

# Hidden in Plain Sight: Journalistic Strategies for Making Climate News in Datafied News Organizations

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## Bio

Elisabetta Petrucci is a PhD Fellow at Roskilde University, part of the Datafied News Industry (DANI) project. Her research is located at the intersection of Journalism Studies and Ecomedia Studies, focusing on the connection between digital technologies and journalistic knowledge production.

## Abstract

Climate journalism is one of the main ways through which the wider public receives scientific knowledge about the climate and ecological crises, making journalism “modernity’s most important form of storytelling” (Hackett & Gunster, 2017, p. 173). Yet, climate journalists have a hard time packaging the slow impact of climate change into the fast-paced temporality of news, resulting in climate issues becoming more prominent in the news agenda when there are specific happenings that allow the anchoring of wider issues in specific events. This anchoring is especially important as with the advent of audience analytics and the datafication of the newsroom it has become increasingly clear that readers do not click on climate news (Weldingh, 2024).

As different technologies became available to news organizations to organize, track, and evaluate processes of news production, distribution and monetization, some scholars have argued that these tools can potentially limit the autonomy of journalists to set the agenda (Nechushtai, 2018; Simon, 2022). However, others have pointed out that they allow journalists to reach wider publics and provide them with a diverse news offer (Ananny, 2018; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). In the process of making the news journalists interact with multiple digital technologies, such as planning systems, content management systems, and audience analytics systems. How do they make use of the digital technologies supporting their work to make the climate news? How do they assess whether and in what form to make news about climate? This article provides an answer to these questions relying on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in three Danish news organizations. The article adopts an epistemological lens (Ekstrom, 2002), both because it understands journalists as knowledge workers (Petre, 2021), and because it aims to understand how technologies become part of the institutionalized practices of journalistic knowledge production about climate change and the ecological crisis.

The article finds that journalists rely on digital tools to boost climate news both inside and outside news organizations. Within the organizations, journalists use digital tools such as planning systems and CMS systems to select which stories to pitch to editors and in which format, as well as to lobby for them and make sure they receive support from the front-page editors, securing them a good spot on the news website. Moreover, to make sure that climate news has an audience, journalists develop strategies to hide climate information in other news, for instance, by not tagging specific news stories as climate news, to ‘trick’ audiences into reading about climate. The article provides an empirical contribution to the discussion of the evolving epistemology of digital news production,

highlighting how journalists make use of the systems supporting their work to assess whether and in what form to make climate news that convince both editors and audiences of their value. By doing so the article suggests that news organizations may inadvertently contribute to a form of algorithmic audience construction, where assumptions about audience disinterest in climate news shape editorial decisions that in turn result in poor audience metrics.

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