

Study on the Action Path of Environmental Communication in Urban Residents' Residential Choice Under the Mediation of Policy Perception

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Abstract

This paper studies the effect of environmental communication on the choice of place for urban residents through policy perception. It will not provide new empirical data, but it will collect related studies on environmental media coverage, risk communication and residential location choices to build a conceptual action plan. First, this paper will introduce how agenda-setting and framing in environmental journalism affect public attention and risk perception; then, it will examine the connection between these perceptions and institutional trust and awareness of environmental and housing policies. Based on research into air pollution perception, information consumption behaviour and preferences for environmental amenities in cities, this paper puts forward that policy perception may moderate the relationship between environmental communication and residents' evaluations of neighbourhood quality, environmental justice and future risk. The new system thinks that the messages of environmental responsibility released by the government and local authorities will affect people's decisions to move. Therefore, in the Design of communication strategies and urban policies, we need to take a mediating path; we should not focus too much on the effect of media messages and recognise that they also shape people's perceptions of environmental quality and living conditions.

Keywords

Environmental communication; policy perception; risk perception; urban residential choice; environmental amenities; environmental justice.

1. Introduction

All sorts of reasons affect the choice of living area for city dwellers, such as housing costs, convenience, social life and the environment in which they live. Recently, due to rapid urbanisation and an increasing number of people who are aware of problems such as air pollution, climate risks and a lack of green spaces, more people have begun to choose homes based on environmental factors.

At the same time, the main sources of information and images for urban environments have also included environmental communication in the form of news media, social media, etc. Environmental journalism and public communication campaigns can raise public awareness of environmental problems and policies, motivate people to alter their living environments, etc.

This paper investigates the concept of action paths for environmental communication in affecting the housing decisions of urban residents by changing their perceptions of policy. No new empirical data are added; rather, existing studies on media effects and environmental risk perception in residential location selection are linked to build a system of literature.

2. Environmental Communication, Agenda-Setting and Risk Perception

Most studies on the media effects of environmental communication have focused on the agenda-setting and framing effects. Estes' study of public opinion, media and environmental policy shows how the direction of environmental policy can be maintained even when it is out of step with public wishes, partly by means of media coverage structures attention and frames conflicts between environmental protection and economic interests [1]. Anderson believes that the media have also had some effect in setting the political agenda and raising public awareness of climate change through the spread of specific narratives or uncertainties [2].

Research on environmental journalism has shown that media representations are not objective reflections of the environment but constructed narratives that select certain problems, people and causes [3]. Visual environmental communication can focus on particular areas, pollution accidents or vulnerable groups to modify people's perception of risk and responsibility [3]. Agenda-setting and framing will change the salience of different environmental problems in urban life for residents choosing a home.

Empirical studies of environmental news and risk perception support the above connection. Huang observed the situation of the Beijing residents and found that when exposed to environmental news, they became more aware of air pollution and the risks that could be caused by it; thus, the dissemination of this knowledge through news indirectly increased their sense of risk [4]. Therefore, it can be expected that environmental communication will raise people's awareness and risk perception indirectly through mediation rather than direct persuasion. Urban residents' heightened risk perception of pollution or other hazards may be included in the assessment of neighbourhood desirability and long-term living plans.

3. Policy Perception as Mediating Mechanism

Environmental communication can alter people's perception of risk and their sense of environmental responsibility, thus modifying their behaviour in the face of this risk. Policy perception is the public's awareness, trust and expectations of government policies for environmental protection and regulation of urban development. It is the hope that the policies will be effective, fair and stable, as well as knowledge of the specific regulations.

Longitudinal analysis of environmental discourse and policymaking shows that media coverage, public opinion and policy outcomes are intertwined in many ways over time [9]. Wu and Lee have found that the flow of environmental discourse is in line with media agenda-setting, presidential agenda-setting and public opinion; however, under these circumstances, changes in policy expenditure have had little direct effect on public opinion [9]. Therefore, the residents' sense of the government's response to and effectiveness of the policy may be based on indirect signals rather than direct experience.

Research on the public's awareness of air pollution and information behaviour has shown that trust in institutions and a sense of personal responsibility for action are necessary conditions for policy acceptance [5-8]. Lorono's research in Greater Manchester shows that the residents are aware of pollution as a human-caused problem and believe that governments and international organisations should cooperate to address it; however, they do not always know about the individual health risks of exposure [5]. Research on the perception of air quality by the public also shows that public communication strategies aim to change awareness, risk perception and beliefs in responsibility through information campaigns [7-8].

In concept, policy perception can be viewed as a filter for media messages according to people's expectations of government actions, and thus affects their choices. If the people believe that the environmental policies are effective and fair, they will be more willing to live in or move to the

area with problems but good prospects. Conversely, a perception of policy failure or injustice may increase the negative effect of risk communication on housing prices.

4. Environmental Risk Perception and Residential Selection

Environmental Risk Perception Affects Residents' Evaluation of Neighbourhoods and Their Decision to Move. Survey studies in several cities have shown that the public's perception of air pollution risk and self-reported behaviour of reducing exposure vary by context, and worry and attention to air quality levels are important predictors of protective behaviour and information seeking [7-8]. Therefore, the risk perception may lead to a change in behaviour, such as altering one's way of life or living arrangements.

Research on the public's perception of environmental hazards and information-seeking behaviour shows that although urban residents are aware of the harm pollution has to health, they do not fully understand the specific risks [5]. A narrow view of this may not lead to any countermeasures for the general problem. Communication scholars believe that by presenting personalised health risks and local environmental problems, people will be more concerned about their lives [5,7].

Research on Happiness and Preferences for Urban Green Spaces offers another reason to live in the city. Tu's study on happiness and urban green spaces shows that self-reported happiness is positively correlated with a person's willingness to pay for living near parks and forests; thus, emotional and experiential evaluations of environmental facilities affect location choices [6]. Given the evidence that urban air pollution can affect residents' willingness to pay for green spaces and other living conditions, it can be inferred that a good environment will make some residential areas more desirable [10].

In short, the above research shows that environmental communication can influence people's decisions on where to live indirectly by changing their perception and value of environmental quality. If the media reports on the pollution and other problems without offering corresponding policy guarantees, the public will feel estranged. When communications feature improvements in the environment or fair-distribution policies, they may increase the attractiveness of living there.

5. Policy Perception Environmental Justice and Neighbourhood Evaluations

Policy perception is closely related to environmental justice concerns. Brulle and Pellow's review of environmental justice research shows that the distribution of environmental burdens and benefits among different social groups and neighbourhoods is unequal due to structural inequalities in housing and urban policy [11]. These patterns affect how residents perceive the content and fairness of the environmental communication in the media.

Research on environmental inequity and neighbourhood assessment shows that the perceived fairness of environmental governance by residents greatly affects neighbourhood assessments. When people believe that certain areas are systematically neglected or excessively polluted, they may avoid living in those neighbourhoods or be reluctant to believe the policy announcements [11]. Environmental communication that reveals these inequalities may thus influence people's living choices by increasing their sense of risk and injustice.

At the same time, policies promoting environmental justice, such as targeted pollution control measures and investments in green spaces for disadvantaged groups, may also change public opinion. If the policy will be implemented and the benefits shared fairly among the people, some residents will be willing to live in that area. Media coverage and public announcements of such

initiatives can raise the public's awareness of the government's policy implementation and motivate more people to live here.

Therefore, the path of action for environmental communication in residents' choice involves the interaction of risk perception, policy perception and justice considerations. Communication that only points out problems in the environment without mentioning corresponding policy efforts may make residents unwilling to live here; narratives that include policy progress and justice-oriented measures can offer more attractive living options for residents.

6. Information Sources, Trust and Policy Perception

Residents are exposed to many sources of information about the environment and policies. Research on public awareness of air pollution and information-seeking behaviour shows that although scientists are generally more trusted than the media or government institutions, most people still obtain their environmental knowledge through television, social media and newspapers [5-8]. Compared with other sources of information, experts' recommendations and frequent exposure to such content may lead to problems in the public's perception of the policy. Research on media reporting of environmental issues indicates that mass media serve as important links in the communication chain between science, policy and the public, organising formal negotiations and daily cultural politics [1-3]. Analysis of media representation also shows problems, such as sensationalism, the combination of multiple issues, and the risk of being misleading or counterproductive [1,3]. The above factors may change how the residents perceive the policy signal and environmental risk.

Longitudinal studies of environmental discourse have shown that media coverage, public opinion and policy outcomes are linked in a feedback loop, and attention cycles and framing affect both the agenda and attitude [9]. In the context of residential choice, this means that a sudden increase in media coverage of pollution or environmental policies may temporarily boost the salience of the environment and change people's perceptions of their neighbourhood; however, such an effect can fade or be countered by later coverage.

Therefore, one needs to know where the information comes from and how trustworthy it is in order to understand why people choose not to move. If the residents believe that the environmental communication is sincere, fair and in line with specific policies, they will be more willing to accept it for their lives here. If they believe that the media's reports are biased or do not align with the actual results of policy implementation, they will ignore the environmental narrative and give more weight to personal experience and social circles.

7. Conceptual Action Path and Practical Implications

Combining the above threads, a conceptual action path from environmental communication to urban residential choice under the mediation of policy perception can be proposed. Through agenda-setting and framing, environmental communication influences the risk perception and environmental salience of residents [1-4]. These perceptions affect people's sense of the neighbourhood environment, convenience and potential health risks [5-8].

Policy perception is the way people understand what the media are showing them about policy. The belief that a policy will be effective, fair and responsive influences whether, after an increase in risk perception, people will avoid the area, reduce risk or remain there [9-11]. When people have a positive perception of the policy and trust in institutions is relatively high, environmental communication may motivate participation in policy-making and support for improvement without requiring a change of residence. If people think the policy is negative, they will avoid high-risk or unfair neighbourhoods due to such communications.

The above mediation path can be used for environmental communication and urban policy design. Display the environmental problems and relevant policies simultaneously to raise public awareness of the government's efforts; otherwise, the public will lose faith in these policies. Urban policymakers can consider how environmental messages are coordinated with housing policies, zoning plans and amenity investments, and recognise that communication about the environment may affect housing demand and social structure.

The system of ideas also suggests that we should not exaggerate the effect of media messages. Although environmental communication can raise public awareness and change attitudes, people's actual living environments are also limited by economic, social and institutional reasons, so they may not be as expected. Given the above deficiencies, we should adjust our expectations and adopt an all-encompassing system of environmental governance and urban planning.

8. Summary

Environmental communication can change people's views on the environment and risks in daily life, and this alteration in thinking will lead to a relocation of residence. Media coverage and public information disclosure of environmental problems can raise people's awareness of the risk, change their perception of risk, and thus alter neighbourhood evaluations.

Policy awareness is also a relatively weak link here. Residents interpret environmental narratives based on their beliefs in the government's responsiveness, policy effectiveness and fairness, and thus may either strengthen or weaken the effect of communication on their living decisions. Given the above mediating effect, it should not be assumed that media coverage directly affects people's living conditions.

This paper has put forward a conceptual action path that connects environmental communication, risk perception, policy perception and residential choice based on existing research rather than new empirical data. In the future, certain communication campaigns, policy initiatives and local governance contexts can be selected as research objects to study how they affect people's life choices. First of all, in cooperation with environmental communication and urban planning, more people will be able to make informed and fair choices about where to live; however, this will not be achieved through communication alone.

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