



ARTICLE

'Boring but important': the paradox in news coverage of climate change

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Abstract

News media play a crucial role in communicating climate change, yet journalistic norms and commercial considerations pose challenges. Still, coverage is increasingly prioritised, even though, according to international research, audience interest remains limited. Through the lens of news media logic, this article examines whether this trend is reflected in journalistic practice by illustrating how commercial and normative logic shapes Danish climate journalists' perceptions of climate change in a country with high climate concerns. The findings show that journalists face challenges related to commercial logic, particularly regarding the complexity of the issue and its perceived lack of newsworthiness. Indeed, climate change's low news value has led to its perception as 'boring' in many newsrooms. Although normative logic, where public opinion formation takes precedence over commercial considerations, dominates among climate journalists and is gaining broader acceptance, it cannot be concluded that climate journalism is moving in a normative direction.

Keywords

Environmental communication; Science and media; Public perception of science and technology

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1 - Introduction

The news media play a crucial role in informing citizens about climate change [Ejaz et al., 2025]. However, research has highlighted challenges in covering environmental issues. In 1983, Sharon Friedman described environmental journalism as a ‘problem child of the media’ because of its complexity and its ‘grounding in scientific and technical information’ [Friedman, 1983, p. 25]. Others have described how journalistic routines, standards, ideology or norms, such as news values, collide with environmental and climate journalism [e.g. Evans, 2016; van Eck et al., 2019]. Environmental journalists also report reduced coverage and limited editorial freedom due to audience-driven commercial concerns [e.g. Figueroa, 2020].

Despite these challenges, climate coverage has increased globally, and environmental reporting has become more stable, suggesting the institutionalisation of the news beat [Djerf-Pierre, 2013].

Although still seen as insufficient, many journalists find that climate change is prioritised despite limited public interest [Craig, 2024; Gibbons, 2020; Harcup, 2023; Mocatta et al., 2024]. Many media have created ‘news climate teams’, and some are developing strategies to enhance coverage [Newman, 2023]. This may signal a normative shift, in which journalists prioritise public interest over commercial demands [Karidi, 2018]. This study explores whether this shift is reflected in journalistic practice based on in-depth interviews with experienced Danish climate journalists from leading climate news media. It applies the concept of news media logic [Asp, 2014], contrasting commercial logic aimed at increasing news circulation with normative logic aimed at contributing to public opinion formation.

Denmark serves as a compelling case study. While the failed COP15 summit hosted by Denmark led to a decline in Danish climate coverage [Eskjær, 2017], there has been a significant increase in popular, political and media attention to climate change since the 2019 ‘climate election’ and subsequent climate law [Blach-Ørsten et al., 2020; Weldingh, 2023]. Its professional and well-functioning media system [Hallin & Mancini, 2004], supported by press subsidies and strong public service media – one of the main providers of environmental news [Newman et al., 2020] – allows more room for normative logic and, consequently, a less competitive news regime. In this regard, Denmark is a most likely case [Flyvbjerg, 2006] for studying whether climate journalism is moving in a more normative direction. This leads to the following research questions:

RQ1: *What challenges do Danish climate journalists experience in relation to commercial and normative news media logic?*

RQ2: *How do these challenges appear in practice?*

Set against the backdrop of the growing prioritisation of climate journalism, this article contributes to the existing literature by illustrating how journalism’s normative and commercial imperatives shape journalists’ practices and conceptions of climate change. Furthermore, it highlights the inherent paradoxes and limitations within climate journalism and news media logic.

This article begins by reviewing research on climate and environmental journalism challenges. It then outlines the theoretical framework of news media logic, including its commercial and normative aspects. Next, it outlines the methodology, semi-structured

interviews and the Danish case. The findings are presented in three sections that address challenges related to commercial and normative logic. Finally, the findings are discussed, and conclusions are outlined.

2 - Challenges of climate and environmental journalism

Research has long highlighted the challenges of environmental and climate journalism. Climate change is rarely considered newsworthy, as it is remote in space and time [Adam, 2021]. This lack of a 'hard news peg' leads the media to favour disasters or staged events [Friedman, 1983, p. 27], with coverage peaking during Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC (COP) meetings and, increasingly, extreme weather events [Saunders et al., 2018; Schmidt et al., 2013]. A study of American climate journalism found that norms such as dramatisation, personalisation, novelty and balance led to an 'informationally biased coverage' that enabled political inaction [Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007]. Historically, journalists have interpreted objectivity as 'balance', giving equal weight to all voices. This has led to misleading debates about anthropogenic climate change [Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004; Wilson, 2000]. More recently, climate journalists have adopted a more interpretative role, understanding objectivity as the 'weight of evidence' [Fahy, 2018; Hiles & Hinnant, 2014].

Commercial concerns have also been pointed out as a challenge in interview studies with environmental and climate journalists. In Pakistan, sensationalism is linked to the financial needs of media organisations, as it increases readership [Sharif & Medvecky, 2018]. A focus on profit is also prevalent in a study of American environmental journalists who felt constrained in their story choices and time allocation [Figueroa, 2020]. Slovenian journalists stated that climate change is covered insufficiently because of low reader demand [Jontes et al., 2024]. This lack of editorial priority is also mentioned by earlier studies [Ørsten, 2006; Pinto & Matias, 2023; Qusien & Robbins, 2024]. Some argued that this is due to the depressing nature of climate change, resulting in a lack of audience attention [Duarte & Eide, 2018; Gibson et al., 2016], while others pointed to public indifference [Craig, 2024].

Even though science is generally difficult to cover journalistically, climate change is said to be particularly complicated because it consists of prognoses and processes, resulting in a lack of 'real events' [Berglez, 2011]. The complexity of carbon markets, new technologies and climate policies result in journalists relying on academics to navigate information [Robbins & Wheatley, 2021, p. 1296]. Two studies have examined environmental and climate journalists' conceptions through the lens of media logic, defined by format, style and medium-specific features. One showed how media logic contributed to constructing artificial turf as an environmental hazard in Swedish news coverage, partly by downplaying scientific uncertainty [Abalo & Olausson, 2023]. Another explored how Swedish climate journalists conceptualise climate change as inside, outside or beyond media logic. *Inside* media logic involves adapting stories to journalistic conventions, such as making them concrete or sensational. *Outside* media logic reflects the perceived incompatibility of climate science with media logic due to its uncertainty and long-term nature. *Beyond* media logic suggests a transformation of climate journalism, such as transcending traditional news beats and geographical boundaries [Berglez, 2011].

While many interview-based studies have addressed commercial pressures, few have examined climate journalism through the lens of media logic, and none have addressed normative dimensions, such as journalistic values or ideals.

This article addresses this gap by applying the framework of news media logic to explore both commercial and normative aspects, illustrating how news media logic shapes journalists' perceptions and practices in climate reporting. The framework is further elaborated in the following section.

3 - Theoretical framework

This study draws on the theoretical field of media logic to understand the challenges of reporting climate change. The concept was introduced by Altheide and Snow [1979], who argued that the growth of the press led to an institutionalised way of making news with shared professional standards and a common 'way of seeing and interpreting social affairs' [Altheide & Snow, 1979, p. 9].

Initially, media logic referred to the form of media content and, later, the technologies through which it is communicated [Altheide, 2020]. Others expanded the concept to include commercial, professional and normative dimensions [Esser, 2013; Landerer, 2013].

The starting point for this study is the definition of news media logic as an institution that reduces uncertainty and shapes the behaviour of news organisations and journalists. This logic comprises both normative and commercial components, reflecting the dual nature of media as 'market and non-market organisations' [Asp, 2014, p. 260].

The commercial component focuses on boosting news circulation by satisfying user demands and adapting content to audience preferences, while the normative component is based on the media's democratic function as a contributor to public debate [Landerer, 2013]. Commercial logic includes constitutive rules that define newsworthiness and regulative rules that guide how news should be presented [Asp, 2014]. It dominates 'wherever media logic refers to newsworthiness and to particular characteristics of media formats' [Landerer, 2013, p. 244].

Newsworthiness is measured through news values. Unlike internationally, where researchers over time have defined various news values such as negativity, conflict and timeliness [e.g. Caple & Bednarek, 2016; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017], the five 'news criteria' — timeliness, identification, sensation, conflict and relevance — have been dominant in Danish journalism textbooks since the 1970s [Schultz, 2006]. These criteria are deeply institutionalised, as they are taught in the country's three journalism schools — up until 1998 there was only one. However, they are also differentiated, as they are employed differently depending on the media [Schultz, 2007]. *Timeliness* is typically described as new information. The closer to deadline, the more timely a story is. A story can also be considered timely when it is tied to a current event. *Identification* is described as closeness between events and the audience, for instance, socially, geographically or culturally. *Sensation* highlights the unusual, while *conflict* emphasises opposing interests. *Relevance* can be understood as important to the public or the audience of specific media [Schultz, 2007, p. 197]. Though rarely mentioned, the criteria are considered explicit, as they form a shared language for arguing news value. They cannot fully explain what constitutes news value but are important elements in understanding journalistic practice [Schultz, 2006].

Based on her field study, Schultz [2006] added the sixth implicit news criterion, *exclusivity*, understood as stories published by only one outlet. Exclusivity has also been described as

part of specific 'commercial news values', as it increases the likelihood of something becoming a news story in market-oriented media. Commercial news values also include the extent of resources invested and how journalistically prepared a story is [Allern, 2002].

Regarding presentation, Asp [2014] identified the storytelling techniques simplification, concretisation, confrontation, accentuation and personalisation. In Denmark, personalisation aligns with the news criteria of identification, as news criteria are employed in both the selection and presentation of news stories [Blach-Ørsten, 2016]. Identification is often achieved through illustrative cases and concrete language [Tverskov & Tverskov, 2010].

Commercial logic also includes the media-specific rules of technology and grammar. Technology refers to adapting content to the format of the outlet while grammar concerns structural aspects of news production, such as publication frequency or whether the focus is domestic or foreign [Asp, 2014; Meyrowitz, 1996].

Normative logic relates to journalism's democratic role: informing the public and scrutinising power holders to enable citizens to form opinions on issues important to society [Asp, 2007]. The objective of normative logic is thus to empower the public to participate in democracy, meaning that content is more important than presentation [Landerer, 2013]. Some scholars have argued that it includes helping to find solutions [Karidi, 2018; Landerer, 2013], while others emphasise presenting different opinions [Asp, 2007]. Informing involves density, breadth and relevance. Density implies that the information should constitute a suitable part of the coverage, breadth refers to different aspects of a stance being presented and relevance could be anything advocating or opposing a stance on an issue [Asp, 2007].

Journalism's social responsibility is tied to ideal-typical values such as autonomy, objectivity and public service. This entails 'a sense of doing it for the public' [Deuze, 2005, p. 447], understood as providing a service as a watchdog and disseminator of information. Despite these ideals, commercial logic often dominates, as most media operate as businesses [Strömbäck & Esser, 2009]. This means that public service media and subsidies might result in a balance between the commercial and the normative [Strömbäck, 2008]. However, the competition for attention between profit-oriented and public service media pulls in the other direction. This can result in competition between commercial and normative logic, both among different media and within the same media [Landerer, 2013].

This study investigates how these tensions between normative and commercial news media logic manifest in a media system with strong public service institutions and press subsidies.

4 - Case and method

To answer the research questions, 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Danish climate journalists. The media landscape in Denmark is small, consisting of both traditional news media and niche media [Blach-Ørsten & Willig, 2016], and as in other Nordic countries, few journalists focus exclusively on environmental issues [Lyytimäki, 2020]. To include a broad range of perspectives, climate journalists representing the main Danish news providers, including public service broadcasters, national daily broadsheets [Newman et al., 2021] and niche media, which are also an important provider of climate change news [Newman et al., 2022], were interviewed.¹ The sample, which aligns with sizes in similar

1. For an overview, see Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of interviewed journalists.

<i>Journalist</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Experience</i>
IP1	Freelance	9 years
IP2	Digital native	19 years
IP3	National daily	16+ years
IP4	National daily	38 years
IP5	Digital native	5+ years
IP6	National daily (business)	5+ years
IP7	National daily	25 years
IP8	Digital native	6 years
IP9	Public service broadcast	5 years
IP10	Public service broadcast	4 years
IP11	National daily	16 years
IP12	Professional journal	16 years

studies [Gibson et al., 2016; Robbins & Wheatley, 2021], aimed to capture diverse perspectives across media and experience levels. Climate journalists from the major national dailies, comprising omnibus and niche papers, were selected through a quantitative study of Danish climate journalism [Welding, 2023]. In addition, one freelance climate journalist, journalists from each of the two public broadcasters, and journalists working in niche media with a particular focus on the environment and climate were interviewed. The respondents' experience with climate change ranged from 4 to 38 years, and despite aiming for gender balance, the final sample included ten men and two women.

The respondents were anonymised as much as possible to obtain an open discussion. Hence, only their length of experience and type of media were included in the overview in Table 1.

The interview guide was divided into three sections: challenges experienced, journalistic role conceptions and the objectivity norm. This study mainly drew on the answers to questions regarding the challenges, which included whether the challenges differed from those related to other issues and whether they had decreased or increased over time. See the entire interview guide in Supplementary material. All but one of the interviews were conducted in person at the subjects' workplaces between October 2022 and January 2023. One interview was conducted on Teams because of geographical distance.

At the beginning of the interviews, participants were informed both orally and in writing about the legal basis for the research, including GDPR-compliant data storage and limited anonymity due to the small number of climate journalists in Denmark. The interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes. They were transcribed verbatim, and quotes used in the analysis were translated from Danish into English and edited for clarity and anonymity.

The coding was conducted hermeneutically using NVivo,² following the qualitative data analysis process [Miles & Huberman, 1994]. All transcriptions were thoroughly read, and preliminary categories were noted. Based on the theoretical framework, the identified challenges were then grouped into three overarching codes: normative logic, commercial logic and other. Within these codes, more specific codes — such as 'abstract' — were applied,

2. Version 12, developed in 2018 by QSR International.

ensuring that all mentioned challenges were included. Finally, these codes were grouped into three overarching themes: boring, important and complex. These themes reflect both commercial and normative aspects of news media logic, as the categories often overlapped.

5 - Findings

5.1 - Boring

As previous research has also shown, audience interest was seen as a key challenge. Many interviewees described climate change as ‘boring’ or ‘uninteresting’, often explained by audience metrics showing fewer clicks on climate stories. Consequently, editors did not believe it would sell well, as illustrated by the following quote.

They [the editors] have this idea that people don’t find it exciting. At least, that’s always the explanation when we pitch to X, X, X and so on. It’s that there are no listeners for it. (IP1, freelancer)

A recurring explanation was that climate change feels distant in space and time. Several journalists mentioned the COP as an example:

I’m going to COP now to cover the conference, but I can tell you now that we don’t do this for the sake of the readership numbers. It’s hopeless. Nobody wants to read about it. This is as distant as it gets. Some people are chatting in Egypt about something that may or may not have a consequence in the future, and you know... It’s unbelievably hard to make it present. (IP3, national daily)

Although the COP meeting was timely, it lacked identification value due to its geographical remoteness, because it took place far away and the temporal distance of the potential effects of the political decisions. Still, it was covered, because ‘it is relevant’ (IP3), suggesting that the objective of informing the public was considered more important than the commercial objective of selling the story to the audience, both from the journalist and the editors. This indicates that relevance is an important news criterion.³

That COP was often mentioned as ‘boring’ is striking, given that it generates the most climate-related news coverage [Eskjær, 2019]. Yet, it also serves a ‘hook’ to make other climate stories timely: ‘The fact that climate change is a problem all the time is not enough. There must be something to hook it on’ (IP1, freelancer).

Temporal distance as something that made climate change uninteresting was also mentioned in connection with the effects of climate change.

We could mention that sea levels are rising and that by 2100, it may be necessary to build dikes around Copenhagen, etc. However, this remains somewhat abstract and far into the future. (IP5, digital native)

3. However, not missing out on covering an event that all other media are reporting on is also a factor, as the positioning between different media outlets also influences the construction of news [Schultz, 2006].

This distance resulted in a lack of ‘a human face’ (IP10, public service) on the problems and thus challenges regarding identification and personalisation. This was particularly crucial for public service broadcasters who relied on images. Journalists described many climate change stories as ‘system stories’ — focused on legislation and systemic effects rather than personal experiences or emotional appeal. Such stories were often perceived as boring because the consequences of climate policy are diffuse and not immediately visible. As a result, they break with the conventions of storytelling by lacking elements such as identification and emotion. In contrast, natural disasters, such as floods in Pakistan or ‘people getting their leg amputated against their will’ (IP10, public service), provided clear victims.

One journalist illustrated this challenge with a story about unfulfilled political promises on energy renovations — an issue directly linked to climate policy but difficult to personalise. After two weeks of searching, they eventually identified a pigeon fanciers’ association that had turned off the heating in their clubhouse due to rising energy costs:

Suddenly, we had this lovely fanciers’ association with these weird, retired types... and you can see their breath, and they are freezing... and then it was suddenly very close. (IP9, public service)

The example shows how the journalist attempted to make an abstract, climate-related system story newsworthy by adding the news criterion identification and the storytelling techniques of personalisation and concretisation. In doing so, the journalist aligned with commercial news media logic by presenting the fanciers as ‘victims’ of failed climate-related policy promises. They also highlighted conflict as a key news criterion, in this case between the association and the authorities. Storytelling thus becomes central to climate change coverage and may, as prior research also suggests [Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007], even result in less coverage when suitable cases cannot be found.

Another journalist had a different approach to making climate change news more interesting:

It’s clear that the more you dive into technicalities and create classic systemic newsie stories, the more interest wanes. I try to navigate that. Our whole idea is that you should try to gather many things in fewer units. So, if, for instance, you want to know something about what to do about the plastic problem, we do a big story about that. Then you can refer to that, update and return after a while, so we don’t make 1,000 news stories about the same subject. (IP8, digital native)

The journalist explained how the media had abandoned the traditional news format and timeliness, replacing many short articles with fewer contextual background stories like ‘What should we do about our plastic problem?’ (IP8), which attracted more interest than event-driven news or coverage of systemic consequences.

In this way, the media moved ‘beyond’ media logic [Berglez, 2011] by introducing new types of reporting. This suggests that perceptions of climate change as boring are closely

connected to news media logic and that low interest is not an inherent quality of climate stories but rather a challenge that requires journalistic creativity.

Furthermore, technology also seemed to play a role. According to journalists at national dailies, print offered more room for content they considered relevant compared to digital media:

People probably read a little more in print. They are also prioritised in print, the slightly more process-oriented articles, right? (IP11, national daily)

This difference seems to stem from the absence of audience metrics and the perception that there is more opportunity for immersion in print.

Interestingly, journalists at climate-focused outlets with dedicated audiences did not mention boredom, suggesting that such perceptions are linked to commercial pressures. An outlier was a journalist from a business outlet (IP6, national daily) who struggled to fit climate stories into beats like finance or investment. Furthermore, stories were sometimes outdated due to faster international coverage, resulting in a lack of compliance with the news criterion of exclusivity. At this outlet, climate change was not a dedicated beat but had to fit into others. This reflects a different grammar in the composition of the media [Asp, 2014], showing how the challenges mentioned, including complexity, are tied to climate change as a beat.

To summarise, journalists' perception of climate change as boring is linked to a lack of news value and storytelling techniques. These challenges are rooted in commercial news media logic, which prioritises audience appeal. This is particularly evident in stories focusing on systemic consequences — since such stories are hard to personalise by putting a human face on them.

5.2 ■ *Important*

The importance of climate change as an issue was often mentioned in connection with its perceived 'boring' nature. Journalists generally considered it the most important issue and thus relevant by default:

Together with the environmental and biodiversity crises, these are the greatest challenges facing humanity on the planet. So, you can hardly write about anything more important or bigger than that. (IP11, national daily)

There was broad consensus that attention to climate change had increased both inside and outside the newsroom.

I think the awareness of climate change has definitely increased, which also means that there is more responsiveness internally to cover the issue. (IP9, public service)

Some journalists, such as IP9, mentioned that the rising attention had resulted in a consensus that climate change was an important issue, making it easier to get climate stories past editors. Others noted that the fact that the public discussion on climate change had changed from establishing whether climate change is a problem to discussing how to solve it had made it easier to convey.

It's become less difficult, as I don't have to start all over again and say, "99% of scientists agree on man-made global warming". (IP12, professional journal)

In this way, the growing awareness and acceptance of climate change as important reflects shifts in both public and political debates. Still, many journalists felt that climate change lacked sufficient attention and saw it as their responsibility to raise awareness. As one journalist said:

It is interesting that there is such a significant gap between what is acted upon and talked about in public and what is scientifically established as fact. There is a huge need for information and engaging fact-based stories that can enlighten the public about the factual foundation on which we ought to base our conversations. (IP5, digital native)

IP5 believed that public focus on climate change was inadequate, given its seriousness and suggested that this was due to a lack of climate literacy. They saw it as their role to contribute to public opinion formation, clearly aligning with normative logic.

One journalist at a climate-focused outlet, where audience metrics were not an issue, described the tension between a sense of urgency and a lack of space and time:

There is so much that's important... But I can't get to the bottom of everything. It feels like a challenge. Also, because this is a burning platform and a field where there's a crisis, action is needed. (IP4, national daily)

This journalist felt that information should be dense [Asp, 2007], which was challenging due to time constraints, and expressed a feeling of personal responsibility for getting all the information out there, revealing an idea of an implied effect of journalism in which information leads to action. This idea, which was also expressed by the former respondent, takes the normative ideal a step further, implying that journalism should not only inform but also contribute to solving societal problems. However, relevance and urgency did not guarantee audience attention. One journalist described climate change as a classic case of 'boring but important':

At university, learning to write features, there was the classical feature and reportage, and then there were these paragraphs called BbI: boring but important. And climate change is an ongoing boring but important section. This is what sometimes makes it a struggle to get it out. Even though everybody agrees that it's important, there's never an eagerness. (IP9, public service)

Climate change was described as the informative and boring part of a feature — more specifically, what Danish textbooks call ‘the third narrative form’ — which uses narrative techniques in the form of scenes with dialogue and fact-based plot to engage the reader. Since climate change was described as the part that ‘sells the story journalistically, but which the readers do not always love to read’ [Hvid, 2005, p. 45, author’s translation], it needed to be wrapped in a narrative that would capture the reader’s attention and ensure engagement.

This quote reflects the paradox that something can be both boring and important and consequently needs something more to ‘get out’, which is embedded in journalism’s storytelling techniques. Regulative rules, such as storytelling, define how news content can be tailored to appeal to an audience [Asp, 2014], thereby implying that news is not inherently interesting. This highlights the tension between commercial and normative logics, which is particularly evident in relation to climate change, a topic that remains consistently relevant.

Summing up, normative logic was dominant among climate journalists, and many experienced fewer challenges related to normative logic, understood as accepting climate change as a significant societal issue. Yet, they struggled with limited space, time and societal focus. Hence, while normative logic was dominant among climate journalists, this was generally not the case in the rest of the newsrooms.

5.3 ■ *Complex*

As in previous studies [e.g., Robbins & Wheatley, 2021], the present study has identified complexity as a key challenge in climate journalism. Based on the interviews, two interrelated dimensions of this complexity emerged: *technicality* and *interdisciplinarity*.

Climate change was often described as complex because of its *technicality*, for instance, in terms of energy:

Is it a good idea for everyone to get central heating? How can you find out? Then you have to look into how much heat loss you have and the length of your cables... And a district heating station also needs to be fired up with something... Can you use energy from windmills? Then you need a way to use heat pumps... So, it is just not that simple, even though it sounds simple. (IP7, national daily)

Seemingly simple questions often had complex answers. Sometimes, the technical level also made it difficult to understand the sources. Similarly, one journalist (IP1, freelance) mentioned that the green transition debate was often distorted because political sources did not understand it and, therefore, spread misinformation. Additionally, others exploited this

complexity to greenwash positions in political debates. Finally, it sometimes resulted in the underprioritisation of climate journalism, as it required significant resources in terms of time and money.

It's much cheaper to send someone to Christiansborg with a microphone to ask two politicians a few questions... than to properly delve into the matter and produce a nuanced article. (IP1, freelancer)

This journalist expressed that climate change was not a priority in the media because of economic issues, requiring more time and expertise than political journalism. Hence, apart from not complying with most of the established news criteria, climate change also seemed to collide with the commercial news value of resources, as the cost decreased the likelihood of it becoming news [Allern, 2002]. Poor audience metrics reinforce this, so the complexity and lack of resources can result in insufficient coverage.

One journalist argued that the lack of comprehension of climate change was not due to its complexity but to journalism's narrow focus on politics:

Imagine if a journalist said, "I think it's hard to understand politics". That person would be disregarded and looked down upon. But it's perfectly fine to say, "I don't understand natural science". (IP2, digital native)

Several interviewees mentioned that science or climate journalists were called nerds in newsrooms, underlining the perception of scientific knowledge as niche. In addition to comprehension issues, the technical nature of climate change also complicates its communication. One journalist noted that simplifying stories was difficult because editors insisted on starting from the basics due to a perceived public knowledge gap.

You must be very clear and start from scratch in your coverage. At least, that's what our editors always tell us. (IP10, public service broadcast)

This challenge eased as the journalist gained expertise and could argue that too many details would make the articles too difficult. Another mentioned that expert disagreement – such as whether biomass is green – complicated framing, often resulting in vague headlines, such as 'Scientists strongly disagree on something' (IP12, professional journal).

Journalists faced simplification challenges and tackled them in different ways. One adapted to commercial logic, while another abandoned simplification in favour of ambiguous headlines. Visualising potential climate consequences, such as sea level rise, was also difficult due to uncertainty, making it challenging to apply the storytelling technique of concretisation.

The *interdisciplinary* nature of climate change adds further complexity. One journalist (IP12, professional journal) explained that understanding whether a reduction or technology was feasible in the green transition required knowledge of the economic, technical, political and low-tech aspects. Another described the difficulty of staying up to date across the many

'islands related to the green transition' (IP8, digital native). One journalist described the problem as follows:

Sometimes, I wish I worked at a business newspaper, where things are a little easier... It's such an interdisciplinary subject where you need to know a little bit about everything. (IP2, niche media)

Covering climate change requires navigating multiple domains, unlike narrower beats like finance. It intersects with natural and applied sciences as well as economics and politics [Gibbons, 2020; Pinto & Castro, 2021]. This requires journalists to specialise in and monitor a broad range of scientific and societal domains.

Where earlier studies have linked complexity to climate change's temporality [Berglez, 2011], lack of proximity [e.g. Høegh-Krohn et al., 2025] and cross-scientific nature [Robbins & Wheatley, 2021], this study found that journalists experience complexity primarily through technicality and interdisciplinarity. These characteristics demand time and resources, lowering editorial priority and creating tension between commercial and normative logic. Technicality also complicates political debate and increases the risk of greenwashing while challenging storytelling techniques, such as simplification and concretisation.

In addition to politics and economics, climate change draws on a wide range of scientific disciplines, much like the science beat. This reflects a structural issue, as journalists often lack training in scientific methods [Weigold, 2001].

6 - Discussion

This study supports earlier research on the challenges of adapting complex issues, such as climate change, to media logic [Abalo & Olausson, 2023; Berglez, 2011; Hinnant et al., 2017]. While journalists have occasionally described climate change as boring — typically to explain low coverage due to public indifference or apathy [Craig, 2024] — this study found that such descriptions are closely tied to audience metrics. The lack of attention based on metrics was mainly explained by the lack of proximity to time and space.

Although important topics often receive few clicks [Nelson, 2019], this does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest. Surveys have shown that most Danes view climate change as serious [European Commission, 2023] and are willing to act on it [Andre et al., 2024]. Thus, audience metrics cannot measure audience interest and are better suited to guiding presentation elements (e.g. headlines) than determining which issues deserve coverage [Kormelink & Meijer, 2018]. At the Danish newspaper Politiken, metrics have led to changes in presentation, including a stronger focus on headlines and visualisations when reporting on climate change [Jordaan, 2024].

Furthermore, framing climate coverage as boring overlooks journalism's public-interest function: journalists are not only responders to audience metrics but are also expected to highlight societal problems and make them comprehensible, suggesting that low engagement is not merely a structural constraint but also a professional challenge. Still, the respondents' concerns about the lack of identification aligned with findings showing that

audiences make better sense of climate news when it relates to specific ground-level issues [Moe et al., 2026].

While climate journalists faced challenges mainly tied to commercial logic, climate change was still covered despite its lack of newsworthiness and simplicity. Attention to climate change has grown inside and outside the newsroom, and there is consensus that climate change is an important and relevant issue that, for some, has made it easier to get climate stories past editors. This suggests a shift towards a normative turn [Karidi, 2018], where journalists prioritise societal relevance over commercial appeal. However, this development may reflect the political debate and the growing focus on the green transition since the 'climate election' in 2019 [Weldingh, 2023] rather than a normative shift. As Bennett [1990] argued, journalism often indexes coverage in alignment with the governmental debate. A similar pattern has been seen in the UK, where political attention has elevated climate change on the media agenda [Gibbons, 2020].

Danish journalists appeared to navigate the tension between normative and commercial logic by prioritising climate coverage while adapting storytelling to practices that 'work with audiences in practice' [Borchardt et al., 2023, p. 10]. This reflects Berglez's [2011] idea of 'creativity inside media logic', where journalists innovate within existing constraints to make complex issues more engaging and accessible.

While this study identified broad challenges within news media logic, their nature and scope vary according to media technology and grammar in the sense of the focus and format of the outlet. This is particularly the case when it comes to the perception of climate change as boring, as journalists with a dedicated or knowledgeable audience did not mention it. Personalisation also seemed particularly challenging in broadcast media, while print allowed more space for systemic and legislative stories, likely due to the absence of audience metrics. However, as the sample was limited to 12 interviews, more research is needed to draw firm conclusions about intermedia differences. Future studies could explore whether challenges related to commercial logic are more prevalent in broadcast and general news media than in niche media and how access to audience metrics shapes the perceived challenges of climate journalism. Finally, as this study focused on Denmark, a country with particularly institutionalised news criteria, it is not possible to generalise all specific findings. Yet Denmark serves as a critical case, supporting the overall conclusion that climate journalism is largely shaped by commercial logic. Including generalists or journalists from other news beats could also reveal a wider range of challenges than those experienced by climate specialists.

7 - Conclusion

This study found that Danish climate journalists work within the persistent tension between commercial and normative news media logics. While climate change is increasingly recognised as a critical societal issue, reflected in greater editorial prioritisation, commercial imperatives continue to challenge and shape journalistic practice. Climate change is often perceived as boring due to a lack of audience attention, which is connected to its conflict with the news criteria of timeliness and identification. In connection with this, storytelling techniques, such as personalisation and simplification, are difficult to apply. The technical and interdisciplinary complexity of climate change also demands significant resources.

Consequently, journalists often feel that the issue is underprioritised. These challenges, which are linked to climate change as a news beat, collide with the dominant normative logic among climate journalists, who see their role as contributing to public opinion formation.

This study adds to previous research by showing that even in a media system with press subsidies and public service media that presumably allows more room for normative logic, climate journalism remains dominated by commercial logic. Thus, despite normative ideals among climate journalists, it cannot be concluded that climate journalism is moving in a normative direction. This can be explained by organisational path dependence, where 'self-reinforcing mechanisms' lead organisations to follow familiar paths rather than adapt to new situations [Schreyögg & Sydow, 2011].

The findings highlight the need for structural changes in journalism education and newsroom practice. Given climate change's intersection with scientific, economic and political domains, journalists need a broader knowledge base. Integrating climate literacy and cross-beat training, especially in areas like business, politics and science, could better prepare future journalists to cover climate change.

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Regarding generative AI, ChatGPT (GPT-4-turbo) and Microsoft 365 Copilot were consulted to improve wording and grammar using the prompt 'revise this sentence for conciseness and correct UK English', as I am a non-native English speaker.

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Supplementary material

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Interviewguide



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