

Media coverage affects perceptions of climate change

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Climate change will not be taken seriously until the media highlights its significance, say researchers at the University of Liverpool.

Dr Neil Gavin, from the School of Politics and Communication Studies, believes the way the media handles issues like climate change shapes the public's perception of its importance. Limited coverage is unlikely to convince readers that climate change is a serious problem that warrants immediate and decisive action.

Researchers found that the total number of articles on climate change printed over three years was fewer than one month's worth of articles featuring health issues. The articles offered mixed messages about the seriousness and imminence of problems facing the environment.

Dr Gavin explains: "Our research suggests that the media is not treating these issues with the seriousness that scientists would say they deserve. The research company Ipsos-MORI found that 50% of people think the jury is still out on the causes of global warming. The limited amount of media coverage - which tends to be restricted to the broadsheets - means that this statistic is unlikely to alter in the short-term.

"Climate change, therefore, may not be high enough on the media agenda to stimulate the sort of public concern that prompts concerted political action. The media may well continue to focus its attention on health, the economy or crime, thereby drawing public attention away from the issue of climate change.

"This is more likely when resources are stretched, government popularity is on the wane, or where more pressing, non-climate-related issues force the government to direct expenditure or invest its political capital and energy elsewhere."

He added: "Even if the British Government wanted to push climate change further up the media agenda, it is not necessarily in a position to shape the debate that takes place in the media."

Source: University of Liverpool

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