

Dissertation

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**Author**                 Crowder, S

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**Climate Change in the Media and  
Public Perceptions of it:**

Investigating the differences between  
Tabloid and Broadsheet Newspapers.

Siân Crowder  
BA (Hons) Geography 2009

### **Signed Declaration**

I declare that the main text of this dissertation is no more than 10,000 words, and is all my own work.

Signed:

Siân Crowder  
April 2009

## **Abstract**

Climate change is a big issue in today's world and holds a potential risk to society, it is therefore important to gauge what the public's understanding of the issue is.

The focus of this study is to try and understand what the public think about climate change being reported in the media and if newspapers influence people's opinions and attitudes towards climate change.

The research carried out consisted of examining several examples of newspaper headlines about climate change from tabloid and broadsheet newspapers and also conducting a questionnaire in the North West of England to find out people's attitudes and knowledge about climate change in the media and the influence tabloids and broadsheets it could have on them.

The study found that most participants thought they had a good understanding of the climate change issue and the most commonly acknowledged sources of this knowledge were school and newspapers. There were some differences between the opinions of broadsheet and tabloid readers; broadsheet readers tended to think that newspaper information was not entirely trustworthy and were aware that newspapers can be very persuasive, whereas tabloid readers appeared more inclined to believe what they read.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Rationale**

The focus of this dissertation is to understand what the public think about how climate change is reported in the media, the researcher is looking to find out if newspaper headlines and images influence people's views on climate change.

The rationale behind this research is that climate change is such a big issue in today's society and has a potential risk to the planet and so therefore it is important to gauge what the public's understanding of the issue is. It is important that the public are properly informed with correct knowledge and so to ensure this it is necessary to find out where the majority of public knowledge comes from.

The study that Leiserowitz carried out in 2004 to see whether watching the film 'The Day After Tomorrow' changed people's attitudes towards climate change showed how people were influenced by the film and this made the researcher interested to see how other media forms could influence people's attitudes. Questions that arose included: How big an influence do the media have over the public's thoughts and ideas? Do different people have different ideas and attitudes because of the type of media or newspaper they are subjected to? Are the public aware of the possible influence the media holds?

There have been many studies conducted into looking at how the media reports on climate change, although many of these have taken place in the USA, newspaper

reporting on the issue has also been specifically looked into, although lesser so, but there is there little research into how different newspapers report different information and what misleading effect this could have on the knowledge of the general public.

## **1.2 Aims and Objectives**

The main aims and objectives of this dissertation are to find out to what extent newspapers influence the public's perceptions of climate change and is the type of newspaper the individual reads an important factor in the strength of that influence.

The principle questions that will be explored are:

- **What is the public's understanding of climate change?**

It will be necessary to question the public to find out what their knowledge of the subject area is.

- **Do newspapers influence the public's perceptions of climate change?**

This will include investigating what the public's perceptions are, how the media reports on climate change issues and then looking at the level of influence that the media has on the public.

- **Is there a difference in people's knowledge and does the type of newspaper that a person reads affect that knowledge?**

This will require looking into any differences between what tabloid and broadsheet newspapers report on and how people interpret what they read.



- **Do the public trust what they read in the newspapers?**

This is important to find out because it may highlight whether a certain type of newspaper appears to the public to be more trustworthy than others and it can then be explored as to whether it is actually more scientifically correct.

### **1.3 Overview of the Dissertation**

This Chapter has given a brief introduction into the topic, the reasons for choosing it for this dissertation and pointed out the aims and objectives that the researcher hopes to achieve. The next chapter is a review of the literature surrounding the topic, it will look at public perceptions of climate change and how the media reports on it. Chapter 3 explains the methodology that was carried out to achieve the aims mentioned in chapter 1 and the reasons for the chosen research methods. The following chapter contains all the results from the data that was gathered, this includes graphs showing questionnaire results and examples of newspaper headlines. The discussion chapter, chapter 5, analyses the data shown in the results and discusses the meanings of it. The final chapter is the conclusion, this includes summaries of the processes undertaken and their findings, also a critical look at the overall dissertation and comments on any limitations or areas for further research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This review will look at the main studies that have been conducted on climate change and the media and the key themes that run through them.

Climate change is a huge global issue that has many books and articles written about it. Climate change is the variation in the global climate of the earth over time. The changes can be caused by the sun and other natural factors or human influences on the Earth.

### **2.2 Public Perceptions of Climate Change**

The public's understanding of climate change varies hugely from just knowing the meaning of simple terms to being aware of the long-term complicated impacts that climate change could have.

In 2005 the Department for Transport conducted a survey to try and find out what public interest and understanding towards climate change was. Their results showed that public awareness of the general issue was fairly high but a more in-depth understanding of the issue varied widely between respondents.

Although the majority of the public do appear to show some concern to the issue of climate change they don't appear to have enough knowledge and understanding of the

subject to be able to change their actions to help in the prevention of it. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2006) recognised this lack in knowledge and have noted that the public need to be educated and informed about the possible negative impacts climate change could have on the world in order for them to change their attitudes and behaviour.

Bord et al studied public perceptions of global warming in 1998 and found that people only tended to find global warming a threat if it was to affect them directly or economically. They did not find it as big or serious a threat as other environmental concerns, such as, air pollution, water pollution or rainforest deforestation. Global warming was also rated as less important and a lower priority in peoples lives when compared against personal and social concerns and goals, such as marriage, income and crime reduction. Climate change has been classed as a 'hidden hazard' (Leiserowitz, 2004), meaning that despite its big potential risk to society it is generally ignored until it becomes a disaster.

A survey in 2007 by the UN Development programme revealed that 54% of Americans believe in taking a 'wait and see' attitude to climate change action, believing that rapid global warming cuts that would immediately impact their lives should be held off for the time being. Similar results were also found in Russia, China and India. This study shows the difference in attitudes to climate change; on one side are the scientists who mostly think climate change is very serious and needs to be dealt with immediately, and on the other is the public who do believe that climate change exists but doesn't rank it as a high priority. Another example of this difference is in a study undertaken by John Sterman, where he asked 212 Massachusetts Institute

of Technology (MIT) students to provide a rough idea of how much they thought governments need to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by to stop the increase of carbon in the atmosphere. Shockingly 84% of the students questioned got the question wrong and greatly underestimated the amount greenhouse gases needed to fall by. As Sterman mentions, this is a worrying outcome considering these students are some of the smartest people in the world. All studies like these emphasise the current problem: plenty of scientific evidence about the severity of climate change but not so much being done politically to combat it.

In 2004 Leiserowitz carried out a study assessing people's perceptions and attitudes towards climate change, he asked them their opinions on the subject before seeing the film 'The Day after Tomorrow' and then again afterwards to see if the film had any impact. In his paper he explained how, before the film was released, there was a lot of media attention towards it as scientists, politicians and other groups debated how scientifically accurate the film was and what political implications it might have. Many predictions for how the public would react were made, some groups thought the film portrayed global warming to be too extreme and that that would mean people would dismiss the issue, whereas others thought the film would scare people into action and force the government to pass climate change legislation. The study tested the idea that representations of risk through popular culture can have a large impact on the perceptions that the public carry, they even have the potential to be more powerful and reach more people than official reports about risks from scientists and the government.

### **2.3 Climate Change in the Media**

The majority of the public learn about climate change and the current issues surrounding it through the world's mass media, as it is an easily accessible source with simplified scientific information that is understandable without a large scientific knowledge.

It has been proven through research that the public learn about science, in particular, climate change, through the media (Wilson, 1995; Bell 1994a).

This gives the media a big responsibility as they are effectively in charge of ensuring the public are correctly informed about the world's issues with climate change and the science that goes with it. In reality though, the media often dramatises and exaggerates stories in order to captivate their audiences and this can have the negative effect of lessening the importance of the actual facts associated with climate change (Wilson, 1999).

Climate change has been theorised about for a long time, even as long ago as the nineteenth century scientists started to hypothesise about what effects burning fossil fuels and releasing more carbon into the atmosphere would have (Arrhenius 1896). But this idea was not picked up as an important issue in the media for a long time; the media first started reporting on global warming around the 1960's but it only really became a big issue in June 1988. This was when James Hansen, a US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) scientist, declared in front of US Congress that he was 99 per cent confident that global warming was here. This

announcement coincided with a very hot summer and drought in the USA and it has been speculated upon that this was possibly the main reason why this time around global warming had become such big news, and had the summer not been so hot Hansen may not have been acknowledged any more than previous reports had (Hertsgaard 1990).

The media often take scientific reports and pick one point or issue out of them and focus on that for their articles, making big headlines and taking something out of proportion, for example when the Stern Report, which largely reported on the economic impacts climate change could have, came out in October 2006, many papers had huge headlines shouting about how terrible things were becoming, but in actual fact the impacts that were reported were over much longer predicted periods of time and a lot more gradual than the articles implied.

A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research looked into how the media reports on climate change and it concluded that visual images used by newspapers and other public-influencing groups are extremely over-used and dramatised to catch peoples attention. There are two possible reasons for this over exaggerated use of imagery, the first is to scare people into action, to do something about climate change, and the second is for commercial and economic rewards for the publishers of the pictures. The report analysed television news and over 600 newspaper and magazine articles to see how the issue of climate change was reported on. They found that the media tended to try and scare the public by using big impacting words and images, but they also found that different newspapers had different views on climate change, some were sceptical, whilst others where “alarmist” (Ereaut, and Segnit, 2006).

The media is a very powerful way to get your information across to the public and so many scientists and people with vested interests use the media as a way of communicating with the rest of the world. In the USA, journalists are now constantly being sent copies of papers and ‘news releases’ on climate change by scientists and officials in order to get their opinions and standpoints out there (Wilson, 1999).

The Climate Report is a record that gets sent free of charge to hundreds of US reporters, in the hope that they will read it and then report back on it in the media. The report is published by the University of Virginia and edited by Patrick Michaels, who is a vocal critic of the current science of climate change. The Climate Report is a big critic of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC is aimed at achieving climate change consensus amongst the world’s leading atmospheric scientists (IPCC, 1992), but agreement is rarely found and Patrick Michaels, along with a few other scientists, still think that climate change cannot be shown to be a true risk and have therefore created their own ways of making sure their message gets across to the public through the media to contradict what the IPCC are saying (Wilson, 1999; Michaels, 1997).

The media is used and manipulated to suit those who want to put forward their message to the world, and through these conflicting arguments being reported, the issue of the threat of climate change swings backwards and forwards with different degrees of severity and therefore the public receive confusing messages.

The media can be quite contradictory when it is reporting on big, long term issues such as global warming. This is because of the arguments between scientists about the

facts of climate change and their interpretations of the results and predictions for the future.

It is very easy to blame the media for misunderstandings about science. The public can blame the media for reporting conflicting information and confusing them, but the scientists also blame the media for conveying the wrong message across to the public. Some scientists say the media doesn't give enough attention to the unanswered questions within the climate change issue and some say that the media only looks at reports and statements by a handful of scientists and they need to be more open to other scientists and reports (Lindzen, 1989; Lashoff, 1990; Nelkin, 1987).

It has been suggested that some scientists may exaggerate or understate global warming risks for their own benefit; Demeritt suggests in 2001 that 'the threat of climate change has been exaggerated by scientists with a financial stake in adopting an alarmist attitude about global warming'.

The media don't just inform the public about the scientific facts, they also influence the way the public perceive things (Nelkin 1987). The words and images that the media use in their reports can deliver a certain message across to the public and can press them into thinking certain ways about the issues.

The arguments over the seriousness of global warming will continue between scientists but whilst the media is still publishing dramatic images to back up their 'scientific information' the public will be inclined to believe what they are told.



Although, the issue remains, are these the facts or are the media just trying to sell newspapers and magazines?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will explain the reasons for the method used to collect the required data in order to achieve the project aims. It will discuss in detail how the research was carried out and why it was done in this manner.

#### **3.2 Qualitative Approaches to Research**

“Qualitative research is essentially a reciprocal process of data collection and data analysis. It does not involve counting and dealing with numbers but is based more on information expressed in words- descriptions, accounts, opinions, feelings. This approach is common when people are the focus of the study, particularly small groups or individuals.” (Walliman, 2006).

Before the 1970s qualitative research was regarded as less useful and less important than quantitative research, but when it began to be used in other disciplines besides the traditional sociology and anthropology throughout the 1970s and 80s it rose in popularity. Previously many mainstream journals concentrated on publishing research articles that were based in the natural sciences and which used quantitative research methods, since then qualitative research has become more accepted amongst journal publishers and editors (Loseke et al., 2007)

Qualitative research studies tend to have smaller sampling sizes and don't necessarily have to be random samples of a population, samples can be selected for certain characteristics. Also the role of the researcher has the potential to be more influential in qualitative research methods and so must be more critically studied in the analysis. Qualitative research can take on many different forms, such as interviews, focus groups or questionnaires, and focuses on language, signs and meanings as well as the obvious data.

### **3.3 Qualitative Research in this Project**

To gain an insight into public perceptions of climate change in the media qualitative research is an important way of assessing people's reactions to the issue. The subject being researched is large and so therefore there is the potential for a lot of data to be collected, there are also many different possible methods for data collection.

To achieve the aims of this Project two research methods have been chosen that collect varying types of information on the subject area. The first is to examine newspaper headlines and stories from a variety of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers; the idea is that this will provide an insight into the type of climate change stories that are reported in the media. The second research method used is a questionnaire to gain an insight into what a portion of the public think about the climate change issue. The purpose of the questionnaire is to gather different ideas and opinions of climate change to understand how aware of the issue the public are.

### **3.4 Newspaper Headlines**

It is appropriate to gather newspaper headlines about climate change to see how scientifically correct they are or if they are pushing the 'scare factor' or even 'playing it down' to make it sound like there is nothing to worry about. It is useful to see what information the public are being faced with before they are questioned on it. As Nelkin (1987) says the media is not just an informative source, they also influence the way that the public perceive things through the words and images that are used.

Newspaper headlines that relate to climate change issues from the past few years will be collected and analysed for any obvious differences in the style of reporting between the tabloid and the broadsheet newspapers, especially if they have different articles on the same issue. Any findings will then be compared with the findings of the questionnaire to see if there appears to be any correlation between what the public think about the differences in styles and what the newspapers actually show.

Headlines from tabloid and broadsheet newspapers will both be collected and analysed. The information the researcher will be looking for in the articles will be any use of imagery, the type of words that are used, the layout of the article, the importance the newspaper appears to have put on it and whether the article appears to be more speculative or scientific.

### **3.5 Questionnaire Data Collection**

When considering how to go about collecting the data needed for this project it was important to examine what information needed to be collected. The researcher decided that only minimal personal information would be required for comparisons, this information being gender, age range and the primary newspaper that they read. It was decided that it would be useful for the participant to gauge their own understanding of climate change and to know where the majority of that knowledge came from. As this project is about the portrayal of climate change in newspapers, the researcher wanted to find out if the public believed newspapers to be a reliable source of scientific information and if they were aware of how influenced they may be by newspapers.

The questionnaires were designed to extract as much information as possible from each participant and were developed with the project aims in mind. The questionnaire began with some quantitative questions aimed at gathering information about the participant to be used for comparison and analysis later. This was followed by a couple of closed questions about the participant's knowledge of climate change, closed questions are useful in giving data that can be easily examined for trends and pictorial data can be produced from it to clearly show what the data represents. The final section of the questionnaire contained more open ended questions about the participant's reactions to climate change issues in the news and their opinions on it, these types of questions enabled the participants to express their own opinions and feelings on the subject.

The questionnaires were distributed across Preston and surrounding areas. Due to the nature of the investigation, the researcher felt that opportunity sampling was the best way of obtaining the largest amount of results for the project. This method does rely on gaining information from the members of the public that are willing to answer questions at the time of asking (Bell, 1999) but some attempts were made to try and select as balanced a sample as possible in order to try and get a true representation of the public. The researcher's colleagues and acquaintances were also used as participants to try and gain as many opinions as possible. The study sample included a fairly balanced range of ages and genders to try and get a true perception of the whole public's feelings.

### **3.6 Explanation of Questions**

A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

This is an explanation of the questions that were asked and what the researcher hoped to find out from each question:

Question 1: Simply to find out the gender of the participant for possible later comparisons.

Question 2: To find out the age range of the participant, also for comparisons. The question only required an age range instead of an exact age in case people didn't want to supply that information.

- Question 3: The purpose for this question was to find out what newspaper the participant most commonly read, this information would then be useful when looking at following answers to see whether the type of newspaper they read appeared to influence their thoughts on climate change.
- Question 4: This question was to assess what knowledge the participant thought they had on the subject.
- Question 5: This question was designed to find out where the participants thought they got the most of their knowledge about climate change from; it is thought that this would then show whether people trusted the newspapers for their knowledge or whether they relied on another source.
- Question 6: This question was used to assess how important the issue of climate change was to each participant and whether they were interested in it, it is a two part question to provide data that could be plotted on a graph but also to provide a place for the participants to give further explanation of their answer.
- Question 7: This question was designed to see how aware participants were of the influence newspapers can carry over people's attitudes and opinions, again this is a two part question, with the second part asking

participants to give an explanation of how they think newspapers can influence them.

Question 8: This question is useful to find out whether participants believe what they read in newspapers and if they think their information is reliable, it also asks them to explain their answers to give more in depth responses.

Question 9: A simple question to allow the participants to make any further comments on any of the issues raised in the questionnaire if they wished to.

### **3.7 Limitations**

There are some limitations to using questionnaires as a research method, for example the participant may misunderstand some of the questions and this may lead to inaccurate answers and not truly represent what the participant's views are.

Participants may also not be sure of an answer and so may respond with what they believe the researcher wants the answer to be, this again would lead to an untrue representation. There can also be problems with the gathering of enough information from the respondents, even with the use of open-ended questions, it is still hard for the participants to answer questions in depth and this makes it difficult for the researcher to gather detailed information and opinions.



Studying newspaper headlines for information on what the media are reporting about climate change is useful for directly finding out the information reported and experiencing what the public have been reading, but limitations of this method include how the researcher interprets the information in the newspapers, as this may be different interpretations than the general public, and so therefore different conclusions could be drawn for what it appears the newspapers are trying to convey.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Examples of Newspaper Headlines

The following are a small sample of newspaper headlines from the past few years, showing headlines about issues within climate change, whether it is recent activity attributed to climate change or future concerns about its potential risks.

The following figures just represent a sample of the headlines that were looked at, as it was not possible to obtain pictures of all of them.

Figure 4.1



Figure 4.1 is an example of a headline from the Daily Express on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2006. It is a very large headline, no imagery is used, the paper is relying on the words to capture the reader's attention, it is supposed to be a shocking headline that scares the public.

Figure 4.2



Figure 4.2 is an example of a headline from the Daily Mirror on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2002, the article is about severe storms across the United Kingdom and strongly suggests that this weather is attributed to climate change, but doesn't actually say it explicitly because there is no proof. The image used on the front page is supposed to shock the audience and scare them about the severity of the storms.

Figure 4.3



Figure 4.3 is an example of a headline from The Guardian on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

Unlike figure 4.2 this front page has no shocking imagery and relies purely on the information given in the headline to capture the reader. This front page headline is just as shocking as the previous one but is much more scientific.

Figure 4.4



Figure 4.4 is an example of a headline from The Independent on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006. This article is about the contents of the Stern Report and what it said needed to be done about climate change. The front page is very eye catching with a large picture of the burning sun and a short headline in the middle of the page that immediately tells you what it is about.

## 4.2 Questionnaire results

The following results will show the opinions of the participants in the questionnaire with regards to climate change. The following graphs show the responses to the closed questions, many of the questions also had open parts to them where participants could elaborate on their answers and express their own views, these will be analysed in the next chapter.

The first three questions of the questionnaire and their responses were as follows:

Question 1: **Are you:**

**Male 43%**      **Female 57%**

Question 2: **Which age group do you fit into?**

<b>10-19</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>20-29</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>30-39</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>40-49</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>50-59</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>60-69</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>70+</b>	<b>3%</b>

Question 3: **Please indicate your most commonly read newspaper:**

**Please only mark one.**

<b>The Times</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>The Star</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>The Sun</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>The Independent</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>The Mirror</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>The Daily Express</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>The Guardian</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>The Telegraph</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>The Daily Mail</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>Other.....</b>	<b>0%</b>

For the purposes of this dissertation the above newspapers have been split into two categories, tabloid and broadsheet, this is so that comparisons can be made between readers of broadsheet newspapers and readers of tabloid newspapers.

The researcher has classed them as shown below:

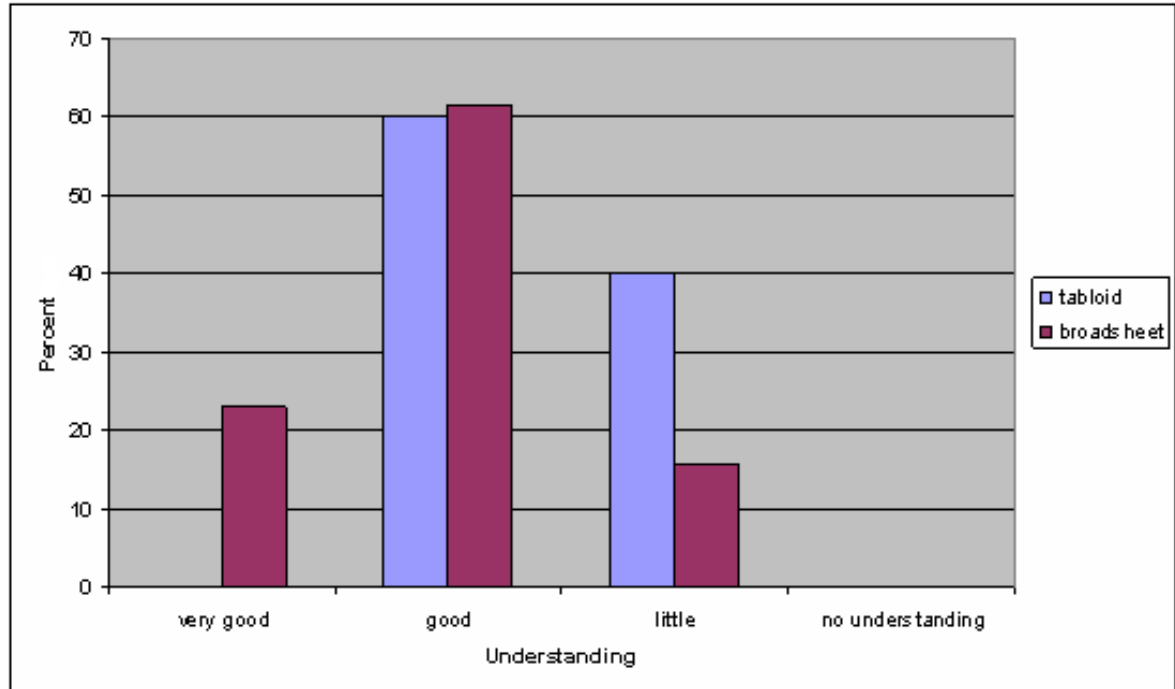
Broadsheet newspapers: The Times, The Guardian, The Independent and The Telegraph.

Tabloid newspapers: The Sun, The Mirror, The Daily Mail, The Star and The Daily Express.

All figures obtained from the questionnaire have been transformed into percentages to make for easy comparison in the following graphs.

Question 4: **How would you rate your understanding of climate change?**

Figure 4.5

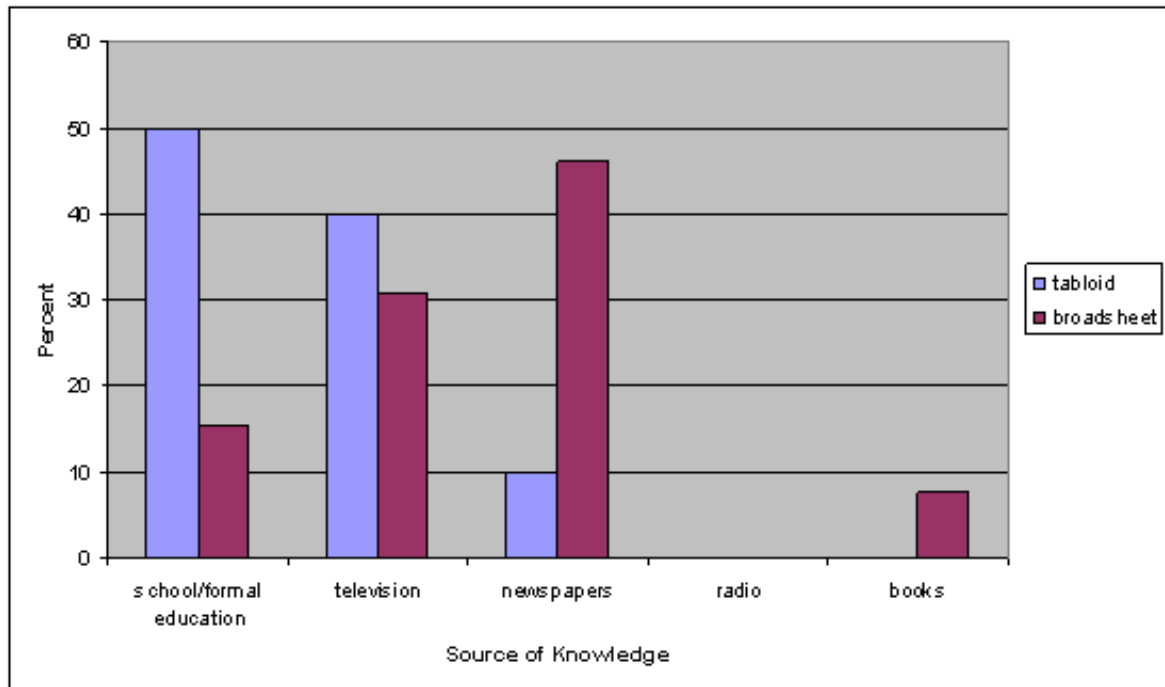


The above graph shows how the participants rated their own level of understanding of the term 'climate change' when given the options of very good understanding, good understanding, little understanding or no understanding. The blue columns represent participants who read tabloid newspapers and the purple columns represent participants who read broadsheet newspapers.



Question 5: **Where would you say the majority of your knowledge about climate change came from?**

Figure 4.6



The graph above shows where participants thought the majority of their knowledge about climate change came from, they were asked to only tick one option and were also given the option of 'other' but no participants suggested any other sources of knowledge. Again, blue columns represent participants who read tabloid newspapers and purple columns represent those who read broadsheet newspapers. No one thought that their knowledge came from the radio, the majority of tabloid readers (50%) attributed school or another form or formal education to their understanding of the issue, whereas the majority of broadsheet readers (46.1%) thought most of their knowledge came from newspapers.

Question 6: **If you see climate change issues on the front page of a newspaper  
what would be your reaction?**

Figure 4.7

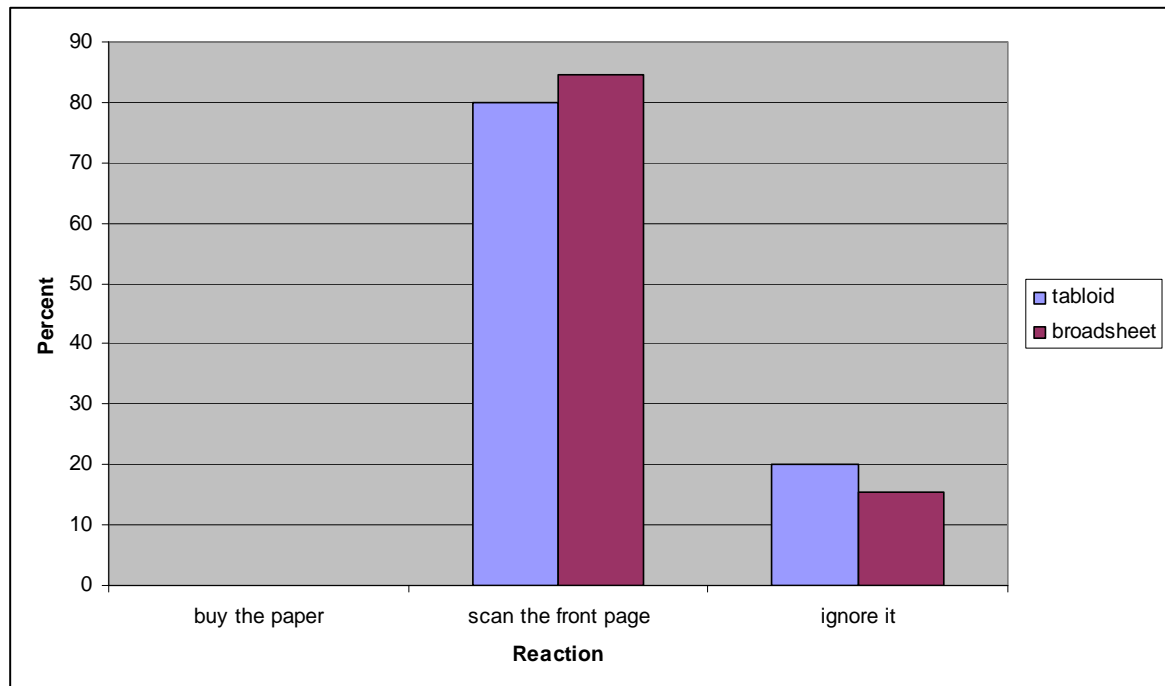
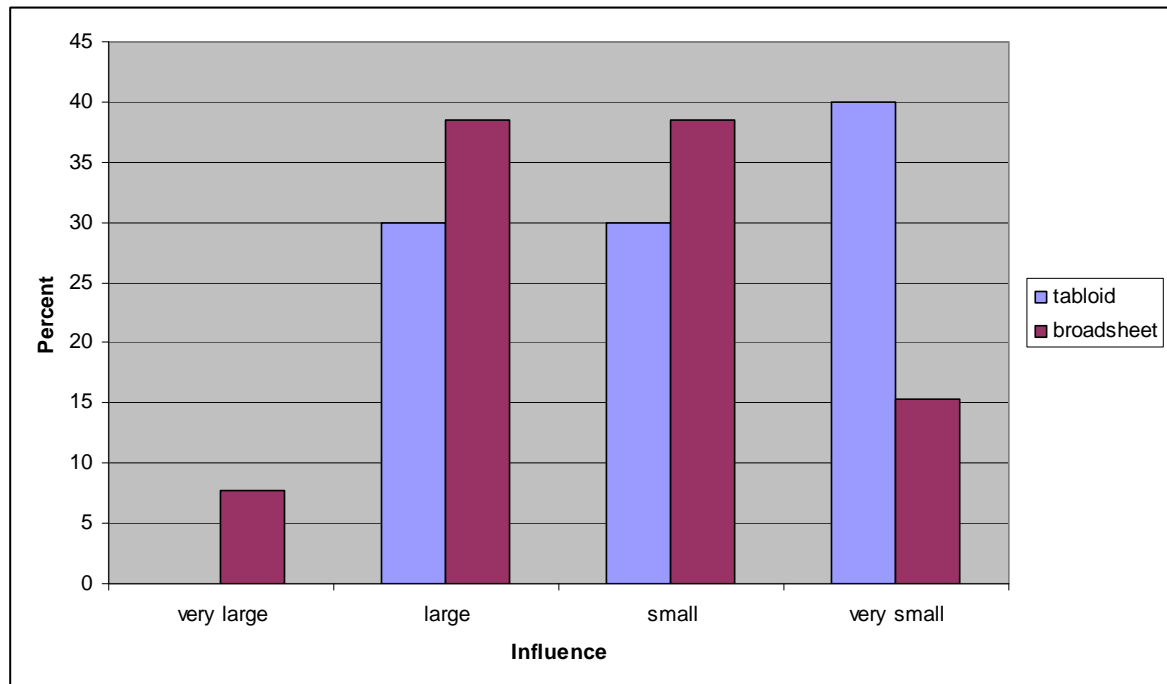


Figure 4.7 is a graph showing what participants reactions would be if they saw a newspaper with climate change headlines on. The blue columns represent tabloid reading participants and the purple columns represent broadsheet reading participants. No one answered that the issue of climate change on the front of a newspaper would be enough to make them buy it. The majority of participants, regardless of what newspaper they read, answered that they would briefly look at the newspaper to find out the key information but then put it back down.

Question 7: **How large an influence do you think newspapers have on what you think about climate change?**

Figure 4.8



This graph shows participants responses about what influence they believe newspapers have on their thoughts on the issue of climate change. The blue columns represent participants who read tabloid newspapers, none of them thought newspapers had a very large influence on what they thought and the majority (40%) thought they only had a very small influence over their thoughts. The purple columns represent participants that read broadsheet newspapers and more of them acknowledge that newspapers can have a large (38.5 %) or even very large (7.7 %) influence over what they think about the subject.

Question 8: **Do you think that the information about climate change in newspapers is reliable?**

Figure 4.9

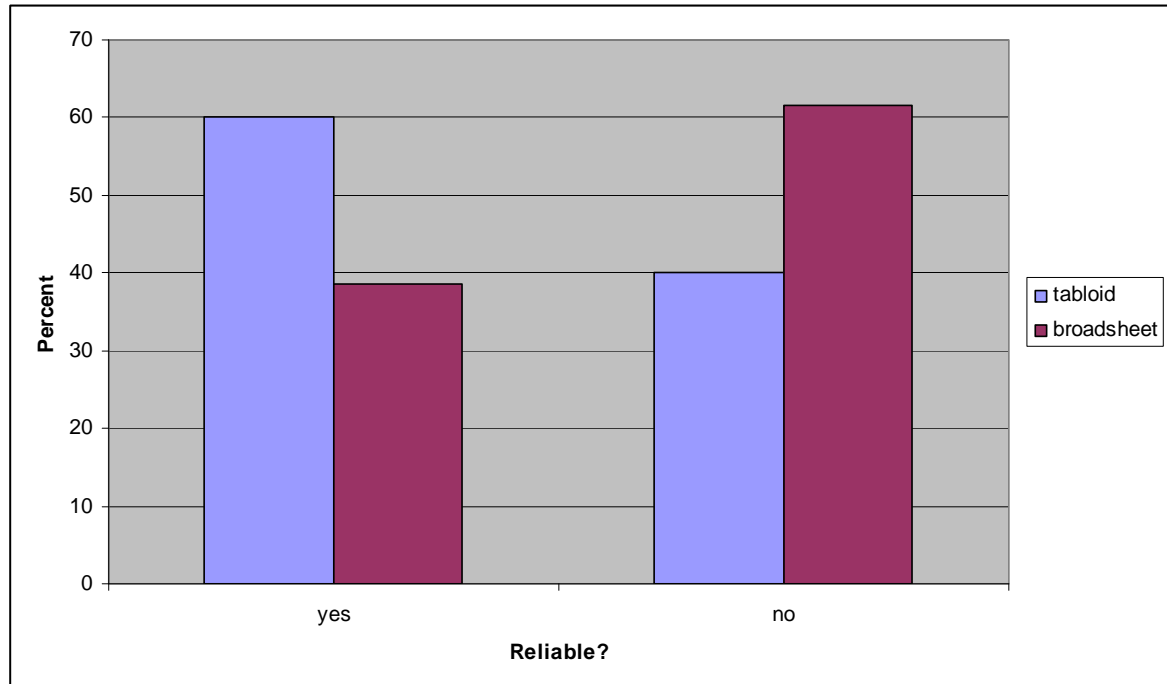


Figure 4.9 is a graph showing participants answers to whether they believed that the information newspapers print is reliable. The majority of participants who read tabloid newspapers (60%), shown on the graph in blue, appear to believe that the information newspapers print on climate change is reliable, whereas the majority of participants who read broadsheet newspapers (61.5%), shown on the graph in purple, seem to think the opposite; they believe that the information is not necessarily reliable.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This Chapter will discuss the responses from the questionnaires that were handed out and what it means in relation to the newspaper headlines shown in chapter 4, it will also explore links between this research and previous research discussed in the literature review. The main objective of the research was to discover if different newspapers influenced what people thought about climate change. Research was conducted that provided qualitative and quantitative data so that there was easily comparable data but also information on how the public felt about newspapers and their influence. This research took on the form of questionnaires with open and closed questions and the analysis of newspaper articles. The questionnaire distributed is available in appendix 1.

In general, the research showed that the majority of participants classed themselves as having a good understanding of climate change, participant's knowledge about the climate change issue tended to come from formal education, television or newspapers. Broadsheet readers thought that the information newspapers printed was not entirely reliable whereas tabloid readers seemed more willing to believe what they read. People who read broadsheets also seemed to be more aware of the influence that newspapers can have over your thinking.

## 5.2 Newspaper Headlines

On the first newspaper headline examined, Figure 4.1, no imagery is used alongside the story; the article just relies on the words to convey the message across to the readers. The headline, in very large lettering to grab the reader's attention, tries to scare the public by using words like 'arctic' to express how extremely cold the winter will be. In smaller lettering, just above the main headline, the paper also mentions how the UK has just experienced a very hot summer and this contrast makes the headline seem all the more dramatic.

In contrast, Figure 4.2 shows the front page of the Daily Mirror almost completely covered with a large shocking image of a car that has been crushed in a storm. The main headline is 'Killer Storm' in very big writing and all capital letters to make it as eye catching as possible, across the top of the picture there is written '3 children crushed as 8 die in gales' this is to show how dangerous the storm was and the mention of children is too evoke sadness in the reader as such young people were affected. The article surrounding the picture does not directly attribute climate change to the cause of the storms but it does strongly suggest that it is the reason for this increase in extreme weather. The imagery used on this particular front page perfectly represents what the Institute for Public Policy Research report (2006) found; that newspapers over-use visual images to catch the public's attention and make stories appear more dramatic.

Figure 4.3, the front page of The Guardian, shows a much more scientific headline than the previous two articles studied. The main visual difference between them is

that the headline lettering is a lot smaller on The Guardian and the wording is a lot more intellectual, for example it refers to warnings from a top scientist. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 contained much shorter and snappier headlines, they also did not contain much more than just the headlines on the front page whereas in Figure 4.3 the majority of the whole article is displayed, the layout of the whole page looks much more professional and gives off a more intellectual impression.

Figure 4.4 is the final front page example and it is a completely different style from all the others, there is no writing on it apart from the headline and it looks much more like the front page of a magazine or journal than a newspaper. The Independent is a newspaper well known for speaking out about climate change issues, through researching this dissertation the researcher has noticed that issues surrounding climate change and global warming are frequently displayed on its front pages and are reported on in depth. This particular front page is covered with a very large image of the burning sun and has a very dramatic headline, 'The Day That Changed The Climate'. There is no other information on the front page, so readers are forced to look inside to find out what the headline is referring to. This could make people more interested in the issue as the headline sounds intriguing and the imagery is very eye catching.

Studying these various newspaper headlines has given an insight into what the public are faced with in the media, and is useful to bear in mind when studying the results of the questionnaire in the following sections.

### **5.3 Understanding of Climate Change**

As figure 4.5 in chapter 4 shows, all the participants thought of themselves as having at least some knowledge of climate change, but only a few classed themselves as having a very good understanding of the issue. This confirms the findings of the Department for Transport survey (2005) that found the public had a general awareness of the issue but more in depth knowledge was needed to change behaviour patterns.

Participants that read broadsheet newspapers classed themselves as having a larger understanding of climate change than tabloid newspaper readers did, 23%, 61.5% and 15.5% of broadsheet readers regarded themselves as having very good, good and little understanding respectively. These figures are much higher than the figures for tabloid newspaper readers, which showed that 60% thought they had a good understanding and 40% classed themselves as having little understanding of the issue; no tabloid readers thought they had a very good understanding of climate change.

This could suggest that broadsheet readers are more educated on the subject of climate change, and could indicate that perhaps broadsheet newspapers have more scientific knowledge in their articles and therefore make the reader feel more informed on the issue.

### **5.4 Sources of Knowledge**

Figure 4.6 is a graph that shows where all the participants attribute the majority of their knowledge about climate change to. The questionnaire gave them six options to choose from, these were: school/formal education, television, newspapers, radio,



books or any other they wished to add. The most popular answer for reader's of tabloids is school or another form of formal education, this could imply that tabloid reader's tend to be younger than those who read broadsheets and so therefore the majority of their knowledge comes from school because more recently climate change has been an important part of the curriculum. Broadsheet readers quote newspapers as their biggest source of knowledge, this could be related to the age factor mentioned previously but it could also be because they pay more attention to the issue when it is in the newspapers and are more interested in it, the issue may also appear in broadsheets more often than tabloids and that could lead to the participants feeling more informed.

The participants were also asked whether a headline about climate change on the front page of a newspaper would make them buy it, and irrespective of which newspaper they read, none of the participants answered that yes it would make them buy the paper. The majority of all the participants stated that they would scan the paper for any major information, as Figure 4.7 shows. This could indicate that the public does not view climate change as a really important issue, as they would not be interested in it enough to buy a newspaper.

Participants reasons who voted that they would ignore the newspaper included that the climate change issue was not something they were interested in, but the most common reason given was that climate change is always in the news and so the participants felt that the articles would have no new information and they were tired of hearing about it, they didn't like how it was always exaggerated and 'apocalyptic'.

The remaining participants, who answered that they would scan the front page of the newspaper for any major information but not buy it, tended to be split in two different directions in terms of their reasons for this reaction. Many participants stated that they were interested in the issue, but they thought it was in the news too much and they were getting bored of it, they thought headlines often over exaggerated and the articles were rarely as interesting as indicated, whereas other participants said that they were interested in the topic, they wanted to know what was happening in relation to it and to see if it was going to affect them personally but they were not interested enough to actually buy the paper.

### **5.5 Newspaper Influence**

Nelkin (1987) reported that the media influence how the public perceive things through wording and imagery and can easily sway the public into certain ways of thinking, question 7 of the questionnaire addressed this issue by asking participants if they thought their opinions were influenced by newspapers and Figure 4.8 shows the results found.

Figure 4.8 illustrates how much of an influence participants believed newspapers had on what they thought of the issues surrounding climate change. The graph shows that no one who read tabloids and only a very small percentage of people who read broadsheets thought that newspapers have a very large influence over their thoughts and opinions. The majority of tabloid readers seemed to think that newspapers only had a very small influence on what they thought, there appeared to be two main reasons for this, the first is that they are naïve and are not truly aware of how

influenced they are, or the second is that they read the articles but are aware that newspapers are not always 100% reliable and so do not let what they read influence them. This question about reliability of newspapers information is important as it has been shown by Wilson (1999) that newspapers and other forms of media are not always trustworthy in what they print as they can dramatise and exaggerate stories to entice their audience in. Tabloid reading respondents thought that newspapers either ‘tend to glorify what is happening in the world or tell you the truth and you can’t tell when they are doing which so you don’t know what to believe’.

The majority of broadsheet readers were split equally; with half thinking newspapers have a large influence and the other half thinking they only have a small influence. This is obviously very contradictory data and this makes it hard to draw any conclusions from it. Reasons for the answers given were explained by the participants, and some of the participants are aware of how unreliable newspapers can sometimes be with scientific information and so make sure they don’t get persuaded to believe everything they read, and so therefore believe newspapers don’t have very much influence over them. Other reasons given for the rest of the majority of participants who thought newspapers can have a large influence were that the participants were again aware of how newspapers are not necessarily reliable and use very persuasive arguments, but this lead this group of people to believe that newspapers can have a large influence because of that persuasiveness, especially seeing as they are distributed widely and read by a lot of people.

When trying to analyse the results to question 7 it is useful to look at Figure 4.9 as this shows what the respondents of the questionnaire thought about the overall

reliability of newspapers. The graph shows that 60% of tabloid readers believed that newspapers were reliable and in comparison 61.5% of broadsheet readers believed that newspapers were unreliable. The data for tabloid readers suggests that, as mentioned above, tabloid readers are more naïve than broadsheet readers in that they trust what they read unquestioningly, and this can back up the data in figure 4.8 that suggests tabloid readers are not aware of how influential newspapers can be.

Overall the results seem to suggest that the public are not that worried about climate change right now, although it has been shown that they are interested in the issue and are vaguely concerned the worry did not seem very immediate, this attitude mirrors what the UN Development Programme (2007) found in America, that people are taking a ‘wait and see’ attitude instead of doing anything about climate change now. With the public not overly concerned by climate change it seems unlikely that the government do more than is absolutely necessary for the time being. As Hulme and Turnpenny (2004) said ‘efforts to mitigate climate change require an interest from all citizens including their motives, actions and attitudes’.

## **6. Conclusions**

### **6.1 Introduction**

There are many conclusions that have become apparent whilst carrying out this research and this chapter will look into those conclusions, explain the findings and make recommendations for any future research whilst also acknowledging any limitations the research encountered.

### **6.2 Findings**

This research has found that the public believe they generally have a good understanding of knowledge on the climate change issue, that knowledge was mostly credited to have come from school/other formal education or newspapers. There were questioning answers found over the reliability of newspapers with the majority of broadsheet reader's not entirely trusting the information that newspapers in general printed, these participant's were also aware that newspapers can try to influence the public's opinion on certain issues by using persuasive language or imagery. From the results, tabloid reader's appeared to be a little less aware of the possible influence newspapers can have and were more willing to believe what they read.

### **6.3 Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study or things that could be adjusted if it were to be done again. One main limitation of the study was that the participants researched

were all from a relatively small area and only covered the North West of England so it is difficult to generalise findings to cover the whole of the population.

It also must be acknowledged that any analyses and conclusions drawn about the results are assumptions made by the researcher and could be interpreted differently by a different person.

Since the research has been carried out, questions about the usefulness of question 6 have arisen. The question asked whether participants would buy a newspaper if it had climate change issues on the front page and was initially included to try and assess how important the issue of climate change was to the participants but the results turned out to not be that helpful and did not contribute much to the dissertation. In reflection a different way of finding out the importance of climate change to the participants would probably have been better, even something as direct as asking participants to rate how important the issue is to them.

The main aim of this dissertation was to find any correlation between climate change knowledge and the type of newspaper a person read. It was found that people who read Broadsheet newspapers thought they had a fairly good knowledge about climate change and they rated their knowledge higher than those who read tabloids, but it is not clear whether the type of newspaper that participants read is the source of this knowledge or if there is something about the type of person that read broadsheets that makes them more knowledgeable about climate change, for example their education.

## **6.4 Recommendations**

Further research that could be undertaken on this dissertation could be to expand the study area to different areas of the country and more respondents. Although as many participants responses as possible were gathered in the timeframe the researcher had for this project, more participants getting involved would improve the study as more results should give a truer picture of the entire population, therefore more time would be an advantage if the study were to be done again.

Another recommendation for possible future research would be to get more in depth background information of the participants involved in the study, especially their educational background, so as to determine exactly what factors influence a participant's knowledge of climate change.

It would also be useful to actually test participant's knowledge of climate change by asking them to explain it or what causes it rather than asking them to judge themselves on their own knowledge because some participants may not have given a true impression.

If all these suggestions were implemented into researching the topic again a much more useful set of results would be available that could be generalised to give an idea of how informed the whole of the UK is on the issue and whether the newspaper that an individual reads has an impact on their thoughts on the issue.

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## **Appendix 1**

## Questionnaire

I am a final year student at the University of Central Lancashire looking into how the media reports the issue of climate change. I would appreciate it if you would take some time to fill out my questionnaire to aid me with my dissertation research. Please tick your answers. Thank you for your help.

**1. Are you:**

- Male                       Female

**2. Which age group do you fit into?**

- 10-19  
 20-29  
 30-39  
 40-49  
 50-59  
 60-69  
 70+

**3. Please indicate your most commonly read newspaper:  
Please only mark one.**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Times       | <input type="checkbox"/> The Star          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Sun         | <input type="checkbox"/> The Mirror        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Independent | <input type="checkbox"/> The Daily Express |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Guardian    | <input type="checkbox"/> The Telegraph     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Daily Mail  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other.....        |

**4. How would you rate your understanding of climate change?**

- Very good understanding  
 Good understanding  
 Little understanding  
 No understanding

**5. Where would you say the majority of your knowledge about climate change came from? Please only mark one.**

- School/Formal education  
 Television  
 Newspapers  
 Radio  
 Books  
 Other (Please state) .....



**6. If you see climate change issues on the front page of a newspaper what would be your reaction?**

- Buy the paper
- Scan the front page for any major information
- Ignore it

Why would this be your reaction?

.....  
.....  
.....

**7. How large an influence do you think newspapers have on what you think about climate change?**

- Very large
- Large
- Small
- Very small

How do you think they influence your opinions?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**8. Do you think that the information about climate change in newspapers is reliable?**

- Yes                       No

Why do you think this?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**9. Any further comments on climate change in the media?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....