



The Reality of Climate Change and Sustainable Solutions in Unscripted TV

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Table of Contents

- 3 Acknowledgments**
- 4 Executive Summary**
- 6 Introduction**
- 10 What We Did**
- 13 What We Found**
- 33 Conclusion**
- 35 Appendix A: Keyword List**
- 36 Appendix B: TV Networks**

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Executive Summary

The global impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly visible on a daily basis. The summer of 2023 was the hottest on record, with hundreds of millions of people worldwide impacted by extreme weather events, including devastating fires, flooding, hurricanes and heat waves. With warming expected to increase by 1.5 degrees celsius by 2027, the forecast is dire unless immediate measures are taken.

With the health of our planet and ourselves at stake, many people may turn to entertainment as an outlet or escape from our precarious reality. Decades of research show that entertainment can inform knowledge, attitudes and behaviors towards a wide range of health and social issues. Entertainment — by virtue of the unique bonds we form with characters on-screen and modeling of specific sustainable behaviors — has the power to help all audiences better understand climate change, and support them in navigating the crisis. Moreover, the growing recognition among Americans that climate change is happening *and* is a legitimate source of concern lends itself to an examination of climate content on screen. As more and more Americans grapple with these issues, we might expect to see them increasingly referenced in entertainment.

In 2022, the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project (MIP) collaborated with Good Energy to analyze how frequently key terms related to climate change are mentioned in *scripted* television. This research, along with research by Rare, indicates audience demand for climate-friendly content in entertainment. Now, MIP has expanded upon this research to measure the prevalence of climate and sustainability-related topics in *unscripted* television shows. We analyzed over 200,000 hours of unscripted TV on 48 U.S. broadcast and cable TV channels during a six-month period from September 2022 to February 2023.

The unscripted TV genre is wide-ranging and highly popular, encompassing docuseries, reality TV, home and cooking shows, travel and lifestyle series, competition and game shows, sports, comedy and talk shows, paranormal series, and informational programming.

Key Findings

- Over a six-month period, 75 climate and sustainability-related keywords were mentioned 28,424 times in unscripted broadcast and cable television.
- Most keyword mentions centered around sustainable climate-friendly behaviors and actions like being vegan or vegetarian, or installing insulation or solar panels. As such, we refer to the keywords collectively as 'sustainability keywords' moving forward.

- Sustainability-related terms appeared in every unscripted category we analyzed, from home shows to paranormal shows to sports and game shows.
- Home shows, docuseries, and food shows had the most mentions of sustainability keywords.
- When sustainability concepts are mentioned in unscripted TV, they gain extraordinary reach. The 28,424 keyword mentions were viewed 7.3 billion times, an average of more than 250,000 views per mention.
- A standout series was *Extreme E Auto Racing* (Fox Sports), which aims to educate viewers about climate change while racing electric SUVs in remote parts of the planet. The racing series had 512 mentions of sustainability keywords, which were collectively viewed over 3.5 million times.
- There were 58 mentions of the phrase “climate change” in paranormal / mystery programming, including many on *Paranormal: Caught on Camera* (Travel Channel), which frequently cited climate change and sea-level change as reasons for an uptick in sightings of cryptids like the Loch Ness Monster.
- While sustainability keywords like “vegan” and “compost” were common in food shows, there were no mentions of “climate change” on any unscripted food show.

Introduction

The global impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly visible on a daily basis. The summer of 2023 was the hottest on record, with hundreds of millions of people worldwide impacted by extreme weather events, including devastating fires, flooding, hurricanes and heat waves.¹ With warming levels expected to increase by 1.5 degrees celsius by 2027, the forecast is dire unless immediate measures are taken.²

Beyond environmental impacts, climate change continues to take a toll on mental health and well-being. Eco-anxiety — or feelings of angst caused by ecological changes — is on the rise, especially among young people.³ A 2021 global study found nearly half of people between the ages of 16 to 25 report that climate-related anxiety impacts their daily lives.⁴

In the face of mounting global pressures and anxieties, many people may turn to entertainment as an escape from our precarious reality.⁵ However, it also has the power to both reflect and shape our perceptions of reality. Decades of research show that entertainment can inform our knowledge, attitudes and behaviors towards a wide range of health and social issues.⁶ Entertainment — by virtue of the unique bonds we form with characters on-screen and modeling of specific sustainable behaviors — has the power to help all audiences better understand climate change, and support them in navigating the crisis. Moreover, the growing recognition among Americans that climate

- 1 Reuters. (2023, September 6). *Summer 2023 was the hottest on record, scientists say*. <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/august-was-hottest-ever-recorded-third-straight-month-set-record-2023-09-06/>; Berman, N., & Baumgartner, S. (2023, September 18). *The weather of summer 2023 was the most extreme yet*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/article/weather-summer-2023-was-most-extreme-yet>
- 2 Paddinson, L., & Gretener, J. (2023, May 17). *'Sounding the alarm': World on track to breach a critical warming threshold in the next five years*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/17/world/global-warming-breach-wmo-climate-intl/index.html#:~:text=The%20annual%20mean%20global%20near,pollution%20from%20burning%20fossil%20fuels.>
- 3 Tsevreni, I., Proutsos, N., Tsevreni, M., & Tigkas, D. (2023). Generation Z worries, suffers and acts against climate crisis—The potential of sensing children's and young people's eco-anxiety: A critical analysis based on an integrative review. *Climate*, 11(8), 171. <https://doi.org/10.3390/cli11080171>
- 4 Lui, J. (2023, April 2). *How two Gen Z climate leaders turn their eco-anxiety into action: 'This isn't a fad. This is the future.'* CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/04/02/how-2-gen-z-climate-leaders-turned-their-eco-anxiety-into-action.html>
- 5 Starosta, J. A., & Izydorczyk, B. (2020). Understanding the phenomenon of binge-watching—a systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(12), 4469. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17124469>; Lundy, L., Ruth, A., & Park, T. (2008). Simply irresistible: Reality TV consumption patterns. *Communication Quarterly*, 56, 208 — 225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370802026828>; Kim, D. D. (2023). Enough drama and horror IRL: How the COVID-19 pandemic changed TV consumption. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 20(1), 72-92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2021.2021678>
- 6 Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L., Rosenthal, E. L., & Blakley, J. (2023). *Lights, camera, impact: 20 years of research on the power of entertainment to support narrative change*. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project. <https://learcenter.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/NormanLearCenter-Narrative-Change-Research-Review.pdf>

change is happening *and* is a legitimate source of concern⁷ lends itself to an examination of climate content on screen. As more and more Americans grapple with these issues, we might expect to see them increasingly referenced in entertainment.

Climate and Sustainability in Scripted Entertainment

There is little research on depictions of the environment, sustainability, and climate change in popular scripted entertainment. However, from existing studies, we know that films with environmental themes, such as *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Interstellar*, can encourage viewers to consider and care for the planet.⁸

To help fill this gap, in 2022, the USC Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project (MIP) collaborated with Good Energy to study representations of climate change in scripted entertainment.⁹ We conducted a baseline analysis tracking the frequency of 36 keywords related to climate change across 37,453 scripted TV episodes and films from 2016-2020, finding:



- *Climate change is largely absent in scripted entertainment. 2.8% of all scripts included any climate-related keywords, and only 0.6% of scripted TV and films mentioned the specific term “climate change.”*
- *When extreme weather events are mentioned, they are rarely linked to climate change (10%). Similarly, when climate change is mentioned, it is rarely discussed alongside the fossil fuel industry (12%) or individual climate actions (8%).*
- *Despite their rarity, scripted TV episodes with climate mentions were viewed more than 1.2 billion times, and theatrically released scripted films with climate mentions earned upwards of \$8.6 billion.*

7 Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E., Rosenthal, S., Kotcher, J., Lee, S., Verner, M., Marlon, J., Lee, S., Myers, T., Goldberg, M., Baddulovich, N., & Thier, K. (2023). *Climate change in the American mind: Beliefs & attitudes, Spring 2023*. Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/climate-change-in-the-american-mind-beliefs-attitudes-fall-2023/toc/2/>

8 Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L., Rosenthal, E. L., & Blakley, J. (2023). *Lights, camera, impact: 20 years of research on the power of entertainment to support narrative change*. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project. <https://learcenter.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/NormanLearCenter-Narrative-Change-Research-Review.pdf>

9 Giaccardi, S., Rogers, A., & Rosenthal, E., L. (2022). *A glaring absence: The climate crisis is virtually nonexistent in scripted entertainment*. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project. https://learcenter.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/GlaringAbsence_NormanLearCenter.pdf

A similar study by the UK-based BAFTA albert found that the keyword “climate change” received 12,715 mentions (3.3% of all analyzed files) in scripted and unscripted programming across six major British broadcasting networks in 2020 — a 10% decrease from the previous year.¹⁰ Moreover, climate-related mentions in British TV tended to center individual behaviors like recycling, reusing, and eating a vegan diet, rather than focusing on opportunities for systemic impact like renewables, wind, and solar energy.

In addition to studying how climate-related themes appear in scripted entertainment, MIP conducted an audience survey to measure demand for climate stories in fictional TV and film. Nearly half of audience members surveyed said they were interested in watching climate-related storylines, particularly in drama, action adventure, and sci-fi genres, and another third were open to it.¹¹ A separate study by Rare found that 7 out of 10 Americans want to see climate-friendly behaviors in Hollywood entertainment content.¹²

Unscripted Entertainment

While there is scant research on environmental themes in scripted entertainment, even less is known about how climate and sustainability issues appear in *unscripted* content and particularly television. Existing studies focus largely on documentaries, showing how environmental films such as *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Blackfish* changed viewers’ attitudes, behaviors, and even led to real-world policy changes.¹³

The unscripted genre is wide-ranging and highly popular, encompassing docuseries, reality TV, home and cooking shows, travel and lifestyle series, competition and game shows, sports, comedy and talk shows, paranormal series, and informational programming.¹⁴ Based on 2023 audience demand data, reality TV is one of top three most popular TV genres in the United States.¹⁵ Moreover, docuseries —

10 Albert. (2021). *Subtitles to save the world: An analysis of how UK broadcasters are exposing audiences to climate change through their content*. <https://wearealbert.org/editorial/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2021/09/albert-subtitle-report-2021.pdf>

11 Giaccardi, S., Rogers, A., & Rosenthal, E., L. (2022). *A glaring absence: The climate crisis is virtually nonexistent in scripted entertainment*. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project. https://learcenter.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/GlaringAbsence_NormanLearCenter.pdf

12 Tiwathia, A., Watamanuk, E., Viana, R., & Thulin, E. (2023). *Measuring demand among US audiences for climate-friendly content in entertainment*. Rare Entertainment Lab and the Center for Behavior & the Environment. <https://rare.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Measuring-Demand-Among-US-Audiences-for-Climate-Friendly-Content-in-Entertainment.pdf>

13 Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L., Rosenthal, E. L., & Blakley, J. (2023). *Lights, camera, impact: 20 years of research on the power of entertainment to support narrative change*. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project. <https://learcenter.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/NormanLearCenter-Narrative-Change-Research-Review.pdf>; Boissat, L., Thomas-Walters, L., & Verissimo, D. (2021). Nature documentaries as catalysts for change: Mapping out the ‘Blackfish Effect’. *People and Nature*, 3(6), 1179-1192. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10221>

14 For more on the different subgenres we used to classify unscripted television, see the Methodology section.

15 Parrot Analytics. (December 21, 2023). *The evolution of the United States TV & streaming landscape: Key audience trends and consumer insights for major platforms*. <https://www.parrotanalytics.com/insights/us/#:~:text=American%20audiences%20gave%20the%20largest,animation%20genre%20in%20Q2%202022.>

documentary-style TV series that film subjects in their own environment — are the fastest growing unscripted subgenre on streaming platforms, with nature-related content such as *Prehistoric Planet* and *Tiny World* emerging as hits in the past few years.¹⁶

Unscripted television attracts large and ideologically diverse audiences. Previous MIP research identified a number of unscripted shows that served as cultural touchstones, meaning they appealed equally to liberal, moderate, and conservative audiences.¹⁷ These included popular and long-running TV shows like *The Voice*, *Pawn Stars*, *America's Funniest Home Videos*, and *MythBusters*.¹⁸



Holiday Baking Show | Food Network

This Study

Given its popularity and widespread appeal, unscripted TV content merits more attention and research. MIP set out to fill this gap by establishing a baseline for representations of climate and sustainability themes in key subgenres of *unscripted* television.

Building upon our 2022 research on climate-related content in *scripted* entertainment, we measured the frequency of 75 keywords in unscripted U.S. network and cable TV content during a six-month period in 2022-2023. For each keyword mention, we also captured data about unscripted subgenre and viewership.

16 Parrot Analytics. (January 10, 2023). *Demand for docuseries and documentary movies*. <https://www.parrotanalytics.com/insights/demand-for-docuseries-and-documentary-movies/>

17 Blakley, J., Watson-Currie, E., Shin, H., Valenti, L. T., Saucier, C., & Boisvert, H. (2019). *Are you what you watch? Tracking the political divide through TV preferences*. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project & FuturePerfect Lab. https://learcenter.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/are_you_what_you_watch.pdf

18 Rosenthal, E. L., Rogers, A. A., Valkenburgh, S. V., Peterson, E., & Weinstein, D. (2021). *Poverty narratives in popular culture: Final report*. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project. https://learcenter.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/PovertyNarrativesinPopCulture_FinalReport.pdf

What We Did

To establish a snapshot of climate and sustainability representation in U.S. unscripted television, MIP monitored 75 keywords broadly related to climate change, sustainability, renewables, and associated topics. We analyzed the frequency of keyword mentions in 200,000 hours of unscripted U.S. network and cable content across 48 channels and 12 subgenres during a six-month period from September 2022 through February 2023.

Keyword Identification Process

We began with the 36 climate-related keywords used in our analysis of scripted TV and film.¹⁹ Additional keywords were then added from the BAFTA albert analysis of climate mentions in British TV,²⁰ and from brainstorming with entertainment industry stakeholders. In total, we evaluated 125 potential keywords for relevance and visibility; keywords were dropped if mentions were largely irrelevant. For example, “clean air” was predominantly used to describe the space between cars in auto racing. Ultimately, 75 keywords were retained for the final analysis.²¹ These keywords broadly fell into the following categories: sustainable solutions (e.g., “vegan,” “solar,” “recycle”); climate change (e.g., “climate change,” “global warming,” “carbon footprint”); waste and pollution (e.g., “food waste,” “plastic pollution,” “ocean pollution”); and colloquial phrases (e.g., “care about the planet,” “save the planet”).

Common stemming and variations were applied to each keyword. For example, “fracking” represents “frack,” “fracked,” and “fracking,” while “ice caps” includes “icecap,” “icecaps,” “ice cap,” and “ice caps.”

Search and Analysis Procedure

Using TVEye, a global search engine for TV transcripts, MIP searched for mentions of the 75 keywords on six national broadcast networks and 42 U.S. cable networks across a six-month period.²² News content, commercials, and infomercials were excluded from analysis.

19 Giaccardi, S., Rogers, A., & Rosenthal, E., L. (2022). *A glaring absence: The climate crisis is virtually nonexistent in scripted entertainment*. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project. https://learcenter.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/GlaringAbsence_NormanLearCenter.pdf

20 Albert. (2021). *Subtitles to save the world: An analysis of how UK broadcasters are exposing audiences to climate change through their content*. <https://wearealbert.org/editorial/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2021/09/albert-subtitle-report-2021.pdf>

21 See Appendix A: Keywords List for the full list of 75 keywords.

22 See Appendix B: TV Networks for a full list of networks analyzed.

We collected the frequency of mentions of each keyword. Viewership data for each episode were provided by TVEyes. We calculated total views per episode based on the number of viewers multiplied by the number of keyword mentions. For example, if an episode of *Chopped* (Food Network) had 200,000 viewers and included five keyword mentions, it would be counted as one million views (200,000 views x 5 mentions).

Drawing upon previously used categories,²³ as well as the specific shows that appeared in our sample, trained student coders classified each mention into one of 17 unscripted subgenres; nine of the most notable subgenres are shown in Table 1.



²³ We conducted secondary research to help define categories of unscripted television, including from popular awards shows' classification systems, including the [Emmys](#), the [MTV Movie & TV Awards](#), and the [American Reality Television Awards](#).

TABLE 1. Notable Unscripted Subgenres with Example Shows²⁴ (In Order of Keyword Mentions)

| notable unscripted subgenres | description | example shows |
|---|--|--|
| home shows  | Shows related to home or lifestyle, including but not limited to home renovation shows, DIY, real estate, travel, and arts/culture. (Excludes food-based travel programming.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Building Off the Grid</i> ● <i>Fixer Upper</i> ● <i>Flip or Flop</i> |
| docuseries  | Shows that focus on a subject(s) — including topics, places, events, animals, individuals, or groups of people — often showing them in real events and situations over a period of time. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Dirty Jobs</i> ● <i>Top Gear</i> ● <i>Wildlife Nation</i> |
| food shows  | Shows that focus on food or cooking topics, including but not limited to cooking shows, cooking competitions, food-based docuseries, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives</i> ● <i>Chopped</i> ● <i>Man V. Food</i> |
| sports  | Shows covering sports and related topics, including but not limited to sports talk shows, sports news, and live sporting events. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Extreme E</i> ● <i>College Football</i> ● <i>NASCAR</i> |
| talk shows  | Shows in which hosts discuss various topics, news, and events — often in front of a live studio audience — and sometimes invite guests, panels, or audience members to participate in discussions. (Excludes sports-centered talk shows & religious talk shows.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>The Daily Show</i> ● <i>The Kelly Clarkson Show</i> ● <i>Jimmy Kimmel Live</i> |
| unscripted comedy/sketch  | Shows that feature a variety of comedic acts, including but not limited to comedy sketches, improvisational comedy, magic, etc. (Excludes talent-based competitions.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Saturday Night Live</i> ● <i>Whose Line is It Anyway?</i> ● <i>The Carbonaro Effect</i> |
| reality  | Shows that focus on a person, groups of people, or communities and are typically casted and heavily edited, showing storylines that may have been pre-written, constructed, or influenced in some way by producers. ²⁷ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Below Deck</i> ● <i>Keeping Up with the Kardashians</i> ● <i>Married At First Sight</i> |
| paranormal/mystery  | Shows focused on exploring supernatural and/or paranormal phenomena. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Paranormal Caught on Camera</i> ● <i>Alien Abduction</i> ● <i>Ghost Hunters</i> |
| competition/game show  | Shows that feature contestants competing for prizes through a variety of physical, mental, skill- or talent-based challenges and rounds. (Excludes dating-based reality shows, cooking competitions, and home improvement-based contests.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Wheel of Fortune</i> ● <i>Celebrity Family Feud</i> ● <i>The Voice</i> |

24 The Lifestyle subgenre had the fifth most mentions. However, we chose not to highlight findings from this subgenre because of the lack of cohesion; keyword mentions were scattered throughout many different types of lifestyle content without a clear throughline.

25 For more on the differences between reality TV and docuseries, see VanArendonk, K. (2020, October 30). Reality TV glows up. *Vulture*. <https://www.vulture.com/2020/10/docuseries-reality-tv-the-vow.html>.

What We Found

Overall Findings

We identified a total of 28,424 mentions of the 75 keywords over a six-month period.

Home shows, docuseries, and food shows featured the most mentions, but mentions were found across every unscripted category — from reality shows to paranormal shows to sports and game shows.

Unscripted mentions have the potential to reach a lot of viewers. The 28,424 keyword mentions were **collectively viewed 7.3 billion times, an average of 255,297 views per individual mention.** As a reminder, total views represents the number of keywords per episode multiplied by the number of viewers. Syndication contributes to even more views. While a single airing of *House Hunters* (HGTV) may only receive a few hundred thousand viewers, episodes re-air so frequently that total viewership is significantly higher.²⁶ Some shows are on several times a day and others enjoy periodic marathons, where the series will take over a network for an entire day.

The most frequently mentioned keywords were those pertaining to sustainable solutions.

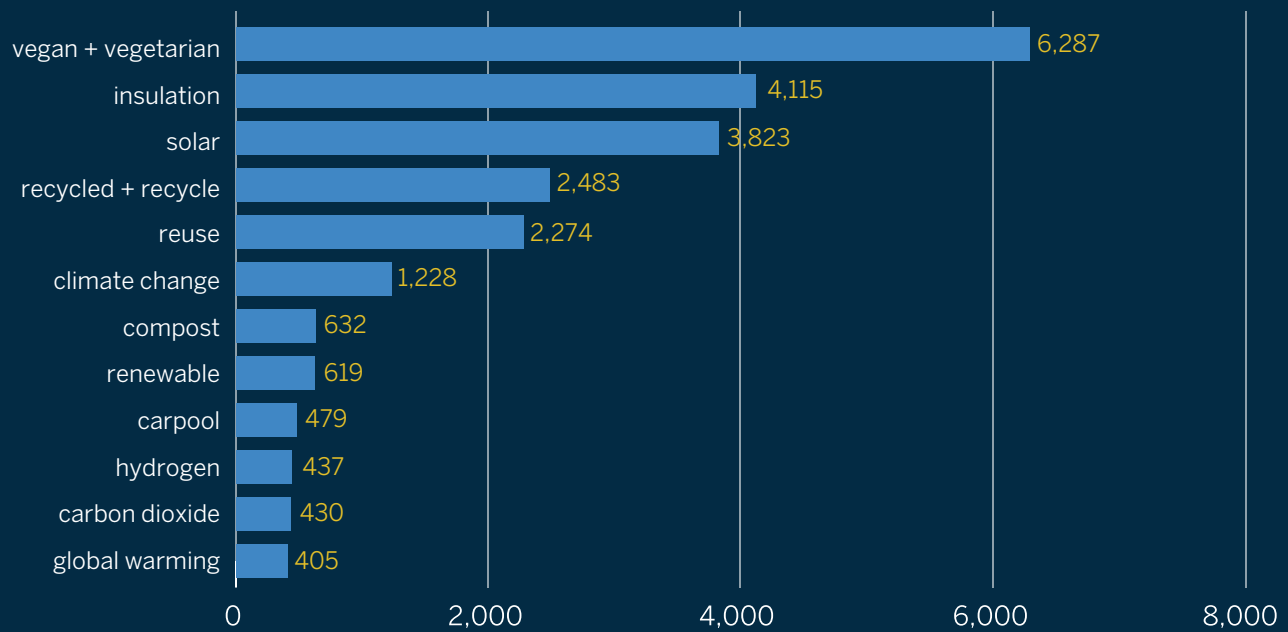
“Vegan” and “vegetarian” alone represented 22% of all keyword mentions. These were common on food shows like *Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives* (Food Network) and reality shows like *Below Deck* (Bravo). Mentions of “insulation” and “solar,” often on home shows, accounted for another 28% of all keyword mentions. This theme was so pronounced that moving forward, we refer to the keywords collectively as ‘sustainability keywords,’ and break out the subcategory of explicit mentions of “climate change” or “global warming” separately.²⁷

The keywords most explicitly relevant to climate change included 1,228 mentions of “climate change” (4% of all mentions), 405 mentions of “global warming,” and 275 mentions of “carbon footprint.”

26 Because *House Hunters* re-airs so frequently, HGTV has reported that it can receive up to 25 million viewers a month. See Harwell, D. (2016, January 25). *How “House Hunters” became the most unstoppable juggernaut on TV.* *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2016/01/25/how-house-hunters-became-the-most-unstoppable-juggernaut-on-tv>

27 This framing is intended to more accurately capture the breadth of the keywords that actually appeared frequently. It is worth noting that “sustainable” and “sustainability” were not among the 75 keywords.

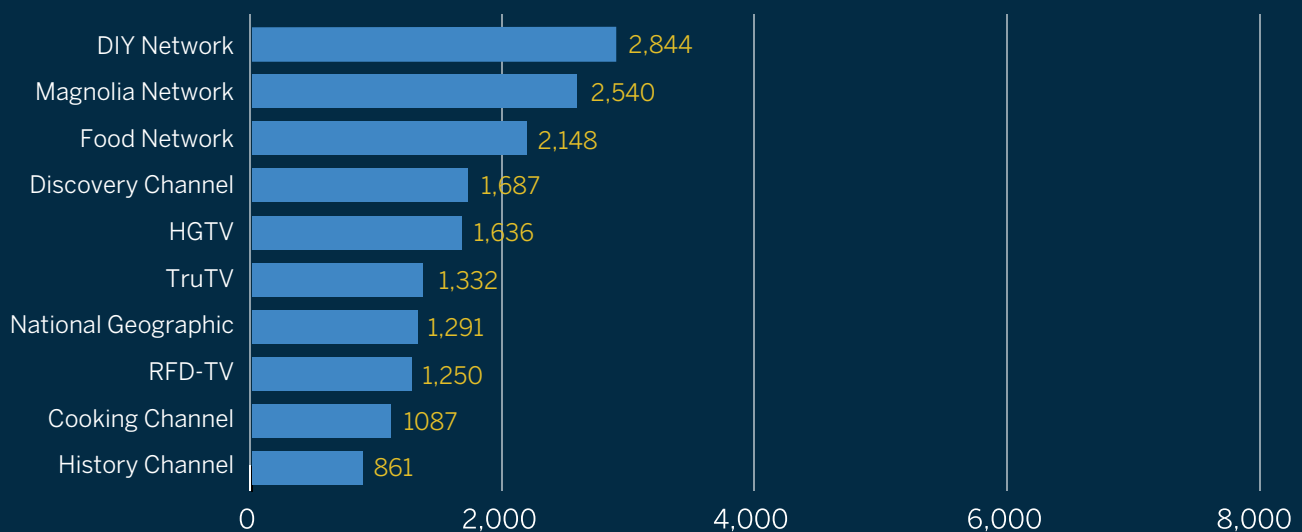
FIGURE 1. Most Frequently Mentioned Keywords



Four of the five networks with the most sustainability mentions were home and food networks.

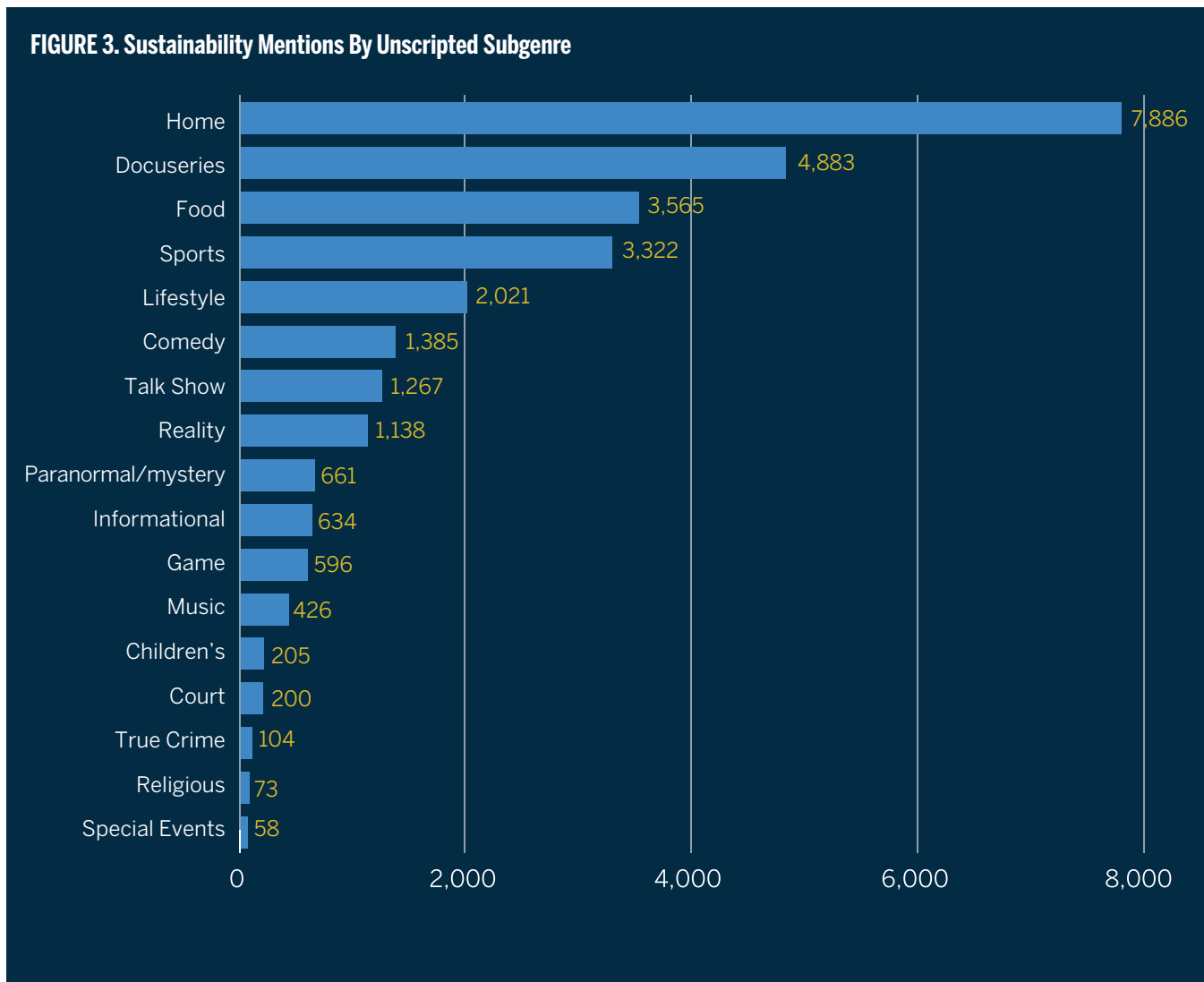
Discovery Channel and National Geographic had the most docuseries mentions and TruTV was in the top 10 networks largely because of unscripted comedy mentions of climate on the show *Impractical Jokers* (TruTV).

FIGURE 2. Top 10 Networks with Most Mentions



Sustainability content was found in every unscripted subgenre.

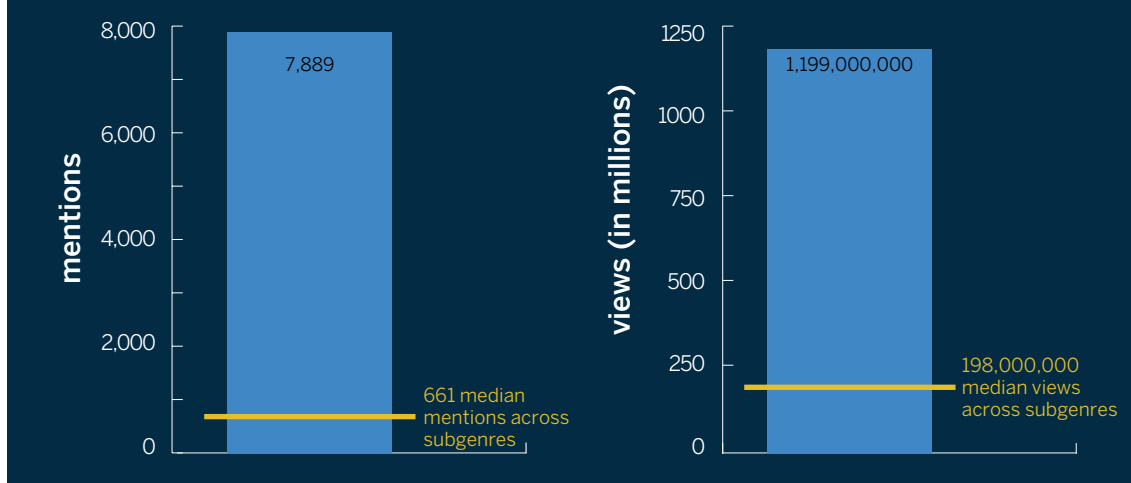
Home shows led the way because of consistent modeling of proper insulation, solar panels, and other eco-friendly home behaviors. Docuseries featured much of the most explicit climate change content, and food shows included many references to vegan, vegetarian, and plant-based content as well as mentions of composting.



The sections below describe how sustainability keywords appeared in several notable subgenres, from most to least mentions of sustainability keywords.

Home Shows

FIGURE 4. Keyword Mentions & Total Views for Home Shows Vs. Median Across Subgenres



Home shows featured more sustainability keyword mentions (7,886) than any other subgenre, and these mentions were viewed nearly 1.2 billion times.

TABLE 2. Top 10 Keywords on Home Shows

| keyword | number of mentions |
|--------------|--------------------|
| insulation | 2,998 |
| reuse | 1,640 |
| solar | 1,517 |
| recycled | 399 |
| compost | 210 |
| recycle | 200 |
| upcycle | 129 |
| eco-friendly | 112 |
| vegan | 93 |
| geothermal | 76 |

This is nearly 12 times the median number of keyword mentions across subgenres and 6 times the median number of views.

Additionally, three out of the top five cable networks with the most unscripted sustainability mentions largely consist of home shows, including DIY, Magnolia, and HGTV.

Two home shows — *Maine Cabin Masters* (DIY & Magnolia) and *Building Off The Grid* (DIY, Magnolia, & Discovery) — had the most mentions of sustainability keywords across all subgenres, with 1,532 and 1,376 mentions, respectively. However, the sustainability mentions that received the most views overall came from the HGTV network, with *Home Town*, *Fixer to Fabulous*, and *Love It or List It* leading the way.

Most of the keyword mentions on home shows were associated with sustainable behaviors like insulation, reusing materials, and installing solar.

There were very few mentions of induction stoves and ovens, but the popular *Property Brothers* (HGTV) series did feature an induction stove and tied it back to sustainability:

“Well, this [stove] is induction too. Not only can you boil water twice as fast, it’s safe. So it’s not gonna get hot. It’s actually the pot itself that gets hot -and not the surface. Yeah and no fossil fuels in the house, so you don’t have those emissions inside the house.”

Building Off the Grid | Discovery



There were only 16 mentions of “climate change” on home shows, compared to a median of 28 across all subgenres.

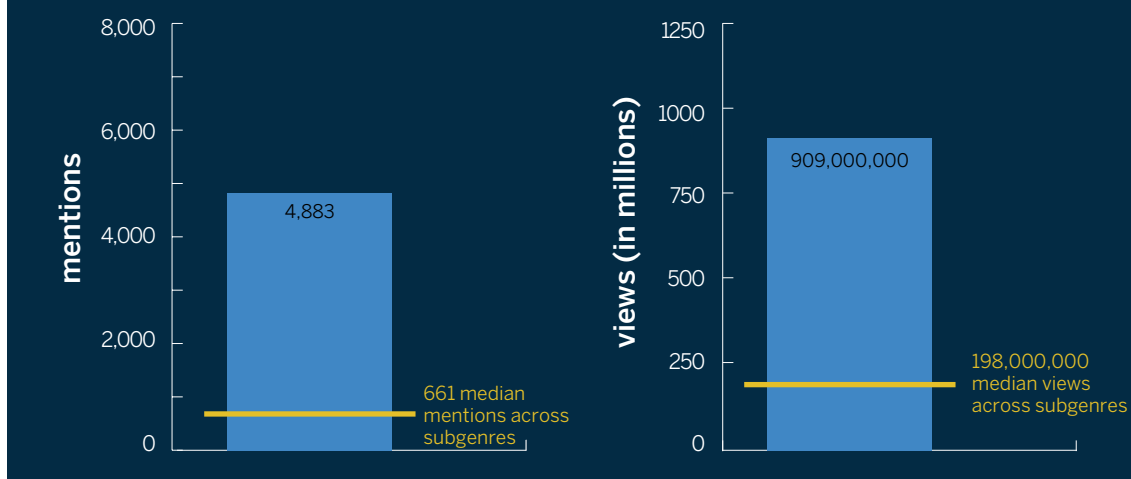
Notable mentions included:

- An episode of *House Hunters International* (HGTV) followed a woman’s move to Paris where she landed her dream job working on climate change and renewable energy.
- An episode of *Building Off The Grid* (DIY, Magnolia, & Discovery) focused on building a self-sustaining home for a Miami couple:

“Stephanie and Conor want something that doesn’t exist yet — a self-sustaining home that will allow them to live fully off the grid. ‘Being in the environmental world and seeing the effects of, you know, climate change and sea level rise, being able to be fully efficient is more desirable for us, considering we’re trying to do as much as we can to minimize our carbon footprint”

Docuseries

FIGURE 5. Keyword Mentions & Total Views for Docuseries Vs. Median Across Subgenres



We identified 4,883 sustainability keyword mentions in docuseries, which were viewed 909 million times.

This is more than seven times the median number of views and four and a half times the median number of views across all genres.

The docuseries subgenre featured 358 direct mentions of “climate change,” compared to a median of 28 across all subgenres. Docuseries also had more “global warming” mentions (107) than any other unscripted subgenre.

Two docuseries incorporated prominent mentions of “climate change” into their subject matter:

- *Wildlife Nation with Jeff Corwin* (ABC) regularly explained climate change impacts on many different types of animals:

TABLE 3. Top 10 Keywords on Docuseries

| keyword | number of mentions |
|----------------|--------------------|
| solar | 799 |
| insulation | 702 |
| recycle(d) | 617 |
| climate change | 358 |
| reuse | 278 |
| renewable | 167 |
| vegan | 166 |
| carbon dioxide | 156 |
| biodiversity | 136 |
| global warming | 107 |

“Pinnipeds are the group of fin-footed aquatic mammals that include seals, sea lions, fur seals, and walrus. Unfortunately, climate change, overfishing, and habitat loss have led to their decline, and other threats like fishing gear entanglements and ingesting plastic garbage are on the rise.”

“The ocean water off the coast of New England is some of the fastest, warming bodies of water in the world. And that is due to climate change. Instead of heading south for winter, the turtles remain in New England foraging for food. When winter comes, many turtles are trapped by the hook of Cape Cod and they become cold snapped. These animals are hypothermic, unable to swim.”

- *Life Below Zero* (NatGeo) detailed the difficulties of living in the Alaskan wilderness and the subjects of the series frequently talked about how climate change impacts their daily lives:

“This happens all the time in Alaska. The river hasn't quite solidified like it would this time of the year because of climate change. And so, you have a sled go down, it broke through the ice so fast, couldn't recover nothing.”

“It is important for Denise and I to have a very low-carbon footprint here and to do the best we can to slow down climate change with our lives.”

Dirty Jobs (Discovery) with Mike Rowe included the most sustainability keyword mentions across all docuseries. The show didn't mention “climate change,” but there were references to “global warming” and “eco-friendly.” *Real Green* (CBS), a docuseries on sustainable living, and *American Pickers* (History), a show with the mission to “recycle America,” had the second and third most mentions, respectively.

Food Shows

There were 3,565 mentions of sustainability keywords on food shows, which were viewed over 878 million times.

This is more than five times the median number of mentions and four times the number of views across all subgenres. The most commonly mentioned keywords in food shows were “vegan” and “vegetarian.” Guy Fieri's shows led the way with *Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives* and *Guy's Grocery Games* which rerun frequently on the Food Network. Fieri's shows regularly mentioned the words “vegan,” “vegetarian,” “meat substitute,” and “plant based.”

FIGURE 6. Keyword Mentions & Total Views for Food Shows Vs. Median Across Subgenres

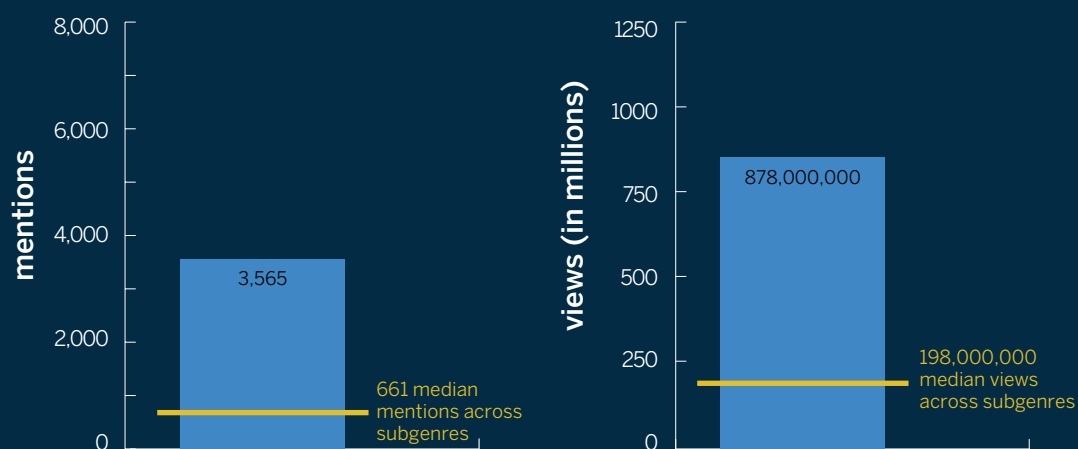


TABLE 4. Top 10 Keywords on Food Shows

| keyword | number of mentions |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| vegetarian | 1378 |
| vegan | 1373 |
| carbon dioxide | 105 |
| compost | 79 |
| insulation | 75 |
| plant based | 73 |
| reuse | 69 |
| meat substitute | 59 |
| meat-free | 43 |
| hydrogen | 41 |

Despite the high frequency of food-related sustainability keywords, there were no mentions of “climate change” on any food show.

There were six mentions of “global warming” — including on *Stanley Tucci’s: Searching for Italy* (CNN & Food Network). Tucci mentioned “global warming” while talking about sustainable fishing practices.

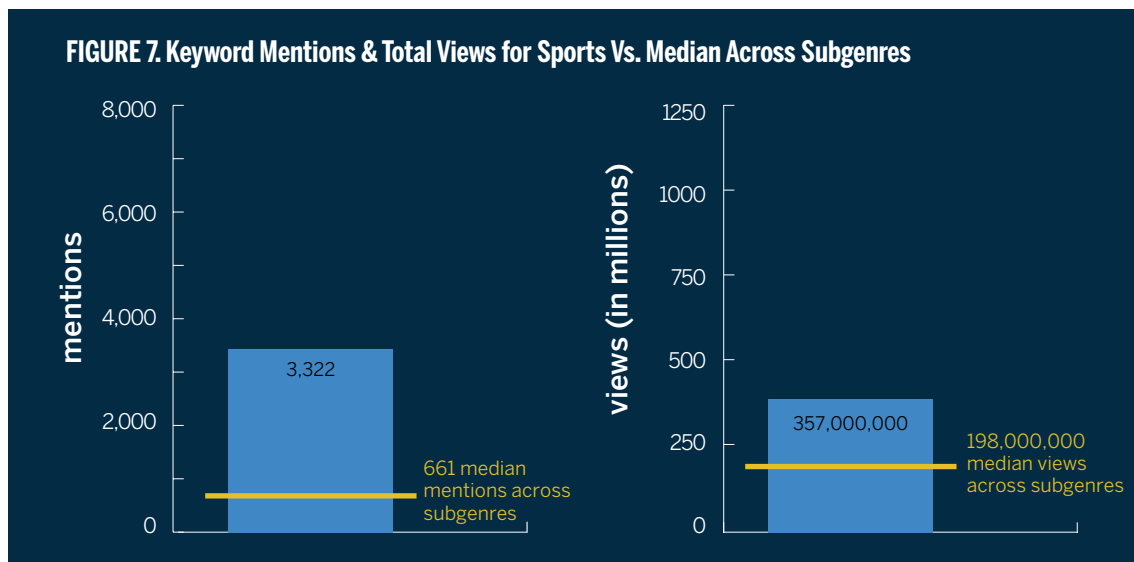
Food TV star Andrew Zimmern repeatedly mentioned sustainability keywords in his popular shows. On *Bizarre Foods* (Cooking Channel), Zimmern said, “*The eco-friendly coconut briquettes produce less smoke and ash than other coals*” and on *Bizarre Foods America* (Cooking Channel), he said:

“Culinary whiz-kids are figuring out how to use plants to take the place of eggs in cooking. Their goal is to make one of the most unhealthy, costly, and environmentally damaging industries in the food world obsolete. So, our approach here is ‘let’s take the animal, the greenhouse gas emissions, the cages out of the equation, and replace it with a plant.’”

Other notable mentions in food programming include:

- *The Kitchen* (Food Network) — “Believe it or not, this isn’t meat. It’s a meat-free plant-based burger. It is on the market, and they’re already getting more and more popular. This is something that really got me for it, is that plant burgers have a carbon footprint that is 89% smaller than that of a traditional beef burger. So, it’s because it takes less energy to produce vegetables than to raise beef cattle. So, this, environmentally, is a great choice.”
- *Table for All with Buki Elegbede* (PBS) — “Ironbound Farms adopted a centuries old farming practice, now called Regenerative Agriculture, which focuses on the soil’s ability to sequester carbon, making it more resilient to climate impact. Long before Europeans settled in New Jersey, indigenous people protected local ecosystems and conserved biodiversity through managing the lands, making them truly the first farmers and the first ever to practice.”
- *Iron Chef America* (Food Network & Cooking Channel) — “Today’s challenger is a talented chef who cooks with natural, organic ingredients and constantly endeavors to reduce the carbon footprint of her Seattle restaurant ‘Tilth,’ an eatery which is one of only two restaurants in America to be officially certified as organic.”

Sports



Sustainability keywords appeared in sports programming 3,322 times, which received nearly 357 million views.

This is five times the median number of keyword mentions and nearly double the median number of views across all subgenres.

There were 246 mentions of “climate change” in the sports subgenre, compared to a median of 28 across all subgenres. Over a million viewers saw Former President Barack Obama mention climate change in his interview with Peyton and Eli Manning on the *Monday Night Football ManningCast* (ESPN 2).

Other notable mentions of sustainability keywords included:

- A CBS Sports report on how Serie A futbol stadiums are turning their lights on closer to the start of the kickoff to save energy and reduce their carbon footprint.
- Details about how Formula 1 Racing endeavors to become carbon neutral on *Formula 1: Grand Prix Sunday* (ESPN).
- A discussion of the carbon footprint impact of additional cross-country flights due to college sports realignment on *Around The Horn* (ESPN).
- Sports talk personality Colin Cowherd (FOX Sports) talking about how climate change isn't a political issue: “*We have video of glaciers melting. We have a global warming issue and people are like, that's politics! No, it's environmental. I don't care about the politics of it. We have glaciers melting. Here is proof, here is data, nobody wants to listen to it.*”

Other mentions included athletes talking about their plant-based diets and commentators making clever sustainability-related wordplay:

“*He has got some green energy with the windmill [dunk]*” — *SportsCenter* (ESPN) description of an NBA basketball play.

“*I'll tell you what, call [the quarterback] climate change because after the initial series, he changed the temperature of this game in a big way.*” — *College Football* (ESPN)

TABLE 5. Top 10 Keywords on Sports Shows

| keyword | number of mentions |
|------------------|--------------------|
| solar | 545 |
| vegan | 488 |
| recycled | 276 |
| renewable | 260 |
| climate change | 246 |
| electric vehicle | 126 |
| plant based | 123 |
| recycle | 113 |
| carbon footprint | 110 |
| insulation | 101 |

One in six keyword mentions in sports programming came from Fox Sports broadcasts of *Extreme E Auto Racing* (Fox Sports).

An international off-road racing series founded by famed British car racer Lewis Hamilton, *Extreme E* features electric SUVs, and all racing locations are chosen to raise awareness around the impacts of climate change. The series intends to provide social and environmental support for the locations chosen.

Airings of *Extreme E* alone accounted for 512 mentions of sustainability keywords, which were viewed 3.5 million times. These mentions were not on the periphery of the racing broadcasts, but largely at the center of the races. Drivers, commentators, and packaged content all dove deep into climate and sustainability content. For example:

“The Extreme E race to fight climate change has arrived in Uruguay, a worldwide leader in extracting energy from the wind, from the sun, and from the sea. What better place to decide the 2022 Extreme E Championship?”

TABLE 6. Top 10 Keywords on Extreme E

| keyword | number of mentions |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| climate change | 139 |
| renewable | 90 |
| climate crisis | 37 |
| solar | 37 |
| recycle/recycled | 51 |
| hydrogen | 30 |
| deforestation | 22 |
| carbon footprint | 13 |
| plastic pollution | 13 |
| reforestation | 11 |

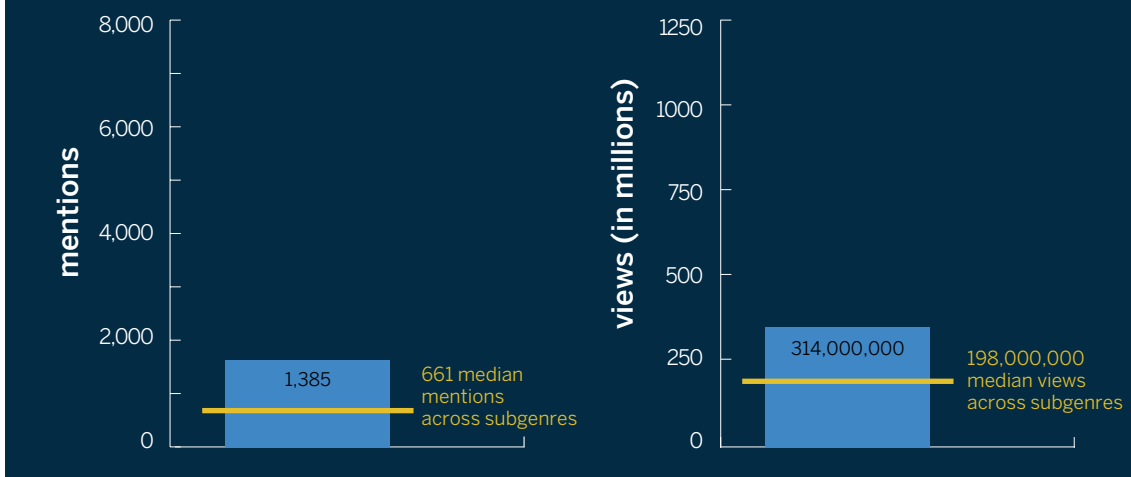
Unscripted Comedy/Sketch

Unscripted comedy shows included 1,385 sustainability keyword mentions, which were viewed 314 million times.

This is two times the median number of keyword mentions and 1.5 times the median number of views.

Unscripted comedy had 65 mentions of “climate change,” compared to a median of 28 across all subgenres. Eighty-five of the sustainability keyword mentions were on *Impractical Jokers* (TruTV & TBS), the hidden camera comedy series where four friends challenge each other to outrageous dares. While keywords were casually mentioned throughout many episodes, one segment was particularly notable. One of the Jokers gave a climate change lecture while progressively making

FIGURE 8. Keyword Mentions & Total Views for Unscripted Comedy Vs. Median Across Subgenres



funny changes to his appearance. The lecture included facts about sea level rise and climate change and shared recommendations for daily activities, like shopping for local produce, to help fight climate change.

Ridiculousness (MTV), the long-tenured series on MTV where comics react to viral videos, still averages over 150,000 viewers, and the show included 33 sustainability keyword mentions.²⁸ These mentions were largely casual one-liners in response to weather-related videos, but one video featured a climate activist dressed as planet Earth while saying:

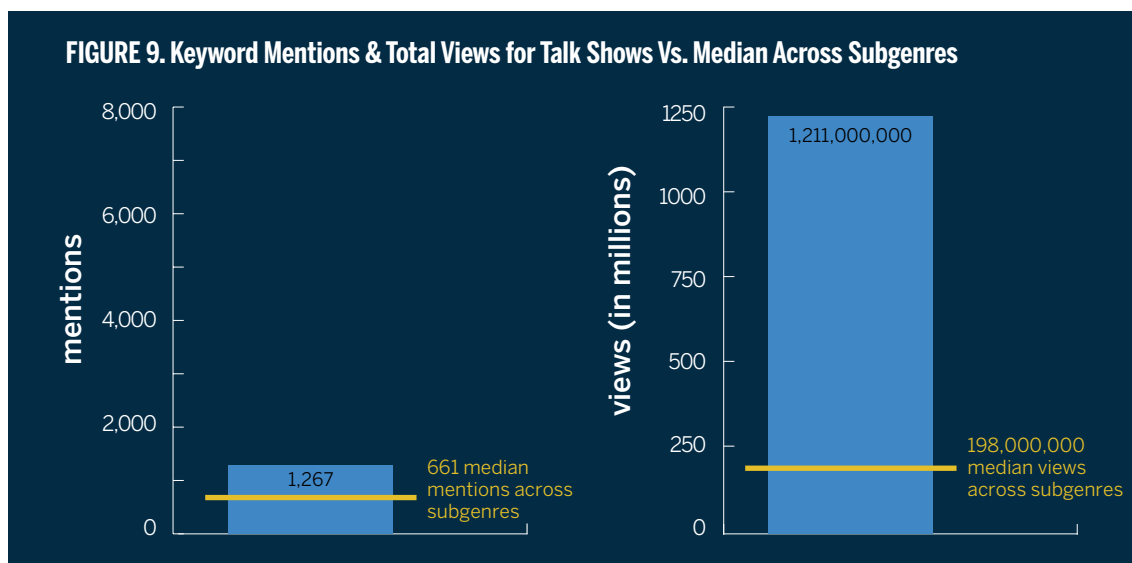
“You gotta protect your Mother Earth. This is it, baby. This is it, baby. Listen to the earth. You’re destroying the forest. Listen to Father Earth.”

TABLE 7. Top 10 Keywords on Unscripted Comedy Shows

| keyword | number of mentions |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| vegan | 281 |
| recycle | 184 |
| public transportation | 119 |
| carpool | 118 |
| vegetarian | 117 |
| recycled | 90 |
| green energy | 83 |
| global warming | 70 |
| solar | 69 |
| climate change | 65 |

28 USTVDB. (n.d.). *Ridiculousness*. <https://ustvdb.com/networks/mtv/shows/ridiculousness/>

Talk Shows



Late night and daytime talk shows mentioned sustainability keywords 1,267 times, accumulating over 1.2 billion views.

While only about double the median number of mentions, these mentions garnered six times the median number of views, and the most views of all subgenres we analyzed. This is in large part due to high viewership of talk shows like *Live With Kelly and Ryan* (ABC), *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* (NBC), and *Jimmy Kimmel Live* (ABC).

The most frequently mentioned sustainability keywords on talk shows included “vegan” and “vegetarian,” with a combined 394 mentions. “Climate change” followed with 166 mentions — almost six times the median of 28 across all subgenres.

Academy award winning actress and climate activist Jane Fonda was responsible for many of the most in-depth sustainability mentions. While promoting her film *80 for Brady*, Fonda made explicit climate-related pleas on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* (NBC), *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert* (CBS), and *The Kelly Clarkson Show* (NBC). The latter featured an exchange where Clarkson and Fonda explained the importance of intersectionality and climate justice:

“Everything is connected. There would be no climate crisis if it wasn't for racism. Where would they put the [bleep], the poison and the pollution. They are not going to put it in Bel Air. They have to find someplace where poor people or indigenous people or people of color [are] living. Put it there. They can't fight back. That's why a big part of the climate movement now has to do with climate justice.” — Jane Fonda

In its 21st season, *Dr. Phil* (OWN) had the most sustainability keyword mentions of all talk shows, primarily because of an in-depth interview with Dr. Britt Wray, the author of *Generation Dread, Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Crisis*. *The Rachael Ray Show* (ABC) had 99 sustainability keyword mentions, many of which were food based keywords (e.g. “plant based,” “meat substitute,” “vegan,” and “vegetarian”) from her cooking segments.

In late night talk shows, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* had the most sustainability keyword mentions, followed by *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (Comedy Central) and *Late Night with Seth Meyers* (NBC). Most late night mentions appeared in guest interviews, such as Noah’s interview with philosopher and author William MacAskill:

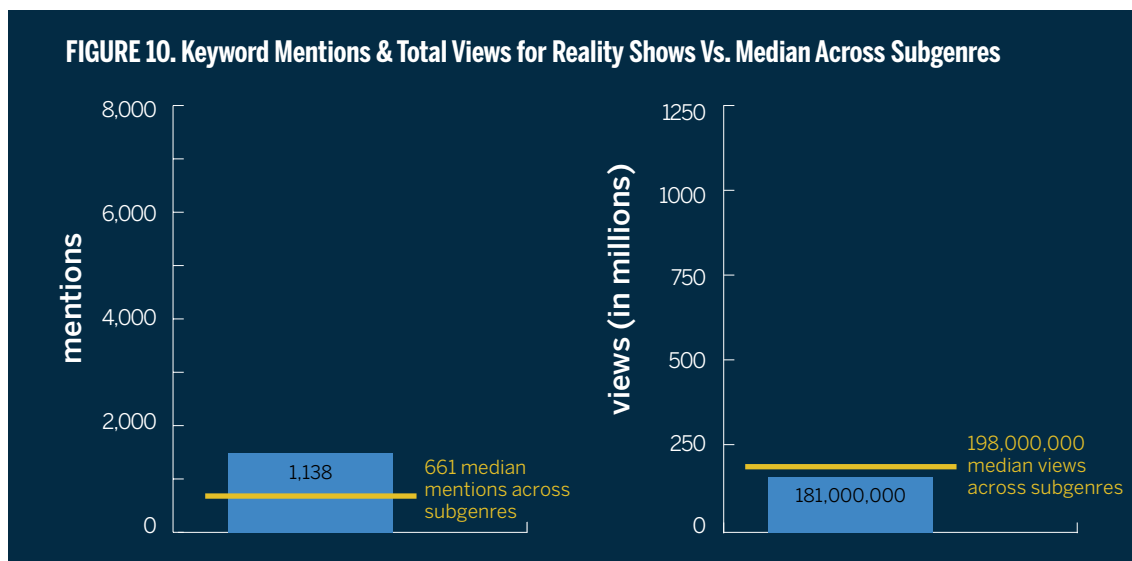
TABLE 8. Top 10 Keywords on Talk Shows

| keyword | number of mentions |
|----------------|--------------------|
| vegan | 288 |
| climate change | 166 |
| vegetarian | 106 |
| carpool | 61 |
| solar | 59 |
| recycled | 52 |
| reuse | 44 |
| recycle | 38 |
| plant based | 36 |
| clean energy | 28 |

“If you want to make an impact on climate change there are things you can do. For instance you can become a vegetarian, you can say okay I will try and limit my carbon output. If you care, will you say I will travel less, fly less or ride a bicycle more or whatever it may be.”

Reality

There were 1,138 mentions of sustainability keyword mentions on reality TV shows,²⁹ which received 181 million views.



This is nearly double the median number of mentions, and below the median number of views. When sustainability keywords appeared on reality TV, they were largely in reference to dietary choices. Over half (57%) of all sustainability mentions in this subgenre were “vegan” or “vegetarian.” For example, *Below Deck* on Bravo and its many spinoffs (*Below Deck Mediterranean*, *Below Deck Sailing Yacht*, and *Below Deck Down Under*) featured the most keyword mentions of any reality program, including numerous references to plant-based diets. Another popular series, *90 Day Fiance* on TLC, which averages 3 million viewers,³⁰ included a number of “vegan” mentions.

Some of the most noteworthy examples of sustainability mentions came from shows on the E! Entertainment Television network. For example, *Total Bellas* mentioned “carbon footprint” and “eco-friendly” in reference to lifestyle changes associated with becoming more environmentally conscious:

29 Note that “reality TV” is often used as an umbrella term and conflated with unscripted television. However, for this report, we defined reality TV as a *subgenre* of unscripted content, which is separate from docuseries. We follow VanArendonk’s (2020) suggestion for distinguishing between the two subgenres: “Reality shows are cast, tested, poked, prodded, often prewritten, and edited to shape stories that would not otherwise have existed. Docuseries, for the most part, film their subjects as they are.” VanArendonk, K. (2020, October 30). *Reality TV glows up*. Vulture. <https://www.vulture.com/2020/10/docuseries-reality-tv-the-vow.html#:~:text=There's%20an%20important%20distinction%20between,their%20subjects%20as%20they%20are.>

30 Walsh, J. (2021, August 5). ‘90 Day Fiancé’ keeps scoring higher ratings than almost any other cable TV program. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joewalsh/2021/08/05/90-day-fianc-keeps-scoring-higher-ratings-than-almost-any-other-cable-tv-program/?sh=6144d4761dae>

“So we’re in Australia. The travel increases your carbon footprint. It makes the environmentalist in me feel very guilty, and I’m at that point where there should be no more excuses.”

“So I want my husband to feel that even though maybe right now our house isn’t as eco-friendly as we would like it, there’s so many things we can do to help save the planet. Look at all this stuff that we can just do in our community, down the street.”

Very Cavallari (E!) and Chrisley Knows Best (USA Network & E!) also made reference to composting and global warming:

“Here, do you want to help me put this stuff in the compost — Like, lift the lid for you? — Sure.” —Very Cavallari

“This weather. — It’s global warming — No, it ain’t global warming. It’s God.” —Chrisley Knows Best

TABLE 9. Top 10 Keywords on Reality Shows

| keyword | number of mentions |
|--------------|--------------------|
| vegan | 395 |
| vegetarian | 256 |
| recycled | 95 |
| carpool | 71 |
| insulation | 55 |
| recycle | 53 |
| solar | 46 |
| compost | 31 |
| plant based | 30 |
| electric car | 15 |

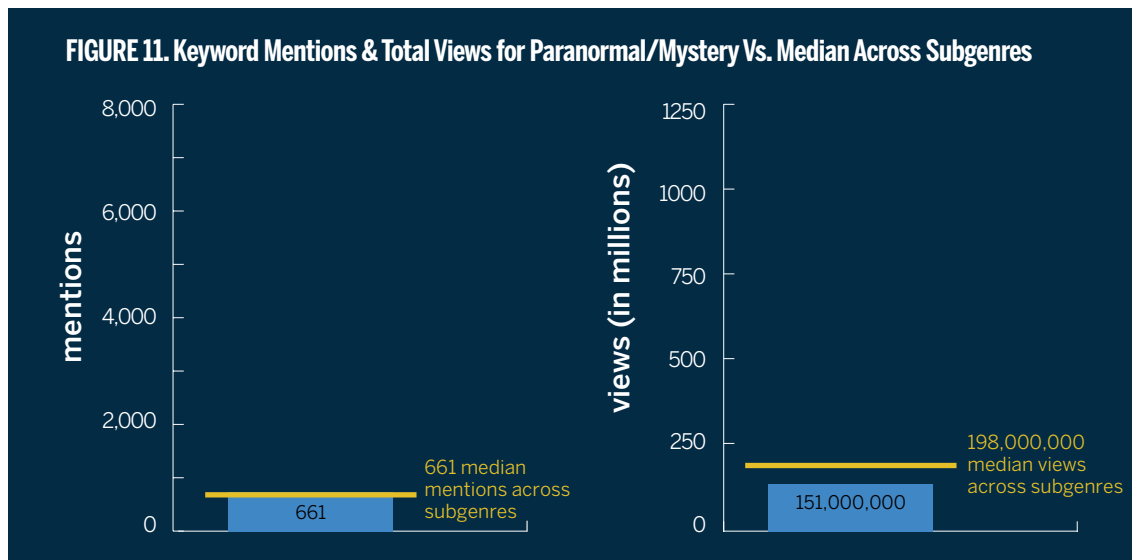
Notably, *Keeping Up with The Kardashians* (E!) — one of the most popular and iconic reality TV series over the last two decades³¹ — rarely mentioned sustainability keywords, other than a handful of mentions of “carpool” and “vegan” and one mention of “electric bike” in syndicated airings of the show.³² In one clip, reality star Kendall Jenner fell off an electric bike, to which her sister, Khloe Kardashian, responded: “I don’t know if, like, electric bike riding and alcohol is smart.”

31 TIME. (2022, August 4). *The 50 most influential reality TV seasons of all time*. <https://time.com/collection/reality-tv-most-influential-seasons/6198513/keeping-up-with-the-kardashians/>; YouGov. (n.d.). *Keeping Up With The Kardashians: Explore the latest public opinion about Keeping Up With The Kardashians*. https://today.yougov.com/topics/entertainment/explore/tv_show/Keeping_Up_With_The_Kardashians?content=articles; Faughnder, R., & Lee, W. (2020, September 8). What the end of E!’s ‘Keeping Up With the Kardashians’ says about the changing TV industry. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2020-09-08/what-the-end-of-e-s-keeping-up-with-the-kardashians-says-about-the-changing-tv-industry>

32 There were no new episodes of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* airing during our sample period, so our findings include sustainability mentions from syndicated re-airings of the show on E! network. In 2022, the Kardashians released episodes of their new show, *The Kardashians*, on the streaming platform, Hulu. Streaming was not included in our sample, however.

Paranormal/Mystery

Paranormal series featured 661 mentions of sustainability keywords, which registered nearly 151 million views.



This subgenre had the median number of mentions and just under the median number of views.

Paranormal series had 58 mentions of “climate change” (compared to a median of 28) and 25 mentions of “global warming.”

Many keyword mentions focused on how changes in climate and sea levels have allegedly led to more evidence of paranormal phenomena. *Paranormal: Caught on Camera* is the most watched show on the Travel Channel with an average of 268,000 viewers per airing.³³ This show repeatedly referenced climate change and sea level rise as reasons for an uptick in sightings of cryptids like the Loch Ness Monster.

“There is a large speculation that if there are cryptids, it’s possible they reside in the ocean, and we’re going to start seeing more and more of these creatures coming up as pollution and climate change occurs.”

The series also mentioned “wind power” to explain that there are UFO sightings around wind power stations and nuclear power plants since “UFOs seem to be attracted or need these energy places to recharge.”

33 USTVDB. (n.d.). *Paranormal Caught on Camera*. <https://ustvdb.com/networks/travel/shows/paranormal-caught-camera/>

Mysteries of the Abandoned (Discovery) also repeatedly exposed its 305,000 viewers (on average) to sustainability mentions.³⁴ One episode explained how cities like Miami can disappear from rising sea levels and another featured an abandoned ski resort in La Paz, Bolivia, that was deserted because there is no more snow:

“By 2009, this 18,000-year-old glacier had completely disappeared. With it came the closure of the resort. Now, because of climate change we don’t have any snow. It’s all like this. It’s just rock. For me, it’s sad to see it without snow. Without skiing, no glacier. It’s such a shame.”

Many mystery shows focused on historical events and mentioned prehistoric or otherwise non-contemporary changes in the climate, such as the ice age or how climate stress changed Ancient Egypt.³⁵ While these mentions are not directly referencing human-caused climate change, some of them related these changes to our current trajectory. In Egypt’s *Unexplained Files* (History), an expert made this claim: “Ancient Egyptians battled climate change — something we can’t even do today.”

Competition & Game Shows

There were 596 sustainability keyword mentions in competition and game shows, which racked up 864 million views.

TABLE 10. Top 10 Keywords on Paranormal Shows

| keyword | number of mentions |
|----------------|--------------------|
| solar | 229 |
| hydrogen | 77 |
| climate change | 58 |
| insulation | 53 |
| carbon dioxide | 36 |
| global warming | 25 |
| renewable | 25 |
| coal mine | 23 |
| geothermal | 22 |
| vegetarian | 17 |

³⁴ USTVDB. (n.d.). *Mysteries of the Abandoned*. <https://ustvdb.com/networks/discovery/shows/mysteries-abandoned/>

³⁵ Birnbaum, M. (2022, November 17). How climate stress contributed to the collapse of ancient Egypt. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/11/17/ancient-egypt-climate-stress/>

FIGURE 11. Keyword Mentions & Total Views for Competition & Game Shows Vs. Median Across Subgenres

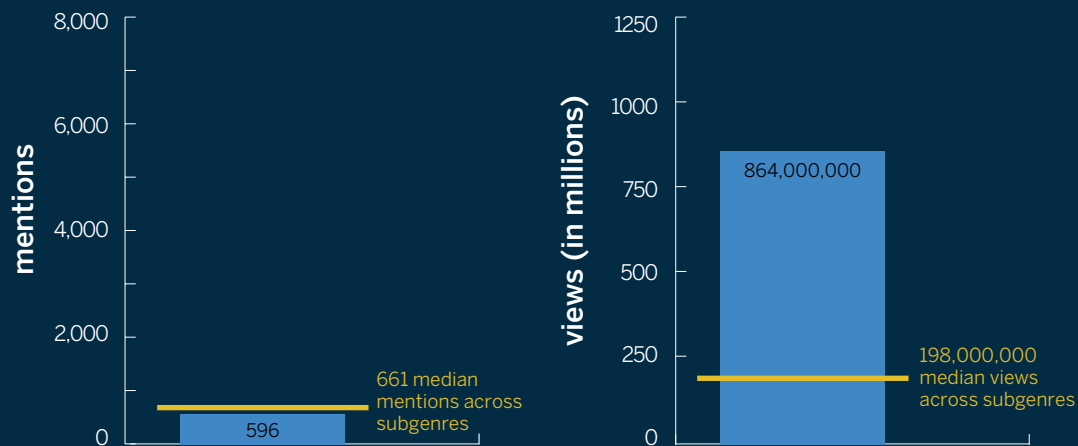


TABLE 11. Top 10 Keywords on Competition & Game Shows

| keyword | number of mentions |
|----------------|--------------------|
| vegan | 108 |
| solar | 65 |
| vegetarian | 45 |
| eco-friendly | 42 |
| climate change | 31 |
| recycled | 29 |
| carpool | 26 |
| food waste | 19 |
| electric car | 14 |
| electric bike | 13 |

This is just below the median number of mentions, but because competition shows and game shows are among the most popular unscripted shows on television,³⁶ these mentions received more than four times the median number of views.

This subgenre had 31 direct mentions of “climate change,” which is close to the median of 28 across all subgenres. Notably, over 4.5 million viewers watched seven-year-old wildlife conservationist Aneeshwar Kunchala deliver a passionate speech on climate and conservation in a four minute segment on *America’s Got Talent: All Stars* (FOX).

Shark Tank (ABC) averages 4.2 million viewers per episode and regularly features opportunities for inventors to showcase sustainable products. In one episode, Sharks Mark Cuban and Gwyneth Paltrow teamed up to invest in an eco-friendly diaper company and in another, Tony Xu and Kevin O’Leary invested in a sustainable medicine packaging company.

36 Schneider, M. (2023, May 23). The most watched of 2022-2023: This season’s winners and losers. *Variety*. <https://variety.com/2023/tv/news/most-popular-tv-shows-highest-rated-2022-2023-season-yellowstone-football-1235623612/>

Game shows also attract high viewership. Based on viewership data from TVEyes, new episodes of *Jeopardy* (ABC) can hit over 9 million viewers and in syndication, the show typically has over 300,000 viewers each day. *Jeopardy* frequently featured sustainability content in its trivia questions and answers, and it occasionally appeared in host-contestant banter as well.

Other game shows like *The Price Is Right* (CBS), *Let's Make A Deal* (CBS), and *25 Words or Less* (FOX) also regularly mentioned sustainability keywords.

Even competition shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race* (VH1) and *Wipeout* (TBS) include sustainability keyword mentions (usually as part of a punchline).

Other Subgenres

Sustainability keywords appeared in all unscripted subgenres. The table below shows the frequency of sustainability keyword mentions and total views from the remaining eight subgenres.

TABLE 12. Keyword Mentions in Other Subgenres

| subgenre | number of mentions | total views |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| lifestyle | 2,021 | 702,000,000 |
| children's unscripted | 205 | 198,000,000 |
| court/legal shows | 200 | 122,000,000 |
| informational content | 634 | 56,000,000 |
| special events | 58 | 51,000,000 |
| music programming | 426 | 31,000,000 |
| true crime | 104 | 18,000,000 |
| religious programming | 73 | 16,000,000 |

Conclusion

This study established a baseline documenting where and how climate and sustainability themes are mentioned in unscripted television.

In terms of sustainability content broadly, certain unscripted subgenres stood out. For example, home shows had more keyword mentions than any other subgenre, with prominent mentions of sustainable behaviors (notably, every unscripted subgenre we analyzed mentioned sustainable actions). Docuseries also had a substantial amount of sustainability-related content. This is unsurprising given that many shows in this category focused on rural living, wildlife, and dangerous occupations. Yet despite the high frequency of sustainability mentions in docuseries, many popular docuseries did not mention any keywords at all.

In fact, while conducting formative research to design this study, we found only a single mention of “climate change” across *all* seasons of two of the most popular docuseries in recent memory: *Ice Road Truckers* (History) and *Deadliest Catch* (Discovery).³⁷

- *Ice Road Truckers* aired for 11 seasons from 2007-2017. There were no mentions of “climate change” or “global warming” in the entire series, despite the fact that the impacts of climate change are most obvious in icy regions, even affecting the viability of producing the show.³⁸
- *Deadliest Catch* is currently airing season 19. In the first 18 years of the series, there was only one episode that mentioned “climate change.” One fisherman said, “*They talk about climate change and about warmer waters, so the crab maybe will go towards colder water.*” Another fisherman loudly retorted “*F*** climate change!*” That said, in a 2014 interview, one of the show’s stars talked about how climate change has changed fishing patterns and made the job much more difficult.³⁹

In addition to the absence of explicit climate discussions in these popular shows, messages opposed to climate action are present in unscripted TV. Most notably, the fossil fuel industry has invested millions of dollars in “provocative anti-electrification messaging,” including advocating for propane usage in unscripted home TV shows.⁴⁰

37 Both *Ice Road Truckers* and *Deadliest Catch* were consistently viewed by over 3 million viewers.

38 Beech, S. (2022, October 4). ‘*Ice Road Truckers*’ will soon be impossible due to climate change. Talker. <https://talker.news/2022/10/04/ice-road-truckers-will-soon-be-impossible-due-to-climate-change/>

39 Bloomberg Originals. (2014, April 22). ‘*Deadliest Catch*’ star: Climate change is very real [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFbACPh2xPA>

40 Tabuchi, H. (2023, January 11). The new soldiers in propane’s fight against climate action: Television stars. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/climate/climate-propane-influence-campaign.html>

There is still much to be learned about this powerful and underexplored TV genre.

Some research suggests unscripted TV reaches diverse audiences with content that appeals across ideological divides.⁴¹ Unscripted executive and founder of Reality of Change, Cyle Zezo, has advocated for the inclusion of sustainability and explicit climate content in many of the series he has worked on, noting:

“You can locate the ways that climate and sustainability intersect with any good stories, without explicitly telling a climate change story. Because it frankly intersects with nearly every story.”⁴²



Next Steps

In the coming year, MIP will be conducting additional research on climate and sustainability depictions in unscripted TV. This includes analyzing keyword mentions in unscripted TV for the entirety of 2024, with streaming platforms, which were not part of the present study. The 2024 research will establish a denominator of all unscripted episodes, in order to calculate percentages and thereby draw comparisons to scripted content. We will also be conducting in-depth content analysis of unscripted depictions to identify the tone, framing, and demographics of climate and sustainability mentions, and to identify visual depictions of sustainable behaviors.

Additionally, as stories addressing sustainability or climate change directly gain traction in both scripted and unscripted genres, we hope to measure the impact of such stories on audiences' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. Such research would begin to establish an evidence base for what makes these stories particularly powerful, and for what audiences.

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Appendix A: Keyword List

The following 75 keywords were used to identify climate-adjacent mentions in U.S. broadcast and cable television programming.

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. air pollution | 26. energy efficiency | 51. ocean pollution |
| 2. biodiversity | 27. environmental impact | 52. oil drilling |
| 3. carbon capture | 28. food waste | 53. oil industry |
| 4. carbon dioxide | 29. fossil fuel | 54. oil pipeline |
| 5. carbon emissions | 30. fracking | 55. plant based |
| 6. carbon footprint | 31. geothermal | 56. plastic pollution |
| 7. carpool | 32. global warming | 57. public transit |
| 8. circular economy | 33. green energy | 58. public transport |
| 9. clean energy | 34. greenhouse effect | 59. public transportation |
| 10. climate action | 35. greenhouse gas | 60. recycle |
| 11. climate catastrophe | 36. Greta Thunberg | 61. recycled |
| 12. climate change | 37. heat pumps | 62. recycling |
| 13. climate crisis | 38. human extinction | 63. reforestation |
| 14. climate impact | 39. hybrid car | 64. renewable |
| 15. climate justice | 40. hybrid vehicle | 65. reuse |
| 16. climate migration | 41. hydrogen | 66. save the planet |
| 17. coal industry | 42. icecaps | 67. sea level |
| 18. coal mine | 43. induction stove/oven | 68. single use |
| 19. compost | 44. industrial farming | 69. smart thermostat |
| 20. deforestation | 45. insulation | 70. solar |
| 21. eco-friendly | 46. LED light | 71. upcycle |
| 22. electric bicycle | 47. meat free | 72. vegan |
| 23. electric bike | 48. meat substitute | 73. vegetarian |
| 24. electric car | 49. melting glaciers | 74. wind energy |
| 25. electric vehicle | 50. net zero | 75. wind power |

Appendix B: TV Networks

The TVEye search corpus consisted of six broadcast networks and 42 cable networks.

Broadcast Networks (National)

- | | |
|--------|-----------|
| 1. ABC | 4. NBC |
| 2. CBS | 5. PBS |
| 3. FOX | 6. The CW |

U.S. Cable Networks

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. A&E | 22. History Channel |
| 2. ACC Network | 23. Lifetime Television |
| 3. AMC | 24. Magnolia Network |
| 4. BET | 25. MLB Network |
| 5. Bravo | 26. MSG |
| 6. CBS Sports Network | 27. MTV |
| 7. Comedy Central | 28. National Geographic Channel |
| 8. Cooking Channel | 29. NBA TV |
| 9. Discovery Channel | 30. NFL Network |
| 10. E! Entertainment | 31. Oprah Winfrey Network |
| 11. ESPN | 32. Paramount Network |
| 12. ESPN 2 | 33. RFD-TV |
| 13. ESPN Deportes | 34. SEC Network |
| 14. ESPN News | 35. TBS |
| 15. ESPNU | 36. The Golf Channel |
| 16. Food Network | 37. The Learning Channel |
| 17. Fox Sports 1 | 38. TNT |
| 18. Fox Sports 2 | 39. Travel Channel |
| 19. FX | 40. TruTV |
| 20. Hallmark Channel | 41. USA Network |
| 21. HGTV | 42. VH1 |

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