The Climate Conversation

How UK broadcast media discuss climate change – a six-month analysis covering Spanish floods, Californian wildfires, COP29, and the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement

be BROADCAST MISSION CONTROL

Implications for Communicators

This report's findings offer crucial insights for anyone planning communications around climate change. The current media landscape is highly event-driven, with dramatic peaks (such as during wildfires, floods, or political shifts) but then rapid decline in attention once these moments pass.

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To truly tackle climate change, we must understand how it is being presented to us as a nation.

Our analysis shows that UK broadcast media's climate change coverage is overwhelmingly event-driven. Over the past six months, we recorded more than 45,000 segments on climate change - yet these discussions fade almost as quickly as they ignite during dramatic events like the Californian wildfires, Spanish floods, or the political wrangling around the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

Alarmist language, with terms like 'ticking time bomb,' comprises 55 per cent of the descriptive content, while a single evening event such as the Oscars garnered nearly 30,000 mentions - about 65 per cent of all climate change references.

For communicators in this space, we need to shift towards more sustained, solution-focused messaging to drive lasting public engagement."

Josh Wheeler
Founder of Be Broadcast

This creates both challenges and opportunities for effective messaging.

Sustaining Engagement

Relying solely on reactive communications during high-impact events is insufficient. The fleeting nature of media attention means that maintaining public engagement requires long-term, strategic planning. Crafting ongoing narratives that build a continuous story can help keep the conversation alive, even when there isn't breaking news.

Balancing Urgency with Constructive Messaging

Alarmist language - making up 55 per cent of the descriptive content - often sparks immediate reactions but does not foster sustained dialogue. Communicators must balance the urgent calls to action with constructive, solution-focused narratives. This dual approach helps to raise awareness without causing audience fatigue, ultimately guiding the public towards actionable change.

Tailoring Messaging for Diverse Audiences

The report indicates that different audiences respond to varied narrative styles:

- For Climate Specialists: Integrate robust, data-driven insights with hopeful messaging to inspire tangible action. This balanced approach can transform urgent information into sustained, solution-oriented strategies.
- For General Communicators: Even without deep expertise in climate science, understanding these media dynamics allows for the development of messages that resonate widely. By highlighting both the severity of the crisis and the potential for innovative solutions, general communicators can contribute to a more informed public debate.

Context-Dependent Messaging

Media narratives shift rapidly in response to external events. Effective communication strategies must be agile, adjusting messages to align with major policy announcements or significant environmental events. This context-dependent approach ensures that communications remain timely, relevant, and impactful.

The Climate Conversation report highlights that successful communication around climate change must move beyond short-lived, reactive bursts. By adopting strategies that sustain engagement, balance urgency with optimism, tailor messaging for diverse audiences, and adapt to the evolving media landscape, communicators can foster a more enduring and productive dialogue on climate change.

Overview

This report offers a comprehensive analysis of how UK radio and TV outlets have discussed climate change over the past six months.

Drawing on detailed transcript analysis from over 45,000 segments, we decode the key narratives, frames, metaphors, sentiment, and calls to action that shape public discourse. By examining the language and narrative consistency across different media types and outlets, this report provides brands with timely insights to inform their media engagement strategies and PR messaging.

Rather than debating climate science itself, our focus is on understanding the media's narrative - whether alarmist, hopeful, or balanced - and how these narratives might influence public perception and brand positioning. In today's competitive media landscape, strategic broadcast PR is not just reactive but an essential asset for long-term brand credibility.

Key Findings

Impact

- **Coverage Tapering:** Without a distinctive hook or a moment of skepticism - such as questioning the effectiveness of COP or the fundamental premise of climate change - broadcast outlets tend to taper off their coverage. This indicates that peak moments are largely driven by breaking news and significant policy or environmental events, rather than a continuous conversation.

Mentions & Timing

- **Volume:** Climate change was mentioned in over 45,000 broadcast segments, with peak discussion occurring during early morning news bulletins and prime-time discussions.
- **Temporal Trends:** Significant spikes in coverage often align with major policy announcements or extreme weather events, underlining the media's responsiveness to current events.

Narrative Frames and Metaphors:

- **Alarmist Language:** Phrases such as "***ticking time bomb***", "***climate crisis***", and "***disaster waiting to happen***" appear frequently - accounting for roughly 55% of the descriptive language.
- **Hopeful/Action-Oriented Frames:** About 30% of segments emphasize transformative ideas through metaphors like "***green revolution***", "***renewable renaissance***" and "***rising tide of innovation***."
- **Neutral Reporting:** The remaining 15% of coverage is factual and data–driven, focusing on policy announcements and research findings.

Calls to Action (CTA):

- **Explicit Appeals:** Approximately 35% of segments conclude with direct calls to action (e.g., "***act now***," "***demand change***") urging immediate response.
- **Implicit Recommendations:** An additional 20% include subtle prompts for community or policy engagement.
- **No CTA:** Nearly 45% of segments end without any call to action.

Narrative Consistency and Urgency:

- **Urgency vs. Progress:** About 60% of the coverage adopts an urgent tone calling for rapid action, 25% offer a balanced view integrating emerging solutions, and 15% highlight steady, incremental progress.
- **Context-Dependent Shifts:** Coverage often shifts in response to external events - such as policy announcements or extreme weather - indicating dynamic narrative adjustments.

In-Depth Analysis

1 Analysis of Broadcast Outlets Covering Climate Change

Across the last six months, climate change has been discussed by 241 unique broadcast outlets. Below is a snapshot of the top outlets by frequency of mention along with our editorial observations:

Outlet	Frequency	Analysis / Observations
BBC World Service Radio	2,795	A dominant international radio outlet delivering comprehensive, globally oriented coverage with in-depth interviews, expert analysis, and a balanced tone.
BBC World TV	2,771	Emphasizes visual storytelling and international perspectives, often combining striking imagery with factual reporting to underscore the urgency of climate impacts.
BBC Parliament	1,681	Focused on legislative debates and policy discussions, framing climate change within political and regulatory contexts to provide insight into governmental responses.
Euronews EN	1,671	Offers a pan-European view on climate issues, highlighting cross-border policy challenges and economic implications while balancing urgency with collaborative outlooks.
CNN International Europe	1,629	Known for fast-paced, breaking news, it frames climate change within global political and economic narratives, frequently emphasizing the international stakes of policy decisions.
BBC Radio 4	1,601	Renowned for its detailed, analytical programming, providing extensive expert commentary and in-depth discussions that contextualize climate change within broader societal trends.
Bloomberg Europe	1,393	Focuses on the financial and economic aspects of climate change, offering data-driven insights into market impacts, investment trends, and the economic dimensions of environmental policies..
CNBC Europe	1,373	Emphasizes business and economic implications, discussing how climate policies affect global markets, investment, and trade - often with a critical edge on policy efficiency.
BBC News Channel	1,360	Combines visual and factual reporting with balanced coverage, often featuring expert panels and data visualisations to present a holistic view of climate-related developments.
Times Radio	1,236	A leading talk radio outlet that engages in analytical discussions and diverse viewpoints, its coverage often highlights both the urgency of the crisis and the nuances of policy debates.

Editorial Observations:

Public Service vs. Commercial Coverage:

BBC outlets provide broad, balanced views through in-depth analysis and visual storytelling, while commercial networks (e.g., CNN International Europe, Bloomberg Europe, CNBC Europe) tend to frame the issue in economic and geopolitical terms.

Regional and Niche Platforms:

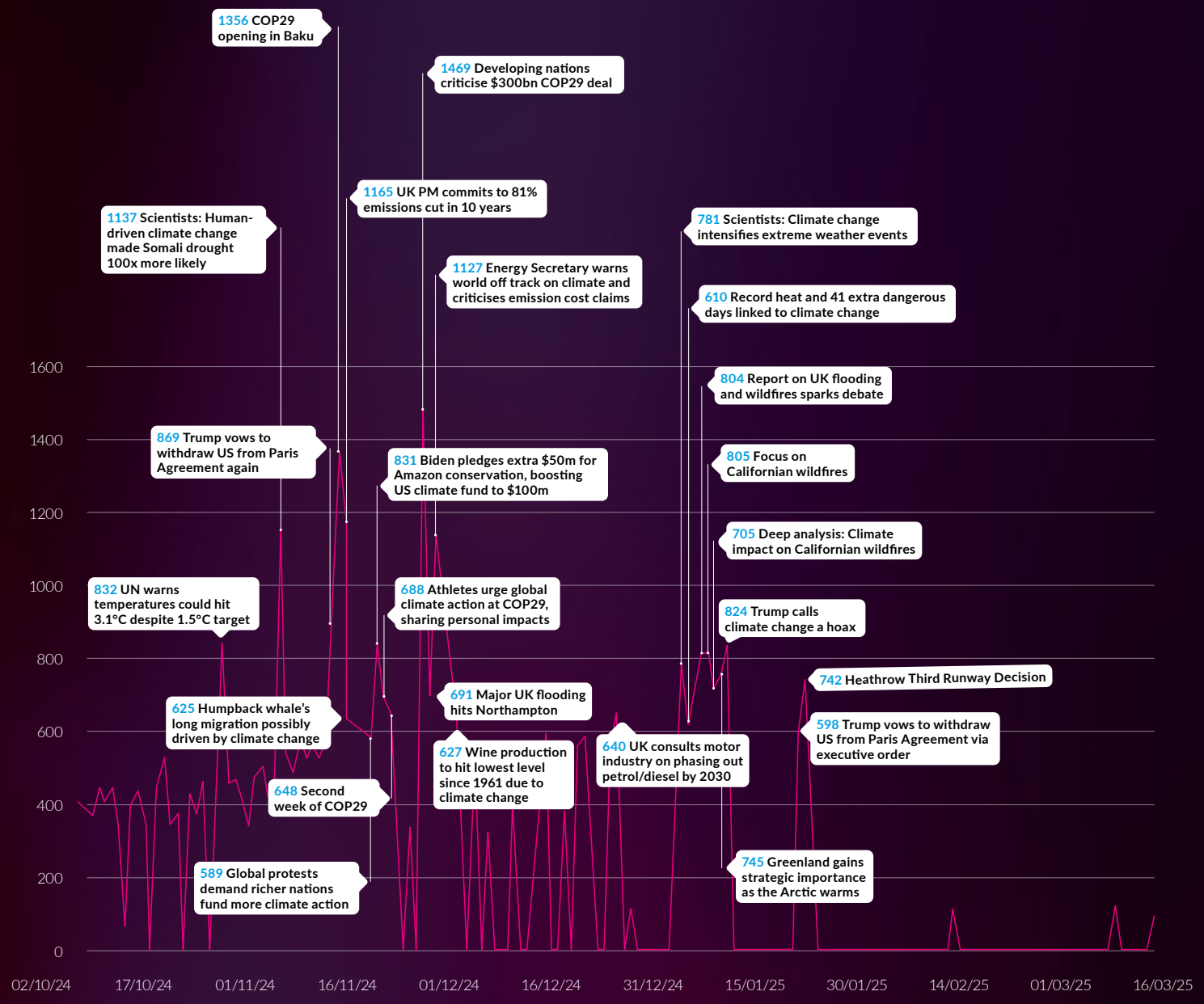
Many regional stations (e.g., BBC Cornwall, BBC Radio Scotland) offer localised coverage that emphasises direct community impacts, making the issue more tangible.

Content Format:

Radio programs favour detailed discussions and expert interviews, whereas TV channels leverage powerful visuals and live reporting to drive emotional engagement.

Peak Moments in Climate Change Coverage

During the six-month period, several key dates emerged as peak moments in broadcast coverage. These spikes often coincided with major policy announcements, significant global events, or dramatic environmental news. The chart below summarizes the peak dates, the frequency of mentions on each day, and a headline that encapsulates the story driving the conversation.



Major News Drivers

Key external events amplified these peak moments:

- **January 20th, 2025:** President Trump leaves the Paris Agreement, which became a catalyst for intense media scrutiny and debate.
- **October 29, 2024:** Spanish Floods triggered widespread coverage on climate impacts, emphasizing the tangible effects of extreme weather.
- **11th – 22nd November 2024:** The COP29 conference in Baku dominated the airwaves, setting the agenda for climate policy debates and international negotiations.

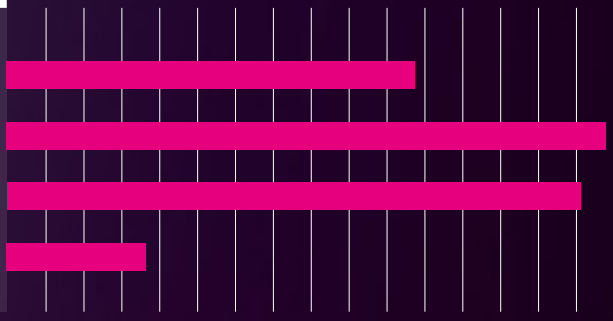
Ultimately, without a distinctive hook or a moment of scepticism - whether questioning the effectiveness of COP or the very premise of climate change - broadcast outlets tend to taper off their coverage. In the absence of such dramatic triggers, the conversation on climate change diminishes, indicating that peak moments are largely driven by breaking news and significant policy or environmental events.

In-Depth Analysis

2 Media Breakdown by Type

The broadcast landscape features a diverse range of media types. The table below presents the frequency of climate change mentions across different media platforms:

Media Type	Frequency
National Radio	10,773
National TV	15,808
Regional Radio	15,136
Regional TV	3,669



Observations

- **National TV:** Uses high-impact visuals and live reporting to create strong emotional engagement.
- **Regional Radio:** Provides localised, community-focused coverage that makes climate issues directly relevant to specific audiences.
- **National Radio:** Delivers in-depth analysis and expert commentary, offering context and historical perspective.
- **Regional TV:** Combines visual storytelling with local relevance, albeit with a smaller volume compared to national outlets.

In-Depth Analysis

3 Sentiment Analysis

Our sentiment analysis was conducted in two stages: a raw analysis and a refined analysis (which discounts alarmist language).

The table below summarizes our findings:

Sentiment Category	Raw Distribution	Refined Distribution*	Interpretation
Positive	5%	15%	Once alarmist language is discounted, more content emphasizes success stories, policy initiatives, and innovative solutions, reflecting a constructive, hopeful outlook.
Neutral	28%	40%	A significant portion of reporting is fact-based, focusing on data, policy announcements, or objective summaries without emotive language - indicating balanced coverage.
Negative	67%	45%	Although many texts discuss adverse impacts, the reduction in negative sentiment suggests that some of the initial negativity was due to hyperbolic or alarmist language.

*Refined Distribution refers to sentiment percentages recalculated after discounting alarmist adjectives and phrases.

Detailed Insights:

- **Raw Analysis:** The high raw negative score (67%) reflects the severity of climate impacts through strong, emotive language.
- **Refined Analysis:** Discounting alarmist language increases positive sentiment from 5% to 15% and neutral sentiment from 28% to 40%, revealing underlying empathy and solution-focused narratives.
- **Overall Outlook:** When alarmist language is set aside, the media narrative is more balanced - acknowledging both the severity of challenges and the proactive responses.
- **What this means is outlets want and use alarmist language in and around this subject BUT they do so in order to talk about the potential solutions. The 'good' acts as a response to the 'bad'.**

In-Depth Analysis

4 Analysis of Calls to Action (CTA)

Our analysis of broadcast segments revealed the following about how calls to action are used:

CTA	Type	Explanation
35%	Direct CTA	Explicit directives such as “Act Now” that prompt immediate audience response.
20%	Implicit CTA	Subtle suggestions for engagement, e.g., encouraging “Community Engagement.”
45%	No CTA	Segments that conclude without any directive call to action.

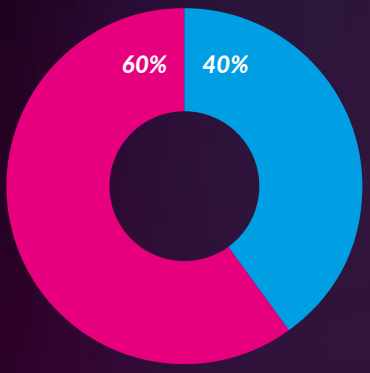
Detailed Insights:

- **Direct CTAs** (35%) encourage immediate action, often crucial during crisis events.
- **Implicit CTAs** (20%) build longer-term engagement by gently inviting participation.
- **But the majority of discussions around this do not have a focal point of action.**

In-Depth Analysis

5 Analysis of Urgency in Discussion

Our analysis focused on whether the language in broadcast segments conveys a sense of urgency regarding climate action:



Detailed Insights:

- **60% of segments** use urgent, alarmist language, stressing immediate action through emotive descriptions and calls for intervention.
- **40% of segments** adopt a more measured, data-driven approach that offers balanced context and long-term perspectives.

6 Discussion of Potential Solutions

Broadcast segments also address potential solutions to climate change, with two main narrative approaches:

Solutions?	Info
25%	Discuss emerging solutions and technological innovations - presenting a view of the issue with optimism and a focus on transformative change.
15%	Focus on incremental and steady progress - often centered around personal or community impact, highlighting small but meaningful steps forward.

Detailed Insights:

- **Emerging Solutions** (25%) showcase breakthroughs and bold policy proposals, fostering an optimistic view of transformative change.
- **Incremental Progress** (15%) emphasises community-led initiatives and gradual improvements, reinforcing trust and credibility through tangible actions.

In-Depth Analysis

7 Analysis of Language Types

Our categorization of language used in climate change discussions is as follows:

Alarmist	Neutral	Hopeful
55%	15%	30%

Detailed Insights:

- **Alarmist** (55%) dominates with dramatic and urgent language, effectively highlighting risks but potentially escalating anxiety.
- **Hopeful** (30%) emphasises solutions and innovative approaches, presenting an optimistic counterbalance.
- **Neutral** (15%) provides factual, data-driven reporting that offers a balanced, objective view.

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