

SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION

Media attention patterns

Environ. Plann. C <http://doi.org/csk9> (2018)



Credit: Design Pics Inc / Alamy Stock Photo

Public attention on a topic usually brings about policy efforts. This attention appears to be closely related to how the media covers an issue. More policy efforts on sustainability should be expected, given the broad assumption that media reporting on it is increasing. However, this coverage remains fragmented and is nonlinear. Research to understand sustainability discourses in the mass media is scarce and rarely looks beyond climate change, making it difficult to develop effective sustainability communication strategies.

Ralf Barkemeyer, from KEDGE Business School, France, and colleagues analysed newspaper coverage of sustainability topics across five countries. Using econometric techniques, they analysed patterns in a sample of 23 newspapers published during 2000–2016. They chose ten topics related to the Sustainable Development Goals, such as biodiversity, human rights, cleaner technologies, and poverty. For each topic, they evaluated coverage seasonality (whether there is a recurring sequence) and whether coverage is random or can be predicted from past reporting. The authors find that attention to climate change follows past trends and also brings biodiversity and clean technology to the media forefront. Reporting on socioeconomic issues is the most seasonal and unrelated to past trends. Depending on coverage level and randomness, for each topic they suggest distinct communication strategies to raise public interest: raising awareness, focusing on specific events, and on specific policy initiatives.

Aiora Zabala

Published online: 14 August 2018

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-018-0127-8>