

Widening the Lens: Developments in Research on Journalism and Environmental Issues

Given the recent rise in media reporting of environment matters including UK flooding and the discussion of disasters and climate change elsewhere, it appeared an appropriate time to bring together researchers to discuss the study of journalism and environmental issues. The event ‘Widening the lens...’ was jointly organised by the BSA Media Group and the News and Journalism Research Group at Leicester on 17th September 2014, to give voice to the latest research developments in this subfield. The gathering hosted presentations across the day on a variety of aspects including theoretical overviews, research studies and practitioner reflections.

Following some introductory remarks from the organiser - Julian Matthews, Anders Hansen opened the event with an authoritative update of research in the field. Speaking first about those research achievements won and those opportunities hitherto to be realised in the field, his talk moved on to stress the importance of integrating analyses of production practices, news outputs and audience reception of environmental communication as part of future scholarship. The reporting of science in the news coverage of environmental problems is a recurring interest in this subfield that James painter explored further in his talk. Focusing on the TV coverage in various countries of the three themed reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), this presentation argued that picture driven narratives of TV news were constructing their delimiting similarities. As also interested in the mediation of the IPCC reports, the last presentation in the first section of papers introduced both TV and web coverage as influencing wider public understanding. Reporting that included the voices of climate sceptics, simplistic news treatments together with generalised and specific accounts of blame were recognised by Neil Gavin as significant for media audiences general (miss)understanding of the issue.



James Painter



Martin Lack



Anders Hansen

The second section of papers developed the theme of voices and perspectives in climate change coverage before widening the focus to discuss those mechanisms that underpin them. The first presenter, Martin Lack, introduced and evaluated various academic definitions of climate scepticism before explaining ambitious research plans for short and long scale research to map its voiced presence across media coverage. Following this, Julian Matthews

introduced the UK politicization of climate change as significant for our understanding of the speaking opportunities offered to interest groups in elite newspaper coverage. His paper discussed how a combination of the (i) elite journalistic logic used to report and (ii) climate change politically framed as a legitimate issue underpinned their increased participation in this reporting. Following this discussion of coverage, Sara Penrhyn Jones examined those events that occurred ‘behind the headlines’ and reflected specifically on alternative media production at the UN Climate Change Conferences. This paper offered rich and detailed observations into the activities of an alternative media producer, including the use of nominal technology to report and the need to negotiate with professional outlooks and requirements when cooperating with environmental groups and journalists.



Neil Gavin



Julian Matthews

The final papers explored representations of the environment offered in non-UK media. Rahma Al Foori introduced findings from a detailed study on the construction of environmental news topics by news producers in Oman. After recognising unique features within this reporting, the presentation moved to introduce the reliance of these journalists on European news agencies and their adherence to particularised laws and production practices as important explanations for news representations. Subsequently, the attention switched to Brazil within the last paper of the day. This account introduced the environmental content in a long running magazine news show in context of recent Federal Laws that now ensure Brazilian media content must reflect environmental topics / education. Employing discourse analysis to examine its representations, Bárbara Henriques identified significant absences in the coverage before offering recommendations on how to develop the educative form of the programme.



Sara Penrhyn Jones



Some participants and presenters



Rahma Al Foori



In sum, all the participants enjoyed the experience to meet and make connections with others researching in this important and interesting area.

A big thank you to everyone involved.

Julian.

Dr Julian Matthews,

Convenor BSA Media Group; Director News and Journalism Group

Follow these links for details on the organising groups:

British Sociological Association Media Study Group -

<http://www.britsoc.co.uk/specialisms/Media.aspx>

News and Journalist Group, University of Leicester –

<http://tinyurl.com/kuc7efx>