

# Subtitles to Save the World - 2

We revisit how the  
broadcasting community is  
covering the climate on screen

A report by albert, BAFTA's  
TV industry-backed project on  
environmental sustainability

November 2020

**#CatsVsClimate**

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# Foreword

*'Unite behind the science...'* or so they say. This report shows that our television content has indeed found space for climate science to shine in the schedule and for the debate to be more scientifically represented in discussions too. *'This changes everything...'*, or so they say. This report also shows that while the climate issue creeps up the editorial agenda, content to support the 'everything transition', i.e. what is necessary to avert climate catastrophe is largely, missing in action.

Are Phil and Kirstie's chosen homes fit for hotter summers? Is John and Lisa's Weekend Kitchen cooking menu planned with consideration for the climate? Is Rylan celebrating styles that the planet can sustain? These examples chosen not for their exception, but indeed the opposite, to highlight the reality that few programme makers have reconciled the reality of the 'change everything' mantra. A problem of huge consequence, for as Lord Puttnam - BAFTA Fellow and climate legislator cited in his TEDx Dublin climate talk, 'you're either part of the solution, or you're going to be part of the problem'.

The key findings of this report show that the climate was mentioned on-screen four times more frequently in 2019 than the previous year. In 2018, 'climate change' was covered with a frequency comparable to 'urine' and 'zombies', a fourfold increase in 2019 has elevated the issue to join 'poo' and 'nonsense'. 'Climate change' is still dwarfed by the industry's presentations of eating 'beef' and 'flying'.

albert is a science-led project, acknowledging the committee on climate change's recommendation that UK citizens must reduce their meat and dairy intake by 20%. Given these findings, perhaps the TV Industry hasn't 'united behind the science' as it thought. Could the TV industry inadvertently find

itself on the wrong side of history? Casual about fast-fashion segments, meaty menus, flight freebies and by association, their consequences and how they are disproportionately felt by those who are already vulnerable.

albert's remit is to empower and support the TV industry to create narratives in every genre that are compatible with a sustainable climate. This broadly dials down to ensuring that whenever food, homes, travel and consumer products are shown on screen - consideration must be given for their connection to climate and the imitability of their presentation.

This report offers a new metric by which to measure ongoing progress: the frequency that the planet is brought into the conversation about a topic that is critical to the transformation to a sustainable society. In 2019, that figure on average was 11.5%. We've far to go. But unlike other industries with heavy machinery and industrialised processes, ideas can change in an instant. The beautiful, complex UK screen content community has a unique and essential opportunity for creative climate leadership. It can, if it chooses to, unite behind the science and help to change everything that the science outlines must change.

Covid has moved UK audiences hugely in the last few months, both in terms of their appetite for science, their interest in the local community and the affordability of high cost, high carbon activity. We have a rare opportunity to fuse these contemporary challenges together for the good of society and to the benefit of the UK producing community.



**Aaron Matthews,**  
Head of Industry Sustainability  
BAFTA albert

# Data sources, assumptions and acknowledgements

- In order to compile this report, subtitling data from BBC, ITV, Channel 4, SKY and Channel 5 was analysed. Many thanks to the broadcasting community for making this report possible.
- The report assumes that a complete data set from each broadcaster was received. Each channel was asked to provide a year's worth of programming subtitling data – excluding news programming. Given the huge quantity of data received, the assumption had to be made that no programme data was missing.
- Different channels have different editorial strategies and therefore, varying opportunities to authentically bring the planet into the conversation. This year's analysis includes data from Channel 5 for the first time which will make comparison between years more challenging. It is for this reason, among others, that a new 'planet placement score' measurement was developed, to make comparisons between channels with different content strategies possible.
- The themes chosen for analysis were informed by the recommendations on the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2018 report. Key terms were used (food, travel, energy, etc) then expanded upon, to help build up a broader picture of how the climate is being discussed on our screen. A full list of these terms can be seen in the methodology section table.
- A significantly greater number of files were received for this year's study compared to last so the wordcount was normalised to make comparison possible by analysing wordcount per 1,000 files. Scrutinising normalised figures offered confidence that the datasets were comparable, for example, words like 'rhubarb' changed 0% when normalised. However, for ease of understanding, actual wordcount figures from both years have been listed in the report.
- The date range for our reports is as follows:  
Published in May 2019: Subtitles to Save the World 1: September '17 – August '18. (Referred to as 2018 data from this point onwards)  
Published in Oct 2020: Subtitles to Save the World 2: September '18 – August '19 (Referred to as 2019 data from this point onwards).

# Methodology

The research, conducted by Deloitte, analysed a year's worth of subtitling data from BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky, between September 2018 and August 2019. The research uncovers how often words associated with five key sustainability topics were mentioned: food, travel, resources, energy and environment.

## Food:

food waste, vegan, meat free, vegetarian, meat substitute, food miles

## Resources:

upcycle, single use, reuse, recycle, environmental impact

## Travel:

electric vehicles, hybrid car, clean air, carbon offsetting, electric car, clean fuel, public transport

## Energy:

green energy, solar power, wind power, renewables, clean energy

## Environment:

carbon emissions, climate change, carbon footprint, global warming, eco-friendly

## The number of files we received from each broadcaster is as follows:

ITV:	17,500
Channel 4:	46,443
Channel 5:	10,493
Sky:	24,836
BBC:	162,304

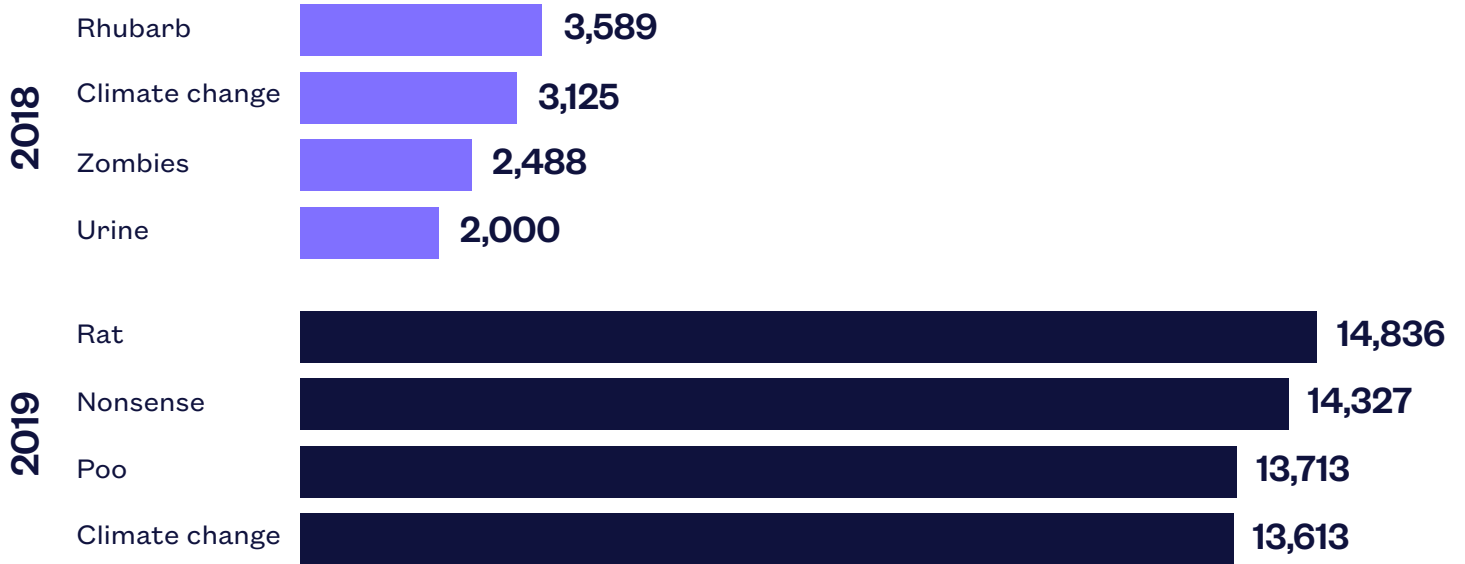
## Count of chosen environment terms found in subtitles

Theme	Search term	Mentions
Food	vegan	9032
	vegetarian	6007
	food waste	1200
	meat free	446
	food miles	163
	meat substitute	59
Environment	climate change	13613
	global warming	1886
	carbon emissions	1059
	eco-friendly	724
	carbon footprint	635
Resources	recycle	4432
	single use	1078
	upcycle	981
	reuse	667
	environmental impact	440
Travel	public transport	2320
	clean air	1158
	electric vehicles	901
	electric car	728
	carbon offsetting	48
	hybrid car	40
	clean fuel	13
Energy	renewables	705
	solar power	363
	wind power	360
	green energy	343
	clean energy	196

# Results

## Which words are mentioned a similar number of times to our climate change terms?

Climate change is represented four times more frequently in 2019 compared to the previous year. Here's how our climate change terms stack up alongside words of a similar frequency.



## Are we putting the right footprint forward?

Showing how frequently the term 'carbon footprint' is mentioned in our TV programmes when compared to other feet related terms.





# How does the 'climate change' count stack up against other words?

Comparing phrases mentioned on television to see just how often climate change is discussed in relation to other subjects on TV.



## How do climate change terms fare against high carbon activities?

The United Nations 2018 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change makes clear the need to reduce meat and dairy intake as well as move to lower carbon modes of travel.

While it is easy to understand why there might be more programmes profiling these high carbon activities (travel and food programmes are prevalent) than the climate crisis itself, it is sobering to consider their presence compared to the coverage that climate change receives.

Theme	Mentions
Plane	43,945
Beef	21,307
Climate Change	13,613

### Points of note:

In this study, 100 random 'beef' and 'flight' references were analysed, 0% of these mentions included any reference to the high carbon tag attached to these activities. In a bid to remain neutral, content producers may feel that they retain a neutral/unbiased position by not mentioning climate change but this omission has an effect too.

Arguably every time flights and beef are mentioned without mentioning their climate impact it reinforces the perception that these activities are not connected to the climate crisis, and will not have consequences in the future we are creating.

Points of note:

- While aviation contributes 3% of global emissions, flights are taken by a disproportionately low number of global citizens. One flight to Europe is likely to constitute around 10% of a UK citizens annual carbon footprint.<sup>1</sup>
- Beef is recognised as the highest carbon footprint meat widely available.<sup>2</sup> The committee on climate change recommends UK citizens adopt a 20% reduction of meat and dairy in order to keep with the 1.5 degree safe limit.<sup>3</sup>

1. Stat based on the average UK citizens footprint being 12.7 tCO<sub>2</sub>e (According to "How Bad Are Bananas - The Carbon Footprint of Everything" - Mike Berners-Lee) and associated DEFRA emissions for an example flight from Oslo to Gran Canaria at 4885km being 1.7 tCO<sub>2</sub>e for a return. (based on DEFRA Emission Factors)

2. Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers - <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/360/6392/987>

3. Committee on Climate Change - Land Use Policies <https://d423d1558e1d71897434.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Land-use-Policies-for-a-Net-Zero-UK.pdf>



# Who has been bringing the planet into their programmes ?

## A snapshot of some programmes from last year that have brought the planet into the narrative.

**Drama:** His name is Rufus. Hey, Rufus. So, what are you listening to? The Best Of Bread. The Best Of Bread? Interesting. What's your name? Ty. Nice to meet you, Ty. I'm Chris. I'm bald and no-one in particular. I know who you are. Yeah? What do you know? I know that you're the state assemblyman and I know that you're thinking of running for senator. I know your voting record and your consistent stand on environmental causes. Er, look, I hate to interrupt, but - Are you Republican? Yes. Why?

**Fact Ent/Reality Show:** Mame and I wanted to be efficient. We're looking out for the environment. Y'all look sexy as hell. We're very ecofriendly, very ecoconscious. I'm gon' be real with you. I know for a fact Mame likes you a lot. I mean, I'm not saying we aren't. No comment.

**Weather Show:** But is our weather getting more unpredictable? And what does the future hold for Britain? One of the consequences of climate change that we do know about is the weather is becoming more extreme. There is more energy, more moisture, more heat in the system. So that means that we're more likely to get record-breaking temperatures or record-breaking rainfall events, than we ever were. And these are happening more frequently.

**Daytime Magazine Show:** You know, us sitting here talking about things triggers things for other people's minds, whether it is from the governmental side of things all the way up there legalistically, being able to pass laws that improve our agriculture, and so on, but on the ground as well, we've seen the impact that has had on plastic and our environment, and the same is true across the board in the way our food is grown as well.

**Food Show:** For Chris and Dom, this is their big chance to sell their unusual vegan dish to diners. We've got some Mexican vegan eggs here, so it's made from tofu. Ooh, tofu. Good for the planet, good for climate change.

**Review Show:** Indoor and outdoor air pollution claiming at least 40,000 UK lives a year. And you thought I was making that up when I told you that. Is this something you're worried about? Well, it is now, yeah.

**Design show:** Come over here. Why is there...? In the first half, you've been very vocal about this design, now suddenly, stunned silence. Gobsnacked! It's wild. going to love that, as well. I think it's amazing. Yes. Friendly dyes, which don't pollute the planet, they are using recycled wallpapers and they are using special glues, So not only is it beautiful, it's also ethical, as well. It's fab.

**Topical Comedy Show:** It's weird, we have a go at kids, saying they don't give a shit, they're just on Fortnite, and then they go and protest about climate change and we have a go at them too. I'd have gone and done it. Get out of school for an hour? Big time! I'm so worried about the climate change.

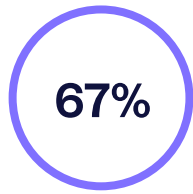
**Cartoon:** A leaky faucet can waste over... 2,000 gallons a year. Turning off your lights can... Power Pittsburgh. And if we kept our thermostats at 68... We'd be free from our dependency on foreign oil in 17 years. I'm Colin. I haven't seen you at school. Just moved from Ireland. My dad's a musician. Is he...? He's not Bono. I thought because you're Irish and you care. He's not Bono!

**Comedy Show:** It's just very nice to get out of London, actually, because the bit of London I live in is filthy. I mean, the air is filthy. You know, from traffic pollution. And all the traffic, really, is these women driving their children to school in these enormous great four-wheel drive Jeeps. Now, why they have to have four-wheel drive in London, I haven't really quite discovered, unless they're worried about encountering a low-sugar Ribena slick coming up Highgate Hill

**Building Show:** The house will not only be a home and a workplace... but will be ecologically efficient and environmentally friendly.

# Audience Research

Do audiences want this? Research conducted by broadcasters shows that:



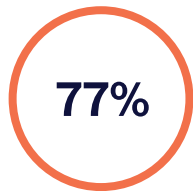
## BBC

67% percent of audiences say that they would watch another programme on climate change, citing their most preferred content as 'new climate technology' (46%) and climate solutions, i.e. recycling (44%).



## ITV

7/10 ITV viewers want to see media companies doing more to communicate how they – the people – can reduce their environmental impact.<sup>4</sup>



## Channel 4

77% of the C4 audience acknowledge we are in a climate emergency with 90% saying that they have changed their daily habits. Of this group, the most common action taken was to buy a re-usable bag 97%.



## Channel 5

C5 viewers are 20% more likely than the average adult to prefer not to buy GM food and 13% more likely than the average person to be worried about the pollution that is caused by cars

” Climate science doesn't lay out how to translate an audience's appetite into on-screen editorial. Nor is there a content code advising on how to ensure issues are given airtime in a way that's proportionate to their risk to society. Rightly or wrongly, this is currently in the hands of creatives. In the same way that citizens need to be engaged, TV creatives must get on board with what is required for the transition to Net Zero and reflect this in their work. This means thinking beyond the familiar issues of plastic pollution or recycling. Content needs to get to grips with how it depicts behaviours and choices with big carbon impacts: homes, food, travel and consumer products.

### Dr Richard Carmichael

Imperial College London, author of Behaviour change, public engagement and Net Zero report for the Committee on Climate Change

” Saving our planet is now a communications challenge.

Sir David Attenborough

# albert Certification

From January 2021, with the support of the executive producers, all productions undertaking albert certification will have to answer the following question:

## “How have you ensured that materially significant components of this programme, are not normalising unsustainable behaviour?”

The context for this question stems from the reality that, in order to live sustainably on this planet, society must not just reduce its environmental impact - but eliminate it, reaching ‘net-zero’. Therefore, all activity with an impact on the environment matters, both in the real world and on screen too.

Responding to this question calls upon programme makers to appraise content in its entirety, and

make decisions about materiality, authenticity and the best way for television programmes and their audience to travel to net-zero together.

This additional question does not create a ‘pass or fail’ standard in albert Certification. Its purpose is merely to remind programme makers about the opportunity available to them to promote positive climate action on screen whilst retaining their editorial control.



# Opportunity Knocks...

2018's report revealed that climate change was discussed a mere 3,125 in 130,000 shows. This year's report shows that this figure has grown fourfold, which on the face of it, is a positive step forward. But what does good look like? Simply asking for the climate to be awkwardly inserted into all content could be considered clunky - risks authenticity and in turn, climate engagement.

Albert has been working to define best practice, hypothesising that the industry should grade itself against the genuine opportunities that occur on screen to make a climate connection. Perhaps such opportunities exist when topics that are critical to transforming our society are discussed: travel and transport, vehicles, cities, workplaces, neighbourhoods, homes, nutrition, cuisine, agriculture, shopping, holidays, utilities, money, finance and economy, clothing and fashion, politics and government, consumer products and electronics.

The table below shows the results of a new methodology, a 'planet placement score'. Here, subtitle files have been searched for specific words

to try and uncover the key topics that are in the narrative. i.e. mentions of recipe + ingredient + lunch, etc. = food, or garden + bedroom + location, etc. = homes. These topic matches were then scanned for the presence of key planetary terms (e.g. sustainability, the environment, climate crisis) within the same episode. The table below shows the result for 1, 2 and 3 planetary mentions. A full list of the words searched for, can be found in the appendix.

This methodology lacks context and is, by the very nature of looking for pre-defined terms - prescriptive. It certainly misses nuanced attempts to portray behaviour that is bad for the planet as a negative character trait and equally, throws up a number of false positives (the term 'planet' for example, can easily be used out of context - i.e. 'What planet are you on?') But the analysis does achieve its aims namely to reveal how often common environmental terms are found alongside topics that are critical to the transition to a sustainable society.

NOTE: Topics are not an indication of genre. For example, matches for 'food' were found to be in both continuing drama and travel programmes.

TOPIC	Number of files with 7+ topic indicators	% of these files with 1 'planet' term	% of these files with 2 'planet' terms	% of these files with 3 'planet' terms
Homes	105,400	16.0%	7.3%	4.5%
Food	102,412	16.3%	7.5%	4.6%
Travel	38,788	18.7%	9.3%	6.0%
Stuff	11,462	26.3%	15.2%	10.8%
Society	36,663	27.6%	15.3%	10.4%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>294,725</b>	<b>18.3%</b>	<b>8.9%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>

Although not a perfect experiment, running this research helps to paint a picture of how our TV programmes are currently responding to the climate crisis. When a show discusses food, travel, our homes or presents the latest gadget or 'must buy' item, the planet is brought into the conversation 5.7% of the time when at least 3 'planetary' mentions are searched for.

Arguably this methodology might not be robust enough to deliver a yardstick for the industry to measure itself against, but it can at the very least kick off a discussion about how channels might seek to align their content with the science.

It's no longer acceptable to show a shot of someone sat in a car without a seatbelt on, unless this deliberate action is a specific part of the storyline. An audience would consider this reckless, unacceptable behaviour. In the same vein, will audiences consider it reckless for a food show to feature meat consumption without making mention to the fact that reducing our meat intake is vital to the long term health of our planet? Surely this approach is necessary in order to ensure the recommendations increasingly present in specialist factual are made a cultural reality.

# The Planet's Channel

What might some of the nation's favourite programmes look like if the environment became a key consideration for the producers?

- ? Could Super Vet talk to his animal mad owners about switching to a low carbon insect catfood?
- ? Should air quality be taken into account on Location, Location, Location when Kirstie and Phil search for that dream home?
- ? Might The World's Most Scenic River Journeys discuss how a changing climate and increased river pollution will impact these magical trips for future generations?
- ? In Rich House, Poor House could the conversation turn to environmental impact and whose high carbon activities are speeding up our global demise?
- ? Could comedy Breeders include a storyline where the children refuse to fly because they're worried about their carbon footprint?
- ? In Doc Martin's sleepy Cornish village, could a freak weather storm, caused by our changing climate bring havoc to its residents?
- ? Imagine if the UK's entry into Eurovision was a song for the planet (well we can't do much worse can we!?)
- ? In the next series of Britain's Best Home Cook could all the challenges revolve around dishes that help us to reduce our meat and dairy intake?
- ? Will recently commissioned Class of 2020 talk about the impact of the climate on young people?
- ? Or what about Ainsley Harriott's The Food We Love show – might he opt for low carbon alternatives to tempt us?
- ? Perhaps John Bishop's Whale Rescue show will discuss the impact that our polluted oceans will have on the beluga whales once they're released back into the wild...
- ? Or if we're asking Is Covid Racist? Then perhaps we could ask the same of Climate Change...



# Closing Thoughts



The screen shouldn't just be a mirror but also a chalk board where we can model a better world as well as reflecting reality. It's a safe space where we can acknowledge the challenges and inequalities that we face as a society, but also where we can offer a glimpse of a more just world where those challenges are faced and resolved. At its best, our screen content can offer its viewers a true sense of community and an understanding that many people share their concerns for the world and its future.

**Lisa Holdsworth**

Chair of the Writers Guild of Great Britain



The pictures on our screen shape the way we see the world. Reaching net zero emissions will take huge political, economic, social, cultural and personal change. Change in the food we eat, the homes we live in, the holidays we go on. Change in our relationship with nature, money, society, family and friends. These stories of change are shocking, entertaining, sad, provocative, inspiring and above all, true. Imagination, storytelling and culture are some of our greatest forces for change. As directors, we are creative leaders and we have the power to make emotional connections. Every film or TV programme we direct is an opportunity to create a new vision for the world, speak to audiences beyond environmental bubbles and normalise behaviour compatible with a sustainable climate. As directors we must play this pivotal role with urgency."

**Steve Smith**

Chair of Directors UK



This report calls upon creatives to do something bold and to do it very quickly. It has taken decades to find on-screen smoking strange, sexism affronting and no seatbelts insane. But we don't have decades. We have to react right now to take the high carbon lifestyles out of our scripts and consider a new, aspirational approach to our storylines instead. We must think carefully about the things we show on screen and ensure it reflects a world we would feel proud and safe to live in. The creative climate challenge needs be inscribed in the DNA of our industry.

**Krishnendu Majumdar**

Chair of BAFTA



# Appendix

## Opportunity knocks search terms

Planet terms	Homes	Food	Travel	Stuff	Society
the environment	property	ingredient	commute	fashion	policy
the planet	location	recipe	drive	electronics	government
carbon footprint	house	breakfast	journey	product	vote
eco	flat	eat	car	price	manifesto
sustainable	home	veg	plane	retail	parliament
sustainability	office	food	flight	purchase	family
environmentally	room	cook	holiday	shopping	fairness
environmental	garden	meal	travel	consumer	community
climate change	building	dinner	bus	goods	neighbours
climate crisis	bedroom	lunch	trip	cosmetics	infrastructure
pollution				beauty	culture
				clothes	
				appliances	
				furniture	



albert is the screen industry authority on environmental sustainability.

Founded in 2011, the project supports the industry in eliminating its environmental impact as well as developing on-screen content that is compatible with a sustainable climate.

A BAFTA, indie and broadcaster backed project, albert is proudly industry funded, meaning all our activities are available at the lowest possible cost to organisations and zero cost to individuals.

With events, online tools and training, practical guidance and thought leadership, albert is enabling all screen industry professions to identify and act upon opportunities on and off screen, for effective climate action.

Find out more:

[www.wearealbert.org](http://www.wearealbert.org)

[info@wearealbert.org](mailto:info@wearealbert.org)

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We are leading a charge against climate change; bringing the screen industries together to tackle our environmental impact and inspiring our audiences to live sustainably through content.

We are albert. So are you.