

## The Rise of the Camping Trend and Its Impact on Environmental Communication: Postprint

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### Abstract

As economic standards continue to rise, peripheral tourism, exemplified by camping, has transitioned from a niche pursuit to a mainstream activity. The rise of camping exerts a significant influence on environmental communication by driving economic development and promoting harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. Meanwhile, as the “mouthpiece” of the Party and the people, news media must more effectively fulfill its functions in environmental communication by upholding positive propaganda, guiding public opinion, and expressing demands for environmental justice.

### Full Text

## The Rise of Camping Culture and Its Impact on Environmental Communication

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**Abstract:** As economic levels continue to rise, peripheral tourism represented by camping has transitioned from a niche activity to a mainstream pursuit. The rise of camping plays a significant role in environmental communication by driving economic development and fostering positive symbiosis between humans and nature. Meanwhile, as the “mouthpiece” of the Party and the people, news media must fulfill its role in environmental communication by adhering to positive propaganda, guiding public opinion, and expressing demands for environmental justice.

**Keywords:** camping, environmental communication, news media

### 1. Environmental Communication

In 2009, Steven Littlejohn and Karen Foss included the entry “environmental communication” in their *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, defining it as

“a branch field of communication studies, as well as an interdisciplinary meta-field.” Guillory and Schoenfeld offered a more specific definition: “Environmental communication refers to the process and practice of planning, producing, exchanging, or researching textual, linguistic, or visual information concerning the environment, environmental management, and environmental issues” [1]. This represents one of the earliest academic definitions of environmental communication, characterized by a distinct pragmatism that emphasizes the practical significance of communication in addressing environmental challenges.

With the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy in recent years, an increasing number of villages have emerged from poverty and achieved positive economic development. Consequently, urban peripheral tourism has gained momentum, and camping activities have gradually evolved from a niche pursuit to a popular pastime. Economic growth has not only propelled camping into the mainstream but the development of camping itself has also stimulated economic expansion. According to a report by iiMedia Research, the popularity index for “camping” has continued to rise since May 2021, reaching a peak around this year’s May Day holiday. In 2021, the core market size of China’s camping economy reached 74.75 billion yuan, representing a year-on-year increase of 62.5%, while the driven market size reached 381.23 billion yuan, with a growth rate of 58.5%. The report projects that by 2025, the core market size of China’s camping economy will rise to 248.32 billion yuan, with the driven market size reaching 1,440.28 billion yuan [2].

## 2. Current State of Environmental Communication Research

International literature reveals that environmental communication research abroad is highly mature, having established cooperative relationships with numerous renowned institutions and formed interdisciplinary, cross-national research teams with close ties and active collaboration. For example, the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication has partnered with a social psychology professor from the University of Cambridge to research climate change issues related to global warming. In contrast, China has yet to develop large-scale professional institutions dedicated to environmental communication research.

Domestic environmental communication research primarily concentrates in two areas. The first focuses on the environment itself, with studies centered on climate and viruses as represented by nature. Scholars Ma Jin and Xu Jian, in their work “Key Issues in Environmental Transmission and Risk Prevention of SARS-CoV-2,” note that the COVID-19 pandemic represents the most severe infectious disease outbreak globally in a century, posing serious threats to human health, life safety, and socio-economic development. From an ecological perspective, they examine the impact of environmental destruction and global change on infectious disease outbreaks at macro temporal and spatial scales, the threats of zoonotic diseases to human health, the diffusion, migration, and mutation patterns of viruses in environmental media, the mechanisms of virus

transmission from animals and environmental media to humans, and environmental safety and secondary risk prevention in major epidemics [3]. The second area involves analyzing the discourse system of mainstream media coverage of environmental communication and examining how mainstream media should respond to environmental issues. In “Discourse Construction of New Mainstream Media in Environmental Communication—A Discourse Analysis Based on the People’s Daily Official Weibo,” Qi Yalin and Sun Hongfei analyze the specific discourse analysis, textual practices, and social practices of People’s Daily’s reporting on environmental issues. Overall, recent domestic research on environmental communication has demonstrated a stable upward trend in publication volume.

### 3. Benefits of Camping for Environmental Communication

#### 3.1 Fostering Positive Symbiosis Between Humans and Nature

China’s tourism policies are undergoing continuous improvement. Dai Bin, President of the China Tourism Academy, notes that the *Guiding Opinions* focus on demand-side management of camping tourism and leisure while addressing supply-side reforms. Various departments bear shared yet differentiated responsibilities, forming administrative synergy to systematically promote high-quality development of camping tourism and leisure. Through top-level design of the campsite system, utilization of existing resources, coordinated industrial development, and safeguards for life and property security, these measures advance the camping industry toward healthy development [4]. As living standards continue to rise, demand for camping experiences grows, leading to the gradual development of camping sites, which plays a positive role in environmental protection. Regarding site selection, campsites are typically located in scenic areas with beautiful landscapes and favorable weather, which encourages attention to environmental protection issues. As people enjoy the pleasures of camping and develop a desire to return, their environmental protection awareness increases, contributing to the collective building of a beautiful homeland and enriching the tourism industry. Through these mutual efforts, a positive symbiosis between humans and nature is further promoted.

**3.2 Driving Economic Development** As living standards improve, the public has moved beyond simply finding open spaces to pitch tents. Consequently, “camping+” products have emerged, with “glamping” (glamorous camping) emphasizing ritual, atmosphere, and personalization. People are more willing to use modern camping facilities and adopt more luxurious, resort-style camping forms, promoting industrial chain development and driving economic growth. Some camping sites integrate accommodation, dining, entertainment, outdoor sports, and hot spring wellness, meeting a series of needs for travel and leisure while driving the development of catering, wellness, and other industries. Zou Qingling, CEO of Lvmama Tourism Network, notes that in recent years, diversified “camping+” product forms have gained popularity among users, including camping+RV, camping+open-air concerts, camping+travel photography, camp-

ing+stargazing, and other featured products that allow tourists to truly harvest beautiful experiences during their journeys. Simultaneously, the products required for camping itself continue to enrich and develop. Beyond traditional equipment such as tents, sleeping bags, and moisture-proof pads, campsites are typically equipped with camping lights, atmosphere lights, tea sets, stoves, coffee machines, sound systems, projectors, board games, and other facilities, fully reflecting consumers' pursuit of quality in camping activities and driving the development of other industries.

#### 4. How Media Should Address Environmental Communication in the Camping Trend

**4.1 Prioritizing Positive Propaganda and Conducting Public Opinion Supervision** As the “mouthpiece” of the Party and the people, media must fulfill the dual functions of communicating top-down policies and conveying bottom-up public sentiment. When facing environmental communication, media must not only communicate national policies and popularize theoretical knowledge about environmental protection to ensure the public can enjoy camping more safely and efficiently but also transmit public demands, such as issues concerning environmental development and protection, upward in a timely manner to promote symbiosis between humans and the environment. Previous environmental communication has largely focused on negative news, such as “forest fires destroying vegetation” and “over-exploitation damaging vegetation.” Media should neither evade these issues nor simply report phenomena; instead, they should identify underlying problems from phenomena, draw lessons, minimize issues, and find the greatest common divisor between environmental problems and communication. This requires media to prioritize positive reporting in future coverage, with objective problem presentation not becoming the main agenda. Positive public opinion guidance should remain the primary direction. The 1976 Tangshan earthquake in Hebei shocked the nation and attracted nationwide attention. In the People's Daily coverage at the time, the earthquake's magnitude and damage were briefly mentioned. A news article titled “Strong Earthquake Occurs in Tangshan, Fengnan Area of Hebei Province—People in Disaster Areas Carry Forward the Revolutionary Spirit of Man's Conquest of Nature Under the Guidance of Chairman Mao's Revolutionary Line to Conduct Earthquake Relief” adhered to positive propaganda reporting and served as the “backbone” in people's fragile psyches, leaving a deep imprint of the era [5].

Public opinion supervision constitutes an important responsibility of news media and a crucial prerequisite for the healthy development of society. In the practice of environmental communication, media has incorporated attention to and reporting on environmental issues into the scope of public opinion supervision. On one hand, this exposes environmental exploiters and users to media and public scrutiny, allowing both media and the public to exercise supervisory rights, reducing the probability of backroom operations, and ensuring citizens' right to know. On the other hand, it places existing problems under public

pressure, urging relevant departments to address issues swiftly and fairly to satisfy public opinion. This enables environmental issues to accept both social and public opinion supervision, promoting transparency in environmental issues and using legal bottom lines and moral condemnation to jointly protect the environment. Although public opinion supervision cannot directly protect the environment, its effectiveness remains powerful and is essential for environmental communication and protection. On July 22, 1980, the *Workers' Daily* published the article "Bohai No. 2 Drilling Platform Capsizes During Towing," which sharply criticized the bureaucratic style of the Ministry of Petroleum Industry's main leaders, who used the name of "irresistible" natural disasters to cover up real contradictions and shirk major responsibilities, actually "white-washing" and "beautifying" a serious liability accident as a natural disaster. This article caused tremendous shock both domestically and internationally as a public opinion supervision report involving environmental communication. The *People's Daily* noted in its commentary: "The exposure of the Bohai No. 2 sinking incident aligns precisely with the wishes and needs of the broad masses, fully demonstrating its value function and producing unexpected social influence and effects" [6].

**4.2 Expressing Demands for Environmental Justice** Environmental justice refers to the "ought-to-be" conditions that nature and humanity demand from the environment, possessing legal justiciability and moral legitimacy [7]. In the traditional media era, channels for expressing environmental justice demands were relatively narrow, and desires for environmental justice were relatively indifferent. Environmental pollution and destruction were not yet so severe, and environmental and democratic consciousness had not truly formed. However, with the arrival of the new media era and continuously improving living standards, public consciousness has gradually awakened, and channels for expressing demands have gained new characteristics of freedom, convenience, openness, and inclusiveness in self-expression and viewpoint articulation. Consequently, environmental awareness has risen unprecedentedly, and demands for environmental justice have surged forth like a torrential river. The China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development noted in its 2013 report "Media and Public Participation Policy for Promoting Green Development in China" that public participation refers to "purposeful social action by stakeholders who are interested in environmental decisions or potentially affected by them, within the scope of their rights and obligations" [8]. In China, when environmental issues arise that affect people's interests, they express their demands to the government through their own means. For example, the 2009 Guangzhou Panyu waste incineration plant incident occurred when the government failed to disclose information to the public before site selection, leading to a series of conflicts triggered by public discussions on forums. The social action plans adopted by the masses basically involve using media platforms to express demands for environmental justice and participate in environmental protection.

*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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