

## Chapter 66

# Integrating Social and Mobile Media in Environmental Marketing Communications in China: Opportunities and Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

*The rapid rise of China as an economic and geo-political superpower has been accompanied with its environmental causalities. According to World Health Organization, more than one million Chinese die of air pollution each year. Non-profit conservation organizations, foreign or domestic, have launched environmental marketing communications campaigns to address these problems. This chapter describes and explores the role of mobile social media in conducting environmental marketing communications in China. Using Rare's Pride Campaign in Yangtze River and other environmental conservation organizations to protect endangered species and natural resources as examples, this chapter demonstrates the benefits and limitations of mobile and social media in promoting environmental causes in China. Discussion, implications, research limitations, and future research directions were presented.*

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## INTRODUCTION

China's ascent as a superpower has been demonstrated not only in its dramatic economic developments in the past decades, but also in its active diplomacy to shape the rules of international arena since the Second World War (Fish, 2017; Ikenberry, 2008). China's growing GDP has grown to \$11.8 trillion, surpassing Japan (\$4.84 trillion) as the world's second largest economy (Bajpai, 2017). On the basis of Purchase Power Parity (PPP) index, some has claimed that China has overtaken U.S. as the world largest economy (Bajpai, 2017). Its real GDP growth rate has often seen double-digits (e.g., 10-15% before the Financial Crisis in 2008) until recent years (Frangos, 2017). Also refer to Frangos (2016), (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-gdp-long-slog-increases-the-pain-1453183305>) for more details. According to Iyengar (2017), China's economy grew stably at 6.5% during the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2017; however doubts about the sustainability of its growth remains due to the country's real estate bubble and debts (Wei, 2017). For example, Moody's Investor Service has downgraded China's sovereign debt to A1—the first time the company cut its rating since 1989 (Macfarlane, 2017).

Accompanied by China rapid rise is the recent President Xi's grandiose rhetoric of "Chinese Dream" (BBC News, 2013), and "One Belt, One Road" Initiative. In his speech about what "Chinese Dream" means for the world, President Xi elaborated in his 2013 speech when he was promoted as the head of Chinese Communist Party (BBC News, 2013).

*We must make persistent efforts, press ahead with indomitable will, continue to push forward the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and strive to achieve the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," "To realise the Chinese road, we must spread the Chinese spirit, which combines the spirit of the nation with patriotism as the core and the spirit of the time with reform and innovation as the core.....To realise the Chinese road, we must spread the Chinese spirit, which combines the spirit of the nation with patriotism as the core and the spirit of the time with reform and innovation as the core. (BBC News, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22726375>)*

Similarly, China's ambitious international initiative, "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) will span over 68 countries, 4.4 billion, and cover over 40% of the worldwide GDP (Griffiths, 2017). OBOR is composed two major trillion-dollar incentives to connect these countries through economic infrastructure belt and 21st century maritime silk road (Griffiths, 2017; *The Economist*, 2016). These projects include power of Siberia gas project with Russia (\$55 billions), Trans-Sumatra toll road in Indonesia (\$27.7 billions), Peshawar-Lahore-Karachi in Pakistan (\$3.7 billions), etc (*The Economist*, 2016). China plans to build a railway from Xi'an to Central Asia, Moscow, and Rotterdam (Griffiths, 2017). The maritime belt will trace the historical route of China's explorer, Zeng Ho, to Southeast Asia, East Africa, and to Europe (Griffiths, 2017). A report by Griffiths (2017) in CNN (<http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/11/asia/china-one-belt-one-road-explainer/index.html>) visually presents China's "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) Initiative.

However, as many have pointed out, the economic justifications to promote this incentive has been to absorb China's over-production in cement, steel, aluminum, among others (Chen, 2008; Griffiths, 2017). However, these industries have often been reported as major polluters (Liu, 2014; Minter, 2015) and the continuation of their expansion worsens China's already fragile ecosystem. In 2014, the Chinese government has announced that it plans to curb carbon dioxide emissions from cement and steel production to mitigate climate changes (Liu, 2014). OBOR Initiative seems to contradict with this goal to protect

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