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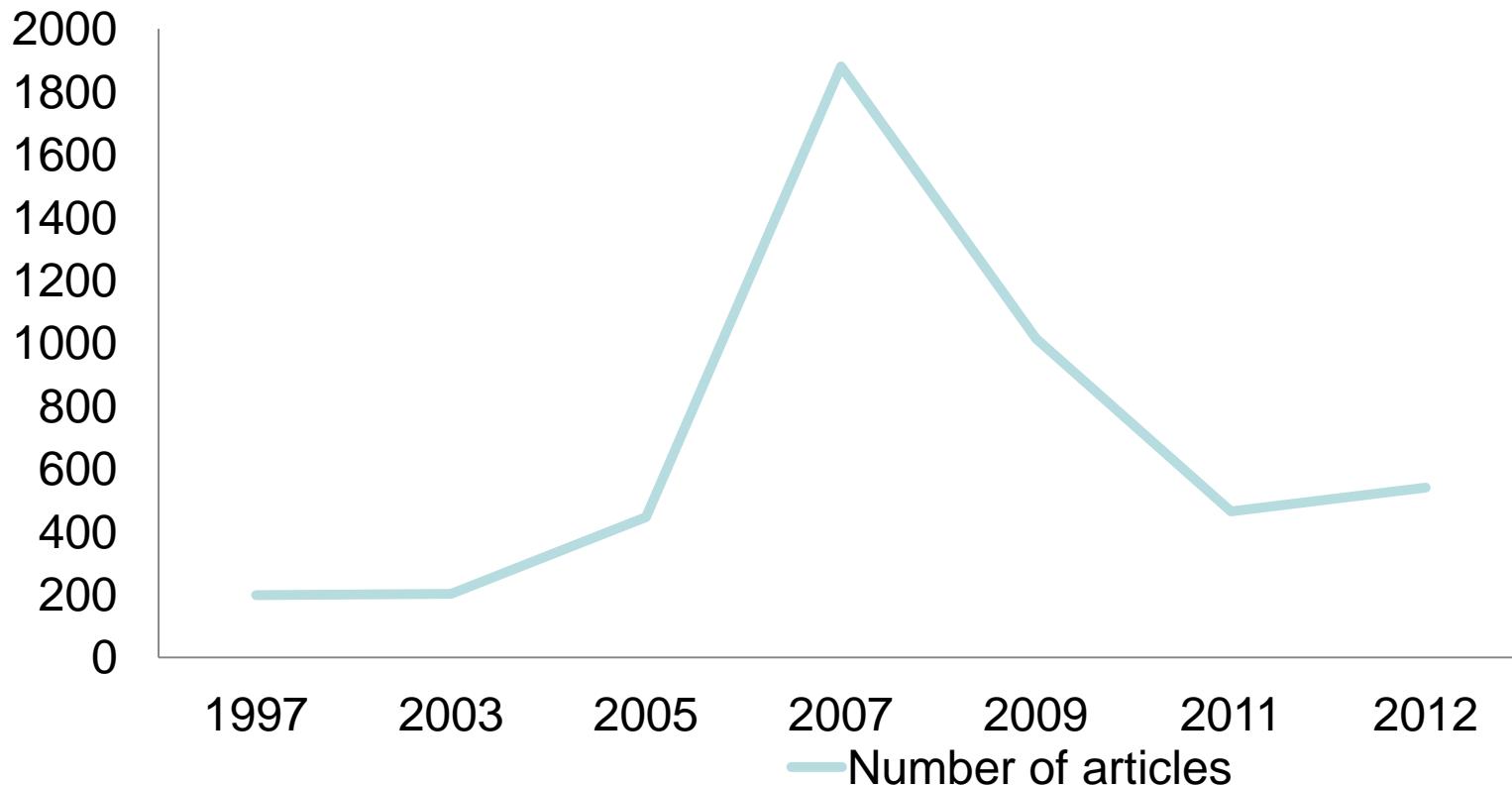
“Up and down” with climate change in the news media

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*Climate from the Nordic Baltic Perspective: Science,
Policy, Economy.*

The Swedish climate coverage 1997-2012



Based on the dailies Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter,
Expressen, Göteborgsposten, Metro

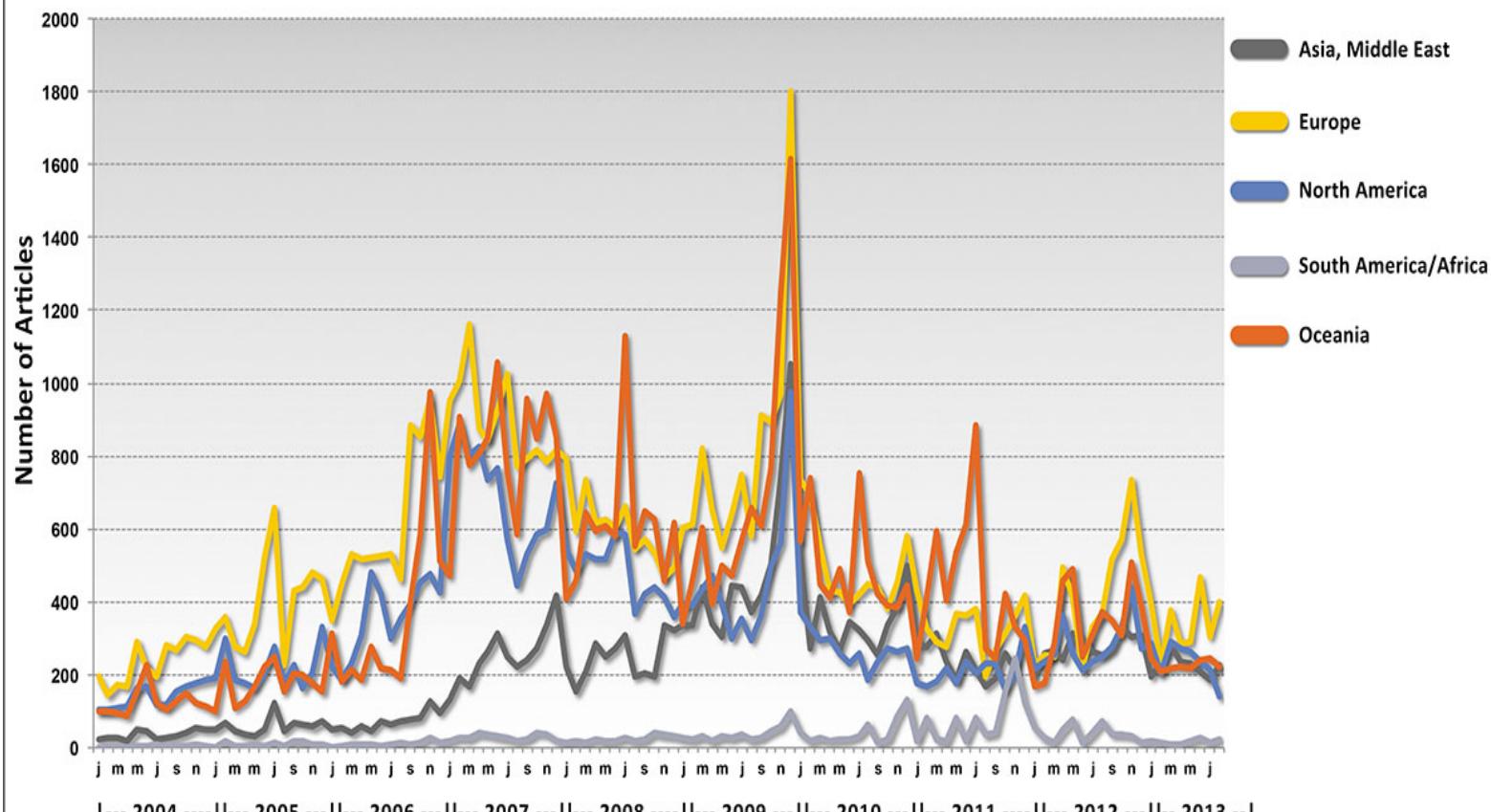
Ulrika Olausson, Jönköping University, 2013



... and not only in Swedish media....



2004-2013 World Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming



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Center for Science and Technology Policy Research (CSTPR), University of Colorado

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What about the content?

- Brought traditional journalistic norms to a head: objectivity, balance, impartiality, truth
- “Balance as bias”



The double role of the media

- Arena for discursive contests between various actors.
- Independent actor with routines and a logic that affect how climate change (and any other issue) will be represented.

Media logic

- The media and journalists work under specific conditions which affect the ways in which events and phenomena will be represented.
- Event dependent
- Difficulties handling uncertainty
- Differences between various types of media and journalist genres.

Media representations of climate change in the Nordic countries

- **Sweden (e.g. Olausson 2009):** Certainty of anthropogenic causes and present consequences
- Anchoring in concrete, observable events: international climate summits, mild winters, hurricanes etc.

**Finland (Lyytimäki 2011): Content analysis
1990-2010 of press coverage. Four major
phases:**

1. Definition phase before Kyoto (1997)
2. Maturation phase after Kyoto
3. Climate hype 2006-2008
4. Phase of leveling off (from late 2008)

**“From screaming headlines to penetrating
background noise”**



Citizens understandings of climate change (Olausson, 2011)

- Do not (or almost not) question the certainty of anthropogenic causes and present consequences.
- Anchor climate change in personal weather experiences.

Three problems with climate reporting: #1 Emotional reporting – emotional fatigue

B: I try to think like this: the thoughts are there, the images are there. But you don't want to... it becomes a burden if you carry the whole world on your shoulders.

(Man, group C)

C: I'm something of an animal lover, so it makes me sad. Unfortunately I don't think that we can do much, because these changes... Looking at these pictures doesn't make me go out and do more. I don't do more for the environment than I would have done otherwise, instead it makes me sad.

(Woman, group D)

B: /.../ scare tactics are used a lot, I think. That's kind of the wrong strategy.

A: After a while you become immune to it.

B: Yes, you get tired of hearing about it, because it's always depressing. After a while you don't give a shit any more.

(Two men, group E)

Three problems...: #2 The business of news

A: I must say, I have my doubts. I find it hard to really trust what they write.
/.../ The media also have a commercial side; they want to sell newspapers, they want people to choose TV4 over TV2. And they know “this isn’t true” and so they put some spin on it. So... it’s frightening to have to say it but, it’s not good in a democracy that we can’t trust the media.

(Man, group E)

B: The news, I’m very skeptical towards it. /.../

A: You have to be “sensacionalista” for the sake of sales, so that’s why.../.../ You don’t know if they just want to boost sales or if it’s true.

(Two women, group K)

A: Well, I’m very critical of the media, of how media handles this. Of course there are many reports about miserable situations, but I think that media to a great extent contribute to this passivity. Because they don’t give people any hope of being able to change things. As soon as you want to do something it gets stuck somewhere in a system that wasn’t designed to handle these problems. So all human beings, everyone in charge, all organizations should assume that we have ten years maybe. What’s our roll then? Media doesn’t start from this assumption, instead media is about making money.

(Man, group O)

Three problems...: #3 Lack of continuity and integration

I. You feel some kind of engagement in any case?

A: Sure, oh yeah, I want to read this, /.../ But there's a risk that afterwards you just turn the page and then you read something else and...

B: ... then it's kind of gone.

A: Yes.

B: I suppose it's still sloshing around somewhere in the back of your mind but it's nothing that you're like "Oh yeah," must deal with this now.

(Two women, group B)

A: You forget quickly. I mean the image disappears pretty fast. It doesn't get permanently etched into you, instead you forget. And it's almost as if environmental issues are perishables. When one of the accidents happens or there's a tsunami, yeah then it's big news... and then X number of days pass and it's forgotten. And then something new has to come along. It's all so temporary somehow. Like there's no long-term thought behind it.

(Man, group E)

A. Yes, it's like I said, of course it has an effect, you start thinking about it. But like I said, just for one day. Do you know what came the day after? /.../ But it should be every day – images about what we are doing to our Earth. But maybe the day after there was a lot more about some reality show somewhere. I actually think that in order for it to influence us for real it has to come out every day so that it can awaken a bit more interest. Not just once in a while.

(Man, group L)

The development of the climate issue in the news media

Yesterday (“Up”): Experts defied scientific uncertainty and explicitly (in the media) connected extreme weather situations and climate change. Scientific certainty and concrete events better suit media logic, and the searchlight of the media focused climate change.



Today (“Down”):(Swedish) climate reporting reduced by half compared with 2009. Other issues (economy) in focus. New challenges for the media? What comes after polar bears and weather? Will the climate issue be integrated in other types of news?



Thank you for listening!