Network news climate change stories rarely report both impact, action

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(Phys.org) —When it involves climate change coverage, viewers don't always get the complete picture from U.S. network television, according to a University of Michigan study.

Major networks—ABC, CBS and NBC—show the impact or actions

taken in climate change stories, but rarely combine the components in the same broadcast to give viewers better coverage, the study shows.

"When information about the threat that climate change poses is not paired with solutions on what can be done in response, individuals may ignore climate messages and be less likely to engage in political action on the issue," said Sol Hart, U-M assistant professor in the Department of Communication Studies and the Program in the Environment.

Hart and colleague Lauren Feldman, an assistant professor at Rutgers University, reviewed 440 network news transcripts about global climate change during a six-year period ending in 2011.

Overall, 60 percent of the broadcasts mentioned the impact of climate change and 59 percent discussed actions that could be taken to address the issue. About 23 percent of the broadcasts discussed both effects and actions together.

Nearly 54 percent of all broadcasts discussed climate change impacts using an environmental frame, 13 percent focused on public health, another 13 percent emphasized economic impact and 8 percent involved national security.

Also, actions to address climate change are most often framed in terms of conflict between politicians and stakeholders on whether to implement an action, rather than how actions may help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the researchers said.

If news audiences believe that a proposed action could ultimately work to adapt to or mitigate climate change, the emphasis on political conflict in coverage "is likely to give the impression that the government will be unresponsive to calls for action and that the likelihood of implementing climate mitigation policies is low," Hart said.

The findings appear in *Science Communication*.

Provided by University of Michigan

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