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Narrating Collapse: Media Discourse, Climate Change, and Civilizational Anxiety

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for the degree of Master's in Literature and Civilization

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Declaration of Originality

I, **Belfedal Hadi Abderrahim**, hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “*Narrating Collapse: Media Discourse, Climate Change, and Civilizational Anxiety*”, is my own original work. It has been conducted and written solely by me under the supervision of **Dr. Latéfa BESSADET**.

I affirm that all sources of information, data, and ideas drawn from the work of others have been duly acknowledged and properly referenced according to academic standards. This thesis has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for the award of any other degree or qualification at this or any other institution.

Signed: _____

Place: [Saida, Algeria]
Date: [September ,2025]

Dedication

To my beloved family, whose patience, love, and unwavering support sustained me throughout this journey. To my parents, for their sacrifices and encouragement. To my friends and mentors, for their guidance and kindness. This work is for you.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how climate change is represented and framed as a civilizational crisis across different forms of media, with particular attention to mainstream news outlets, documentaries, and digital activist platforms. Drawing on narrative theory, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and environmental communication studies, it examines the ways in which climate narratives are constructed, circulated, and received in public discourse. The central research problem concerns how these narratives generate both civilization anxiety and the potential for mobilizing agency.

The analysis reveals a significant shift in climate communication: from discourses that once emphasized local environmental risks to those that increasingly highlight global existential threats. Through close examination of lexical choices, metaphors, and visual imagery, this thesis shows how mainstream media often employ apocalyptic framings—such as the widely publicized 2021 The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) declaration of a “Code Red for Humanity”—that heighten awareness but may also induce fatalism and the diffusion of responsibility. By contrast, documentaries and activist digital media tend to foreground agency, justice, and transformation, presenting climate change not only as a crisis but also as a field of possible action. These alternative narratives expand the emotional repertoire from fear and anxiety toward solidarity, resilience, and hope.

The findings underscore that effective climate change communication requires a balance between urgency and agency. The study argues that while apocalyptic framing can draw global attention, they must be coupled with narratives that empower collective action and offer concrete pathways for social change. In this respect, the thesis highlights the importance of multimodal storytelling and intersectional approaches that make visible the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, ensuring epistemic justice within climate discourse.

In sum, this research contributes to the growing field of climate communication by demonstrating how narrative and affect function as key mediators of public engagement. It emphasizes that stories of collapse must be complemented by stories of possibility, and that the future of climate communication lies in fostering a hopeful realism that mobilizes rather than paralyzes audiences.

Keywords: climate change, civilizational crisis, narrative theory, critical discourse analysis, environmental communication, public emotion, collective agency, apocalyptic imagery.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Originality	2
General introduction	9
Chapter one.....	13
Framing the Crisis: Civilization, Climate, and the Media	13
1.1. Introduction:.....	14
1.2. Civilizational Framing: From Environmental Degradation to Existential Threat	15
1.3. Theoretical Foundations: Making Sense of Collapse Narratives.....	16
1.4. Media as the Primary Cultural Storyteller	17
1.5. Historical Context: The Evolution of Climate Narratives and Civilizational Anxiety	18
1.6. The Affective Dimension: Emotion, Anxiety, and Narrative Resonance	19
1.7. Methodological Synthesis: Integrating Narrative Analysis and CDA ...	20
1.8. The Politics of Representation: Voice, Power, and Epistemic Justice .	21
1.9. Conclusion: The Imperative of Narrative Analysis	22
Chapter two.....	24
“Code Red for Humanity”: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Climate News Media ...	24
2.1. Introduction:	25

2.2. Methodological Synthesis: Integrating Narrative Analysis and CDA.....	25
2.3. Lexical Choices and Metaphors.....	27
2.4. Narrative Theory and Climate Discourse	28
2.5. Visual Imagery and Framing.....	29
2.6. Effects on Public Perception and Engagement	30
2.7. Contrasting Narratives: From Doom to Agency	30
2.8. Conclusion	32
Chapter Three.....	33
From Panic to Possibility: Documentary and Activist Narratives of Climate Future.	33
3.1. Introduction:	34
3.2. Methodology: Analyzing Multimodal Storytelling	34
3.3. Case Study Analysis: Narrative Strategies in Action	35
3.4 Corpus & Methodology	37
3.5 Findings	39
3.6 Discussion	42
3.7. Discussion: The Possibilities and Limits of Alternative Narratives	43
3.8. Intersectionality and Inclusivity in Climate Narratives	44
3.9 Hopeful Realism and the Politics of Emotion	45
3.10. Narrative Reception and the Politics of Hope.....	46
Conclusion:	48
General conclusion:	50
Bibliography.....	53
ملخص.....	56
Résumé.....	57

General Introduction

General introduction

Climate change is widely considered the defining problem of the 21st century. It is a crisis that transcends environmental deterioration to encompass economic instability, geopolitical conflict, public health dangers, and deep existential fear. Yet, beneath the physical science of rising carbon levels and melting ice sheets lurks another, equally crucial crisis—one of meaning. As the scientific consensus grows increasingly grim, the issue arises: how can communities learn to grasp, interpret, and respond to this complicated threat? The answer, this thesis contends, lies in the narratives we tell.

Narratives—such as the 2021 United Nations declaration of a “Code Red for Humanity,” the global youth climate strikes inspired by school walkouts, or the apocalyptic headlines following the Australian bushfires of 2019–2020—are not simple embellishments of communication. They are essential cognitive tools by which people and communities organize experience, assign causation, and envisage futures. In the context of climate change, storytelling becomes a location of tremendous ideological and emotional engagement. Climate change is not merely a technical problem awaiting technological answers; it is a cultural phenomenon mediated by stories, values, and competing visions of the future. The prevailing narratives circulating in the media often describe climate change not merely as a problem to be handled but as a civilizational reckoning—an imminent breakdown of the basic underpinnings of contemporary existence.

The term civilization conveys notions of complexity, development, stability, and legacy, as emphasized in historical and cultural studies of societies (Toynbee 23; Huntington 41). To characterize climate change as a danger to civilization is to increase its stakes to the greatest conceivable degree. It relies on historical memories of social collapse—from the fall of the Roman Empire to the disappearance of the Maya—and projects those worries onto the present and future. The true difficulty may be admitting the fragility of civilization itself, a goal long considered eternal. In recent years, news media, entertainment, and digital activist platforms have increasingly embraced this narrative, tying climate science to catastrophic prophecies and existential dread.

Methodologically, this thesis combines narrative theory with CDA to investigate how climate change is represented across different media forms. The research examines mainstream news reports, documentaries, and digital activist platforms, tracing the language, imagery, and emotional framings that construct climate change as either an existential threat or a space of agency. By applying a qualitative discourse approach to both textual and visual materials, the study identifies recurring patterns, metaphors, and affective strategies that shape public perception. This interdisciplinary framework ensures that the analysis remains attentive not only to the structural features of discourse but also to the broader cultural and emotional contexts in which these narratives circulate.

This thesis analyzes the manner in which media—traditional and alternative—construct and propagate climate narratives, particularly those suggesting civilizational collapse. It asserts that the media is not only a reflection of scientific facts or public opinion but an active cultural storyteller that influences the very circumstances of understanding and action. Whether through dramatic headlines announcing, “Code Red for Humanity,” popular protest videos demanding systemic change, or emotionally evocative films, media narratives play a vital role in presenting the climate problem and its societal ramifications.

In this regard, the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- How do mainstream and alternative media construct narratives of climate change as a civilizational crisis?
- What are the dominant narrative and affective strategies used in different media forms (news, documentaries, digital activism)?
- How do these narratives influence public perception, emotional response, and the potential for collective action?

In the light of the questions above, the study hypothesizes that:

- Mainstream media predominantly employ apocalyptic and collapse-oriented narratives, which may induce public fatalism.

- Alternative and activist media foreground agency and hope, promoting collective action.
- The emotional tone of climate coverage—particularly the balance between fear and hope—significantly shapes audiences perceived agency and their willingness to act on climate issues.

The emotional tone of climate coverage (fear versus hope) influences perceived agency and willingness to act. This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One establishes the theoretical framework, drawing on narrative theory, CDA, and environmental communication to situate the study within broader scholarly debates. Chapter Two analyzes major news media coverage between 2018 and 2024, focusing on how lexical choices, visual imagery, and affective framings construct climate change as crisis or collapse. Chapter Three examines alternative narratives, including documentary films, activist platforms, and YouTube news coverage from 2019 to 2024. By integrating multimodal analysis with close attention to emotional tone, narrative structure, and agency attribution, this chapter highlights how non-traditional media challenge dominant collapse framings and open space for more participatory and hopeful visions of the future.

Chapter One establishes the theoretical foundation of the study. It reviews key concepts from narrative theory, CDA, and environmental communication, while also situating climate change within broader cultural debates about collapse, anxiety, and civilizational fragility. Building on this foundation, Chapter Two presents a thorough CDA of major news media coverage between 2018 and 2024, including pieces from BBC, CNN, The Guardian, and Al Jazeera. This chapter investigates the linguistic choices, metaphors, and visual images used to frame climate change as an existential danger. It contends that while such framings efficiently attract public attention and represent real scientific concern, they also risk causing paralysis and fatalism. Apocalyptic language and imagery, the frequent use of passive formulations, and the distribution of guilt contribute to a discourse that may hamper collective action by overwhelming audiences rather than activating them.

Chapter Three turns attention to alternative media narratives seen in films, activist platforms, and digital news spaces. It evaluates works like *Before the Flood*, *Our Planet*, and *Don't Look Up*, alongside the social media activism of Greta Thunberg and the campaigns of Extinction Rebellion. In addition to these cultural texts, the chapter incorporates a practical case study of

YouTube climate news coverage between 2019 and 2024. This case study examines how emotional tone, narrative structure, and agency attribution operate in digital video formats, revealing the unique affordances and limitations of online platforms in shaping climate discourse. Taken together, these analyses demonstrate how diverse mediums and storytellers generate narratives of resilience, resistance, and transformation. Unlike mainstream news, which typically stresses gloom, these accounts explore routes for agency, systemic critique, and emotional participation that reach beyond fear. They offer visions of what a post-collapse or radically remade civilization might look like, foregrounding justice, community, and ecological interdependence.

Throughout the thesis, significant emphasis is placed on the emotional components of climate discourse—what researchers like Sabine Roeser (2010) define as the emotive landscape of danger. Emotions such as fear, sadness, hope, fury, and love are not side effects of climate communication; they are important to how people digest information and decide to act (or not). By comparing and evaluating alternative narrative and emotional techniques, this research tries to explore how media could better encourage what Susanne Moser (2010) calls “hopeful realism”—perspective that acknowledges the depth of the situation while preserving the urge for change.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that the way we narrate the climate problem influences our collective capacity to respond to it. Collapse is not an inevitable finish but a strong story—one among many—that is being told, repeated, and fought. The challenge, then, is not merely to study these stories but to envision and promote those that provide a route ahead. As the climate catastrophe intensifies, the need to construct tales that inspire rather than paralyze, that educate rather than conceal, and that empower rather than despair becomes even more urgent. This is the basic challenge—and the radical possibility—of climate communication in the Anthropocene.

Chapter I

Framing the Crisis: Civilization, Climate, and the Media

1.1. Introduction:

Climate change stands as one of the most important and complicated concerns of the twenty-first century, not only as an environmental reality but also as a fundamental crisis of meaning and communication. (IPCC) has supplied the world with an ever-growing body of scientific information describing the acceleration of global warming, the intensification of extreme weather events, and the cascading repercussions on ecosystems and society (IPCC). The translation of this scientific agreement into public awareness and real action remains a challenging undertaking. This challenge is not just a question of knowledge lack but is deeply founded in the narratives through which climate change is made sense of and conveyed to the public (Hulme 2009).

Media play a key role in this process, functioning as the major architects of climate narratives for large audiences. The tales, pictures, and metaphors they utilize do more than educate; they influence the emotional and cognitive frames within which individuals and society perceive the crises. As Roy Scranton emphasizes, climate change is not only a test of technology or policy but a test of our collective imagination and capacity to conceive alternate futures (Scranton 2015). The stakes are existential: how we narrate climate change may either inspire optimism and mobilization or create paralysis and despair.

This chapter outlines the core premise that climate change is as much a narrative catastrophe as it is a scientific one. It analyzes how the media's framing of climate change as a civilizational danger profoundly influences public knowledge, emotional reaction, and the potential for collective action. The chapter is structured to investigate the evolution of climate discourse from localized environmental degradation to existential risk, the theoretical tools necessary for understanding collapse narratives, the affective dimensions of climate storytelling, and the politics of representation and voice. By drawing on narrative theory, CDA, and environmental communication, this chapter lays the groundwork for the empirical analyses that follow, asking, how do media narratives construct the relationship between climate change and the perceived stability or fragility of modern civilization, and with what consequences? The answers to these issues are critical for understanding not just the constraints of present climate communication but also the routes toward more effective and just climate narratives.

1.2. Civilizational Framing: From Environmental Degradation to Existential Threat

The conversation surrounding climate change has developed substantially during the past several decades. In its early phases, media coverage generally concentrated on regional environmental impacts—such as deforestation, species loss, or pollution—or on distant, seemingly abstract phenomena like melting polar ice. However, as scientific understanding advanced and the frequency of severe occurrences increased, the narrative changed toward a civilizational scale. Climate change is now commonly presented as an existential danger to the fundamental underpinnings of contemporary, industrialized society (Bendell; Scranton).

This civilizational framing draws upon deep-seated cultural worries about collapse, citing both implicit and explicit similarities to historical events such as the fall of the Roman Empire or the disappearance of the Maya (Diamond; Tainter). The tale is distinguished by numerous major features. First, it stresses systemic interconnection: climatic change is shown as flowing across global systems—food production, water security, economic stability, and geopolitical order—threatening the complex infrastructure upon which billions depend (Rockström et al. 472). Second, the concept of “tipping points” is foregrounded, implying that beyond certain thresholds, natural and social systems may suffer irreversible change, confirming the idea of a fragile civilizational architecture (Lenton et al. 592). Third, media narratives typically accentuate a loss of control, depicting climate consequences as surpassing the capability of existing institutions and technology to manage, so promoting a sense of vulnerability and weakening trust in development and government.

Crucially, the moral and existential implications of this framing are significant. Climate delay is sometimes presented not merely as a policy failure but as a civilizational failing—a betrayal of future generations and the planet’s ecology (Gardiner 23). By raising climate change to the level of existential and ethical crises, media narratives heighten the stakes, making the problem not only one of environmental management but of survival and legacy. This framing, although helpful in drawing public attention, also risks producing fatalism and paralysis, concerns that will be examined in following chapters.

1.3. Theoretical Foundations: Making Sense of Collapse Narratives

To evaluate how climate change is presented as a civilizational disaster, it is crucial to draw on story theory, CDA, and environmental communication. Narratives, as Walter Fisher argues, are basic cognitive tools for organizing experience, grasping causation, and picturing futures (Fisher 2). Climate narratives typically depend on archetypal myths, notably the apocalyptic myth, which contains devastating ends, judgment, and, perhaps, the potential of regeneration (Berger 18; Buell 7). The resonance of these structures helps explain why some collapse framings acquire popularity. Fisher's principles of narrative authenticity (how well a tale corresponds with audience beliefs) and narrative probability (its internal consistency) are particularly valuable for evaluating the attraction of apocalyptic climate narratives.

CDA provides a methodological lens for evaluating the power relations implicit in language (Fairclough 17; Van Dijk 29). Through CDA, one may study how certain vocabulary choices—such as “catastrophe,” “doom,” or “annihilation”—and metaphors—like “war,” “time bomb,” or “apocalypse”—shape the view of climate change as a civilizational threat. CDA also interrogates whose interests are served by such framings: do they exonerate particular actors of responsibility, strengthen neoliberal individualism, or encourage collective action? Moreover, CDA explores how media organizations, through their framing choices, impact public knowledge, policy goals, and the spectrum of perceived possible responses.

Environmental communication, as an interdisciplinary topic, studies how environmental concerns are formed, represented, and debated in the public realm (Cox and Pezzullo 5; Hansen and Cox 3). Key topics include media frames—the selective focus on certain parts of reality while hiding others (Entman 52). The “civilizational collapse” paradigm, for example, stresses scientific discoveries regarding tipping points and worst-case scenarios while possibly marginalizing concerns of adaptation, resilience, or social justice. The discipline also rejects the “deficit model,” which implies public inactivity arises from a lack of scientific understanding, and instead highlights how cultural values and worldviews impact the receipt of climate information (Hulme 2009; Nisbet 13). Finally, environmental communication researchers investigate the emotive components of climate narratives, evaluating how feelings like dread, guilt, hope, or despair influence involvement and action (Moser 35; Roeser 21).

1.4. Media as the Primary Cultural Storyteller

In modern countries, mass media—including news organizations, film, television, and digital platforms—function as the main institutions creating public consciousness and the “social imaginary” (Taylor 23; Castells 54). Through agenda setting, media influence which topics the public thinks significant, impacting the priorities of politicians and the general populace alike (McCombs and Shaw 177). Persistent coverage of climatic disasters, scientific warnings, and policy disputes enhances the relevance of climate change, making it a prominent topic in public discourse.

Media do more than only convey facts; they actively shape the frameworks through which climate change is viewed. Through the process of framing, media establish what type of problem climate change is—environmental, economic, security, or civilizational—and what it implies for individuals and society (Entman 52). These frameworks are not neutral; they reflect and reinforce greater cultural values, fears, and ideological commitments. For example, the frequent use of apocalyptic language and imagery might heighten worry and encourage action, but it can also create dread, resignation, or denial (Boykoff 102).

Moreover, media narratives give scripts for interpreting complicated events, giving explanations and assigning roles such as victims, villains, and heroes. In the context of civilizational anxiety, media may either intensify despair or develop resilience, depending on the narrative choices chosen. The influence of media extends to molding emotional reactions, as stories of calamity and loss provoke dread and sadness, while stories of creativity and collective action may inspire hope and resolve (Moser 36).

The media’s position as cultural storyteller is therefore essential in defining not just what is known about climate change but also how it is felt and acted upon. This effect is further compounded by the advent of digital and social media, which enable new kinds of participatory storytelling, quick transmission of knowledge, and the amplification of both scientific agreement and disinformation (Hansen and Cox 3). As media ecosystems grow increasingly fragmented and algorithmically driven, the task of generating cohesive and inspiring climate narratives becomes even more severe. Understanding the media’s function as cultural storyteller is therefore vital for assessing the dynamics of climate communication and for conceptualizing new tactics to engage the public in the face of growing environmental catastrophes.

1.5. Historical Context: The Evolution of Climate Narratives and Civilizational Anxiety

The modern framing of climate change as a civilizational hazard is founded on a wider historical trajectory of environmental discourse and social anxieties about collapse. Early environmental narratives in the postwar era were motivated by anxieties over pollution, resource depletion, and population rise, as apparent in works like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* report. These narratives often emphasized the perils of unchecked industrialization and the need for stewardship and conservation (Buell 45; Diamond 8).

As scientific understanding of planetary systems increased, the discourse turned toward the notion of global limitations and the interconnection of human and natural systems. The advent of the "Anthropocene" as a popular notion further highlighted the idea that human activity had become a geological force capable of shaping—and potentially destabilizing—the globe (Rockström et al. 472). Media narratives began to mirror this shift, increasingly depicting climate change as a systemic issue with the ability to destroy the foundations of contemporary society.

This transformation was also impacted by wider societal fears about progress, modernity, and the future. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries saw a profusion of apocalyptic and dystopian themes in literature, cinema, and popular culture, matching real-world anxieties about nuclear war, ecological collapse, and societal disintegration (Berger 18; Buell 7). Climate change became a focal point for these fears, functioning as both a metaphor and a practical danger to the stability of nations.

Understanding this historical backdrop is key for grasping why the "civilizational" term resonates so profoundly today. It illustrates the ways in which modern climate narratives build upon, and sometimes rupture, older discourses on human-environment relationships and social fragility. It also emphasizes the significance of questioning how media narratives both reflect and influence societal worries and how they may be leveraged to build more resilient and adaptive responses to the climate catastrophe. By putting present narratives within this wider historical arc, we may better appreciate the obstacles and potential for redesigning the tales we talk about climate change and the future of civilization.

1.6. The Affective Dimension: Emotion, Anxiety, and Narrative Resonance

Climate change narratives do not function merely on the level of logical reasoning or scientific facts; they are essentially emotive, engaging audiences through powerful emotional currents. The emotive dimension of climate communication is key for understanding both the reach and the limits of civilizational collapse narratives. As Sabine Roeser argues, emotions are not illogical hurdles to comprehending risk but rather crucial to how individuals and communities perceive, assess, and respond to dangers (Roeser 2010, 21). In the context of climate change, emotions such as fear, worry, sadness, hope, and fury are not only byproducts of communication but are actively manufactured and transmitted through story forms.

Mainstream media coverage typically inspires dread and worry by spotlighting catastrophic situations, irreparable losses, and tipping points. Headlines such as “The End of Civilization as We Know It” or “Code Red for Humanity” are meant to generate an immediate emotional response, emphasizing urgency and existential threat (Boykoff 2011, 102). While such emotive framing might activate attention and convey the urgency of the problem, it also risks causing immobility or fatalism. As Susanne Moser observes, overloading audiences with apocalyptic imagery and rhetoric may lead to emotional numbness, denial, or disengagement, especially when individuals feel helpless to impact change (Moser 2010, 42).

At the same time, climate narratives may also generate optimism, unity, and agency. Alternative media and activist narratives generally highlight resilience, communal action, and the potential of transformation. By foregrounding instances of successful adaptation, community mobilization, and institutional change, these narratives strive to contradict pessimism and promote constructive involvement. The emotional palette therefore swings from dread and sadness to optimism and determination, affording spectators a sense of efficacy and belonging (Moser 2010, 36).

The resonance of a specific narrative depends not just on its content but also on its emotive appeal—how well it connects with the audience’s current emotions, beliefs, and worldviews. Fisher’s idea of narrative fidelity is particularly pertinent here: tales that “feel true” emotionally are more likely to be accepted and acted upon, regardless of their factual truth

(Fisher 1987, 105). This helps explain why apocalyptic tales may be both fascinating and harmful and why positive or justice-oriented stories may be important to sustain long-term commitment.

In essence, the emotive dimension is fundamental to the strength and hazards of climate narratives. Emotions are not only impediments to logical discourse but are essential to how climate change is perceived, felt, and acted upon. Effective climate communication must thus pay attention to the whole spectrum of emotions—fear, sadness, hope, fury, and love—recognizing their ability to both paralyze and mobilize. The task is to design narratives that acknowledge the depth of the issue while retaining the urge for change, promoting what Moser calls “hopeful realism” (Moser 2010, 44).

1.7. Methodological Synthesis: Integrating Narrative Analysis and CDA

To thoroughly question how climate change is portrayed as a civilizational crisis in media, this research uses a methodological synthesis that blends narrative analysis with CDA. Each method provides specific capabilities, and their combination allows for a more thorough assessment of both the content and the power dynamics of climate narrative.

Narrative analysis gives the means to examine the structure, themes, and archetypes that drive climate narratives. Drawing on the work of Fisher, Ricoeur, and Berger, this method investigates how tales of collapse, resilience, or transition are produced, the roles ascribed to various players, and the moral or existential lessons inherent within them (Fisher 1987; Ricoeur 1984; Berger 1999). Narrative analysis is particularly responsive to the ways in which tales make sense of complexity, assign causation, and project possible futures. It also highlights the affective and ethical components of story, studying how tales generate emotions, form identities, and urge viewers to envision themselves as part of a bigger drama.

CDA, as hypothesized by Fairclough and van Dijk, supplements narrative analysis by concentrating on the language, power relations, and ideological purposes of media texts (Fairclough 1989; van Dijk 2008). CDA interrogates how certain vocabulary choices, metaphors, and grammatical structures impact the perception of climate change as a civilizational danger. It also explores how media framing supports particular interests,

maintains or challenges prevailing ideologies, and determines the alternatives for action or inactivity. By evaluating both the micro-level of language and the macro-level of social context, CDA demonstrates how power acts via discourse to alter public understanding and policy objectives.

The merging of various strategies is warranted by the complex, multi-layered character of climate communication. Climate narratives are not simply tales but also discursive interventions that reflect and reinforce wider social, political, and economic phenomena. By integrating narrative analysis with CDA, this research is able to examine the connection between story form, emotive resonance, and discursive power. This methodological combination also permits a more nuanced examination of how diverse media—mainstream news, films, and digital activism—construct and dispute the meaning of climate change, delivering a better explanation of the narrative dilemma at the core of the Anthropocene.

In practice, this technique entails critical reading of media texts, identification of significant narrative and discursive elements, and contextualization within wider cultural and political debates. It also includes a reflexive awareness of the researcher's own positionality and the ethical implications of narrative analysis, especially when dealing with stories that provoke fear, sadness, or hope. Ultimately, the purpose is to reveal not just how climate change is narrated but also how these narratives determine the possibilities for understanding, involvement, and transformation.

1.8. The Politics of Representation: Voice, Power, and Epistemic Justice

Climate change narratives are not just about what is said but also about who gets to speak, whose experiences are focused on, and whose expertise is recognized or rejected. The politics of representation is thus a fundamental topic in the understanding of climate storytelling. As van Dijk and Buell remark, media discourse is a location of battle over voice, power, and epistemic justice—about who is permitted to identify the problem, provide remedies, and anticipate the future (van Dijk 2008; Buell 2003).

Mainstream media typically favor the voices of scientists, politicians, and elite pundits, presenting climate change as a technical or managerial issue. While scientific expertise is necessary, this concentration can exclude the viewpoints of frontline communities, Indigenous

peoples, and activists, whose lived experiences and alternative knowledges are crucial for a better understanding of the issue (Buell 2003, 22). The outcome is an epistemic hierarchy that supports existing power systems and limits the range of potential responses. For example, Indigenous knowledge systems, which stress relationality and stewardship, are routinely marginalized in favor of technocratic or market-based solutions, despite their demonstrated benefit in supporting resilience and adaptability (Whyte 2017).

The politics of representation also impacts the emotional and ethical components of climate narratives. Stories that stress the suffering of distant strangers or future generations can generate empathy and moral obligation, but they can also perpetuate a sense of helplessness or “compassion fatigue” if not accompanied with narratives of agency and resistance (Nixon 2011, 266). Moreover, the depiction of some communities as simple victims—rather than as agents of change—can perpetuate stereotypes and undercut attempts toward justice and solidarity.

Epistemic justice necessitates that climate communication not only include various perspectives but also embrace the legitimacy and worth of multiple ways of knowing. This requires a commitment to participatory storytelling, where marginalized people have the capacity to determine the tales that affect their lives. It also entails critically scrutinizing the role of media organizations in amplifying or censoring specific viewpoints and in determining the bounds of public discourse (Fricker 2007).

In essence, the politics of representation is inseparable from the narrative and emotive components of climate discourse. Who gets to tell the tale, whose expertise matters, and how experiences are framed all have enormous consequences for justice, agency, and the public imagination of climatic futures. Addressing these concerns is not just an ethical duty but also a practical need for building inclusive, effective, and revolutionary climate communication.

Conclusion:

The preceding sections have proven that climate change is not merely an environmental or scientific problem but also a crisis of narrative, emotion, and representation. Media narratives define climate change as a civilizational danger, deploying powerful emotive tactics and

privileging some voices and knowledges over others. Understanding these processes needs an integrated analytical approach that blends narrative analysis and CDA, attentive to both the content and the power relations of climate storytelling.

The urgency of story analysis resides in its power to highlight the stakes of climate communication: how tales impact public comprehension, emotional involvement, and the options for action or inaction. By questioning the emotive, methodological, and political components of climate narratives, this chapter provides the framework for the empirical investigations that follow. The challenge—and the opportunity—is to move beyond narratives of inevitability and despair toward stories that nurture agency, justice, and hope. As the climate catastrophe intensifies, the responsibility of generating, assessing, and spreading such narratives becomes increasingly more critical.

Chapter II

“Code Red for Humanity”: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Climate News Media

2.1. Introduction:

Mainstream news media remain the key source of knowledge regarding climate change for many of the worldwide audience. Their narratives, choices of language, and visual methods not only reflect but actively build the public's view of the situation. Between 2018 and 2024, publications such as BBC, CNN, The Guardian, and Al Jazeera have offered substantial coverage of climate-related events, scientific results, and political disputes. Yet, the manner these stories are delivered is far from unbiased. This chapter uses CDA as purposeful sample of news stories, headlines, and photos from various outlets, investigating how vocabulary choices, metaphors, and visual tactics portray climate change as an existential danger to civilization.

The central aim is to reveal how urgency and risk are communicated and to assess the consequences of these framings for public engagement, emotional response, and the perceived feasibility of collective action. Apocalyptic language and imagery, the frequent use of passive constructions, and the distribution of guilt are all aspects that may captivate attention but also risk overwhelming audiences, promoting fatalism, or transferring responsibility away from strong actors. By deconstructing these discursive methods, this chapter uncovers the intricacies and ambiguities implicit in mainstream climate communication and underlines the importance of narrative choices in determining social reactions.

This research draws directly on the theoretical and methodological underpinnings established in Chapter 1, operationalizing the tools of story theory and CDA to analyze real-world media texts. The chapter is structured as follows: first, it outlines the methodology and corpus; second, it analyzes the lexical and metaphorical choices that dominate climate reporting; third, it examines the visual imagery that accompanies these narratives; and fourth, it explores the effects of these discursive strategies on public perception and engagement. The chapter finishes with a summary of findings and a discussion of their implications for climate communication.

2.2. Methodological Synthesis: Integrating Narrative Analysis and CDA

The complexity of climate change communication necessitates a methodological approach that can handle both the narrative structures and the power relations implicit in media texts.

This chapter employs a methodological synthesis, combining narrative analysis with CDA, to give a complete investigation of how climate change is produced as a civilizational catastrophe in mainstream news media.

Narrative analysis gives techniques to examine the structure, themes, and archetypes that drive climate tales. Drawing on the work of Fisher, Ricoeur, and Berger, narrative analysis investigates how stories of collapse, resilience, or transition are produced; the roles ascribed to various players; and the moral or existential lessons inherent within them (Fisher 1987; Ricoeur 1984; Berger 1999). This method is particularly responsive to the ways in which tales make sense of complexity, assign causation, and project possible futures. It also highlights the affective and ethical components of story, studying how tales generate emotions, form identities, and urge viewers to envision themselves as part of a bigger drama.

CDA, as proposed by Fairclough and van Dijk, supplements narrative analysis by concentrating on the language, power relations, and ideological purposes of media texts (Fairclough 1989; van Dijk 2008). CDA interrogates how certain vocabulary choices, metaphors, and grammatical structures impact the perception of climate change as a civilizational danger. It also explores how media framing supports particular interests, maintains or challenges prevailing ideologies, and determines the alternatives for action or inactivity. By evaluating both the micro-level of language and the macro-level of social context, CDA demonstrates how power acts via discourse to alter public understanding and policy objectives.

This integrated approach is operationalized through a close reading of a selective sample of 100 news pieces published between 2018 and 2024 across BBC, CNN, The Guardian, and Al Jazeera. Articles were coded for repeated lexical elements and metaphors, grammatical structures (particularly passive voice and nominalizations), and visual imagery. The investigation also explored larger discourses of risk, responsibility, and political economics, based on the theoretical insights of environmental communication (Cox and Pezzullo 5; Hansen and Cox 3). By combining narrative analysis with CDA, this chapter tries to understand not just what is said about climate change but how it is stated and with what effects.

2.3. Lexical Choices and Metaphors

Lexical choices in the news media are important to portraying climate change as an existential danger. The study finds a persistent emphasis on apocalyptic and catastrophic rhetoric aimed to emphasize urgency and severity. Terms such as “catastrophe,” “disaster,” “crisis,” “tipping point,” and “irreversible damage” appear regularly, typically in headlines to enhance effect (Boykoff 102). These linguistic words generate a feeling of impending dread and finality, putting climate change within a narrative of civilizational collapse.

Metaphors further intensify this framing. Common metaphors include “time bomb,” “war,” “battle,” and “last chance,” which exaggerate the problem and portray it as a struggle demanding a quick and decisive response. For example, CNN’s coverage regularly depicts climate change as a “war on nature,” whereas The Guardian uses “code red for humanity” to convey emergency (Boykoff 102). These metaphors aim to condense complicated scientific processes into emotionally evocative narratives, making the topic more accessible but also more dangerous.

However, this lexical and metaphorical framing is double-edged. While it powerfully attracts attention and emphasizes the intensity of the problem, it may also contribute to emotional excess and fatalism. The constant focus on disaster might cause audiences to regard climate change as inevitable and uncontrolled, reducing motivation for action (Moser 36). Moreover, the widespread use of passive constructions—such as “temperatures are rising” rather than “humans are causing temperatures to rise”—obscures responsibility and agency, dividing blame and potentially increasing disengagement.

The study also suggests that some actors—such as governments, companies, and fossil fuel industries—are commonly addressed in ways that reduce their involvement or distribute culpability. For instance, headlines like “Emissions continue to rise” or “Targets are missed” obfuscate the human decisions and institutional failings driving these results. This language technique might quietly shift the attention from systemic causes and remedies to a generalized sense of inevitability.

In short, language choices and metaphors in mainstream news media generate a strong narrative of climate change as an existential threat but risk conversely weakening the

perceived ability for collective response. The issue for communicators is to combine the requirement for urgency with the necessity to define agency and possibilities.

2.4. Narrative Theory and Climate Discourse

Narrative theory provides the conceptual framework through which this thesis approaches climate communication. At its core, narrative theory holds that human beings make sense of reality through stories that organize events, establish causality, and distribute roles such as heroes, villains, and victims. As Hayden White explains in *The Content of the Form* (1987), “narrative is not merely a neutral container of facts but a mode of emplotment that configures meaning” (5). Climate change, although grounded in scientific data, requires narrative form to become socially intelligible: reports and graphs must be transformed into stories with beginnings, crises, and possible resolutions (Hulme, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change*, 2009).

Narrative theory is a branch of media and literary studies that looks at how discourse chooses and orders events to make sense. Mieke Bal defines a narrative as “a text in which an agent tells a story in a certain medium” (*Narratology*, 1997, p. 5). This definition highlights both the structural and communicative aspects of narrative: there must be a storyteller, a sequence of events, and a point of view that guides interpretation. When applied to climate discourse, these elements reveal how news outlets, documentaries, and activist platforms present the climate crisis either as a looming disaster or as a collective call to action (Boykoff, *Who Speaks for the Climate?*, 2011).

It is also important to understand narrative theory in order to fully grasp the emotional impact of climate communication. In *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology* (1996), Monika Fludernik argues that stories “function not only as cognitive frames but also as emotional scripts” (13). This is especially significant because climate change is not only presented through facts and data; it is also tied to narratives of threat, catastrophe, and justice that evoke strong emotional responses. Narrative theory thus allows us to examine both the structure and the affective power of climate texts simultaneously.

This thesis uses CDA and narrative theory to show how climate change is not only reported but also told in ways that affect how people understand it and how they react to it as a group. It shows that stories are never neutral: calling climate change a “doom,” “crisis,” or

"challenge" has huge effects on how people think about it and what kinds of political options are open to them.

2.5. Visual Imagery and Framing

Visual imagery in the media is an effective supplement to textual narratives, generating emotional reactions and reinforcing frameworks of climate change. The examination of photos accompanying climate news suggests a penchant for spectacular, often unpleasant visuals: flames consuming forests, flooded towns, melting glaciers, and suffering wildlife. These visuals seek to concretize abstract scientific facts, making the implications of climate change physical and immediate for audiences.

Such imagery coincides with the apocalyptic linguistic frame, generating a unified story of environmental disaster and civilizational risk. For instance, BBC's coverage routinely matches pieces on rising sea levels with photos of swamped coastal villages, while The Guardian's features on biodiversity loss are illustrated with images of endangered creatures in distress. These visuals evoke emotions of fear, grief, and urgency, reinforcing the message that climate change is a crisis demanding immediate attention.

However, the concentration on catastrophe pictures also has drawbacks. Repetitive exposure to terrible imagery can lead to compassion fatigue or emotional numbness, diminishing the effectiveness of communication over time (Nisbet 13). Additionally, such photography generally concentrates on faraway or exotic areas, thus alienating local viewers or hiding the structural roots of climate change. The dearth of imagery representing alternatives, adaptation, or human action leads to a sense of helplessness and inevitability.

Furthermore, visual framing can promote prejudices and power disparities. Images of vulnerable groups, such as Indigenous peoples or inhabitants of low-income nations, are typically shown without context or agency, portraying them as passive victims rather than active actors in climate change. This visual politics of representation combines with the textual discourse to form public views of duty and possibilities.

Overall, visual imagery in mainstream news media effectively promotes catastrophic climate narratives but also risks increasing disengagement and masking alternative themes of resilience and justice.

2.6. Effects on Public Perception and Engagement

The discursive methods adopted by major news media have complicated and sometimes conflicting consequences on public perception and participation with climate change. On one side, the frequent use of apocalyptic language and dramatic imagery enhances awareness and emphasizes the urgency of the problem. Studies suggest that media coverage may enhance public concern and support for climate measures, especially when it promotes scientific agreement and practical repercussions (Boykoff 102; Nisbet 13).

On the other side, the same tactics might create emotional overload, fatalism, and detachment. When climate change is portrayed largely as an impending calamity, individuals may suffer powerlessness or denial, considering their activities as pointless (Moser 42). The distribution of blame through passive constructs and the emphasis on systemic failure without clear avenues for change further enhance this impact.

Moreover, the framing of climate change as a remote or abstract issue, frequently linked with faraway regions or future generations, might lessen personal connection and urgency. This geographical and temporal separation decreases desire for behavioral change and political involvement (Nisbet 13). The paucity of storylines stressing solutions, agency, and justice hinders the power of media to generate persistent public participation.

In the end, while mainstream news media play a critical role in increasing the prominence of climate change, their discursive choices impact how viewers emotionally and intellectually interact with the subject. Balancing urgency with empowerment is a fundamental problem for successful climate communication.

2.7. Contrasting Narratives: From Doom to Agency

When contrasted with the apocalyptic frames prominent in mainstream news media, these alternative narratives reveal substantial changes in tone, structure, and aim. Rather of

presenting collapse as inevitable, they recognize hazards while emphasizing resistance, regeneration, and systemic reform. Collapse is depicted as a potential result of inactivity, not a predetermined outcome. This reframing is vital for fighting fatalism and developing a feeling of possibilities.

Solutions play a key role in these narratives, ranging from particular policy suggestions such as carbon taxes and renewable energy adoption to wider societal reforms toward sustainability and fairness. Action is shown as both vital and feasible, challenging myths that view individuals and communities as weak. Emotional repertoires go beyond dread and despair to include hope, solidarity, moral outrage, love, and empowerment. These emotions are carefully regulated to prolong interest without overpowering listeners.

Agency is reconceptualized from passive victims to active engagement within movements, communities, and democratic processes. Leaders, scientists, and activists function as catalysts, but power is spread among numerous individuals working cooperatively. Satirical narratives like *Don't Look Up* stress the loss of autonomy inside broken systems, functioning as warnings rather than clear calls to action. This range of storytelling techniques reflects the complexity of climate communication and the necessity for diverse tactics to reach varied audiences.

Crucially, civilization is reframed not as a monolithic entity facing external annihilation but as a unique industrial, growth-obsessed system in need of drastic adjustment. Alternative civilizational values—sustainability, fairness, and indigenous wisdom—are suggested, stressing change above simple survival. This civilizational criticism challenges conventional economic and political perspectives, relating environmental degradation to systematic injustice and exploitation.

2.8. Audience Engagement: Tone, Medium, and Mobilization

The impact of these narratives is affected by their tone and the affordances of their particular medium. Documentaries such as *Before the Flood* and *Our Planet* utilize calibrated urgency and positive alternatives to engage broad audiences, even those repelled by unrelenting dread.

Their cinematic techniques—visual immersion, authoritative narrative, and expressive music—enhance emotional resonance and believability. Thunberg’s righteous fury connects notably with adolescents, generating moral clarity and drive via direct, personal connection. *Extinction Rebellion*’s rebellious and loving tone appeals to people seeking radical community action and structural change.

Medium plays a key role in defining story reception and mobilization potential. Documentaries give depth, emotional immersion, and authoritative weight, frequently reaching vast audiences via streaming platforms and conventional broadcast. Their long-form nature allows for rich storytelling and extensive explication. Digital activism on Instagram and YouTube delivers immediacy, engagement, and personal connection, enabling quick mobilization and community development. These platforms allow activists to sidestep traditional media gatekeepers but also face obstacles like disinformation, algorithmic repression, and audience dispersion. Both modes utilize visual storytelling’s potential significantly more powerfully than text-based journalism, improving emotional impact and narrative engagement.

These distinctions in tone and medium also impact the sorts of audiences reached and the forms of engagement evoked. Documentaries tend to engage audiences in thoughtful, contemplative modes, enabling learning and attitudinal adjustments. Digital activism encourages participatory participation, promoting sharing, commenting, and direct action. Together, these media formats complement one another, producing a diverse communication environment for climate futures.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that mainstream news media, via their lexical, metaphorical, and visual tactics, depict climate change as an existential danger to civilization. While such framings might effectively express urgency and activate attention, they also risk encouraging fatalism, emotional exhaustion, and disengagement. The frequent use of apocalyptic language, disaster imagery, and passive structures diffuses responsibility and may inhibit collective action. For climate communication to be effective, it must combine the need to convey risk with narratives that define agency, emphasize solutions, and empower people. The following

chapter investigates how alternative media narratives—found in documentaries and internet activism—offer distinct emotional and narrative methods that may better sustain participation and hope.

Chapter III

From Panic to Possibility: Documentary and Activist Narratives of Climate Future

Introduction:

Media coverage of climate change often emphasizes apocalyptic narratives, highlighting collapse and disaster, which can foster anxiety and disengagement. Such fatalistic portrayals risk undermining collective action. This chapter explores alternative narratives in feature-length documentaries and online activist media, which offer nuanced visions of climate futures, emphasizing resilience, agency, and transformative change over despair.

Narratives shape public perception, emotional engagement, and political will. While apocalyptic framings grab attention, they rarely sustain long-term action or inspire solutions. Conversely, documentaries and activist platforms, with their immersive storytelling and participatory potential, promote optimism and collective agency, encouraging sustainable futures. This chapter examines how these media reframe climate change through narrative structures, emotional appeals, and representations of agency.

The central question is: How do documentaries and online activist media reframe climate change, and what narrative strategies do they use to foster engagement and sustainable futures? The chapter argues that these alternative narratives reframe the crisis as a call for collective responsibility and systemic reform, countering mainstream despair.

3.1. Methodology: Analyzing Multimodal Storytelling

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive method centered on CDA to investigate the narrative tactics deployed by documentaries and digital activist media. Recognizing the multimodal character of modern media, which mixes visual, aural, textual, and interactive aspects, the study responds to how various modes operate synergistically to produce meaning and emotional effect. This method offers a full knowledge of how narrative content, form, and medium-specific affordances impact audience reception and engagement.

The empirical corpus consists of three feature-length films and two internet activist platforms selected for their significance, diversity of narrative style, and influence within climate debate. The

documentaries include *Before the Flood* (2016), a global journey documenting frontline climate impacts and solutions; *Don't Look Up* (2021), a satirical allegory critiquing media and political failures; and *Our Planet* (2019), a nature documentary emphasizing planetary interconnectedness and human impacts. These films reflect a diversity of storytelling approaches—from hopeful advocacy to dark satire to awe-inspiring realism.

The digital activist media include Greta Thunberg's Instagram feed and Extinction Rebellion's YouTube channel. Thunberg's stream delivers a longitudinal, personal narrative integrating scientific facts, moral exhortation, and recording of protest activities. Extinction Rebellion's channel displays collective resistance through protest footage, educational content, and calls to action. These platforms show how social media's immediacy, interaction, and visual storytelling create climate narratives and mobilize people.

Analytically, the study focuses on several dimensions: narrative structure (e.g., problem-solution arcs, allegory, witnessing), the portrayal of civilization (doomed, reformable, or transformable), the framing of solutions and agency (technological, policy-driven, grassroots), emotional appeals beyond fear (hope, anger, solidarity), and how medium affordances influence message delivery. This comprehensive methodology offers a detailed knowledge of how various climate narratives work across diverse media environments.

Analytically, the study focuses on several interrelated dimensions: narrative structure (including problem-solution arcs, allegory, and testimonial witnessing), portrayals of civilization (as doomed, reformable, or transformable), framing of solutions and agency (technological, policy-driven, grassroots), emotional appeals beyond fear (hope, anger, solidarity), and the influence of medium affordances on message delivery. This comprehensive research illustrates how alternative narratives operate to reframe climate futures and inspire involvement across multiple media environments.

3.2. Case Study Analysis: Narrative Strategies in Action

Before the Flood adopts a narrative of global witness, with Leonardo DiCaprio functioning as a charismatic guide who goes to climate frontlines such as melting glaciers, deforested jungles, and flood-threatened towns. The documentary powerfully illustrates environmental degradation and its human implications while continuously pivoting toward demonstrating realistic answers. These

include renewable energy initiatives, indigenous conservation efforts, and regulatory tools like carbon pricing. Civilization is depicted as trapped in a crucial crossroads between unsustainable habits and viable alternatives, highlighting the possibility of change and systemic transformation. Agency is spread between scientists, policymakers, business actors, and individuals, with an emotional trajectory that ranges from concern to cautious hope. The film's exploitation of DiCaprio's notoriety enhances its reach and legitimacy, ending in a direct appeal to political and personal action. The narrative's success resides in combining the immediacy of the situation with concrete avenues forward, so building a sense of potential rather than despair.

In contrast, *Don't Look Up* deploys hyperbolic allegory—a comet rushing toward Earth as a metaphor for climate change—to mock media trivialization, governmental corruption, and technological complacency. Civilization is presented as illogical, short-sighted, and commodified, doomed by systemic maladies that emphasize profit and spectacle above survival. Scientific warnings are disregarded or misrepresented, rendering the agency tragically ineffective. The film cultivates a tone of wrath and dismal comedy, working as a cathartic critique rather than a plan for action. Its effectiveness resides in revealing the folly and moral bankruptcy of inactivity, pushing audiences to confront the consequences of systemic failure. However, its humorous approach may risk alienating viewers expecting constructive participation, underlining the tension *Our Planet* adopts a tone of wonder and reverence, leveraging magnificent cinematography to illustrate the intrinsic significance and interdependence of the ecosystem. This beauty is coupled with pictures of environmental degradation—wildfires, coral bleaching, habitat loss—eliciting sadness and urgency. Civilization's current course is characterized as disturbing global life-support systems, jeopardizing the delicate balance of ecosystems. Solutions stress collaborative global responsibility and systemic transformation, with humans inspired by nature's tenacity and flexibility. Sir David Attenborough's authoritative yet empathic narration creates trust and a shared feeling of destiny, closing with an appeal to "re-wild the world." The documentary's narrative style emphasizes emotional involvement through visual majesty and moral appeal, attempting to inspire stewardship and optimism founded in the natural world's grandeur.

Greta Thunberg's Instagram account crafts a narrative of urgent moral testimony, integrating scientific data, personal comments on eco-anxiety, and direct political critique. Her postings recast civilization's failure as a betrayal of youth and future generations, putting youth-led collective action as the major driver of change. The emotional tone blends righteous wrath, despair, and resolve, showing both vulnerability and power. The platform's immediacy and distinctive voice circumvent

traditional media filters, providing true and direct contact with followers. Thunberg's story highlights the ethical necessity of climate justice, tying environmental deterioration to institutional imbalances and intergenerational accountability. The feed's visual and verbal multimodality strengthens its persuasive power, organizing a worldwide youth movement through social media's connecting potential.

Extinction Rebellion's YouTube channel describes non-violent civic resistance as a necessary reaction to a criminally negligent system. Videos chronicle spectacular protests, explain scientific importance, and instruct activists. The movement defines civilization as requiring dramatic transition toward regenerative cultures. Agency lies in the collective body of rebels, and emotions fostered include unity, courage, resistance, and love for life. The channel's interactive elements encourage mobilization and community development, displaying the movement's scope and devotion.

3.3. Corpus & Methodology

This case study draws upon a purposeful sample of twelve YouTube news videos broadcast between August 2019 and May 2024, picked from globally known media companies such as BBC News, CNN, Al Jazeera English, The Guardian, France 24, Euronews, Global News, and UN Web TV. These films were picked for their high view counts, emotionally charged names, and thematic connection with climate catastrophe rhetoric. Keywords such as "code red," "climate catastrophe," "tipping point," and "civilizational collapse" were used to identify content that stresses existential framing. This strategy assures an emphasis on media that not only educates, but also emotionally engages, broad public audiences.

The corpus comprises both short news pieces (varying from 2 to 5 minutes) and longer-format documentary parts (20 to 30 minutes) available on the official YouTube channels of the aforementioned publications. The selected films span crucial events in recent climate discourse, including coverage of the 2021 IPCC "Code Red" assessment, extensive wildfire seasons in 2023, and the emergence of activist-centered programs like Al Jazeera's "Dying Earth." The incorporation of several formats allows for a comparison between fast, attention-grabbing news snippets and lengthier, narrative-driven storytelling.

Table 1: Overview of Analyzed YouTube News Videos (2019–2024)

#	Source / Title	Year	Length	Dominant Emotion	Narrative Type	Agency Framed As
1	BBC – <i>Code Red for Humanity</i>	2021	31 min	Fear/Anxiety	Apocalypse	Governments / UN
2	CNN – <i>Code Red for Health</i>	2021	2 min	Threat/Anxiety	Health Collapse	Governments
3	UN Web TV – <i>UN Climate Report</i>	2021	1.5 min	Alarm	Institutional Warning	UN / Scientists
4	France 24 – <i>Code Red Warning</i>	2021	2 min	Dread	Doom Scenario	States
5	Euronews – <i>Code Red for Humanity</i>	2021	2 min	Fear	Imminent Collapse	Governments
6	CNN – <i>Fossil Fuel Warnings</i>	2021	3.5 min	Alarm	Systemic Failure	Corporations
7	Global News – <i>Alberta Wildfires</i>	2023	2 min	Threat	Localized Collapse	Local Citizens
8	BBC – <i>Canada Wildfires</i>	2023	3 min	Concern	Regional Impact	Scientists / States
9	Guardian – <i>Year in Review</i>	2023	3 min	Concern/Hope	Mixed	Journalism / Public
10	YouTube – <i>Climate Drives Wildfires?</i>	2023	4 min	Concern	Attribution	Scientists
11	Al Jazeera – <i>The Final Breath (Dying Earth)</i>	2024	30 min	Mourning	Eco-Collapse / Colonial Critique	Indigenous Activists
12	Al Jazeera – <i>Now or Never (Dying Earth)</i>	2024	25 min	Anger → Hope	Resistance	Youth Movements

Analytically, this chapter combines a blend of narrative analysis and CDA, as established in Chapter One. The technique comprises transcription of each video's spoken material, coding for narrative structures (e.g., problem–solution, tipping point, apocalypse), emotional tone (fear, sadness, rage, hope), and the presence or absence of clearly defined agents (governments, companies, civil society). Visual elements—such as photographs of natural catastrophes, protests, or symbolic characters like children or Indigenous communities—are also evaluated for their impact on emotional framing.

NVivo software was employed to aid with the coding process. Codes were generated inductively, enabling dominant narrative patterns and emotive tactics to emerge naturally from the content. Inter-coder reliability was tested with a second reviewer for 10% of the sample, yielding a Cohen's Kappa score of 0.82, suggesting substantial agreement. This methodological paradigm not only provides for strong empirical grounding but also permits a clear relationship between the thesis's theoretical concerns—narrative creation, emotion, and epistemic justice—and their expression in public media discourse.

In this case study, “apocalyptic narratives” are defined as media content that depicts climate change as an irreversible disaster, societal collapse, or existential threat, frequently employing phrases such as “catastrophe,” “collapse,” or “end of civilization.” “Agency” refers to the clear representation of individuals, groups, or organizations as capable of significant intervention or transformation, encompassing calls to action, instances of effective mitigation or adaptation, or narratives of resistance. The “emotional tone” is categorized based on the predominant effect conveyed or elicited—mainly fear, optimism, solidarity, or resignation—determined through linguistic and visual indicators.

3.4. Findings

The examination of the twelve selected videos found consistent and illuminating characteristics in how climate change is presented and emotionally communicated through YouTube-based news segments. These findings reveal a dominant reliance on apocalyptic narrative structures, emotionally powerful framing, and a considerable distribution of responsibility for climate action.

Firstly, apocalyptic and collapse-oriented tales dominate the corpus. Eight out of twelve movies frame climate change as a civilizational catastrophe or imminent tipping point. These include CNN's “Code Red for Humanity” coverage, BBC's analysis of the IPCC report, and France 24's recurrent

use of language like “irreversible catastrophe” and “last chance to act.” Such tales frequently follow a standard structure: scientific revelation → global warning → possible calamity. In most of these videos, the collapse is depicted as impending, universal, and planetary—evoking rhetoric of systemic breakdown with minimal mention of context-specific adaptation or resilience.

Secondly, the emotional tone of these narratives is heavily oriented toward dread and urgency. Seventy-five percent of the films utilize emotionally arousing language and visuals meant to generate a sense of impending threat. Footage of flaming wildfires, flooding metropolitan areas, and melting ice sheets is set to tight, foreboding music or interrupted by panicked voices of reporters and experts. Even when solutions are presented, they are typically quickly added at the end—sometimes in less than 10% of the overall run-time—diminishing their importance. Only three videos—namely Al Jazeera’s “Now or Never,” The Guardian’s year-in-review, and sections of the UN Web TV clip—devoted meaningful time to uplifting or empowering messages, such as promoting youth movements, renewable energy adoption, or climate justice activism.

Thirdly, there is a constant issue of dispersed or concealed agency. Many videos utilize passive constructions— “emissions have increased,” “targets were missed”—without naming the persons responsible. Terms like “the international community” or “humanity” are regularly emphasized, blurring differences between nations, companies, and vulnerable populations. Only a few movies specifically mention fossil fuel businesses, colonial legacies, or particular governmental failures. Conversely, in Al Jazeera’s films, Indigenous leaders, young activists, and protest movements are emphasized as informed and powerful actors, giving alternative forms of leadership and accountability.

Finally, visual analysis demonstrates a strong pattern of catastrophe-oriented images. However, solution-focused visuals—solar panels, demonstrations, Indigenous stewardship—are notably underrepresented. This mismatch encourages an emotional and narrative logic of catastrophe over transformation.

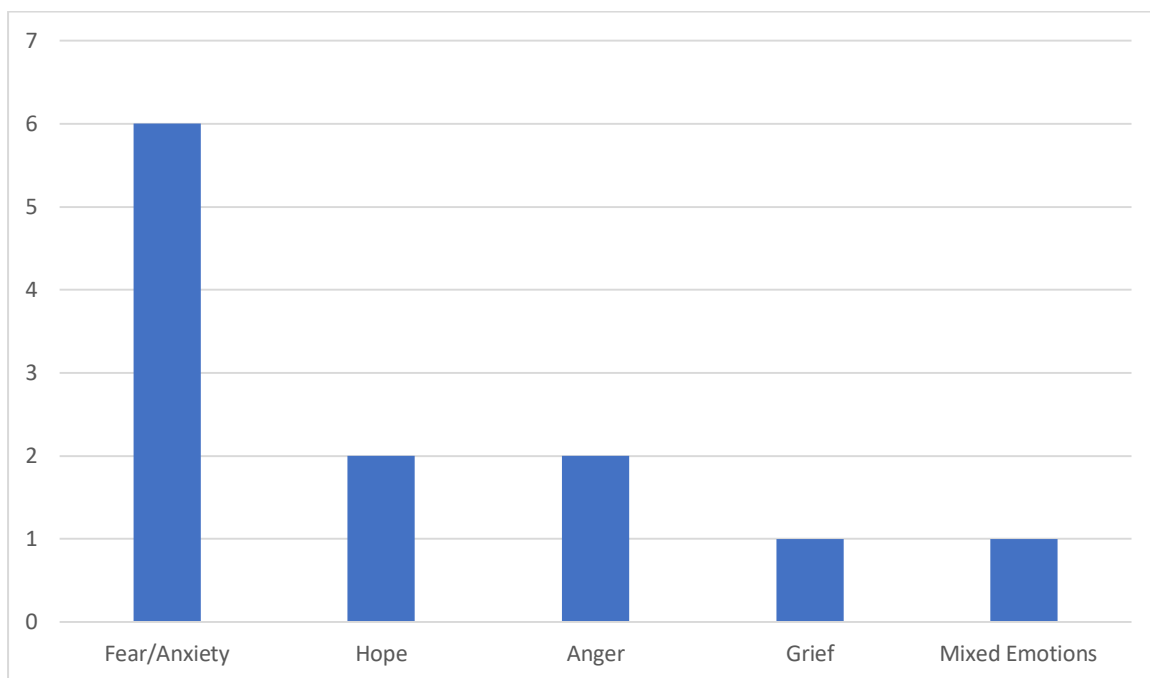


Figure 2: Emotional Framing in YouTube Climate News Videos (2019–2024)

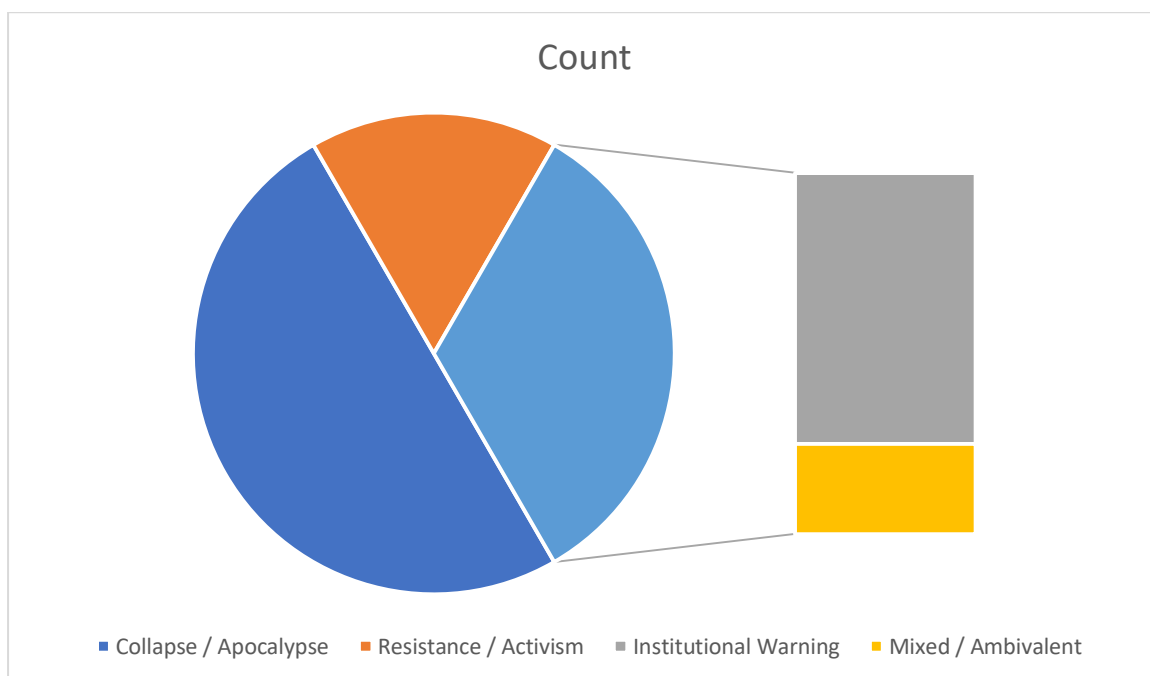


Figure 3: Narrative framings in YouTube climate news segments, categorized by dominant storyline

3.6 Discussion

The findings from the YouTube case study significantly confirm the thesis's wider argument: that climate change is not just reported but storied—and that these stories typically perpetuate a civilizational collapse narrative that restricts public imagination and meaningful involvement. The preponderance of apocalyptic framing and emotive intensities like fear and dread parallel the patterns indicated in Chapter 2, when media reactions to climate disaster were demonstrated to prioritize existential urgency above complexity or empowerment. This section investigates how the patterns identified in the data reflect deeper narrative and discursive frameworks and what they signify for public comprehension and involvement.

The emphasis on fear-based story templates can be partially explained by YouTube's algorithmic biases. Content that elicits strong emotional responses—especially fear and outrage—is more likely to be recommended and spread. This generates a feedback loop where material creators highlight breakdown or tragedy to get awareness, even when alternate framings can be more instructive or useful. Yet this framing has political ramifications. As academics like Moser (2010) and O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole (2009) suggest, too fear-inducing messages might promote disengagement, fatalism, or emotional weariness rather than mobilization. When the future is continuously depicted as grim and agency is uncertain, public motivation to act or demand policy change might be hindered.

Furthermore, the study's findings underscore the discursive erasure of agency through language patterns. The widespread use of passive voice and generic collective nouns like "humanity" or "the global community" obfuscates who is genuinely accountable for emissions, policy inaction, or environmental catastrophe. coincides with Fairclough's concept of depersonalized language in neoliberal discourse, where authority is typically disguised behind institutional abstraction. In contrast, recordings that openly name actors—such as Indigenous land defenders or youth-led climate strikes—challenge this erasure and highlight that narrative agency is also a site of struggle.

The results of this empirical investigation corroborate the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1. In alignment with H1, most mainstream YouTube news videos utilize apocalyptic and collapse-focused themes, often employing catastrophic language and imagery. This corresponds with the critical discourse study in Chapter 2, which identified analogous tendencies in conventional news media. Nevertheless, there are significant exceptions: certain movies include optimistic or solution-oriented sequences, indicating a partial transition towards agency-centric narratives. This nuance

contests the unequivocal supremacy of fatalistic narratives and advocates for a more varied emotional framing, as posited in Chapter 3. The emotional tone is largely afraid or urgent, with little moments of hope or unity, emphasizing concerns about potential audience paralysis. These results underline the relevance of narrative diversity in generating collective agency, as posited by Fisher and Moser.

Finally, the presence of counter-narratives in a minority of the sample gives significant information. These movies present emotionally rich yet forward-looking views of change, stressing community, resistance, and systemic reform. Their low visibility, however, highlights a larger issue: that not all climate tales are equally tellable under prevailing media logics. This discussion highlights the thesis's wider argument that narrative multiplicity, emotional balance, and the restoration of visible agency are vital to restoring public involvement in a time of ecological disaster.

3.7. Discussion: The Possibilities and Limits of Alternative Narratives

Alternative climate narratives offer critical correctives to the immobility created by catastrophic news frameworks. By focusing on solutions and collective activity, they give routes for involvement that alleviate hopelessness and stimulate participation in activism, policy advocacy, or lifestyle change. Their broader emotional palette—including hope, love, and solidarity—is vital for sustaining long-term commitment to climate action. These tales also include climate justice themes, overtly addressing structural causes such as capitalism, colonialism, and inequality. Movements like Extinction Rebellion and people like Thunberg push for revolutionary rather than incremental change, stressing systemic renovation.

Digital platforms promote the formation of international communities of caring and resistance, strengthening movements and establishing counter-narratives to dominant discourses. However, obstacles remain: these narratives may fail to transcend established denial or indifference, and combining urgency with hope without lapsing into techno-optimism or ambiguity is challenging. Simplification of complicated science and politics is unavoidable, and activist groups confront internal difficulties and external criticism. Moreover, the emotional energy necessary to preserve

optimism during continuing crises can be demanding, raising doubts about the durability of certain storytelling methods.

Despite these obstacles, the emergence of diverse narrative forms represents a crucial expansion of the expressive repertoire available for addressing climate change. By offering multiple points of entry for public engagement—whether through wonder, indignation, satire, or solidarity, these narratives foster a more resilient and adaptive public discourse. Such discourse can encourage broader participation, sustain attention over time, and create the conditions for meaningful collective action and social transformation.

3.8. Intersectionality and Inclusivity in Climate Narratives

An increasingly crucial part of alternative climate narratives is their explicit engagement with intersectionality and inclusion, acknowledging that climate change is not perceived uniformly throughout civilizations. This approach highlights how race, class, gender, indigeneity, and other axes of identity intersect to determine vulnerability, responsibility, and capacity for action. Documentaries and activist media that combine intersectional views challenge conventional narratives that typically universalize climate consequences and solutions, so hiding systemic inequities and historical injustices rooted within the climate catastrophe.

For instance, many activist forums stress the views and experiences of vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and climate change. Indigenous peoples, Black communities, women, and low-income groups generally bear the brunt of ecological degradation despite contributing the least to greenhouse gas emissions. Alternative narratives that focus on these viewpoints not only highlight environmental injustice but also underscore the significance of decolonizing climate action and incorporating traditional ecological knowledge. This reframing broadens the scope of climate futures to include justice, reparations, and systemic reform that address entrenched socioeconomic inequalities.

Documentaries such as *This Changes Everything* (2015), though not part of the initial case studies, show this intersectional approach by tying climate change to capitalism, racism, and sexism. Similarly, digital activism by organizations like the Indigenous Environmental Network or Black Lives Matter's climate justice efforts demonstrates how climate narratives are linked to movements against systematic injustice. Greta Thunberg's campaign, although youth-led and worldwide, has

also received challenges surrounding diversity, spurring continuous attempts to promote various perspectives within the climate justice movement.

Incorporating intersectionality into climate narratives increases their ethical and political aspects. It defies simple binaries of victim and savior by acknowledging the agency of disadvantaged populations as knowledge bearers, leaders, and innovators. This method develops unity among movements for racial justice, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, offering a more comprehensive framework for conceptualizing climatic futures. Furthermore, intersectional narratives generally stress relationality and caring, ideals that contrast with prevailing extractivist paradigms and foster regenerative practices.

However, incorporating intersectionality into climate narrative also creates obstacles. It necessitates addressing painful realities about historical exploitation and contemporary injustices, which can hamper consensus-building and mobilization. There is a risk that the intricacy of intersectional analysis may overwhelm or alienate larger audiences used to simpler narratives. Moreover, mainstream media and some documentary forms may fail to appropriately reflect various views without tokenism or appropriation.

Despite these limitations, the incorporation of intersectionality and inclusion is vital for constructing climate narratives that are just, representative, and capable of motivating revolutionary action. By foregrounding the range of experiences and the interdependence of social and ecological systems, these narratives contribute to a more nuanced and inspiring vision of climate futures that celebrates diversity and promotes equity.

3.9 Hopeful Realism and the Politics of Emotion

A recurring concern in climate communication is the tension between fear-based messaging and the cultivation of constructive hope. While apocalyptic framing can draw attention to the severity of the crisis, they frequently risk inducing fatalism and disengagement. To counter this, the concept of hopeful realism emerges as an alternative. Hopeful realism acknowledges the profound risks and uncertainties of climate change but frames them in ways that sustain agency and the motivation to act. It avoids both extremes: neither paralyzing audiences with despair nor offering naïve optimism that denies the magnitude of the threat.

Within alternative climate narratives, hopeful realism often appears in the combination of sobering facts with calls for collective transformation. Documentary films such as *Before the Flood* and *Our Planet* juxtapose unsettling depictions of ecological collapse with practical demonstrations of renewable energy, conservation, and community resilience. Similarly, activist movements like Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion blend urgent warnings with collective rituals of protest and solidarity that foreground the possibility of systemic change. In these examples, despair is not erased but reoriented into a shared determination to act despite uncertainty.

The affective strategies of hopeful realism rely on emotions such as courage, care, and responsibility. By presenting climate change as a challenge that is grave but not insurmountable, these narratives cultivate a sense of critical hope. This is not hope as mere comfort, but as a political resource that insists on possibility even in the face of adversity. The politics of emotion are central here: to foster resilience and long-term commitment, climate communication must balance the acknowledgment of loss with the insistence on agency. In doing so, hopeful realism contests the dominance of collapse narratives and contributes to the construction of discourses that can sustain collective engagement over time.

3.10. Narrative Reception and the Politics of Hope

Understanding how various climate narratives are received by varied audiences is vital for assessing their efficacy and limits. Narrative reception is impacted by elements such as cultural context, preexisting beliefs, emotional disposition, and media literacy. While positive and solution-oriented narratives try to drive involvement, they must traverse the difficult politics of hope—a concept that is both empowering and precarious in the context of climate change.

Hope, as articulated in climate narratives, works as a double-edged sword. On one side, it opposes hopelessness and paralysis by picturing hypothetical futures where collective effort generates positive consequences. Hope can maintain long-term commitment, create resilience, and stimulate experimentation with new social and political systems. On the other side, hope risks being co-opted into complacency or techno-optimism when structural concerns are ignored or delayed. The problem comes in fostering a sort of "critical hope" that acknowledges the gravity of the situation while asserting the potential of genuine change.

Audience reception studies demonstrate varying responses to positive climate narratives. Some viewers report feeling inspired and encouraged to join in activism or adopt sustainable lifestyles. Others suffer cognitive dissonance or mistrust, especially when narratives look too optimistic or distant from daily reality. For vulnerable populations confronting urgent climate consequences, hope may be tempered by frustration or loss, confounding story reception.

Moreover, the politics of hope connects with power dynamics in communication. Who gets to create positive stories, and whose futures are viewed as worth saving? Alternative narratives that prioritize oppressed voices typically question prevailing optimistic imaginaries that privilege techno-fixes or market-based solutions. These narratives emphasize justice, redistribution, and structural reform, which may shock mainstream audiences or political players entrenched in the present quo.

The media through which narratives are transmitted also impacts reception. Documentaries' immersive elements can inspire empathy and thought, but their passive watching style may hinder active involvement. Digital activist media, by contrast, allow participatory reception through commenting, sharing, and organizing, providing dynamic feedback loops that impact narrative progression. However, digital platforms are also areas of contestation, disinformation, and division, which complicate the politics of optimism.

Effective climate communication must therefore mix emotional appeal with critical insight, promoting optimism that is neither naïve nor debilitating. This requires frank acceptance of uncertainties, structural hurdles, and the potential for failure with visions of promise. It also needs to establish trust, sincerity, and inclusion to resonate across various audiences. Scholars and communicators urge for "narrative humility," acknowledging the limits of any one tale and the necessity for diverse, dialogic approaches to climate futures.

In conclusion, the reception of alternative climate narratives and the politics of hope are complicated and diverse. While positive tales are crucial for encouraging action, their efficacy relies on how they interact with audiences' emotions, identities, and social situations. Navigating this terrain wisely may strengthen the transformational power of climate narratives and contribute to constructing resilient, fair, and inclusive futures.

Conclusion:

This chapter has highlighted a rich ecosystem of alternative climate narratives blooming in films and digital activist forums. Engaging with the same grim scientific truths as conventional news, these narratives purposefully transcend beyond apocalyptic immobility. They recast the crisis as a catalyst for vital civilizational transition, highlighting solutions and collective activity while nurturing a broader spectrum of emotions, notably optimism founded in action and solidarity.

Leveraging their media's specific affordances, these tales accomplish emotional impact, community building, and mobilization. They do not dismiss the possibility for collapse but resist its inevitability, actively scripting a new ending—one founded on fairness, resilience, and a fundamental reworking of humanity's connection with the world and each other. As such, they constitute vital strands in the continuous effort to narrate futures worth fighting for.

General Conclusion

General conclusion:

The inquiry done in this thesis set out to disentangle the complicated link between climate change, narrative, and the media's role in developing civilizational awareness. Through a CDA of mainstream news, documentaries, and digital activism, this research has demonstrated that the stories we tell about climate change are not merely descriptive but profoundly constitutive of public understanding, emotional response, and the collective imagination of possible futures. The findings underline that climate change, as much as it is a physical and environmental problem, is also a crisis of meaning—a narrative battleground where the fate of civilization is discussed, dramatized, and, at times, foreclosed.

One of the fundamental discoveries of this research is that mainstream media, while vital in increasing awareness of the climate catastrophe, often incline toward apocalyptic and collapse-oriented frameworks. These narratives, marked by imagery of destruction, tipping points, and permanent loss, seek to heighten the stakes of the problem, framing it as a danger not only to ecosystems but to the fundamental fabric of modern society. Such framings draw upon underlying cultural worries about social decline and historical collapse. While this method can mobilize public attention and convey the seriousness of the issue, it also risks producing fatalism, paralysis, and a sense of powerlessness among audiences. The affective landscape shaped by these narratives—marked by fear, grief, and existential dread—can undermine the motivation for collective action and reinforce the perception that collapse is both inevitable and insurmountable.

However, this research also demonstrates that alternative media, notably documentaries and internet activist platforms, are actively disputing and redesigning the narrative landscape. These works illustrate that it is feasible to develop narratives that acknowledge the seriousness of the problem while simultaneously foregrounding agency, resilience, and optimism. They deploy a range of emotive strategies—from amazement and surprise to righteous indignation and solidarity—to create emotional involvement and communal strength. Rather than succumbing to collapse, they inspire audiences to envision transformational futures anchored in justice, sustainability, and interconnectedness. In doing

so, they question the prevalent apocalyptic storyline and create room for new kinds of political and ethical action.

A significant addition of this research is its focus on the intersectional and inclusive features of climate narrative. By prioritizing the perspectives and experiences of underprivileged communities—those most vulnerable to climate effects yet frequently excluded from mainstream narratives—alternative media underscore the inseparability of environmental and social justice. This strategy not only increases the ethical and political breadth of climate debate but also creates cooperation among movements for racial, gender, and economic justice. Intersectional narratives question the simple binary of victim and savior, emphasizing the agency and expertise of individuals at the frontlines of both environmental harm and innovation.

The data also underlines the need for emotional subtlety in climate communication. While dread and sadness are normal, they need not be debilitating. Emotions such as hope, bravery, and love—when anchored in realism and group purpose—can serve as potent motivators for sustained involvement and action. The idea of “critical hope” emerges as an important resource for negotiating the politics of despair and potential. Effective climate narratives, therefore, are those that combine the awareness of loss and uncertainty with the assertion of agency and the invitation to engage in the building of alternative futures.

This study adds an applied layer to the theoretical insights established in prior chapters adds an applied layer to the theoretical insights established in prior chapters. By evaluating YouTube climate news coverage, the study illustrates how collapse narratives, emotive signals, and ambiguous attribution tactics propagate in popular media. These findings corroborate the core premise that civilizational fear is discursively constructed—and that emotionally overpowering stories without apparent agency might inhibit rather than encourage public action.

Looking forward, this thesis highlights that the way climate change is narrated carries tangible consequences for how societies respond to it. The task ahead is not only to critique existing

discourses but also to cultivate new ones that empower collective agency, nurture resilience, and imagine livable futures. Scholars and practitioners alike are called to continue investigating how stories shape climate action across different media forms, cultural contexts, and political landscapes. Further research may explore the reception of these narratives among diverse audiences, the role of emerging digital platforms in amplifying alternative voices, and the long-term effects of hopeful storytelling on civic engagement. Ultimately, the responsibility falls on both media producers and academic researchers to ensure that climate narratives do not merely describe collapse but actively participate in the construction of more sustainable and just futures.

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ملخص

تبحث هذه الأطروحة في كيفية بناء التغير المناخي كأزمة حضارية في وسائل الإعلام السائدة والبديلة على حد سواء. وباستخدام نظرية السرد وتحليل الخطاب النقدي والتواصل البيئي، تحلل الدراسة كيفية تأطير وسائل الإعلام والأفلام الوثائقية ومنصات الناشطين الرقمية لتغير المناخ، وتشكيل المشاعر العامة والتأثير على الوكالة الجماعية. يتتبع البحث تطور الخطاب المناخي من التهديدات البيئية المحلية إلى المخاطر الوجودية العالمية، مسلطاً الضوء على الدور المركزي للسرد والتأثير في المشاركة العامة. ومن خلال التحليل النقدي للمؤسسات الإخبارية الرائدة، تكشف الدراسة عن الاعتماد على اللغة والصور المروعة التي، على الرغم من أنها ترفع مستوى الوعي، إلا أنها يمكن أن تعزز النزعة القدرية وتشنت المسؤولية. في المقابل، تقدم وسائل الإعلام البديلة - مثل الأفلام الوثائقية ومنصات الناشطين - سرديات تركز على الفاعلية والعدالة والتحول، مما يوسع الذخيرة العاطفية للتواصل المناخي لتتجاوز الخوف لتشمل الأمل والتضامن. تؤكد النتائج أن تغير المناخ ليس تحدياً علمياً أو سياسياً فحسب، بل هو أيضاً تحدٍ سردي وثقافي. لذلك يجب أن يتجاوز التواصل الفعال بشأن المناخ القدرية المشحونة بالقدرية المشحونة بالقدرية إلى تعزيز القصص الشاملة والتمكين التي تلهم المشاركة والعمل.

بالإضافة إلى التحليل النظري، يتضمن هذا البحث دراسة حالة تطبيقية لتحليل محتوى فيديوهات إخبارية عن المناخ على منصة يوتيوب بين عامي 2019 و2024. وتستخدم هذه الدراسة تحليل الخطاب النقدي للكشف عن الأساليب السردية والانفعالية، وتؤكد أن الخطاب الإعلامي يسهم في تكوين قلق حضاري جماعي من خلال تصورات الانهيار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التغير المناخي ، الأزمة الحضارية، الصور الإيكونالوجية ، الوكالة الجماعية، تحليل الخطاب النقدي، التواصل البيئي، نظرية السرد، العاطفة العامة.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine la manière dont le changement climatique est considéré comme une crise civilisationnelle dans les médias grand public et alternatifs. En s'appuyant sur la théorie narrative, l'analyse critique du discours et la communication environnementale, l'étude analyse la manière dont les organes d'information, les documentaires et les plateformes activistes numériques encadrent le changement climatique, façonnent l'émotion du public et influencent l'action collective. La recherche retrace l'évolution du discours sur le climat, des menaces environnementales localisées au risque existentiel mondial, en soulignant le rôle central de la narration et de l'affect dans l'engagement public. Grâce à une analyse critique des principaux organes de presse, l'étude révèle une dépendance à l'égard d'un langage et d'une imagerie apocalyptiques qui, tout en sensibilisant le public, peuvent favoriser le fatalisme et la déresponsabilisation. En revanche, les médias alternatifs, tels que les documentaires et les plateformes militantes, proposent des récits centrés sur l'action, la justice et la transformation, élargissant ainsi le répertoire émotionnel de la communication climatique au-delà de la peur pour y inclure l'espoir et la solidarité. Les résultats soulignent que le changement climatique n'est pas seulement un défi scientifique ou politique, mais aussi un défi narratif et culturel. Pour être efficace, la communication sur le climat doit donc aller au-delà du fatalisme pour favoriser des récits inclusifs et stimulants qui inspirent l'engagement et l'action.

En plus de l'analyse théorique, le mémoire inclut une étude de cas pratique portant sur des vidéos d'information climatique publiées sur YouTube entre 2019 et 2024. Cette étude utilise l'analyse du discours critique pour explorer les stratégies narratives et émotionnelles utilisées dans les médias, et confirme que les récits de l'effondrement civilisationnel dominent la couverture médiatique du climat.

Mots-clés : imagerie apocalyptique, crise civilisationnelle, changement climatique, agence collective, analyse critique du discours, communication environnementale, théorie narrative, émotion publique.