

Nuclear power plants: public perception of the risks and threats

[Science](#), [Physics](#)



The dissertation looks at the way the public perceive the risks and threats offered by nuclear power plants within the UK. A process of content analysis, looking at news articles from The Times and The Telegraph 2012, was used. The public perceptions of nuclear power has always been markedly different to other means of generating electricity, despite the small number of incidents in reactors, with a strong tendency amongst the public, exacerbated by the media, to see such power in a negative way. The study examines the ways in which the media are able to influence public perception strongly, and in a negative way.

The study includes an extensive literature review to contextualise the discussion. The background of nuclear power plants is discussed, looking at how nuclear power was discovered, and the development of functioning power plants. The growth of concern about nuclear power is traced, and the role of the media also examined. In particular, the mechanisms by which the media are able to sway public opinion are considered. The literature review is supported by a number of useful illustrations, graphs and tables.

A methodology section justifies the choice of content analysis as a research tool, and considers other ways of investigation which could be, or which have been, used to address the way the public perceive nuclear power. Content analysis offers a way to look at public perceptions by analysing relevant texts in which those perceptions are expressed or shaped. It looks for particular concepts occurring in these texts, and assesses the extent to which each occurs. The relationship between key terms is also assessed. It has been used similarly in other studies looking at this area, for example

Perko, Turcanu and Geenen (2012). The method chosen is justified against other possible ways of gauging public opinion, for example through surveys or time series analyses. Many previous studies have collected quantitative data, underlining the need for qualitative analyses such as the one presented here.

Using content analysis, the study uncovers a number of features of media discussions of nuclear power. The results section looks, in turn, at the number of nuclear related articles, the main claims made by these articles, the position taken by the author and whether any evidence to support the claims is given, and if so what that evidence is. The study finds that the media does influence the public perception of nuclear power, and that they are biased in the way they present nuclear power to the public. It also finds mixed positive and negative portrayals of nuclear power. Finally recommendations for future research are made.

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