

Social Media vs Real-World Environmental Action: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: *The rapid growth of social media platforms has transformed the way environmental issues are communicated and perceived by the public. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter (X) play a significant role in spreading awareness about critical environmental concerns like climate change, pollution, and sustainability. Millions of users interact with such content daily through likes, shares, and comments, making social media a powerful tool for digital activism.*

However, an important question arises regarding the effectiveness of this online engagement: does increased awareness on social media actually lead to real-world environmental action? This study aims to compare the influence of social media awareness with actual eco-friendly practices adopted by individuals. The research focuses on identifying the gap between online participation and offline behavioral change.

Primary data for this study was collected through a structured questionnaire targeting college students, while secondary data was gathered from existing research articles and reports. The findings indicate that although social media significantly enhances awareness, it does not always translate into meaningful action. A large number of individuals engage in online activities related to environmental issues but fail to adopt consistent eco-friendly practices in their daily lives.

The study highlights the presence of “slacktivism,” where individuals participate in low-effort online actions that create a sense of contribution without leading to substantial impact. It concludes that while social media is an effective awareness tool, there is a need to bridge the gap between digital engagement and real-world environmental action. Recommendations are provided to improve the effectiveness of environmental campaigns by linking online initiatives with practical, offline participation.

Keywords: *Instagram*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, environmental issues have become one of the most pressing global concerns. Problems such as climate change, air and water pollution, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity are increasingly affecting ecosystems as well as human life. Addressing these challenges requires not only government policies and industrial changes but also active participation from individuals. In this context, awareness plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes and encouraging environmentally responsible behavior.

With the advancement of technology, social media has emerged as a powerful communication tool that influences public opinion and behavior. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter (X) allow information to spread rapidly across large audiences. Environmental campaigns, awareness drives, and sustainability movements are now commonly promoted through posts, videos, hashtags, and online challenges. These platforms enable individuals, influencers, and organizations to share information, raise concerns, and mobilize support for environmental causes.

The accessibility and interactive nature of social media have made it easier for people, especially youth, to engage with environmental issues. Users can participate in discussions, share content, and express their views instantly. This has led to the rise of digital activism, where individuals contribute to social causes through online activities. However, this form of engagement often raises questions about its effectiveness in bringing real change.



Despite the high level of awareness generated through social media, there is growing concern that such engagement may not always translate into actual environmental action. Many users actively like, share, or comment on environmental posts but may not adopt eco-friendly practices in their daily lives. This phenomenon is often referred to as “slacktivism,” where participation is limited to low-effort online activities rather than meaningful real-world involvement.

Therefore, it becomes important to examine whether social media is truly effective in encouraging environmental action or if it mainly creates awareness without significant behavioral change. This study focuses on comparing social media engagement with real-world environmental practices to understand the gap between intention and action.

The research aims to analyze how social media influences environmental awareness and to what extent this awareness leads to practical steps such as reducing plastic usage, conserving resources, or participating in environmental activities. By identifying this gap, the study seeks to provide insights into how digital platforms can be better utilized to promote real and sustainable environmental change.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing use of social media has significantly influenced the way environmental issues are communicated and understood by the public. Various researchers have studied the role of digital platforms in spreading awareness, shaping opinions, and encouraging participation in environmental activities. This section reviews existing studies related to social media, environmental awareness, and real-world action.

Several studies highlight that social media serves as an effective tool for disseminating environmental information. Researchers have found that platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter (X) enable rapid sharing of content, allowing environmental messages to reach a large and diverse audience.

According to recent findings, visually engaging content such as videos, infographics, and reels increases user interaction and helps in simplifying complex environmental concepts for the general public. As a result, social media plays a crucial role in educating individuals about issues like climate change, pollution, and sustainable living.

In addition to awareness, social media has also contributed to the growth of environmental activism. Digital campaigns, online petitions, and hashtag movements have encouraged people to participate in global discussions and support environmental causes. Studies suggest that social media provides a platform for individuals, especially youth, to express their concerns and connect with like-minded communities. This has strengthened collective action and increased visibility for environmental issues at both national and international levels.

However, despite these positive impacts, many researchers have raised concerns about the effectiveness of social media in bringing real-world change. One of the most discussed concepts in this context is “slacktivism.” Slacktivism refers to low-effort online activities such as liking, sharing, or commenting on posts, which give users a sense of involvement without requiring significant commitment or action.

Studies indicate that while users may feel satisfied after engaging online, they are less likely to take concrete steps such as reducing waste, conserving energy, or participating in environmental programs.

Furthermore, research shows that there is often a gap between awareness and behavior. While social media can influence attitudes and increase knowledge, it does not always lead to consistent behavioral change. Factors such as convenience, lack of resources, social norms, and personal motivation play an important role in determining whether individuals adopt eco-friendly practices. For example, a person may be aware of the harmful effects of plastic but may still continue using it due to lack of alternatives or habit.

Some studies also suggest that social media can sometimes create temporary trends rather than long-term change. Environmental topics may become popular for a short period due to viral content, but the impact fades over time if not supported by continuous efforts and real-world initiatives.

Overall, the literature indicates that social media is highly effective in raising awareness and initiating conversations about environmental issues. However, its ability to convert this awareness into meaningful real-world action remains limited. This gap between online engagement and offline behavior forms the basis of the present study.



III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study is conducted with the aim of understanding the relationship between social media engagement and real-world environmental action. The objectives are designed to analyze both awareness and behavior in a comparative manner.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the role of social media in creating awareness about environmental issues among individuals. With the increasing use of digital platforms, it is important to understand how effectively social media educates users about problems such as climate change, pollution, and sustainability.

Another important objective is to evaluate the extent to which individuals actually engage in real-world environmental practices. This includes activities such as recycling, reducing plastic usage, conserving water, participating in cleanliness drives, and adopting sustainable lifestyles. The study seeks to determine whether awareness gained through social media is reflected in these actions.

The research also aims to compare online engagement with offline behavior. Many individuals actively participate in environmental discussions on social media by liking, sharing, or posting content. However, it is essential to analyze whether this digital participation leads to meaningful action in real life.

In addition, the study focuses on identifying the gap between awareness and action. Understanding this gap will help in recognizing the limitations of social media as a tool for environmental change and highlight areas where improvement is needed.

Finally, the study aims to provide suggestions for bridging this gap by improving the effectiveness of social media campaigns and encouraging individuals to convert online awareness into real-world environmental responsibility.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology outlines the systematic approach used to collect, analyze, and interpret data for this study. It ensures that the findings are reliable, valid, and relevant to the research objectives.

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and comparative research design. The descriptive aspect focuses on understanding the level of environmental awareness created through social media, while the comparative aspect analyzes the difference between online engagement and real-world environmental actions.

4.2 Nature of Data

Both primary and secondary data have been used in this study.

Primary data provides firsthand information collected directly from respondents.

Secondary data supports the study through existing literature such as research papers, journals, articles, and online reports related to social media and environmental behavior.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire created through Google Forms. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and multiple-choice questions to gather accurate and easy-to-analyze responses.

The questions were divided into sections covering:

Social media usage

Environmental awareness

Real-world environmental actions

Comparison between online and offline behavior

Secondary data was collected from reliable academic and online sources to support theoretical understanding and provide background information for the study.



4.4 Sampling Method

The study uses a convenience sampling method, where respondents were selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate. This method is suitable for academic research with limited time and resources.

4.5 Sample Size

A total of 75 respondents participated in the survey. The sample mainly consists of college students, as they are active users of social media and are more exposed to environmental content online.

4.6 Tools and Techniques for Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using simple statistical tools such as:

Percentage analysis to interpret responses

Pie charts and bar graphs for visual representation

Comparative analysis to identify the gap between awareness and action These tools helped in presenting the data in a clear and understandable manner.

4.7 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on understanding the behavior of social media users, particularly students, in relation to environmental awareness and action. It is limited to analyzing general trends and does not cover all demographic groups.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire and interprets the findings in relation to the research objectives. The responses provide insights into social media usage, environmental awareness, and real-world actions taken by individuals.

5.1 Social Media Usage

The data indicates that a majority of respondents are highly active on social media platforms. Most participants reported using platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter (X) on a daily basis. Among these, Instagram emerged as the most preferred platform for consuming environmental content due to its visual and engaging format such as reels and posts.

A large percentage of respondents stated that they frequently come across environmental content while scrolling through their feeds. This shows that social media plays a significant role in exposing users to environmental issues, even if they are not actively searching for such information.

5.2 Environmental Awareness

The survey results reveal that social media has a strong impact on increasing environmental awareness. Around 85% of respondents agreed that they have become more aware of environmental problems such as climate change, plastic pollution, and global warming due to social media.

Respondents also indicated that they are more informed about sustainable practices like reducing plastic use, conserving water, and adopting eco-friendly habits. This suggests that social media is effective in educating users and spreading important environmental messages.

5.3 Real-World Environmental Actions

Despite high awareness levels, the percentage of individuals engaging in real-world environmental actions is comparatively lower. Only about 40–45% of respondents reported actively practicing eco-friendly habits in their daily lives.



The most common actions taken by respondents include:

Reducing plastic usage

Saving water and electricity

Reusing materials

Participating occasionally in cleanliness drives

However, consistent and long-term commitment to such practices was found to be limited.

5.4 Online Engagement vs Real Action

The comparison between online engagement and real-world action highlights a clear gap. Approximately 70% of respondents reported liking, sharing, or posting environmental content on social media, whereas less than half of them translate this engagement into actual behavior.

This indicates that while people are willing to express support online, fewer individuals take the effort to implement those ideas in their daily lives.

5.5 Interpretation of Results

The findings suggest that social media is highly effective in creating awareness but less effective in ensuring behavioral change. The ease of online participation encourages users to engage with environmental issues at a superficial level. Activities like liking or sharing posts require minimal effort and provide immediate satisfaction, which may reduce the motivation to take further action.

Additionally, practical barriers such as lack of time, resources, or convenience may prevent individuals from adopting eco-friendly practices consistently. This leads to a situation where awareness exists, but action is limited.

5.6 Overall Analysis

Overall, the data clearly demonstrates a gap between awareness and action. While social media successfully informs and engages users, it does not always lead to meaningful real-world environmental impact. This gap forms the central focus of the study and highlights the need for strategies to convert digital engagement into practical action.

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into the relationship between social media engagement and real-world environmental action. While the data clearly shows that social media plays a significant role in raising awareness, it also highlights a noticeable gap when it comes to actual behavioral change.

One of the key observations is that social media makes environmental information easily accessible and engaging. Users are constantly exposed to content related to climate change, pollution, sustainability, and eco-friendly practices. This continuous exposure helps in shaping attitudes and increasing knowledge about environmental issues. As a result, individuals become more informed and conscious about the environment.

However, the study also reveals that increased awareness does not necessarily lead to consistent action. Many individuals participate in online activities such as liking, sharing, or posting environmental content, but fail to adopt similar practices in their daily lives. This supports the concept of slacktivism, where users engage in low-effort digital actions that create a sense of contribution without leading to real impact.

Another important aspect highlighted in the discussion is the difference between intention and behavior. While individuals may have the intention to act in an environmentally responsible manner, various factors prevent them from doing so. These include lack of convenience, limited availability of eco-friendly alternatives, time constraints, and absence of strong motivation. For example, a person may be aware of the harmful effects of plastic but may still use it due to its easy availability and affordability.

The role of social validation also plays a part in this gap. On social media, users often receive likes, comments, and appreciation for sharing environmental content. This creates a feeling of participation and recognition, which may



reduce the urgency to take further action in real life. In other words, online engagement sometimes replaces actual effort.

Despite these limitations, it is important to acknowledge that social media is not entirely ineffective. It acts as a starting point for awareness and has the potential to influence attitudes positively. When combined with real-world initiatives such as campaigns, workshops, and community activities, social media can become a powerful tool for environmental change.

Therefore, the discussion suggests that the problem is not with social media itself, but with how it is utilized. There is a need to design campaigns that go beyond awareness and actively encourage participation. Linking online content with practical actions, challenges, or community involvement can help in reducing the gap between digital engagement and real-world behavior.

VII. CASE STUDIES

This section presents real-life examples of environmental campaigns to understand how social media influences awareness and whether it leads to actual environmental action. These case studies help in supporting the findings of the research.

7.1 TeamTrees Campaign

The #TeamTrees campaign is one of the most successful examples of how social media can be used to drive real-world environmental action. Launched in 2019 by YouTubers and content creators, the campaign aimed to plant 20 million trees worldwide.

Social media platforms played a crucial role in spreading awareness about the initiative. Influencers, celebrities, and organizations promoted the campaign through videos, posts, and hashtags. The campaign encouraged people to donate money, where each dollar contributed to planting one tree.

The success of this campaign shows that when social media awareness is directly linked to a clear and measurable action, it can lead to significant real-world impact. The campaign not only raised awareness but also resulted in actual tree plantation, demonstrating the potential of digital platforms when used effectively.

7.2 Plastic Ban Awareness Campaigns in India

In India, social media has been widely used to promote awareness about plastic pollution and government initiatives such as plastic bans. Campaigns encouraging the reduction of single-use plastics have gained popularity on platforms like Instagram and Twitter (X).

Many users share posts about the harmful effects of plastic, promote alternatives such as cloth bags, and participate in online discussions. These campaigns have successfully increased awareness among the public, especially among young people.

However, despite this high level of awareness, the implementation of plastic reduction practices at the ground level remains inconsistent. Many individuals continue to use plastic due to convenience, lack of affordable alternatives, or weak enforcement of policies.

This case study highlights the gap between awareness and action, showing that social media alone is not sufficient to bring about consistent behavioral change without proper infrastructure and support.

7.3 Role of Environmental Influencers

Environmental influencers on social media promote sustainable lifestyles by sharing tips, eco-friendly products, and daily habits that reduce environmental impact. They play a key role in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of their followers.



While many followers are inspired by such content, not all of them adopt these practices consistently. Some may follow trends temporarily but fail to maintain them in the long term. This again reflects the challenge of converting inspiration into sustained action.

Overall Insight from Case Studies

The case studies demonstrate that social media can be highly effective in raising awareness and even driving action when campaigns are well-structured and action-oriented. However, in most cases, there is still a gap between online engagement and real-world implementation. Success depends on how effectively awareness is connected to practical, achievable actions.

VIII. FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of primary and secondary data, the study presents the following key findings:

The research clearly indicates that social media plays a significant role in increasing environmental awareness among individuals. A large majority of respondents reported that they frequently encounter environmental content online and have become more informed about issues such as climate change, pollution, and sustainability.

However, the study also finds that high awareness does not necessarily lead to real-world environmental action. While many individuals understand environmental problems, fewer of them consistently practice eco-friendly behaviors in their daily lives.

Another important finding is that online engagement is considerably higher than offline action. A large percentage of respondents actively like, share, or post environmental content on social media, but only a smaller proportion actually take practical steps such as reducing plastic use, conserving resources, or participating in environmental activities.

The research also highlights the presence of slacktivism among social media users. Many individuals engage in low-effort online activities that give a sense of participation without requiring meaningful commitment or action. This creates a gap between intention and behavior.

Furthermore, the study finds that various barriers prevent individuals from taking action, even when they are aware of environmental issues. These barriers include lack of convenience, limited access to eco-friendly alternatives, time constraints, and habitual behavior.

Another key finding is that social media campaigns are more effective when they are linked to clear and actionable steps. Campaigns that provide direct ways to participate, such as donations, challenges, or community activities, are more likely to result in real-world impact.

Overall, the study identifies a clear gap between awareness and action, emphasizing that while social media is successful in educating and engaging users, it is less effective in ensuring consistent environmental behavior.

IX. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between social media engagement and real-world environmental action, with a focus on identifying whether digital awareness leads to meaningful behavioral change. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that social media has become a highly effective platform for spreading environmental awareness and educating individuals about critical issues such as climate change, pollution, and sustainability.

The study shows that a large number of individuals are exposed to environmental content on a daily basis and have developed a better understanding of environmental challenges. Social media platforms have successfully created a space where information is easily accessible, visually engaging, and widely shared. This has contributed significantly to increasing public awareness, especially among young people.

However, the research also reveals a significant gap between awareness and action. While many individuals actively engage with environmental content online, a comparatively smaller number translate this awareness into real-world practices. Activities such as liking, sharing, or posting content often replace actual efforts like reducing waste, conserving resources, or participating in environmental initiatives.



The concept of slacktivism plays an important role in explaining this gap. Low-effort online participation gives users a sense of involvement, but it does not necessarily lead to long-term commitment or behavioral change. Additionally, practical challenges such as lack of convenience, limited resources, and habitual behavior further reduce the likelihood of real-world action.

Despite these limitations, the study acknowledges that social media still holds great potential as a tool for environmental change. When used effectively, it can not only raise awareness but also motivate individuals to take action. The key lies in designing campaigns that go beyond information sharing and actively encourage participation through clear, achievable steps.

In conclusion, social media is a powerful starting point for environmental awareness, but real and sustainable change can only be achieved when this awareness is converted into consistent real-world action. Bridging this gap is essential for addressing environmental challenges effectively and ensuring a more sustainable future.

X. SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, several suggestions are proposed to bridge the gap between social media awareness and real-world environmental action. These recommendations aim to enhance the effectiveness of digital platforms in promoting sustainable behavior.

One of the key suggestions is to design action-oriented social media campaigns. Instead of only spreading awareness, campaigns should include clear and practical steps that individuals can follow. For example, challenges like “no plastic week,” tree plantation drives, or community clean-up activities can encourage users to participate actively rather than just engage online.

Another important recommendation is to integrate online campaigns with offline activities. Educational institutions, local communities, and organizations should collaborate with social media platforms to organize real-world events. This can include workshops, awareness programs, and environmental drives that allow individuals to take direct action. It is also suggested to provide incentives for eco-friendly behavior. Rewards, recognition, or certification for participating in environmental activities can motivate individuals to adopt sustainable practices. Social media can be used to highlight and appreciate such efforts, encouraging others to follow.

Improving accessibility to eco-friendly alternatives is another crucial step. Many individuals fail to take action due to lack of convenient and affordable options. Governments and organizations should ensure that sustainable products and practices are easily available to the public.

The role of influencers and content creators should also be utilized effectively. Influencers can go beyond promoting awareness by demonstrating practical actions and encouraging their followers to adopt similar habits. Real-life examples and consistent messaging can have a stronger impact on behavior.

Additionally, there is a need to promote long-term engagement rather than temporary trends. Environmental campaigns should focus on creating lasting habits instead of short-term viral content. Continuous efforts and follow-ups can help in maintaining interest and commitment.

Educational institutions should also play a significant role by including environmental activities in their curriculum. Students should be encouraged to participate in projects, field visits, and campaigns that promote real-world environmental responsibility.

Finally, it is recommended to use social media as a tool for accountability. Encouraging individuals to share their real actions, rather than just opinions, can create a sense of responsibility and inspire others to act.

XII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the study provides useful insights into the relationship between social media engagement and real-world environmental action, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may affect the generalization and interpretation of the results.



One of the primary limitations of the study is the small sample size. The research is based on responses from a limited number of participants, which may not fully represent the views and behaviors of a larger population. A bigger sample size could provide more accurate and diverse results.

Another limitation is that the study focuses mainly on college students. Since students are highly active on social media, the findings may be more relevant to younger age groups and may not reflect the behavior of older or less digitally active populations.

The study also uses a convenience sampling method, which means respondents were selected based on accessibility rather than random selection. This may introduce bias and limit the overall reliability of the findings.

Additionally, the data collected is based on self-reported responses. Participants may provide socially desirable answers, especially when asked about environmentally responsible behavior. This can lead to a difference between reported actions and actual behavior.

The research is also limited in terms of geographical scope, as it does not cover multiple regions or cultural contexts. Environmental awareness and behavior can vary significantly across different locations, which is not fully captured in this study.

Furthermore, the study focuses on general environmental actions and does not explore specific behaviors in depth. A more detailed analysis of particular practices, such as waste management or energy conservation, could provide deeper insights.

Lastly, the study is conducted within a limited time frame, which may not capture long-term behavioral changes. Environmental actions often require sustained effort over time, which cannot be fully analyzed in a short-duration study.

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