

OPINION Is the media finally waking up to the threat of climate change?

There is increasing evidence that 'Phew! What a scorcher!' may have had it's day...

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By  **John Jewell**
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📍 Cardiff Bay on February 27 (Image: WalesOnline/Rob Browne)

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It is perhaps a consequence of the relentless pace of modern life that the unseasonably warm weather we experienced just over a week ago has very nearly been forgotten.

As **Storm Freya provides** us with weather conditions much more familiar to this time of year, it's worth looking at just how the mainstream media reported this late February "scorcher".

On Tuesday 26 of last month, the BBC 6 O'clock news programme **Wales Today** had reporter Ben Price dispatched to sunny Barry Island where the focus was on sand castle building, tanning and the positive effects on local businesses.

Though Price did mention the Met Office analysis which pointed out that in the last half a century winters had got progressively milder, he also stated the Met Office assurance that no "heatwave, storm or flood can be directly linked to global warming".

The tone of Price's report was overwhelmingly upbeat - in Aberaeron there was a sense of "tranquillity around the marina" and in his weather report at the end of the show, Derek Brockway highlighted that temperatures had reached 20.8°C (69.4°F) in Porthmadog, which represented the warmest winters day ever in Wales.

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He also quoted Swansea University geography Professor Mary Gagen, who not unreasonably pointed out: "It is lovely having an ice cream in February, but if this carries on we could see millions of pounds of damage, lives taken and the extinction of species across the world."

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But if you relied entirely on the UK tabloid press for your information though, you could be forgiven for thinking that the months of February and July were joyfully interchangeable.

On February 26, alongside photographs of people shimmering in the summer heat, [The Sun reported](#) that we were "basking in it", elsewhere offering advice on coping in a heatwave: "The public are encouraged to keep an eye on vulnerable friends, family members and neighbours who may struggle to cope in the extreme heat."

[MailOnline](#) was, for the most part, similarly upbeat. On February 25, we were told that parts of the UK were hotter than the likes of Malaga, Rome and the Algarve whilst assorted images showed smiling, carefree children in parks or beaches thronging with life.

At least MailOnline did attempt to counter the imagery with some concerned voices. Green Party MP Caroline Lucas was quoted, calling on the Government to "wake up to this crisis", declare a "climate emergency" and transform the economy to prevent "climate catastrophe".

[In the Independent](#) Lucas wrote an article of her own, stating that the media narrative around the 20C° heat needed to shift from celebration to concern.

[In the Guardian](#), [Jonn Elledge](#), assistant editor of the New Statesman, expressed similar anxiety. He wrote of his dismay at the BBC tweeting out the high temperatures in Ceredigion (very, very briefly the highest ever temperature ever recorded in Britain) with a gif of the sunshine icon and the "same excitable breathlessness with which Springwatch would announce it had found a new type of vole".

But Lucas has also acknowledged that after years of calling out the media for "climate silence" there has been "incremental improvement" in how the subject has been covered. This is something also acknowledged by [Climate Home News](#) – an independent news site dedicated to climate stories.

They argue that in respect of the extraordinary temperatures last summer it was clear to see, in newspapers and on television, that there was a willingness to make the connection between the unusual weather and global warming trends

I think this is evidently the case. Yes, we still have front pages, such as the Sun's "RECORD BREAKING SUNSHINE – FEBRUARY" which seem woefully inappropriate but there does seem to be a resolute effort across most media to provide a critical context for climate change.

As Leo Hickman, [editor of Carbon Brief](#), has noted, coverage now better reflects scientific consensus.

Speaking to Climate Home News about last summer's heatwaves he said, "[It] has lacked that false balance we used to see five or 10 years ago. All of the doubting is being left to the op-ed columns."

A BILLIONAIRE AND ONLY...

THOUGH her name might be unfamiliar to those with little interest in youth culture, Kylie Jenner is nonetheless one of the most notable celebrities on the planet.

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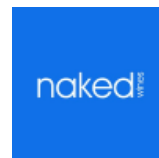
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And when business magazine Forbes published its annual World Billionaires ranking a few days ago, the fact that she was declared the world's youngest "self-made" billionaire attracted the attention of the global media.

So, for those unaware, Kylie Kristen Jenner is a US reality TV star, model and business success who has starred in the smash hit Keeping Up with the Kardashians since 2007. And, whilst a considerable chunk of her fortune is the result of her successful Kylie Cosmetics company which made \$360m (£274m) in sales last year, she is also, arguably, the world's most financially astute user of social media.

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Kylie Jenner

With her combined 42 million Facebook and Twitter followers added to a further 19.7 on Instagram, Jenner can, according to People.com, command the equivalent of US\$1m for every sponsored post she sends through her social media platforms. She is, in effect, the highest paid celebrity “influencer.”

An influencer in this sense should be understood in the same sense as we understand conventional celebrity endorsement. Essentially, they are individuals who have the ability to influence the opinions or consumer behaviour of a target audience.

In a social media sense, then, it’s logical to assume that brands will be attracted to those celebrities with the greatest number of followers: here is a ready-made custom base potentially eager to buy any product endorsed or associated with their hero or heroine. According [to the Times](#) , brands will spend \$6.5bn this year on influencers.

Kylie Jenner is 21.

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