**The Israeli Media’s Role in Coping with Climate Change: The Perspective of Journalists and Columnists**

**Abstract**

The climate crisis is currently considered the greatest threat to the planet and its inhabitants ever known to humankind. As in any multidimensional largescale crisis, the media plays a central role in managing and coping with it. The media is one of the most effective tools for putting pressure on decision makers on the one hand, and for shaping relevant attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors among civilians on the other.

Despite the fact that Israel is considered to face a particularly high probability of suffering the effects of climate change, climate media research in Israel is still in its infancy. In this context, the current study seeks to examine perspectives of Israeli journalists and columnists on the media’s role in all matters pertaining to the climate crisis.

To that end, 25 in-depth interviews were conducted during March–April of 2021 with members of the media dealing with climate change. An analysis of the interview transcriptions indicates that the participants all shared the perception that the media was failing in its coverage of the crisis. The explanations they provided included fierce competition over the news agenda (mainly when positioned against security issues), financial and political pressure placed on the news outlets, the exceptional complexity of the topic, and a lack of cooperation on the part of editors.

The participants proposed two main solutions for improving the media’s functioning in regard to covering the crisis: reframing the entire field and providing dedicated training to journalists and editors on how to cover the climate crisis.

**Introduction**

Climate change is currently considered the greatest threat to the planet and its inhabitants known to mankind (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Bolsen et al., 2019; Brüggemann & Engesser, 2017; Houghton et al., 1996; Houghton et al., 2001; Rabinowitz, 2020; Watson et al. 1997). The recent report published in August 2021 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), considered the foremost authority in the field (Climate Change, 2021), apparently finally indisputably refuted the last of the sceptics’ attitudes regarding the scope of the impact climate change is expected to have on our lives.

As in every multidimensional largescale crisis, the media plays a central role in managing and coping with the crisis. Accordingly, recent decades have seen the emergence of a research field known as “climate media,” in which researchers investigate various aspects of the media’s effect on how the fight against the climate crisis is managed (Anderson, 2009; Antilla, 2005, 2010; Boykoff, 2011; Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004, 2007; Lowe et al., 2006; Nisbet, 2019; O’Neill et al., 2015; Rode & Fischbeck, 2021; Schäfer, 2012; Schäfer & Schlichting, 2014; Willig et al., 2021). Similar to the way it operates in other sociopolitical contexts, the media is considered a major tool for applying pressure on decision makers on the one hand, and shaping relevant attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors among civilians on the other.

Despite the fact that Israel is considered to face a particularly high probability of suffering the effects of climate change, mainly due its innate geopolitical conditions (Brachya, 2013; Michaels & Alpert, 2013; Rabinowitz, 2009; Rabinowitz, 2020), climate media research in Israel is still in its infancy. One explanation for the limited interest in climate change lies in the fact that the political discourse in Israel does not generally revolve around the issue. Among the reasons for this is the relative urgency of other issues considered to be more “burning,” chiefly the issue of security (Bar-Tal & Carmi, 2012; Bookman; 2021; Nossek, 2019). In addition, and as a natural consequence, media attention to environmental issues in general and climate change in particular has been extremely poor (Katz-Kimchi, 2013; Mekelberg, 2012). The few studies that have examined climate media in Israel have only reinforced the bleak outlook regarding the climate crisis’ status in the political, public, and media discourse (Nossek, 2010, 2019; Nossek & Kunelius, 2012; Rabinowitz, 2020).

The current study aims to contribute to the limited body of knowledge regarding media and climate in Israel. Through a series of in-depth interviews, it seeks to examine the perspective of Israeli climate journalists and columnists on how the media’s functioning in the context of the climate crisis, in terms of both the current situation and in terms of what was desirable and possible to achieve.

***Climate Media around the World***

In recent decades, the scope of research dedicated to various aspects of media and climate has been expanding. Many researchers consider the media to be an affective mechanism for advancing legislative processes and shaping pro-climate policies, whether by raising public awareness and shaping public opinion for the purpose of applying pressure on decision makers, or by applying direct pressure on statesmen and politicians (Borth et al., 2021; Brüggemann & Engesser 2017; McDonald, 2009; Stamm et al., 2000). Other researchers point to the media’s dysfunctional conduct regarding the climate crisis. Antilla (2005) notes how major media outlets in the United States used to present the scientific stance on the climate crisis as controversial, presenting it together with opposing voices in the name of fundamental journalistic values, as if the two sides had equal merit in relation to a debatable issue. Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) and Petersen et al. (2019) reached similar conclusions regarding the destructive effect of the Western media’s demand for balance and neutrality that prevailed on the platform given to those leading the official scientific approach. Boykoff and Roberts (2007) also referred extensively to the series of restrictions that made it difficult for the media to realize its potential to contribute to the fight against the climate crisis.

Recognizing the media’s power and influence, several researchers have raised the concern that the media may actually hinder global efforts to limit the damage caused by the crisis, especially given the deliberate distribution of false information on social media by elements known as “climate deniers” (Antilla, 2010; Menezes, 2018; Nettlefold & Pecl, 2022; Painter et al., 2018).