

Overview



Engaging China's Generation Z: A Research on Life Values and Climate Communication is a research report focused on China's Generation Z, aiming to empower climate communication practice. Generation Z generally refers to those born between 1995 and 2009, who have witnessed the accelerating impact of climate change on humanity and are growing into pivotal societal roles. As such, their climate awareness is more pronounced, and their actions are more influential. Both the academic and practitioner realms of international climate communication are increasingly focusing on Generation Z, actively exploring how to shift their perceptions, attitudes, and actions towards climate change through effective communication, thus advancing climate objectives.

Engaging China's Generation Z aims primarily to address the prevalent issues and confusions in climate communication practices directed towards this demographic. In Chinese context, Generation Z faces the unprecedented urgency of "dual carbon goals", and systemic social transformations intertwine closely with their personal destinies. However, current climate communication often employs an elite-oriented discourse, which disconnects from the individuals' daily lives. Moreover, several practical challenges persist:

- How should we set communication goals aimed to help Generation Z become the "carbon-neutral" generation?
- How can we understand their uniqueness? Are they a unified whole group, or do they have complex internal nuances?
- How can we effectively reach Generation Z and engage in more appealing, sustainable communication strategies to enhance their consensus on climate change, and their participation?

The shortcomings in climate communication make it difficult for climate change to be integrated into the lifestyle and life planning of Generation Z. In other words, there is

a pressing need in the field to introduce comprehensive insights into Generation Z and innovative methodologies to forge deeper connections with them, unleash their unique potential, and leverage their capacity to lead transformative climate actions. Following the methodologies of Climate Narratives for the Chinese Public (Zeng et al., 2023), this report uses life values as the underlying logic for investigating public insights and shifts the target towards China's Generation Z, striving to:

- **Provide an in-depth analysis of the climate mission and communication objectives of China's Generation Z** through the analysis of macro-policy trends and interviews with field experts and practitioners;
- By conducting nationwide surveys and paired interviews with Generation Z, we can intricately detail their life values and climate characteristics. While creating a demographic profile, we also develop a “map” of the main values, **offering comprehensive insights into China's Generation Z**;
- Based on analyses of the climate mission, life values, climate characteristics, and media usage habits of Generation Z, **offering strategic recommendations for climate communication tailored to China's Generation Z** to government departments, non-profit organizations, and businesses, thereby helping to enhance Generation Z's climate awareness and build their capacity for action.

1. Clarifying the unique climate mission of China's Generation Z

Firstly, *Engaging China's Generation Z* identifies the unique mission that China's Generation Z should assume in climate change, based on the orientation of climate policies and the views of field experts. It aims to provide a comprehensive, in-depth, and practical reference framework for communication practitioners when setting climate communication goals Paired at Generation Z.



·Facing accelerated climate risks, Generation Z needs a paradigm shift in

underlying climate perceptions. The probability and impact of climate risks that Generation Z may face in the future are significantly higher than those of the previous generation, affecting individual lives, economies, societies, and cultures. Therefore, Generation Z needs to shift their underlying climate perceptions to connect changes in production and living with climate change, recognizing the urgency of climate change and integrating climate action with personal development and social progress, understanding the interconnections.

·Facing an unprecedented task of “dual carbon goals”, Generation Z needs

creative and transformative climate actions. Within the framework of the “dual carbon goals” set for 2030 and 2060, Generation Z will grow into the elite backbone of various sectors in Chinese society, gradually gaining control of social resources and participating in significant social decision-making process, with their personal destinies closely intertwined with the “dual carbon goals.” Hence, Generation Z needs not only to practice a low-carbon living but also to pay attention to the impacts and opportunities brought by climate policies, driving systemic social changes through their transformative climate actions.

·As the generation of digital natives leading digital and network culture,

Generation Z needs to promote the shaping of green social norms. Compared to the previous generation, Generation Z is familiar with and masters information technology, possesses stronger networked cultural creativity, hence holds social discourse authority. They also have a stronger international outlook and cosmopolitan spirit. Therefore, Generation Z should fully utilize these unique potentials to share climate information, promote climate actions, and shape a green, low-carbon social culture and norms among families, communities, social media, and others media platforms. Furthermore, Generation Z should also adopt a global stance, conveying China's climate governance experience, promoting, and participating in international climate cooperation.



2. Understanding the life values and climate characteristics of China's Generation Z

The report summarizes the core values and climate characteristics of China's Generation Z based on empirical research, aiming to help communication practitioners avoid stereotyping and superficial understanding of Generation Z, providing deeper generational insights and corresponding communicative enlightenments.

Regarding their life values, the report finds:

·**Patriotism coexists with an international outlook.** Living in an era of rapid economic growth and technological advancements in China, they have witnessed China's rise, holding high levels of patriotism and national pride. At the same time, being part of the globalization wave, they possess an international outlook, holding unique views on international relations and world developments, supporting the promotion of international cooperation.

·**Both competitive and laid-back.** Generation Z lives in a time of abundant material life and development opportunities, possessing more chances to enhance their capabilities and qualifications, hence they highly identify with the value of striving and pursuing self-enhancement. However, the intense social competition and the accompanying life pressures also make Generation Z anxious about future uncertainties, thus fostering a desire to enjoy the pleasures of present life.

·**Respect for tradition while advocating for equality.** Generation Z respects and reveres traditional culture, agreeing that it should be maintained, inherited, and promoted. They, however, are not rigidly adherent to strict rules, welcoming change, seeking ideological transformation, and innovation. This is particularly evident in their pursuit of new forms of social equality; they have lower hierarchical notions, eager to express their opinions, expecting their views to be heard and valued, and desiring sufficient independence and freedom.



·**Enjoying autonomy while caring for society.** Generation Z is a highly self-driven generation; unlike the previous generations that emphasized interpersonal relations, Generation Z focuses more on personal feelings and ideas, valuing individual agency and autonomy. However, this does not mean that Generation Z is indifferent; in fact, they maintain a compassionate and caring attitude towards socially disadvantaged groups and others in need of help.

·**Anticipating the government yet feeling ordinary.** Generation Z holds high expectations for the role of the nation and government, supporting the notion that the government should take responsibility for addressing current major social challenges. However, as members of Generation Z are still in university or just entering society, they feel a lack of opportunities and confidence to engage in public social challenges due to the increasingly competitive environment, leading to a low sense of political efficacy.

These life values also project onto climate change, affecting Generation Z's understanding of climate, actions, emotional attitudes, and advocacy in various ways. To help communicators understand the true climate characteristics of Generation Z and find an approach to engage them in climate communication, this report summarizes from empirical research findings and found:

·**In terms of climate perception, Generation Z generally shows concern for climate change, but there are also gaps and misconceptions in their perception.**

They perceive the impacts of climate change as more significant on a national and societal level than on individuals, and they believe that the natural environment is more affected by climate change than economic development and health conditions, indicating that they have not yet fully recognized the impacts of climate change on all aspects of society. Additionally, their level of climate knowledge shows a lack of thorough understanding.

- **Regarding climate action, Generation Z displays varying attitudes toward different actions, with support, opposition, and hesitation present.** They tend to support personal actions within their means that do not significantly lower their quality of life; however, they are skeptical or hesitant towards costly climate actions that may lead to a sense of deprivation. Moreover, in forming green social norms and other public climate actions, their willingness to act has not yet translated into concrete actions. Nonetheless, an increasing number of Generation Z members have been actively engaging in climate action in recent years, showing burgeoning hope and potential.
- **When it comes to emotions, Generation Z exhibits significant climate anxiety.** They commonly feel anger, sadness, and helplessness about climate change, displaying negative emotional traits. These feelings stem partly from the negative and uncertain impacts of climate change, and the human's preference towards comfort and convenience that leads to pessimism. These feelings stem also partly from a sense of powerlessness about the effectiveness of their climate actions.
- **Regarding advocacy, Generation Z supports emission reduction plans, advocates for climate justice, and international cooperation.** They show strong support for solutions such as the development of energy-saving and emission reduction technologies and subsidies for clean energy, believing in the power of technology to deal with climate challenges and create new job markets. Moreover, they are concerned about vulnerable groups affected by climate change, advocating for adequate social security and climate adaptation mechanisms. In international climate governance, Generation Z believes that developed countries should bear more historical responsibility and supports international cooperation.
- **In terms of social trust on climate change, Generation Z trusts traditional media and experts the most.** Among the primary sources of climate change, due to their professionalism and authority, traditional media and experts in the climate science



field, enjoy a higher degree of trust from Generation Z. In contrast, they have lower trust in climate information on various social platforms and are skeptical of statements from businesses, particularly those potentially polluting ones.

3. Analyzing the internal differentiation of China's Generation Z: six segments and sub-generations

Generation Z in China has grown up in an era rich in both material and spiritual resources, and they are currently in the prime page of their life, exhibiting vigorous vitality. However, they are simultaneously faced with significant life decisions such as employment, marriage, and parenting, and are entangled in a highly competitive social environment. This leads to a **diversification of life values and climate attitudes within Generation Z, resulting in differences and inconsistencies in climate action**. This report aims to help communicators understand and delineate the different segments within Generation Z by classifying them based on their life values and life stages, thereby customizing communication strategies to effectively reach target audiences.

Firstly, this report uses the underlying logic of life values and, based on empirical research findings, categorizes China's Generation Z into six segments: Backbone Traditionalists, Disengaged Individualists, Passionate Strivers, Easygoing Leisurists, Moderate Pragmatists, And Philosophical Observers. It then outlines the distinct climate characteristics of each segment.

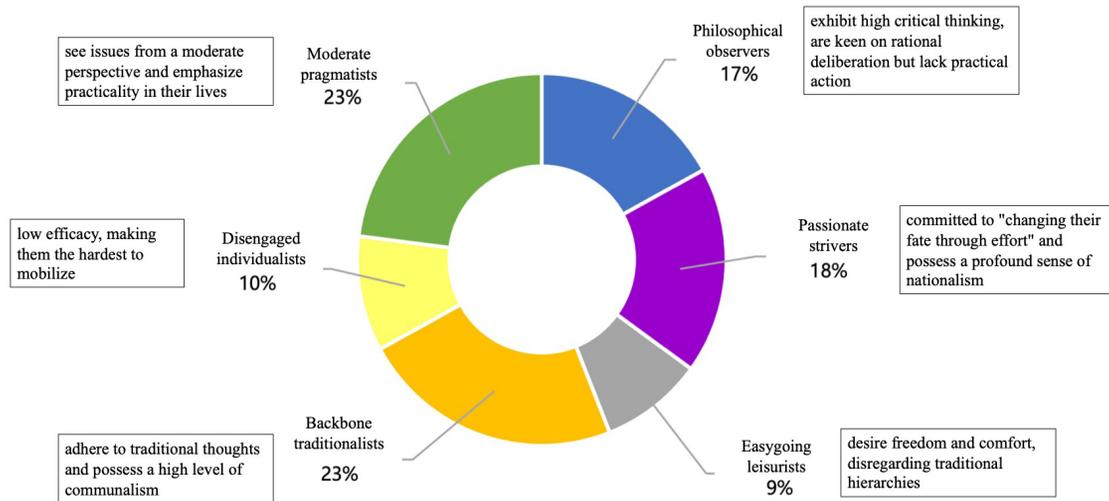


Figure 1: The Six Segments of China's Generation Z

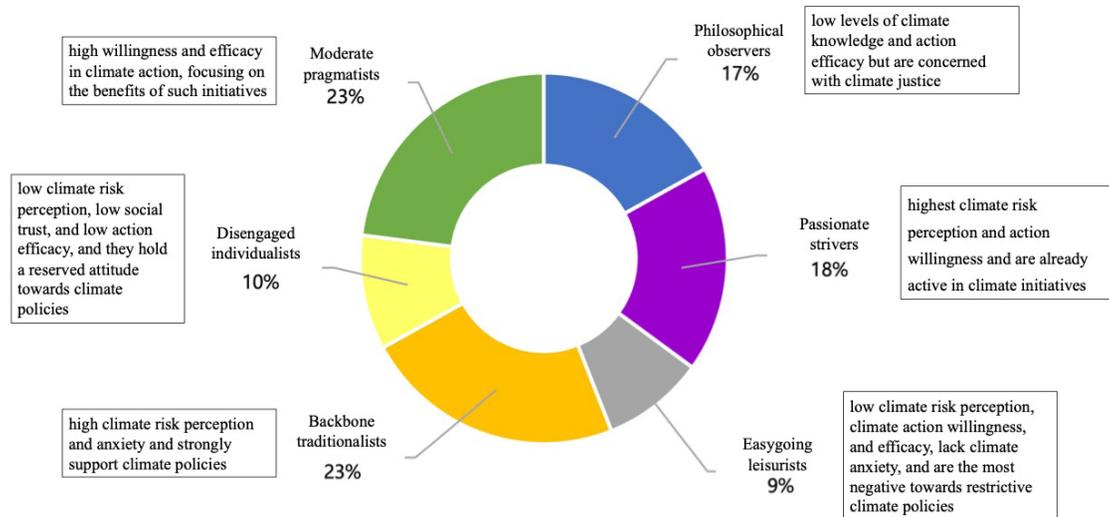


Figure 2: Climate Characteristics of the Six Segments of China's Generation Z

Secondly, based on the age range of Generation Z, this report divides them into two sub-generations: ages 18-22 and 23-27. It has been found that:

- The 18-22 age sub-generation exhibits more diversified life values, with various beliefs coexisting in significant proportions. They possess higher levels of social trust, are more supportive of restrictive emission reduction plans, and favor online entertainment and video platforms.
- The 23-27 age sub-generation, as they step into society, gradually develops rational and reflective characteristics and, due to considerations of real-world issues, leans

more towards moderate and practical life values. Consequently, they are more concerned about climate change, have a higher perception of climate risk on a societal level, and are more supportive of international cooperation in climate governance.

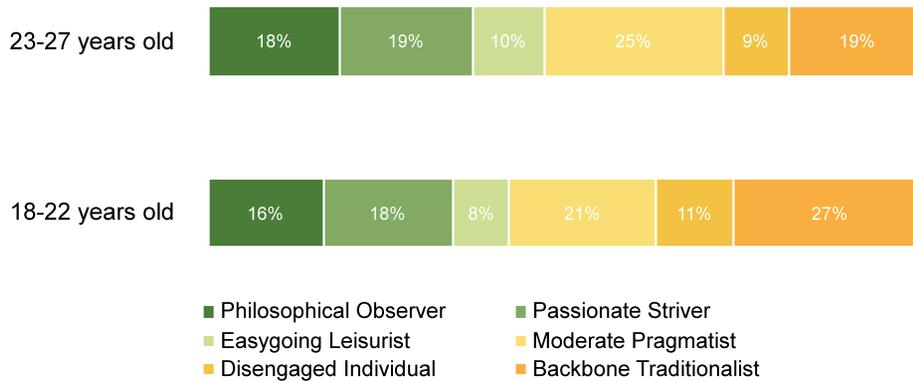


Figure 3: Sub-Generations of Generation Z

4. Paired climate communication strategies to enable Generation Z to fulfill their climate missions

This report provides specific communication insights based on Generation Z’s life values and climate characteristics, while also summarizing a set of effective, practical, and actionable climate communication strategies. These are designed to address the practical challenges of climate communication aimed at Generation Z and to actively mobilize their participation in climate actions, thus supporting the nation’s “dual carbon goals.”

Specifically, when setting communication goals, **do not rush into action. Instead, carefully consider communication objectives that align with Generation Z’s climate mission.** This report suggests moving beyond the traditional mindset of mere information sharing, incorporating Generation Z’s climate mission into the strategy planning, and focusing on the realities of Generation Z’s climate awareness and

actions.

·In developing communication strategies, **do not merely focus on science popularization. Tailor the communication based on Generation Z's characteristics and beliefs.** It is crucial to establish connections with Generation Z's life values, utilizing topics of interests and familiar logical approaches to find effective way of communication.

·In identifying the target audience, **avoid simplistic labeling. Instead, precisely target the audience segments.** The report emphasizes the need to avoid stereotypical and one-dimensional views of Generation Z, focusing instead on the internal differences within the group. It provides specific methods for distinguishing the six segments, using socio-economic and life belief indicators.

·When communicating with different segments, **avoid generalizations and aim for customized communication objectives and content.** This report suggests matching the most appropriate communication objectives with each segment and formulating differentiated communication strategies accordingly.

·In choosing communication channels, **do not blindly trust major platforms but opt for highly compatible communication channels.** We should bear in mind to consider the climate information to be communicated, the climate goals to be achieved, the characteristics of the media platforms, trending topics, and the audience's media usage habits. Effective communication can only be maximized when these elements are well-matched.

·In developing communication products, **aim for more than single-touch media contact; create a closed-loop of climate action.** The report recommends moving beyond traditional communication channels to innovate in the development of communication products. Make climate communication situational and tool-oriented, manage the communication process in a closed loop, and rediscover offline methods

to deepen connections with Generation Z, fostering their active participation.

Additionally, this report includes strategy suggestions tailored for government departments, non-profit organizations, and businesses, based on the institutional positions, discourse characteristics, and public perceptions of these stakeholders.

Furthermore, in 2023, our research center, based on core findings from *Climate Narratives for the Chinese Public*, developed a climate narrative methodology grounded in life values. This was explored in cooperation with three representative institutions in the field. After analyzing how the climate narrative methodology is applied in communication practice and the impacts it generates, key elements and steps in utilizing this methodology were summarized, hoping to inspire climate communication practices within the field.

When utilizing this report, we hope communicators will not only place Generation Z within the broader social environment and historical context but also focus on their internal life values and climate characteristics. With a better understanding of Generation Z's commonality and difference, you will develop effective communication activities, contributing new momentum to China's climate governance.

Methodology

·Public Survey

- Target Audience: Chinese Generation Z public (aged 18 and above)
- Sample Size: 3,552 respondents; the survey questionnaire was designed by the research team and distributed by the Shanghai Zero Point Index Information.
- Scope of the Survey: The survey covered mega-cities, provincial capitals, municipalities, other prefecture-level cities, county-level cities or counties, and rural areas, encompassing the entire nation.

·Focus Groups

- Interviewees: Recruited by the research team
- Sample Size: 53 interviewees
- Format: Includes six segments of the public, with members from each segment participating in two sessions, totaling 12 online/offline focus groups.

·Narrative Workshops

- Test Subjects: Participants from the focus groups
- Sample Size: 53 participants
- Testing Method: Using 11 narrative themes, the testing involved analyzing keywords and phrases marked as liked/disliked to generate narrative recommendations.

·Expert Salons and Stakeholder Interviews

- Participants: Experts and scholars in the dual-carbon and climate communication fields, as well as seasoned practitioners in climate communication
- Format: Conducted multiple salons and in-depth interviews both online and offline

