

Topics (T)

The Social, Communications, Economic and Cultural Dimensions of Environmental Change (9)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATING THE VALUE OF SPACE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

Abstract

The space industry is often perceived as a frivolous use of resources, with many arguing that we should prioritize solving pressing climate, environmental, and social issues on Earth before venturing into space. However, this perspective overlooks the crucial role that space technology plays in various aspects of life on Earth, especially in tackling global challenges such as climate change. Additionally, despite the industry’s critical contributions to addressing climate change, it is often mistakenly perceived as a driving contributor in water vapor and CO₂ emissions.

This paper argues that the negative perceptions of the space industry are primarily due to the industry’s historical shortcomings in communication and public relations. For example, the industry tends to focus on describing the technical aspects of their work, such as the capabilities of a technology or the details of a mission, rather than focusing on the significance and impact of their work. This lack of emphasis on the “why” leads to a disconnect with external parties such as the general public and media who may not fully understand or appreciate the importance of space technology in addressing global challenges like climate change.

Mitigating these negative perceptions is of utmost importance for several reasons, chief among them being the industry’s reliance on external funding from sources such as Congress and venture capitalists. Because the industry’s ability to secure funding for things like critical climate change technologies is directly linked to its ability to communicate its value effectively to these stakeholders, it is crucial that the industry take a proactive approach to better communicate both the “what” and the “why” of its work.

This paper delves into the current state of the space industry’s communications and public relations efforts, examining the various internal and external factors that shape these efforts. It also discusses the risks associated with not reforming the industry’s cultural and communication practices, including the potential loss of talent to other industries perceived as more socially- and environmentally-conscious, and the greater impact on the environment and climate if it is more challenging to secure funding for space-related climate change technologies. The paper concludes by offering practical and actionable recommendations for the industry to improve its communication efforts in order to more effectively communicate the value space technologies have, especially for combating global challenges like climate change.