

Divided by climate

Intergenerational justice and age as a polarizing factor in the Czech media coverage of the Fridays for Future movement

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Theoretical background

Polarisation of climate media discourse (Brüggemann & Engesser, 2017; Parks, 2020)

Employment of **journalistic norms**, particularly the requirements for balanced reporting that amplify sceptics' perspectives in news reporting (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007)

Role of **journalistic values** - conflict (Brüggemann & Engesser, 2017) or dramatization (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007), with a stronger tendency towards conflict framing in more conservative media (Ruiu 2021b; Carmichael et al., 2017)

In recent years reporting is more in line with scientific consensus, and "journalistic practices as part of media logic are evolving from objective/balanced towards more interpretive journalism" (Brüggemann & Engesser, 2017, p. 66)

Theoretical background

Climate change and its media coverage involve **generational aspects at several levels** (intergenerational justice - Sanson & Burke, 2019; coming generations do not have a legal opportunity to participate in political decision-making - Thompson, 2010)

Perspective of the young generation is entirely marginal in the media coverage of climate change (Graham & Bell, 2020)

Greta Thunberg and the FFF's appeal – **a strong generational tone** from the beginning, a gradual change and abandonment of generational discourse by the movement (Díaz-Pérez et al., 2021).

Background of the study

Czechs often ranked among the **most sceptical** countries in international comparisons (European Commission, 2021, p. 22–23) but the vast majority of the population agrees that climate change is indeed happening, that it has been caused mainly by human activity, and represents a severe problem.

The differences between generations **are not significant enough to speak of a generation gap.**



Research questions

RQ1: How are age and generational relations constructed in the Czech online climate discourses surrounding the FFF activities?

RQ2: What is the significance of age as a dominant perspective in the online climate media discourses?

RQ3: Which normative constructions related to generational roles and attributes do the media reveal in their coverage of the FFF activities?

Data and methods

Keywords: "Fridays for Future", "FFF", "Greta Thunberg", "climate strike", "strike for climate"

Social listening tool Sentience tracking mentions of the FFF movement in the Czech online media from January 2019 to June 2021

Three two-month periods, i.e., **March - April 2019, September - October 2019, and March - April 2021**

14 nation-scope online media outlets: five mainstream online dailies, most of them owned by Czech oligarchs (idnes.cz, lidovky.cz, ihned.cz, aktualne.cz, novinky.cz), two alternative (rather left-wing liberal) online dailies (A2larm.cz, denikreferendum.cz), three online dailies that can be categorised as journalistic projects created recently as an alternative to dailies owned by Czech oligarchs (Echo24.cz, Deník N, Seznam Zprávy), one tabloid online daily (blesk.cz) and three online weeklies (Respekt, Reflex, tyden.cz)

Our dataset consisted of **620 articles**

First two coding procedures from grounded theory – **open and axial coding** (Straus & Corbin, 1998) to inductively, exploratively identify specific categories of media representations of the FFF related to the generational aspects of the issue.

Results

1. Climate represented predominantly in terms of differences and inequalities stemming from age

1a: Climate crisis impacts different generations differently (Young people bearing the consequences of the older generations' inactivity or destructive activities)

- the “lost or stolen future” theme
- the responsibility and responsabilisation theme

1b: Generation war on climate (explicit stress on the generational conflict)

1c: Climate as a youth agenda - or not?

1. Climate change as a topic revealing normative construction of generational division of roles in the society

2a: Childlike, irresponsible, passive adults (positive towards FFF)

2b: Children standing in for politicians (positive towards FFF)

2c: Striking truants theme negotiated in the media

2d: Uncritical adults letting children rule the world (negative towards FFF)

Climate - a generational issue for the media: Climate represented predominantly in terms of differences and inequalities stemming from age

Age represents a key perspective and serves as a polarising factor - how different generations approach climate change differently, how climate impacts them differently, or how generations are divided in a conflict over the issue?

Climate crisis impacts different generations differently

While a fifty-years-old may lose their calm old age, a teenager will, in case of the ecosystem destruction, lose almost their whole life [a2larm.cz].

The school strike as a form of protest has a meaning by itself - why prepare for the future if there may not be one [a2larm.cz]

We will have to live for the whole decades with the consequences of your [the adults' - authors' note] lack of activity [a2larm.cz].

Generation war on climate

the luckiest in the history of children...they live in prosperity that can be proved ...their protest against the generation of their parents represents a disdain for the skills and hard work of the former generations thanks to which today's teenagers can live their spoiled material dream

young people, mimicking many generations before them, craftily blame others again

Involuntarily responsabilised children vs irresponsible adults or truants admired by uncritical adults? Normative construction of the generational division of roles in the society

The tendency of the media to explain or rationalise the surprising political participation of children or young people, using the perspective of in/appropriate roles of different generations.

Childlike, irresponsible, passive adults

Maybe it occurs to you that we are young, non-experienced, naive, but then what about those who are able to successfully ignore information and warnings by respected scientists for such a long time?; the students defend themselves. [lidovsky.cz]

If children can act like adults, couldn't we just try as well? [denikreferendum.cz]

Children standing in for politicians

"We know that some politicians want to take part in our strike on Friday. Don't come, go to your work and start doing it properly. You are those in power and only you have a chance to save our future. Dedicate yourself to climate policies. We are striking because we have no other option. You do have it. Use it," the students added in relation to the politicians' participation during the strike. [idnes.cz]

Striking truants theme negotiated in the media

They do not strike in their free time also because the protests which the sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg started aimed at being seen and heard. A strike taking place on Saturday would be less visible just because it would not be a strike, but a mere demonstration. [a2larm.cz]

Uncritical adults letting children rule the world

... the USSR ended because it was ruled by politburos consisting of demented geriatrics who afterwards, one after another, were dropping like flies. The ascendancy of kids is perhaps even worse than the ascendancy of geriatrics. [lidovsky.cz]

Conclusions

Czech online media rather supportive of the FFF movement

The media discourse shows a significant tendency towards polarisation of the issue along the axis of age

Conservative media use a negative representation of the FFF movement itself in their conflictual framing, liberal mainstream and alternative media are rather supportive of the movement and create the conflict through an emphasis on the theme of intergenerational justice.

Constructive or peace journalism calling for a substantial change in the media coverage of global crises (Atanasova, 2022; Overgaard, 2021)?

Questions?

Thank you for your time and attention!