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What Framework Promotes Saliency of Climate Change Issues on Online Public Agenda: A Quantitative Study of Online Knowledge Community Quora

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Though scientists have achieved consensus on the severity and urgency of climate change years ago, the public still considers this issue not that important, as the influence of climate change is widely thought to be geographically and temporally bounded. The discrepancy between scientific consensus and public's misperception calls for more dedicated public communication strategies to get climate change issues back on the front line of public agenda. Based on the large-scale data acquired from the online knowledge community Quora, we conduct a computational linguistic analysis followed by regression model to address the climate change communication from the agenda setting perspective. To be specific, our results find that certain narrative strategies may make climate change issues more salient by engaging public into discussion or evoking their long-term interest. Though scientific communicators have long been blaming lack of scientific literacy for low saliency of climate change issues, cognitive framework is proved to be least effective in raising public concern. Affective framework is relatively more influential in motivating people to participate in climate change discussion: the stronger the affective intensity is, the more prominent the issue is, but the affective polarity is not important. Perceptual framework is most powerful in promoting public discussion and the only variable that can significantly motivate public's long-term desire to track issues, among which feeling plays the most critical role compared with seeing and hearing. This study extends existing science communication literature by shedding light on the role of previously ignored affective and perceptual frameworks in making issues salient and the conclusions may provide theoretical and practical implications for future climate change communication.