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Social media, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and now TikTok, often make us feel worried about the environment without realizing it. We start to watch videos, posts, and threads (on Twitter) that stick in our minds. Sometimes these feelings worsen when we converse with others about the environmental state, and how it seems like a neglected issue.

These platforms promote prolonged and sometimes unhealthy use. They show us things that make us feel strong emotions, like anxiety, worry, or fear. The problem is, that they often show a lot of scary news about things like climate change or animals disappearing. This can make us feel like everything is becoming increasingly worse and we feel that there's nothing we can do because the media has engraved our minds with the message that “The big corporations are the only ones that can make a change”.

The media also tries to recommend more content in our feed that relates to today’s trending topics or most liked posts/videos. That poses the risk that we might only see stuff that makes us worry more about the environment, It could create a never-ending stream of bad news.

The things we see on social media can cause fear towards the environment and environment-related issues. They focus on things that will get a lot of attention, even if the news is shocking or extreme. Sometimes, they show things that aren't true just because it gets people talking and do some “trends”. This can make us not trust the real facts about the environment. Plus, when we react to these scary things by commenting or sharing, social media thinks we want to see more of it, so they show it to us even more. It's like a cycle that keeps making us more anxious about the environment.

All this worry about the environment on social media happens because these platforms want us to keep using them. They show us stuff that will grab our attention, even if it's upsetting. It can make us feel like things are worse than they are and that we can't do anything to help. But it's important to remember that the things we see aren't always the whole picture, and there’s more than we can see, for example in a natural disaster when everything we can see is the bad things, the worst scenario, and we are not saying that that’s not real but it also can be also making everyone feels more anxious, even though this can make the solutions came a little bit fast but we only see what people wanted to see, or sometimes what the government wants. Finding a balance and knowing where to look for accurate information can help us feel more in control and hopeful about making a positive difference for our planet and our mental health.

**Social Causes of Eco-Anxiety:** Eco-anxiety could be caused by various factors in many areas that contribute to its prevalence around the community especially in young audiences. The interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental challenges creates a sense of helplessness and uncertainty among individuals. The traditional media has put it on the spot, and more with bleak scenarios, contributing to the sense of threat. Consequently, individuals experience heightened anxiety and stress regarding the state of the planet and its future.

**Positive Impact of Social Media:** Despite popular belief, social media can play a positive role and act for good. Firstly, it provides a platform for diverse voices, allowing to spread of information quickly if it is a natural disaster, and environmental activists to amplify their concerns and try to share and find solutions. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok facilitate the diffusion of information, promoting environmental consciousness among users all around the world.

**Fostering Awareness:** Social media has played a pivotal role in raising awareness about environmental issues. Campaigns, challenges, and viral content centered around sustainability, conservation efforts, and climate action have reached millions, sparking conversations and motivating collective action. Hashtags like #ClimateAction, #SustainableLiving, and #ZeroWaste have united individuals passionate about reducing environmental negativity.

**Empowerment and Action:** Social media empowers individuals to take tangible actions. Online communities and groups dedicated to environmental causes provide a space for sharing ideas, resources, and practical tips for sustainable living. Educational content, such as tutorials on reducing carbon footprint or creating eco-friendly habits, equips individuals with the tools to make a positive impact in their daily lives.

**Amplification of Environmental Crises:** Social media, where information spreads rapidly, often highlights environmental crises in real time. Images and videos depicting natural disasters, deforestation, species extinction, and the effects of climate change flood the platform, creating a continuous stream of disturbing content. Constant exposure to alarming news can leave people feeling overwhelmed and increase anxiety, hopelessness, and environmental anxiety.

**Echo Chambers and Confirmation Bias:** Social media algorithms tend to personalize content based on user's preferences, creating echo chambers where individuals are exposed to information that is consistent with their existing beliefs. This phenomenon reinforces existing environmental fears by continuously presenting alarming news and reinforcing the sense of impending environmental disaster, without providing balanced perspectives or solutions. There is a possibility.

**Spread of Misinformation:** The free nature of social media allows for the spread of misinformation and pseudoscience about environmental issues. False or exaggerated claims about environmental threats can mislead individuals and lead to increased fear and confusion. Misinformation can undermine trust in the scientific consensus and increase feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness.

**Comparison and Pressure:** Social media often presents idealized versions of green living and activities, which can create a culture of comparison and instill feelings of guilt and inadequacy in those who feel they fall short. there is. Seemingly perfect sustainable lifestyles and large-scale environmental efforts by others can increase feelings of deficiency and contribute to increased anxiety about personal impact and the state of the world.

**Overload of Negative Content:** The sheer volume of distressing environmental content on social media platforms can lead to emotional fatigue and desensitization. Continuous exposure to bleak news without adequate breaks or balanced content can desensitize individuals to environmental issues, leading to a sense of powerlessness or emotional numbing rather than constructive action.

**Recommended action:** Given the potential for environmental anxiety to be exacerbated by social media, several recommendations have emerged to promote a healthier online environment. Consuming information critically is a fundamental principle, and we encourage fact-checking and verification before sharing content related to environmental issues. Encouraging platforms to balance disturbing news with positive articles and practical solutions can help combat the overflow of negative information. Educational initiatives that promote environmental literacy provide accurate insights and practical steps for positive change. At the same time, building a collaborative online community focuses on solutions and mutual support to address environmental concerns.

Media literacy programs also enable users to distinguish between reliable sources and misinformation, fostering more informed conversations. By promoting mindful consumption habits and encouraging offline behavior, awareness is translated into concrete, sustainable practices within local communities. Platforms, environmental organizations, and mental health professionals can work together to promote responsible communication policies and put warnings when the social media SEO detects keywords so that people can be aware of what will be found on the posts. Additionally, we recognize the impact that environmental anxiety has on individuals by providing mental health support resources and advocating for self-care practices. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of our strategy ensures continuous improvement to maintain a balanced and supportive online space centered around environmental discussion.

Genavie Castellano Part 3: Eco-Anxiety & Social Media

**Prospectus:** Planet Earth is seemingly becoming worse off, and human society is just beginning to seek ways to reverse the damage. Because the damage is already setting in, many individuals, ill and well-informed alike, may experience some degree of eco-anxiety and stress, worrying about “How much worse could it get?” or “What could I possibly do”? Social media is a source of fast news and imagery for news around the world, however, it could be causing more harm and negatively informing the public with its already tarnished reputation for egging on the comparative lifestyle and pessimistic thinking. Social media platforms, like Instagram for example, could enhance their setup to inform the public by providing information links within posts or keywords when searching for items up, to further educate the public. By using the eye-catching marketing and instantaneous news technique it’s known for, social media can create a more positive mental environment by replacing people’s questions of “What can I do?” with “Here’s what I can do”!

**Intro:** The use of social media has opened many doors and opportunities for the growing technology scene of our society. It provides easy access to news, connections to friends and families, and an open area for individuals to share their views and interact with others who hold similar ones. One of the more popular platforms, Instagram, is particularly attractive to users because of its fast-paced environment for capturing the moment or sharing the news through posts, photos, and videos. Instagrammers can find instant gratification, communication, and inspiration; the experience is all tailored and personalized to you and your interests by simply tapping the “like” button. Social media, more specifically, the Instagram platform, can be used to positively affect an individual’s interests and mental health, through the instantaneous nature of the app, by connecting with like-minded users, keeping them informed about the world around them, and providing inspiration and resources for further exploration and creativity.

**Similar View:** One of the biggest concerns for users entering the social media scene is the negative impacts on mental health. Influences to worsening health issues such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness have all been linked to increased use or ill-use of the platforms. “Since it’s a relatively new technology, there’s little research to establish the long-term consequences, good or bad, of social media use. However, multiple studies have found a strong link between heavy social media and an increased risk for depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts” (Robinson and Smith). Anxiety, for example, can begin or continue to be a negatively fed mental parasite for many individuals. Social platform use can bring rise to problems such as a comparative lifestyle, FOMO (fear of missing out), becoming self-absorbed, or feeling cut off or isolated from others. This creates an anxiety-prone mindset for an individual who may begin to constantly worry if they are doing enough to promote their social image, provide followers with the daily updates or news they “can’t live without”, or worry about keeping up with everyone’s perfect lives. One may begin to sink into a rabbit hole with no escape and slowly become more distant from their real connections or the real world. As a result, when it comes time to have an opinion on real-world issues or a normal conversation about such things, many of these online natives have no idea how to react or navigate their feelings healthily. “Social media and internet interactions offer a veil between the person sending and the person receiving the message. These interactions are no longer face to face, and this can lead to some unfiltered conversations as people feel they can say anything with no repercussions” (Nair).

**Similar View:** Take the climate crisis for example. The changing temperature, resource depletion, and its effects on the state of Planet Earth and its people is becoming an urgent situation. Many people or groups are becoming struck with a sense of panic about what they can do to help and fast. This ongoing environmental emergency has brought to life a new level of worry for concerned individuals to fall into, known as eco-anxiety. Eco-anxiety refers to constant and sometimes extreme worry relating to environmental issues and the current state and harm that humans are causing to our planet. The surge of climate news and negativity can leave many individuals with feelings of hopelessness and stress and questions like “I’m just one person, what could I possibly do”? It’s a hard pill to swallow that the Earth is suffering, and people may feel that it’s too late in the game for them to make a meaningful impact.

**Opposing View, Using what we know to positively benefit mental health/how it doesn’t worsen eco-anxiety:** Even though the topic of climate change has earned itself a negative reputation, some good has been brought forth despite the circumstances.Along with the rise of climate news, climate solutions and innovations have been implemented into society, a few of which you might recognize such as alternative electricity systems, solar projects, recycling, and waste management. However, the common theme here is that these plans are mostly implemented by large-scale companies or big organizations. What about local efforts? How does society work to engage the communities and provide ways for people to get involved and aid the cause? The best way for an individual to join the climate solution is to simply be informed. Educate yourself. “Education can encourage people to change their attitudes and behavior; it also helps them to make informed decisions. In the classroom, young people can be taught the impact of global warming and learn how to adapt to climate change. Education empowers all people but especially motivates the young to take action. Knowing the facts helps eliminate the fear of an issue which is frequently colored by doom and gloom in the public arena” (United Nations). This education can take place in formal classroom settings, auditoriums with guest speakers, through hands-on volunteer work, or even from inside your pocket. Yep! That cellular device you carry around all day can be a useful tool for keeping you informed about real-world issues. The trick is to use what you know best, and today’s youth has mastered the art of social media. Many pro-environment organizations and news sources provide facts and information on related issues. It’s a great opportunity to reach the community since most of our society lies in or relies on the digital scene for news, solutions, how-to’s, entertainment…you name it. These social platforms are perfect for catching viewers’ attention through short, eye-catching posts or videos that show a glimpse of how they can do their part, have breaking news topics brought to their attention on the spot such as natural disaster news, or skim through the main ideas of a topic, as opposed to spending precious time reading through “lengthy” articles or blogs.

Furthermore, as users interact with posts or comments, they are more likely to find related content or positive, “good news stories” relating to the climate dilemma, and even find like-minded individuals with whom they can further discuss what they briefly read or saw. “Social sites like TikTok and Reddit are great for community building, too, and can help spread “good news” stories that generate widespread interest and firm up public interest in climate research” (Fletcher). This can aid in developing a more hopeful social media scene, and users will be more inclined to stay up-to-date with their surroundings, have an informed opinion about real-world issues, and realize that there are many ways to make an impact in related areas.

**My Perspective & What Can Be Done Better:** I feel that if social media is used to meaningfully inform the public, it can be an extremely useful tool in education. Education is key to welcoming the community to participate in the climate crisis. After all, why would one choose to have an opinion on or get involved with something they do not know about? Within our digital society, however, we have a built-in information-transfer system with the many social platforms out there: Reddit, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook to name a few big names. Since most of the population is on at least one of these platforms, it provides easy access to reach an audience.

My group and I decided to approach one of the main social platforms, Instagram, for this discussion. Since the premise of Instagram is to capture the moment in quick stories, reels, or eye-catching photos and posts, we figured why doesn’t the platform take advantage of this tactic and catch a pro-environment audience with its technique. One of the features of the app is the “For You Page” where users can find recommended content based on what they scroll through and like for hours on end. Climate-related issues typically aren’t going to pop up on here unless it’s breaking news, which might display negative or devastating environmental news and either discourage further clicking or worsen an already gloomy mental space for the scroller. A better alternative would be if news producers changed the way they present their information to promote positive statistics and ways to get involved and make an impact. They could do so by using colors that pop, interesting visuals, or even providing brief, informative text over a reel that would be hard to read unless you clicked and interacted with the post. The result? More interaction with climate-related data -> more informed individuals -> interactions such as clicking, sharing or liking will help bring more climate news to the “For You Page”. Another method would be through providing information links or searchable/clickable keywords that would lead users to more extensive reading resources, such as articles about healthily combatting eco-anxiety or even explaining what climate change is. Scrollers could access the information links either by reading an Instagram account bio, post descriptions, or depending on their search queries, resources would also pop up. This method is similar to how social media worked to keep the public informed about health and help options during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, on Instagram, if one searches up the word “Covid”, search results include links to the Center for Disease Control and their information on Covid-19, and even Trusted Resources and important account suggestions to follow or view posts such as World Health Organization or UNICEF. We were thinking that this was an easy way to reach the curious user. Keywords might include words like: environment, anxiety, climate, earth, or solutions and similar accounts to credible environmental researchers and scientists, volunteer programs, and even psychological and mental health pages for healthy coping strategies. The tactic would rely on mapping out and analyzing popular “user journeys” throughout the app to see where the best areas to draw positive attention would be. By “user journey” we’re referring to the typical path users follow through from opening the app, scrolling, interactions…etc.

**Conclusion:** By using methods and routines that much of our society follows within the digital world, we can use it to our advantage to healthily promote solutions and positive, yet important news to the public and help users cope or rethink their negative thinking on the climate change issue! Being properly educated on real-world issues, allows people to make informed decisions, form sound opinions, and have an overall better emotional experience when receiving news. Let’s work to establish hope among the hopelessness.

Annotated Bibliography

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“Our study has brought preliminary evidence to answer this question. Using a nationally representative sample, we assessed the association of two dimensions of social media use—how much it’s routinely used and how emotionally connected users are to the platforms—with three health-related outcomes: social well-being, positive mental health, and self-rated health” (Bekalu, et. al). The Harvard study was persuasive for the context of this paper in mapping out that positive outcomes can be produced through routine social platform use, such as mental health benefits and connections. This source was not directly used or cited within my writing, but it provided a strengthening perspective on the use of social media as a means of breaking distance barriers and connecting with others.

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“Social media can further the impact of climate change research by hosting climate-conscious digital communities. This is particularly important for folks who live in areas where the biggest environmental problems are largely ignored or misunderstood. Would-be climate activists can connect with researchers and organisations to fund their climate-change projects and raise awareness in their area” (Fletcher). This source’s argument was persuasive for this essay. Fletcher breaks down four ways that social media can get communities involved in climate research in a positive light by highlighting areas of: community building, sharing information to the public, disaster response, and challenging the misinformation worry/issue.

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“It’s no surprise that the widespread use of social media for communicating ideas, personal and professional stories and experiences has had a profound effect on the overall way people communicate today. Just how has social media affected communication, you ask? In more ways than you may think! But not all are bad — just look at our list of social media effects on communication” (Nair). This source took a more casual, yet persuasive approach to the social media and climate discussion. It breaks down what social media is and goes into depth about the type of communication environment it has created for users, such as the style of persuasion or use of the platforms and how it can be used to further keep our society informed about real-world issues. This works perfectly for this argument of Part 3 of the essay’s section.

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“Human beings are social creatures. We need the companionship of others to thrive in life, and the strength of our connections has a huge impact on our mental health and happiness. Being socially connected to others can ease stress, anxiety, and depression, boost self-worth, provide comfort and joy, prevent loneliness, and even add years to your life. On the flip side, lacking strong social connections can pose a serious risk to your mental and emotional health” (Robinson and Smith). This source was very useful and persuasive regarding the mental health aspect of this essay. It provided different perspectives of the pros and cons of social media use, and particularly highlights the negative impacts increased use could lead to, such as anxiety, depression, or even affected social skills. This helps strengthen this section of the essay by providing insight into areas where social media could be positively used and improved.

“Education Is Key to Addressing Climate Change.” *United Nations*, United Nations, 14 July 2020, [www.un.org/en/climatechange/climate-solutions/education-key-addressing-climate-change#:~:text=In%20the%20classroom%2C%20young%20people,gloom%20in%20the%20public%20arena](http://www.un.org/en/climatechange/climate-solutions/education-key-addressing-climate-change#:~:text=In%20the%20classroom%2C%20young%20people,gloom%20in%20the%20public%20arena).

“Education is a critical agent in addressing the issue of climate change. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) assigns responsibility to Parties of the Convention to undertake educational and public awareness campaigns on climate change, and to ensure public participation in programmes and information access on the issue” (United Nations). This brief article I personally found persuasive because it highlighted the importance of of education as an entry ticket to understanding and getting involved in the climate solution. I agree that by educating and providing resources to the community through local and large-scale organizations and voices, it can create a more comfortable environment for individuals to share and stay informed with news, which was a main point for this essay.

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