

Media coverage of climate change and newsroom politics: The case of Montenegro

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Abstract

Climate change is one of the most important global topics of public interest. Consequently, the role of the media is crucial to inform citizens about it and to raise public awareness. This paper is devoted to an analysis of the reporting methods of the most visited Montenegrin web portals regarding the topic. We also aim to determine how media workers and political agents cover this topic. Since 2007, Montenegro has been constitutionally represented as an ecological state, which has an excellent legislative framework but also numerous environmental problems. Bearing these facts in mind, we investigate this topic through the content and discourse analysis of 268 media texts on web portals in the period from October 21 to November 22, 2021 (UN Climate Change Glasgow Conference) and in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven important people covering this topic in Montenegro. We conclude that Montenegrin society is environmentally illiterate, although young people are more aware of the threat posed by climate change. The apathy of Montenegrin citizens can partly be attributed to the influence of media that superficially report on this issue and make no effort to educate the population or raise awareness about environmental protection and climate change.

KEYWORDS: climate change, Montenegrin portals, media practices, newsroom politics, Glasgow Summit

Introduction: Climate change or climate crisis?

Over the past two decades, we have increasingly encountered phrases like climate change, global warming, greenhouse effect, and ozone hole in the media. Experts from diverse disciplines have repeatedly cautioned that climate change stems from humanity's irresponsible treatment of nature, emphasizing the urgent need to address environmental pollution. The repercussions of ecological ignorance are now becoming evident in our global society, manifesting as heatwaves in Europe, snowstorms in the Middle East, and tornadoes in places like Venice and Poland.¹ Senior officials, state authorities, the NGO sector, and activists have all joined the battle for environmental protection. However, based on media reports, it appears they are not entirely united in this endeavor.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change² warned about the serious consequences for citizens around the globe in its report in 2007 when it stated that “global warming is behind the enlargement and increased numbers of glacial lakes, faster melting of permafrost in western Siberia and other areas, ecosystem changes in both the Arctic and Antarctic...” (Giddens, 2009, p. 32). The planet’s future depends on many factors, such as economic and population growth, the spread of low-carbon technology, and increased inequality between regions. The most optimistic estimates predict global warming in the range from 1.1 to 2.9°C. Experts warn that the sea level will have risen by 18 to 38 centimeters by the end of the 21st century. The IPCC predicts that, even with reduced population growth and switching to cleaner energy sources, the sea level would rise by 48 centimeters and the temperature by 4°C. However, other voices can also be heard regarding this topic. Singer and Avery claim that climate change is not caused by human activity. According to them, “the stakes in global warming debate are huge. Humanity and wildlife may both be losing in the debate” (Singer & Avery, 2007, p. 4). They say that “the activist tells us that modern society will destroy the planet. However, they don’t have much evidence to support their position” (Singer & Avery, 2007, p. 6).

¹ Also, Montenegro has serious problems with environmental pollution. It is, for example, far behind European standards in terms of waste recycling. According to the Waste Management Plan 2015-2020, Montenegro was supposed to recycle 25% of waste per annum, but in the past year only between 10 and 15% of waste was recycled. The goal for the next nine years is to recycle 40% of waste, which is difficult to achieve due to the citizens’ insufficient awareness of this issue (Marković, 2021). In 2020, the worst air pollution (i.e., the highest concentrations of particulate matter) was detected in Pljevlja, Bijelo Polje, Nikšić, and Podgorica (M. L., 2021). The most heavily polluted rivers in Montenegro are the Vežišnica, the Cehotina, the Morača in the section downstream from the city collector, the Ibar, the Lim, and the Grnčar because of the irresponsible behavior of individuals but also because of wastewater overflow.

² This institution was founded in 1988. Climate change risk assessment reports can be found on the website <https://www.ipcc.ch/>.

A similar position is taken by Lomborg (2010, p. 65), who also argues that this problem has been receiving too much attention and states that the most significant problems that the planet faces are poverty, curable diseases, and so on. In his book *The new climate war* (2021, p. 9), Mann claims that “the origins of the ongoing climate wars lie in disinformation campaigns waged decades ago, when the findings of science began to collide with the agendas of powerful vested interests.”

Giddens writes that people are aware of the danger of global warming, but that few are ready to change their habits. He explains human behavior in the following way: “The dangers brought by global warming, as terrifying as they may seem, are not tangible, immediate and visible in everyday life, so many people will sit idly by and not take any concrete action” (2009, p. 10). This is precisely why the media have a crucial informative and educational function and can appeal to and draw people’s attention to this problem through campaigns in cooperation with state institutions and the NGO sector.

The perception of environmental problems nowadays depends on political debates and other public arguments, but the media plays a key role in this. This paper analyzes media coverage of climate affairs in Montenegrin web portals and newsroom politics. We believe portals are one of the most important news sources from which people get their first information. We focus on the reporting methods and news coverage of this topic; additionally, we observe editors as active agents in representing and constructing this topic and in shaping audiences’ responses and awareness. Our main intention is to investigate the quality of eco-reporting and to determine the status of environmental journalism in Montenegro.³ For this purpose, we conduct a content and discourse analysis of Montenegrin web portals, which report on environmental topics, and hold seven in-depth semi-structured interviews with editors and other influential people to see what kind of messengers they are and how they construct environmental content in Montenegro and shape audiences’ responses to climate change. We want to analyze the editors’ choices when selecting news, and we presuppose that not only individual beliefs are important, but structural or contextual factors are more significant.

Eco-journalism in search of a better future

As the name suggests, environmental or eco-journalism implies informing the public about nature and the human impact on the environment but also the impact of the environment on the individual and citizens at both the local and global levels. In the book

³ Montenegro is a country in Southeastern Europe with an area of 13,812 square kilometers and a population of 619,211 inhabitants according to the latest Monstat census of 2021.

Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere, Pezzullo and Cox (2018) explain that “environmental journalism” means the search for, verification, and production of content on environmental problems. This form of journalism developed gradually. As environmental movements started appearing in the 1960s, journalists were reporting mostly on oil spills, air pollution, smog, and similar phenomena. However, the year 1990 saw the establishment of the Society of Environmental Journalism to improve the quality of reporting. Research showed that environmental journalism, which is very closely related to science, technology, healthcare, and medicine, differs from other forms of reporting. Bødker and Neverla (2012) underscore the intricate nature of environmental and climate change journalism, which navigates the realms of politics, business, science, and culture, spanning across local, regional, and global spheres. They contend that conveying certain issues, such as global warming, can be challenging, emphasizing the need to render these topics more tangible through informative genres. Simultaneously, they highlight the media's capability to elevate any subject from a scientific realm to a political discourse by framing it in a particular way and instigating public debate. In a similar vein, Gillam (2020) observes that environmental journalists, who specialize in this field, frequently seek insights from scientific journals, academic institutions, regulatory bodies, and trusted scientific experts in their quest for answers and accurate information.

Reporting on environmental issues must be based on the respect for professional standards that are balanced, accurate, and based on credible sources (Hansen, 2020). Theorists claim there is a danger that the journalist might be perceived as an environmental activist, which is why it is necessary to separate these two functions, bearing in mind the political and environmental interests at the center of many environmental problems. This is also prescribed by Guideline 10 of the *Code of Montenegrin Journalists*, which stipulates that media workers must avoid conflicts of interest, thus observing professional standards such as fairness and impartiality.

This new form of journalism involves initiating public debates, promoting environmental protection, and uniting different actors (state institutions, the NGO sector, and the whole of society) with the aim of saving the planet. With this form of journalism, it is possible to cover a broad range of topics, such as biodiversity, pollution, natural hazards, environmental protection policy, renewable energy, reports, initiatives, events, citizens' habits, etc. (see Iberdrola, n.d.). Priest points out the importance of this form of journalism and corroborates Giddens' position that citizens cannot perceive climate change, such as how they do the presence of heavy metals in water. Environmental problems are mostly inconspicuous, which is why they need to be visible in the media;

she writes that “environmental reporting is a crucial component of society’s response to these and many other environmental problems: If we do not know that the problems exist, we cannot motivate people to act to address them” (Priest, 2022, p. 367). Environmental journalism is simultaneously a combination of politics, economics, science, and culture, and requires education through various trainings, workshops, and courses so journalists can report on these topics. There are free courses on the internet in which journalists can acquire basic knowledge in terms of information sources, presenting scientific findings to the public, and interpreting data from international reports. The Poynter Institute (Krueger, 2017) provides four guidelines for writing about climate change: do not conflate science and policy; be specific about which climate change *debate* you are covering; be clear about the science; avoid “global warming: yes or no?” coverage. Whitmarsh and Mitev (2022) add that journalists must avoid using emotional language that could induce anxiety in the citizens. The use of certain terms can influence citizens’ perceptions of environmental issues. The authors cite the example of American consultant Frank Luntz, who advocated the use of the term *climate change* instead of *global warming*, believing that the latter sounded intimidating and emotional (Whitmarsh & Mitev, 2022). They (2015) also explain that the term global warming is used by people who are very concerned about the environmental situation, whereas the term climate change is used by skeptics and those who refuse to acknowledge the severity of the situation. Positive messages that arouse hope and invite people to action will be a good practice example about messages that only make people anxious. Whitmarsh and Mitev also emphasize that “trusted messengers are therefore also an important component of audience responses to climate change” (2022, p. 386).

Free media and financial independence: the quality reporting on environmental topics

According to the data from the Knight Centre for Environmental Journalism, only 12 percent of environmental journalists have a formal education in scientific and environmental fields (Pezzullo & Cox, 2018). Hansen (2020) notes that environmental journalists are the first to come under political and economic pressures that are reflected in layoffs or switching to a freelance position. The author claims that numerous studies have shown that, to raise the quality of reporting, it is necessary to establish better cooperation among owners, the political and economic interests of the media, and the framing of environmental journalism (Hansen, 2020). This means that the manner of reporting largely depends on the degree of media freedom since politicians and powerful businesspeople may be involved in environmental scandals, such as corruption, political

conflicts, or criminal activities (Freedman, 2020). Kovarik (2020) further suggests that the reporting method is also impacted by the extent of media freedom. He notes that in developing countries, numerous journalists who have criticized industrial pollution and government regulations have faced severe consequences for their reporting approach. He argues that the contrast between an authoritarian and a libertarian philosophy of communication significantly shapes the landscape of environmental journalism. Friedman (2010) highlights several challenges within science and environmental reporting. She argues that conveying scientific topics isn't merely another specialized form of reporting; it hinges on the audience's limited familiarity with these subjects in the context of their daily lives and the perceived distance from such topics. Furthermore, the reporting dilemma lies in scientists perceiving their media contributions as insufficiently precise, while editors find them lacking in excitement. Friedman suggests embracing interpretive reporting as a means to bridge this gap and make these subjects more accessible to the general public. She underscores the importance of journalists' real-world experiences, which can be leveraged to effectively communicate complex scientific and environmental matters to a broader audience.

Montenegrin journalists are not specialized in environmental journalism and work under political and economic pressure. The economic conditions in which Montenegrin media operate do not enable journalists to specialize in any specific sort of reporting. According to data from the Media Trade Union of Montenegro for 2021, as many as 200 media outlets operate in the small market of a country with approximately 619,000 inhabitants. Based on a survey of 87 journalists, the union states the alarming data that 57.5% of journalists have not undergone further professional training, even though every media outlet needs to be flexible, bearing in mind that technological development affects media reporting. One in four journalists has a net salary ranging from €500 to €600, so 44% of media professionals are forced to work two jobs because of low earnings. Editors influence in part or fully the reporting of 75.6% of the respondents (Laković Konatar, 2021). These findings provide compelling evidence that Montenegrin journalists represent the most vulnerable link in the media ecosystem. They lack specialization, receive inadequate compensation, and consequently lack the motivation to deliver high-quality reporting on matters of public significance. Additionally, there is the danger that editors-in-chief, their assistants, and editorial staff may not recognize the significance of this topic and fail to prioritize it when selecting the stories to be published. Editors who have the role will choose those topics that align with their affinities when adopting a social agenda. Robinson (1973) differentiates between three approaches to analyze the concept of *gatekeeper* depending on the influencing factors. According to individualistic the-

ories, the choice of topics depends on the individual and psychological characteristics of the professional who is at the top of the pyramid, whereas some socio-institutional studies assert that the manner of reporting depends on the context within an organization, or more precisely on the editorial policy of the media. Cybernetic theories postulate that the environment influences public information on problems (Kunczik & Zipfel, 2006).

Within the scope of the individualistic approach, White (1950) conducted an experiment aimed at demonstrating that editors are led by their own beliefs when selecting news. For a week, he analyzed the information selection of an editor he called Mr. Gates, who had 25 years of experience working in print media. Even though he received information from three agencies, he did not use nine-tenths of the material. He prioritized political topics while de-emphasizing human interest stories and crime news. Gieber (1972) also recreated White's experiment but understood that it is not only subjective predispositions that affect the choice of events but also structural coercions, which means that the desk editor performs his job under pressure while the superiors are in a decision-making position. Famous Canadian media theorist McLuhan (2008) posited a similar opinion decades ago, according to which powerful groups outside the editorial board play a key role in the choice of information. He argued that those who run the media on behalf of the owners tend to show interest in program content, while the owners themselves do not go beyond providing the information that the audience wants. His claim is supported by the French economist Cagé, who states that billionaires buy media to gain new power leverage, treating them as "expensive lovers" (2016, p. 73).

The theory of Gans (2010) is the most comprehensive and does not focus on owner editors but rather sees the selection of news as a closed circle comprising the source, journalist, and audience, who are interconnected. The choice of the source depends on the audience, with the source usually being an influential representative of the audience. He discusses the role of journalists in a democratic society and points out that it is necessary to move from passive stenography to active reporting and to improve reporting on economic issues due to the interests of powerful corporations. Citizens themselves can be newsworthy if they actively participate in discussions on issues of public interest. In this way, Gans shares McLuhan's opinion and does not deny the influence of powerful groups as a key factor in the news selection process. At the same time, it is evident that Gans' view differs from that of Hansen, who believes that journalists should not assume the role of environmental activists (Gans, 2010). Regardless of the differences in the theoretical approach, the editor will choose, under the influence of various factors, which value element of the news is the most important—topicality, familiarity, importance,

consequences, human interest, conflict, unusualness, impact, and audience (Malović, 2005). The theories of journalists and mirrors became obsolete long ago, as studies have shown that journalists do not have the power of decision-making and that the events themselves do not determine the importance of news, nor do journalists hold the mirror or present the events to the public as they happened. Journalists, through news representations, instead construct the news agenda and, by their reporting, also reality itself (Hall, 1997).

The operation of the media in the Montenegrin market is best illustrated by the gatekeeper theory in combination with McLuhan's, White's, and Gans' theories. Montenegrin citizens understand that the editorial policies of the media determine the manner of reporting on political, economic, and social events. A survey conducted by the Digital Forensic Centre on a sample of 1,022 respondents in 16 Montenegrin municipalities revealed that 48% of the respondents believe that the media promotes the interests of certain political parties, while 28.9% believe that the media works in their owner's interest. As many as 38.4% of the respondents note that the media produce different reports on the same event (Digitalni forenzički centar, 2022). The survey results demonstrate that the main precondition for respecting professional and ethical standards is freedom when deciding on the product presented to the public. Surveys by the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro and the Digital Forensic Centre confirm that Montenegrin journalists face political and economic pressures in their editorial boards. Can we expect media workers to inform the public better about environmental problems in such circumstances, bearing in mind that they work two jobs and come under pressure from the editors or media owners?

Pezzullo and Cox (2018) explain that the public perception of environmental problems depends on many sources: political debates, arts, and documentaries, but the key role in this process is that of the media. Gilliam (2020) warns that the scientific arena is also a very important field of information manipulation. The industry has its own interests, while scientists and governments worldwide attempt to convince people that they are working in their interest. Even information coming from regulatory agencies is not entirely accurate. Gilliam (2020) cites Krimsky and Stern, who conclude that journalists rely on scientific journals as credible sources of information; however, she warns that if these sources are contaminated and prone to distorting the facts, then damage will be done and the citizens' trust in science and the media destroyed. Social media and plat-

forms also promote an agenda in accordance with the political interests of individuals or groups (Gilliam, 2020).⁴

Direct manipulation methods, such as agenda-setting, make it possible to steer people's attention more easily to certain problems. During the reporting, "journalist[s] don't only share information but also may act as conduits to amplify other voices—citizens, public officials, corporate spokespersons, academics and more—seeking to influence public attitudes and decisions about environmental matters" (Pezzullo & Cox, 2018, p. 25). In contrast, the media's auxiliary functions, such as the guiding, propaganda, and persuasive functions, will convince the citizens that the journalists are working in their interest, informing and educating the public on important social issues. Each message that is sent via the media undergoes a certain framing: it is framed in accordance with the media's editorial policy. Giles (2021, p. 159) defines media framing as the "process where the topic is presented from a certain angle (or several angles), inviting the public to reach certain conclusions and make certain allusions to other topics." Frames and settings play an important role in shaping reality, which has very much been acknowledged in journalism (Hansen, 2020). Lester and Cottle (2009) have shown how different parties (politicians, scientists, climate change victims) can be presented in different ways. Citizens are typically portrayed as victims, bearing the brunt of climate change's consequences or as activists striving to alleviate its impacts. In contrast, politicians and scientists take center stage, emerging as pivotal and representative figures in this narrative. Appelgren and Jönsson (2021) differentiate between diagnostic (identifying the problem and looking for a culprit), prognostic (proposed solution based on the problem identification), and motivational framing (identification of motivating factors). Priest (2022) sees the media agenda's function in how different stakeholders (environmental organizations, state institutions, academic community, corporations) come together to resolve a problem and encourage citizens to think about environmental issues.

The audience and environmental journalism: The environmentally illiterate Montenegrin society

Katalinić (2007) highlights the media's role in shaping environmental attitudes, emphasizing the importance of incorporating modern media into the educational curriculum to instill environmental awareness in children. Jukić (2011) further underscores that ecological literacy extends beyond a mere accumulation of environmental facts and empha-

⁴ The author gives the example of Facebook, where a profile was created under the name "Why climate change is fake news," or Google, which pushes search results leading to websites claiming that climate change is a fraud (Gilliam, 2020).

sizes that ecologically literate citizen should also cultivate values, opinions, and skills that empower them to translate knowledge into meaningful action. The environmentally illiterate Montenegrin society is divided due to the contradictory attitudes of politicians and experts on climate change.⁵ A survey conducted in 2021 on a sample of 1018 respondents showed that one-third of Montenegrin citizens believe that the notion of a human effect on climate change was false. Nevertheless, three quarters of the citizens are aware that climate change poses a threat to humanity (IPSOS, 2021). A survey (IPSOS, 2021) showed that Montenegrin citizens tend not to read news about ecology. Slightly over a third of the citizens (36%) regularly or frequently follow environmental news, while 41% sometimes read about these issues. UNDP's 2022 survey gives hope regarding the environmental awareness of younger generations. The survey found that young people in Montenegro are more ecologically literate and more aware of the threat posed by climate change. For example, 74% of young people aged 18 to 29 believe climate change is a global problem, while 57% also perceive it as a national problem. One third of young people feel personal responsibility, while three in four respondents are ready to change their habits. Over 50% walk regularly, buy environmentally friendly products and consume power and water rationally (Mina, 2022). Jakovljević (2020), after surveying 100 citizens from five Montenegrin municipalities, arrived at similar conclusions. The results showed that 42% of the citizens get their environmental information from television, 62% were not satisfied with how the media report on environmental issues, and 88% believed that the media do not have an educational function in relation to this question. Most of the respondents (60%) were young people aged 18 to 27. Such studies confirm that younger generations are more ecologically literate, specifically the so-called

⁵ Montenegro became an ecological state with the adoption of the Žabljak Declaration back in 1991, but thirty years later it faces numerous environmental issues: the devastation of the River Tara, gravel mining, high degree of air and water pollution in some municipalities, 400 illegal landfills, waste recycling, etc. According to Article 1 of its Constitution, Montenegro is defined as a "civil, democratic, ecological and a state of social justice, based on the rule of law" (Constitutional Assembly of the Republic of Montenegro, 2007). Although the populist rhetoric of the politicians often referred to the term ecology, this question has only really been problematized as of December 2018, when Chapter 27 was opened, dedicated to environmental protection and climate change. Through this chapter, Montenegro undertakes to harmonize its legislative framework with the EU *acquis* in ten areas: "horizontal legislation, water and air quality, waste management, nature protection, industrial pollution control and risk management, chemicals, noise, civil protection and climate change" (Radna grupa za pregovaračko poglavlje 27, n.d.). At the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2015, Montenegro adopted the Paris Agreement, undertaking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent by 2030 as compared to 1990 (Đurović et al., 2016). This is a highly important issue, bearing in mind that emissions from industrial production generate a greenhouse effect which leads to global warming. For example, the Thermal Power Plant Pljevlja and the Aluminium Plant Podgorica accounted for the majority (75%) of national emissions in 2013. Moreover, Montenegro has a "rich" legislative framework in regard to environmental protection and climate change: Law on Environment, Law on Environmental Impact Assessment, Law on Nature Protection, Law on Noise Protection, Law on National Parks, Law on Air Protection, Law on Waters, Law on Waste Management, Law on Protection Against Negative Climate Change Effects, National Sustainable Development Strategy 2030, Waste Management Strategy of Montenegro until 2030, National Climate Change Strategy 2030. These are just some of the documents regulating this issue.

Millennials born from 1981 to 1996 and the Zoomers (1997-2012). This finding leads us to conclude that Giddens' (2009) claim that people are unwilling to change their habits primarily applies to the older population.

According to Priest (2020), the audience holds its unique set of opinions, values, expectations, and beliefs concerning science and ecology. Consequently, it interprets stories through this lens. However, it remains crucial to elucidate scientific research methodologies to the audience. Additionally, it's vital to acknowledge that scientists are not insulated from society and can be influenced by political and ideological factors, which they may inadvertently transmit through the media. N

Appelgren and Jönsson (2021) highlight the potential of data journalism as a bridge between the scientific style and professional standards, with a critical caveat against overusing the scientific style, which could risk alienating the audience due to potential comprehension challenges. Environmental data journalism relies on open data, public documents, interviews, and data contributions from scientists and the public through crowdsourcing. The degree of audience involvement in data analysis is shaped by six key factors: the subject matter, information sources, individual beliefs, time constraints, emotional connections, and analytical skills (Appelgren & Jönsson, 2021). The authors also identify three significant barriers within this process: scientific illiteracy, socio-cultural influences, and a sense of futility among citizens who may doubt the impact of their engagement. Social psychologists use the term *social amplification of risk*, according to which society reacts to information related to crisis situations. However, the audience's reaction to climate change depends on factors such as gender, age, and ethnic background. In the English-speaking world and former communist countries, people are more skeptical and less worried regarding climate change (Whitmarsh & Mitev, 2022). In Europe, the younger generation exhibits a higher level of environmental literacy compared to their older counterparts. Interestingly, despite their greater concerns, young people maintain a sense of optimism regarding climate change. This behavior can be attributed to the fact that climate change will significantly impact the lives of Millennials and Zoomers for the majority of their existence (Whitmarsh & Mitev, 2022). As an illustrative instance of youth activism, the authors point to the example of Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. She orchestrated the Fridays for Future protest in August 2018, leveraging the power of social media. This movement drew participation from over 1.6 million young individuals across 120 countries the following March. They united in their demand for concrete actions from governments and international leaders in addressing the climate crisis.

In the meantime, citizen environmental journalism has also sprung up: citizens who send environment-related information to journalists. In Montenegro, the number of environmentally aware citizens is growing among the younger population; on the website of the Centre for Investigative Journalism of Montenegro, under the section “Citizens – Reporters,” we can find information on landfills across the country or on environmental incidents, such as wastewater drainage into the Bay of Kotor. Motta (2020) says that it is necessary to develop conversational journalism in the future by educating journalists and providing them with sufficient time and opportunities to win the audience over for conservation, as well as to sponsor programs that will help in community building to exchange ideas on this issue. Research has demonstrated that messages are more readily and effectively embraced when conveyed in familiar language. In their work, Thier and Lin (2020) critique the media for predominantly focusing on catastrophic consequences, overlooking the practice of constructive journalism, which offers solutions to the problems at hand.⁶ Readers of journalism with a constructive approach to climate change feel a greater level of positive emotions and hope than stories with a defeatist frame. Hope can be defined as an emotional or cognitive approach according to which the audience believes a goal can be achieved. The apathy of Montenegrin citizens can partly be attributed to the influence of media that superficially report on this issue and make no effort to educate the population or raise awareness about environmental protection and climate change. However, Stanišić sees a solution in raising ecological awareness, which is possible only if “environmental topics get more media coverage and if the relevant institutions get involved in finding a solution” (eKapija, 2022).

On methodology

In pursuit of our objectives, our initial focus revolves around the examination of Montenegrin portals’ coverage of climate change. Our foundational premise posits that these portals tend to provide superficial and fact-based reporting on this critical issue. A secondary proposition suggests that the public broadcaster’s portal, guided by its defined public responsibilities within the media legislative framework, places greater emphasis on climate change reporting compared to other Montenegrin portals.

To substantiate these assertions, we will employ a comprehensive approach that includes content analysis. This analysis will center on key variables, such as genre, focus,

⁶ Thier and Tong (2022) refer to the study by Nicole Dahmen, Kathryn Thier, Brent Walth from 2019, which showed that constructive journalism increased the audience’s participation and influenced their behavior in terms of a desire for additional learning on the topic, in contrast to standard journalistic reporting that is focused on the problem.

sources, media language, and informative value. Additionally, we will apply discourse analysis to enrich our understanding of the media landscape in Montenegro concerning climate change reporting. Based on the data from *SimilarWeb*, the sample covers the most visited portals with different editorial policies: *Vijesti*, *Analitika*, *Café del Montenegro* (CDM), *Borba*, and *Antena M*. We have chosen the public broadcaster portal because, according to Article 9 of the “Law on National Public Broadcaster, Radio and Television of Montenegro,” it must promote Montenegro’s ecological character and inform the citizens on environmental issues, as it is stated in the *Official Gazette 080/20* of August 4, 2020 (Parliament of Montenegro, 2020), whereas *Café del Montenegro* is the oldest portal in Montenegro, founded in 1997. The articles from these portals were analyzed for the period from October 21 to November 22, 2021. This period was chosen because of the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, held from October 31 to November 12, 2021. From October 21 to November 22, 2021, a total of 268 texts dedicated to climate change were published. More specifically, we analyzed how the portals reported ten days before the event and ten days after the officials had met. Through a qualitative content and discourse analysis and seven semi-structured interviews with portal editors, representatives of state institutions (Department for Climate Change within the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism), the NGO Ozon, and an expert in the field of climate change and professor at the Faculty of Science and Mathematics, University of Montenegro, we noted the obstacles in constructing the public opinion about climate change in a quality manner. Specifically, in addition to three interviews with representatives of the executive power, the civil sector, and a university professor, we conducted four interviews in December 2021 with the editors of the *RTCG*, *Antena M*, *Borba*, and *Analitika* portals to record the problems faced by online media when reporting on climate change and the role of the editor’s politics in the newsroom.

Reporting of Montenegrin portals on climate change

Based on our analysis results, it can be argued that Montenegrin portals did provide coverage of this topic during the analyzed period. Nevertheless, our findings reveal that this reporting was predominantly superficial and relied heavily on factual presentation. The largest number of texts were published by the *Vijesti* portal (62), followed by *Café Del Montenegro* (CDM) (57), *Antena M* (43), *RTCG* (42), *Analitika* (39), and the fewest by *Borba* (25). Even though the *RTCG* portal, as a public service broadcaster, has a legal obligation regarding program content to the public and a separate section dedicated to ecology, it ranks fourth in terms of the number of published texts.

Table 1: Topics covered in the news

Topics	RTCG	Vijesti	Antena M	Borba	Portal Analitika	CDM
Current situation in Montenegro	-	9	5	3	4	4
Climate change as a consequence	12	22	9	7	20	22
Meetings between officials	30	21	26	9	6	25
Conflict among politicians	-	4	1	3	3	2
Conflict between politicians and environmental activists	-	6	2	1	2	3
Human interest	-	-	-	2	4	1

The topics that dominated in this period were meetings between officials, as well as the consequences of climate change. This can be explained by the fact that two important events dedicated to these issues were held in the observed period: the G20 Summit in Rome and the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. Meetings with officials were given the most space by the *RTCG* portal (71%), while this issue was covered the least on the *Analitika* portal (15%). This shows that the topic is very politicized, while the media also highlighted the political capacity of climate change. The portals *Analitika* (15%) and *Borba* (12%) published the largest number of texts about the G20 Summit in Rome, while the *RTCG* portal did not report at all on this event, where high officials agreed to zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050. Most attention was paid to the summit in Glasgow by the portals *Borba* (76%), *Analitika* (69%), *RTCG* (64%), *Antena M* (58%) and *CDM* (54%). Of course, not all texts had informative value, such as articles “Sleepy Joe in Scotland at the United Nations Climate Change Conference” (*Borba*, 2021), “UK’s longest lasting snow patch has melted away” (*CDM*, 2021a), “Macron: I know the Prime Minister of Australia lied to me” (*Z.O.*, 2021). Consequently, climate change was the focus of the *Analitika* portal in 51% of the texts, while conflicts between politicians and environmental activists, or protests led by Greta Thunberg, were covered the most on the *Vijesti* portal (9%). Thunberg is a well-known young activist from Sweden who criticized the politicians gathered at the summit, telling them that they are pretending to take the future of the young generation seriously. Within the category of political conflicts, we categorized texts that featured officials from different countries failing to reach a consensus on the necessary measures for preserving our planet. These texts often included instances where officials placed blame on each other for the global environmental predicament. Climate change has become a divisive issue among leaders of both developed and developing nations, including major world powers such as the United States, China, India, and Russia.

Focusing on the current situation in Montenegro, particularly in the context of negotiations pertaining to “Chapter 27,” which is dedicated to environmental protection and climate change, as well as public opinion surveys on this matter, the *Vijesti* portal emerged as the primary source of information, garnering the attention of 14% of citizens.

We find a focus on climate change itself in 89% of texts on the *CDM* portal, 80% of texts on the *RTCG* portal, and 75% on the *Vijesti* portal. We recorded the most pseudo-events, as events created by the media, on the portals *Antena M* (30%) and *Borba* (28%) and the fewest on the portals *RTCG* (2%) and *CDM* (8%). The *Antena M* portal paid a great deal of attention to the announcement of the participation of the President of Montenegro, Milo Đukanović, at the Summit in Glasgow. The portals *Antena M* (32%), *Borba* (20%), and *Vijesti* (20%) primarily relied on announcements as the basis for their articles. This preference for announcements serves as an indication of the shallowness inherent in their reporting.

Table 2: News genre

Genre	RTCG	Vijesti	Antena M	Borba	Portal Analitika	CDM
News	26	42	39	10	14	25
Report	16	12	1	11	19	31
Interview	-	-	1	1	1	-
Article	-	2	1	2	1	-
Comment/Column	-	3	-	1	4	1
Coverage	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hybrid genre	-	3	1	-	-	-

As can be seen from Table 2, the factual reporting method dominates on all portals. Portals also took genres such as interviews from other media. The largest number of news reports was published on the *Antena M* (90%), *Vijesti* (67%) and *RTCG* (61%) portals. For example, an interview with Noam Chomsky was published on the *Antena M* portal, which was taken from *tomdispatch.com* and *Peščanik* “Before it’s too late” (Antena M, 2021a). We could not identify any original articles authored by the media outlets themselves across all portals. Occasionally, we come across a few articles in the demanding analytical genre on these portals; however, it’s important to note that all of these articles are sourced from other media outlets. For instance, the article titled “Climate change: Ecological disasters we recently solved and what we learned from them” (Vijesti, 2021a), featured on the *Vijesti* portal, was originally published on the *BBC* Serbian portal.

Nonetheless, it's worth highlighting that the portals *Analitika* and *Vijesti* exhibited the broadest diversity of genres, including the publication of comments and columns on the topic, suggesting a more varied content approach. For example, *Vijesti* published a comment by a journalist from Deutsche Welle, "Coal and oil should be ditched quickly: After Glasgow, the glass is still half full" (*Vijesti*, 2021b), as well as a comment by the UN Resident Coordinator to Montenegro Peter Lundberg with the metaphorical headline "Deafening alarm bells" (Lundberg, 2021). What is surprising is that the RTCG portal, as the public broadcaster for Montenegro, exhibited the lowest variety of news genres when reporting about climate change; its reporting was very factual and consisted exclusively of news and reports.

Table 3: Headline types

	RTCG	Vijesti	Antena M	Borba	Portal Analitika	CDM
Informative	35	55	36	21	31	44
Sensationalistic	3	3	4	3	5	12
Metaphorical	-	1	1	1	3	-
Mixed	4	3	2	-	-	1

Most of the texts were accompanied by very informative headlines. Sensationalist headlines were linked to apocalyptic predictions that the portals seemingly could not resist and information that was not of public interest. For example, "Guterres: We are digging our own graves" (R.P., 2021), "Vučić gave a speech in Glasgow in front of empty seats?" (*Analitika*, 2021), "Nature's revenge: The Dead Sea recedes, strange craters erupt," (*CDM*, 2021b), "Cameras caught it all: Biden dozing off in public again" (*Antena M*, 2021b), etc.

Relying on Weinberg's (1996) classification, we recorded four types of sources: official (officials, representatives of institutions, PR departments, etc.), unofficial (participants or eyewitnesses of an event), primary (documents), and secondary (media and databases). The largest number of texts on all portals were taken from other media, which can also be seen based on the authorship variable and the source. Two, three, or more sources are found on the *Vijesti* portal in 51% of texts. However, half of the texts (54%) on the *Vijesti* portal were taken from other media outlets, such as *Beta*, *Mina*, or *Radio Free Europe*, which cite official sources of information. *Antena M* relies on official sources in 81% of the texts, *Borba* in 56%, and *Analitika* in only 28% of the texts. The portals *Analitika* (69%) and *CDM* (65%) base their texts mostly on secondary sources of information; presidents

of states, international institutions, politicians, the non-governmental sector, representatives of monarchies, religious leaders, and similar appear as official sources.

Table 4: Sources of news reporting

Sources	RTCG	Vijesti	Antena M	Borba	Portal Analitika	CDM
Official	17	24	21	13	10	17
Unofficial	1	-	2	-	-	-
Secondary	23	6	4	9	27	37
Not indicated	-	-	1	2	1	2
Official and unofficial	-	3	1	-	1	-
Official and secondary	1	21	12	1	-	1
Primary and secondary	-	1	1	-	-	-
Official and primary	-	1	1	-	-	-
Official, unofficial, and secondary	-	2	-	-	-	-
Official, primary, and secondary	-	4	-	-	-	-

It is commendable that the media did not use administrative or bureaucratic vocabulary but reported in newspaper style, meaning in a language understandable to the audience. The exception are comments that were written by experts that featured forecasts regarding the future of the planet, as well as expectations after the Glasgow Summit.

Table 5: Media language

Media language	RTCG	Vijesti	Antena M	Borba	Portal Analitika	CDM
Administrative style	-	2	-	-	-	1
Newspaper style	42	57	42	25	38	55
Scientific style	-	3	1	-	1	1

Based on a content and discourse analysis of 268 texts published on the portals *RTCG*, *Vijesti*, *CDM*, *Analitika*, *Borba*, and *Antena M*, we confirmed that the Montenegrin online media superficially and factually report on climate change. The absence of analytical genres and media-initiated texts in online media when addressing such a crucial global issue is a matter of significant concern. Our analysis of six diverse media outlets reveals a predominant focus on meetings with officials and an undue emphasis on insignificant meeting details that often lack any informative value. This pattern of reporting suggests both a lack of media interest in covering the topic and a deficiency in personnel capacity. Such reporting practices result in a lack of adequate information for citizens about cli-

mate change, contributing to environmental illiteracy. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the IPSOS survey (2021) found that one-third of Montenegrin citizens believe that the concept of global warming is a falsehood. This perspective can also be attributed to the environmental illiteracy of the editors, who, as White (1950) posits, play a pivotal role. It may be that “Mr. Gates” in Montenegro does not prioritize environmental issues and climate change over other topics. A similar viewpoint is supported by Robinson (1973), who, through individualistic theories, underscores the significance of editors' individual characteristics and perceptions in relation to other influencing factors.

Scarce human resources, the impossibility of specialization of journalists, and the socio-economic position of media professionals have resulted in a factual method of reporting, which leads to the fact that the audience is not informed about this topic. The second assumption was refuted because the *RTCG*, a public service broadcaster portal published only 42 texts dedicated to climate change. Despite employing nine individuals and having the potential to leverage technological and journalistic content convergence, the *RTCG* portal's coverage of climate change did not surpass that of other portals. This discrepancy can be attributed to the limited degree of media freedom within the Public Broadcaster. It's worth noting that the council members of *RTCG*, as per Article 40 of the Law on National Public Broadcaster Radio and Television of Montenegro, are *appointed* by the Parliament's administrative committee through a process that considers their resumes, candidate interviews, and the number of NGOs supporting their candidacy.

Through 268 texts, Montenegrin citizens who—like the rest of the public—have the habit of reading only headlines, were able to learn only several facts:

1. In accordance with the Global Green New Deal, the world has committed itself to zero carbon dioxide emissions (i.e., to reduce the emission of harmful greenhouse gases).
2. Opinions of officials such as Boris Johnson, Guterres, Prince Charles, and religious leaders (Pope Francis), which were partially apocalyptic but also called for the society to come together to solve global problems.
3. Rich and developed industrial countries are the biggest global polluters.
4. Italy will triple the funds for financing developing countries in the fight against climate change.
5. The President of Montenegro signed the Declaration on Forests and Land Use for environmental protection.

6. Montenegro implemented 92 out of 112 measures in the period from February to July 2021 under “Chapter 27,” dedicated to environmental protection and climate change.

We can attest the superficial nature of Montenegrin portals’ reporting through an examination of the topics covered, the genres used, the quantity of announcements published, and the reliance on information sourced from other media outlets. *Antena M* and *Borba* published the most pseudo-events, while *Vijesti* and *Borba* published the most announcement-based texts. The portal *RTCG* has a duty to cover topics of public interest; as much as 71% of the texts are written about meetings between officials, despite the topic being unpopular with the audience, according to the editor Rada Brajović (personal communication, December 14, 2021). Appelgren and Jönsson (2021, p. 756) point out the difference between commercial media and public broadcasters, explaining that commercial media are exclusively oriented towards finances, while the public broadcaster is associated with values such as variety, equality, and freedom. Taking these facts into consideration, one could anticipate that the public broadcaster’s portal would provide a more accurate report on this globally significant public issue. The citizens could gain the best information on the climate crisis and the consequences of humanity’s reckless relationship with nature via *Vijesti* and *Café del Montenegro* portals. However, information quantity does not necessarily coincide with quality. The most superficial reporting on the Glasgow Summit and environmental issues was conducted by the portal *Analitika*, which took 69% of the texts from other media, with the portal *Café del Montenegro* in a close second place, having 65% of its texts based on secondary sources. The quantity of published announcements and the reliance on external media sources clearly indicate that original news content primarily originates within the editorial board itself. Given the challenging economic conditions under which Montenegrin media outlets operate, the feasibility of dispatching correspondents to cover events like the Glasgow Summit or hiring freelancers might be limited. However, there remains an opportunity to enhance their coverage by translating relevant texts and soliciting comments from pertinent state institutions, environmental experts, and the NGO sector, all of whom engage with this subject matter.

Modest staff capacities and financial scarcity as an “obstacle” to informing citizens

To determine why Montenegrin portals do not pay sufficient attention to this important global problem, we conducted seven in-depth semi-structured interviews with the editors of the *RTCG* portal Rada Brajović, as a public service medium, the *Analitika* portal

Rosanda Mučalica, assistant editor of *Antena M* Mirjana Miladinović and editor of *Borba* Dražen Živković, as well as the institution of the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism, the NGO Ozon representative Aleksandar Perović, and the professor of the Faculty of Science and Mathematics, Svetlana Perović. The editors of the portals *RTCG*, *Analitika*, *Antena M*, and *Borba*, claim that the most represented environmental topics on their portals are the so-called “dark topics” that directly concern Montenegro and environmental crime. “These are topics about devastation, gravel mining, illegal logging, and air pollution in the winter months,” says *RTCG* portal editor (Brajović, personal communication, December 14, 2021). When it comes to the Summit in Glasgow, the editors think that they have paid attention to that topic in accordance with the conditions of their newsrooms. The *RTCG* portal reported on the topic via agency news, the *Analitika* portal through numerous articles in the *Society* and *World* sections (Mučalica, personal communication, December 13, 2021), while the editors of the *Antena M* (Miladinović, personal communication, December 13, 2021) and *Borba* (Živković, personal communication, December 22, 2021) portals agree that they were not able to cover the summit fully.

Considering the authorship of the texts, the editor of the *RTCG* portal points out that in her and other Montenegrin newsrooms, there are fewer and fewer authored texts on environmental topics and that most of them are taken from the agency: “In the last year, I don’t think we had a feature story on these topics” (Brajović, personal communication, December 14, 2021). According to the editors, staffing capacities are scarce in all newsrooms. More attention must be paid to daily topics, and the dynamics of work do not leave much room for dealing with other topics of public interest. The editor of the portal *Analitika* described this:

The portal, as a small collective, does not have the possibility of individual journalists reporting on environmental topics. The nature of the work is such that all colleagues must be capable of reporting in various areas. (Mučalica, personal communication, December 13, 2021)

The specialization of journalists or editors for a single topic is not realistic in Montenegrin media conditions. “We don’t have anyone who specializes in that area. We are a private outlet that barely makes ends meet,” admitted the editor of the *Borba* portal (Živković, personal communication, December 22, 2021).

Daily current events certainly cannot diminish the public importance of environmental issues. Regardless of specialization, Montenegrin editors must leave some space for analytical texts and investigative journalism in a country where environmental crime oc-

curs. The *RTCG* portal is the only one of the analyzed portals that has a separate section on the topic of ecology. According to the editor, only current news about environmental issues in the country is featured on the front page. "International research and meetings of officials from abroad are a little less popular with the public" (Brajović, personal communication, December 14, 2021). The portals *Analitika*, *Antena M*, and *Borba* do not have a dedicated ecology section; environmental topics are placed in the *Society* or *World* sections.

The editors of the portals confirm that people rarely read texts on environmental topics. "Feature stories that contained a specific view of the problem, unique photos, and statements were widely read. Other topics that can be read in all media were not very popular with the readership," says the assistant editor of the *Antena M* portal (Miladinović, personal communication, December 13, 2021). The editor of the *Borba* portal (Živković, personal communication, December 22, 2021) is the only one to claim that these topics have not been read. On the *RTCG* portal, the editor (Brajović, personal communication, December 14, 2021) says there is no view counter, but *Google Analytics* is used to check readership. However, the editor of the *Analitika* portal (Mučalica, personal communication, December 13, 2021) states that the readership will also depend on the access to the media, the placement, and the position that the texts from this field have.

Editors frequently rely on a variety of sources when covering environmental topics, including state institutions, experts, NGOs, and global media. Interestingly, the interviewed editors at these portals appear to lack well-defined criteria for determining the news value elements that inform their text selection process. Most journalists in these newsrooms tend to prioritize news based on its timeliness and proximity to the audience, justifying this approach by pointing out the readers' preference for Montenegro-centric news. Additionally, it's worth noting that some editors mentioned the absence of a specific editorial policy regarding environmental topics. For example, as the editor of the *Borba* portal said: "We broadcast everything of public interest, that is, daily events that deal with issues of ecology" (Živković, personal communication, December 22, 2021). However, we state that proximity and topicality should not be the only elements of the value of news appearing in domestic media.

The professor at the Faculty of Science and Mathematics, who teaches the course on environmental issues, Svetlana Perović (personal communication, April 26, 2022), and the representative and the establisher of the NGO Ozon, Aleksandar Perović (personal communication, April 13, 2022) recognize the importance of the portal for informing the public about climate change. Perović (personal communication, April 26, 2022) believes

that the role of the portal is to inform citizens about the importance, trends, and impact of climate change on the environment and people's health. Perović (personal communication, April 13, 2022) sees the big advantages of the portal compared to traditional media, while people/audiences use/read portals more often and everywhere. Some editors have different opinions about the changes in the way portals have been reporting on climate change in the previous five years. The editor of the portal *Analitika* (Mučalica, personal communication, December 13, 2021) states: "Much has changed, and, it seems, it has become easier for the media to cover certain topics." The editor of the *Antena M* portal (Miladinović, personal communication, December 13, 2021) says that domestic media have taken sides with topics that are becoming globally important, while the editor of the *Borba* portal (Živković, personal communication, December 22, 2021) explains that he does not notice that the way of reporting has changed especially not in a positive direction.

The Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism (personal communication, May 9, 2022) emphasized that there was a shortage of journalists specializing in ecology, which led to media reports predominantly relying on the republishing and translation of foreign news. However, they highlighted their commitment to maintaining up-to-date cooperation with the media, actively responding to journalist requests and inquiries. It's worth noting that the responsiveness of state institutions to media inquiries alone did not adequately signify a strong collaboration between the two parties; effective cooperation should involve proactive communication to better inform the citizens. The NGO Ozon representative, while expressing positive views on media collaboration, also criticized the performance of state institutions (Perović A., personal communication, April 13, 2022). Brajović, the editor of the RTCG portal (personal communication, December 14, 2021), emphasized their media company's efforts to disseminate information from both the non-governmental sector and state institutions. She acknowledged that ecological topics received limited attention in domestic media and were seldom featured on front pages. However, she underscored the importance of journalist education and newsroom restructuring. Perović A., the representative of the NGO OZON (personal communication, April 13, 2022), suggested that Montenegrin journalists should have placed greater emphasis on comments, columns, and thematic competitions, utilizing literary, photographic, or video content. The Ministry (personal communication, May 9, 2022) emphasized the need for media reports to be firmly grounded in accurate facts. They advocated for more collaboration between journalists, scientists, and activists. However, they pointed out that while accurate factual reporting in the media was essential, it was not sufficient on its own, as facts required contextualization. Professor Per-

ović S. at the Faculty of Science and Mathematics contended that information about climate change should have been further contextualized and made more visible and accessible to citizens through media channels (personal communication, April 26, 2022). This aligned with Priest's (2022) perspective that invisible environmental issues must have gained visibility in the media.

However, although commercial portals such as *Analitika*, *Antena M*, and *Borba* do not have a separate section on ecology, the mentioned online media place news about climate change in the more widely read section, titled "Society." The editors themselves admit that they are primarily guided by the interests of the audience, meaning that they act in accordance with White's (1950) and Gans' (1980) theoretical postulations and choose topics that are more interesting to the audience. Interestingly, some of the editors stated that they do not have an editorial policy regarding environmental issues, even though the highest legislation (i.e., the Constitution of Montenegro) states that Montenegro is an ecological country. This means that the most important factors influencing the selection of topics are editors and media owners who dictate a certain social agenda but also the audience itself.

Based on an analysis of the reporting by the portals, as well as seven semi-structured interviews, we can conclude that the theoretical presumptions of White (1950), McLuhan (2008), and Gans (1980) are applicable to Montenegrin online media: the selection of news depends on the editor-in-chief and owner and their perception of environmental issues, as well as on powerful figures connected to the media owners. Citizens and sources also represent a kind of influential factor regarding the manner of reporting and information selection.

The editors openly admitted to not being satisfied with how this topic was covered, justifying their reporting by economic factors, and dealing with local environmental topics. Topicality and familiarity are not the only elements that the editors can use as guides when drafting their media agenda. It is commendable that the portals did not furnish many texts with sensationalist titles in the reporting period. The greatest number of sensationalist titles can be found on the portal *CDM* (21%), *Analitika* (12%), *Borba* (12%), and the least on the portal *Vijesti* (4%), *RTCG* (7%), and *Antena M* (9%). The superficiality of the reporting testifies that the editors in Montenegro do not recognize the importance of this global problem, and they are guided, as White (1950) and Gans (1980) would argue, by the presumption that the audience is always right and by the interests of the media company and the audience's interest in the topics.

Conclusion

This paper delves into the quality of climate change reporting by Montenegrin portals and the editorial dynamics influencing this reporting. Drawing from an analysis of 268 texts and seven in-depth interviews, we arrive at several key conclusions.

Firstly, it's evident that the most widely-read commercial portals in Montenegro, as well as the public service broadcaster, tend to offer superficial and fact-based coverage of climate change. Among these, portals like *Vijesti*, *CDM*, *Antena M*, and *RTCG* published the most information on the subject, while *Borba* featured the least.

Our analysis reveals a notable inclination of the media towards covering high-ranking officials' meetings, occasionally marked by sensational statements from state leaders or peculiar occurrences such as world leaders dozing off during meetings. Additionally, pseudo-events involving domestic executive representatives received significant attention. However, the Montenegrin portals fall short of the reporting recommendations put forth by Friedman (2010). They have not effectively engaged with scientists and experts as primary sources of information. Furthermore, they have missed the opportunity to educate the public and render ecological and environmental issues more relatable by tapping into everyday experiences.

Editorial policies significantly shape the framing of messages, aligning with the findings of Giles (2011). Editors determine the reporting approach and impact the perception and attitudes of citizens regarding climate change.

During the study period, news and reports dominated the coverage, with *Vijesti* and *Antena M* portals featuring relatively few interviews or columns from global media sources. Instead, the most visited portals relied on secondary sources, such as *Analitika*, *CDM*, and *Vijesti*, representing a concerning journalistic practice.

The economic crisis conditions restrained the media from sending correspondents to cover events like the G20 Summit in Rome and the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. However, they still had the option to engage with experts to facilitate public understanding of high officials' decisions and their environmental implications.

The shallowness of reporting becomes glaringly apparent when we observe that portals like *Antena M*, *Borba*, and *Vijesti* primarily relied on press releases for their articles. Furthermore, the public service broadcaster's portal allocated considerably less attention to the issue, with only 42 published texts, in stark contrast to commercial online media. Additionally, it predominantly focused on factual reports and news, missing valuable opportunities to provide more comprehensive human interest stories, educate citizens,

and promote environmental awareness through informative and educational content and public advocacy campaigns.

Our in-depth semi-structured interviews yielded contrasting viewpoints. The representative of the NGO Ozon perceived progress in media reporting (Perović, A., personal communication, April 13, 2022). However, the representative from the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning, and Urbanism expressed regret over the limited number of journalists educated to cover environmental issues (personal communication, May 9, 2022). Nonetheless, they expressed satisfaction with their cooperation with the media. In contrast, a professor teaching an environmental course believes that climate change should enjoy more prominent visibility in Montenegrin media. This aligns with the perspectives of many theorists, including Pezzullo and Cox (2018), who stress the media's significant role and their influence on the audience's perception of climate change as a global issue.

However, it's crucial to recognize that the media's focus on the social agenda primarily hinges on editorial policy and the constraints imposed by the media company itself, which can impact journalists' freedom in choosing topics to cover.

In 2021, according to the Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders, Montenegro ranked 104th (Reporters without Borders, 2021). Considering the problems journalists face on editorial boards, the editors-in-chief who are directly connected to media owners should be held accountable for superficial and purely factual reporting. The data presented by the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro that 75.6% of journalists feel some form of pressure from their editors and 40% from owners, shows that journalists are not free to choose their topics, nor are they educated for quality reporting on environmental issues and climate change, as 57.5% of media workers are not specialized for reporting on any issue. Based on the above facts, we can conclude that scarce information and the superficial method of reporting do not contribute to the environmental awareness of Montenegrin citizens. Citizens who are media and environmentally illiterate are not interested in reading news on climate change. The citizens' media illiteracy is demonstrated by the index of the Sofia-based Open Society Institute, where Montenegro ranks 32nd out of 35. The study conducted by IPSOS (2021), and the responses given by the editor on the public broadcaster's portal also confirm the citizens' environmental illiteracy and lack of interest in this topic. The media plays a key role in informing the public about climate change, given how much time people spend with the media. Only by improving the quality of reporting and working together with state institutions and the non-governmental sector through public advocacy campaigns can citizens become

ecologically literate and only in this way media can teach them to protect the planet from themselves and their harmful habits.

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Povzetek

Podnebne spremembe so ena najpomembnejših globalnih tem javnega interesa. Zato je vloga medijev ključna pri obveščanju državljanov o tem in ozaveščanju javnosti. Članek je posvečen analizi načinov poročanja o tej temi na najbolj obiskanih črnogorskih spletnih portalih. Prav tako pa želimo ugotoviti, kako medijski delavci in politični akterji pokrivajo te teme. Črna gora je od leta 2007 ustavno zastopana kot ekološka država, ki ima odličen zakonodajni okvir, a tudi številne okoljske probleme. Ob upoštevanju teh dejstev to tematiko raziskujemo prek vsebinske in diskurzivne analize 268 medijskih prispevkov na spletnih portalih v obdobju od 21. oktobra do 22. novembra 2021 (konferenca ZN o podnebnih spremembah v Glasgowu) in prek poglobljenih polstrukturiranih intervjujih s sedmimi pomembnimi akterji, ki pokrivajo te teme v Črni gori. Ugotavljamo, da je črnogorska družba okoljsko nepismena, čeprav se mladi bolj zavedajo nevarnosti podnebnih sprememb. Apatijo črnogorskih državljanov lahko delno pripišemo tudi vplivu medijev, ki površno poročajo o tej problematiki in se ne trudijo izobraževati prebivalstva ali ga ozaveščati o varstvu okolja in o podnebnih spremembah.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: podnebne spremembe, črnogorski spletni portali, medijske prakse, uredniška politika, podnebni vrh v Glasgowu

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