

# The Psychology of Pro-Environmental Communication

Beyond Standard Information Strategies

Christian A. Klöckner



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# Contents

<i>List of Figures, Tables, and Boxes</i>	vii
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<i>Preface and Acknowledgements</i>	ix
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## **Part I**

1 What Is Environmental Communication and Why Is It Important?	3
2 Potential and Limitations of Environmental Communication	20

## **Part II**

3 Understanding Communication – Insights from Theories of Communication	45
4 Decision Models – What Psychological Theories Teach Us about People’s Behaviour	69
5 Communication in Large Social Systems – How Information Spreads through Societies	103
6 Traditional and New Media – About Amplification and Negation	119
7 Target Group Segmentation – Why Knowing Your Audience Is Important	146

## **Part III**

8 An Overview of Communication-Based Intervention Techniques	163
9 Promoting Pro-Environmental Behaviour in Groups and Organisations	179
10 Playing Good? – Environmental Communication through Games and Simulations	197

11	Rock Festivals, Sport Events, Theatre – Some Out-of-the-Ordinary Means of Environmental Communication	213
	<i>References</i>	235
	<i>Index</i>	258

# Figures, Tables, and Boxes

## Figures

1.1	A visualisation of the POET model of environmental sociology	8
1.2	The three elements of social practices	9
1.3	An integrated model of individual behaviour in social contexts	12
2.1	Motivation–opportunity–ability (MOA) model as proposed by Thøgersen (2009)	22
2.2	A model of meat-eating behaviour	35
3.1	A model of human memory	55
3.2	The elaboration likelihood model	59
4.1	The theory of planned behaviour	70
4.2	The norm-activation theory according to Harland et al. (2007)	78
4.3	The value-belief-norm theory according to Stern (2000)	80
4.4	Matching of behaviour models to prevalent goal frame	84
4.5	The comprehensive action determination model	92
4.6	The stage model of self-regulated behavioural change	96
4.7	A comprehensive model framework for environmental behaviour	100
5.1	Diffusion of innovation in a social system through the different types of actors	111
6.1	The protection motivation theory adapted from Floyd et al. (2000)	131
6.2	The social amplification of risk framework	136
7.1	Prototypical structure of Schwartz' basic value orientations	151
9.1	The process of groups shaping group members' behaviour which in turn shapes the group	195
11.1	Positive aspects of a rock festival as identified during the workshop	221



## Tables

2.1	A selection of environmentally relevant behaviours in the domain “shelter”	32
2.2	A selection of environmentally relevant behaviours in the domain “food”	34
2.3	A selection of environmentally relevant behaviours in the domain “consumption”	37
2.4	A selection of environmentally relevant behaviours in the domain “mobility”	39
2.5	A selection of environmentally relevant behaviours in the domain “leisure activities”	40
4.1	Overview of communication techniques and their connection to the theory of planned behaviour	75
4.2	Overview of communication techniques and their connection to the norm-activation theory	79
8.1	A structured overview of intervention techniques	177
9.1	Overview of influence strategies spouses use in marital decision-making	182
11.1	Possible contributions of organisers and audience to reduce the negative environmental impact of a big event	215

## Boxes

2.1	Environmental design – making the external conditions steer the choice	23
2.2	The potential of household actions to mitigate climate change – an analysis from the United States	26
4.1	Applying the theory of planned behaviour to green consumer behaviour	73
4.2	Habitual behaviour in everyday life	90
7.1	A measurement instrument to detect an individual’s stage of change	156

# Preface and Acknowledgements

Now that the writing of this book finally comes to an end and I sit here pondering this preface, I ask myself what it was that made me want to embark on such an endeavour. Used to writing scientific papers, I soon found out that writing a book is something very different. What motivated me to go through with it was that I felt that a structured overview of my perspective on environmental communication would help not only me but hopefully also students, practitioners, and other researchers in addressing some of the most pressing challenges we are facing. When the process of writing this book started a couple of years ago, it started as something completely different, just as it usually is when such projects develop over time. A representative of the publisher and I met in my office in late summer 2011, and I proposed an edited book about innovative applications of environmental psychological interventions. The publisher, however, wanted me to write a textbook about environmental psychology. Since there have been a number of high-quality textbooks in environmental psychology published in recent years, I went back to think about new ideas and the result was the seed for the book that you hold in your hands today. I concluded that another general textbook of environmental psychology would not be necessary, but there appeared to be a need for a more focused book on environmental communication with a clear psychological focus. When I proposed this to the publisher, the response was positive and I started conceptualising the book.

This book will have a bias towards psychology, and I did this on purpose because I am an environmental psychologist and quantitative method teacher by training, and not an environmental communicator. I felt that environmental communication, which is traditionally strongly influenced by disciplines other than psychology, would benefit from some psychological theories and methods. At the same time, I think that environmental psychology is too little focused on understanding the processes involved in environmental communication. Even if the main focus will be on psychological theory and methods, from environmental psychology to cognitive and social psychology, I will also consider contributions of other disciplines throughout the chapters of the book.

Another important comment I have to make right at the beginning is that this book became a hybrid between a textbook and proposing new

ideas, models, and even data. Each chapter will have the classical review questions in the end; I will provide a list of suggested readings, and the presentation in most sections will hopefully be digestible and helpful for both students on the master level and practitioners who like to get a more comprehensive introduction to psychology-based environmental communication. However, I also felt it useful to use this book to stimulate the development of the discipline by presenting a number of new models, by sketching new lines of research, or by presenting new data.

The book is organised into three parts. In the first part, which consists of the first two chapters, the basic assumptions about environmental communication will be introduced and the key terms will be defined. Furthermore, the chapters will situate environmental communication in the context of other disciplines and traditions within its domain, as well as sketch the potential and limitations evident in environmental communication. In the second part, which consists of Chapters 3–7, the basic theories and empirical findings for understanding how environmental communication works are introduced. This part of the book will give the reader a broad overview about theories and studies that are helpful when designing environmental communication campaigns. In each chapter, conclusions will be drawn, specifically linking the presented models and theories to environmental communication. In the last part of the book, Chapters 8–11, a more case-based approach is chosen. Cases of environmental communication are presented and analysed with respect to the theoretical framework developed in the earlier sections.

I would like to thank a number of people for their input to this book: my colleagues Sunita Prugsamatz, Mehmet Mehmetoglu, Paul Stern, and Ellen Matthies for their stimulating discussions about environmental psychology topics that always help me to get new ideas, identify bad ones, and focus on the good ones. Also thanks to Ida Antonsen, Ingeborg Ljødal, Rut Kristine Tærud Olberg, Lieselotte Roosen, Maria Skogrand, Isabel Richter, and Laura Sommer who critically reviewed earlier versions of the manuscript, my language editor Megan Marks, my editor Eleanor Christie at the publishing office at Palgrave Macmillan for helpful comments and careful guidance, two anonymous reviewers for feedback to the book proposal, and last but not least my wife Silke and my son Phillip who coped with all the hours of weekend and evening writing.

I conclude with a statement that one of my favourite directors made in his first programme when he became director of the theatre in Bochum: Viel Spass! (Have fun!)

# Part I

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# 1

## What Is Environmental Communication and Why Is It Important?

### Chapter summary

This chapter addresses the question of why environmental communication is an indispensable part of environmental strategies. Disciplinary views like environmental economics, environmental sociology, or environmental governance are briefly presented and contrasted to the psychological perspective to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the topic and the psychological perspective this book is taking. Different forms of communication are outlined (e.g. direct person-to-person; mediated communication via telephone, videophone, print media, TV, radio, or Internet) and their characteristics described. Communication behaviour is contrasted with other forms of human behaviour. The question of how far communication has to include intentionality, or if communication also includes unintended behaviour, is addressed. Furthermore, the difference between verbal and non-verbal communication is outlined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of which understanding of communication is most helpful for the topic at hand, that of describing, understanding, and designing pro-environmental communication strategies. Based on this discussion, a working definition of pro-environmental communication is presented.

### 1.1 Introduction

As this book addresses the topic of environmental communication, this first chapter has a number of functions. First, it serves to demonstrate that environmental communication is necessary to tackle the environmental problems our societies face and that communication is an essential part of changing societies towards more sustainability. This will be done by placing environmental communication in a context

of engineering, economics, sociology, governance, and psychology. Second, communication behaviour needs to be critically analysed along the lines of three dimensions: which forms of communication exist, how is communication different from other types of human behaviour, and what is the difference between verbal and non-verbal communication. Based on these considerations, an attempt will be made to define environmental communication in a way that benefits understanding of this specific type of behaviour for the remainder of this book.

## **1.2 Why is environmental communication necessary?**

Our societies have, through history, been challenged by many different environmental problems such as deforestation, pollution, biodiversity loss, climate change, acidification of the oceans, and depletion of the ozone layer. Two main streams of approaches can be taken to tackle such problems. One is developing new, cleaner, or more efficient technology, thus trying to fix the problem with technological solutions which usually do not imply severe changes in people's behaviour. The other is trying to influence people to reduce damaging behaviours or to shift to alternative, less damaging behaviours. Although the two streams seem to be distinctive at first glance, they have considerable overlap. A binding element in all approaches is that they all depend on environmental communication in one form or another.

### **1.2.1 The technology-centred approach**

When chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) from refrigerators are depleting the ozone layer, engineers must come up with new, less damaging replacements. When carbon dioxide emissions contribute to climate change, new or alternative technologies that improve efficiency and do not rely on fossil fuel need to be developed. When combustion engine cars are a huge environmental problem, then more efficient cars or alternative fuel cars might be a solution. The number of examples in this line of thinking is almost infinite. However, in recent years, a shift from the belief in technology as the prime solution to environmental problems towards behaviour- and lifestyle-centred strategies has occurred (Chapman, 2007). This has several reasons. Some believe that long-term technological progress might be too slow to achieve the necessary reduction in environmental pollution to prevent severe consequences, so short-term behaviour change is necessary (Anable & Shaw, 2007). Another reason is that technological solutions which are not changing people's way of living are often not effective enough to address the