Framing Climate Change Within The Media

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Climate change is one of the largest humanitarian issues we face today as a society, and the way it is framed within the media can influence individual perception of consequences and solutions, and more importantly, can influence social movements and activism

Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

Visuals such as a distressed polar bear effectively induce an emotional response to ecological destabilization, which can potentially influence individual behaviour. However, these images also perpetuate the divide between humans and nature, making these issues appear abstract or distant from reality (Born, 2019)

Media outlets become important informational tools in which the public can become aware of certain environmental issues and ultimately create changes within their social environment. High dependency on media outlets can facilitate informed decision making, as seeing environmental destruction in news media can encourage pro-environmental behaviours amongst viewers (Zhang & Zhong, 2020).

Discourse Analysis: media discourse analysis investigates the underlying interpretations and the given context of a media piece, and how it may be interpreted or understood by various audiences. (Deacon et al. 2010)

Framing Analysis: an analysis of the way in which information is organized that enables individuals to interpret, identify, and label this information. Information can be framed to contain certain associations, and to convey a certain message or context. (Simon & Xenos, 2000)

Methodology

A framing and discourse analysis was conducted on the IPCC's AR5 Summary Report (2014) and AR6 Summary Report (2020) to provide a direct comparison between how the framing of climate change has changed. Insight is then provided on how scientific language has been interpreted within media outlets, most notably *The New York Times*, and how framing has been influenced by journalists and advertisements. Finally, a case study on ExxonMobil, a natural gas company, will provide a discourse analysis on several advertisements from the company.
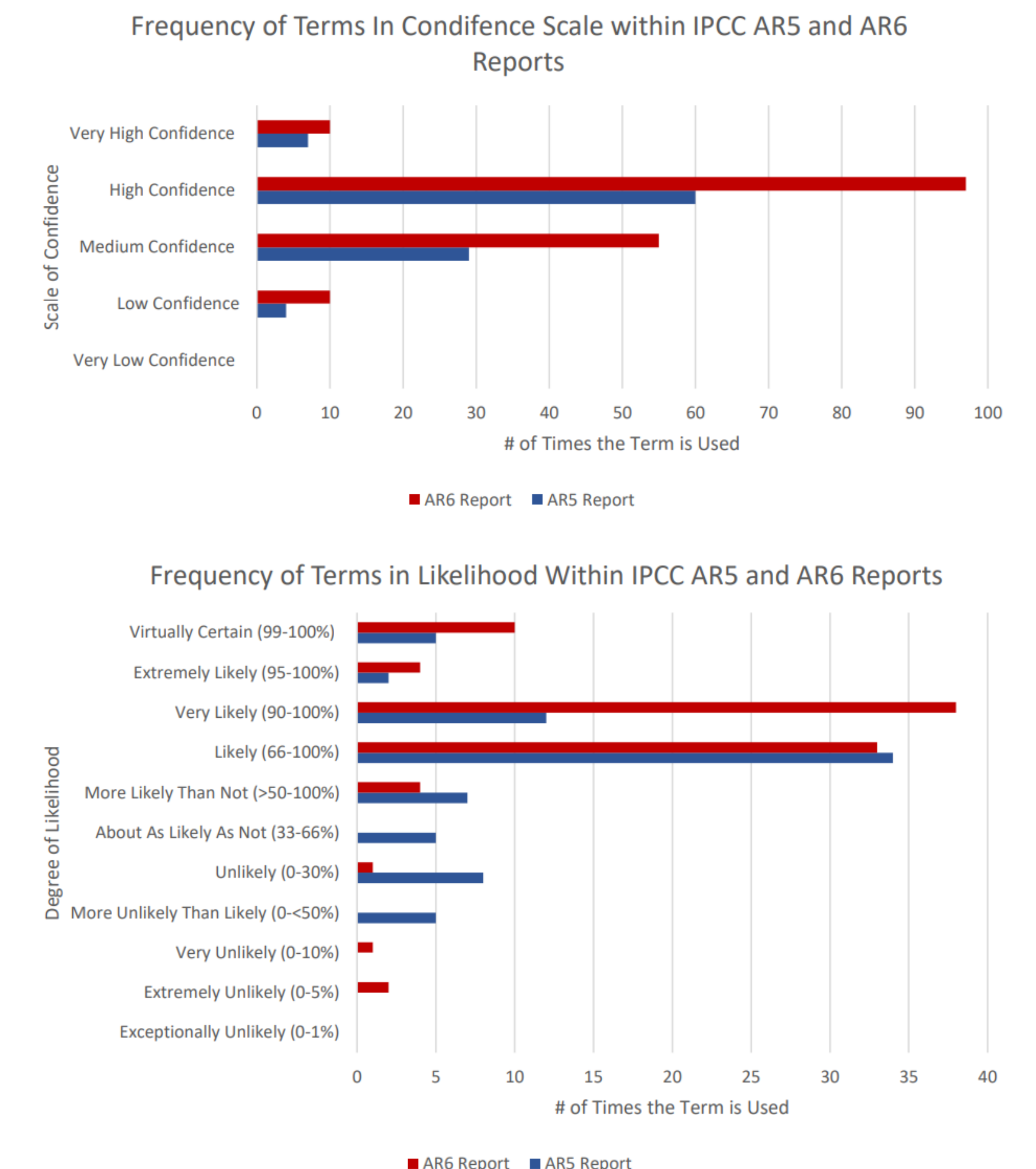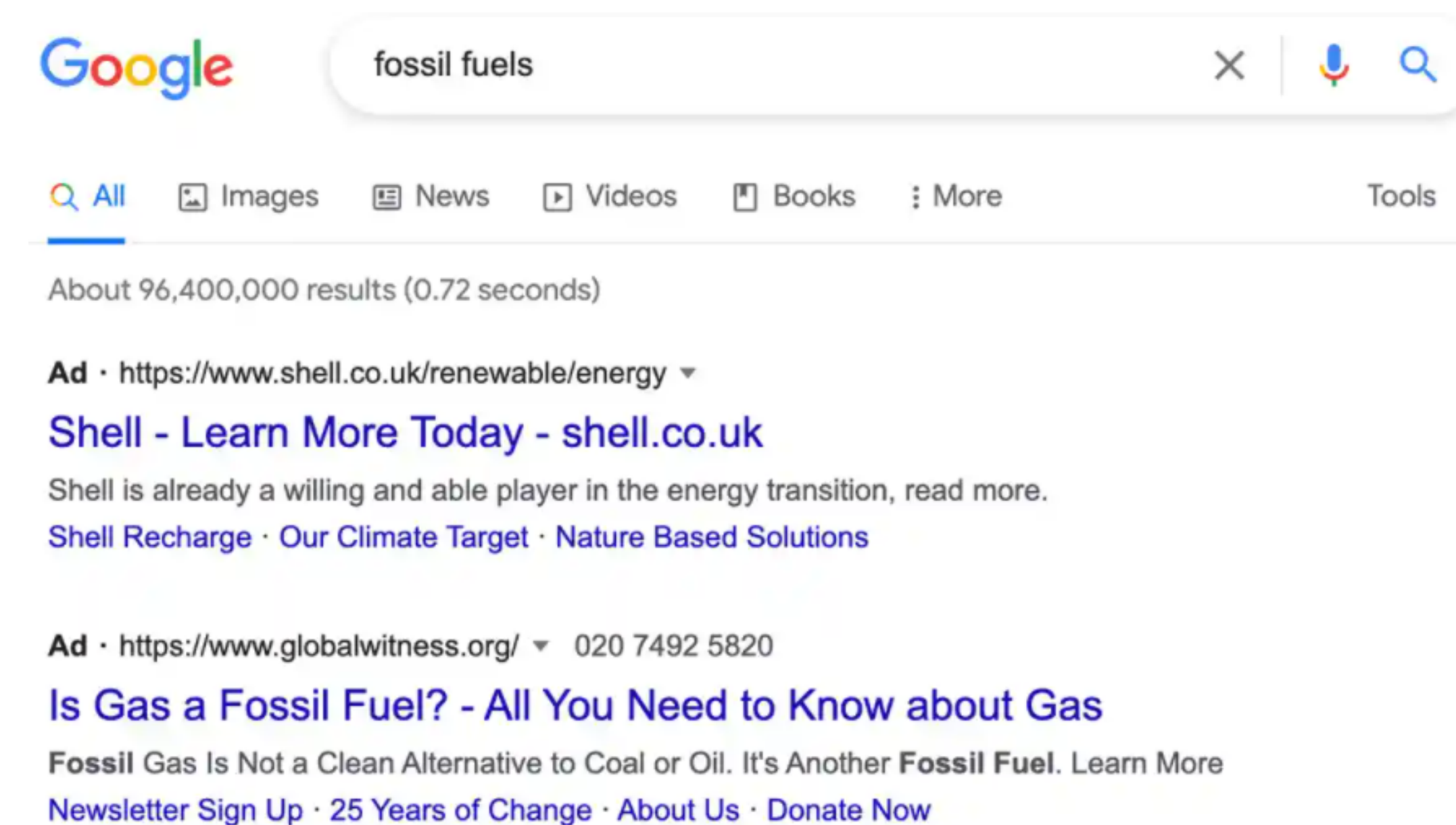
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Results

The IPCC's AR5 Report (2014) included vague language that did not distinguish the role of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions as the main driver of climatic changes, however, while showing high confidence that the planet is warming at an exponential rate. This report does not provide an intial sense of urgency for action, and could be interpreted as being a low-priority issue until the science becomes "certain" or "proven", which are not adjectives used within the IPCC anthology. This allows for the misinterpretation of results.

The AR6 Report (2020) states that it is "unequivocoal" that human influence has warmed the planet, providing a clearer depiction of our influence and the severity of the issue at hand. This report included stronger language than the previous report, and also includes a more hopeful outlook that there are still measures to be taken to reduce projected warming.

Frequency of Terms In Condifence Scale within IPCC AR5 and AR6 Reports

Frequency of Terms in Likelihood Within IPCC AR5 and AR6 Reports

In the early 2000s, ExxonMobil displayed very explicit doubts about anthropogenic climate change, citing scientific uncertainty. ExxonMobil issued several advertisements within *The New York Times* in 2002 spreading anti-climate ideologies. The narrative has now changed to exhibit a 'fossil fuel saviour' frame, in which the associated risks are acknowledged and fossil fuels will be part of the solution, despite actively lobbying against climate policies. Recent ads from ExxonMobil in *The New York Times* during the COP26 climate summit promotes the use of carbon capture technology, greenwashing fossil fuel advertisements.

Coverage of climate change in the media must be careful of fearmongering and greenwashing, but also must provide solutions to their audience of individual actions that can contribute to preventing ecological devastation. This will be effective in ecnouraging pro-environmental behaviour. It is important that framing and discourse on climate change does not redirect responsibility that encourages 'business as usual' behaviour. Climate change is a complex issue that must be addressed with collective effort and collaboration between all levels of society. Our perception of climate change is influenced by the media that we choose to consume, our political activism, and our individual understanding of the science behind it.