

## Green Information Communication in Contemporary China: A 5W Model Perspective

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**Abstract:** Drawing on Lasswell’s 5W communication model, this study conducts a systematic analysis of green information communication mechanisms in contemporary China. The findings indicate that in terms of communicators, green communication has shifted from being dominated by government and mainstream media to a more collaborative, multi-actor framework. In terms of content, it has expanded from a “problem-oriented” focus to encompass value guidance and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles. Regarding communication channels, traditional media and digital platforms now operate in parallel, with social media and short-video platforms emerging as key arenas. At the audience level, the public has gradually transformed from passive recipients into active participants and co-creators. In terms of effects, green communication not only enhances public awareness of environmental risks and recognition of ecological values but also promotes practical behaviors such as low-carbon travel, waste sorting, and green consumption. Overall, the study demonstrates that in the digital era, green communication is characterized by interactivity and practice orientation, playing a vital role in advancing ecological civilization and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Green communication; Lasswell's 5W model; Digital media; China; Environmental awareness; Practice-oriented engagement

### I. Introduction

With the intensification of industrialization and the iterative advancement of science and technology, human society is increasingly entering what Beck described as the “risk society.” Global ecological crises—such as climate change, environmental pollution, and the loss of biodiversity—constitute typical “manufactured risks.” These risks not only pose severe threats to the natural environment but also profoundly disrupt social order and the routines of everyday life. At this historical juncture, environmental issues are no longer confined to scientific or technological challenges; rather, they have become urgent social concerns that require broad public engagement through effective communication mechanisms.

Consequently, green communication has emerged as a critical approach to preventing ecological degradation and fostering transformations in public awareness and behavior, thereby underscoring its growing importance.

At present, green communication is not limited to the simple transmission of environmental information. It has also assumed multiple value-oriented functions, such as promoting the concept of ecological civilization, advocating green values, and encouraging sustainable lifestyles. Particularly in the digital era, the forms, channels, and levels of participation in green communication have become more diverse than ever before. Government agencies, corporate organizations, media platforms, environmental NGOs, and individual users are

increasingly involved in the production and dissemination of discourses on environmental issues. This multi-actor participation has propelled green communication from a marginal concern to a mainstream agenda, constructing a dynamic and complex communicative ecosystem.

In 1948, Harold Lasswell, in his seminal essay *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society*, proposed the well-known “5W model,” a classical structural framework in communication studies. This model offers a clear analytical perspective for examining the relationships among the communicator, the message, the channel, the audience, and the effect. Applying the 5W model to the study of green communication not only helps to clarify the logic underpinning the dissemination of environmental information but also reveals the mechanisms through which diverse communicators shape and construct environmental discourses. Therefore, introducing the 5W model into the analysis of green communication is both theoretically appropriate and practically significant.

## **II. Who: The Pluralistic Structure of Green Communication Actors**

As the primary source of green information, communicators have always played a central role in the communication process. At present, the official discursive arena, represented by government agencies and mainstream media, continues to dominate as the most influential actor in green communication. Institutions such as the Ministry of Ecology and Environment and local forestry administrations disseminate environmental policies to convey the state’s strategic intentions regarding the construction of ecological civilization. In addition, “national team” media outlets such as CCTV News and People’s Daily Online frequently serve as communication windows for government

environmental policies, transmitting information and guiding values through news reports, special programs, and public service advertisements. This type of communication underscores political orientation and value leadership, aiming to strengthen institutional recognition of green awareness.

## **III. Say What: The Expansion and Integration of Communicative Content**

At present, the value dimension of green communication has expanded beyond its early focus on singular reports of natural disasters to encompass a broader, multi-level system of content, including the construction of ecological civilization, the promotion of low-carbon lifestyles, and the popularization of environmental education.

Traditional disaster-centered news reporting typically concentrated on sudden and crisis-oriented environmental events such as floods or smog. Its core communicative logic lies in reproducing disaster scenes through textual and visual representation, thereby evoking emotional resonance and alerting audiences to potential risks. While such “problem-oriented” communication can effectively attract short-term attention, it often fails to embed sustainable green action within the audience’s cognitive framework, and may even contribute to environmental fatigue or a sense of helplessness. Scholars have observed that when environmental reporting excessively focuses on disasters and crises, it tends to elicit only short-term emotional resonance among the public while failing to generate lasting motivation. In contrast, communication content centered on value orientation and the advocacy of practical engagement is more likely to foster a sense of responsibility and encourage sustainable behaviors.

By contrast, contemporary green communication is increasingly shifting from a “problem-oriented” to

a “value-oriented” approach. Rather than passively reproducing information about natural disasters, it actively constructs and disseminates green values and practices. For instance, People’s Daily published an article entitled Personal Carbon Accounts Record the Changes Brought by Green Lifestyles, which systematically described how digital platforms document citizens’ environmentally friendly behaviors in the new era. This example illustrates how green communication has moved beyond the limitations of warning-oriented disaster coverage toward practice-oriented value communication, thereby guiding public engagement in sustainable action.

#### **IV. Which Channel: Diversification and Digitalization of Media Channels**

Contemporary research and practice in environmental communication are no longer confined to the level of “issue representation”; rather, they must further uncover the institutional and structural conditions that underlie communicative processes. As Morgan has pointed out, in the context of an escalating planetary crisis, environmental communication requires a transdisciplinary perspective that attends to the structural, material, and media-related factors embedded in discourse and knowledge production. This implies that green communication is not merely a one-way transmission of information or a matter of popular science dissemination; instead, it is profoundly shaped by media logics, platform algorithms, capital interests, and policy orientations. On short-video platforms, for instance, algorithmic recommendation systems and commercial imperatives often determine which green issues gain greater visibility and which discourses are marginalized. From this perspective, analyses of green communication channels must integrate considerations of institutional environments, media

structures, and technological logics in order to more fully grasp the mechanisms and effects of green communication.

With the proliferation of the Internet and smart devices, the media channels of green communication have gradually extended from traditional mass media to new digital platforms. Conventional outlets such as television, radio, and newspapers still play an important role in interpreting environmental policies and carrying out macro-level advocacy on green issues. However, in the digital era, the emergence of social media, short-video platforms, and online communities has injected new vitality into green communication. Platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, Kuaishou, and Xiaohongshu have become critical arenas for disseminating environmental information. These platforms not only push green content to potential audiences through algorithmic recommendations but also enhance public engagement and immersion by means of hashtags, online challenges, live streaming, and interactive participation.

For instance, the collaboration between Douyin Nature and Haidian Park on World Earth Day serves as a typical case illustrating the diversification and interactivity of communication channels. Offline, the initiative introduced educational trails, science signage, and interactive games, allowing visitors to experience nature firsthand. Online, participants could scan QR codes to access expert science videos, while users were encouraged to record and upload short videos identifying plants and animals and to engage in hashtag discussions. This model transcended the limitations of traditional one-way broadcasting by combining experiential and participatory modes of communication, thereby raising public awareness of ecological issues and stimulating concrete environmental actions.

At the same time, the decentralized logic

of social media has enabled individual users and environmental organizations to bypass traditional information barriers and directly generate and share green content. This process has facilitated the bottom-up diffusion of environmental issues across broader social networks. Furthermore, digital platforms have increasingly incorporated data visualization, gamification, and interactive functions, providing audiences with quantifiable feedback on their green behaviors and reinforcing the practice-oriented and action-driven nature of green communication in the digital age.

## **V. To Whom: Multi-layered Audience Structure and the Transformation of Public Roles**

Zhang's research demonstrates that news media and social media perform differentiated functions in fostering public engagement with environmental issues. Specifically, news media contribute to strengthening the public's macro-level understanding of environmental topics by providing comprehensive information and framing, whereas social media through its interactivity and relational affordances—facilitates more practical participation in green consumption and environmental action. This finding corroborates the present study's emphasis that contemporary youth and online users are no longer passive recipients of information but have become value co-creators and active participants in the process of green communication.

Within the ecosystem of green communication, audiences have gradually moved beyond the traditional role of passive receivers, showing a multi-layered structure and a transformation of roles. First, the general public remains the fundamental target group of green communication. Through policy interpretation and popular science dissemination, government agencies and mainstream media guide society at large to develop broad recognition of

ecological civilization and value identification with environmental protection.

Second, youth groups, owing to their higher media literacy and stronger sensitivity to social issues, have become key participants in green communication. They actively engage in social media interactions, online challenges, and short-video production, thereby demonstrating a strong capacity for value expression and the translation of ideas into practice. For instance, during World Earth Day, the campaign "Protect Nature Science Popularization," jointly launched by Douyin Nature and Haidian Park, attracted large numbers of young users. By scanning QR codes to watch expert videos, uploading short videos of plants and animals, and participating in hashtag discussions, young audiences contributed to the creation of an integrated online–offline model of green communication, reflecting their creativity and agency.

At the same time, community residents and urban households serve as practical audiences in issues such as waste sorting, low-carbon living, and green consumption. Their changes in lifestyle directly determine the effectiveness and grounding of green communication.

Equally important are environmental NGOs and online opinion leaders (KOLs), who function as special audience groups. They not only receive information on environmental issues but also engage in secondary production and re-dissemination, amplifying the social influence of green topics and fostering both cognitive and emotional resonance among the public.

Taken together, these developments indicate that audiences in green communication are shifting from being single-dimensional recipients into becoming diversified co-creators and active participants. Their interactivity and agency within communication networks have become decisive variables in

determining whether green communication can achieve deep and sustained social mobilization.

## **VI. With What Effect: Communicative Outcomes and Social Impact**

The ultimate goal of green communication is to foster transformations in public awareness and behavior. Its impact is reflected not only in the reach of information and the attention it garners but also, more importantly, in the long-term shifts in social values and modes of action. From the perspective of communicative outcomes, green communication first enhances public perceptions of environmental risks and strengthens identification with ecological civilization, thereby bringing environmental issues into the mainstream public agenda.

Second, through the interactive mechanisms of media platforms, green communication reinforces audiences' sense of participation and responsibility, gradually transforming abstract green concepts into concrete daily practices such as waste sorting, low-carbon travel, and green consumption. Furthermore, the involvement of opinion leaders and celebrities generates broader emotional resonance and value identification, producing exemplary and mimetic effects that significantly expand the social influence of environmental issues.

At the same time, green communication plays an integrative role in aligning policy advocacy, public education, and collective social action, thereby creating opportunities for collaboration among governments, enterprises, NGOs, and the public. Taken together, the significance of green communication extends far beyond the mere transmission of information; it functions as a vital force in shaping green values, mobilizing collective action, and addressing global environmental challenges, thereby demonstrating its irreplaceable practical importance and long-term value.

## **VII. Conclusion**

Overall, by adopting Lasswell's 5W model as an analytical framework, this study systematically reveals the structural features and operational logic of green information communication in contemporary China. From communicators to content, from channels to audiences, and ultimately to communicative effects, green communication demonstrates characteristics of multi-actor collaboration, value-oriented content, diversified media channels, and the transformation of audience roles, while exerting profound influence on public awareness and social mobilization. In particular, within the context of digitalization and social media, green communication is moving beyond the traditional one-way model of science popularization toward a more interactive, participatory, and practice-oriented communicative ecology. This transformation not only facilitates the cultivation of sustainable lifestyles and value recognition among the public but also provides valuable insights for ecological civilization building and environmental governance in China and beyond. Looking ahead, green communication must be further advanced through institutional support, technological innovation, and social collaboration. Only with more scientific communication strategies and broader public mobilization can the vision of ecological civilization be widely disseminated and collectively practiced, thereby enabling humanity to confront pressing environmental challenges.

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