertising cake, the future of distributed content (where articles sit on social media sites rather than on the website of the media which created them), and the uncertain growth of online and smartphone videos, are just three of the uncertainties facing new players and old. Any one of the three new players profiled in this book could be sold on to another company at any time, which could herald an abrupt change in strategies, international presence, or editorial priorities. Moreover, changes in formats and platforms are ever-changing. As Kelly Oakes from BuzzFeed predicted, the home website of legacy or new players might well disappear in the next five years as few people will need to go there to get their news.¹²²

Many observers are concerned these radical changes in the news 'ecosystem' (Fahy and Nisbet 2011) have led to a situation where news publishers have lost control over the distribution of their journalism, which for many readers is now 'filtered through algorithms and platforms which are opaque and unpredictable'.¹²³ Katherine Viner, the editor of the *Guardian*, makes a powerful case that one consequence has been the capacity of technology to 'disrupt the truth'.¹²⁴ However, the rise of digital-born companies taking advantage of the changes in social media has not always been negative for the practice of journalism. As we saw in Chapter 7, one heartening theme to emerge from interviews with senior editors and journalists at the sharp end of news coverage is that they are motivated just as much by the imperative of the public need for reliable and unbiased information about the environment as by a heightened sense of what gets shared or liked.

¹²¹ Monkey meat and the Ebola outbreak in Liberia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XasTcDsDfMg> (4.2 million views); The worst fish in America: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnZp1jtOhR0> (1.6 million views); Poisoned by the Gold rush: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_KAOD6IZmE (300,000 views).

¹²² Kelly Oakes, at RISJ conference, Oxford, 13 May 2016.

¹²³ Emily Bell quoted in Katharine Viner, 'How Technology Disrupted the Truth', *Guardian*, 12 July 2016.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

In Chapter 3, our metrics showed that in early 2016 HuffPo, BuzzFeed, and Vice were on an upward curve in terms of attracting new audiences, and in many countries were eclipsing more traditional players as a source of news. This may level off, or even fall.¹²⁵ But as regards news about the environment, particularly in the UK and the US, they have achieved a status of being amongst the most popular online news sources for those who are already interested in the environment. This may become true also in other countries, if they continue their international expansion and invest in more original content there. Much of the academic research on climate change in the media lags behind the changes in news provision and consumption, particularly when it concentrates on print and television outlets. This book has gone a small way in helping to fill the gap. But there is an overwhelming imperative for scholars, journalists, governments, NGOs, and anyone interested in the (effective) communication of climate change, to take due note of the increasing centrality of both online news and digital-born providers in the provision of information in this field, and the next steps they may follow.

¹²⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/sep/18/us-newspapers-strike-back-huffington-post-digital>

Appendix 1

Notes on the Research Method

How Articles were Chosen

The search words used were ‘global warming’ or ‘climate change’ and ‘Paris’ or ‘UN summit’. If a story or piece of content included no mention of the Paris or UN summit, then it was discarded, unless it was part of a package of background stories tied specifically to the summit. The ‘story’ was the basic unit of analysis, and refers to the online content which may be text, video, pictures, or other formats, normally grouped around one headline. All very short stories, equal to or less than a couple of sentences long, were discarded, including trails. Blog posts, opinion pieces, and editorials were included. The search engine LexisNexis was normally used for legacy players; in the case of the new players, a complex mixture of methods was used (see below). The search engines on their own websites were used for the niche players.

The number of articles identified by these methods during the three-week period between Wednesday 25 November and Wednesday 16 December 2015 inclusive was around 2,400 across the six countries. To achieve a reduced number of articles to be coded, we aimed to achieve roughly the same number of articles/content in the new players’ category as in the legacy player category. Where possible, we also aimed to have roughly the same sample size for each country.

The sample size was reduced to 637 articles, following this formula:

France: all of the Vice and BuzzFeed articles were coded; for HuffPo and both legacy players every 4th article from the sample was taken, and every 3rd article for the niche player.

Germany: all of HuffPo and Vice coded; every 3rd article for both legacy players and the niche player.

Poland: the one Vice article coded; every 2nd article for *Gazeta Wyborcza*; all of *Rzeczpospolita* and the niche player.

Spain: all the new players coded; every 4th article for both legacy players; every 8th article for the niche player.

UK: all of BuzzFeed and Vice; every 3rd article for HuffPo; every 10th article of the *Guardian*, every 4th article of the *Telegraph*; every 2nd article of the niche player.

USA: all of BuzzFeed and Vice; every 10th article of HuffPo; every 5th article of both legacy media; all of the niche player.

For this publication, the niche player sample was not analysed, in part because of the wide differences in the types of niche players. Also, as explained in Chapter 4, the Poland data were omitted from the analysis in Chapters 5–7 due to the small size of the sample.

We are aware that the country allocations of some of the legacy players are somewhat arbitrary as media organisations like the *New York Times*, and particularly the *Guardian*, see themselves as global players. However, country-based differences between legacy players in English was not a major feature of our analysis.

New Players

The content analysis of the new players is a major challenge, for the following (and other) reasons.

- (a) Most of their content gets pushed out via social media, and not (first) accessed via the website. As we mentioned in Chapter 1, BuzzFeed, for example, is now on 30 different social media platforms. However, we monitored posts from BuzzFeed, HuffPo, and Vice on Facebook and Twitter for two days of the summit (on 7 and 11 December 2015), and the same material could also be found on their websites. Interviewees from BuzzFeed and Vice said most of the material they posted also ended up on their website.
- (b) Search engines are generally very poor on the new players' website, and particularly BuzzFeed and Vice. We used a wider variety of search terms to ensure we captured as much as possible of their content around the summit.
- (c) Headlines and sometimes content are constantly changed to attract more virality. We were unable to factor this into the content analysis.
- (d) In some cases, such as Vice, the content on the UK-facing site about the summit or climate change was low, but UK users would have

had access to more Vice material on the vice.com site, on social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube, and via the Vice app on smartphones or other devices. We used a complicated search method to try and identify which were on the UK site, to differentiate them from the US site, and which were on both UK and US sites. The software used by the King's College project described in Appendix 4 picked up the metadata identifying which 'section' the article was categorised under on UK and US sites, by which all those that were under any section mentioning 'uk' (uk; uknews; ukpolitics; etc.) were classified as UK. With Vice, a similar method was followed using the URLs, keeping all with /en_uk/ or /en_gb/, but also keeping the articles that appeared on the general site but focused on the summit. With HuffPo we used the metadata again, restricted only to sections mentioning 'uk' (uk universities; uk politics; uk tech; etc.).

Coder Reliability

Achieving consistency in coding across numerous countries and cultures is always a challenge, and in this case, even more so in assessing the tone, language, and perspective. However, to gauge the reliability of the collected data on the coding sheets, we measured the inter-coder reliability by letting all five coders code the same five articles and applying the reliability coefficient Lotus, developed by Fretwurst in 2015.¹²⁶ We aimed at having Lotus coefficient values above 0.8 (i.e. 80% agreement), but in some cases of difficult variables, we agreed that 70% agreement would be acceptable. In fact, the average Lotus coefficient for all variables of the codebook was 0.87, or in other words, there was an average of 87% agreement between the five coders. This value is considered to be very good.

¹²⁶ <http://www.iakom.ch/Lotus/LotusManualEng.pdf>

Appendix 2

List of Interviewees and Areas of Questioning

France: Cyrille Vanlerberghe, head of the Science & Medicine section at *Le Figaro*; Stéphane Foucart, head of the Planet section at *Le Monde*; Grégory Rozières, head of the 'C'est Demain' section at the Huffington Post (fr.)

Poland: Tomasz Ulanowski, science journalist at *Gazeta Wyborcza*; Radosław Pitetruska, photographer at PAP (Polish News Agency).

Spain: David Meseguer, senior news editor at Vice Spain, Barcelona; Caty Arévalo, environment reporter at EFE Verde, Madrid; Miguel Corral, environment reporter at *El Mundo*, Madrid; Manuel Planelles, environment reporter at *El País*, Madrid.

UK-based: Milène Larsson, senior producer and reporter at Vice; Fiona Harvey, environment correspondent for the *Guardian*; Alister Doyle, environment correspondent for Thomson Reuters; Kelly Oakes, science editor at BuzzFeed UK; Tom Chivers, science writer at BuzzFeed UK.

US-based: David Freeman, senior science editor at the Huffington Post, USA; Robert Eshelman, former environment editor at Vice News, USA; Jim Dalrymple, reporter, Vice News.

Broad Areas of Questioning

1. General approach to covering environment and climate change (cc):

How important is the theme of environment and cc compared to other themes for your media organisation?

- **Content:** Do you or your media organisation have a particular editorial approach towards covering these themes? For example, how much is your coverage (i) science-based? (ii) campaigning for change? (iii) driven by stories of hope or disaster? (iv) prioritising some aspects of the story rather than others?
- **Audiences:** to what extent is your coverage driven by an appreciation of audiences? For example, how much do you use algorithms to

drive content, including headlines? How much are you driven by sharing on social media?

- Formats: do you prioritise some formats over others? E.g. video over text?
- Platforms: on which platforms is your content mostly consumed? Is it adapted for different platforms? Are you (made) aware of what sort of environment and cc stories get shared the most?
- Tone: do you sometimes set out to be different in terms of the tone of a story from normal reporting?
- Sources: Do you prioritise some sources over others? Do you ever quote climate sceptics?

2. Paris summit

How would you describe your general editorial approach to covering the Paris summit? Any outstanding examples of coverage?

3. Other media organisations

Would you say that your approach is different to other media organisations, regarding (1) and (2) above? How much monitoring do you or your colleagues do of other media organisations?

4. Anything else important to mention?

Appendix 3

Supplementary Information

Chapter 3: Interest in Environment News and News in General

In many cases there is a correlation at the individual level between interest in environment news and interest in other news topics, or in news as a whole. People who are highly interested in one news topic also tend to be highly interested in other topics too. To check the results in Figure 3.2, we assigned a numerical value to each level of interest on the five-point scale used in our survey question, and then combined levels of interest in other hard news topics (defined broadly in line with Reinemann et al., 2011) to compute an average score, and then compared this to the level of interest in environment news (not shown). By this method, we identified those countries where interest is comparatively high (e.g. Hungary and Italy) or comparatively low (USA and UK). This reveals a pattern that broadly maps onto overall levels of interest in Figure 3.2, but does so in a more meaningful way because it effectively controls for that fact that in some countries people are more interested in news generally. Looked at in this way, those in the US and the UK are still among the least interested in news about the environment, which is perhaps not surprising given that other studies have shown that they are among the least concerned about climate change (Pew Center, 2015). In Spain, Germany, Poland, and France, people are on average as interested in environment news as they are in other topics.

Chapter 3: Questions and Sources for Figures

3.1 **Q2_NEW2016.** How interested are you in news about [topic]? *Base: Total sample*

3.2 **Q2_NEW2016.** How interested are you in news about the environment? *Base: Total sample in each country*

3.3 **Q2_NEW2016.** How interested are you in news about the environment? **Q1F.** Some people talk about 'left', 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. With this in mind, where would you place yourself on the following scale? *Base: Left/Centre/Right: UK = 468/1009/292, US = 476/871/591, France = 622/442/623, Poland = 261/995/337, Germany = 149/1485/69, Spain = 626/1130/159.* In Germany and Spain the base sizes for those on the right are small because many respondents declared themselves as 'slightly right of centre', which is considered centre in the above scheme, rather than 'fairly right-wing' or 'very right-wing'. However, if the seven-point political scale used in Q1F is treated as a continuous variable, the described relationship between politics and interest in news about the environment is robust in every country.

3.4 **Q2_NEW2016.** How interested are you in news about the environment? *Base: 18-24/25-34-35-44/45-55/55+ UK = 220/206/293/400/905, US = 175/329/377/300/1016, France = 201/321/379/393/868, Poland = 247/423/344/303/683, Germany = 183/301/306/400/845, Spain = 182/457/420/355/690.*

3.5 **Q2_NEW2016.** How interested are you in news about the environment? **Q1D.** What is your highest level of education? *Base: School/university or professional qualification: UK = 837/1120, US = 1069/1000, France = 782/1258, Poland = 865/1090, Germany = 574/1428, Spain = 604/1428.* Note: Those respondents who said that they are currently in education were removed from the analysis.

3.6 **Q4.** You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news? *Base: 18-24/25-34/35-44/45-54/55+ who used a source of news in the last week: 5598/9187/9686/9383/18371.* Note: Those who selected a different source as their main source of news are not shown.

3.7 **Q5B**. Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week? Via online platforms (web, mobile, tablet, e-reader). *Base: Total 2014/2015/2016 sample*. Note: Poland was not surveyed in 2014. Vice was not included as an option in 2014 outside of the UK. Vice was not included as an option in Poland in any year.

3.8 **Q5B**. Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week? Via online platforms (web, mobile, tablet, e-reader). *Base: 18-24/25-34-35-44/45-55/55+ UK = 220/206/293/400/905, US = 175/329/377/300/1016, France = 201/321/379/393/868, Poland = 247/423/344/303/683, Germany = 183/301/306/400/845, Spain = 182/457/420/355/690*. Vice was not included as an option in Poland.

3.9 **Q2_NEW2016**. How interested are you in news about the environment? **Q5B**. Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week? Via online platforms (web, mobile, tablet, e-reader). *Base: High/low interest in news about the environment: UK = 718/1306, US = 872/1325, Spain = 1281/823, Poland = 884/1116, France = 835/1327, Germany = 1079/956*.

3.10 **Q2_NEW2016**. How interested are you in news about the environment? **Q5B**. Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week? Via online platforms (web, mobile, tablet, e-reader). *Base: High/low interest in news about the environment: UK = 718/1306*.

3.11 **Q2_NEW2016**. How interested are you in news about the environment? **Q5B**. Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week? Via online platforms (web, mobile, tablet, e-reader). *Base: High/low interest in news about the environment: US = 872/1325*.

Chapter 6

Table 6.1. All content coded as 'mainly video'

MEDIA	HEADLINE AND LINK	DURATION
HuffPo DE	Climate conference in Paris: today it's about renewable energies (Klimakonferenz in Paris: Heute geht es um Erneuerbaren Energien) http://www.huffingtonpost.de/annalena-baerbock/klimakonferenz-paris-erneuerbare-energien_b_8748518.html	2'16
HuffPo FR	VIDEO. COP21, UNFCCC, BINGO, do you know the acronyms of the climate conference? (VIDÉO. COP21, CCNUCC, BINGO, connaissez-vous les sigles de la conférence climat?) http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2015/12/01/video-cop-21-sigle-climat-paris-environnement-rechauffement-climatique_n_8662716.html	2'03
Le Monde	Video: bypasses ban on demonstrations in Paris (Vidéo : contournements d'interdiction de manifester à Paris) http://www.lemonde.fr/cop21/video/2015/11/29/video-contournements-d-interdiction-de-manifester-a-paris_4820020_4527432.html	2'11
Le Monde	COP21: 'The worst as the best, can come out of the agreement's text', according to Greenpeace (COP21: 'Le pire, comme le meilleur, peut sortir du texte de l'accord, selon Greenpeace) http://www.lemonde.fr/cop21/video/2015/12/09/cop21-le-pire-comme-le-meilleur-peut-sortir-de-ce-texte-selon-greenpeace_4828131_4527432.html	3'28
Le Monde	COP21: 'We will spend the rest of our lives fighting global warming' (COP21: 'Nous allons passer le reste de nos vies à combattre le réchauffement climatique') http://www.lemonde.fr/cop21/video/2015/12/10/cop21-nous-allons-passer-le-reste-de-nos-vies-a-combattre-le-rechauffement-climatique-selon-350-org_4828984_4527432.html	1'37
Sueddeutsche Zeitung Online	Where the climate misery has already started (Wo die Klimamisere schon begonnen hat) http://www.sueddeutsche.de/wissen/klimagipfel-warum-wir-beim-klimaschutz-jetzt-handeln-muessen-1.2762376	2'16
Vice UK	Hundreds of thousands around the world took part in demonstration against climate change https://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/the-hangover-news-30-11-15	1'19
Vice UK	An international deal to limit global warming was agreed in Paris http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/hangover-news-14-12-2015-783	7'33

Vice	Police clash with protesters in Paris: COP21 – Climate Emergency (Dispatch 1) https://news.vice.com/video/police-clash-with-protesters-in-paris-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-1	16'25
Vice	Climate activism under attack: COP21 – Climate Emergency (Dispatch 2) https://news.vice.com/video/climate-activism-under-attack-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-2	8'23
Vice	Toxic tours and civil disobedience: COP21 – Climate Emergency (Dispatch 3) https://news.vice.com/video/toxic-tours-and-civil-disobedience-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-3	12'38
Vice	Cop-outs and denial: COP21 – Climate Emergency (Dispatch 4) https://news.vice.com/video/cop-outs-and-denial-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-4	8'54
Vice	Naomi Klein and Jeremy Corbyn: COP21 – Climate Emergency (Dispatch 5) https://news.vice.com/video/naomi-klein-and-jeremy-corbyn-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-5	7'33
Vice	This is only the beginning: COP21 – Climate Emergency (Dispatch 6) https://news.vice.com/video/this-is-only-the-beginning-cop21-climate-emergency-dispatch-6	8'59
Vice	Can climate change be stopped? – The People Speak https://news.vice.com/video/can-climate-change-be-stopped-the-people-speak	4'40
Vice FR	COP21: The climate emergency (Dispatch #1) (COP21: L'urgence climatique (reportage #1) https://news.vice.com/fr/video/cop-21-l-urgence-climatique-reportage-1	16'25
Vice DE	The fight for coal (Die VICE Reports: Der Kampf um die Kohle) http://www.vice.com/de/video/heimat-ausgekohlt-der-kampf-um-die-kohle-101	19'25

Appendix 4

The UK Media's Coverage of the Paris Summit

As part of the RISJ project to examine the media coverage of the Paris summit, researchers at the Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power at Kings College, London provided detailed analysis of the 22 leading news online sites in the UK, including Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice. Using a content analysis software tool known as Steno, from a total sample of 120,000 articles, they identified 1,527 articles during the three-week period 25 November to 16 December, which were either principally about the COP summit (1,018), or where a significant mention was made early in the article. They then applied a tagging process derived from created political dictionaries to identify and categorise relevant articles. Their most important findings are the following.

The *Guardian* (361 articles) and the BBC (147) had the highest volume of coverage, followed by the *Independent* (96) and the *Financial Times* (90).¹²⁷ This could be interpreted as media organisations with left-leaning or more centrist tendencies having more interest in the topic of climate change than those which are right-leaning. Significantly, Huffington Post (UK) came next with 75 articles, once again showing that it is interested in volume. BuzzFeed (UK) had less articles (25), but considerably more than tabloids like the *Sun* (11) or the *Star* (2). Vice UK published only six online articles on the COP summit, but UK users would have had access to more Vice material on the vice.com site, on social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube, and via the Vice app on smart phones or other devices.

In terms of quoted sources, the King's College researchers found that within the total sample of articles, they identified 2,325 where at least one quote was present within a given article. These broke down into:

- Government/political spokesperson: 1,293 (55.6%)
- NGO spokesperson: 476 (20.5%)
- Scientists: 187 (8.0%)
- Individuals/unaffiliated activists: 115 (4.9%)
- Corporations: 114 (4.9%)

¹²⁷ MailOnline had 437 articles, but when agency copy was removed, the figure dropped to 60.

- Industry bodies: 67 (2.9%)
- Experts: 41 (1.8%)
- Celebrities: 32 (1.4%)

The top NGOs quoted were Greenpeace, present in 40 articles, Friends of the Earth (35), Oxfam (28), World Resources Institute (21), WWF (19), and Avaaz (16). As for the top government or political figures, these were divided into the US government: 230; UK government: 192; French government: 169; Indian government: 88; Chinese government: 68; and Australian government: 52. The researchers found that only 5% of the quotes were from representatives of corporations, and only 3% from industry bodies, including corporate environmental lobbyists.

Some indication of the emphasis put on visual formats by BuzzFeed and Vice can be seen from a breakdown for the COP articles on all 22 sites into text (with or without photographs), video, video and text combined, photos only, and photos and video with text. For the 17 BuzzFeed 'articles' with a COP focus, the seven text-based articles were heavily illustrated with large photos, six were photo slideshows or a series of photos with captions, one was video and text, and two were a combination of video and photos. For Vice, even though the sample was small at six 'articles', four of them were video-based. In contrast, only eight of the 54 Huffington Post articles contained videos or were only photos. It is interesting to note that a relatively high percentage of the *Guardian* articles (21%, or 55 out of 258) included video, which was also true (less surprisingly) of the BBC (57%, 64 out of 112).

The research team also conducted what they described as experimental analysis into the framing of the coverage, using a pre-selected different frame for each of the four weeks they examined: first week (16–22 November), optimism or pessimism about the expected results; second week (23–29 November), crisis versus solution; third week (30 November to 6 December), economic cost; and fourth week (7–13 December), satisfaction with the deal.

In the first week, the balance of the coverage was cautiously optimistic about the outcome (50 positive references, compared with 42 pessimistic). In the second week, the balance was towards the favourability of solutions (67 references, compared to 60 references to crisis), but with noticeable splits between outlets. The *Daily Mail* was much more crisis-oriented, whereas the *Guardian* published the most solutions coverage. In the third week, the balance was towards cost-effective solutions (46 references, compared to 25 for expensive but necessary and 19 for expensive and

impossible). Again, there were splits between outlets, as Huffington Post UK was the most positive, the *FT* and *Telegraph* evenly split, and the *Daily Mail* most negative. Finally, in the week after the end of the summit, the balance was towards seeing the deal as satisfactory (30 references compared with 18 unsatisfactory references), again with splits between outlets (BBC nearly all satisfactory, *Guardian* mostly satisfactory, *Daily Mail* split, *FT* unsatisfactory).

Among the surprises that the researchers found was the absence of any attempt by the organised sceptic community to orchestrate a ‘COP spoiler’, similar to the ‘Climategate’ incident prior to Copenhagen in November 2009. Indeed, several commentators have remarked on the relative absence of sceptical voices in the coverage.¹²⁸ This was generally true of the articles monitored in the UK press, but with some important exceptions. Right-leaning outlets like the *Mail*, *The Times*, *Telegraph* and *Spectator* gave space to 21 authored articles by prominent sceptics in the following breakdown: *The Mail* (David Rose one article, Bjorn Lomborg one, Christopher Booker one); *The Times* (Matt Ridley three); *Telegraph* (Christopher Booker six, Lomborg two); *Spectator* (Matt Ridley two, Benny Peiser two, David Rose two, Lomborg one). The left-leaning *Guardian*, *Mirror*, and *Independent* gave no such space.

Finally, the researchers compared the amount of coverage about the COP summit to the amount given to celebrities or celebrity events. To quote two examples, in the first week of the summit (30 November to 6 December), the summit attracted 132 articles compared to almost twice that amount (229) which covered the television personality, Kim Kardashian. In the week after the summit (7–14 December), the deal reached at COP21 received less coverage than the final of the TV show, the *X Factor* (192 articles versus 212).

¹²⁸ See e.g. R. Timmons and R. Brulle, ‘A Strange Silence in Paris’, <http://news.trust.org/item/20160330152605-jhb28/>; S. Stefanini and A. Restuccia, ‘Climate Sceptics Feel the Chill at Paris’ at <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/12/climate-change-skeptics-paris-216532>

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RISJ PUBLICATIONS

SELECTED RISJ BOOKS

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John Lloyd

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Robert G. Picard (ed)

Local Journalism: The Decline of Newspapers and the Rise of Digital Media
Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (ed)

The Ethics of Journalism: Individual, Institutional and Cultural Influences
Wendy N. Wyatt (ed)

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Nigel Bowles, James T. Hamilton, David A. L. Levy (eds)

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Journalism and PR: News Media and Public Relations in the Digital Age
John Lloyd and Laura Toogood

Reporting the EU: News, Media and the European Institutions
John Lloyd and Cristina Marconi

Climate Change in the Media: Reporting Risk and Uncertainty
James Painter

Women and Journalism
Suzanne Franks

Transformations in Egyptian Journalism
Naomi Sakr



New 'digital-born players' such as Huffington Post, BuzzFeed and Vice are challenging traditional media in their provision of news in general, and about the environment in particular. They have invested heavily in a wide range of countries and languages in an attempt to reach young audiences, who increasingly use social media as their source of news.

Despite their success, these new players have hardly been studied. This book, written by lead author James Painter and researchers in five countries, takes the UN summit on climate change in December 2015 as a case study, and analyses how new players and legacy media in France, Germany, Spain, the UK, and the USA covered it.

It shows that new players are an important addition to climate change coverage. They reach new segments of the audience with a wide range of novel reporting styles, formats, and tone that marks them out from more established media.

The authors argue that this is particularly beneficial at a time when environmental reporting is being reduced in media organisations across the world.

An outstanding book that represents the best of media scholarship. It is analytically rigorous, evidence-based, and written in a style that is lucid, engaging, and impactful.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR MATT NISBET, NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY, USA

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