
Public And Personal Responses To Environmental Pollution In China

Since 2013, China has been in a war against pollution. This country is a communist and the government has had to take measures to cut its impact on the environment. A new policy is made that gave the right to authorities to order the ban of burning coal, the closure of thousands of factories and the shut down of construction sites, however, this came with an economic and social cost. How did this affect China's population and what were there responses with the media that was evolving around them? This article explains a study made to look at how different types of media affected public environmental expression and personal environmental action.

The Chinese government has been working to reform its environmental governance. The major cause that was considered in the study was media use. It was found that media affected people's knowledge of environmental issues and their attitudes and behavior's towards it. The study examined how personal difference variables such as internal environmental efficacy, and perceived severity of pollution-along with one's direct experience with environmental pollution influence use of multiple media channels for environment-related information (Sun, Merolla, and Seo, 2018). It also explored how uses of various types of media whether traditional, online or social, shapes Chinese citizens. Furthermore a model is made to verify whether the proposed relationships were moderated by personal experience with pollution.

The team of students presented some proposals in three hypothesis. The first hypothesis is that "internal environmental efficacy and perceived severity are positively associated with the use of multiple media sources for environment-related information" (Sun, Merolla, and Seo, 2018, para. 23). The second hypothesis was that "the effect of susceptibility variables on a public environmental expression and personal environmental action are mediated by multiple media uses" (Sun, Merolla, and Seo, 2018, para. 24). The last hypothesis was that "the direct experience will serve as a global moderator to the relationship between two variables: a) susceptibility variables and media use behavioral response, and b) media use and behavioral response" (Sun, Merolla, and Seo, 2018, para. 25). The company which performed this study commissioned an online survey to the public in mainland China.

The survey consisted of an online panel of online users which received incentives for their participation. Sun, Merolla, and Seo (2018) noted that "Beijing and Hebei provinces have received intense media coverage in recent years because of their experiences of high levels of air pollution. Gender, age, education also served as control variables in the study" (para. 27). For the three proposals, these were the results; the first hypothesis was supported. The results showed that efficacy had a positive effect on using traditional media, online news and social networking service (SNS) (Sun, Merolla, and Seo, 2018, para. 40). The second hypothesis was partially supported. From the data pulled from a provided table, it showed the effects of internal environmental efficacy on personal and public responses to environmental pollution were significantly moderated by traditional media and online news media use (Sun, Merolla, and Seo, 2018, para. 41). The final hypothesis was also partially supported.

In regards with the two variables, the direct experience significantly moderated the effect of

efficacy on traditional media use only and it mediated the relationship between traditional media use and perceived severity (Sun, Merolla, and Seo, 2018, para. 42). Sun, Merolla, and Seo (2018) noted, through the different tables and figures from the results of the three proposals, that “for people that had a positive direct experience had higher perceived severity which led to more frequent use of traditional media” (para. 44) and that “for people who had a negative direct experience had higher perceived severity which led to less frequent use of traditional media” (para. 44). Results indicate that multiple forms of media, including traditional sources such as television, newspaper, and radio, and newer sources such as online news and SNS, are consequential to Chinese citizens’ environmental behavior. Overall, the roles of traditional media and online news media were primary in explaining the behaviors of China’s mainland. At the end of this study, even though SNS did not influence personal environmental opinion, traditional and online media usage aided the population to take personal environmental actions. (Sun, Merolla, and Seo, 2018, para. 45).

Currently in China, there is an ongoing tension between economic development and environmental protection in Chinese media. Even though environmental issues receive the attention that is required, which is more than in the past, when reporting on environmental crisis the media omits specific information. That is why for future research, Shaojing Sun, Andy Merolla, and Mihye Seo would like to test the validity of their results. They could conduct content analysis of environmental news coverage across news sources to compare the nature of reporting. It would help to find out if traditional news sources include more efficacy-enhancing content, relative to online news sources (Sun, Merolla, and Seo, 2018, para. 48). They would also recognize the limitations that where in the study such as, using cross-sectional data which limited the capacity to test claims, the level of media landscape in China and the lack of detailed information about media content that the population is exposed to. All in all, this study considered the potential direct effects of traditional media, online media, and social media use on public and private pro-environmental behavior.

Moreover, the results showed whether these forms of media use mediate the relationship between two differential susceptibility variables which were internal environmental efficacy and perceived severity. Finally, the study explored whether these mediated relationships were moderated by individuals’ direct experience with environmental pollution (Sun, Merolla, and Seo, 2018, para. 40). The goal was to understand the ways in which use of media about the environment affects two forms of environmental behavior: public environmental expression and personal environmental action, and this study shed light on the factors that have potentially motivated the environmental behavior of Chinese citizens in the different spheres: public and private. The different forms of media have predicted people's willingness to talk about environmental issues and their willingness to take action for the environment in their country. The results of this research also show that people use the media differently for environmental information based on their direct experience with pollution in their environment. Overall, these findings provide new insights into the role of the changing media landscape in China in shaping the populations’ behaviour on pro-environmental.