



Research article

The Influence of Social Media on Environmental News Reporting and Public Discourse in China

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ABSTRACT

The digital revolution has reshaped environmental news coverage and public discourse in China, particularly with the rise of social media platforms. This study investigates the influence of social media on environmental news coverage and public discourse in China. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, content analysis and in-depth interviews were conducted to analyze environmental news coverage across social media platforms. Quantitative data analysis revealed significant differences between traditional print media and social media in terms of source attribution, framing, and tone of environmental news coverage. Social media platforms exhibited a higher emphasis on environmental threats, a more positive tone, and a greater reliance on sources such as environmental NGOs and academia. Qualitative data analysis provided insights into the amplification of environmental issues, the diversification of voices, and the interactive engagement facilitated by social media platforms. The findings highlight the transformative role of social media in environmental communication, empowering real-time dissemination, amplifying diverse perspectives, and fostering public engagement. However, challenges such as misinformation and government regulations underscore the need for critical evaluation and media literacy initiatives. This study contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape of environmental journalism and public discourse in China, providing valuable insights for policymakers, journalists, and environmental advocates. Future research should continue to explore the interplay between social media and traditional media, addressing emerging challenges and opportunities in the digital age.

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Introduction

The rapid digitalization of information dissemination in the 21st century has fundamentally transformed the landscape of news coverage and public discourse worldwide. This transformation is particularly evident in the context of environmental news coverage in China, where the shift from traditional print media to digital platforms, especially social media, has become a significant phenomenon. Social media platforms, characterized by their vast reach and interactive nature, are increasingly influencing how environmental issues are reported and discussed, thereby playing a crucial role in shaping public awareness and attitudes towards environmental protection. Historically, print media in China has been the primary source of information for

the public. Newspapers and magazines provided detailed and authoritative reports on various issues, including environmental concerns. However, the advent of the internet and the proliferation of digital devices have drastically altered the media consumption habits of the Chinese populace. According to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), as of 2023, there were over 1 billion internet users in China, with a significant proportion engaging with social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin (CNNIC, 2023). This shift from print to pixels has profound implications for environmental journalism and public discourse.

Social media's role in environmental news coverage can be examined through its capabilities in real-time

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information dissemination, citizen journalism, and fostering public engagement. Unlike traditional print media, which is limited by publication schedules and physical distribution, social media platforms allow for instantaneous sharing of news and information. This immediacy is crucial during environmental crises, such as natural disasters or pollution incidents, where timely updates can aid in raising awareness and mobilizing public response. For instance, during the 2013 smog crisis in Beijing, social media played a pivotal role in informing the public about air quality levels and health precautions, often outpacing official channels (Sina Weibo, 2013). Furthermore, social media facilitates a form of citizen journalism that empowers individuals to report and share environmental issues from their immediate surroundings. This grassroots level of reporting can uncover environmental problems that might be overlooked or underreported by mainstream media. Studies have shown that citizen-generated content on social media has led to increased visibility of local environmental issues and has pressured authorities to take action (Tong, 2020). For example, viral posts and videos on platforms like Weibo and WeChat have highlighted issues such as illegal waste dumping and deforestation, prompting official investigations and remedial measures.

In addition to enhancing the reach and immediacy of environmental news, social media also promotes public engagement and discourse. Interactive features such as comments, likes, and shares enable users to participate in discussions, express their opinions, and mobilize collective action. This participatory nature of social media can lead to a more informed and active citizenry, capable of advocating for environmental policies and practices. Research indicates that social media campaigns and discussions have been instrumental in raising environmental awareness and shaping public perceptions in China (Zhang & Skoric, 2018). The "Clean Air Action" campaign on WeChat, for instance, successfully engaged millions of users in discussions about air pollution and its health impacts, influencing public opinion and policy debates. However, the influence of social media on environmental news coverage is not without challenges. The prevalence of misinformation and the echo chamber effect, where users are exposed primarily to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, can distort public understanding of environmental issues (Zhou & Moy, 2007). Additionally, the Chinese government's stringent internet regulations and censorship policies pose significant constraints on the free flow of information, affecting the scope and accuracy of environmental reporting on social media (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013). Despite these challenges, the role of social media in shaping environmental awareness and discourse in China remains significant.

The transition from print to digital media, epitomized by the rise of social media platforms, has markedly influenced environmental news coverage and public discourse in China. By enabling real-time information dissemination, fostering citizen journalism, and promoting public engagement, social media has become a powerful tool in raising environmental awareness and driving collective action. Understanding the dynamics of this transformation is crucial for comprehending the contemporary landscape of environmental journalism and public discourse in China. Future research should

continue to explore the interplay between traditional and digital media in this context, considering both the opportunities and challenges posed by this digital shift.

The justification for this study lies in the critical need to understand the evolving dynamics of environmental news coverage in the digital age, particularly in a rapidly developing country like China where environmental issues are both urgent and complex. The traditional print media, while authoritative, often faces limitations in reach and timeliness. In contrast, social media platforms have demonstrated unparalleled potential in swiftly disseminating information and engaging the public, which can significantly impact environmental awareness and activism. This study aims to bridge the gap in existing literature by systematically examining how social media influences environmental news coverage and public discourse, juxtaposed with the role of traditional print media. The primary objectives of this research are to analyze the nature and extent of environmental reporting on social media compared to print media, assess the impact of social media on public engagement and awareness regarding environmental issues, and explore the challenges and opportunities presented by the integration of social media into environmental journalism. By achieving these objectives, the study seeks to provide comprehensive insights into the transformative role of social media in shaping environmental discourse in China, thereby informing policy makers, journalists, and environmental advocates about the most effective strategies for leveraging digital platforms to promote environmental sustainability. The importance of studying the Chinese context in this research is multifaceted. China's rapid digitalization, particularly through social media platforms like WeChat and Weibo, has revolutionized environmental news dissemination and public engagement. With over 1 billion internet users, these platforms play a pivotal role in real-time reporting and citizen journalism, crucial during environmental crises (CNNIC, 2023). Moreover, China's stringent internet regulations influence the scope and accuracy of environmental reporting (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013). Understanding these dynamics not only illuminates China's unique media landscape but also provides insights applicable to other contexts, like Bangladesh, facing similar environmental challenges.

Research Gap

This study aims to fill a critical void in the existing literature on environmental news coverage in China. Despite growing interest in how social media influences public awareness and engagement with environmental issues, there remains a dearth of systematic analyses comparing the nature and impact of environmental reporting across traditional print media and social media platforms in China. Existing studies often focus on either traditional media or social media separately, failing to comprehensively examine their comparative roles and effects in environmental communication (Ferdous & Khatun, 2020; Gao & Zhang, 2021; Tong, 2020; Wang & Li, 2020). This study addresses this gap by employing a mixed-methods approach to systematically analyze and compare environmental news coverage between People's Daily and China Daily (representative traditional print media) and Weibo and WeChat (prominent social media platforms). By integrating quantitative content analysis

with qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, this study not only explores differences in source attribution, framing, and tone of environmental reporting but also investigates how these mediums foster public engagement and influence policy debates (Zhang & Skoric, 2018; Yang & Liu, 2019).

Understanding these dynamics is crucial in the context of China's rapidly evolving media landscape, where digital platforms are reshaping the dissemination and reception of environmental information. By elucidating these interactions, the study provides actionable insights for policymakers, journalists, and environmental advocates to effectively utilize digital platforms for enhancing environmental awareness and sustainability efforts.

Literature Review

The transformation from print media to digital platforms, particularly social media, has fundamentally altered the dynamics of news coverage and public discourse globally. This shift is significantly observed in the domain of environmental journalism in China, where social media platforms have become pivotal in shaping environmental awareness and influencing public engagement. A growing body of literature explores the role of social media in environmental communication, highlighting its impact on both the dissemination of information and public participation. Traditional print media has long been the cornerstone of environmental news coverage, providing in-depth and investigative reports on environmental issues. Print media's structured and detailed approach to reporting has historically contributed to public awareness and policy discussions (Ferdous & Khatun, 2020). However, the digital revolution has disrupted this traditional model, introducing new platforms for information dissemination that are faster and more interactive. Social media, in particular, has emerged as a crucial tool for spreading environmental awareness, offering unique advantages over print media.

Social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin in China enable real-time dissemination of environmental news, which is essential during environmental crises. Research by Gao and Zhang (2021) indicates that social media's immediacy allows for timely updates and widespread dissemination of information, often outpacing traditional media. During the 2013 Beijing smog crisis, social media played a vital role in informing the public about air quality levels and health precautions, demonstrating its potential to enhance public awareness during emergencies (Sina Weibo, 2013). Moreover, social media's interactive nature fosters greater public engagement compared to traditional print media. Platforms like Weibo and WeChat enable users to participate in discussions, share opinions, and mobilize collective action, thereby contributing to a more informed and active citizenry. According to Tong (2020), the participatory features of social media have been instrumental in raising environmental awareness and facilitating public discourse on environmental issues. Social media campaigns, such as the "Clean Air Action" on WeChat, have successfully engaged millions of users, influencing public opinion and policy debates.

The rise of citizen journalism on social media also plays a crucial role in environmental reporting. Ordinary

citizens can report local environmental issues, providing a grassroots perspective that is often missing in mainstream media coverage. This form of journalism empowers individuals to bring attention to environmental problems in their communities, which can prompt official investigations and actions. Yang and Liu (2019) found that citizen-generated content on platforms like Weibo has led to increased visibility of local environmental issues, highlighting social media's role in amplifying voices that might otherwise be unheard. However, the interaction between social media and traditional print media is complex and multifaceted. While social media offers speed and interactivity, print media provides depth and reliability. Studies suggest that the two mediums can complement each other, with social media often serving as a source of real-time updates and print media providing detailed analysis and context. This synergy is crucial for comprehensive environmental reporting. For instance, Wang and Li (2020) argue that effective environmental communication requires the integration of both print and digital media to ensure accurate and timely information dissemination.

Despite its advantages, the influence of social media on environmental news coverage is not without challenges. The prevalence of misinformation and the echo chamber effect, where users are exposed primarily to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, can distort public understanding of environmental issues (Zhou & Moy, 2007). Additionally, the Chinese government's internet regulations and censorship policies pose significant constraints on the free flow of information, affecting the scope and accuracy of environmental reporting on social media (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013). These challenges highlight the need for critical evaluation of the content disseminated on social media platforms and underscore the importance of reliable print media in providing verified information.

The shift from print to digital media, especially social media, has significantly influenced environmental news coverage and public discourse in China. Social media platforms facilitate real-time information dissemination, enhance public engagement, and promote citizen journalism, thereby playing a crucial role in raising environmental awareness. However, the interaction between social media and traditional print media remains complex, with each medium offering unique strengths and facing specific challenges. Understanding this interplay is essential for comprehending the contemporary landscape of environmental journalism in China and developing strategies for effective environmental communication. Future research should continue to explore this dynamic relationship, considering the evolving nature of media consumption and the ongoing digital transformation.

Theoretical Framework: Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory Uses and Gratifications theory posits that individuals actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs and desires, thereby playing an active role in selecting and interpreting media content (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). This theory has been adapted to explain how audiences engage with social media platforms, where users are not passive consumers

but active participants who contribute to and shape content (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

Application to Social Media and Environmental News Coverage

Social media platforms have transformed the landscape of environmental news dissemination and public discourse in China. Users no longer solely rely on traditional print media for information but actively participate in creating and sharing environmental news content on platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin. This phenomenon necessitates a nuanced examination of how social media influences environmental news coverage and public discourse.

Users turn to social media for environmental news to satisfy informational needs and to share relevant content with their networks. Unlike traditional media, social media enables rapid dissemination of news and facilitates immediate responses from users (Huang, 2020). Social media platforms facilitate two-way communication, allowing users to engage directly with environmental news content through comments, likes, and shares. This interactive nature amplifies the reach and impact of environmental messages beyond traditional media boundaries (Zhao & Jiang, 2019).

While traditional media still plays a significant role in setting the agenda for environmental issues, social media users contribute to agenda setting by highlighting specific environmental topics through their posts and interactions. The framing of environmental news on social media is influenced not only by professional journalists but also by ordinary users who provide diverse perspectives and interpretations (Han & Chan, 2017). Social media platforms serve as virtual public spheres where discussions on environmental issues unfold. Users engage in debates, express opinions, and mobilize collective actions, thereby influencing public discourse and policy agendas related to environmental conservation (Chen & Zhang, 2021).

To clarify the conceptual misunderstanding, it is crucial to differentiate between news coverage in traditional media and user-generated content on social media. While the study examines both, it should explicitly delineate the distinct roles and influences of these two types of media in shaping environmental narratives in China. In summary, integrating Uses and Gratifications theory provides a comprehensive framework to analyze how social media influences environmental news coverage and public discourse in China. By understanding users' motives and behaviors on social media platforms, this theoretical approach enhances our comprehension of the evolving dynamics between media consumption, environmental awareness, and public engagement.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do differences in source attribution, framing, and tone of environmental news coverage between traditional print media and social media platforms influence public perception and awareness of environmental issues in China?

RQ 2: How do social media platforms facilitate the amplification of environmental issues, diversification of voices, and interactive engagement in China, and what are the implications for public discourse and policy advocacy?

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis and in-depth interviews to examine the influence of social media on environmental news coverage and public discourse in China.

Content Analysis

The content analysis focuses on comparing environmental news coverage across social media platforms and traditional print media. The sample includes articles and posts from January 2023 to December 2023. The researchers selected two major Chinese newspapers, People's Daily and China Daily, based on their national circulation, influence, and reputation as leading state-run media outlets. For social media, Weibo and WeChat were chosen due to their widespread usage and prominence in China's social media landscape. Weibo, often compared to Twitter, is known for its public discussions, while WeChat combines social networking with messaging, widely used for sharing news and personal updates.

For print media, we collected articles from the digital archives of the selected newspapers using keywords such as "environment," "pollution," "climate change," and "sustainability." For social media, we used the same keywords to gather posts, ensuring a representative sample by selecting entries with high engagement metrics (likes, shares, and comments). The final dataset includes 500 print articles and 1,000 social media posts.

The researchers analyzed the content using a coding scheme developed based on previous studies, focusing on themes such as environmental issues, sources of information, framing, tone, and call-to-action. Two coders independently coded the content, achieving an inter-coder reliability of 0.85, indicating a high level of agreement.

In-depth Interviews

To complement the content analysis, we conducted 20 in-depth interviews with journalists, environmental activists, and social media influencers in China. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives. Journalists were chosen from various media outlets to represent different types of coverage. Environmental activists were selected based on their active involvement in environmental advocacy, and social media influencers were chosen based on their significant following and engagement in environmental topics. The selection aimed to include individuals with expertise and substantial influence in their respective fields.

Interviews were semi-structured, lasting approximately 60 minutes each. Questions explored the participants' views on the role of social media in shaping environmental awareness, the interaction between social media and traditional print media, and the perceived impact on public discourse and policy. Interviews were conducted in Mandarin, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. We identified recurring themes and patterns related to the dissemination of environmental information and the influence of social media on public opinion and policy advocacy. NVivo software was used to assist in coding and organizing qualitative data. The study was approved by the university's ethics committee. All participants provided informed consent, and data confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

By integrating content analysis with qualitative insights from interviews, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape of environmental news coverage in China. The in-depth interviews specially contribute to understanding public discourse by revealing how key communicators perceive and engage with the content,

thereby influencing wider societal discussions. These interviews capture personal narratives and expert opinions that elucidate how public discourse is shaped and steered by both traditional and new media platforms, bridging the gap between data-driven analysis and real-world communicative practices.

Sampling Justification

The selection of People's Daily and China Daily aimed to reflect dominant state-run media voices. Weibo and WeChat were chosen for their prevalence and influence in Chinese social media. Purposive sampling ensured diverse perspectives in interviews, enriching the study's insights.

Results

Quantitative Data Analysis

The content analysis involved quantifying various aspects of environmental news coverage across traditional print media and social media platforms. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize key findings regarding the frequency, source attribution, framing, and tone of the content. Table 1 presents the distribution of environmental news coverage across the selected print and social media platforms.

Table 1: Distribution of Environmental News Coverage Across Media Platforms

Media Platform	Total Articles/Posts
People's Daily	250
China Daily	250
Weibo	500
WeChat	500
Total	1,500

As shown in Table 1, the dataset comprised 500 articles/posts from each traditional print media outlet (People's Daily and China Daily) and 1,000 entries from each social media platform (Weibo and

WeChat), totaling 1,500 articles/posts. Table 2 illustrates the distribution of source attribution in environmental news coverage across print and social media.

Table 2: Distribution of Source Attribution in Environmental News Coverage

Source Type	People's Daily (%)	China Daily (%)	Weibo (%)	WeChat (%)
Government	30	25	15	20
Environmental NGOs	20	15	25	30
Academia	15	20	20	15
Industry	10	10	10	10
Other Media	5	5	5	5
Uncited	20	25	25	20

As depicted in Table 2, there are variations in source attribution across different media platforms. While government sources are more prevalent in traditional print media, environmental NGOs and

academia are relatively more prominent on social media platforms. Table 3 summarizes the framing of environmental news coverage in terms of thematic emphasis across print and social media.

Table 3: Framing of Environmental News Across Media Platforms

Framing Type	People's Daily (%)	China Daily (%)	Weibo (%)	WeChat (%)
Environmental Threat	35	40	45	50
Technological Solutions	25	20	20	15
Policy Advocacy	20	15	10	10
Economic Impact	10	10	10	10
Lifestyle Choices	5	5	5	5
Other	5	10	10	10

As illustrated in Table 3, environmental threats are the most frequently emphasized theme across all media platforms, with social media platforms displaying a slightly higher emphasis compared to traditional print

media. Table 4 outlines the distribution of tone in environmental news coverage across print and social media

Table 4: Distribution of Tone in Environmental News Coverage

Tone Type	People's Daily (%)	China Daily (%)	Weibo (%)	WeChat (%)
Positive	20	25	35	40
Neutral	60	55	50	45
Negative	20	20	15	15

As shown in Table 4, neutral tones dominate environmental news coverage across all media platforms, with social media platforms displaying a slightly higher proportion of positive tones compared to traditional print media.

To answer the first research question and further explore the differences in environmental news coverage between traditional print media and social media platforms, chi-square tests were conducted to assess the statistical significance of the observed differences in source attribution, framing, and tone. Chi-square tests revealed significant differences in source attribution between traditional print media and social media platforms ($\chi^2 = 38.72$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$). Specifically, environmental NGOs and academia were cited more frequently on social media platforms compared to traditional print media, whereas government sources were more prevalent in traditional print media.

Significant differences in framing were observed between traditional print media and social media platforms ($\chi^2 = 27.85$, $df = 5$, $p < 0.001$). Environmental threats were emphasized more prominently on social media platforms, while traditional print media exhibited a relatively higher emphasis on technological solutions and policy advocacy. Chi-square tests indicated significant differences in the tone of environmental news coverage between traditional print media and social media platforms ($\chi^2 = 18.63$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$). Social media platforms displayed a higher proportion of positive tones compared to traditional print media.

The quantitative analysis provides valuable insights into the differences in environmental news coverage between traditional print media and social media platforms in China. The findings suggest that social media platforms tend to rely more heavily on

environmental NGOs and academia as information sources, emphasize environmental threats, and adopt a more positive tone compared to traditional print media. These differences highlight the evolving landscape of environmental communication and the unique role of social media in shaping public discourse and awareness of environmental issues.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis involved thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with journalists, environmental activists, and social media influencers in China. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the role of social media in shaping environmental awareness, the interaction between social media and traditional print media, and the perceived impact on public discourse and policy advocacy.

Identified Themes

Amplification of Environmental Issues

Participants highlighted the role of social media platforms in amplifying environmental issues and increasing public awareness. They noted that social media enables rapid dissemination of environmental news and information, reaching a diverse audience beyond the readership of traditional print media. Participants emphasized the power of social media in mobilizing public attention and engagement around environmental issues, facilitating grassroots activism and citizen journalism.

Diversification of Voices

Participants observed a diversification of voices in environmental discourse facilitated by social media platforms. They noted that social media allows for the inclusion of marginalized perspectives, including voices from grassroots activists, citizen scientists, and

affected communities. Participants highlighted the democratizing effect of social media, enabling individuals and organizations to bypass traditional gatekeepers and contribute to environmental discussions directly.

Interactive Engagement

Participants highlighted the interactive nature of social media platforms, which facilitate two-way communication and dialogue between content creators and audiences. They noted that social media enables real-time feedback, discussion, and collaboration among users, fostering a sense of community and collective action around environmental issues. Participants emphasized the importance of fostering constructive dialogue and information sharing on social media platforms to enhance environmental literacy and collective problem-solving.

Challenges of Misinformation

Despite the potential benefits of social media, participants also discussed the challenges posed by misinformation and sensationalism. They noted that social media platforms may amplify rumors, conspiracy theories, and false information, undermining the credibility of environmental news and hindering informed decision-making. Participants emphasized the need for media literacy and critical thinking skills to navigate the complex landscape of information on social media platforms.

Collaborative Dynamics with Traditional Media

Participants highlighted the complementary relationship between social media and traditional print media in shaping environmental discourse. They noted that social media often serves as a catalyst for traditional media coverage, with stories and discussions originating on social media platforms being picked up by mainstream news outlets. Participants emphasized the importance of collaboration between journalists, influencers, and activists across different media platforms to amplify environmental messages and foster meaningful change.

To answer the second research question, the qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of social media's influence on environmental discourse in China. By amplifying environmental issues, diversifying voices, and facilitating interactive engagement, social media platforms play a significant role in shaping public awareness and mobilizing collective action around environmental challenges. However, addressing the challenges of misinformation and leveraging collaborative dynamics with traditional media are essential for harnessing the full potential of social media as a tool for environmental communication and advocacy.

Discussion

The study explored the evolving landscape of environmental news coverage in China, focusing on the transformative impact of social media alongside

traditional print media. This discussion synthesizes findings from the literature review, theoretical framework, quantitative data analysis, and qualitative thematic analysis to illuminate the dynamic interplay between these media platforms in shaping public awareness and discourse on environmental issues.

The transformation from traditional print media to digital platforms, particularly social media, has revolutionized environmental journalism globally (Ferdous & Khatun, 2020). Social media platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin have emerged as crucial channels for real-time dissemination of environmental news and fostering public engagement (Gao & Zhang, 2021). These platforms facilitate interactive communication, citizen journalism, and rapid response capabilities during environmental crises (Sina Weibo, 2013; Tong, 2020). However, alongside their benefits, social media also faces challenges such as misinformation and governmental censorship, impacting the reliability and scope of environmental reporting (Zhou & Moy, 2007; King et al., 2013).

Applying Uses and Gratifications Theory to social media in environmental communication highlights how users actively seek, create, and share content to fulfill specific needs, influencing the agenda-setting process and public discourse (Katz et al., 1973; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). This framework underscores the participatory nature of social media, where users not only consume but also contribute to environmental narratives, amplifying diverse voices and perspectives (Han & Chan, 2017).

The quantitative analysis revealed significant differences in environmental news coverage between traditional print media and social media platforms. Social media platforms exhibited a higher reliance on sources from environmental NGOs and academia, emphasizing environmental threats and adopting a more positive tone compared to traditional print media (see Table 1-4). These findings indicate that social media plays a distinct role in agenda setting and framing environmental issues, often complementing the depth of analysis provided by traditional print media.

Qualitative thematic analysis further illuminated the multifaceted impact of social media on environmental discourse in China.

Participants highlighted social media's role in amplifying environmental issues, diversifying voices, and fostering interactive engagement among users (see Identified Themes section). Despite its benefits, participants also acknowledged challenges such as misinformation and the need for collaboration with traditional media to ensure accurate and balanced reporting.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings underscores the complex and evolving nature of environmental communication in China. Social media platforms enhance accessibility and immediacy in environmental news dissemination, empowering users to engage actively and mobilize around environmental causes. However, these platforms also require careful management to mitigate the spread of

misinformation and ensure the credibility of environmental reporting.

This study contributes to our understanding of how social media complements and challenges traditional print media in environmental journalism. Future research should continue exploring the evolving dynamics of media consumption and its implications for environmental awareness and policy advocacy. Practically, media professionals and policymakers should collaborate to enhance media literacy, promote responsible reporting practices, and leverage the strengths of both traditional and social media for effective environmental communication.

In summary, the study emphasizes the transformative impact of social media on environmental news coverage and public discourse in China. By amplifying voices, enhancing engagement, and expanding the reach of environmental narratives, social media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping public awareness and fostering collective action. However, addressing challenges such as misinformation and ensuring collaborative dynamics with traditional media are crucial for maximizing the potential of media in environmental communication. Limitations of the study include the focus on a specific geographical context (China) and the rapidly evolving nature of digital media, which may influence findings over time. Future research could explore comparative studies across different regions or analyze longitudinal trends in media coverage to provide deeper insights into the evolving role of media in environmental communication.

Conclusion

The rapid evolution of media landscapes, propelled by the digital revolution, has reshaped environmental news coverage and public discourse in China. This study has delved into the transformative influence of social media on these domains, elucidating the multifaceted dynamics at play. By integrating insights from the literature review, quantitative data analysis, and qualitative data analysis, this research offers a comprehensive understanding of how social media platforms are influencing environmental awareness and public engagement. Social media platforms have emerged as powerful vehicles for disseminating environmental information in real-time, amplifying awareness, and mobilizing action. The immediacy and interactivity of platforms like Weibo and WeChat facilitate swift dissemination of news, particularly during environmental crises. By providing timely updates and fostering citizen journalism, social media platforms empower individuals to engage with environmental issues directly, contributing to a more informed and responsive public.

One of the key findings of this study is the diversification of voices in environmental discourse facilitated by social media platforms. Citizen journalists, grassroots activists, and marginalized communities find spaces for expression and advocacy on platforms like Weibo and WeChat, supplementing mainstream media coverage. This democratization of environmental reporting enriches public discourse, uncovering local issues and fostering inclusive dialogue that reflects the diversity of perspectives and experiences. The interplay between social media and traditional print media presents both synergies and challenges. While social media platforms offer speed and accessibility, traditional print media provides depth and reliability. The integration of both mediums is essential for comprehensive environmental reporting, ensuring balanced and nuanced coverage. However, challenges such as misinformation and government regulations underscore the need for critical evaluation and media literacy initiatives to navigate the digital landscape effectively.

As China continues its digital transformation, understanding the evolving dynamics of environmental journalism and public discourse remains imperative. Future research should delve deeper into the interplay between social media and traditional media, exploring emerging platforms and evolving communication trends. Efforts to address challenges such as misinformation and censorship will be essential for fostering a more transparent and informed public discourse on environmental issues. The transition from print to pixels has ushered in a new era of environmental communication in China, characterized by the pervasive influence of social media platforms. By harnessing the power of real-time dissemination, amplifying diverse voices, and fostering interactive engagement, social media platforms are shaping public awareness and driving collective action towards environmental sustainability. Understanding and navigating these dynamics will be pivotal for advancing environmental journalism and advocacy in the digital age.

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Conflict of Interest

None of the authors present any conflicts of interest.

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