

A Qualitative Study of Newspaper Discourse and Online Discussions of Climate Change in China

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Abstract : Climate change is one of the most crucial issues of this era, with contentious debates on it among scholars. But there are sparse studies on climate change discourse in China. Including China in the study of climate change is essential for a sociological understanding of climate change. China -- as a developing country and an essential player in tackling climate change -- offers an ideal case for studying climate change for scholars moving beyond developed countries and enriching their understandings of climate change by including diverse social settings. This project contrasts the macro- and micro-level understandings of climate change in China, which helps scholars move beyond a focus on climate skepticism and denialism and enriches sociology of climate change knowledge. The macro-level understanding of climate change is obtained by analyzing over 4,000 newspaper articles from various official outlets in China. State-controlled newspapers play an essential role in transmitting essential and high-quality information and promoting broader public understanding of climate change and its anthropogenic nature. Thus, newspaper articles can be seen as tools employed by governments to mobilize the public in terms of supporting the development of a strategy shift from economy-growth to an ecological civilization. However, media is just one of the significant factors influencing an individual's climate change concern. Extreme weather events, access to accurate scientific information, elite cues, and movement/countermovement advocacy influence an individual's perceptions of climate change. Hence, there are differences in the ways that both newspaper articles and the public frame the issues. The online forum is an informative channel for scholars to understand the public's opinion. The micro-level data comes from Zhihu, which is China's equivalence of Quora. Users can propose, answer, and comment on questions. This project analyzes the questions related to climate change which have over 20 answers. By open-coding both the macro- and micro-level data, this project will depict the differences between ideology as presented in government-controlled newspapers and how people talk and act with respect to climate change in cyberspace, which may provide an idea about any existing disconnect in public behavior and their willingness to change daily activities to facilitate a greener society. The contemporary Yellow Vest protests in France illustrate that the large gap between governmental policies of climate change mitigation and the public's understanding may lead to social movement activity and social instability. Effective environmental policy is impossible without the public's support. Finding existing gaps in understanding may help policy-makers develop effective ways of framing climate change and obtain more supporters of climate change related policies. Overall, this qualitative project provides answers to the following research questions: 1) How do different state-controlled newspapers transmit their ideology on climate change to the public and in what ways? 2) How do individuals frame climate change online? 3) What are the differences between newspapers' framing and individual's framing?

Keywords : climate change, China, framing theory, media, public's climate change concern

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