

Article

The Media's Role in Coping with Climate Change: The Perspective of Journalists and Columnists Covering the Subject

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Abstract: Inspired by the Hierarchy of Influence model, the current study seeks to examine the perspectives of Israeli journalists and columnists on the media's role in handling climate change. 25 in-depth interviews were conducted during March–April of 2021 with members of the media who cover the crisis. Findings indicate that the participants believe the media was failing in its mission. Explanations included fierce competition over the news, the exceptional complexity of the topic, and a lack of cooperation on the part of editors. The participants proposed two solutions for this alleged malfunction: reframing the field and providing training to journalists and editors on how to cover climate change.

Keywords: climate change; climate journalism; hierarchy of influences model; journalists' perspective; media's role; Israel



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1. Introduction

Climate change is currently considered the greatest threat the planet and its inhabitants have ever faced (Brüggemann & Engesser, 2017; World Health Organization, 2022). The recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), considered the foremost authority in the field (IPCC, 2023), indisputably and finally refuted the last of the skeptics' claims regarding the scope of the impact climate change is expected to have on our lives. As in every multidimensional large-scale crisis, the media plays (or at least have the potential to play) a central role in managing and coping with the situation. Accordingly, recent decades have seen the emergence of a research field known as "climate/environmental journalism", in which researchers investigate various aspects of the news media's effect on how the fight against climate change is managed (Antilla, 2005, 2010; Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004, 2007; Figueroa, 2020; Rode & Fischbeck, 2021). Like their conduct in other sociopolitical contexts, the media is considered to play a major role in applying pressure on decision makers (Fawzi, 2018; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2011; Walgrave et al., 2018). At the same time, media coverage influences public understanding, risk perception, and behavioral intentions regarding climate issues (Vu et al., 2019). Trying to evaluate the role of the media in such contexts calls for direct attention to the work of relevant journalists: their work routines, their relationships with sources, the pressures they face, and their personal and professional perspectives on the major question at stake (Anderson, 2017; Borth et al., 2021; Boykoff & Yulsman, 2013; Ejaz et al., 2022; Figueroa, 2020; Reese, 2019; Robbins & Wheatley, 2021; Strauss et al., 2021). Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) "Hierarchy of Influences" (HOI) model is an especially useful theoretical framework for examining such questions. In their effort to explain the various forces that shape the journalistic work and the production processes, the authors have suggested five levels of

analysis, from micro to macro, creating a whole picture of this tremendously important realm (Ferrucci & Kuhn, 2022; Reese & Shoemaker, 2016; Reese, 2019).

Israel faces particularly acute climate challenges due to its geographical location in a region already experiencing accelerated warming. Climate models predict the Eastern Mediterranean will warm 1.5 times faster than the global average, with temperature increases of 2.5–3.5 °C projected by 2050 (Alpert et al., 2019). The country also faces an increased risk of extreme weather events, water scarcity, and desertification (Paz et al., 2021). Despite these vulnerabilities, Israel's climate action has lagged behind other developed nations. Unlike most OECD countries, Israel is not evaluated in the Climate Change Performance Index due to its relatively recent accession to the organization and historically limited climate policy framework (Tal, 2021; Wolf et al., 2022). Under the Paris Agreement, Israel committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 26% below 2005 levels by 2030—a target widely criticized by environmental groups as insufficiently ambitious (Rabinowitz, 2020).

The governance structure for climate issues in Israel is fragmented, with responsibilities distributed across multiple ministries. The Ministry of Environmental Protection holds primary responsibility, but coordination with energy, infrastructure, and economic ministries has proven challenging (Tal, 2020). A Climate Bill was first introduced in 2021 but faced significant political obstacles, reflecting the ongoing prioritization of other issues in Israeli governance.

This policy landscape exists within Israel's unique security context, where immediate threats frequently dominate public and political attention. The persistent security challenges create a distinctive media environment where climate issues must compete against security concerns that are perceived as more immediate and existential (Bookman, 2021; Nossek, 2019; Shar & Dekett, 2020). As a natural consequence, media attention to environmental issues, in general, and climate change, in particular, has been extremely poor (Kassirer, 2022). The few studies that have examined climate journalism in Israel have only reinforced the bleak outlook regarding climate change status in the political, public, and media discourse (Kassirer, 2022; Nossek, 2019).

Inspired by Reese and Shoemaker's (2016) "Hierarchy of Influences" model, this work aims to contribute to our understanding of the media's role in coping with climate change, while broadening the limited body of knowledge regarding the media and climate in Israel. Through a series of in-depth interviews, it seeks to examine the perspective of Israeli climate journalists and columnists on how the media is functioning in the context of climate change, in terms of both the actual situation and of what is desirable and possible to achieve. By applying this model to the Israeli context, we can systematically analyze how various influences interact to shape climate coverage in a media system with distinctive characteristics. This approach allows us to situate journalists' perspectives within a broader theoretical framework while identifying which levels of influence are most significant in this specific national context.

1.1. Climate Change and the Media

In recent decades, the scope of research dedicated to various aspects of the media and climate change has been expanding. Many researchers consider the media an effective mechanism for advancing legislative processes and shaping pro-climate policies, whether by raising public awareness and shaping public opinion for the purpose of applying pressure on decision makers, or by applying direct pressure on public leaders and politicians (Borth et al., 2021; Brüggemann & Engesser, 2017). Moving from a focus on covering mitigation-related stories (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007; Liu et al., 2011; Painter et al., 2018; Strauss et al., 2021) to adaptation-related ones, as the crisis deepens and scientific forecasts

become increasingly severe (Borth et al., 2021; Bowden et al., 2021; Boykoff & Roberts, 2007), scholars have been studying the changing roles and influences of journalism and the media in this context. Other researchers find the media's conduct regarding climate change dysfunctional. Antilla (2005) notes how major media outlets in the United States previously presented the scientific stance on climate change as controversial, presenting it together with opposing voices in the name of fundamental journalistic values, as if the two sides had equal merit in relation to a debatable issue. Recognizing the media's power and influence, several researchers have raised the concern that the media may hinder global efforts to limit the damage caused by climate change, especially given the deliberate distribution of false information on social media by elements known as "climate deniers"¹ (Antilla, 2010; Menezes, 2018; Painter et al., 2018).

Numerous studies have focused on analyzing how climate change was represented in various media texts, both visual and verbal, including journalistic content (Antilla, 2010; Schäfer & O'Neill, 2017). Comparative studies have investigated quantitative and qualitative changes in the media's representation of the crisis, focusing on framing, reframing, and the use of metaphors over the years (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004; Boykoff & Roberts, 2007; Lakoff, 2010; Schäfer & Painter, 2021). Based on the rich literature about framing and its influence on attitudes and beliefs, environmental communication scholars have examined its potential impact on changing the public, as well as the political discourse about climate change. In most cases, their conclusion has been that reframing climate change in the media may lead to desired modifications in how people think and talk about it (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007; Engesser & Brüggemann, 2016; Guenther et al., 2024; Nisbet, 2009; Painter et al., 2018).

1.2. Climate Change Journalism

A growing number of studies address professional–organizational aspects of the journalistic work and their implications on how the media functions in the context of the crisis. Many of these studies describe how the global shrinking of news organizations in recent years has diminished the resources allocated for covering the crisis (Anderson, 2017; Borth et al., 2021; Boykoff & Yulsman, 2013; Ejaz et al., 2022; Schäfer & Painter, 2021; Robbins & Wheatley, 2021). Other studies focus on climate journalists' and columnists' perspectives, examining the limitations and pressures they face in attempting to increase the scope of climate change coverage. Some of this pressure arises from within the organization and some is external, coming from various economic and political elements (Anderson, 2017; Borth et al., 2021; Boykoff & Yulsman, 2013; Ejaz et al., 2022; Robbins & Wheatley, 2021; Strauss et al., 2021). An example of a major journalistic challenge stemming from the political reality in the West is that for many years, climate change was perceived as being identified with leftists and liberals. "Climate deniers" and those most vigorously opposing holding humans responsible for climate change were typically right-wing conservatives. Thus, journalists seeking to cover the issue and reach as broad an audience as possible had to be highly creative, and often failed to communicate the scientific version of the crisis to the conservative camp (Hart & Feldman, 2021; Lakoff, 2010).

Another issue receiving research attention is the challenge climate change poses to professional "communicators", as it is a particularly complex topic with abundant scientific data and concepts. Journalists therefore face a dual challenge: they must grasp the complexity of the issue themselves while simultaneously communicating it reliably and effectively to the lay public (Menezes, 2018; Robbins & Wheatley, 2021; Strauss et al., 2021; Their & Lin, 2022).

The tension between the desire to cover climate change accurately and professionally and fundamental journalistic norms has occupied several prominent environmental journalism researchers (Antilla, 2005; Ejaz et al., 2022; Robbins & Wheatley, 2021). For years,

the widespread assumption was that adhering to these norms made climate deniers overly prominent, as [Boykoff and Boykoff \(2004\)](#) found in their groundbreaking study. However, [Brüggemann and Engesser \(2017\)](#), as well as [Strauss et al. \(2021\)](#), point to a significant changing trend. A comparative analysis of articles on climate change from around the world led them to identify a change in coverage trends, primarily a shift from balanced to interpretive journalism, with the researchers contending that journalists now cover climate deniers who oppose the IPCC's principles solely to critically examine their arguments and weaken their stand in the public's opinion.

The common ground to the above-mentioned studies is the focus on different factors that shape the work and production of climate change journalists. The media sociologists Shoemaker and Reese have formulated the "Hierarchy of Influences" model to map the major sources of influence on the journalistic work ([Ferrucci & Kuhn, 2022](#); [Reese & Shoemaker, 2016](#); [Reese, 2019](#); [Shoemaker & Reese, 2014](#)). The authors have pointed out five categories of influence on the micro (individual and routine), meso (organization), and macro (social institution and social system) levels. In recent years, many studies of environmental and climate change journalism have based their analyses on the HOI model, analysing the global north ([Anderson, 2017](#); [Duan & Takahashi, 2017](#)) as well as the global south ([Ejaz et al., 2022](#); [Figueroa, 2020](#); [Siyao & Sife, 2021](#)). The current study wishes to follow this line, focusing on the Israeli case study.

1.3. The Israeli Case Study

The Israeli media ecosystem is characterized by a hybrid nature, combining features that are typical of Western democracies (an overall free press, various commercial and public media outlets, and an extremely vivid digital sphere) with features that are more typical of non-democratic regimes, like the existence of an active military censorship and a journalistic culture which legitimizes cooperative relationships with government and military officials ([Schejter, 2022](#); [Soffer & Yalon, 2015](#)).

The Israeli media, in most of its forms and channels, rarely cover climate change ([Kassirer, 2022](#); [Nossek, 2019](#); [Yaron, 2022](#)). Most coverage focuses on climate-related local and international disasters. Only very few media outlets (i.e., the elite newspaper 'HAARETZ') insist on paying regular, almost day-to-day attention to climate change ([Kassirer, 2022](#); [Yaron, 2022](#)). At the same time, a plethora of environmental NGOs exist, some of which are directly involved in drawing strategic plans in the Ministry of Environmental Protection, while others promote public campaigns and actions to influence decision makers indirectly ([Nossek, 2019](#); [Tal et al., 2013](#)). These groups are digitally active in social networks and the internet and serve as a leading source of information to anyone of interest.

As mentioned above, the fierce competition between the media, public, and political agenda that pits national security against climate change is a leading explanation for the crisis's lack of prominence in both the public and political discourse. It also explains the limited scope of studies devoted to the issue to date ([Bookman, 2021](#); [Nossek, 2019](#); [Shar & Dekett, 2020](#)). In fact, very few climate change journalism studies have been conducted in Israel and most of these analyze coverage patterns of major international climate conferences and other climate events, as well as map general trends in climate coverage in traditional and new media. Some of these studies examined the attitudes of several environmental and climate journalists regarding the coverage of specific events ([Kassirer, 2022](#); [Nossek, 2019](#); [Yaron, 2022](#)).

[Shar and Dekett \(2020\)](#) recognized the severity of the crisis as well as the complacency with which it was met in the public, media, and political discourse in Israel. Consequently, they called for the public's widespread use of social media to raise the issue to the top of

the agenda and obligate decision makers, who are sensitive to public opinion, to drive the relevant political and national processes.

In light of the existing literature, the current study is aimed at exploring how Israeli journalists and columnists who write about climate change perceive the role of the Israeli media in coping with it.

2. Materials and Methods

From March–May 2021, we conducted 25 unstructured in-depth interviews with media representatives who focus on climate change exclusively or as part of a range of coverage and topics.

After mapping the members of the Israeli media (from major and other outlets, traditional and new media) dealing with climate change, the researcher approached all these journalists and columnists and asked them to participate in the study. The response rate was very high; only one journalist declined.

Participants included—in an equal gender division—two scientists with regular environment and climate columns in popular news sites, six journalists covering the environment and climate as their exclusive field of coverage, two editors who write as journalists on the topic, and fifteen journalists who covered environment and climate change issues as one of several coverage fields. (In the months since collecting the data, a journalist who had covered climate as a secondary field has become the first journalist in Israel appointed with the title “climate change correspondent”). See Appendix A for more information on the study participants.

The interviews lasted about 50 min each, on average. Eighteen of them were held on Zoom, both due to taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic and to accommodate for the convenience considerations raised by the participants. Four interviews were conducted over the phone (at the participants’ choice) and three in person, in locations chosen by the participants. The researcher assured the participants that she would refrain from publishing their names and other identifying details that could link them to what they said in the interviews. After obtaining the participants’ consent, the authors recorded the interviews, transcribed them, and thematically analyzed them (Orbe, 1998). We employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2012) six-phase approach: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report. The objective was to look for expressions notably relevant to the research questions. In accordance with the methodology, the author tried to reveal these ideas while being reflexive and paying sensitive and equal attention to all interviewees (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Orbe, 1998). The quotes presented in our findings were selected based on their representativeness of broader patterns, clarity in expressing shared sentiments, and ability to illustrate tensions or contradictions within the data. While we highlight areas of consensus, we also note instances of divergent perspectives, particularly between journalists from different media sectors.

3. Results

This part of the paper presents the key points that arose in the in-depth interviews. It begins with the journalists’ general assessment of how the media was functioning regarding climate change, followed by their explanations for it. The section ends with a series of suggestions they made for improving the Israeli media’s performance in relation to climate change.

3.1. The Israeli Media's Performance Regarding Climate Change: A Resounding Failure

Based on an analysis of the interview transcriptions, the participants all shared the view that the media was failing in its coverage of the crisis: failing in keeping the audience in the know, failing in raising the issue and in keeping it on top of the agenda, and failing in pointing out the responsible players. A journalist from a media outlet extensively covering environmental and climate issues (#13) mentioned the implications of the media's dysfunctional conduct regarding climate change: "There's such a low level of knowledge, awareness and understanding here compared to what we see in other places."

The participants described how the media barely dealt with climate change, pushing it off the news agenda (and consequently off the public and political agenda). A reporter from one of Israel's major financial newspapers puts it this way (#24):

I think we're practically not doing anything about the issue. Getting it in at the end of a newscast?!? I think every newscast should open with climate change, all over the world. . . We've got to get it into our brains, and if the government isn't doing it, then it's the media's job to do it.

Another aspect of the media's failure in covering the crisis from the participant's perspective is how the media avoids identifying the political and financial elements responsible, at the very least, for preventing the implications of the crisis and the efforts to contain it to be addressed effectively. As one of the participants stated (#14),

The focus should be on corporations and governments, not private individuals, and this is one thing not only the Israeli media, but the *New York Times* as well, consistently fail to do, always publishing articles about "how you need to improve", "you", as an individual.

There was a consensus among participants regarding the "distribution of blame" among the various media: commercial television channels were perceived as having the largest gap between potential influence and scope and quality of coverage. One journalist claimed that for the commercial channels, "it's as if climate change doesn't exist" (#25), and another journalist added "It's still very marginal in the strong and major media outlets in Israel, and it's a terrible shame" (#15)

The participants' arguments are congruent with most researchers' harsh criticism of the media (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007; Menezes, 2018; Nossek, 2019; Painter et al., 2018).

3.2. Key Explanations for the Phenomenon

3.2.1. Competition over the News Agenda

Among the participants' explanations for the Israeli media's conduct were the security situation and, later, the COVID-19 crisis—two major competitors for the news agenda. Following the HOI model (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), such pressures may be understood not only as a function of a complex reality, but as an example of the influence which the social system has on the journalistic work, as prioritizing security issues becomes a dominant norm.

The participants largely agreed that the media's minor attention to climate change was not surprising, given its longstanding chronic neglect of environmental issues. This was despite the expectation that we would see a much clearer change in trend given the crisis's increasing intensity. According to a veteran investigative reporter (#3), "In a country like ours, where what's important is the political-security issue and governments change twice a year, the environment has been neglected and pushed aside". Another veteran environment and climate journalist (#14) added.

The discourse in Israel is very "here and now", constantly focusing on "Iran Iran Iran" and housing prices and all of that, and that really keeps the issue removed from the Israeli public, or big parts of it.

This finding has implications beyond Israel, for other regions where security concerns dominate media agendas. As climate impacts intensify, media organizations may need to develop strategies for sustaining climate coverage during security crises rather than treating these issues as mutually exclusive.

The competition for media, public, and political attention—in which the ongoing security situation receives greater priority than climate change, a journalistic phenomenon which Djerf-Pierre (2012) has called the “Crowding-out effect”—was referred to in most studies dealing with coverage of the crisis in the Israeli reality (Alonso Jurnet & Larrondo Ureta, 2025; Bookman, 2021; Nossek, 2019; Shar & Dekett, 2020). However, this occurs in other countries as well. Boykoff and Roberts (2007) wrote extensively about the fierce competition environment and climate issues faced against issues considered far more pressing in the United States. Rauchfleisch et al. (2023), and Stoddart et al. (2023) demonstrated how, over time, climate change was pushed to the margins of the news due to media, public, and political attention being diverted to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2.2. Financial and Political Pressure

Another explanation relevant to all commercial media, particularly television channels, involves financial interests motivating many media outlet owners, which lead them to avoid attacking major polluting entities. Research literature around the world has dealt extensively with the harmful implications of financial and political pressure placed on news editors and directly on journalists who cover environmental and climate issues (Anderson, 2017; Figueroa, 2020; Qusien & Robbins, 2024; Thapa Magar et al., 2024). Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) HOI model treats such pressures as part of the social institutions’ level of influence. Much of the financial pressure comes from major advertisers, who fear that preoccupation with the link between polluting industries and climate change will harm their status. As Boykoff and Roberts (2007) described it,

To create demand for real mitigation of climate change emissions would require the media to repeatedly and insistently call for truly revolutionary changes in society, precisely away from consumption of the products of their advertisers. (p. 34)

Other financial pressure comes from commercial media outlet owners (and/or their partners), in cases where media moguls have holdings in polluting factories. These exploit their direct control over the media to dictate minimal coverage of environmental and climate news to minimize harm to themselves (Boykoff & Yulsman, 2013; Qusien & Robbins, 2024; Schäfer & Painter, 2021). Furthermore, Anderson (2017) notes that the ongoing pressure causes newsrooms in general, and environment and climate reporters in particular, to censor themselves in advance.

The participants included journalists working in commercial media outlets, columnists who publish their analyses on major new sites for no financial remuneration, and journalists working in public or alternative/independent media outlets. Despite the different perspectives stemming from their organizational affiliations, all the participants pointed to the existence and detrimental influence of financial pressures. Some had experienced it directly, while others had heard about the phenomenon from their colleagues. As a reporter from one of the major news sites claimed (#7),

The media’s business model currently relies on those who own the media outlets, who are also tycoons with connections and interests. [Covering] the environment is not in their interest.

A veteran environment and climate journalist related (#14) the following:

Every time I’d broach anything to do with the Haifa Bay or Idan Ofer,² the owner of the oil refineries and so on and so forth, editors would get scared. . . I saw it, and it was

obvious that the newsroom was terrified, that there was self-censorship going on. It was clear to me that there was also pressure.

Along with financial pressure, and as a natural consequence, the participants reported political pressure placed on them intended to influence their coverage of “sensitive” environmental and climate issues. This political pressure comes mainly from the relevant government ministries protesting the allegedly critical presentation of legislative measures that have (or have not) been taken.

3.2.3. Climate Change: Between the Right and the Left

Another political aspect affecting climate coverage can be found on the ideological spectrum between right and left, economic and social values, and conservatives and liberals. This explanation of the Israeli media’s failure in covering climate change may be analyzed according to the HOI model as a combination of the organizational level (i.e., a media outlet’s political agenda), the social institutional level (external political pressures to adhere to a given agenda), and the social system level (following relevant ideologies and norms).

Referring to this phenomenon in the U.S., [Nisbet \(2009\)](#) has called it “the ‘two Americas’ of climate change perceptions” (p. 22). In most countries around the world, environmental struggles, and particularly the fight against climate change, is identified with the liberal left. On the other hand, “climate deniers” who protect polluting industries and object to holding humans responsible for climate change generally identify with the conservative right. This is not the place to try to explain the roots of this phenomenon; however, its very existence makes it very difficult for climate journalists in Israel and around the world to do their job. [Hart and Feldman \(2021\)](#) note the level of caution climate journalist must take when reporting on the crisis, so as not to lose audiences who identify with the conservative right. [Poortinga et al. \(2019\)](#) found that in Israel, like in every European country, individuals’ attitudes toward climate change often reflected their political opinions. Leftists tend to identify more with the urgency of dealing with the crisis, while most right-wing voters see it as a “leftist issue” that has no real effect on their lives.

Most of the participants discussed this sensitive issue. The fact that climate change is identified with the political left makes it difficult for right-wing media to cover it. An environment and climate journalist working for several media outlets (#6) mentioned conversations he had had with right-wing members of the media: “These Bennett³ guys said to me, ‘Yes, but we have a problem talking about it to our public because they’ll say, ‘What? Have you turned into Meretz⁴ or something?’”

Identifying climate change with the left also presents a challenge to media outlets trying to appeal to broad audiences that are concerned about alienating the rightists among them. In this context, a journalist from one of the daily newspapers (#15) said “It’s always seen as a leftist issue, and leftist issues are always pushed aside”.

3.2.4. The Complexity of the Issue

For many years, research literature has been studying the massive challenge faced by those seeking to cover the crisis due to its immense complexity ([de Oliveira & Lewenstein, 2023](#); [Gibson et al., 2015](#); [Robbins & Wheatley, 2021](#); [Strauss et al., 2021](#)). This involves two different yet complementary fronts. First, journalists need to teach themselves the fundamental concepts, key scientific findings, and forecasts that change from time to time, all of which are scientific in nature and phrased in a language foreign to anyone outside the field.

The second front involves making information accessible to the public in a way that is clear and interesting, while still being reliable and sound. Beyond the complex scientific issues, the participants addressed the fact that some climate issues were arguably beyond

readers' understanding, being quite abstract and/or too overwhelming or intimidating, making it impossible to fathom the depth of the crisis. As a prominent climate journalist (#18) described,

It's very complicated to make the public understand the urgency. It's complicated to understand that we're going to die from air pollution and not a terrorist attack. It's complicated to understand that food is expensive and will become even more so due to extreme climate events.

The inherent complexity of the topic is intensified by the chronic shortage of human and other resources prevalent in most Western media outlets (Borth et al., 2021; Menezes, 2018; Schäfer & Painter, 2021). As a result, most media organizations struggle to provide their employees with the necessary training and time for learning the topic. A reporter from an online magazine (#23) said "Everything I know I researched myself. . . I have [had] no specialized training or education and not much of a budget for dealing with the issue".

Furthermore, most media outlets do not allocate specific positions for covering climate change and reporters who are busy covering a series of other topics are required to learn and convey the already complex issue to audiences (see, for example, Strauss et al., 2021). One of the participants (#10) explained "They make you an 'environmental reporter' in addition to your role. The environment is an issue you deal with on top of everything else". A prominent climate journalist (#14) simply stated "We don't have the conditions for producing good climate journalism".

Referring to the complexity of the issue from different angles—journalists' poor scientific background, newsroom practices and routines which restrict journalists' available resources, etc.—once again echoes Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) HOI model, especially regarding the individual, the routine, and the organizational levels.

3.2.5. The Greatest Challenge of All: Editors

To explain the Israeli media's dysfunctional coverage of climate change, the participants discussed several challenges they faced. However, the most salient of these in terms of scope and complexity was that posed by editors. A small group of journalists that included representatives from *Ha'aretz*, *The Marker*, *Globes*⁵ and the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, and an even smaller number of journalists from other media outlets, described how fortunate they were to have editors who recognized the severity of the crisis and its newsworthiness. They described these editors as working to remove obstacles and restrictions from their path and "backing them up" whenever necessary. In contrast, all the other participants described the many obstacles their editors placed before them.

Climate journalism scholars have already recognized the powerful influence news editors have on the media's ability to realize its potential to contribute to addressing the crisis. According to these researchers, while editors carry a lot of weight in every field of coverage, climate change specific characteristics makes them particularly and profoundly influential (Ejaz et al., 2022; Gibson et al., 2015; Qusien & Robbins, 2024; J. Smith, 2005).

How, then, are the difficulties news editors place on climate reporters expressed? According to some of the participants, editors tend to underestimate the public's interest in climate change, while journalists and columnists clearly see that the public's interest is only increasing over time. This argument regarding Israeli citizens' considerable interest in climate change is congruent with several findings of Laslo and Baram-Tsabari's (2019). A study conducted by Borth et al. (2021) also pointed to a significant gap between the public's actual interest in climate change and the perceptions of news editors in the United States.

This assumption on the part of editors results in the highly selective acceptance of ideas and written content. Evidently, the fierce competition prevalent mainly among online news sites leads editors to be extremely selective, as one of the reporters (#23) described: "News

editors have become addicted to clickbait, whatever brings in more ratings, whatever gets people to cry the most.” Another reporter from an independent news site (#24) added: “Editors and publishers only care about traffic. . . It’s very difficult to “sell” to editors. You need to find a very, very special angle to get a green light”. Another reporter from an online magazine #9 attested to similar responses from editors: “they say to me, it’s not interesting enough, it won’t get clicks. . . They blow me off. It sucks”.

According to the participants, news editors do not recognize the magnitude of climate change and are not knowledgeable about the data and forecasts, and this is yet another reason why they have difficulty providing it with an appropriate platform. For example, an environment and climate reporter active in several media outlets shared the following (#6):

There was an environment reporter who worked on Channel 2 [a leading commercial T.V. channel] for many years. She would come to the chief editors and say, ‘I have something interesting’, and they would say ‘Oh no, there she goes again. . . well okay then, whatever, do a story about it.’ And then, at best, they would air it at the end of the news broadcast, or they’d just cut it out. Terrible frustrations.

Gibson et al. (2015) described similar findings from a study conducted among American climate journalists; our reporters also pointed to the challenge of getting their editors on board with climate change coverage. As one local TV reporter told us, editors know that audiences struggle with the issue, so they often take a dim view of extending steady the coverage of it. In fact, one freelance reporter recalled numerous phone calls with editors who have said some version of ‘oh, that sounds like an interesting story, but we already did a climate change story this year’. Therefore, when facing skeptical editors, reporters must come up with strategies for convincing them that ‘these stories can be done in a compelling and interesting way’, as a local TV reporter said (p. 8).

The climate and environment fields suffer from simplistic, lightweight, and ineffective framing due to, among other reasons, editors’ misperception of the crisis and the importance that the public attributes to it. As a reporter working for one of the daily newspapers and an independent news site observed (#23),

I think the branding is wrong. “Global warming” is an abysmal term for it. . . We’re not actually seeing temperatures rise ourselves. . . People don’t know how to attribute it to what’s happening, they don’t understand that it’s a result. . . The issue suffers from bad PR.

Like Ejaz et al.’s (2022) study of climate journalism in Pakistan, which describes how journalists feel all alone on their mission due to the absence of rallying for editorial involvement, Israeli journalists and columnists have stressed a sense of heavy responsibility to push climate change forward, as editors either stay passive or restrain their efforts. Combining the routine level (editorial policies) with the organizational level of influence (to which editors strongly react), the HOI model may once again contribute to our understanding of the complex combination of forces which influence the work of journalists.

3.3. Possible Solutions for Making the Israeli Media More Effective

When asked what they would do differently if only they could, the participants’ answers were divided into two categories. The first consisted of far-reaching and not necessarily feasible solutions, as a leading climate journalist in Israel (#18) said the following: “I would fire all the editors. . . Kick out all the media owners who are driven by personal interests.” Another reporter just starting out in the field in a public media outlet (#5) hoped for the following:

To not be scared about bringing it up, making it heard. There’s no shame in having it be on the cover, even if it’s not “new”. To constantly give it a platform, to make room for it in the first place.

A third climate reporter working in a newspaper highly devoted to promoting the issue (#17) added the following:

It needs to be on television a lot more. Its absence is really palpable. It needs be on the news every single evening, until it becomes a regular part of the agenda. Environmental corruption needs to be exposed a lot more.

The second category of answers consisted of practical suggestions the participants believed would make the Israeli media more effective in covering climate change. Two suggestions were particularly salient: reframing the issue and providing training for journalists and editors.

3.3.1. Reframing

In an aim to increase the appeal of climate change coverage, first in the eyes of editors and later in the eyes of the public (enough for the public to demand its elected officials treat the crisis with the utmost gravity), most of the participants suggested changing how the issue was framed, handled, and presented to the public. A journalist working for a right-wing media outlet (#19) raised a particularly interesting suggestion: highlighting security aspects as part of the coverage and clarifying the connection between national security and climate change, since in Israel the entire issue of security is highly prominent in the media. In her own words.

I think the whole story with the ship and the oil... the reason it received so much coverage, why was it? Because they saw it as a security issue. For two weeks it was all: 'Is it Iran? Is it a terrorist attack?' Suddenly it was important, it has that kind of impact.

This idea echoes the findings and arguments the media and climate researchers have raised in recent years (Flusberg et al., 2017; Guenther et al., 2024; Hart & Feldman, 2018, 2021; Nisbet, 2009; Their & Lin, 2022) and finds expression in an interview that Bookman (2021) conducted with a researcher whose work combined the fields of climate and security.

A broader aspect of reframing involves liberating climate change from the limited and "less prestigious" niche in which it is currently being covered. Many journalists noted the logic and effectiveness of emphasizing the crisis's relevance to each and every leading coverage field, chiefly politics, the economy, and security. A young climate reporter summed it up (#25):

The main thing is simply connecting the dots... We shouldn't necessarily develop a separate field for it but provide the environmental perspective on everything.

This argument is congruent with that of Lakoff (2010), one of the prominent researchers on framing, regarding the most effective way of dealing with environmental and climate issues: "...the environment is not just about the environment. It is intimately tied up with other issue areas: economics, energy, food, health, trade, and security" (p. 76). Similar arguments have been raised by J. Smith (2005) analyzing climate change coverage patterns and decision-making processes within the BBC. Their and Lin (2022) have referred to a rather new journalistic practice, which they call "solution journalism". Journalists adhering to this practice focus their writing on solutions to societal problems, rather than on the implications of those problems. The authors suggest that this journalistic practice has a positive influence on people's engagement with climate change. Thus, using such framing may be another way of utilizing the reframing tool to improve the media's performance in the fight against climate change.

3.3.2. Training

The second solution the participants raised was creating a training system for environmental and climate journalists and editors. The participants' basic premise was that training journalists would make them better professionals at covering the crisis and making

it accessible to the public. Regarding editors, the participants believed training would bring climate change closer to their world, make them aware of its severity, and cause them to use whatever tools they had at their disposal to fight against it. In fact, this is how the participants expressed their great frustration: they found themselves failing to “sell” stories about climate change to editors and convince them it was worthy of a bigger and more respectable platform, knowing that exposing editors to objective information from external professional sources could lead to the long-awaited turnabout. In this context, a reporter from a daily newspaper (#12) argued “providing training about the environment to editors, reporters, and opinion leaders, a type of course [...] Ultimately, if you want to effect change, you need education. Education for journalists and editors”. Another reporter (#17) also referred to the necessity of training news editors: “It’s something that should resonate with everyone. The first step is simply providing information. Most editors don’t know enough.” A senior journalist in the field (#18) described what she would change in the current reality, if only she could: “I’d install normal editors who were aware of the issue and force all the editors and journalists to undergo some training and take some courses”. The same journalist also referred to British and American projects for training members of the media on covering the crisis as a source of inspiration that should be emulated. A similar notion can be found in [Menezes’s \(2018\)](#) and in [Nisbet and Fahy’s \(2015\)](#) studies on the importance of scientific training for climate journalists and editors.

In fact, initial steps in this desirable direction began to take form during this study. One of the participants, a young, vigorous, and highly motivated journalist (#11) has managed to organize a free multidisciplinary course about the climate at Tel Aviv University intended exclusively for journalists and editors. This journalist stated that she sought to reach reporters across a range of fields, not just climate reporters, based on the understanding that climate change was relevant to every field covered. She claimed that “many journalists are still ignorant when it comes to the environment and are not aware of the severity of the crisis”, and added “Part of the solution needs to involve a joint dialogue between reporters about the issue”. In a recent study, [H. Smith and Morgoch \(2022\)](#) described the positive experiences of American science and environmental journalists that had been sent to “training camps” designed to supply them with relevant professional tools. Turning these sporadic initiatives into a widespread phenomenon might indeed be a meaningful step forward.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The study findings indicate that from the perspective of environmental and climate journalists and columnists, a wide gap exists between climate reality and the desirable conduct by the Israeli media in relation to climate change. Popular media, chiefly the commercial television channels, relegate coverage of the crisis to the margins of the news. The fact that in some quality Israeli newspapers, the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, and a few independent news sites the scope and depth of coverage is immeasurably greater than in most other media is cold comfort, given that their audiences are relatively limited and generally already convinced of the severity of the crisis.

Although study participants came from different media outlets, held different positions (mainly journalists and columnists), and had different professional backgrounds (as can be seen in [Appendix A](#)), their observations were extremely similar. Explanations for the Israeli media’s failure to cover climate change raised by the participants were surprisingly similar to those emerging from other Western countries, as evident from the research literature. The complexity of the issue, the financial and political pressure to prevent damage to outside interests, identifying the fight against the crisis with the political left, and competition from news topics considered more “burning” are the reality not only in Israel. Climate change is

essentially a global crisis, and the causes hindering those seeking to provide broad coverage of the issue are common to many countries worldwide (albeit mostly Western countries).

Still, the Israeli arena differs from the Western one in one significant respect. The Israeli media has only started to cover climate change in recent years, initially solely in the context of major international conferences and natural disasters, and currently at a slightly broader scope. However, we seem to have skipped over a highly problematic stage of dealing with the crisis: arguments about its actual existence, who the responsible entities are, and treating climate deniers as legitimate political players. These are central issues that Western coverage of the crisis has dealt with over the years, yet they are practically absent from the Israeli landscape. It is as if we have skipped over these difficult preceding steps and jumped straight to a reality in which the number of climate deniers and skeptics is progressively diminishing, and their voices are now barely heard in the media. As described in the results section, climate change and the fight against it are frequently associated with the political left; however, this does not mean that the voice of (right-wing) climate deniers can be traced over media coverage of the crisis in Israel. This might be another indication of the low profile of this topic on the news media. Future studies should delve deeper into this unique phenomenon.

Based on the understanding that without a significant political involvement nothing will change, and that without the public's involvement decision makers will not change their priorities, climate journalists and columnists seek to ensure climate change does not fall off the news agenda. Regrettably, they must cope with editors who, not sharing this worldview, make stringent approval conditions for investigative climate stories and news items. Furthermore, they do not allocate resources that would encourage better journalism, reinforcing relegation of the crisis to the environmental niche, and they fail to support and back up their reporters, who are exposed to threats and pressure from powerful elements.

A central theme in our findings is the persistent tension between security and climate coverage in the Israeli media. This dynamic represents a concrete manifestation of what [Djerf-Pierre \(2012\)](#) describes as the “crowding out effect”, where certain issues systematically displace environmental coverage from the media agenda. In Israel, this displacement occurs with particular intensity. This displacement operates through several mechanisms. First, at the routine level, breaking security news consistently takes precedence in newsroom decisions. Second, at the organizational level, many outlets maintain dedicated security correspondents but rarely specialized climate reporters. Third, at the social systems level, security concerns are deeply embedded in Israeli cultural identity and news values in ways that climate issues are not.

Interestingly, several participants suggested that this tension might be addressed through integration rather than competition, specifically by reframing climate as a security issue itself. This finding has implications beyond Israel for other regions where security concerns dominate media agendas, particularly in the broader Middle East. As climate impacts intensify, media organizations may need to develop strategies for sustaining climate coverage during security crises rather than treating these issues as mutually exclusive.

The full picture of pressures and limitations on the work of Israeli climate journalists, which limit the potential of the news media to play a constructing role in coping with climate change, as described by this study's participants, can be best understood in light of [Shoemaker and Reese's \(2014\)](#) “Hierarchy of Influences” model. The HOI model is particularly valuable for analyzing climate journalism because it captures the complex interplay of factors affecting this specialized field. Climate coverage faces distinctive challenges at each level—from scientific complexity (individual) to event-driven news values (routines), to resource limitations (organizational), to pressure from fossil fuel interests (social institutions), to political polarization (social systems)—all limiting the

ability of journalists, and the media as a whole, to contribute to the fight against climate change. In this sense, the current study adds to the growing body of research which analyzes climate journalism using the theoretical framework of the HOI model (Anderson, 2017; Duan & Takahashi, 2017; Ejaz et al., 2022; Figueroa, 2020; Siyao & Sife, 2021).

Without a major change of approach on the part of news editors in most Israeli media, we will have to make do with isolated cases of brave, professional, and groundbreaking journalism. Without the necessary changes, we will continue to witness this important and highly influential social institution fail to contribute to the fight against one of the greatest crises the world has ever known.

This study has a few limitations which must be noted: although shedding light on particular case studies has its own contribution to the literature, the current case study is extremely unique. Among other reasons, Israel is a very small country, and the level of familiarity among different elite members is comparatively high. This might make political and financial pressures on the news media more effective. Working in a small market with limited professional opportunities might further limit the news personnel's motivation to bravely go against the interests of affluent players. In addition, the study focuses only on the point of view of journalists and columnists, while stressing the crucial role of editors in this context. Future studies should include interviews with this extremely important group of players. Future research should also expand this work by employing quantitative methodologies, particularly questionnaires, to examine how personal, professional, and organizational factors shape climate journalists' perspectives and daily practices. Building on the "Hierarchy of Influences" (HOI) model, such analyses could delve deeper to explore additional variables, including cultural contexts, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the forces that mold climate journalism across different settings.

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Appendix A

# of Years in the Position (During Study Period)	Areas of Coverage	Type of Organization	Medium	Interviewee's # and Role
10	Global issues	Commercial	T.V.	1. Journalist
7	Northern area news, environment	Commercial	T.V.	2. Journalist
8	Environment + investigations	Public	T.V.	3. Journalist, investigative reporter

# of Years in the Position (During Study Period)	Areas of Coverage	Type of Organization	Medium	Interviewee's # and Role
7	Environment + varied topics	Public	Radio	4. Journalist
1	Environment	Public	Radio	5. Journalist
12	Environment	Public	Radio	6. Journalist, columnist
2	Varied topics, including environment	Mainstream	News website	7. Journalist
2	Science, climate change	Mainstream	News website	8. Scientist, columnist
6	Northern area news, environment	Mainstream	News website	9. Journalist
4	Health and environment	Elite, right-wing	Newspaper (print and online)	10. Journalist
2	Climate change	Elite	Newspaper (print and online)	11. Journalist
4	Environment	Elite	Newspaper (print and online)	12. Journalist
4	Jerusalem area and environment	Elite	Newspaper (print and online)	13. Journalist
12	Environment	Elite	Newspaper (print and online)	14. Journalist
5	Varied topics, including environment	Mainstream	Newspaper (print and online)	15. Journalist
7	Varied topics, including environment	Elite, economic news	Newspaper (print and online)	16. News editor, columnist
3	Varied topics, including environment	Elite, economic news	Newspaper (print)	17. Journalist
5	Climate change	Mainstream, economic news	Newspaper (print and online)	18. Journalist
1	Varied topics, including environment	Mainstream, right-wing	Newspaper (print and online)	19. Journalist
5	Southern area news, environment	Mainstream	Newspaper (print)	20. Journalist
6	Varied topics, including environment	Media criticism	Website	21. Editor, columnist
4	Science, climate change	Mainstream	Newspaper (print and online)	22. Scientist, columnist
2	Environment	Alternative, left-wing	Website	23. Journalist, investigative reporter

# of Years in the Position (During Study Period)	Areas of Coverage	Type of Organization	Medium	Interviewee's # and Role
2	Varied topics, including environment	Alternative, left-wing	Website	24. Journalist
2	Varied topics, including environment	Elite, left-wing	Newspaper (print and online)	25. Journalist

Appendix B

Guiding questions to interviewees

Note: This guide served as a flexible framework for the interviews. The order and exact wording of questions varied based on conversation flow, and follow-up questions were used to explore emerging themes.

1. Background and Experience
 - Could you tell me about your professional background in journalism?
 - How did you come to cover environmental and climate issues?
 - What proportion of your work focuses on climate change?
2. Media's Role and Performance
 - How would you describe the Israeli media's overall handling of climate change?
 - What do you see as the media's primary responsibility regarding climate change?
 - How does climate coverage in your organization compare to other topics?
 - Has there been any evolution in how climate is covered in Israeli media?
3. Challenges and Limitations
 - What challenges do you face when trying to cover climate change?
 - How do your editors respond to climate-related story pitches? To what extent does the editorial system encourage you to pursue this direction? To what extent does it inhibit your attempts to publish stories about climate change?
 - Have you experienced any pressure (internal or external) regarding climate coverage?
 - How does competition for attention with other topics affect climate coverage?
 - What are the distinctive characteristics of this field compared to other coverage areas you have worked in previously, or that you currently cover?
 - How much availability do you have to cover climate change? How could your performance as someone who covers this field be improved?
 - In your opinion, are there specific conditions in Israel that influence the ability of local media outlets to cover climate change? What are these conditions and how do they impact journalistic work?
4. Potential Solutions
 - If you could change anything about how Israeli media covers climate change, what would it be?
 - What resources or support would help you improve climate coverage?
 - Are there models or examples of effective climate journalism you look to?

Notes

- ¹ The term refers to genuine deniers as well as to those who simply wish to promote such perceptions for different interests.
- ² One of the most affluent families in Israel, controlling its largest refining and petrochemicals conglomerate.
- ³ A reference to Israel's right-wing previous PM, Naftali Bennett.

⁴ Left-wing Meretz is considered to be Israel's most eco-friendly political party.

⁵ *Ha'aretz*, *The Marker*, and *Globes* are among Israel's elite newspapers.

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