



Research Article

DOI: 10.58966/JCM2025449

Role of Communication in Promoting Environmental Activism Amongst Hikers in Western Visayas: An Ethnographic Research

Geff B. Sagala^{1*}, John Christian Cabales²

^{1,2}University of San Agustin, Iloilo City, Philippines

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 18 November, 2025

Revised: 30 November, 2025

Accepted: 08 December, 2025

Published: 22 December, 2025

Keywords:

Environmental Communication,
Environmental Activism, Hikers,
Ethnography, Philippines

ABSTRACT

This study examines the pivotal role of local guides and hiking organizers in fostering environmental activism, focusing on their communicative experiences and strategies. Drawing insights from participant statements, the analysis reveals that these individuals are central to cultivating active environmental communities by transforming passive observers into engaged stewards. Key findings indicate that guides primarily achieve this through: 1) Leveraging Shared Experiential Connection, where direct immersion in nature fosters profound emotional bonds and a sense of shared awe, as participants witness and appreciate natural beauty firsthand. 2) Instilling Knowledge and Values, acting as on-trail educators who contextualize environmental issues with immediate relevance, making abstract concepts tangible and fostering responsibility through direct instruction and modeling. 3) Facilitating Collective Action, by organizing concrete environmental initiatives like clean-up drives and tree planting, thereby translating appreciation into active participation and reinforcing shared responsibility through collaboration with community leaders and organizations. 4) Building Networks and Social Capital, by utilizing diverse communication channels—including social media groups, chat apps, and regular meetups—to ensure sustained engagement, foster a shared identity, and empower collective planning and action. In conclusion, local guides and hiking organizers are instrumental in bridging the gap between environmental awareness and tangible action. Their blend of immersive, experiential communication and strategic, multi-platform reach is highly effective in nurturing deep personal connections to nature, educating diverse audiences, and solidifying groups into resilient, active communities committed to environmental protection.

INTRODUCTION

The fast rising issue of environmental degradation presents one of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century. From anthropogenic climate change and biodiversity loss to widespread pollution and resource depletion, the Earth's natural systems are under unprecedented strain, threatening both ecological stability and human well-being (Mukherji, 2023). Scientific consensus overwhelmingly points to human activities as the primary driver of these alarming trends, necessitating urgent and transformative action across all sectors of society.

Climate change poses a serious threat to all generations today, especially that younger people will be more

affected by environmental problems than older people. Schools, different agencies, and the local government are continuously calling for an active participation of the community in protecting the environment and combatting climate change. According to Wallis and Loy (2021), it is important to foster environmental activism as early as possible for the younger generation to drive more support for a sustainable future of our society.

Amidst this escalating crisis, environmental activism has emerged as a critical force, serving as a catalyst for awareness, policy change, and the promotion of sustainable practices. Historically, environmental movements have played a pivotal role in shaping public discourse, advocating

*Corresponding Author: Geff B. Sagala

Address: University of San Agustin, Iloilo City, Philippines

Email ✉: geffsagala@gmail.com

Relevant conflicts of interest/financial disclosures: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

© 2025, Geff B. Sagala, This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

for legislative protections, and holding corporations and governments accountable for their ecological footprint (Burns et al., 2020). From the early conservation efforts of the 19th century to the rise of modern environmentalism in the 1960s and the contemporary global climate strikes, activism has consistently pushed the boundaries of what is considered politically and socially acceptable in relation to the environment.

However, the nature and efficacy of environmental activism are continually evolving in response to the complexity and scale of current ecological challenges. The digital age has transformed communication and mobilization strategies, enabling activists to reach wider audiences and coordinate actions on an unprecedented scale (Carty et al., 2019). Concurrently, environmental movements face new hurdles, including well-funded opposition, political polarization, and the profound psychological and social impacts of climate anxiety (Norgaard, 2011; Marshall, 2015). The effectiveness of different activist approaches—ranging from direct action and civil disobedience to policy lobbying and public education campaigns—is a subject of ongoing debate and scholarly inquiry.

Communication is not merely a supplementary element in environmental activism but a fundamental force that shapes awareness, influences attitudes and behaviors, mobilizes collective action, and ultimately contributes to policy change and a more sustainable future. Its role continues to evolve with technological advancements and a deeper understanding of human psychology and social dynamics (Jacqmarcq, 2021).

According to San Cornelio et al., (2024), communication serves as the primary means to inform the public about environmental issues, their causes, consequences, and potential solutions. Effective communication aims to build a deeper understanding of environmental concepts and foster critical thinking about environmental challenges. In addition, environmental communication seeks to persuade individuals, communities, businesses, and policymakers to adopt more sustainable practices and policies (Comfort & Park, 2018). Digital platforms, especially social media, have revolutionized environmental activism. They facilitate rapid information sharing, raise awareness, and mobilize support for campaigns (Vu et al., 2021). Social media enables activists to connect with like-minded individuals, build communities, and foster global solidarity, amplifying voices and expanding the reach of advocacy efforts.

Understanding the dynamics of environmental activism is therefore crucial for comprehending societal responses to the ecological crisis. This research seeks to delve into the role of communication in promoting environmental activism. By exploring the multifaceted landscape of environmental activism, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of its role in fostering environmental awareness, driving social change,

and ultimately, shaping the future of our planet. This investigation is particularly relevant in the context of Western Visayas region, which is particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts and grappling with sustainable development goals, where local and global environmental issues intersect, demanding robust and persistent advocacy.

This study explored the critical role of communication in promoting environmental advocacies amongst the hiker community in Western Visayas. Generally, this study answered the research question “how do the local guides and hiking organizers communicate to the visitors and hikers the importance of environmental protection and conservation?”

Specifically, this study will answer the following research questions:

- What is the role of communication in promoting and encouraging the hikers to engage in environmental activism?
- How do the local guides and hiking organizers form a community of environmental activists?
- What are the communicative practices of local guides and hiking organizers in promoting environmental activism?

Various literature were published exploring the motivations and insights of hikers (Geiger et al., 2023; Wilcer et al., 2019) in engaging themselves to outdoor activities such as hiking and mountaineering. However, the field of environmental communication and its interplay in environmental activism hasn't been explored yet.

This study was anchored on the “New Social Movement Theory” (NSM) which focuses on movements that emerged after the 1960s, often centered on issues of identity, lifestyle, and quality of life including environmentalism. This theory emphasizes that communication is central to shaping collective identity, fostering shared values, and expressing grievances in new social movements (Buechler, 2013). It emphasizes symbolic politics and the creation of alternative meanings related to environmental issues.

As Swaminathan and Wade (1999) highlights, New Social Movement (NSM) theory provides a valuable lens for understanding the dynamics of environmental activism, particularly in how communication shapes its emergence, character, and impact. Unlike “old” social movements (e.g., labor movements) primarily focused on economic class conflicts and material redistribution, NSMs are generally seen as arising from and addressing “post-materialist” values and issues related to identity, culture, and quality of life (Scott, 2023).

NSM theory emphasizes that environmental movements are often about forging a shared environmental identity and a collective sense of purpose (Staggenborg, 2016). Communication, through narratives, symbols, rituals, and shared experiences, plays a crucial role in constructing this identity. Environmental activism, from

an NSM perspective, is about challenging the prevailing “growthism,” consumerism, and anthropocentric worldviews that underpin environmental degradation (Carter, 2018). Communication becomes the vehicle for articulating alternative values, lifestyles, and relationships with nature. This involves framing environmental issues not just as technical problems, but as deeply rooted in cultural practices and societal norms.

NSMs often operate with decentralized, often informal, and networked structures, rather than rigid hierarchies. Communication technologies (especially social media) are critical for coordinating actions among loosely affiliated groups, sharing information, and fostering a sense of collective identity across geographical boundaries. The networked nature, facilitated by communication, allows environmental movements to be highly fluid and adapt quickly to changing circumstances, new scientific findings, or political opportunities (Rootes, 2014). NSM theory remains highly relevant for understanding how communication, particularly through its role in identity formation, cultural contestation, and decentralized mobilization, is fundamental to promoting environmental activism in the contemporary world.

With this, this study could further emphasize the critical role of communication in promoting the culture of activism, and forming communities of environmental warriors. This could help communication scholars theorize communication practices that can help pro-environmentalists encourage more active participation from the society in protecting the environment. This could also lay down some policies to the local governments units to support the local guides and hiking organizers in promoting the local tourism and at the same time advocating environmental activism.

METHODS

This study employed qualitative research using an ethnographic study design. Qualitative research is an iterative process in which it improves understanding of the scientific community (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Ethnographic research raises fundamental questions about the nature and extent of our dependence on organizations and the implications of this dependence for the way we perceive social life (Ouroussoff, 2020).

The best research framework for examining and observing the culture is through an ethnographic study. The researchers will have an opportunity to explore the lived experiences of the hikers and hiking community by immersing themselves in the actual setting.

Sources of Data. This study looked into the multiple perspectives of the stakeholders via an in-depth interview thru one-to-one correspondence and community immersion. Inclusion criteria will ensure that the conversation partners have rich and detailed experiences with environmental activism and cultural communication.

This study interviewed stakeholders who met the following inclusion criteria:

- Has been working as a local guide and hiking organizer for at least 5 years
- A resident of a local community within the mountain range known for hiking activities
- Must be at least 25 years old with experience hosting a group of hikers

The researchers personally interviewed 9 local guides and hiking organizers to gather their perspectives on the concepts of environmental activism and environmental communication.

The researchers utilized a snowball sampling technique where a gatekeeper was identified to help pinpoint the first local guide that suited the inclusion criteria. The gatekeeper worked in the Department of Tourism in the local region and controlled the contacts of the local guides and hiking organizers. By having a gatekeeper, this diminished the bias of the respondents and ensured that the participants were knowledgeable and credible as a source of data.

After the first interview, the researchers sought a referral from the first participant, and so on and so forth, until the data were saturated with the necessary information needed by this study.

This study was done via a series of in-depth interviews with the stakeholders with assumptions that their views are multiple and differ from each other. In-person interviews with the conversation partners lasted for at least 45-60 minutes.

Aside from the interview, a direct observation was done with the stakeholders. The researcher lived with the participants for a given time to observe and take note of their communicative practices and shared culture with the hikers.

This study used thematic coding to analyze the transcribed interview and observation notes using Braun and Clarke's (2006) systematic method of capturing themes or patterns. Analysis of the experiences yielded to identifying overarching themes described by the conversation partners (Dawadi et al., 2021). The transcripts of the interview were encoded and thematic analysis was used to come up with the discussions of the research objectives.

This study required an in-person interview and community immersion with the stakeholders. A voice recorder, camera, personal laptop, and printer were used in the conduct of the study.

This study ensured utmost concern on ethics especially in the conduct of data collection. The researcher ensured that the respondent's information was kept private and confidential. The respondents were not forced in any way to participate in this study and are allowed to withdraw from participating at any given time. Respondents and participants were asked to sign an informed consent

and informed assent form to ensure their willingness to participate in this study. The researcher also ensured that all information gathered in this study will be used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Role of Communication in Promoting Environmental Activism

Communication is the lifeblood of environmental activism. It's how information spreads, perceptions shift, and individual concern transforms into collective power for environmental protection. More than just sharing facts, it ignites emotions, fosters a shared identity, and builds a sense of collective responsibility.

Raising Awareness and Building Environmental Literacy

Findings showed a strong emphasis is placed on informing and educating the public about environmental issues and solutions. Communication is the primary vehicle for informing the public about environmental issues, their causes, consequences, and potential solutions. It aims to build a deeper understanding of environmental concepts and foster critical thinking.

Participant 2 argues on sharing environmental awareness, education, and inspiring thoughts and actions can make a ripple effect.

Participant 4 said, I want to let more people understand the importance of protecting the environment and educate them on the proper use of natural resources through awareness campaigns and information dissemination strategies.

Actions taken without a deep understanding of why they are important are often based on fleeting trends or external pressure. Once the trend passes or the pressure subsides, the behavior might revert. True understanding goes beyond mere facts; it involves critical thinking, recognizing interconnections, and appreciating the long-term implications of human activities on ecosystems. It fosters a sense of purpose and direction for action.

Participant 1, said we a need strong awareness campaign that will raise environmental literacy among our people.

Participant 8 mentioned, using communication strategies to educate new hikers and enthusiasts, passing down our knowledge and experiences to help them better understand the importance of protecting our natural resources.

When people are well-informed about environmental issues, several factors come into play that increase their likelihood of adopting environmental activism. Being informed means not only knowing about problems but also about viable solutions. This includes understanding sustainable practices (e.g., composting, energy conservation, sustainable consumption), knowing about renewable technologies, and being aware of policy options.

This knowledge empowers individuals to choose actions that are effective and to advocate for broader systemic changes.

Participant 5 said, we want our visitors to be well-informed of environmental issues through our dialogs and stories along the trail.

Participant 9 highlights the need to impart their knowledge to the hikers so they can empower more people to be active in environmental protection.

Influencing Attitudes and Behaviors

Communication seeks to persuade individuals, communities, and policymakers to adopt more sustainable practices. Campaigns are designed to encourage pro-environmental behaviors by raising awareness, increasing knowledge, influencing attitudes, and impacting intentions. Education and awareness are not merely ends in themselves but vital catalysts for behavioral change.

Participant 7 said, people need to understand the importance of our environment so they can be persuaded to act and protect nature.

Participant 8 argues that education is really important to influence the attitudes and behaviors of hikers in protecting the environment.

As more people become informed and start adopting pro-environmental behaviors, these actions can become normalized within a community. This can create a positive feedback loop, encouraging others to conform to new, more sustainable social norms. By fostering a populace that truly understands the intricate relationship between human actions and environmental health, we pave the way for a collective shift towards more sustainable and responsible living.

Participant 3 highlights the positive influence of social media in normalizing environmental activism. When my friends see me, it's normal for them to hear stories and wisdom about taking care of the environment.

Participant 6 said, I use my platform to inform my network about sustainable and responsible hiking activity.

Communication can help build a sense of shared identity around environmental stewardship within a community. When people feel they are part of a group working towards a common environmental goal, their sense of responsibility shifts from purely individual to collective. This shared identity encourages participation and mutual accountability.

Participant 2 said, I influenced the new hikers to share my advocacy and become stewards of mother earth.

Participant 6 emphasized that people want to belong to a circle of network who share the same interest in environmental activism.

Additionally, people visit natural sites like mountains, rivers, or beaches, they engage all their senses. They feel the cool spray of a waterfall, hear the rustle of leaves, smell the damp earth after a rain, see the vibrant colors of a sunset, or taste the fresh air. This rich sensory

input creates a memorable and immersive experience that intellectual understanding alone can't replicate. It transforms an abstract concept ("nature") into a tangible, personal reality.

Participant 4 said, new hikers like to feel the earth and connect with nature.

Participant 8 said, I influence new hikers to immerse themselves with nature and enjoy the outdoors.

The synergy of lived experience and intrinsic motivation creates a powerful, resilient drive for protection. When people truly feel the beauty and value of nature, and experience its benefits firsthand, their desire to protect it becomes an inherent part of who they are. This deep connection fosters consistent pro-environmental behaviors, advocates for stronger policies, and inspires others, creating a ripple effect of stewardship that is far more profound and enduring than actions driven solely by rules, regulations, or financial incentives. It cultivates a genuine love for Mother Earth that transcends words and manifests in sustained, meaningful action.

Mobilization and Collective Action

Digital platforms, especially social media, are crucial for rapid information sharing, raising awareness, and mobilizing support for campaigns. Hashtags, online petitions, and digital storytelling can have immense impact on society. Additionally, communication enables activists to connect, build communities, and foster global solidarity, amplifying voices and expanding advocacy efforts. It supports grassroots organizing by providing platforms for individuals and groups to organize, share information, and disseminate unified messages.

Participant 1 said, the goal is to bring more people together and all work together in protecting the environment.

Participant 3 emphasizes that communication paves a way to bring people together so we can discuss the things to be done for our advocacy of protecting the environment.

Many environmental challenges, such as climate change, ocean plastic pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity loss, operate on a global or regional scale. An individual's efforts, while commendable, are often too small to significantly impact these massive problems in isolation. Environmental degradation is often a symptom of larger systemic issues, including unsustainable industrial practices, outdated infrastructure, problematic policy decisions, and economic models that prioritize growth over ecological health. Individuals may feel powerless to change these deeply entrenched systems on their own.

Participant 6 highlights the need for more people to act and protect the environment.

Participant 9 said, these environmental crises are not limited to our region, but the whole world and people need to work hand-in-hand to solve these problems.

When individuals come together and coordinate their efforts, their collective impact is exponentially greater

than the sum of their individual actions. A community organizing a large-scale clean-up, advocating for policy changes, or adopting sustainable practices across homes and businesses can create tangible, widespread positive change. A community-wide response fosters the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices. People can learn from each other, pool their skills, and access collective funding or support that would be unavailable to individuals.

Participant 8 said, we do coordinated efforts with various organizations to promote environmental activism.

Additionally, when communities act together, they can build resilience against environmental shocks and adapt to changing conditions. This includes developing local disaster preparedness plans, creating green infrastructure, or implementing community-based conservation initiatives. Recognizing the interconnectedness of human well-being and the environment creates a moral imperative for collective action. It shifts the responsibility from solely individual choices to a shared duty to protect the common good.

Participant 4 emphasized that humans and the environment are connected with each other.

Building Connection and Stewardship

Communication cultivates a sense of responsibility as it directly instructs on pro-environmental behaviors (e.g., Leave No Trace principles) and leverages social norms and peer influence within communities (like hiking groups). Additionally, communicating that individual actions make a difference, along with providing clear steps, empowers individuals to contribute. Finally, bringing people to natural places allows them to see beauty firsthand, fostering appreciation and a commitment to protection based on understanding.

Participant 2 mentioned, I want to inspire the hikers, especially new visitors, to act and join my advocacy of protecting the environment.

Participant 5 argues that education helps people realize that we, as people, are connected to our environment. Our livelihoods and lifestyle are dependent on the well-being of nature.

Beyond mere information, this study argues the need to cultivate a deeper emotional and experiential bond with the environment. This component highlights communication's role in tapping into the powerful social fabric of human communities. People are inherently social beings, and their behaviors are often influenced by what others around them do, and what they perceive as acceptable or desirable.

Communication makes desired behaviors visible. When environmental efforts are highlighted through social media posts, community talks, local news, or word of mouth, it demonstrates that "people like us" are engaging in these actions. This visibility helps establish new social norms.

Participant 1 said, people see my posts in social media and this increases the reach of my message to protect the environment.

Participant 4 highlights that the more people see my advocacy the more connections I build promoting environmental activism.

Communication, especially through community platforms and word-of-mouth, can create positive peer pressure. When friends, family, or neighbors express enthusiasm for environmental actions, or when local groups organize collective efforts, it can inspire others to join in to be part of the group and contribute to a shared goal.

Participant 3 said, a lot of my friends on social media are motivated to try hiking because of the positive vibe I post on my wall.

Participant 7 said, because of my hikes and travels my peers are inspired to also try outdoor adventures.

A personal connection and appreciation for nature are powerful motivators for protection, moving beyond abstract concepts to lived experience and intrinsic motivation. For many, nature provides a sense of grounding, belonging, and identity. Protecting it becomes an act of self-preservation and safeguarding a part of their own being or heritage. Acknowledging that nature contributes to one's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being (e.g., through clean air, fresh water, recreational opportunities, aesthetic beauty) fosters a protective instinct. People want to preserve what nurtures them.

This study proves that social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, and private messaging apps perform several critical functions that support and extend traditional face-to-face activism. Digital platforms allow activists to share calls to action, logistics, and real-time updates instantly to a large audience. Additionally, unlike physical meetings, digital platforms allow for continuous communication between activists even when they aren't physically together. Shared content, narratives, hashtags, and digital solidarity help create a shared identity and sense of purpose among a geographically dispersed group, making them feel like part of a larger movement.

Forming a Community of Environmental Activists

Local guides and hiking organizers form communities of environmental activists by creating profound, shared experiences in nature, coupled with consistent education and opportunities for action.

Leveraging on Shared Experiential Connection

Participant 5 said, I bring people to natural sites 'so they can see for themselves how beautiful and mesmerizing nature is.

This shared experience of awe and beauty is the bedrock that guides and fosters a profound emotional connection between the hikers and nature. When a group

collectively marvels at the sunset over the mountain ranges, they share a vulnerability and appreciation that builds camaraderie.

Participant 2 said, I let my joiners see and enjoy the beauty of sunset or sunrise after a difficult hike.

Participant 9 emphasized, hikers are always after the sunset or sunrise and we are giving it to them to experience this moment so they can appreciate nature more.

Guides often highlight the unique features, local stories, and ecological significance of a specific place (e.g., the mystical forest of Mt. Madjaas, the legends of Mt. Nangtud and Baloy, and the sea-to-summit view in Igaras). This helps participants develop a personal attachment to that locale, transforming it from a mere destination into a place they feel invested in protecting.

Participant 3 said, during socials we like to tell stories and share our history to our joiners so we can form connections and bond during socializing.

Participant 6 said, even during hikes, I tell a lot of stories about environmental protection and biodiversity so I can establish connections with the hikers.

In essence, guides transform passive observers into active learners and potential environmental stewards. By grounding abstract ecological concepts in the tangible reality of the trail, they bridge the gap between knowing and caring, making the call to protect Mother Nature intensely personal and deeply understood. This hands-on, contextual education is arguably one of the most effective ways to cultivate a lasting sense of environmental responsibility.

Instilling Knowledge and Values

Guides act as educators on the trail, explaining the disturbance human activities cause to ecosystems, the importance of respecting and protecting nature, and even animal instincts when disturbed. This knowledge is immediately relevant because it's tied to what participants are seeing and experiencing.

Participant 2 said, during trails, I talk about environmental awareness, covering topics such as the disturbance human activities cause to ecosystems, the importance of respecting and protecting nature, and animal instincts when disturbed.

Participant 5 mentioned, I also address waste management during trails.

Hikers aren't just hearing about facts; they are seeing, smelling, hearing, and even feeling the environment. A guide can point to an eroded section of a trail and explain how improper footing or shortcuts cause it, making the concept of soil erosion tangible. They can highlight litter and discuss its impact on the local ecosystem in real-time.

Participant 1 emphasized, I explained to the hikers the concept of landslide and the root cause why it is happening.

Participant 4 said, I instill knowledge and wisdom to the hikers as we are traversing the trails going to the summit.

The guides are giving concrete examples of how human disturbances are harming the ecosystems. The guides discuss how taking shortcuts off a designated path contributes to soil erosion, which then affects water quality and plant life. Additionally, the guides are explaining how loud music or shouting can stress wildlife, disrupting their feeding or breeding patterns. The guides are also pointing out areas where development has encroached on natural spaces and discussing the broader implications for local biodiversity.

Participant 5 said, I talk to the hikers and share my knowledge of what's right and what not to do while hiking like the impact of loud music, deviating from trails, and going out of the trail.

Participant 9 mentioned, I teach hikers how to spot trails so they will not create new paths that disrupts the natural environment.

Beyond the facts, the guide-hiker relationship is key. Hikers are more likely to absorb and internalize information from a knowledgeable, passionate guide who is sharing their immediate observations and expertise. The guide is not just lecturing; they are exploring with the group, fostering a shared journey of discovery and responsibility. A guide's genuine passion for the environment is contagious. They inspire hikers not just to learn, but to care and act.

Facilitating Collective Action

Beyond just hiking, organizers plan concrete environmental activities like "clean-up drives and tree planting." This transforms passive appreciation into active participation, showing individuals how their combined efforts lead to tangible positive change.

Participant 4 said, I do vlogging and gather people in the community to promote activities concerning environmental activism, such as clean-up drives and tree planting.

Collaboration and leveraging on existing networks is crucial in forming a community of environmental activists. It recognizes that even the most passionate individual or small group can only do so much. To create widespread impact, it's essential to partner with established entities that already have reach, resources, and credibility within communities.

Participant 4 said, I coordinate with community leaders, different civic organizations, and government agencies to reach more people and disseminate more information about environmental activism.

Participant 9 emphasizes that people need to work together as one to protect the environment.

Beyond just sharing information, coordination facilitates direct action. When a clean-up drive or a tree-planting event is promoted by the barangay captain, a local church, and an environmental NGO, it attracts a larger, more diverse group of volunteers. This collective effort reinforces the idea that environmental

protection is a shared responsibility, not just an individual burden. It fosters a sense of community ownership over environmental challenges and solutions. It's about building bridges, forging alliances, and recognizing that true impact often comes from working together, leveraging existing social structures and institutional capacities to create a far-reaching and resilient network for change. This strategic approach ensures that environmental messages not only reach more ears but also resonate deeper, leading to more robust and sustainable action within communities.

Building Networks and Social Capital

Hikers formed a shared identity. Regular participation in guided hikes or environmental events fosters a shared identity as "mountaineers," "nature lovers," or "environmental advocates." This group identity strengthens commitment.

Utilizing social media groups, chat apps, and regular meetups allows for continued communication, sharing of ideas, and planning of future initiatives, solidifying the group into an active community.

Participant 1 mentioned, my way to promote environmental activism is through posting on social media and being active in online community forums.

Participant 4 said, I use social media like Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, and others to spread awareness and information about environmental activism and also to build networks.

The digital and interpersonal strategies are crucial for transforming a collection of interested individuals into a cohesive, effective force for environmental good. This approach leverages the strengths of different communication modalities to foster sustained engagement, build shared purpose, and empower collective action.

Social Media Groups are proven to be an excellent platform for open-ended discussions, polling opinions, and gathering diverse perspectives on environmental challenges or potential solutions. Members can share articles about sustainable practices, videos on waste management, or innovative ideas for environmental activism. This democratic exchange of ideas enriches the group's knowledge base.

Participant 2 said, I use social media groups to establish connections and find people who are interested in environmental activism.

Participant 3 highlights the importance of socialization. I mingle and socialize with hikers to build networks and promote environmental activism.

The consistent application of these communication tools such as social media apps and platforms achieves enhanced sense of belonging forming a community of environmental activists connected to a shared mission of protecting the environment. When individuals are regularly engaged, their commitment to the group's goals deepens. Knowing that peers are relying on them, or seeing the collective progress, drives personal accountability.



Through continuous communication and collaborative action, the group develops a strong collective identity as environmental advocates. They are no longer just individual hikers but the community working to protect mother nature.

The findings of this study aligns remarkably with the core tenets of New Social Movement (NSM) Theory, particularly on its emphasis on non-material issues, culture, identity, and communication as the driving forces of contemporary collective action. This demonstrates that local guides are not merely interpreters; they are cultural entrepreneurs of the environmental movement, strategically using direct, immersive communication to construct a collective identity driven by shared post-material values and mobilizing action around shared local grievances.

Communicative Experiences while Promoting Environmental Activism

The communicative experiences of local guides and organizers are a blend of direct, immersive interaction, and broad, mediated outreach.

Experiential Communication during Hikes/Events

Guides narrate the stories of the land, its flora and fauna, and the impact of human activities. This isn't just dry facts; it's engaging storytelling that connects participants emotionally to the environment. This contextualization enriches the experience, turning a simple visit into an educational journey.

Participant 2 said, during hikes, I tell stories about the mountains and its terrain.

Participant 8 said, I talk to hikers and tell stories that are interesting to them.

Experienced individuals (like mountaineers or environmental advocates) can share their deep understanding and passion for nature, inspiring newcomers to develop a similar appreciation and sense of responsibility. This mentorship reinforces the values of environmental protection within a community.

Additionally, local guides verbally instruct on proper trail etiquette, waste disposal, and minimizing impact. Crucially, they model these behaviors, demonstrating responsibility through their own actions. This "do as I do" approach is highly influential.

Participant 7 highlights the importance of telling the hikers to be responsible for their waste. I keep on reminding the hikers to leave without a trace to nurture and protect the environment.

Participant 8 said, it is important that you communicate with the hikers what are the things they should not do when hiking and camping.

Hiking also facilitates informal dialogue and question and answer between the hikers and the local guide. The informal setting of a hike encourages questions and discussions, allowing guides to address concerns, clarify misconceptions, and deepen understanding in real-time.

Participant 1 mentioned, there are times that hikers are asking random questions as they experience things by themselves.

Participant 5 said, hikers have lots of questions during hike and as an environmental advocate, I make it a point to clarify things and discuss important issues about protecting the environment.

Mediated / Ongoing Communication (Before & After Hikes/Events)

Local guides are creating content in social media to communicate and promote environmental activism. This includes posting and creating contents before and after the hike. Sharing visuals of nature's beauty to inspire, but also confronting posts about disturbance caused by human activities. Disseminating information on topics like waste management, animal instincts when disturbed, or general environmental activism. Creating visual narratives that capture the beauty of nature, the efforts of clean-ups, and the impact of environmental issues, making the message more engaging and accessible.

Participant 1 said, I post good photos of the mountains to encourage more visitors to experience hiking.

Participant 2 said, I am immediately posting photos and videos of my hikes so more people can see my adventures and influence them to better protect the environment.

On another note, this study proves that word of mouth is still a powerful, personal form of communication. Guides share their extensive experience as an environmental activist. This personal testimony and expert insight build trust and directly influence individuals within their personal networks.

Participant 6 highlights that his degree in Environmental Management has a huge influence in promoting environmental activism.

Summary

Communication plays an indispensable, multifaceted role in promoting environmental activism, acting as the bridge that connects initial awareness to sustained, collective action.

Communication is fundamental for disseminating vital information, serving as the prerequisite for meaningful engagement. It educates the public by translating complex environmental challenges, their causes, and potential solutions into easily understandable concepts. This includes detailing the disturbance human activities inflict upon ecosystems and highlighting the importance of respect and protection for nature.

Beyond mere factual delivery, effective communication cultivates intrinsic motivation and personal responsibility. It moves individuals from abstract concepts to lived experiences, fostering a deep personal connection and appreciation for nature that compels them to protect what they genuinely value. By appealing to ethical considerations and shared values, communication instills a

profound sense of responsibility beyond simple instruction on pro-environmental behaviors.

Crucially, communication functions as the engine for collective mobilization. It not only outlines how individuals can contribute but also communicates urgent calls to action, organizes events like clean-up drives and tree plantings, and underscores that environmental challenges necessitate large, concerted efforts. It is the “glue” that solidifies groups into active, sustained communities of environmental activists, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose through continued idea sharing and planning via digital platforms and in-person meetups.

To maximize impact, activism strategically employs diverse, hybrid platforms. This includes dominant digital channels like social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram) and vlogging, coupled with powerful traditional methods like radio and interpersonal exchanges through community forums and word-of-mouth.

Ultimately, local guides and hiking organizers are uniquely positioned to leverage this full spectrum of communication. They transform individual nature enthusiasts into committed environmental stewards by strategically combining the immersive, emotionally impactful education of direct interaction on the trail with consistent, structured opportunities for action and widespread digital reinforcement. This dual approach ensures that environmental messages are not only deeply understood but continuously reinforced and broadly disseminated.

CONCLUSION

Based from the findings of this study, it can be conclusively stated that local guides and hiking organizers are pivotal actors in cultivating environmental activism, primarily through their holistic and highly effective communication strategies. They transform abstract environmental concepts into tangible, personal experiences. By acting as on-trail educators, they directly link observed natural beauty or human disturbance to specific environmental knowledge and the urgent need for protection. This hands-on, experiential learning is a powerful catalyst for understanding and subsequent action.

More than just informing, their communication fosters a profound personal connection and appreciation for nature. This emotional bond, cultivated through shared experiences of awe and beauty, directly motivates individuals to protect the environment intrinsically, moving beyond external pressures to a genuine sense of care and responsibility.

Finally, the local guides’ efforts extend beyond one-off interactions, focusing on creating and sustaining communities of environmental activists. Through continued communication, idea sharing, and collaborative planning for initiatives like clean-up drives and tree planting, they foster a shared identity and purpose, ensuring long-term engagement and collective action.

In essence, local guides and hiking organizers are not just facilitators of outdoor experiences; they are community builders and frontline educators who leverage both the immersive power of nature and strategic communication to transform individuals into passionate, informed, and actively engaged environmental stewards. Their work is critical in translating appreciation for the natural environment into sustained, collective efforts for its protection, where direct engagement with natural landscapes is a significant part of the community’s interaction with the environment.

The findings of this study provide a highly specific and actionable framework for understanding the role of communication in environmental activism by illustrating its power to bridge the gap between abstract concepts and sustained action. Furthermore, communication extends beyond the hike itself through continued communication, idea sharing, and collaborative planning, and this fosters a shared identity and purpose.

Moreover, international sustainable tourism and conservation efforts increasingly recognize local guides and hiking organizers as crucial to conservation and responsible tourism. These guides are seen as protectors and educators who provide authentic, place-based knowledge.

Additionally, modern activism relies on a hybrid strategy where digital platforms are used for global environmental communication. Organizations like the United Nations and major nongovernment organizations leverage these platforms to humanize the environmental crisis and inspire action.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are highly recommended:

- Strategize Multi-Platform Communication through consistent digital content. Local guides are recommended to maintain a regular schedule for posting high-quality photos/videos from hikes that showcase both nature’s beauty and the impacts of human activities. Utilize features like Instagram Reels, Facebook Live during a clean-up, or YouTube Shorts for quick educational snippets.
- To better promote environmental activism, it is recommended to have a dedicated online community hub by creating and actively moderating social media groups specifically for hikers and environmental advocates. These platforms should be used for ongoing discussions, sharing relevant articles, organizing future activities, and providing a space for members to connect and share their own environmental journeys.
- Foster local leadership by identifying engaged members within the hiking community who can take on leadership roles in organizing activities, managing social media groups, or leading specific advocacy initiatives within their own localities.



By implementing these recommendations, local guides and hiking organizers can significantly amplify their impact, transforming their passion for nature into a powerful, collective force for environmental protection across their communities.

REFERENCES

1. Aspers, P., & Corte, U. (2019). What is qualitative in qualitative research. *Qualitative sociology*, 42(2), 139-160. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-019-9413-7>
2. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
3. Buechler, S. M. (2013). New social movements and new social movement theory. *The Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia of social and political movements*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm143>
4. Burns, C., Eckersley, P., & Tobin, P. (2020). EU environmental policy in times of crisis. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27(1), 1-19.
5. Carter, N. (2018). *The politics of the environment: Ideas, activism, policy*. Cambridge University Press.
6. Carty, V., & Reynoso Barron, F. G. (2019). Social movements and new technology: The dynamics of cyber activism in the digital age. *The Palgrave handbook of social movements, revolution, and social transformation*, 373-397.
7. Comfort, S. E., & Park, Y. E. (2018). On the field of environmental communication: A systematic review of the peer-reviewed literature. *Environmental Communication*, 12(7), 862-875. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2018.1514315>
8. Dawadi, S., Shrestha, S., & Giri, R. A. (2021). Mixed-methods research: A discussion on its types, challenges, and criticisms. *Journal of Practical Studies in Education*, 2(2), 25-36. <https://doi.org/10.46809/jpse.v2i2.20>
9. Geiger, K., Sers, S., Buday, L., & Wäsche, H. (2023). Why hikers hike: an analysis of motives for hiking. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 27(4), 315-329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14775085.2023.2252420>
10. Jacqmarcq, M. (2021). Environmental activism in the digital age. *Flux: International Relations Review*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.26443/firr.v11i1.52>
11. Marshall, P. (2015). *Nature's web: Rethinking our place on earth*. Routledge.
12. Mukherji, A. (2023). Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report. <https://doi.org/10.59327/ipcc/ar6-9789291691647>
13. Norgaard, K. M. (2011). *Living in denial: Climate change, emotions, and everyday life*. mit Press.
14. Ouroussoff, A. (2020). What is an ethnographic study?. In *Inside Organizations* (pp. 35-58). Routledge.
15. Rootes, C. (2014). *Environmental movements: Local, national and global*. Routledge.
16. San Cornelio, G., Martorell, S., & Ardèvol, E. (2024). "It is the Voice of the Environment that Speaks", Digital Activism as an Emergent Form of Environmental Communication. *Environmental Communication*, 18(4), 375-389. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2023.2296850>
17. Scott, A. (2023). *Ideology and the new social movements*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003363156>
18. Staggenborg, S. (2016). *Social movements*. Oxford University Press.
19. Swaminathan, A., & Wade, J. B. (1999, August). Social movement theory and the evolution of new organizational forms. In *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Vol. 1999, No. 1, pp. I1-I6). Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510: Academy of Management. <https://doi.org/10.5465/apb.1999.27627374>
20. Vu, H. T., Blomberg, M., Seo, H., Liu, Y., Shayesteh, F., & Do, H. V. (2021). Social media and environmental activism: Framing climate change on Facebook by global NGOs. *Science communication*, 43(1), 91-115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547020971644>
21. Wallis, H., & Loy, L. S. (2021). What drives pro-environmental activism of young people? A survey study on the Fridays For Future movement. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 74, 101581.
22. Wilcer, S. R., Larson, L. R., Hallo, J. C., & Baldwin, E. (2019). Exploring the diverse motivations of day hikers: Implications for hike marketing and management. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 37(3). <https://doi.org/10.18666/JPra-2019-9176>

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE: Sagala, G.B., Cabales, J.C. (2025). Role of Communication in Promoting Environmental Activism Amongst Hikers in Western Visayas: An Ethnographic Research. *Journal of Communication and Management*, 4(4), 84-93. DOI: 10.58966/JCM2025449