

Constructing Climate: Media Frames And Ideological Influences On Public Discourse

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Abstract: *This article examines the various cultural contexts in which climate change is portrayed in literature, film, and other media. This study applies sociological theories and performs a thorough literature analysis to examine how media narratives influence climate discourse, shape environmental attitudes, and frame climate change as a crisis or a disagreement. Investigating how different regions, cultural customs, and significant figures portray climate change and how this representation can either reinforce or challenge preexisting beliefs, the study also explores the power dynamics at play in climate storytelling. In order to illustrate how various narratives—mainstream and alternative— influence public opinion and governmental action, this study highlights the disparate representations in the media. It continues by saying that the media has an obligation to combat misinformation, encourage people to take action, and increase public awareness of climate change. Grasping these different imaginations, however, is crucial for tackling the messy interplay of media, the social, and environmental accountability while providing effective climate action. The authors caution against the common tendency to view media narratives as passive reflections of societal norms, noting that media selectively construct and reconstruct global environmental discourse. This construction and shaping have long-term implications for social behavior and public policy.*

Keywords: *Climate change, media narratives, public perception, sociological impact, environmental discourse, political engagement, climate communication, ideology, cultural framing.*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2021), Climate change has been among the key environmental challenges of the century. Evolutionised stories – or cultural narratives – that surround language and media representations of climate change have produced public perceptions that seem at odds with the scientific evidence of rising global temperatures, increasing frequency and intensity of weather extremes, and ecological collapse from bodies such as the IPCC and the UNEP (Boykoff, 2019). How the public views climate change, how politicians discuss it, and how rapidly societies respond to natural disasters are all influenced by media such as movies, television, literature, and online media (Nisbet, 2009).

The various media outlets serve as potent socializers, shaping perceptions of the world and public opinion on climate change (Hulme, 2009). According to Levy and Spicer (2013), popular culture has the capacity to either support the status quo or promote different viewpoints on climate change through the use of narratives, symbols, and visual images. Films like *Snowpiercer* (2013) and *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), which are dystopian in nature, heighten viewers' sense of urgency and dread by dramatizing the disastrous effects of climate change. O'Neill and Boykoff (2011) contrast this with documentaries like

Before the Flood (2016) and An Inconvenient Truth (2006), which aim to educate the public and mobilize action towards sustainability and policy reform.

Furthermore, literature has always been an important factor in enhancing eco-awareness. Literature has offered imaginative spaces for engaging with the complexities of climate change and its societal implications, from the modern environmental movement's 1962 seminal work *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson to more recent cli-fi novels like *The Year of the Flood* by Margaret Atwood and *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson (Ghosh, 2016). By facilitating real-time participation, action, and the distribution of both factual information and disinformation, digital media and social networking sites amplify the debate surrounding climate change (Schäfer & Schlichting, 2014).

The media has the power to raise awareness, but it also runs the risk of spreading false narratives about climate change, such as portraying it as a simple matter that cannot be solved or that it is too complicated to warrant any significant action (Beck, 2015). Media coverage of climate change can be accelerated by political factors, business interests, and ideological proclivities (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007). As such, sociological critical investigation is necessary at the juncture between media and popular culture surrounding climate change, as well as in the interpretations of these narratives and how they construct collective understandings and affect policymaking processes (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005).

This study examines the various ways that climate change is framed in the media, how these framings affect public opinion, political participation, and policy responses, and how cultural narratives function in this process. By examining representations in literature, film, television, and online media, the study seeks to contribute to the current discussion regarding the social aspects of communicating about climate change. Understanding how the divide between political agency, scientific literacy, and public discourse will be closed in relation to climate change requires an awareness of these representations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is evident in recent years that environmental studies are devoted to studying how climate change interacts with popular culture. Media portrayals of climate change, according to scholars Boykoff (2011) and Hulme (2009), have a substantial impact on how the public views the issue, how policymakers react, and how involved society is in environmental protection. Media portrayals of climate change do more than just relay scientific results; they actively shape public perceptions of the problem and the remedies that are considered possible or appealing (Nisbet, 2009; Schäfer & Schlichting, 2014). This section provides a literature assessment on three main themes related to climate change representations: media narratives in India, how social media influences climate discourse, and how Western media portrays the issue.

2.1 Western Media: Apocalyptic Narratives, Crisis Frames, and Scientific Authority

The Western media has been instrumental in creating and spreading stories about climate change around the world. According to scholars (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005; Boykoff & Roberts, 2007), Western media frequently takes on apocalyptic, alarmist, and crisis-driven perspectives, highlighting the terrible repercussions and existential dangers. This trend is clearly visible in prominent Hollywood productions like *2012* (2009), *Snowpiercer* (2013), and *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), all of which portray climate change as an abrupt, catastrophic occurrence with disastrous worldwide fallout. Researchers warn that while these narratives raise awareness and attention, they also have the potential to cause climate weariness, desensitization, and fatalism, which in turn discourages people from actively working towards long-term solutions to the climate crisis (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009).

Western climate discourse has been greatly influenced by documentaries, fictional films, and journalistic reports. Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) and Leonardo DiCaprio's *Before the Flood* (2016) have been credited with increasing climate awareness by translating complex scientific data into accessible

narratives (Boykoff, 2011). On the other hand, Ghosh (2016) and Levy and Spicer (2013) both point out that these types of media tend to provide oversimplified, Western-centric viewpoints and fixate on technical and legislative solutions that might not work for everyone. In addition, scientific knowledge has always taken precedence over conventional ecological wisdom in Western climate discourse, which has a long history of excluding indigenous knowledge systems and alternative epistemologies (Hulme, 2009).

Western media outlets frequently portray climate change as a critical situation necessitating swift action, in line with the scientific consensus (Schäfer, 2012). Having said that, not all news sources use the same framing. It has been shown that conservative-leaning periodicals, especially in the US, minimize or completely reject the idea of climate change, presenting it as an ideologically driven fabrication (Boykoff & Luedecke, 2016; Treen et al., 2020). In areas where climate change is still a divisive political topic, this polarization has contributed to public skepticism and policy gridlock (Farrell et al., 2019).

2.2 Indian Media: Development, Disaster, and Climate Justice Narratives

Indian media tends to portray climate change as a more localized economic and social issue, in contrast to their Western counterparts, who tend to describe it as a planetary catastrophe (Billett, 2010; Narlikar, 2022). India is particularly susceptible to climate-related disasters, including floods, heat waves, and cyclones. However, when these extreme weather events occur, the media tends to focus on them and associate them with larger developmental issues rather than global climate policies (Jain & Kumar, 2019). While this regional perspective helps put climate change in an Indian context, it can also lead to a disjointed view of the problem, with climate change considered a collection of unrelated occurrences rather than a worldwide systemic problem (Sen & Chaturvedi, 2021).

Climate policy is frequently framed in terms of industrialization, economic growth, and poverty reduction in development-oriented narratives that are presented by Indian media (Chattaraj, 2020). There needs to be a balanced approach to environmental protection and economic ambitions in light of India's position as a fast-developing economy, which is reflected in numerous media stories (Gupta, 2019). Indian media frequently presents climate change mitigation as a pragmatic issue necessitating responses that are in line with national objectives, energy stability, and poverty alleviation, in contrast to the Western media's tendency to frame climate action as primarily a political and moral obligation (Billett, 2010).

The incorporation of indigenous knowledge and traditional ecological practices is another prominent feature of Indian climate change discourse. Indian media has begun to highlight community-led adaptation strategies, sustainable agriculture, and water conservation methods used by rural and indigenous communities, in contrast to the prevalent Western narrative that focuses on technological and scientific solutions (Gupta, 2019). These narratives oppose the dominant Western narrative by recasting traditional ecological knowledge as an asset for climate resilience, not an antiquated method of environmental management.

2.3. Social Media: Digital Climate Activism, Misinformation, and Algorithmic Bias

One of the most active and contentious arenas for communicating about climate change is social media, which is changing the way people talk about, share, and act on environmental concerns (Schäfer, 2012). In contrast to centralized, expert-curated news coverage, activists, scientists, and regular people can shape climate narratives on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Pearce et al., 2019).

An important aspect of social media's impact on climate discourse is the way it has brought together youth-led movements and grassroots activism. Global climate activism has been catalyzed by hashtag campaigns like #FridaysForFuture, #ClimateStrike, and #ExtinctionRebellion, with figures like Greta Thunberg becoming internationally famous (Fisher & Nasrin, 2021). These movements illustrate the

generational divide in climate politics, as younger activists are using digital platforms to confront governments, corporations, and older generations for their lack of action on climate change.

However, social media is also associated with certain risks and challenges, especially with the dissemination of false information and climate denialism. Scientifically accurate information on the climate takes longer to circulate and reaches fewer people on social media than climate misinformation (Walter et al., 2021). The public's polarization, distrust, and ignorance about climate science have been exacerbated by corporate-funded misinformation efforts, political propaganda, and algorithmic biases (Treen et al., 2020). The lack of depth, complexity, and scientific truth in short-form content, along with the fragmented and fast-paced character of social media debate, further complicates climate communication (Boykoff & Luedecke, 2016).

Social media enables real-time, small-scale reporting on issues in a time when mainstream media doesn't cover them as much. Social media and messaging apps like WhatsApp and Twitter have been used by citizen journalists and activists to draw attention to environmental injustices, corporate pollution, and government inaction (Sen & Chaturvedi, 2021). Social media's de-democratization of the climate debate has raised both opportunities and concerns, so it is crucial to critically examine how it affects climate awareness and action.

The study discovered discernible variations in how stories about climate change are framed on social media, in India, and in the West. The Western media's tendency to emphasize tragedies and end-of-the-world stories may make people feel more threatened and force them to ignore valid arguments. In contrast, Indian media portrays climate change from a regional perspective and places a strong emphasis on development, disaster relief, and climate justice. Social media's ever-changing landscape makes it both a vital and contentious arena in the climate debate because it promotes activity and disseminates false information.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study looks at how the media depicts climate change using key sociological and media studies theories. These frameworks provide a critical viewpoint for analyzing how climate narratives are constructed, disseminated, and interpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts.

3.1 FRAMING THEORY (ENTMAN, 1993)

Framing theory holds that the media do more than simply report the news; they also shape their audiences' perceptions of the world by emphasizing certain facts while downplaying others (Entman, 1993). Climate change can be framed as a scientific, economic, political, or moral issue, depending on the frame (nisbet, 2009). O'Neill and Nicholas-Cole (2009) found that the western media usually uses alarmist or catastrophic perspectives to depict climate change. Although this framing aids in highlighting the urgency of the problem, it can also make viewers feel helpless, terrified, and disinterested. However, media outlets in South Asian nations, such as India, frequently represent climate change through a development and social justice lens, connecting it to problems of ecological resilience, resource depletion, and poverty (Billett, 2010). Understanding different framing strategies is necessary to evaluate how climate narratives affect political discourse, public opinion, and policymaking.

3.2 Cultural Hegemony and Ideological Control (Gramsci, 1971)

A critical viewpoint on how prevailing ideologies use the media to influence public consciousness can be found in Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). The way that climate change is portrayed by Western media usually reflects neoliberal and capitalist agendas, emphasizing technological solutions, market-based responses, and corporate sustainability initiatives at the expense of alternative perspectives held by indigenous peoples and the South (Levy & Spicer, 2013). According to

Ghosh (2016), this hegemony marginalizes narratives that support climate justice, indigenous knowledge systems, and radical systemic change. It also determines the legitimacy of climate solutions. However, new media outlets in developing nations are challenging dominant narratives and advancing different viewpoints on climate change and resilience.

3.3 Narrative Paradigm Theory (Fisher, 1984)

Storytelling is essential to human communication because, according to Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm Theory, people interpret the world through narratives rather than merely logical arguments (Fisher, 1984). This viewpoint is particularly pertinent to the debate over climate change since conflicting narratives affect public opinion, policy preferences, and moral judgment (Boykoff, 2011). There is a great deal of cultural diversity in climate change stories; indigenous storytelling traditions place an emphasis on ecological interconnectedness and intergenerational responsibility, while Western media frequently depict dystopian, future-focused scenarios (Schäfer & Schlichting, 2014). Another illustration of how narrative frameworks impact climate awareness and impact grassroots activism and policy discussions is the increasing popularity of social media-driven storytelling and climate fiction, or "cli-fi," according to Hosseini et al. (2023).

3.4 Risk Society and Media-Induced Uncertainty (Beck, 1992)

Ulrich Beck's Risk Society Theory states that modern society are more focused on mitigating and controlling global threats, many of which are exacerbated by media portrayals (Beck, 1992). Climate change is one of the best examples of a manufactured risk, where public perceptions of environmental risks are shaped by a confluence of scientific uncertainty, governmental inertia, and media rhetoric (Giddens, 2009). Media portrayals of climate risk have been shown to elicit a range of behavioral reactions, including heightened environmental activism, climate apathy, and denialism (Treen et al., 2020). By using algorithmic and ideological effects to present climate change as both a politically divisive issue and an existential crisis, social media platforms also contribute to a highly polarized risk perception (Walter et al., 2021).

By combining these theoretical positions, this study offers a comprehensive framework for examining narratives about climate change in digital, Indian, and Western media environments. Cultural hegemony emphasizes the power dynamics in global climate storytelling, risk society theory contextualizes the impact of media on public attitudes and behavior, narrative paradigm theory explains the role of storytelling in climate engagement, and framing theory explains how media shapes climate discourse. Combining these frameworks offers a thorough grasp of how different sociopolitical contexts mediate, debate, and internalize climate change, which will inform future research on media influence and climate action.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study conducts a systematic literature review to examine climate change representations in media, with an emphasis on Western and non-Western narratives. Rather than undertaking direct content analysis of films, television, and news media, the study synthesizes current scholarly work on climate discourse in journalism, popular culture, and digital media.

4.1 Data Collection and Analysis

Relevant peer-reviewed sources were chosen from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, with studies spanning 2005 to 2024. The selection criteria centred on: A thematic analysis was done, with findings divided into three major themes: Western media crisis narratives, non-Western resilience-based framings, and social media's involvement in climate debate. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) investigated power dynamics, ideological biases, and cultural hegemonies (Fairclough, 1995; Gramsci, 1971).

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study, utilizing Framing Theory, Cultural Hegemony, Narrative Paradigm Theory, and Risk Society Theory, uncovers notable discrepancies in climate change representations among Western media, Indian media, and social media. These variations illustrate overarching sociological frameworks, encompassing power dynamics, ideological conflicts, and the media's influence on public awareness.

5.1 Western Media: The Production of Climate Anxiety and Political Ambivalence

Western media predominantly depicts climate change as a disastrous, apocalyptic emergency, so supporting a fear-driven narrative (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009). This is in line with the Risk Society Theory (Beck, 1992), in which the media increase feelings of uncertainty by framing climate change as a catastrophic risk that need urgent action. This perspective promotes fatalism and passivity, causing individuals to feel that climate change is an unsolvable problem causing psychological disengagement instead of action (Leiserowitz, 2004).

Moreover, the dominant narratives propagated by the Western media, which are the best examples of Gramscian cultural hegemony, often ignore alternative epistemologies like indigenous knowledge systems and community-based resilience frameworks and prioritize technical and market-oriented solutions (Ghosh, 2016). Documentaries such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), which focus mostly on individual responsibility and policy changes, while soft-pedaling the attacks on capitalism and industrial modernity, create awareness about the climate (Levy & Spicer, 2013).

The politicization of climate narratives is particularly evident in the American media, where reporting is impacted by ideological differences. Right-wing media typically minimizes climate change or presents it as an unproven science, which is an example of how political and economic interests shape climate discourse (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007). This ideological polarization is a reflection of the media's role as a tool of power, influencing public opinion of the climate in ways that uphold the status quo. In this discussion we have understood the interconnected impact of Western media's portrayal of climate change through multiple theoretical lenses. As shown in Figure 1, Western media's role in shaping public perception is influenced by risk society theory, Gramscian cultural hegemony, and ideological polarization in U.S. media.

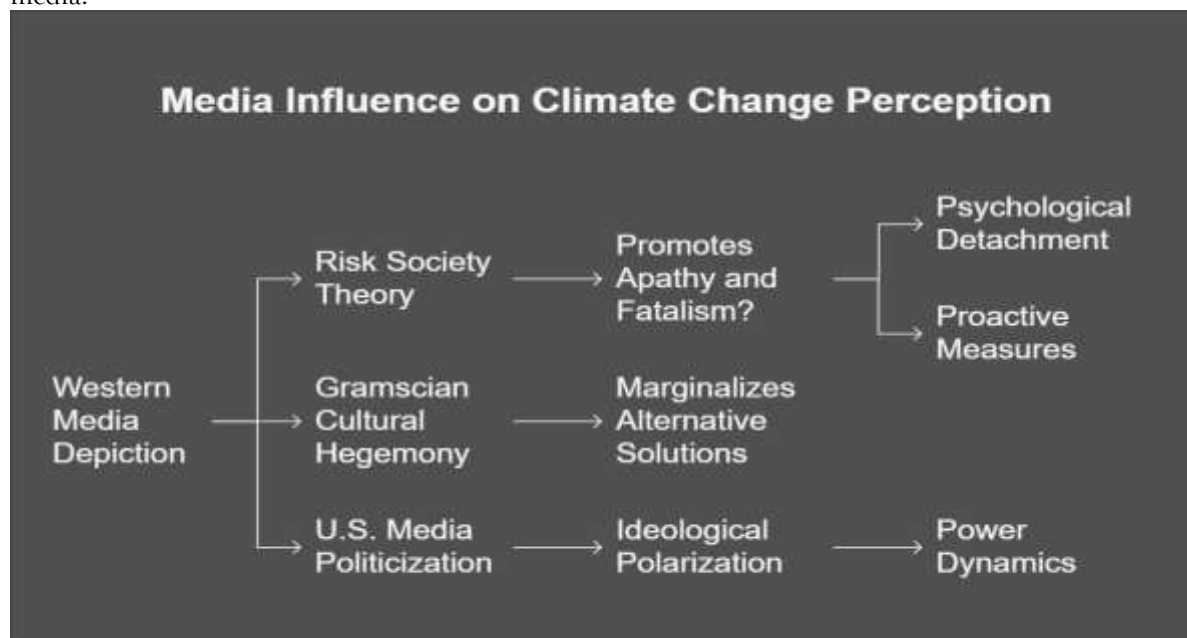


Fig.1: Media Influence on Climate Change Perception

5.2 Indian Media: Developmental Framing and Climate Justice Narratives

Even though both Global North and Global South media have national frames, Global North media tend to frame climate change as an international crisis, whereas those in the Global South (e.g., India, Philippines) are dominated by localized reports that contextualize climate change in terms of economic development, resource competition, and social justice (Billett, 2010). This developmental framing parallels with Narrative Paradigm Theory (Fisher, 1984) in climate change perceived as a part of a wider struggle for development in between environmental sustainability vs economic progress. Several important insights emerged, such as the prevalence of references to climate change alongside urgent, locally-relevant socioeconomic issues such as agricultural stress, extreme weather, and the displacement of vulnerable populations (Jain & Kumar 2019). Unlike Western media's abstract, future-oriented climate storytelling which depicts climate change conceptually as part of a distant future, Indian media brings the reality of climate change into everyday lived experiences, and therefore rests the onus of identifying climate change as an actual problem. Furthermore, indigenous knowledge systems and community-based adaptation techniques are more acceptable in Indian media. The Western emphasis on technological solutions and policy negotiations contrasts with reports on local climate resilience, traditional farming practices, and water conservation (Gupta, 2019). This distinction demonstrates how media portrayals are ingrained in cultural and national contexts, influencing public opinion and policy discussions in unique ways. As Indian media reflects hegemonic power structures, corporate-controlled media mostly plays the role of state echo chambers prioritising economic growth over environmental concerns (Chattaraj, 2020). Despite the growing visibility of climate activism, coverage is often centred on narratives of urbanisation and industrial progress – a reflection of the state-led narrative that prioritises socio-economic objectives over long-term environmental sustainability. As understood in this discussion, Indian media narratives revolve around the localized Narratives, indigenous knowledge and developmental framing. As shown in Fig 2, this reflects the nature of Indian media's climate change discourse.

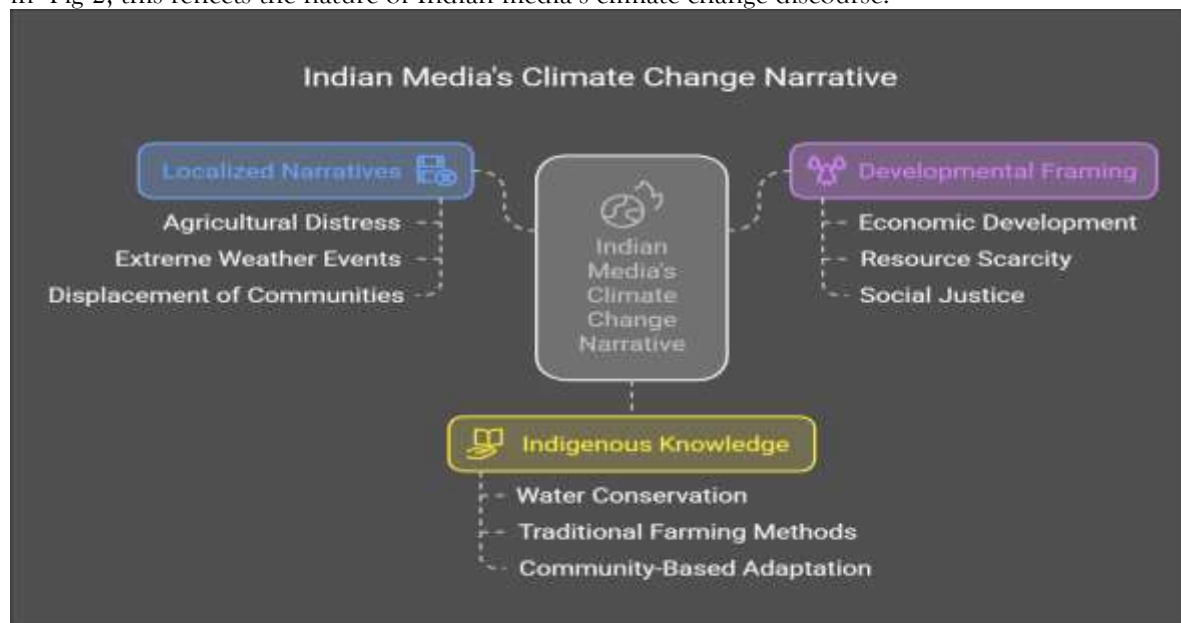


Fig.2: Media Influence on Climate Change Perception

5.3 Social Media: Digital Activism vs. Misinformation

From a communication tool to a platform to challenge hegemonic media narratives and support grassroots climate advocacy. Movements like Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion are instead using digital platforms to convey their messages to audiences across the globe, utilizing decentralized and participatory engagement instead of institutional climate discourse (Fisher & Nasrin, 2021)

But there are also other dangers that come with this democratization of the climate debate, not least as disinformation and climate denial spread. Content that disputes climate change or simplifies the

understanding of climate change is reinforced and encouraged by social media algorithms that reward content that conforms to the ideology of an individual (Treen et al., 2020). It fits into the Risk Society Theory which works by generating uncertainty, enabling differing viewpoints on climate matters (Walter et al. 2021).

Moreover, social media commodifies climate discourse, with businesses, influencers, and companies employing environmental messages for profit-oriented "greenwashing" initiatives. Although internet platforms facilitate action, they are also commercialized environments where climate narratives are influenced by business dynamics rather than solely ethical considerations. As understood in this discussion social media empowers grassroots cultural activism by challenging hegemonic narratives but also amplifies misinformation, echo chambers and green washing due to algorithmic bias and commercialization. As shown in the Fig.3, how the nature of social media's role in climate discourse.

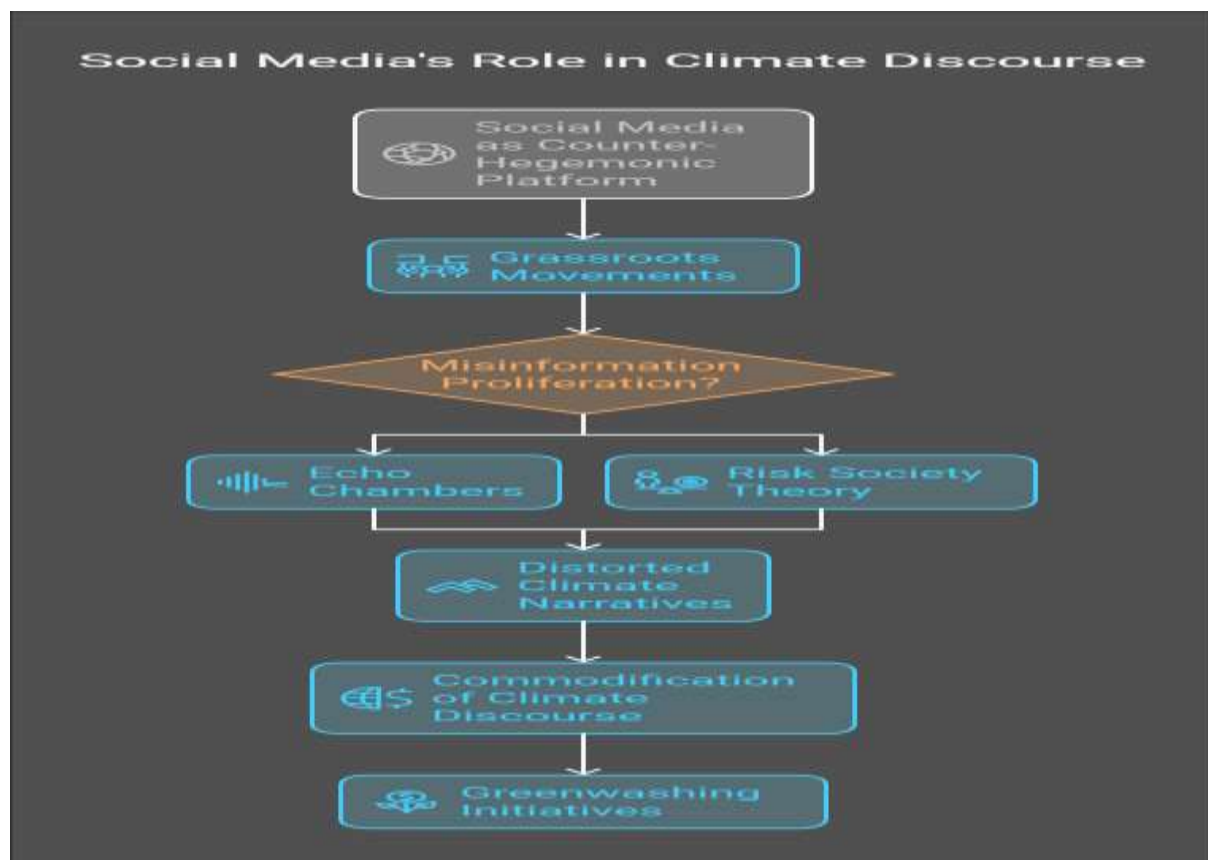


Fig.3: Media Influence on Climate Change Perception

5.4. Comparative Discussion: Power, Ideology, and Media Representation

This comparative analysis elucidates the extent to which the structural forces, ideological contests, and media ecosystems that both enable and challenge existing configurations of power shape climate narratives. Western media portray climate change as an urgent global crisis facing humanity while nevertheless sustaining neoliberal solutions and maintaining an avoidance of systemic critique. While limited by corporate and state interests, Indian media embeds climate change into the frames of social justice and development. While social media allows activists to mobilize and be counter-narratives to production, it also leads to climate discourse commodification, ideological polarization, and disinformation.

They illustrate how climate change is indeed not a scientific issue in the sense of narrowly conceived climatology, but rather a profound sociological phenomenon whereby media representations shape

understandings of the public, speak to political narratives, and reinforce or undermine structures of hegemony. It is vital that we understand these dynamics to create climate communication strategies that are more inclusive, egalitarian, socially responsible and that do not resort to fear-mongering or technocratic solutions, but rather build climate action on local contexts and community solutions. As understood in this discussion, climate narratives are shaped by power, ideology, Western media inclined to neoliberal responses, and Indian media situating climate change in the context of social justice. Social media facilitates activism but also commodification, polarization, and misinformation, thus necessitating inclusive and community-centered climate communication. As shown in Fig 4, the nature of climate change is narrated in western, Indian, and social media.

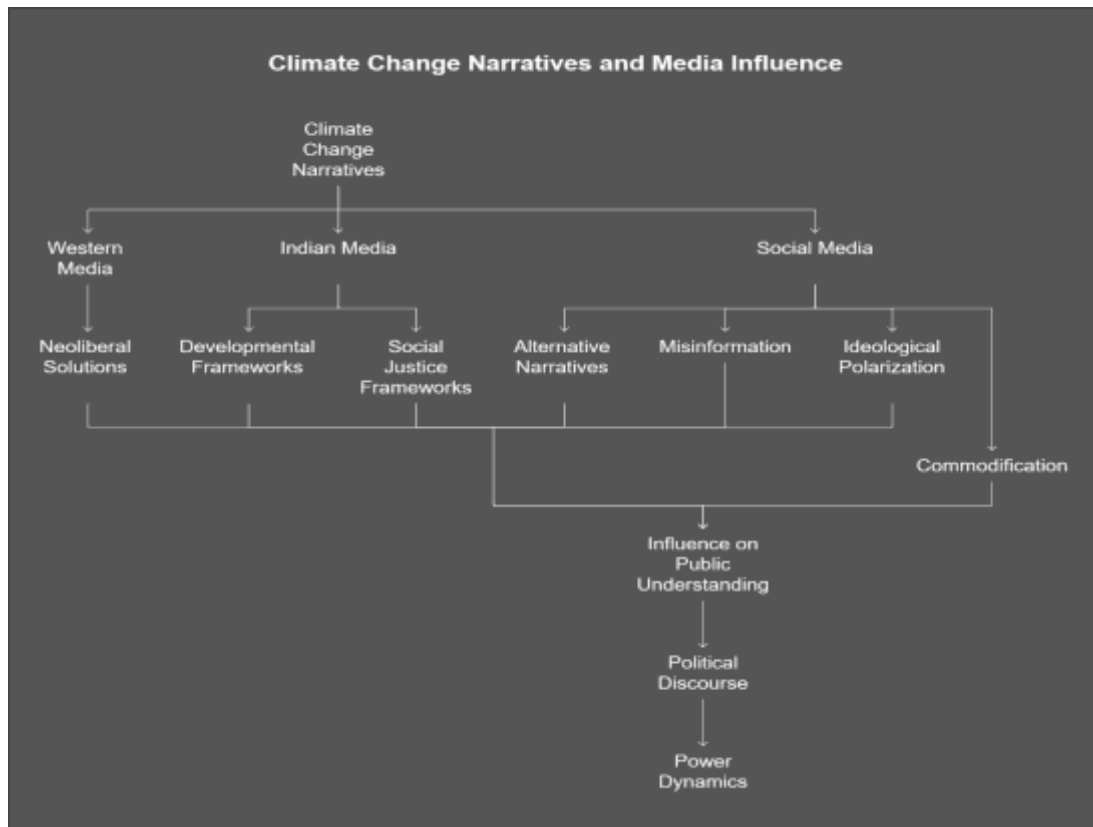


Fig.4: Media Influence on Climate Change Perception

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In highlighting how Western, Indian, and digital media narratives are embedded with unique sets of ideological culture and politics, this study demonstrates how different media landscapes are contrasted confronting three concurrent narratives of politics in the broad cultural, political, and economic contexts of globalization. The Indian media tends to link climate change with the goals of development, social justice, and resilience while climate change is often communicated in apocalyptic and fear-based narratives in the West (Singh 2023). Social media offers a decentralized, participatory platform that enables community activism (for and against) as well as, disinformation dissemination. The way the media presents climate change news affects public opinion, how policy is determined and how social movements are developed.

These representations have sociological implications that go beyond communication studies, clarifying how perceptions of risk, ideology, and power influence societal environmental consciousness. Gramscian hegemony highlights how dominant climate narratives, which usually marginalize indigenous and Global

South perspectives, support capitalist and neoliberal agendas. According to the Risk Society Theory, media can both encourage action and climate fatigue and apathy by increasing uncertainty and existential risks. The importance of storytelling in making climate change ethically compelling and understandable is highlighted by narrative paradigm theory, which influences public opinion and policy discussions.

Even though media narratives are important for raising awareness, they can also spread fear, misinformation, or political inertia, especially when climate rhetoric is overly sensationalized, depoliticized, or appropriated by commercial organizations. The predominance of Western-centric narratives usually leads to oversimplified solutions, ignoring community-based and localized strategies that might be more advantageous in particular sociopolitical situations. The rise of social media activism although effective has also introduced challenges associated with algorithmic misinformation and ideological echo chambers, making coherent climate action a more nuanced endeavor. Research going forward must focus on the audience for climate stories, assessing the reactions of different demographic, cultural and ideological groups to media representations. Social media movements, citizen journalism, and AI-powered content curation represent a progressive cultural shift that may influence environmental consciousness, but more research is needed to establish the degree of these associations, the pathways they traverse, and how they might be expressed through numerous avocado plates across sunny Instagram feeds. Finding successful climate communication strategies relies upon knowledge of how audiences receive, ignore, or challenge climate messaging

Future climate conversations need to strike a delicate balance between a sense of urgency and optimism so as not to give scared or overburdened societies a reason to disengage from tackling climate risks. This demands a diverse set of cultural voices to be brought into the dialogue, especially those of marginalized and indigenous communities, which often are at the mercy of regional climate impacts yet their traditional ecological knowledge and local adaptive capacities are less central to the climate conversation. Policymakers, journalists, and media professionals will need to adopt a broader, more multidisciplinary approach to climate narrative for common accountability and inter-culture harmony. If climate communication is to have any impact, the spectacle and alarmism must yield to solutions-oriented, egalitarian, and aspirational stories. Having a better understanding of the social, political and economic complexities of the interlinked challenges of climate change allows the media to be a trigger.

Acknowledgments: we are acknowledging our Head of the Department Prof Dr. Amritpal Kaur for providing her support we also thanks the Chandigarh University for providing their valuable support.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest

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