

Sustainability | Individual communication

IC - (20916) - VISUALISING COP26: HOW COP26 WAS VISUALLY COMMUNICATED BY UK MEDIA

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Background and objectives

The 2021 Conference of Parties (COP26) in Glasgow was a significant moment in the fight against climate change, and the public mostly get their information about COPs from news media. Visual representations of climate change issues have become an important area of study in recent years (O'Neill, 2019; Pearce et al., 2020). While research exists on the (textual and visual) frames used in media coverage of COPs (Wessler et al., 2016), there have been recent shifts in the visual representation of climate issues, particularly climate protest (Hayes & O'Neill, 2021). This study aims to identify the visual discourse of COP26 in UK news media, and to understand the role that photographer experiences and photo and wire agencies play in constructing that discourse.

Process and methods (for empirical research)

This study takes a mixed-methods qualitative visual content approach to analyse 1,335 images collected from eight leading UK newspapers over the duration of COP26. First, the denotative content of images was coded according to a codebook adapted from Wessler et al. (2016). Then, particularly common or salient visual themes were analysed in more detail using visual critical discourse analysis (Rose, 2016). Leading wire agency photographers at COP26 were also interviewed.

Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)

Findings indicate a consistent visual discourse of COP26 reproduced by leading UK news organisations (though ideological differences exist), with depictions of people being most common. In particular, experiences of photographers (including access issues and professional relationships) and the power of wire agencies in constructing visual discourse is discussed.

Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution

This study provides the first empirical analysis of the images used by UK media publications to visually represent COP26, and, unlike most studies in this area, takes a broader approach to understanding visual discourse, studying not only the images themselves but also the photographers and, crucially, the photo and wire agencies which are responsible for the vast majority of news images.

Palavras-chave : Communication, Climate change, Visual communication, Media