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Narrating the UK's adaptation to a changing climate:

Analysing newspaper coverage of climate change impacts & adaptation

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Background

The UK is already experiencing the impacts of a changing climate. This is expected to increase over the coming decades as UK weather patterns become hotter and wetter, likely bringing systemic scale impacts to water, food, health and our natural capital.

Adaptation offers a means of

responding to challenges brought by a changing climate. Experts define adaptation as making changes to natural and human systems which can limit harm caused by negative impacts and maximise benefit from new opportunities¹.

The UK government approach to becoming a 'climate-ready society'² is to support self-motivated uptake of adaptive actions in all social sectors including households.

For this to occur at scale, individuals will need to be both sufficiently informed and appropriately motivated. They will need to be confident as to how climate change risks might impact them and how they can productively respond. However, the climate change impacts and adaptation conversation is increasingly being taken up by the wider public discourse, such as the media. These sources might have greater reach and influence than



government messaging.

Therefore, the public discourse on adaptation will likely affect the extent to which individuals are able and willing to partake in becoming a climate ready nation.

Research Question

How is climate change adaptation being discussed in the public discourse, and what are the currently most prominent narratives of the conversation?

Using narrative analysis to understand adaptation media coverage

Methodology

This research will analyse data collected from UK national broadsheet, mid-market and tabloid newspapers plus local newspapers, over the period January 2013 – December 2017. Relevant articles will be collected using a Boolean search in the online newspaper database LexisNexis.

Analysis

This research will undertake a narrative analysis of the collected texts. As defined for this research, a narrative must begin with the occurrence of events so unusual and impactful that they disrupt the normal state of the story world. Narratives must also have consciously-acting agents who respond to these unusual events in

some way. They choose and then develop a set of actions which aim to move the currently disrupted situation towards a resolution and a new state of normal.

In this analysis, climate change impacts will be considered as the precipitating events of the narrative(s). It will then identify the agents tasked with responding, the actions proposed, and the end-states which are presented as optimal.

Picture credit: Metro Pictures, 2014. <http://metro.co.uk/2014/02/10/gallery-southern-uk-prepares-flood-defences-4297769/>

1. IPCC. 2014. IPCC Fifth Assessment Report Working Group II Contribution: Glossary. [Online]. [Accessed 22nd January 2018]. <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg2/>

2. DEFRA. 2013. The National Adaptation Programme: making the country resilient to a changing climate. [Online]. [Accessed 22nd January 2018].

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209866/pb13942-nap-20130701.pdf

