

When I say climate change, what do you see? News Values and Psychological Distance in Climate Visuals of Dutch News Media

Christel W. van Eck, Linda van den Heijkant and Toni G. L. A. van der Meer
Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR), University of Amsterdam

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News media play an important role in communicating the urgency of climate change. Climate journalism faces two major challenges. First, news values influence how journalists select and compose their content to ensure that their reporting is newsworthy. For example, journalists' adherence to balanced reporting has resulted in a disproportionately large stage for climate skeptics, leading audiences to assume that scientists have not yet settled on the issue. The second challenge for climate journalism is how to frame the issue in a way that successfully bridges the psychological distance that people often experience. For example, climate change has often been presented as an abstract issue, far removed from people's lives, which makes audiences feel less engaged with the issue. However, previous research has primarily examined journalistic texts and the effects of texts on audiences. It has largely overlooked the role of climate visuals in news media, while visuals have the power to elicit strong emotional responses. Hence, with two studies, we aimed to analyze the news value and psychological distance of climate visuals in Dutch news media and the effect on the general public.

We analyzed the climate visuals present in the web content of the climate sections of the two major Dutch news agencies, *NOS* and *NU.nl*, between March and September 2023. For the first study, we systematically coded the 372 visuals along the following dimensions: 1) causes versus impacts versus solutions; 2) local versus distant; 3) human versus non-human; 4) scientific versus non-scientific; 5) political versus non-political. For the second study, we conducted a survey among the Dutch general public ($N = \sim 1000$) to test the effects. We purposively selected a sample of visuals that represented each dimension and reached 100% inter-coder agreement about the accompanying codes. First, respondents answered an open question about how they visualize climate change. Second, they assessed the sample of visuals by rating 1-item statements about the news values (i.e. objectivity perception, novelty perception, emotional perception) and psychological distance (i.e. geographical, social, and temporal distance), on a 7-point Likert scale.

Preliminary results of the first study show that the climate visuals mostly communicate the impacts of climate change ($n = 146$), followed by the causes ($n = 42$) and solutions ($n = 37$). Climate change is both represented as a distant phenomenon ($n = 161$) and a local phenomenon ($n = 146$). Most visuals did not include humans ($n = 235$), but some did ($n = 137$). Finally, the majority of visuals were non-scientific ($n = 308$ vs. $n = 62$) and non-political ($n = 331$ vs. $n = 41$). We have not yet conducted the statistical analyses of the second study, but preliminary analyses of the open-ended question show that respondents most often visualize climate change as a phenomenon that is about the dangerous, negative impacts.

Overall, our preliminary results show that climate visuals in Dutch news media present the phenomenon as an issue that is far-away, non-human, and has dangerous impacts. These results raise the question whether climate journalism should rethink their visuals strategy to communicate the urgency of climate change and engage their audiences with the issue.