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Corporations, Consumerism and Culpability: Sustainability in the British Press

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Abstract

Sustainability and sustainable development are prominent themes in international policy-making, corporate PR, news-media and academic scholarship. Definitions remain contested, however sustainability is associated with a three-pillar focus on economic development, environmental conservation and social justice, most recently espoused in the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. In spite of its common usage, there is little research about how sustainability is represented and refracted in public discourse in different national contexts. We examine British national press coverage of sustainability and sustainable development in 2015 in a cross-market sample of national newspapers. Our findings show that key international policy events and environmental and social justice frames are peripheral, while neoliberalism and neoliberal environmentalism vis-à-vis the promotion of technocratic *solutions, corporate social responsibility and 'sustainable' consumerism* are the predominant frames through which the British news-media reports sustainability. This holds regardless of newspaper quality and ideological orientation.

Key words

Sustainability; sustainable development; UK newspapers; discourse analysis; consumption

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Introduction

Since the publication of the 1987 Bruntland report Our Common Future there has been increasing attention to, and coverage of, sustainability and sustainable development in policy-making, corporate discourses, national news-media and academic scholarship (Aguirre, 2002; Barkemeyer et al., 2009; Helsten et al., 2014; Pal and Jenkins, 2014). The popularity of these terms coincided with an emergent framing of environmental problems as a global challenge, and growing recognition of climate change in particular as a present and future threat. There has been an accompanying surge in research about news-media coverage of climate change over this period (Nerlich et al., 2012), but comparatively fewer studies of how sustainability is framed in the national press, with the exceptions of Lewis (2000) in the US context and Barkemeyer et al.'s (2009) longitudinal analysis of global news-media coverage. This paper therefore seeks to address a gap in the literature, by examining how sustainability and sustainable development is framed in British national newspapers.

One possible explanation for the lack of research on news-media coverage of sustainability is the methodological difficulty presented by the wide usage of the term (Barkemeyer et al., 2009). Unlike climate change, which (although sometimes misconstrued) can more clearly be defined with reference to scientific knowledge and observable biophysical phenomena, 'sustainability' and 'sustainable' development are social constructs with multiple and contested meanings. Aguirre (2002) traces the scientific use of sustainable development in the study of finite natural resources, through the political environmentalism of the Bruntland report's emphasis of intra/intergenerational equity, poverty reduction, resource-transfer and limits to growth, to a "collective surge" (p.102) in its rhetorical use and institutionalisation as a "murky concept" (p.106) that covers myriad environmental, economic and social concerns. Others have similarly argued that sustainability/sustainable development may be an "empty signifier" (Laclau 1996) – a concept so widely used that it lacks meaning and clarity of purpose (Dryzek, 1997; Lélé, 1991; Sunderlin, 1995). Romsdahl et al.'s (2017) recent study of local government responses to climate change, for example, has shown how sustainability is reframed in order to make progress on specific policies.

Yet, the collective surge of interest in sustainability shows no sign of subsiding. In September 2015, 193 United Nations member states adopted a new Sustainable Development Agenda as successor to the Millennium Development Goals, comprising 17 global goals and 169 targets directed equally at the global north and south (UN, 2017). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reinforce a so-called "three pillar" or "triple bottom line" view of sustainable

development (Pal and Jenkins, 2014) as advancing economic prosperity, environmental conservation and social justice. The adoption of the SDGS coincided with a high-profile meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris in December 2015. This was the UNFCCC's 21st annual Conference of the Parties (COP21), but the 2015 negotiations assumed particular prominence as a range of governmental and non-governmental actors sought a new legally-binding agreement on reducing carbon emissions as a successor to the landmark 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

Previous research on news-media coverage of sustainability and climate change has found that major policy events have not had a significant impact on press coverage, with the notable exceptions of the two Rio Earth Summits on Sustainable Development, in 1992 and 2012, and the 1997 meeting of the UNFCCC which resulted in the Kyoto Protocol (Barkemeyer et al., 2009; Hellsten et al., 2014). Koteyko (2012, p.25) argues that the Kyoto Protocol, through its introduction of carbon trading and other finance mechanisms, has been a "main driver of corporate strategic change" in the adoption and expansion of sustainability. The 2015 SDGs and the Paris Agreement would seem to be the logical successors to these policy processes, reiterating and strengthening international commitments to sustainable development and reducing carbon emissions. It follows that we might expect heightened news-media interest in these events in the context of national sustainability and sustainable development agendas.

However, as we shall discuss in the findings section of this paper, these events were peripheral in British press coverage of sustainability in 2015. The relative muteness of international policy rhetoric has significant implications, challenging claims to universality and shared priorities for sustainable development across the global North and South. This paper outlines a divergent and counter-intuitive framing of sustainability by British news-media, one which largely ignores the international diagnosis of global problems and sidesteps core principles such as common but differentiated responsibility for sustainable practice. In the discussion that follows, we explore the pervasive influence of neoliberal environmentalism and consumerism in the British national press and suggest that this is a major obstacle to meaningful change.

This research is part of a larger project called INTERSECTION, a multidisciplinary arts and social science collaboration exploring intergenerational justice, consumption and sustainability in China, Uganda and the UK. Similar work has also been undertaken in the Chinese (Author 6 et al., forthcoming) and Ugandan contexts.

Sustainability and climate change frames

Previous research on sustainability and climate change coverage suggests that in Britain and similarly the US, neoliberalism is the metaframe through which environmental problems and possible solutions are commonly understood. For instance Lewis (2000) found that US news-media did not present competing frames of sustainable development, but rather consistently reinforced three dominant development frames:

(i)   economic growth is equivalent with development;

(ii)   technology can solve most problems;

(iii)   industrialized countries have been most successful in development.

This "technological fix" view of sustainability sees environmental and economic problems as reconcilable within the existing neoliberal model, with "northern agents and business leaders as the actors who enable sustainable development to occur" (Lewis 2000, p.264, see also Beder, 1994; Koteyko, 2012). A key theme in this type of coverage is the techno-centred management of nature through finance mechanisms and scientific innovation (Boyo, 2008; Doulton and Brown, 2009; Koteyko, 2012; Pal and Jenkins, 2014).

Longitudinal research studies indicate a significant shift over time from a focus on political environmentalism and state-level actors, towards corporate social responsibility (CSR) and lifestyle frames. Comparing Dutch and British news-media coverage of the 1992 and 2012 Rio Earth Summits, Helsten et al. (2014) observe that:

> "Compared to the calls for saving the planet (as a whole) by binding state-level agreements in 1992, in 2012 this has changed to a more present-oriented focus on positioning big businesses as the leaders, and the lifestyle of private consumers toward sustainability." (Helsten et al., 2014, p.479)

In a study of British national newspaper coverage between 1990 and 2009, Koteyko (2012) similarly finds considerable overlap between climate change, business and accounting lexis (e.g. carbon accounting, carbon tax, carbon trading). From 2005 onwards there is increasing usage of lifestyle terms like carbon footprint, low-carbon living and low-carbon diet, signalling "a new dawn in environmental activities when companies started to pass down their responsibilities to individual consumers" (Koteyko 2012, p.31).

One of the most notable features of this type of coverage is the absence of the social justice pillar of sustainable development. In Boykoff's (2008) study of British tabloids, "justice and risk" frames account for less than 4% of the total media coverage in a sample of 4,945 articles

about climate change over a seven-year period. In a study of British broadsheet newspapers focussed on climate change and international development, Doulton and Brown (2009) similarly find that helping the poor receives little coverage, and that the British press "accentuates and perpetuates widely held views of developing countries as the poor as hapless victims facing another set of disasters" (Doulton and Brown 2009, p.201). Pal and Jenkins (2014) in the US context argue that company CSR reports successfully frame sustainability around corporate growth and profit, without addressing social concerns. Others have critiqued the use of journey metaphors both in news-media and corporate reports, where claims to be moving towards sustainability draw attention to future goals instead of accountability for present actions (Helsten et al., 2014; Milne et al., 2006). This tension is reflected in the wider academic literature on sustainability, which views the dominant technological fix or reformist framing of sustainability as precluding a justice-based approach (Agyemen, 2007; Bailey and Wilson, 2009; Escobar, 1995).

The choices and values that drive journalistic decisions are influenced by discourses already in circulation, as well as editorial decision-making and news-sense (Davies, 2008; Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001). This is set within the doxa and orthodoxy of journalistic practice (Benson, 2005), with reference to the wider arenas of political and economic power (see Bourdieu, 1998; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Evans, 1994; Davies, 2014; Lewis et al, 2008). Several studies have considered how journalistic norms influence news-media representations of climate change and sustainability, from the "balance as bias" problem elevating skeptical voices and creating the impression that there is no scientific consensus on climate change (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004; Boykoff and Mansfield, 2008), to the personalisation and dramatization of the environment through a focus on crisis and natural disasters (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007; Doulton and Brown, 2009). Hansen (1991) has argued that environmental news coverage shares the "authority orientation" of other types of news coverage, reproducing hierarchies of credibility (pace Becker 1967) in positioning political and business elites as expert sources. More recently, Koteyko (2012) has drawn attention to the influence of the rhetoric of corporate advertising and PR copy, noting that the role of news-media representation in the politics of "neoliberal environmentalism" is under-researched.

While some studies have found that British press coverage of climate change tends to be more accepting, positive and solutions-focussed (Boykoff and Rajan, 2007; Grundmann and Krishnamurphy, 2010; Helsten et al., 2014; Nerlich et al., 2012), Painter and Gavin (2016) note the growth of a "significant skeptical commentariat" in the UK similar to that in the US. In the

British context, newspaper ideological orientation can be a key influence. Carvalho's (2005, 2007) and Carvalho and Burgess' (2005) research on three broadsheet titles found skepticism to be more prevalent in the right-leaning Times newspaper than the left-leaning Guardian and Independent, and Boykoff and Mansfield (2008) also found more skepticism in the right-wing tabloids The Daily Mail, Express, and Sun than the left-wing Mirror. Painter and Gavin (ibid.)'s more recent research across a range of titles reports a similar finding, also noting that article type is significant with non-specialist opinion pieces in The Sun, The Telegraph, The Times and The Daily Mail responsible for much of the skeptical coverage. Doulton and Brown (2009) argue that in coverage of climate change and international development, the British right-wing press invokes "neoliberal capitalism, the free market, a Promethean view of man's [sic] relationship with nature, and an aversion to political control", while left-wing titles more often appeal to "a social democratic ideology, with a global outlook and values of equality and solidarity" (Doulton and Brown, 2009, p.200). In the broader context of sustainability, Koteyko's (2012) research on the use of carbon compounds suggests that there is more green lifestyle reporting in British broadsheets than in the tabloids, possibly indicative of a link between sustainability and social class whereby environmentalism itself is framed as an aspirational, middle class ideology (Cooper et al., 2012).

In summary, the existing literature on news-media representations of sustainability and climate change suggests that neoliberal environmentalism and individualism are important frames. However, these studies have tended to have a more limited focus specifically on climate change and/or development, and address questions of responsibility, justice and skepticism primarily in relation to the environment. Our research is more wide-ranging, expanding the discussion to consider the relative weight given to the economic, environmental and social pillars of sustainability in the British national press. The research sought to address these specific questions:

- RQ1: What sustainability frames are employed in British newspapers?
- RQ2: What aspects of sustainability receive the most coverage?
- RQ3: Who is considered responsible for (un)sustainable practice?
- RQ4: Are sustainability frames, like climate change frames, influenced by newspaper quality and ideological orientation?

Our research makes an important original contribution to the literature by examining the assumption of a predominant technological fix, or neoliberal, metaframing of sustainability and illustrating its influence across a range of newspaper titles.

Methodology

Our exploratory analysis focuses on the predominant sustainability frames in British national newspapers in 2015, the year of the SDGS and Paris Agreement and the most recent year for which a complete dataset was available at the time of research. It includes a cross-market sample of national news press: The Guardian, The Telegraph, The Daily Mail, The Mirror and The Sun. These five newspapers were selected on the basis of their combined print and online readership in 2015, according to figures from the National Readership Survey (NRS, 2017), as well as their contrasting editorial stances and relationship with social class. Our analysis focuses on traditional print media news brands and their online outlets both as key influencers of public opinion and awareness of environmental issues (Boykoff, 2008; Nerlich et al., 2012), and agenda-setters for elite players (Koteyko, 2012; Painter and Gavin, 2016).

Our sample covers the entire period from 1 January to 31 December 2015, with newspaper articles identified for analysis using the Lexis Nexis search engine and the search terms "sustainable" and/or "sustainability". Sustainability has a broad meaning which carries implications for word count frequencies and presents a methodological challenge (Barkemeyer et al., 2009). As Table 1 below illustrates, this search returned hundreds of results, particularly for broadsheet newspapers The Guardian and The Telegraph. The initial search results were read and refined based on their relevance to the research questions. We included articles from national editions of each newspaper, excluding those that appeared only in Irish, Northern Irish or Scottish editions. We excluded articles in which sustainability was used in its adjectival sense to describe endurance, such as commentary on sports teams or weight loss programs. We also excluded, perhaps more controversially, articles in which sustainability referred solely to the financial performance of individual companies, as we were concerned this would otherwise weight the sample heavily towards business features. For The Guardian, this methodology was applied to the first 1,000 search results ranked by relevance, i.e. those in which our search terms appeared most frequently. The Guardian and Telegraph coverage far outnumbered the middle market and tabloids; for these titles we selected and analysed a random sample of 1/3 of the total number of relevant results. Table 1 below summarises this process and the 546 articles included in our final sample.

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Table 1: Sample of 2015 British newspaper coverage of sustainability

Newspaper	Search results	Relevant results	Final sample
The Guardian	1,000+	736	248
The Telegraph	947	351	117
The Daily Mail	260	117	117
The Mirror	297	33	33
The Sun	297	31	31

Our methodological approach was primarily a qualitative content analysis, with the aim of identifying the key sustainability frames within the news-media discourse (Connolly-Ahern & Castells i Talens, 2010), though we also employed descriptive statistics to aid interpretation of the data. We worked with Entman's (1993, p.52) definition of frames as those aspects of communicating texts that define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements and suggest remedies. Entman (2003, p.217) states: "Framing entails selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution." Although other researchers such as Borah (2011) go some way to rejecting simplistic or singular definitions of framing, we have found this a useful starting point.

Qualitative framing analysis involves looking at what is discussed and what is omitted, as well as how key actors are portrayed within the discourse (Connolly-Ahern & Castells i Talens, 2010). In a pilot phase, 100 articles apiece from the two broadsheet newspapers, The Guardian and The Telegraph, were close-read and coded manually by the first and second author. Initially, we were open coding focussed on capturing detail relating to article type (Painter & Gavin 2016), key actors' voices (Doulton & Brown 2009), and themes suggested by the literature review including the three pillars of sustainability (economy, environment and society), skepticism of sustainability, moral claims relating to culpability, responsibility and rights, and COP21 and the SDGs. Through data analysis, comparison and discussion of our coding, we rationalised pertinent categories for article type and voice, and identified a number of issue-specific frames (Matthes 2009) within the economic and social pillars of sustainability, which focus on particular problems and/or solutions. From this pilot, a codebook was developed and the first 200 articles re-read in light of our agreed analytical categories. In the final analysis 546 articles were manually coded for article type, date, word count, their key actors, and the following frames:

- Primary Sustainability Frames
  - Economic: sustainability can be achieved through existing market mechanisms.
    - Applied Technology: faith in business, financial and scientific innovations.
    - Consumerism: promotion of aspirational green lifestyles and products.
    - CSR: relating business' efforts to harmonize profitability and sustainability.
    - Growth: equating economic growth with sustainability.
  - Environment: inclusive of biodiversity, climate change, nature and nonhumans.
  - Society: sustainability must include a social basis of cooperation.
    - Crisis: dramatization of perceived threats to social harmony.
    - Equity: appeals to human rights and reducing poverty and/or inequality.
  - Skepticism: a disbelief in the necessity or viability of sustainability.
- Moral Claims
  - Culpability: identifies and blames particular actors for unsustainable practice.
  - Entitlement: identifies and supports particular actors' claims to rights or goods.
  - Responsibility: identifies actors who are responsible for sustainable practice.
- Intergovernmental Events
  - COP21 ('The Paris Agreement')
  - SDGs ('The Sustainable Development Goals')

We typically identified multiple frames per article, particularly for the broadsheet and middle market titles which tended to carry longer news stories and features and include a range of voices. For example, *The Guardian's* "A dying Californian shopping mall gets the world's largest green roof" (18/09/2015) discusses responsibility for sustainable practice, applied technology, CSR and consumerism, and *The Daily Mail's* "Green is Good: How you can make healthy profits as an ethical investor" (29/11/2015) includes the voices of businesses, experts and ordinary people. The next section outlines our main findings. These findings include descriptive statistics (numeric totals and percentages) presented alongside qualitative content analysis, as an indication of how often each of the frames we identified appeared in the text. However, the main concern and contribution of our research is the identification of sustainability frames and moral claims, as useful analytical categories that may be taken up by other researchers, for example as a focus for more sophisticated quantitative content analysis.

Findings: Sustainability in the British Press

Article type

Table 2: Coding for article type (gross and %)

	Gross numbers					Percentage of coded articles				
	Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Telegraph	Sun	Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Telegraph	Sun
Advertorial	0	39	4	1	0	0	16	12	1	0
Feature	33	165	14	59	18	28	67	42	50	58
News	58	11	10	47	6	50	4	30	40	19
Opinion	26	33	4	11	7	22	13	12	10	23

Across all newspapers but The Daily Mail, sustainability most frequently appears in feature-length articles, rather than being connected with major news pegs. In The Daily Mail, the newsworthiness of sustainability is in the dramatization of environmental conservation ("Marine life halves in 45 years", 16/9/15) and perceived social crises ("Pensioners are now earning more than those still in work", 21/10/15). The Daily Mail and The Sun, another right-wing title, have more commentary-based content, which Painter and Gavin (2016) have previously linked with the promotion of climate skepticism. Left-wing titles The Guardian and The Mirror are the only newspapers to feature significant advertorial (paid for) content. In The Mirror's case, similar copy from the same company appears on four occasions. The Guardian's advertorial content includes a wide-ranging commentariat drawn from its online professional networks for sustainable business, global development and various other quasi-news platforms. This dataset includes paid-for articles from private companies like H&M and Unilever, NGOs like the Fairtrade Foundation and Rainforest Alliance, and UN agencies such as the FAO and UNICEF.

Of all of the codings, article type is arguably the most likely to be subject to artefacts of data collection and analysis, as well as factors other than news-sense. For instance, the use of advertorial is a business decision as well as an editorial one. The Guardian has a stated policy of accepting paid for content, along with other carefully graduated degrees of pseudo-advertorial, identified as such in the copy. The Daily Mail and The Sun appear to have accepted no advertorial within the analysed dataset, yet this does not mean that these titles are devoid of PR copy (Lewis et al, 2008), self-evident in environmental 'news' articles such as "Coming to IKEA, the meatball without any meat!" (The Daily Mail, 30/1/15). The Guardian uses more

feature material than the other papers, but this too could be an artefact of the dataset given that much of the copy appears on the website only, and so space limitations do not apply.

Intergovernmental Events

Table 3: Coding for intergovernmental events (gross and %)

	Gross numbers					Percentage of coded articles				
	Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Telegraph	Sun	Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Telegraph	Sun
COP21	2	15	0	0	0	2	6	0	0	0
SDGs	1	27	0	4	0	1	11	0	3	0

As briefly discussed in the introduction, we anticipated that the SDGs and Paris Agreement would feature prominently as high-profile intergovernmental events towards the end of 2015, promoting North-South cooperation on sustainable development and reducing carbon emissions. Neither appeared frequently within our sample, and they were simply not mentioned in some titles. They have a slightly higher profile in The Guardian, with 6% of articles referring to COP21 and 11% to the SDGs. These articles include paid-for copy from UN agencies, and many that mention the conferences only in passing reference to other stories. On the one hand this finding seems stark, in contrast to our INTERSECTION colleagues' findings in China (Author 6 et al., forthcoming) and Uganda where both appeared as major national news stories within the sustainability coverage. On the other, it is possible that articles about COP21 may have employed language other than sustainability and therefore would not have been identified through our sampling methodology. (All articles referencing the SDGs, however, ought to have been included by virtue of their name).

Primary Sustainability Frames

Table 4: Coding for primary sustainability frames (gross and %)

	Gross numbers					Percentage of coded articles				
	Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Telegraph	Sun	Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Telegraph	Sun
Economy	70	196	23	94	21	60	79	70	80	68
Applied Tech	7	62	1	13	4	6	25	3	11	13
Consumerism	38	102	11	45	14	32	41	33	38	45
CSR	20	90	10	11	5	17	36	30	9	16
Growth	19	59	7	36	2	16	24	21	31	6

Environment	39	129	13	61	4	33	52	39	52	13
Society	29	53	12	15	8	25	21	36	13	26
Crisis	23	13	7	10	8	20	5	21	9	26
Equity	10	42	6	5	1	9	17	18	4	3
Skepticism	28	9	1	19	3	24	4	3	16	10

Table 4 shows the relative prominence of the three pillars of sustainability – economy, environment and society – as well as skepticism of sustainability as frames within the discourse. The 'Economy' and 'Society' parent codes are given as aggregate figures. Some of these results are unsurprising in the context of previous research, for instance illustrating that the right-wing press is similarly prone to skepticism of sustainability as it is of climate change. The Daily Mail, The Telegraph and to a lesser extent The Sun are more likely to include skeptical articles with an inferred framing of rationalism and reasonableness (Doulton and Brown, 2009), contrasted with the wasteful, untrustworthy, silly or heart-over-head approach of sustainability advocates. For example, The Daily Mail describes the Church of England's call for fasting for climate justice as a "'skip a sandwich and save the planet' movement" (20/6/15) and claims European development aid is being spent on "trapeze lessons, Jamaica jollies and coconut studies!" (20/7/15). Nominally left-wing titles The Guardian and The Mirror are more likely to appeal to CSR and social justice, though with a contrasting focus on the national ("…we as a country, need to decide if we think it's right for the huge levels of poverty and inequality that exist to continue", Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell in The Mirror, 28/9/15) and global economy ("Big coffee brands can support their farmers - here's how" in The Guardian, 19/6/15).

More striking, however, are the similarities across these diverse news brands. The economy is without exception the dominant frame through which sustainability is discussed and defined, in 60-80% of all articles. Within this frame, sustainable consumerism is a popular focus across all titles with common tropes including fashion, food and tourism. In the broadsheet papers The Guardian and The Telegraph, environmental sustainability – issues such as climate change and deforestation – are prominently discussed, but generally within the neoliberal economic frame and not to the same extent. In all newspapers bar The Sun social issues receive the least coverage, and in the middle market and tabloid press much of this coverage is attributable to a dominant news frame of sensationalism (de Vreese, 2005) and nationalism vis-à-vis stories of 'Crisis': an overloaded state welfare system and health service, and fears of immigration. In

other words, there are few positive or solutions-focussed news stories about the social pillar of sustainability, perhaps reflective of the fact that this is conceptually "relatively unexplored territory" (Murphy, 2012) compared with the dominant sustainability frame of neoliberal environmentalism.

Moral Claims

Table 5: Coding for moral claims (gross and %)

	Gross numbers					Percentage of coded articles				
	Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Telegraph	Sun	Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Telegraph	Sun
Culpability	25	29	10	13	7	21	12	30	11	23
Entitlement	2	12	1	4	2	2	5	3	3	6
Responsibility	22	172	3	60	6	19	69	9	51	19

This coding indicated whether issues of culpability (who is to blame for unsustainable practice), entitlement (who is entitled to changes in practice) and responsibility (who has the ability to act in creating sustainable practice) feature in the text. Responsibility is invoked frequently in broadsheet newspapers The Guardian and The Telegraph, often in tandem with CSR and/or sustainable consumerism frames. Entitlement and culpability are much less common, and in The Guardian 7 of the 12 articles that code for entitlement are paid-for content from NGOs and UN agencies. Similarly to the equity coding, these Guardian articles have a global focus on issues such as food security. Fewer articles in the tabloid and middle market press code for any moral claims, though these titles are more likely to discuss culpability – variously in relation to human actions causing environmental harm, and politicians and immigrants being blamed for social crises.

These findings suggest that a justice or rights-based framing of sustainability is scarcely present in the British national press, similar to previous findings on climate change and development coverage (Boykoff, 2008; Doulton and Brown, 2009). Lack of engagement with entitlement and culpability frames could be interpreted as a readership-wide, editorial or even societal refusal to acknowledge them. Given the ethnocentric nature of news (Galtung and Ruge, 1965) it could be argued that entitlement would not belong to British audiences, and culpability might, so it is a prudent editorial choice to not confront readers with these positions.

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Voices

Table 6: Coding for voices (gross and %)

	Gross numbers					Percentage of coded articles				
	Mail	Telegraph	Guardian	Mirror	Sun	Mail	Telegraph	Guardian	Mirror	Sun
Businesses	43	42	177	15	12	37	36	71	45	39
Commentator	2	0	3	0	2	2	0	1	0	6
Editorial staff	44	43	29	11	16	38	37	12	33	52
Experts	29	23	74	7	2	25	20	30	21	6
IGOs	12	2	30	5	0	10	2	12	15	0
NGOs	39	11	42	4	5	33	9	17	12	16
Ordinary people	8	7	10	4	0	7	6	4	12	0
Political Elites	4	16	14	2	1	3	14	6	6	3
Politicians	47	21	22	10	10	40	14	8	30	32
Public Figures	23	19	7	4	8	20	17	3	12	26

Table 6 shows the presence of different actors and agencies cited or quoted in the articles. It counts the incidences of their presence, but does not show where in the copy they appear, their place within the narrative, or the credibility they are granted. Nevertheless, the coding gives an indication of the dominance of elite voices, particularly business voices, in all news-media. It confirms that sustainability coverage broadly conforms to the authority-orientation of other types of news coverage (Lewis, 20000; Hansen, 1991). The dominance of business as a credible voice (Becker, 1967) places sustainability in an ontological positioning which rejects the role of several key actors. It is interesting to note that left-leaning titles The Guardian and The Mirror include more business-led content, expressly promoting a CSR approach to sustainability through initiatives such as The Guardian's 'Sustainable Business Awards' and online platform, and The Mirror's 'Pride of Construction Awards'.

Unsurprisingly, politicians and non-elected political elites such as the Governor of the Bank of England appear in articles advocating economic growth, such as this quote from a Treasury spokesman in The Daily Mail: "our long-term economic plan is working, with the strongest growth of any major advanced economy last year" (11/3/15). These actors appear to be more prominent in the tabloid and middle market press coverage. Ordinary people are rarely given a voice. Inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) such as the UN are not especially present,

which taken together with the findings on COP21 and the SDGs suggests that internationalist policy frames are a low priority for British newspaper editors. NGOs is a broad category that includes environmental organisations and trade associations (for example the National Farmers' Union, quoted in several Daily Mail articles), and as such is associated with a range of issue-specific frames. The Sun and to a lesser extent The Daily Mail and The Telegraph's reliance on editorial staff, columnists and celebrity voices may be related to their more skeptical content (Painter and Gavin, 2016), and The Sun's more populist coverage rarely includes expert voices.

In the right-wing press, public figures such as celebrities and the royal family boost the newsworthiness of sustainability, particularly in regard to sustainable consumerism. The Sun's fashion column boasts "Actress and humanitarian Olivia [Wilde] has teamed up with high-street store H&M to be the face of its new Conscious Collection" (11/1/15), and six of the 31 sustainability stories in this newspaper are recipes from celebrity chef Jamie Oliver. Celebrities thus play a significant role as "cultural intermediaries" (Piper, 2015) through the promotion of sustainable consumerism and aspirational green lifestyles.

Discussion and conclusion

Building on previous research on news-media coverage of climate change, our analysis shows that British newspaper reporting of sustainability tends to "not confront existing power asymmetries and inequalities" (Boykoff, 2008, p.559) but rather reproduces the dominant development frames of neoliberalism and neoliberal environmentalism. In the British context, action towards sustainability is chiefly envisaged through business leadership and the lifestyles of private consumers rather than through political intervention (Hellsten et al., 2014; Koteyko, 2012). CSR is an especially prominent frame in The Guardian, with an online platform devoted to sustainable business. Several articles juxtapose corporate ambition with political failure, for instance in The Guardian Forum for the Future founder Jonathon Porritt says:

> "I can't help but compare what seems to be moving forward within the business community, and just how little seems to be moving forward within government circles" (17/6/15)

and the paper reports on COP21 that:

> "Business leaders are preparing for a limited agreement on reducing carbon emissions at the crunch UN summit in Paris later this year, despite growing

> support from them for carbon pricing and a commitment to cut emissions."
> (2/6/15)

Similarly, in The Telegraph, BP warns:

> *"...*fossil fuels are unsustainable unless the international community unilaterally
> introduces tougher binding regulations on atmospheric pollution." (18/2/15)

Along with articles such as "What motivates CEOs to solve the world's big social and environmental problems?" (The Guardian, 6/8/2015), "Eco tycoon's Dale Forest fun" (The Sun, 6/12/15) and "Fresh call to fashion over the plight of cotton workers" (The Daily Mail, 19/4/2015) this frame often idealises business as the vanguard of social change, held back by government inefficiency.

Sustainable consumerism is a particularly dominant frame connecting the economy and environment. Across all news brands, a large number of articles promote green products and lifestyle choices, "from upcycled jars (which are everywhere)" (The Sun, 13/9/15) to "a pair of trousers you could throw on the compost" (The Guardian, 24/3/2015). This focus and its celebrity backers – from TV chefs Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, to eco-brand ambassadors Leonardo DiCaprio and Dame Judi Dench – is, as Doyle argues, consistent with that of:

> "…the broader lifestyle project of neo-liberal societies [on] improving the
> privatized and lifestyled [sic] self through reflexive modes of consumption as a
> form of political citizenship." (Doyle, 2016, p.778)

This frame is best characterised as 'light green' consumerist environmentalism. It emphasises pleasure, reward and desire typically through food, fashion and tourism, for example a "luxury boutique hotel" that "combines chic interior design with environmentally sustainable elements" (The Telegraph, 4/7/15), H&M's "chic" and "tailored" Conscious Exclusive Collection (The Mirror, 7/3/15), and Lidl's Marine Stewardship Council certified lobster, "a great value, sustainable product from the cold, pristine waters of Canada" (The Daily Mail, 26/10/15). It treats consumer desire as "an immutable function of human society" (Cooper et al., 2012, p.110) and rarely problematizes the ecological implications of the growth economy.

This framing tends to preclude questions of equity, rights and justice in regard to sustainable development, with British consumer lifestyles generally represented as part of the solution. For example, an article on food waste that is critical of the "£12.5billion worth of produce wasted

each year" in the UK is not concerned with readers buying less, but rather "urging shoppers and supermarkets to buy imperfect vegetables" (The Daily Mail, 3/11/15). In the US context, Lewis (2000, p.268) observes that "the press allows northern agents to mask their responsibility [for] environmental destruction". Similarly, the British press does not substantively address issues of entitlement and culpability.

CSR and sustainable consumerism stories are generally framed positively around innovation, protecting/creating jobs, and harmonizing economic and environmental or social goals. Although many broadsheet articles acknowledge responsibility for sustainable practice and (occasionally) human environmental impacts, corporate actors tend to "discursively share the blame in an egalitarian manner" (Pal and Jenkins 2014, p.401). Rather than a call to action, this rhetorical position is used "to create a false social norm of inaction" (Marshall, 2014, p.31). There are many examples of powerful business actors deferring substantive reform (Milne et al., 2006) or passing the buck with arguments such as:

> "…despite their large research and development budgets, it's not multinational companies that are best set to innovate; it's the smaller, more agile firms that supply them." (The Guardian, 19/11/2015).

BP's chief executive Bob Dudley suggests that "No single change or policy is likely to be sufficient on its own." (The Telegraph, 18/2/15), and Gu Energy executive assistant Jessica Carroll says that while "companies are excited to incorporate sustainability", they are only "moving in that direction" and it "helps to prepare for a long journey" (The Telegraph, 27/7/15).

Culpability frames in the middle market and tabloid press tend to focus on national and European politicians in the context of perceived social crises, and occasionally on human actions that have caused environmental harm. In the latter, specific actors are rarely named but rather implied, with culpability attributed to a collective, "slippery we" (Marshall, 2014, p.31). For instance, a Daily Mail article on bird species at risk of extinction notes "Climate change, habitat loss, overfishing and changing land management have all been blamed" (4/6/15), and a Mirror article on Earth Overshoot day cautions: "For the rest of the year, we'll be taking more natural resources than the planet can produce" (13/8/15). Culpability discourses, where they appear in the broadsheets, often address the peripheral and the foreign: Brazil's culpability for the destruction of the Amazon whilst hosting the Olympics (The Guardian, 6/5/15), developers' culpability in evicting sustainable farmers (The Telegraph, 13/3/15), and sea poachers' culpability for overfishing (The Telegraph, 9/1/15).

Corporations, Consumerism and Culpability: Sustainability in the British Press

Big business is sometimes criticised, particularly by The Guardian in articles such as "Business leaders are not taking sustainability seriously" (13/1/15) and "Banks and pension funds continue to bankroll deforestation and land grabs" (5/5/15). Similarly, this newspaper sometimes adopts a more nuanced and critical stance towards sustainable consumerism, describing the sustainability efforts of single-serve coffee pod maker Nespressso as "a mix of the good, the bad and the ugly" (27/5/15), and acknowledging ecological limits to growth:

> "An unfortunate side effect with every sustainable or ethical business is that regardless of the altruism behind each recycled, upcycled, unpackaged or renewable product is that sustainability ultimately means the sustainability of profit, not planet." (13/8/15)

However, sustainability frames that are positively business-focussed receive substantial coverage: only approximately 15% (26 of 177) of all Guardian articles where business is identified as a key actor express a negative or ambivalent view of the private sector's efforts to boost sustainability. To this extent The Guardian's coverage is pulled between two poles creating a potential field of conflict between a cultural pole in which its ideology rejects big business, and a more heteronomic pole (Benson, 2005) which focuses upon the need for business to adopt sustainability and spend its advertising budget with the paper.

Although the economy in general, and sustainable consumerism in particular is a prominent theme across all news brands, newspaper type and ideological orientation does influence some aspects of this framing. There appears to be more mistrust of sustainability in the right-wing press, in which "issues of sustainable living are often translated into issues of social identity for polemical purposes" (Cooper et al., 2012, p.115). In the populist Daily Mail and Sun, skepticism is characterised by anti-elitism directed variously at politicians, religious leaders, highly-paid individuals and the middle classes, seeking to expose them as laughable hypocrites. Daily Mail columnists dismiss a sustainability conference by noting "International business types and politicians are flying here to participate" (28/11/15), describe Pope Francis' encyclical on climate change as "a very PC prayer for our times", and recount losing an argument over a slug with a "food evangelist" at "one of those overpriced organic farm shop cafes" (1/7/15). They also invoke social class with reference to "New Labour luvvies" (4/7/15) and "North London's liberal elite" (16/9/15). Meanwhile The Sun claims sustainability initiatives are a waste of taxpayers' money with exposés such as "Green Tsar's £500k wages" (24/6/15) and:

> "Do-gooder ministers have ordered every single lightbulb in their department's Whitehall HQ to be replaced with 'more sustainable energy efficient LED lighting'. The cost to the public? A dazzling £552,000." (6/9/15)

Sustainability stories appear much more often in the broadsheet newspapers than the middle market and tabloid press. We identified ten times as many relevant results in The Telegraph than either of the tabloid newspapers, and more than twice that number in The Guardian. Sustainability frames are thus more commonly associated with a middle class, professional readership, and skeptical frames with deriding that readership.

Contrary to expectations in choosing 2015 as our analysis period, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement did not figure extensively within our sampling of British print news-media coverage of sustainability. In contrast to their focus on intergovernmental solutions, our analysis revealed a dominant framing of sustainable consumerism and sustainability being achievable through market forces, technology and economic growth. The same analysis showed framing of culpability and responsibility, and of human rights and equity, to be sub-dominant. This matters because it is contrary to the international policy context, where governments in the global North and South are ostensibly committing to a sustainable development and de-carbonisation agenda that demands fundamental change. The British media is representing sustainability superficially at best, in ways which do not expose readers to the importance of international commitments or the need for behaviour change. The need to reduce consumption in particular is not being communicated to the wider public; conversely the media is promoting 'sustainable' consumerism vis-à-vis attractive green products and lifestyles as panacea for problems caused by overconsumption.

These findings are evident across all the analysed news-media, regardless of newspaper quality and editorial ideology. However, there is some variation across titles regarding treatment notably in discourses of crisis, as well as in attitudes to key actors such as elites and activists. Further comparative studies are necessary to place these findings about the media framing of sustainability in an international context, such as those being conducted by the INTERSECTION programme in China and Uganda.

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