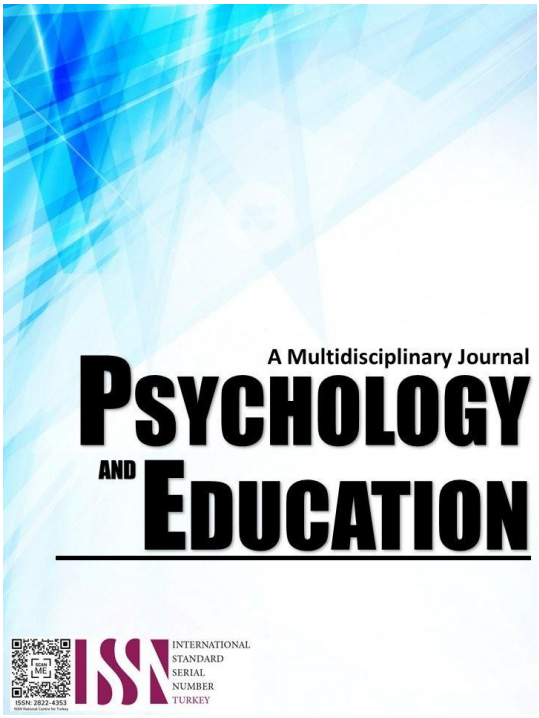
THE JOURNEY OF SHARED GREEN CONSUMPTION PROMOTION: A CASE STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY IN CHINA



PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Volume: 37
Issue 9
Pages: 983-988
Document ID: 2025PEMJ3623
DOI: 10.70838/pemj.370907
Manuscript Accepted: 05-06-2025

Psych Educ, 2025, **37**(9): 983-988, Document ID:2025PEMJ3623, doi:10.70838/pemj.370907, ISSN 2822-4353

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Research Article

The Journey of Shared Green Consumption Promotion: A Case Study of Environmental Advocacy in China

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explored how social media interaction promotes shared green consumption (SGC) as an environmental advocacy strategy in China, focusing on the Civil Society Environmental Protection Public Welfare Organization (CSEPPWO) in Changsha City. Conducted from May 2024 to February 2025, the study involved 20 purposively selected informants and employed Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Findings revealed that social media enabled the transition of Green Hunan from grassroots activism to national influence, expanding its advocacy to include SGC through collaboration, recycling, and sustainable living campaigns. Social media enhanced transparency, credibility, and engagement but faced challenges such as digital fatigue, misinformation, and limited inclusivity. Despite barriers, stakeholders contributed through donations, leadership, and educational initiatives. The study highlights the crucial role of inclusive and adaptive digital strategies in advancing environmental behavior and policy influence.

Keywords: *shared green consumption, environmental advocacy, social media interaction, sustainability communication, qualitative case study*

Introduction

The escalating global environmental crisis manifested through climate change, ecological degradation, and unsustainable consumption patterns has catalyzed an urgent demand for transformative sustainability practices across sectors and communities (Maurya, 2024). Among emerging responses is the concept of Shared Green Consumption (SGC), which emphasizes resource-efficient, cooperative behaviors rooted in collective environmental stewardship. This paradigm not only redefines consumption but also empowers communities to co-create sustainable futures through shared responsibility and localized action.

In China, the trajectory of environmental governance has shifted significantly in recent years, moving toward an integrated framework that fosters green innovation, circular economic models, and civil society engagement (Gao & Teets, 2021). Cities such as Changsha, a provincial capital in Hunan, have become experimental grounds for environmental initiatives, with local non-state actors including Civil Society Environmental Protection Public Welfare Organizations (CSEPPWOs) playing critical roles in translating national policies into grassroots action. These organizations engage in ecological education, community mobilization, and advocacy, thus acting as key mediators between policy and public participation.

However, despite the proliferation of digital tools and social media campaigns to promote environmental awareness, a critical knowledge gap persists: the extent to which digital engagement, particularly via social media interaction, leads to tangible behavioral changes in sustainable consumption remains underexplored. While platforms such as WeChat and TikTok have been lauded for their advocacy reach, empirical evidence on their efficacy in fostering actionable environmental behaviors particularly within the framework of SGC is limited and fragmented (Jayadatta, 2023).

This study addresses this gap by focusing on a single case study Green Hunan, a prominent CSEPPWO based in Changsha City to critically examine how social media interaction influences the promotion and adoption of shared green consumption behaviors in urban China. Through qualitative inquiry into organizational practices, stakeholder perceptions, and digital engagement strategies, the research seeks to uncover the enabling and constraining factors in leveraging social media for environmental transformation.

While the study's scope is intentionally delimited to one organizational context, thereby limiting its generalizability to other socio-political environments or technological ecosystems, it offers valuable insights into the micro-processes of digital environmental advocacy. The findings are expected to contribute to the theoretical and practical discourse on environmental communication, with implications for designing inclusive, adaptive, and community-centered frameworks for sustainable behavior change in digitally mediated contexts.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the macro question, "How does social media interaction utilization promote shared green consumption behavior in the community?" Specifically, this study seeks answers to the following:

1. What is the overview of Civil Society Environmental Protection Public Welfare Organization (CSEPPWO)?
2. What is the participants' understanding of the shared green consumption behavior using social media interaction?
3. What are the benefit and disadvantages of social media interaction in shared green consumption behavior?
4. How does CSCEPPWO strategize to attainment its goals and objectives?

5. What insights and policy recommendations can be suggested?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the role of Civil Society Environmental Protection Public Welfare Organizations (CSEPPWOs) in promoting shared green consumption (SGC) through social media interaction in Changsha City, China. Qualitative research focuses on the exploration of meanings, experiences, and processes from the perspective of those involved (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The case study approach was deemed appropriate as it provides an in-depth and contextually rich understanding of complex social phenomena (Yin, 2018). It allowed the researcher to investigate real-world interactions between digital platforms, organizational initiatives, and individual behavioral change toward sustainability. This design was especially suitable for studying the nuanced and evolving dynamics of SGC in the context of digital environmental advocacy, where flexibility and adaptability in data collection and interpretation are vital. Qualitative inquiry further enabled the contextualization of stakeholder narratives, revealing the underlying mechanisms and perceptions that shape environmental behavior and advocacy in digital spaces (Hafferty et al., 2024). Reflexive journaling was employed throughout the data collection and analysis process to mitigate researcher bias and enhance interpretive integrity (McGrath, 2021).

Respondents

A total of 20 key informants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement and experiential relevance to the study. The participants comprised four (4) government officials, four (4) officers of CSEPPWO, four (4) representatives from partner agencies, four (4) social media platform managers, and four (4) individual beneficiaries. The selection adhered to strict inclusion criteria to ensure that only those with significant engagement in environmental advocacy and shared consumption practices were included. Exclusion was applied to individuals who lacked sufficient exposure or could not provide informed insights. Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals with firsthand knowledge of shared green consumption practices and direct involvement in CSEPPWO-related initiatives, consistent with Patton's (2002) approach to information-rich cases. The sample size of 20 was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation, as recurring patterns and themes emerged across the diverse participant categories (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Data triangulation across participant groups strengthened the credibility and validity of the findings (Flick, 2018).

Procedure

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured individual interviews, guided by an interview protocol designed to elicit deep reflections on participants' experiences with SGC and social media interaction. This approach allowed for flexibility while maintaining focus on the core research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The interview guide was pilot-tested and refined for clarity and alignment with the study objectives. During the interviews, the researcher engaged in systematic observation, taking note of interactional patterns, platform functionalities, and organizational workflows. These observations complemented the verbal data and provided a richer understanding of the digital ecosystem within which SGC occurs. All interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

A database was established to facilitate efficient data management and retrieval. All qualitative data were organized and analyzed using NVivo 12 to facilitate systematic coding and theme development. Thematic analysis was employed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: (1) familiarization with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. This framework was suitable for identifying recurring patterns across diverse data sources, ensuring both depth and rigor in the analysis.

Document Analysis Complementing the interviews, document analysis was used to triangulate and enrich the primary data. As suggested by Mackieson et al. (2029) this method involves a systematic examination of textual, visual, and audio materials. Sources included domestic and international policy documents, government reports, environmental campaign materials, social media posts, academic articles, and organizational archives. This multi-source strategy enabled a holistic view of CSEPPWO operations, digital strategies, and policy contexts relevant to SGC.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Central Philippine University Research Ethics Review Board. Letters of permission were secured from relevant organizations and agencies. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and strict confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Data were securely stored in password-protected devices accessible only to the research team. Participation was entirely voluntary, and the study declared no conflict of interest.

Results and Discussion

1. Overview of the Civil Society Environmental Protection Public Welfare Organization (CSEPPWO)

Theme 1: Growing Green Hunan from Grassroots Movement to National Impact

Green Hunan began as a small, localized movement under the name Phoenix Environmental Protection in 2007 and evolved into a nationally recognized environmental organization. It was officially registered in 2011 and later achieved 5A-level social organization status in 2022, indicating high credibility and operational capacity (Manager 1, 3). The organization transitioned from focusing solely on river protection, specifically the Xiangjiang River, to encompassing broader ecological and climate issues. This growth reflects a strategic expansion built on volunteer mobilization, policy advocacy, and the effective use of digital tools (Manager 2).

Subtheme 1.1: From Activism to Institutional Recognition

Green Hunan's evolution mirrors the trajectory outlined by Lang (2022) who assert that NGOs become more impactful when they blend grassroots mobilization with formal institutional engagement.

2. Participants' Understanding of Shared Green Consumption Behavior Using Social Media Interaction

Theme 2: Expanding Advocacy from River Conservation to Shared Green Consumption

Participants consistently described shared green consumption as a behavioral shift toward sustainable living through everyday actions such as second-hand shopping, recycling, carpooling, and reducing single-use plastics often inspired by content on WeChat and TikTok (Beneficiary 1, 2).

Subtheme 2.1: From Water Protection to Sustainable Living

Participants expressed that pollution must be addressed upstream through lifestyle changes, not just environmental cleanups. This sentiment aligns with Liang et al. (2022), who emphasize the value of habit formation in promoting sustainability.

Subtheme 2.2: Digital Platforms as Catalysts for Behavior

Social media interaction was widely credited as a key driver for SGC. Interviewees noted that platforms offer visual storytelling and interactive campaigns (e.g., #ZeroWasteChallenge) that encouraged behavioral change at the household level (Social Media Platform 3). This is supported by Chen et al. (2023), who found peer influence via social media increased eco-behavior adoption by 80%.

Subtheme 2.3: Collaboration for Sustainable Impact

Green Hunan's partnerships with businesses and policymakers enabled broader adoption of SGC values through policy incentives and corporate accountability. Partner Agency 2 emphasized industry collaboration, while Government Official 3 noted joint efforts in policy implementation.

3. Benefits and Disadvantages of Social Media Interaction in SGC Behavior

Theme 3: Sharing, Collaborating, and Sustaining Shared Green Consumption

Subtheme 3.1: Social Media as a Megaphone for Change

Interviewees highlighted the cost-effectiveness, reach, and immediacy of social media platforms. Livestreamed clean-up drives and interactive campaigns such as "Plastic-Free Week" mobilized public participation (Manager 4). These findings are supported by Chen et al. (2023), who found real-time updates boost volunteerism by 60%.

Subtheme 3.2: Challenges in Digital Engagement

Despite its benefits, participants acknowledged drawbacks of digital advocacy, including:

Information Overload: Participants noted audience fatigue due to repetitive sustainability posts (Social Media Platform 2). Kyu Kim et al. (2021) observed that excessive green messaging led to disengagement in 68% of users.

Clicktivism vs. Real Action: Interviewees described a gap between online engagement and offline behavior, confirming Shen et al. (2021) findings that 74% of users failed to translate online support into participation.

Misinformation and Skepticism: Concerns over greenwashing and inconsistent messaging were raised. Nguyen et al. (2023) emphasized the need for AI-based fact-checking to sustain campaign credibility.

4. How CSEPPWO Strategizes to Attain Its Goals and Objectives

Theme 4: Greening Consumption Through Research and Policy Advocacy

Subtheme 4.1: Integration of Science and Technology

Green Hunan combines environmental science, AI analytics, and grassroots data (e.g., Water Source Evaluation Mini-Program) to guide policy and conservation efforts (Partner Agency 4). Ambasht (2023) found that data integration enhances response time and enforcement impact.

Subtheme 4.2: Environmental Benchmarks and Policy Alignment

Green Hunan sets sustainability metrics for both businesses and communities, promoting accountability in carbon tracking, waste management, and green certification (Partner Agency 3). These efforts align with Wang et al (2023), who reported that benchmarks led to 30% waste reduction and 25% energy efficiency gains.

Theme 5: Strengthening Organizational Credibility

Transparent reporting, frequent updates, and livestreamed events have increased stakeholder trust. Chen et al. (2023) support this approach, noting such strategies improve donor engagement by 60%.

5. Insights and Policy Recommendations

Theme 6: Facilitating Broad Dissemination and Engagement

To ensure long-term impact, Green Hunan has optimized platform algorithms and promoted trending campaigns to maximize visibility (Social Media Platform 1, 2). Viral initiatives like #GreenFriday have influenced corporate and public behavior alike (Sailer et al., 2022).

Theme 7: Enhancing Digital Access and Cost Efficiency

Digital platforms have democratized environmental communication, reducing costs and broadening outreach. Real-time updates accelerate participation and emergency response (Berigüete et al., 2024)

Theme 8: Addressing Structural Barriers and Inclusion Gaps

Limitations remain in platform adaptability, inclusivity (e.g., youth and rural access), and recognition systems. Research by Khan (2023) suggests integrating gamification and user rewards can increase youth participation by 60%.

Theme 9: Advancing Financial and Resource Mobilization

Regular donation campaigns, in-kind resource sharing, and eco-product fundraising were identified as vital to organizational sustainability. Manager 3 noted real-time social media storytelling increases donor conversion. Chen et al. (2023) found such approaches enhance donor engagement by 60%.

Theme 10: Leadership and Policy Recommendations

Green Hunan has successfully embedded environmental education in schools and communities, fostering early behavioral change. Maravilla & Flores (2024) reported that such interventions increase long-term eco-practices. Additionally, stakeholder forums and localized policy dialogues were recommended to address misinformation and mobilize broader participation.

Discussion

This study revealed how Civil Society Environmental Protection Public Welfare Organizations (CSEPPWOs), exemplified by Green Hunan, operationalize shared green consumption (SGC) through strategic use of social media, technological innovation, and policy engagement. The findings highlight the organization's institutional evolution, the behavioral influence of digital platforms, and the structural mechanisms required for scaling environmental advocacy.

The institutional growth of Green Hunan from grassroots activism to a formally recognized 5A-level organization illustrates the trajectory by which civic movements gain policy leverage through hybrid governance structures (Lang, 2022; Yin, 2018). This transition enabled the expansion from localized river conservation to broader sustainability campaigns, aligning civic advocacy with national ecological objectives.

Social media emerged as a critical tool for shaping behavioral change, with platforms like WeChat and TikTok facilitating habit-forming and emotionally engaging campaigns such as #ZeroWasteChallenge. This finding aligns with Chen et al. (2023), who noted that peer influence and visual storytelling increase eco-behavior adoption, and supports Wang and Li's (2022) conclusions on digital nudging and behavioral reinforcement.

Despite these advantages, digital engagement presented challenges including information fatigue, superficial clicktivism, and greenwashing a pattern echoed by Kyu Kim et al. (2021) and Shen et al. (2021), who noted the gap between digital support and offline action. Calls for AI-driven content verification to mitigate misinformation mirror Nguyen et al.'s (2023) recommendations on ensuring digital credibility in environmental messaging.

Green Hunan's strategy of integrating grassroots data with AI-enhanced monitoring technologies, such as the Water Source Evaluation

Mini-Program, reflects a science-driven model of environmental governance. These initiatives parallel Ambasht's (2023) assertion that citizen science and real-time analytics improve enforcement efficiency and data responsiveness. The implementation of sustainability benchmarks further aligns with Wang et al. (2023), who found such measures critical to improving environmental performance metrics.

Trust and organizational credibility were strengthened through transparent communication and participatory campaigns, validating Chen et al.'s (2023) findings that real-time updates and digital visibility boost donor confidence. Moreover, livestreamed activities and consistent updates moved trust-building beyond traditional reporting, fostering ongoing engagement in digital spaces.

While digital platforms reduced outreach costs and expanded public engagement supporting Berigüete et al. (2024) on the democratizing potential of real-time communication structural challenges remain. Barriers such as limited youth involvement, digital illiteracy, and lack of incentives highlight the need for inclusive engagement strategies, with Khan (2023) suggesting gamification and youth-centric content to enhance digital participation.

Financial sustainability was achieved through diversified resource mobilization strategies, including social media storytelling and eco-product fundraising, with Chen et al. (2023) reporting a 60% increase in donor engagement through such approaches. Leadership efforts in embedding environmental education in schools reflect Maravilla and Flores's (2024) evidence that early interventions foster long-term sustainable behavior.

Ultimately, this study affirms that the success of CSEPPWOs in promoting SGC hinges on adaptive governance, strategic digital engagement, inclusive policy frameworks, and transparent operations. Future efforts must institutionalize environmental literacy, integrate technological safeguards, and support multi-stakeholder platforms to ensure equitable and sustained ecological impact.

Conclusions

This study provided an in-depth exploration of Green Hunan, a Civil Society Environmental Protection Public Welfare Organization (CSEPPWO), and its pioneering efforts in promoting Shared Green Consumption (SGC) in China. Through a comprehensive qualitative inquiry, the research examined organizational strategies, participant perceptions, social media engagement, and multi-stakeholder collaborations that collectively shaped a dynamic model for environmental sustainability.

The findings reveal that Green Hunan successfully evolved from a grassroots environmental initiative to a nationally recognized public welfare organization by combining civic activism, digital mobilization, and policy advocacy. Social media emerged as a transformative force not merely a communication tool, but a catalyst for community participation, behavioral change, and real-time policy engagement. The organization's use of platforms like WeChat and TikTok fostered collective identity and enabled scalable, low-cost, and inclusive environmental action.

Furthermore, this study highlights that meaningful SGC extends beyond individual behavior to include business and government collaboration, resource-sharing practices, and science-based benchmarking. The integration of digital storytelling, interactive content, and algorithm-driven campaigns facilitated high visibility and sustained public trust, while transparent reporting and community-driven initiatives strengthened Green Hunan's institutional credibility.

Despite notable successes, the study also identified enduring challenges, including digital fatigue, misinformation, limited inclusivity, and difficulties in translating online engagement into offline action. These challenges underscore the need for adaptive digital strategies, robust verification mechanisms, and broader infrastructure to bridge the digital divide.

This research contributes to the literature on environmental governance, digital advocacy, and sustainable consumption by presenting a replicable model that blends grassroots mobilization, digital innovation, and institutional partnership. As environmental concerns intensify globally, the Green Hunan experience provides valuable insights for CSEPPWOs, policymakers, and sustainability practitioners seeking to scale green practices through inclusive, participatory, and digitally enabled approaches.

Future studies are encouraged to employ mixed-method designs and comparative analyses across different sociopolitical contexts to further validate the transferability and scalability of the shared green consumption model. Expanding research on youth engagement, rural participation, and AI-enhanced advocacy strategies may offer deeper insights into overcoming participation gaps and sustaining collective environmental action.

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