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## **An analysis of climate change narratives in the online alternative news of New Zealand**

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## **Abstract**

There is no other issue that is as important as climate change. The public learns about this important issue through the media. While mainstream media have been found to inadequately report on this issue, little research has examined how alternative media frame climate change. On 22 March, Professor Tim O’Riordan, the British Sustainability Commissioner and advisor to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, gave a public speech arguing that climate change must be framed not as a sacrifice or a penalty but as an opportunity to benefit the future. If such a frame were to be found, one might expect to see its presence initially in the alternative press. Using Professor O’Riordan’s arguments as a launching point for this study, this research examines how *Aotearoa Indymedia* and *Scoop*, both independent news websites based in New Zealand, are framing the issue of climate change. This research is essential in understanding the role of corporate media in structuring such an important social issue and how alternative media might fundamentally differ.

There is no other issue that is as important as climate change. This is the urgent warning from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an organization comprised of hundreds of scientific experts from around the world. In their most recent report, the IPCC detailed the impacts and vulnerability of each country on the planet as well as proposals for adaptation and mitigation to potentially reduce some of the impacts ("Ipcc to release "climate change 2007: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability" report", 2007). The predictions were dire and the call for action was direct. The public learned about these warnings from the IPCC through the media. Indeed, the media are the principal source of information regarding climate change. News, specifically, has functioned as an authoritative version of reality that specializes in orchestrating everyday consciousness for the public. This function is heightened when issues are of particular concern and when they are relatively amorphous, such as the issue of climate change. It is because of this public reliance on the media for scientific information that a careful analysis of news content is necessary.

On 22 March, Professor Tim O’Riordan gave a public speech titled, “Not just communicating: How to share hard policy choices about climate change with the public” to an engaged audience at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. In his role as the British Sustainability Commissioner and advisor to British Prime Minister Tony Blair on environmental issues, Professor O’Riordan has a unique perspective on the relationship between media and social change in relation to global warming. He argued in his presentation that climate change must be framed not as a sacrifice or a penalty but as an opportunity to benefit the future (O’Riordan, 2007). O’Riordan said that only through such framing can the public consciousness on global warming shift. He argued that he was beginning to see such “reward” frames in newspaper coverage of global warming around the world. Professor O’Riordan added that New Zealand was poised to lead the global community in regards to climate change given its historical roots in progressive social change and its global image as clean and green.

Using Professor O’Riordan’s arguments as a base for this study, this research examines how the alternative media in New Zealand is framing the issue of climate change. Much research has already examined mainstream coverage of climate change and has found news content to be severely lacking. This research aims to examine content from the alternative press in New Zealand to uncover if there are any important differences. As a case study, this research examines *Aotearoa Indymedia* and *Scoop*. Both

are independent news websites based in New Zealand. Aotearoa *Indymedia* aims to use “media production and distribution as a tool for promoting social and economic justice” (“Mission statement”, 2007). *Scoop* claims to give voice to “perspectives not being addressed through traditional media” (“Introducing scoop”, 2007). This research, to better understand how alternative media represent climate change, is essential in understanding the role of corporate media in structuring such an important social issue and how alternative media might fundamentally differ.

### **Climate Change**

There are several definitions of climate change depending upon the specific terminology used to describe this scientific phenomenon. “Global warming,” “the greenhouse effect,” and “climate change” are terms that have all been used in the media interchangeably. However, they each have specific implications. Global warming is simply the warming of the earth through sunspots, natural and evolutionary shifts, or anthropogenic actions, which are generally traced to rises in methane and/or carbon dioxide. Conversely, the greenhouse effect is a natural process in which gases, such as water vapor, nitrous oxide, methane and carbon dioxide, trap energy from the sun. Other planets naturally have greenhouse effects. On earth, this phenomenon keeps the surface temperature anywhere from 25 to 60 Celsius degrees cooler than it would otherwise be without these important gases trapping energy from the sun (“The greenhouse effect”, 1995).

Climate change is a more encompassing definition of this scientific phenomenon (Dispensa & Brulle, 2003). Due to the complex interplay of eco-climates around the globe with gases trapped in the atmosphere, the term climate change encapsulates potential conflicting consequences such as a sea-level rise coupled with more severe droughts in some areas; an increase in ‘extreme’ weather events as well as prolonged drops and rises in temperature elsewhere; the extinction of several species combined with the proliferation of other insects (Duncan, 2006). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has found that ‘climate change’ is due to human activities (Black, 2007). Put broadly, climate change refers to the “proposition that human activities are altering the composition of the planet’s atmosphere to a degree sufficient to affect the natural processes that play fundamental roles in shaping global climate” (Trumbo, 1996, p. 273).

The IPCC report for climate change in New Zealand in particular, is not promising. The IPCC report states that since 1950 the mean temperature in New Zealand has increased by 0.4 degrees; there are between 10 and 20 fewer frosts each year; the sea level has risen 70mm; and the country's alpine ice has dropped by a quarter ("Climate change 2007", 2007). The IPCC projects that surrounding seas could rise as much as a half a meter in some areas; air temperature could increase up to 3 degrees; there will be more droughts in the east of the country and more rain in the west; and the country will be exposed to more pests and agriculture diseases. These results led Dr Jim Salinger from the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research to conclude that "the potential impacts of climate change for New Zealand are likely to be substantial without further adaptation" (National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, 2007).

### **Mainstream Coverage of Climate Change**

The news media is an integral source of knowledge about climate change (Wilson, 1995). The media are a central component in constructing the social world that surrounds the people, events and places that we call reality (Stein, 1972). The public depend upon the media, especially in relation to environmental risks (Hannigan, 1995). The media therefore has great power in democratic societies because of the dependence that the public places on them for necessary information (Gilens & Hertzman, 2000).

News about science has steadily increased over the last century (Lester, 1995). However, the coverage is often confusing or outright inaccurate (Reed, 2002). Previous research has argued that the historical lack of quality in science journalism is due to inadequate science education among journalists (Wilson, 2000); a lack of communication between journalists and scientists (Bell, 1994; Reed, 2001); a presumed scientific illiteracy among the public that leads to simpler scientific reporting; a bias within corporate media against science that may be harmful to 'big business' (Nissani, 1999); and the simple fact that science stories tend to be outside of standard journalistic norms dictating what makes the news (Hansen, 1994).

Yet, climate change has been an issue on the media agenda for decades (Weingart *et al.*, 2000). While most science stories are episodic and center on specific events or breakthroughs (Hansen, 1994), climate change has had a steady presence in mainstream media. During that time, much of the coverage

has been sensationalistic (Cox & Vadon, 2006), focusing on extreme predictions rather than a conceptual understanding as to the causes of climate change. Because of this, public knowledge about climate change is often inaccurate or confused (Kempton *et al.*, 1995). Adding to the confusion is the continued news reliance on conflict and controversy. The overwhelming majority of news reports about climate change continue to report on a supposed scientific debate surrounding the causes of climate change. One 'side' inevitably argues that climate change has been brought about by human activity while the other 'side' maintains that this is a natural phenomenon (Helvarg, 1994; Wilson, 2000). This conflict frame persists in the media even though there is almost complete agreement among the scientific community that climate change is caused by humans ("Climate change 2007", 2007; Oreskes, 2004). Wilson (2000) argues that the journalistic routine of achieving balance within a story is the cause of such coverage.

The sources that journalists rely upon for climate change coverage has also influenced resulting content in mainstream media. Trumbo (1996) found that politicians and interest groups, rather than scientists, are often sourced as experts in stories about climate change. This reliance on individuals and institutions that traditionally hold power in society can have a profound impact on resulting coverage in that they may control the discourse on possible solutions.

Scientific journalism in the mass media about climate change also avoids any discussion of values or political and economic choices (Wilkins, 1993). This void in coverage persists even though climate change is undoubtedly accelerated by choices "embedded in socioeconomic structures and value systems" (Trumbo & Shanahan, 2000, p. 200). Pervasive media reliance on episodic coverage (Iyengar, 1990) usurps any possibility of examining deeper issues of power that may benefit elite interests (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003). While mainstream media coverage of climate change has been found to be lacking, alternative media hold the promise of a different possibility.

### **The Alternative Press**

Alternative media has been traditionally very hard to categorize (Downing, 2003). Atkinson (2006) defines alternative media as "any media that are produced by noncommercial sources and attempt to transform existing social roles and routines by critiquing and challenging power structures" (p. 252). The existing social roles and routines that alternative media seek to critique generally stem from capitalism, consumerism, patriarchy, and the nature of corporations.

It is this foregrounding in social critique that has historically placed alternative media in diametric opposition to the mainstream press. Whereas the mainstream media have been traditionally viewed as maximizing audiences through conventional and formulaic stories, alternative media often advocate programs of social change through the framework of politicized social commentary (Armstrong, 1981; Duncombe, 1997). Alternative media have the capacity for “transforming spectators into active participants of everyday dealings and events affecting their lives (Tracy, 2007, p. 272).” Indeed, alternative media often view their role as “one of educating and mobilizing the ‘masses’ in the service of the cause or movement” (Hamilton, 2000, p. 359). This view is shared by social and political movements that make great effort to forge alliances with alternative media (Atton, 2002; Grace, 1985; Santa Cruz, 1995). This effort is grounded in the fundamental belief that alternative media can spur a type of alternative communication that does not occur through the mainstream press. These ‘alternative communications’ construct different social orders, traditions, values and social understandings (Hamilton, 2000).

Michael Albert from the independent and “alternative” *Z Magazine*, wrote “an alternative media institution sees itself as part of a project to establish new ways of organizing media and social activity and it is committed to furthering these as a whole, and not just its own preservation (Albert, 2006).” This very important point of demarcation has separated how alternative media have covered important social issues differently than the mainstream press. For example, Atkinson (2003) found that alternative media utilized resistance narratives about multinational corporations. Other research has found that alternative media often draw from ironic “culture jamming” as a form of media activism not found in the mainstream press (Harold, 2004). Still other work contends that alternative media facilitates democratic participation and cultural disruption while the mainstream press avoids such social critique (Makagon, 2000). Downing (2001) argues convincingly of the complete mainstream blockage of public expression and the necessity for alternative media to fill the cultural and social gap.

*Aotearoa Indymedia* and *Scoop* are New Zealand based media organizations that purport to ascribe to basic tenets that define alternative media. On *Aotearoa Indymedia*’s mission statement, it reads that their goal is to “further the self-determination of people under-represented in media production and content, and to illuminate and analyze local and global issues that impact ecosystems, communities and

individuals ("Mission statement", 2007)." The organization operates as a collective group of volunteers working under specific editorial aims, such as to provide an "open-publishing newswire" that "respects people's rights." *Scoop* defines itself as a "fiercely independent press release driven Internet news agency ("Introducing scoop", 2007)."

Previous research has found that climate change content in the mainstream media have relied on valueless, sensationalistic, extreme and confrontational frames originating from politicians and interest groups rather than scientists. This research asks if alternative media have framed climate change differently given its clearly defined oppositional stance to the mainstream press.

### **Framing Analysis & Research Questions**

This research argues that media have a powerful role in shaping ideology about political issues. Recent research from Carragee and Roefs (2004) argued that framing studies must begin to examine their results within the "contexts of the distribution of political and social power" (p. 214). They build this argument upon previous research which broadly yet directly linked framing to power and ideology (Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978).

Research has shown that readers often forget specific elements of media stories, but retain general impressions (Graber, 1988) that later become integrated into their own perceptions of the world (Potter, 1993). News provides information that can play a fundamental structural role in decision-making (Gandy Jr., 1982) about the surrounding world and shapes people's perceptions of that which they cannot experience directly (Lippmann, 1921). News in particular is an authoritative version of reality (Barker-Plummer, 1995) that specializes in "orchestrating everyday consciousness—by virtue of their pervasiveness, their accessibility, their centralized symbolic capacity" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 2). News frames shape how the public interprets issues and events (Sotirovic, 2000). Consequently, the public's only understanding of social issues derives from a construction provided by media over time (Altheide, 1976; Gamson, 1992; Gitlin, 1980; Ryan *et al.*, 1998; Tuchman, 1978).

This research aims to examine newspaper content through a framing analysis. News and information must be categorized if any meaningful comprehension and communication is to take place. News, like any other communication system, can be understood as a narrative that has implied meanings. Otherwise stated, "news and information has no intrinsic value unless embedded in a meaningful context

which organizes and lends it coherence” (London, 1993). The ‘meaningful context’ is the frame that shapes a news story (Entman, 1993). However, the term “frame” has been problematized by a history of multiple uses (Tankard Jr. *et al.*, 1991), and varying conceptualisations ranging from schema or script to refer to audience perception and processing (Entman, 1993; Severin & Tankard, 1997).

While sometimes difficult to ascertain on an initial reading, frames purport to view an issue through a macro lens by examining the central theme of an issue. Gitlin (1980) has defined frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). Hertog and McLeod (1995) state that “the frame used [for interpretation] determines what available information is relevant” (p. 4). Thus, the frames of a story determine the relevant pieces of descriptive information that attaches to that concept. This construction of power and relevance is integral in understanding the frame’s significance and alludes to the assimilation of frames by the receiver.

In further integrating public opinion and causality into the explication of framing, Entman (1993) wrote that frames increase the salience of particular aspects of a story by promoting a specific “problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.” Further, a frame “suggests what the issue is” (Tankard Jr. *et al.*, 1991). Perhaps synthesizing these conceptualisations into a single definition, Reese (2001) states that “frames are the organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.” Thus, the frames of a story do influence how the public thinks of an issue through definitions of the issue itself, who is responsible and what should be done. This cognitive dimension of an issues’ attributes asks who or what is the cause of a problem, what is the prognosis, and what actions need to be taken (Klandermans & Tarrow, 1988). This analysis of media frames focuses on the relationship between “public policy issues in the news and the public perceptions of these issues” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

In examining media frames, content analyses can be either inductive or deductive. In line with the previous work of Gamson (1992), the inductive approach first begins with a loose, preconceived idea of media frames that may exist in content and then slowly proceed in an attempt to reveal additional frames utilized that may not have been considered. These studies can be difficult to replicate and are quite labor

intensive (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). However, they often allow for a deeper level of analysis and understanding. This method also allows for uncovering all possible frames. The second deductive approach involves first defining the frames one wishes to search for in content and then proceeding with a comprehensive examination. While a drawback to this method is that one may not discover all the frames present, these studies can be easily replicated and can detect subtle differences between media (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). It is through both the inductive and the deductive method that this research examines the issue of climate change. The research starts with the basic four frames of conflict, responsibility, human-interest and morality, but then after examining the content, this study will allow for possible new values within these frames to emerge.

Frames that have been commonly found in general political coverage are the conflict frame (Capella & Jamieson, 1997), the responsibility frame (Iyengar, 1991), human-interest frame and morality frame (Neuman *et al.*, 1992). These frames account for a large majority of frames found in news (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Neuman *et al.* (1992) first argued that media emphasize on the conflict frame between individuals, groups, or institutions as a way of attracting audience attention. As this research has already found, mainstream media coverage of climate change has traditionally relied upon the conflict frame. This finding was replicated in election campaign news (Patterson, 1993) and has been found to induce public cynicism (Capella & Jamieson, 1997). After examining a portion of the content, this research found that potential conflicts within climate change could be framed around debates as to the cause of climate change; debates about funding climate change control measures; governmental debate; or political protest. Therefore, the following research question was proposed:

R1: Do *Aotearoa Indymedia* and *Scoop* utilize the conflict frame, and if so, how?

Second only to the conflict frame, the human-interest frame can often be used to introduce emotion to an issue, event or problem (Neuman *et al.*, 1992). This attempt to emotionalize the news is often relied upon to capture audience interest (Bennett, 1995). In the case of climate change, the human-interest frame may be utilized to predict dire personal consequences and a “scary future.” Human-interest could be framed as individuals or groups doing “their” part to curb climate change. Human-interest could also be framed within a discussion about values embedded in the cause or response of climate change or the personal economic choices needed to combat the problem. The second research question reads:

R2: Do *Aotearoa Indymedia* and *Scoop* utilize the human-interest frame, and if so, how?

In another attempt to personalize or bring emotion to an event, news often adopts a morality frame. This puts the event, problem, or issue in the context of religious doctrine or moral resolutions. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) agree with Neuman et. al.(1992) that these references may not be direct. Because of professional journalistic norms, reporters may often introduce morality into content via an outside interest group that mentions these issues through quotation or reference. This frame is particularly relevant given Professor O'Riordans call for media treatment of the social response to climate change should be framed as a civic duty or opportunity rather than a sacrifice or a penalty. The third research question is:

R3: Do *Aotearoa Indymedia* and *Scoop* utilize the morality frame, and if so, how?

Finally, the responsibility frame, first discussed by Iyengar (1990), argues that news implicitly assigns responsibility for the event, issue or problem at hand. This responsibility is often placed on either the individual, the government, business, the legal arena, the scientific community or civic change organizations. This is an important frame given previous research, which has argued that climate change ignores the responsibility of major industrial polluters given the relationship between mainstream media and corporate interests. Possible other responsible agents discovered after reviewing news content, could be the individual, the government, industry, non-profits or all of us. Therefore, the fourth research question is:

R4: Do *Aotearoa Indymedia* and *Scoop* utilize the responsibility frame, and if so, how?

The four frames of conflict, human-interest, morality and responsibility have been used to study other areas of news content but have not been applied to the issue of climate change. Given the stated purpose of the alternative press is "one of educating and mobilizing the 'masses' in the service of the cause or movement" (Hamilton, 2000, p. 359), this research also asks the following questions:

R5: Do *Aotearoa Indymedia* and *Scoop* discuss public mobilization in regards to climate change?

R6: Do *Aotearoa Indymedia* and *Scoop* educate about the cause(s) of climate change?

R7: Who is framed as the primary source in *Aotearoa Indymedia's* and *Scoop's* climate change articles?

Without making any causal claims as to the impact of these frames to public policy, this research takes the nascent step of examining what content exists in alternative New Zealand media.

## Methodology

The *Aotearoa* Independent Media Centre categorizes content into sections. A category labeled “Environment” is among the 20 options ranging from “Indigenous Struggles” to “Housing” to “Globalisation.” Within the environment category a manual search for articles that mentioned climate change was completed. This search resulted in 13 articles. Conversely, a Google-driven *Scoop* Media search was done with the key terms “climate change.” This resulted in 47,300 articles. The search engine returned the most “relevant” 170 articles. From this number, every 13<sup>th</sup> article was selected ( $170/13 = 13.0769$ ). In total, this resulted in 26 articles for examination. The article was the unit of analysis.

Given the small sample size, this study engaged in a qualitative analysis that also included the use of basic frequencies, adjusted residuals and percentages to help address the seven research questions at hand. Examining frequencies was necessary in order to measure the relative importance of specific variables in relation to each other. The findings from the content analysis were further examined and qualified through the tradition of discourse and narrative analyses. When applicable, specific strategies of signification (Mitra & Cohen, 1999) were identified in news content. As Foucault (1989, 1991) argued, discourses are inevitably not about a particular person, place or thing. Rather, discourses are part of a complex network of identity and power relations. This research engages in a critical discourse analysis in the hopes of understanding the language used and also in whose interests and to what possible effects the language may have in society (Matheson, 2005).

This work engages in a systematic process and examination of lexical choices in the “strategies of signification” utilized. In searching for trends in vocabulary used, this research also questions the range of possible vocabulary items that could have been utilized (Matheson, 2005). Given that mainstream media has been found to report on climate change in very specific ways, this research questions what alternative discourses could have been utilized by *Scoop* and *Indymedia Aotearoa*. As Hodge and Kress (1993) argue, the use of terms such as “freedom fighter” rather than “terrorist”, for example, demonstrates how social forces engage the text. Within any news text, there are limitless linguistic options available for description. Yet, some are chosen more than others (Kress, 1983). These discursive approaches are used, presumably, for a news outlet to relate better to their audience (Reah, 2002). Therefore, they are instructive in analyzing how *Scoop* and *Indymedia Aotearoa* conceptualize their readers.

This research hopes to examine, not only the choices of language used but consistent patterns which “suggest preoccupations within the particular discursive context, and which therefore add up to a representation of the world for a culture or for a group which holds status within a culture (Matheson, 2005, p. 22).” Trends will be sought out both within one text (collocations) and across different texts.

## Results

**Conflict Frame:** *Do Aotearoa Indymedia and Scoop utilize the conflict frame, and if so, how?*

The use of the conflict frame itself was found in 80.8 percent of all content. Its use as a framing technique for climate change was fairly balanced between *Scoop* and *Indymedia* with 76.9 percent of *Scoop* articles framing climate change as a conflict and 84.6 percent of *Indymedia* articles doing the same. However, the particular conflict frame utilized (governmental debate, political protest, debates as to the solutions of climate change, debates surrounding the funding of climate change) was found to be used quite differently between *Scoop* and *Indymedia*. *Scoop* drew from within a governmental debate frame (69.2 percent) far more than *Indymedia* (7.7 percent). *Indymedia* framed climate change as an issue of political protest (69.2 percent) quite often while *Scoop* did not utilize this frame once.

*Indymedia* reported climate change as a political protest struggle. “The opening of the Wellington Inner City “Bypass” was delayed, as it was blockaded by protesters this morning...one person was arrested (15 cops showed up!) and was charged with obstructing a public way” (*Indymedia*, 28 December 2006). Protesters are seen in constant conflict with industry and the government. “Greenpeace activists scaled the 60m Marsden B power station which is planned to convert to coal” (*Indymedia*, 5 November 2006). This conflict is decidedly favouring the protesters. Few sympathetic adjectives are used to describe police or government, but activists are seen to “scale walls,” “climb buildings” and “occupy lands” for specific, altruistic goals. For example, an *Indymedia* article, the protesters “who, well equipped with climbing gear and food for several weeks, climbed the building...because of the millions of tonnes of climate-changing carbon dioxide that (Marsden B) will produce in its lifetime” (*Indymedia*, 24 February 2005). This situates the protesters with a clear underlying principle - to stop these tonnes of climate-changing carbon dioxide from escaping into the atmosphere. Opponents to their protests are not afforded any purpose in their position or being. A case in point pertains to the conflict between security guards protecting the Solid Energy building and protesters. Protesters “lobbed dozens of water balloons in the

direction of guards” but, only to “get the security guards in the beach mood” (*Indymedia*, 8 November 2006). Meanwhile, security guards were only “partially successful in their efforts to stay dry.” The guards are not given any reason for being there other than as the objects of the protesters games.

Governmental debate, heavily emphasized in *Scoop*, can clearly be seen in a 2006 article titled, “MPs now aligned on climate change policy.” The article focuses on debates to reach a “multi-party agreement” and discussion to organize a “multi-party conference on climate change policy.” The debate, however, is ultimately seen by the Business Council’s Chief Executive, to involve “lots of discussion, and possibly disagreement, on the details. That’s to be admired as a healthy thing” (*Scoop*, 20 December 2006). This exemplifies how conflict itself is to be venerated as a natural and “healthy” part of the democratic process – even when the severity and weight of an issue, such as climate change, is dramatically clear. This helps to explain the reliance on conflict as a frame in discussing climate change.

***Human-Interest Frame:*** *Do Aotearoa Indymedia and Scoop utilize the human-interest frame, and if so, how?*

The majority of content (61.5 percent) did not present any human-interest frame in content. *Indymedia* was more likely not to use a human-interest frame (69.2 percent) than *Scoop* (53.8 percent). When the human-interest frame was used in news about climate change, predictions of a “scary personal future” was the principle use (34.6 percent), with *Indymedia* relying on this frame more than *Scoop*. Discussion of personal values was only seen once while individuals doing “their” part and personal economic choices were never used in news content.

Examples of a dire future predicted in news content were plentiful. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of February in 2007, *Scoop* reported, “the increase of temperature by 1.8 to 4 degrees Celsius this century, projected in the IPCC report, will make hot extremes, heat waves and heavy rainfall, more frequent.” Again, warnings in *Scoop* argued that “many millions more people are projected to be flooded every year due to sea level rise by the 2080s” (*Scoop* 7 April 2007).

*Indymedia* found that “climate change is expected to have devastating global consequences if left to continue unabated” (*Indymedia*, 13 Aug 2005). Put more specifically, “the trend (of melting ice caps) is set to accelerate with forecasts that by the summer of 2070 there may be no ice at all...In

Antarctica...(global warming) is causing the food chain to crash affecting fish, penguins, sea birds, whales and other animals, as well as commercial Fisheries" (*Indymedia* 17 November 2004).

The one example of personal values was found in a quote from the Green party co-leader Russel Norman, who said that the "vast majority of New Zealanders want some forward-thinking leadership and action...they want their government to show some leadership" (*Scoop*, 28 August 2006). This places the discourse about climate change squarely within the desires of a public that appreciates guidance, direction, control and management. This sought after quality by the "vast majority of New Zealanders" makes a statement about what the public values in Government and what they value within themselves.

***Morality Frame: Do Aotearoa Indymedia and Scoop utilize the morality frame, and if so, how?***

The morality frame was only utilized in 38.5 percent of total news content. The civic duty and reward frame was found in 23.2 percent of content, while the sacrifice and threat frame were found in 15.3 percent. The overall morality frame was used more by *Scoop* (53.8 percent) than *Indymedia* (23.1 percent). When broken down, the civic duty was the only frame used by *Indymedia*, while *Scoop* utilized all four frames (civic duty, reward, sacrifice, and threat) at least once.

In one of the clearest examples of the reward frame, *Scoop* reported the Mr. Neilson, the Business Council's Chief Executive said, "our extensive nationwide research shows New Zealanders are willing to help tackle climate change. They need to be given that opportunity. The benefits will be considerable. Done right we will have cleaner air, secure long term energy and water supplies, cleaner air and lower fuel bills from safer cars, and new research-based products and services, which lower emissions and improve energy efficiency, for sale to the world" (*Scoop*, 20 Dec 2006). This quote illustrates an intertextual mix of populist lexical choices, according to Fairclough (2003). In this example, Mr. Neilson is speaking for all New Zealanders while still maintaining his legitimacy as an official in our society. He is quoting from his own "extensive nationwide research," which places him above the average citizen who would likely not have the means to conduct a similar poll. This quote mixes informational news with persuasion and conjures up a passive, immobilized populace that simply wants to do the "right" thing for themselves and for their country. He aligns himself with that populace while dictating what

the specific outcomes will be, such as cleaner air and secure long term energy, rather than other possible outcomes, such as global cooperation or less reliance on automobiles.

Simon Osterman, from the Auckland World Naked Bike Ride, is quoted as saying, “we should be encouraging, not penalising, individuals who choose to highlight the available solutions to climate change” (*Scoop*, 17 February 2005). By invoking the word “we”, this statement again places the source inside a bond between the readers, the government and himself. He is speaking for all three when he uses the term “we.” However, it should be made clear that he isn’t offering a definitive reward. Rather, he is stating, “we *should* be encouraging” and not alternatively stating, “we *will* be encouraging.” This reflects that he is actually not an integral part of the triumvirate bond first imagined between himself, the government and the readers. He remains outside of that bond and is hoping for a reward, rather than providing one.

Civic duty, a frame principally found in *Indymedia*, is best illustrated through the following examples. The Save Happy Valley Coalition spokesperson, Frances Mountier said to *Indymedia* that “deep down, they know that we are right and we owe it to ourselves (to stop climate change)”, (*Indymedia*, 1 March 2007). Taken to the national level, another *Indymedia* article highlighted the civic duty frame when it reported, “New Zealand has a regional and global responsibility to address our carbon dioxide emissions” (*Indymedia*, 16 January 2007). In saying that “we owe it to ourselves” and it is our “responsibility” to behave a certain way, the reader can imply that these actions are in fact duties. The word “duty” derives from “due,” which is defined as that which is owing. When one owes another, they have an obligation to repay that debt. Here, this obligation, is in relation to ourselves, our nation and our earth. This bestows a high level of responsibility. If one looked at these sentences along a different set of lexical choices, the outcome is far different. For example, “New Zealand has a responsibility to address our carbon dioxide emissions” leaves a key question unanswered. To whom is New Zealand responsible? Left unanswered, there is not a moral imperative to act. But, when it this responsibility is to the region and the globe, our own civic duty becomes very clear.

*Indymedia* also reported, “while political parties and greedy corporations squabble over who looks the greenest, our global climate chaos worsens. People will not sit back and take it. It is up to us.” (*Indymedia*, 28 December 2006). In labeling political parties and corporations as “greedy,” while also describing their behavior as “squabbling,” *Indymedia* gives the opposing entity an inherent prominent

position. If corporations are greedy then the opposition is caring and philanthropic. The next sentence provides a name for corporate opposition and it is the “people.” Finally, when the last sentence reads, “it is up to us,” the reader knows that she or he has been included in this group of caring philanthropy.

The threat frame, found only in *Scoop*, relied on the public's fear of a potentially grim future. Mr. Briceno, Director of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction warned, “we face a serious challenge...to avoid the worst-case scenario” (*Scoop*, 8 February 2007). This “worst-case scenario” would undoubtedly befall us unless we changed our behavior immediately. As Greenpeace campaigner, Robbie Keman argued, “avoiding action now to tackle climate change is delaying the inevitable” (*Scoop*, 30 April 2002). However, under the threat frame, even action is not going to be enough. Professor Fitzharris, from University of Otago, is quoted as saying, “eventually adaptation (to climate change) will be insufficient to reduce vulnerability” (*Scoop* 7 April 2007). In this case, the dire consequences threatened are sure to occur as there is no hope of a solution.

The sacrifice frame was only used once. This frame directly demands more of the reader. The threat frame does not require an action from the reader, outside of the possibility of fear; a reward is a gift to the reader and civic duty is a moral obligation. However, the sacrifice frame requires that someone needs to give something up, or at the very least, make a difficult decision about a future sacrifice. To illustrate, *Scoop* reported, “some tough decisions needing to be made in the near future to tackle climate change” (*Scoop*, 11 February 2007). This lone example does not require an immediate sacrifice. Rather, it suggests that the sacrifice of only a decision will be required in the undefined future.

***Responsibility Frame: Do Aotearoa Indymedia and Scoop utilize the responsibility frame, and if so, how?***

An overwhelming 88.5 percent of content utilized the responsibility frame, with *Indymedia* being slightly more likely to utilize the frame than *Scoop*. Within the responsibility frame, government was found to be the central responsible agent. *Scoop* was far more likely to find that government was responsible for climate change (76.9 percent) and never placed responsibility on industry (0 percent). *Indymedia* found industry to be responsible for climate change in about 30 percent of their coverage. Only *Indymedia* had any instance of “all of us” as the responsible agent for climate change. They used this frame once.

An example of the framing of government as the responsible agent in *Scoop* comes from the 8 February 2007 publication: “seeking to counter the potentially catastrophic impact of global warming, a United Nations body...called on Governments to speed up implementation of a two-year-old accord to reduce the risks facing millions of people exposed to climate-caused calamities.” Another direct call on government is quoted from Atkinson, a Greenpeace campaigner. He says, “we urgently need (government) policies to lower our emissions, encourage renewable technology such as wind farms, stop climate-polluting power sources...” (*Scoop*, 18 July 2006). These direct calls to the government are purposeful, immediate and demanding. Both examples here rely on a strong sense of immediacy. The first “calls on Governments to speed up...” and the second example says, “we urgently need government policies.” This immediacy implies that the government has not been doing a proper job up until this time. By removing “urgently” the sentence reads as a plaintive request, but with the insertion of this word, the sentence is a clear demand.

Both examples couch the responsibility of climate change as an argument between “us” and them (the government). By using a quote that states that “we” are in urgent need of an action, *Scoop* puts the individual reader against those that inherently *should* be responsible. If it is us that are calling upon the government for action, then we clearly are absolved of our own responsibility.

Climate change was framed with nobody responsible in 11.5 percent of coverage. Examples of individuals being framed as the responsible agent for climate change were rare (7.7 percent). An example of the individual being framed as the responsible agent for climate change, curiously places that responsibility in juxtaposition against the media, rather than curbing consumption. “Don’t hate the media! Be the media! Let the world know about and see any actions you participated in over the weekend. Post an action report! Upload images!” (*Indymedia*, 5 November 2006). Thus, even when individuals are framed as responsible, their consumption patterns are not often in question, but their ability to communicate with the media regarding climate change is what needs to bear some responsibility for the problem.

Systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994) argues that language choices are made from a relatively limited range of options. If one examines the decisions in language that are made, it is possible to make insights into how social forces create the text and thereby, meaning (Hodge & Kress, 1993). The

following sentence could have read: “Don’t hate climate change! Be the catalyst against climate change! Let the world know about and see any actions you take to curb your consumption over the weekend...” This lexical choice, shifts the relationship between climate change and the individual, rather than placing it between the individual and the media.

**Public Mobilization:** *Do Aotearoa Indymedia and Scoop discuss public mobilization in regards to climate change?*

A strong majority of content (80.8 percent) did not emphasize the public mobilization frame. *Scoop* (7.7 percent) relied on it less than *Indymedia* (30.8 percent) but it still did not play a large part in newspaper content. Further, not all instances of the public mobilization frames were direct calls to action but entreaties for these calls to action to take place. “Every New Zealander must take the Government and Toll NZ to task” (*Scoop*, 1 August 2006) and “expect to see more protest action!” (*Indymedia*, 28 December 2006) are examples of the reporter urging public mobilization. There is much more expected, both on the part of the reader and the source, when one examines an alternative lexis, such as “*we will take the Government and Toll NZ to task.*”

Other examples found were indeed inviting public mobilization through a direct call to action. “You’re warmly invited to the Save Happy Valley coalition’s celebration of our first successful year of occupying Happy Valley” (*Indymedia*, 16 January 2007) is such an example. This direct call to action also indicates, by way of labeling the year as “successful” that this is a coalition worth participating in. It has seen success, in only its first year, and is likely to enjoy more successes in the future. The second example, “please come down and support, especially for Mondays picket!” (*Indymedia*, 5 March 2005) is another direct entreaty for participation, but it is less positive and more of a plea. In beginning this sentence with “please” the reporter appears to be less confident of the outcome.

**Primary Source:** *Do Aotearoa Indymedia and Scoop educate about the cause(s) of climate change?*

The primary source was most commonly found to be an activist group (42.3 percent). Politicians (19.2 percent) and no primary source (19.2 percent) tied for second place in terms of usage. Falling a distant third were scientists at 11.5 percent. Both industry representatives and academics were each found once in news content.

*Scoop* did not report with “no primary source” once in this sample. However, *Indymedia* did use “no primary source” in 38.5 percent of content. *Indymedia* also used activist groups more (53.8 percent) than *Scoop* (30.8 percent). *Indymedia* did not use politicians, industry representatives or academics as the primary source once in this sample, while *Scoop* relied on these sources throughout.

**Education:** *Who is framed as the primary source in Aotearoa Indymedia's and Scoop's climate change articles?*

Most articles (80.8 percent) did not discuss how the problem of climate change had begun and what caused its continual progression. The division between sources was relatively even with 84.6 percent of *Scoop* content not discussing the causes of climate change and 76.9 percent of *Indymedia* doing the same. When explanations were given, they were brief. One article read, “aerial gridlock contributes a whopping 10% of the world's global warming, poisons the atmosphere and destroys the ozone layer” (*Scoop*, 1 August 2006). The reader does not know what causes the additional 90% of global warming and also is left wondering what effect this global warming will have on their own lives. Another example from *Scoop* states, “transport is a major contributor to our national increase in greenhouse emissions. 40% of New Zealand's CO2 emissions are transport related” (*Scoop*, 17 Feb 2005). Again, what makes the remaining 60% of CO2 emissions is left unknown.

*Indymedia* also was terse in its treatment of climate change causes. “Coal is one of the leading contributors to climate change” (*Indymedia*, 8 Nov 2006). Another, even briefer, connection between the cause and effect of climate change comes from *Indymedia*. “The mine will...further add to climate change” (*Indymedia*, 13 Aug 2005). The reader can imply that the mine is a contributing factor to climate change, but still doesn't exactly know why.

## Discussion

This small case study demonstrated that within this sample, online alternative media utilized many of the frames that mainstream media have been found to use in coverage of climate change. *Indymedia* and *Scoop* both relied on conflict in over 80 percent of their articles; they both did not draw from human-interest frames; both outlets rarely used the morality frame; neither emphasized public mobilization to a strong degree; and under 20 percent of total content was found to actually educate

readers about the causes of climate change. However, within these findings, there were interesting deviations from what has been reported in the mainstream media.

While conflict was heavily utilized in the content sampled here, neither outlet relied on the conflict frame in the way that many mainstream outlets have in the past. Both *Indymedia* and *Scoop* did not debate the cause of climate change once, whereas mainstream media have repeatedly framed climate change within that particular conflict frame. This may be due to an implicit understanding between these news outlets and their readers that the possible causes of climate change have been solidified. It is possible that these outlets debated potential causes during earlier time periods, but no debate was evident during this sample. This is in marked contrast to mainstream media.

Perhaps not surprisingly, *Indymedia* framed the conflict as one of political protest while *Scoop* framed it as a governmental debate. This political protest frame may reflect *Indymedia*'s explicit goals to "further the self-determination of people under-represented in media production and content, and to illuminate and analyze local and global issues that impact ecosystems, communities and individuals ("Mission statement", 2007)." Framing climate change as protest may be reflective of a common frame throughout news content in *Indymedia*. Further content analysis of *Indymedia* content would be able to determine this.

Values were rarely emphasized as a human-interest frame and personal economic and political choices were never used. This was an unexpected finding and contradicts previous research examining alternative media. Perhaps emphasizing scary predictions of the future in relation to climate change has become such a means of storytelling through the news that alternative media rely on this technique as well. Indeed, an expanded content analysis could uncover if alternative media actually rely on this frame more than mainstream media. If alternative media often use their coverage as a vehicle for mobilizing change, fear is a convincing motivator and may be used much more in alternative media content than present research suggests.

Morality was not emphasized in news content. However, when it was utilized, the civic duty and reward frames were used more than the sacrifice and threat frames. Only a more thorough analysis would uncover if these trends could be seen across other alternative media and if any mainstream outlets are emphasizing civic duty and reward as well. No research to date has found this, but there might be cultural

changes afoot. In the alternative press, these frames have some, albeit small, presence in news content and highlight the potential role of alternative media in creating social change.

Neither outlet stressed that “all of us” are responsible for climate change. A position one might expect if alternative media is contextualized as a community media. Indeed, individuals were removed from almost all responsibility in these articles and the central blame was placed on government and industry. If one accepts the definition of alternative media as a challenging agent against mainstream norms and structures, then this framing technique makes sense. However, if one defines alternative media in accordance to community relations, such emphasis on government and industry may remove readers from a participatory role.

While activist groups were the primary sources cited in this sample, there was still little mention of mobilization or basic education as to the causes of climate change. Such a disconnect in alternative media content, contradicts the stated purpose of both these news outlets and particularly of *Indymedia*. Perhaps news norms and values have become so pervasive as to have such an impact on alternative content or perhaps there are other frames that alternative media do emphasize that are overlooked here. Further study should help clarify this.

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