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### Healthy Environmental Communication Practices

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## Healthy Environmental Communication Practices

### Abstract

The goal of my academic research is to highlight the importance of appropriate, scientifically correct and accurate communication when discussing Environmental Health. If we want to begin making changes to help our environment to become more sustainable and ultimately provide more years of existence we must stop the lies, propaganda and spread of misinformation. "Communication constructs a social world that is relational, collaborative, strategic, symbolic, and adaptive" (Learning Outcomes in Communication). The objective is to understand the discourse on environmental issues and try to use our communication discipline to engage and dissect this issue from a Communication perspective. Our standards when talking about environmental issues should be high due to the severity. Recognizing discourse and critically analyzing the messages we are consuming on climate change is important for our own interpretation. As for writers with any type of platform it is our responsibility to create accurate messages for audiences to absorb and make sense of. When communicating about the environment our ethical principles and values should be present. As a society it is very important to practice sharing knowledgeable information to provide truth. Political gain and financial gain should be stopped when compromising our environmental health. We can make a difference if we work to disrupt this discourse and use academia to help save our planet. It is unethical to destroy a whole civilization's environment for private financial gain. All humans will suffer the consequences of this discourse one day if we do not aim to be accurate and appropriate when communicating about environmental health.

### Key Words/Phrases

communication      environmental health      public discourse      rhetoric      media  
literacy      environmental justice

## **Communication on the Environment**

In a world that is so fast paced and constantly evolving we must adapt and work to maintain the environment we are given. As humans we are responsible for sharing useful information to help keep our environment livable. The reality and impact of environmental issues is multidimensional and affects our lives differently based on a number of aspects. The socio-environmental tensions create confusion and misdirection with action. There is no time for a political debate on this global crisis. Misrepresentation of environmental science is a socially constructed issue that needs attention in order to have environmental justice. In order for communication to be effective it needs to be truthful. This is a global issue that could compromise our entire ecosystem and planet. The way our news outlets communicate about climate change and the environment holds power and directs attention from their audience to focus in specific ways. These narratives aren't always correct and have a deeper intention and as a society we are entitled to the truth about our reality and environment's health. "Journalists must navigate not only the complex science around accelerating climate change, but also the politics, cultural shifts, technological innovations and commercial pressures that can influence publics' reception of such information" (Pinto, 2019). This statement explains the difficulty in reporting on climate change because of the associated factors and impacts around the world. It is politicized and the information is not purely scientific. Understanding the controversy might help us understand the reason and ways it is framed. It is controversial and authors "use emotion-laden terms, or emphasize politics over information that can help communities build resilience" (Pinto, 2019). The use of powerful language and instillment of fear to the public is just causing more harm. Therefore, the discourse I will focus on is politicized reporting on climate change as well as private profit from misinformation on environmental news. I will be explaining the importance of how we communicate about environmental science to the public. I will go in depth about ways to recognize discourse, critically analyze messages, and create appropriate messages when speaking about environmental issues. This research also finds

ways to embrace and articulate differences on the subject. Lastly, I would like to conclude with real solutions and ways to help this issue of communication discourse when speaking on the environment.

### **Communication Discourse and the Environment**

As a learning outcome of communication studies, recognizing the influence of public discourse is prominent in our society. The discussion on the environment within politics contains discourse. "As the environment takes an ever increasing role in our public discourses then it raises important questions about how these far-right understandings develop, how they are presented and how they react" (Jones, 2021). This study focused on public perceptions that are linked from political parties. It is important to note the way politicians engage with the rhetoric on the environment is intentional and they use the environmental space to create movements aligned with their interests. The influence of public discourse is important for our community and civic life on a global level. As a society we must exercise our human rights to advocate for change that could benefit our environment rather than private businesses. The environment is spoken about differently depending on who is involved and what is at stake. We can pay attention to which leaders are involved, other potential outside influences and where the information aligns and what ideas are attempted to be portrayed. One example of the influence of public discourse was during the Covid-19 pandemic. We saw how powerful communication is when it comes to the spread of information. The way people understood the pandemic differed and misconceptions caused chaotic responses from the public. Many people and businesses profited on the global crisis by controlling the narratives. This environmental communication discourse created many different problems. Other issues caused by this misinformation were confusing the population, alleviating concerns by spreading a "false sense of security and distrust in the government (Guilio, 2020). The clash between science and our society is understandably a consequence of private actors and unqualified health authorities spreading different information on global disasters. "The use of blogs in environmental discourse has gone

mainstream, with legacy media organizations, such as the *New York Times* and *the Guardian*" (Tandoc & Takahashi 2014). This discourse affects how people understand or misunderstand the environmental issues we are facing. The debate on global disasters must stop because it is ultimately prolonging change and disrupting scientific development models that could be in the works for our future. It is important for our community to understand the role of communication to reach a point where we can resolve the environmental challenges. The influence of public discourse is responsible for civic life, promoting human rights, and freedom. Scientific knowledge and specific experts can help begin new developments and proposals to avoid private discourse and information that is skewed to fit political narratives. Guilio explains "this process requires urgent efforts by the scientific community to improve the public communication of science, seeking scientific dissemination that favors a reflective, interrogative and problematizing perspective about the scientific knowledge we produce, and the social and cultural conditions and implications of Science and Technology." It is important to have professional environmental institutions involved in the conversations and plans to help this crisis.

### **Meanings and Messages**

As an audience it is also important to look deeper into the meanings and critically analyze messages. This is also a learning outcome #5 of communication majors, to critically identify meanings within messages. We are in charge of our own education and we can practice researching sources, owners, relationships and understanding how media is a tool for private corporations and individuals. Being able to analyze and understand information through active listening and identifying meanings in messages will help our understanding be more accurate. Practicing media literacy will be useful on any topic and especially controversial topics such as climate change and global warming. Looking at socioeconomic influence, education, community influence and any relevant information-seeking will help expand our knowledge and bring awareness to influential factors on why messages are being stated a specific way. We might not

have the natural exposure to information but having a sense of environmental literacy and environmental justice can help us piece together the bigger picture. “Understanding how media industries, journalists, advertisers, public relations professionals, academics, governments, and scientists communicate climate change is of utmost importance. Interdisciplinary research offers a critical, comparative view of twenty-first century communication about climate change and provides critical examinations of the interfaces of mediated expressions communicated to the public through news reports, artistic expressions, scholarly work, and examinations of voice and policy (Shumow & Gutsche, 2016). We can ask ourselves, who might be benefiting from this? Who owns this corporation and what is their involvement with the narrative? What meanings are embedded in these messages? What type of publication is sharing this? Recognizing the influence of messages is an extremely powerful tool to discover intentions and mediated messages. In our modern environment we have various sources of information so it is important to evaluate credibility. “One consequence of the increased information abundance is the accompanying issue of finding the best information to meet one's needs from among the enhanced number of possible information providers. In many cases this involves locating the most credible information” (Metzger & Flanagin (2013). Credible information consists of research in the field as well as considering the source and message being shared. There is accessible scientific evidence and knowledge about our environment that contains legitimacy. Social groups and powerful figures might have the funds to control the narrative but before believing in the rhetoric we can look for the process of how they obtained this information. It might be difficult to find this information but the direction of our research might show patterns and hidden agendas by these narratives. On the other hand we can reconstruct this issue by creating appropriate messages about the environment for positive change.

### **Information Styling on the Environment**

Environmental health is extremely important and the amount of information available could be overwhelming to summarize. When talking about such an important issue we must

carefully create messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context. It is evident that environmental discourse uses specific information in a specific context to portray an intended image. Locating relevant and useful information to specific goals, audiences, purposes and contexts will build an appropriate message. Selecting modalities and technologies to accomplish communicative goals will also present messages the best way possible. Different audiences need different styles and adjustments to be able to be processed accurately. This process is also described as the learning outcome #4 for communication majors. Accomplishing communicative goals is important to stay on track with information and accuracy for an audience. The important topic of environmental issues should be critically adjusted before sending messages to an audience. These messages that concern the environment, must focus with information and knowledge about the issue while using carefully selected sources. Effective messaging can inspire public support for environmental policies and pressure to take appropriate measures to help solve the issue. All of these key components make a statement valid. There is scientific evidence and knowledge available to support solutions to environmental issues. The way this information is understood and interpreted is crucial.

### **Ethics and the Environment**

Explaining this global issue from an ethical communication perspective can advocate a course of action that. The process of applying ethical communication principles and practices involves identifying ethical perspectives. This learning outcome is very important to compare and propose solutions that include ethical elements of a communication situation. There are different intentions and being able to articulate when solutions aren't ethical is extremely important. Our world isn't one sided, we must respect all the aspects and ask ourselves if we are doing the right thing. When spreading information about our natural environment we must be reasonable and realize this is all we have. Making ethical decisions is vital for our future and finding reasonable solutions. An example of ethical discourse on environmental communication was Trump's tweets about climate change. "Environmental protection and economic prosperity

go hand in hand” Trump said. He added “A strong market economy is essential to protecting our critical natural resources and fostering a legacy of conservation. My administration is committed to being effective stewards of our environment while encouraging opportunities for American workers and their families.” (Pinto, 2019)” His framework is unethical; he uses the framework of protecting our natural resources but really he helps “fund the world’s largest greenhouse gas polluters” (Pinto, 2019). Political leaders will also use lobbyists to sit and fight for policies that only profit private right wing interest groups. The lobbyists are used to gain credibility and control political movements. This is unethical and impacts our environment negatively. We are being stirred further from effective solutions to our environment’s health. It is risking more people’s lives to lie and stand by unethical choices. We survive in this environment, so to lie and profit on destroying it is extremely unethical.

We can grow as a society if we practice looking deeper into information and narratives on any topic presented towards us. Understanding the potential motives and reasonings behind ideas and perspectives can open conversations to be bigger and more understanding of one another. We can then demonstrate being self aware, identify challenges, evaluate ethical solutions and resolve the issues. This process of looking for potential influences will help us articulate our communication goals more effectively. This complex issue with mediated messages tells us we must continue to “deconstruct and reconstruct existing dynamics in the direction of strengthening an agenda of advancement for sustainable practices, in which new dialogues between science and society are built” (Giulio, 2020). Although this is difficult it could strengthen our conversations and space for talking about environmental issues. Encouraging dialogue and thoughtful knowledge can benefit our future more than controlling narratives to gain profit. Environmental professionals who study and do research should be involved in our publications of information. Rather than creating false narratives and division in perspectives I truly think we can embrace the differences and learn from each other. Knowledge can be built from different experts to propose new developments. Communication on the topic of our

environment should be transparent, accurate and factual. Articulating connections in the information we have and different perspectives can help us come to more sensible solutions. The future of our environment depends on efficient communication on the topic.

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**LOC's:**

LOC #2 Employ Communication Theories, Perspectives, Principles, and Concepts

LOC #4 Create Messages Appropriate to the Audience, Purpose, and Context

LOC #5 Critically Analyze Messages

LOC #7 Apply Ethical Communication Principles and Practices

LOC #9 Influence Public Discourse