

# Global Warming, Climate Change and the Media: A Review



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## Abstract

This condensed review is aimed at showcasing the most important research efforts conducted over the last 20 years, focused on news media coverage of global warming and climate change. Firstly, a brief account is provided on the broad consensus by the scientific community in regard to the responsibility of mankind in causing Anthropogenic Global Warming (AGW) and triggering the associated climate changes. Subsequently, references are provided to several major papers that discuss the ways in which the news media - from several countries in the world - cover climate change-related issues. Finally, mention is made to an ongoing research focused on the Italian news coverage of the three major hurricanes that torn through the Caribbean and Southern US in September 2017.

**keywords:** Global warming; Climate change; News media coverage; Hurricane harvey; Hurricane irma

**Abbreviation:** AGW: Anthropogenic Global Warming; ACC: Anthropogenic Climate Change

## Introduction

Global warming and related climate changes have emerged as crucial issues in the public agenda in the early late 1980s-1990s [1]. From 2006, media coverage of such topics has increased [2,3], mainly due to the publication of the 'Stern review' in 2006; extremely important were also the major efforts taken by world-famous climate activists, such as former US Vice-President Al Gore and others [4]. Another factor contributing to the upsurge of climate change-related issues in the media was the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the IPCC in 2007; furthermore, in February 2007 the documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" was awarded an Oscar by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Such ongoing increase in media attention has been associated with an increase in scientific evidence of man-induced global warming and related climate change [5,6]. In regard to scientific consensus on Anthropogenic Global Warming (AGW), an in-depth study conducted by [7] that reviewed all scientific papers published from 1993 to 2002 on AGW, revealed that no paper rejected the consensus. A few years later, a survey addressed to 3146 Earth scientists documented that 82% of the interviewees agreed that human activity is a meaningful factor, capable of playing a major role in altering average global temperatures [8]. Another paper [9] analyzed a great deal of public statements on climate change, formulated by scientists who published peer-reviewed climate papers on the topic: The results of the study reveal that 98% of those scientists are fully aware of the role played by humankind in triggering Anthropogenic Climate Change (ACC). In recent

years, a major paper by Cook et al. [10] documented that 97% of the scientific papers published from 1991 to 2011 fully confirm the threat posed by Anthropogenic Global Warming (AGW).

Regarding the media coverage of climate change, in the last couple of decades there have been several studies aimed at documenting the role exerted by the news media in covering climate change. Major works were published, focusing on news media representation of climate change and global warming in countries such as Canada [11,12], Australia [13], India [14], Finland [15], Italy [16-18], Nigeria [19], Japan [20], Sweden [21], Peru [22], the UK [23-29], and the US [30-38]. Particularly important have been the studies on media framing of climate change and adaptation in North America [39], as well as on media coverage of climate change during 15 years in 27 countries [40].

A key point is also the role played by the media in influencing the public opinion: Liu et al. [41] have documented that there are two main ways in which the media can affect public opinion; first, the media can enhance the importance of a particular subject, increasing public awareness about a particular issue. In regard to climate change, increased media coverage of climate change during the last 10 years has brought about a corresponding increase in public interest, in both negative and positive ways [42]. On the other hand, the media are able to "frame" topics in order to make them more relevant, to suggest if a given issue should be considered a problem, how it should be addressed, and who is supposed to address it [21].

To complement the present condensed review, I wish to present a research that is in progress [43], and that follows up on previous works by Pasquare Mariotto & Pozzetti [16], Pasquare Mariotto & Oppizzi [17], and Pasquare Mariotto & Venturini [18]. This research uses a combination of a qualitative and a quantitative, software-based approach to document how the Italian news media has covered three major climate events that struck the Caribbean, the Southern US and Mexico between August 25 and the end of September 2017. Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria wrought unprecedented havoc to an extremely wide area; millions of people were affected, damage was immense and there was major loss of life. My present research is aimed at determining whether the Italian news media discussed not only the catastrophic events as they unfolded, but also the implications of the three hurricanes in terms of global warming and climate change. In order to conduct my content analysis, I chose two major Italian newspapers, *La Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera*, regarded as representing the “elite media” in Italy, as defined in McCombs [44]. Preliminary results of the research have enabled me to document that, just like was assessed by Pasquare Mariotto & Oppizzi [17] the two news papers seem to have different “agenda settings”: The coverage by *La Repubblica* appears to be more focused on the possible connection between climate change and the three, back-to-back hurricanes. On the contrary, *Corriere della Sera* does not seem to place much emphasis on the possible connection between climate change and the huge climate events. The study will be completed with a comparison with the coverage of the three hurricanes by two UK news outlets, the *Times* and the *Guardian*, respectively. The overall purpose is to define if and how these two major news media highlighted the connection between Harvey, Irma, Maria and climate change [45].

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