
GP Model Essay - Social Media**To what extent has the media advanced the cause of conservation?**

It is without much doubt that mankind's activities are causing much harm to environments worldwide, destroying the habitats of flora and fauna. Much more has to be done with regards to conservation, in order to preserve our environment for our future generations. The use of media has been mostly a boon for conservation efforts, as it has allowed the essence and spirit of conservation to be easily disseminated among peoples around the world. However, It is also important to note that the media is at best, a tool used in conservation efforts and people may abuse the power of the media to slow down conservation efforts. In view of these concerns, a proper study is needed to examine the extent of the influence of the media in advancing the cause of conservation.

From a societal viewpoint, the use of media has emerged as a potent force multiplier for conservation efforts, as it has enabled the message of conservation to be easily spread among many people, creating greater awareness of the issue. When people first started confronting environmental issues like air pollution or rain forest destruction decades ago, it was mainly through traditional press reports on the nightly news or the front page of a major newspaper. With people becoming more interested in social media, and the news media losing strength as advertising revenues declined, many environmental organizations found it easier to get people's attention through the use of advertising. Social media platforms provide a place for sharing biodiversity-related content and posts on nature experiences. Such posts include a wealth of information about what users find meaningful to post about. They may reveal species people have spotted or tell which landscapes they like. Content of the posts may also reveal why users were visiting specific locations. National parks could increasingly encourage their visitors to post about their experiences, with a common hashtag. Media would essentially raise the public profile for conservation groups which in turn might mean more opportunities for the group to leverage upon. For example, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), a conservation group based in the USA has largely turned to the Internet to help the public foster understanding of the vision and ideas of the group. This shows how valuable media has become in reaching out to large swathes of people, spreading the crucial message of conservation around the world and advancing its cause.

Despite the media allowing more people to learn about conservation efforts, most people still do not act upon this simple message due to the limitations of the media as a communication tool, hence reducing the importance of media as a medium of communication. Indeed, the increased traffic about conservation via technology and media also resulted in a rise of climate change deniers. Using the accessibility and the convenience of the media, these climate change deniers have been vociferous in their efforts in claiming that climate change is part of natural progression of the world and that reports about devastation of habitats have been wildly overblown. With so much contradictory information placed online, this leads to much confusion and scepticism. Eventually, people might lose trust in the information found online and choose not to take actions towards environmental conservation. As stated in an article by UK press regulator, IPSO, that an article by Mail on Sunday has distorted information on climate change which was inaccurate and misleading but it was shared 200 more times and distorted by other news agencies like Fox News and The Daily Caller in the US.

From an economic perspective, the use of media and technology has allowed conservation and environment groups to be more self-sustaining and thereby ease the spreading of conservation's core message. As most of these conservation groups are non-profit organizations, they often have to rely on donations from the public for essential bills. Using various crowdfunding sources such as Kickstarter and Indiegogo, most of these conservation groups are better equipped to pay essential bills, by virtue of donations from the public. This frees them up from various marketing costs and efforts, allowing them to focus on their core mission-spreading the message of conservation. In addition, governments also leverage upon the cost savings that media brings about. Instead of entrenching themselves in traditional forms of communication and advertisements, which are sometimes prohibitively expensive, governments are switching to a lighter and more interactive approach in terms of reaching out to the public about the message of conservation. Indeed, media has allowed various stakeholders to drastically reduce marketing and advertising costs by making use of social media, allowing them to focus on their core area of operations.

However, conservation and environment groups need to take into consideration the economic viability of using the media to spread their message which depends on its

effectiveness, and very often, may incur subtle high economic cost and limited effectiveness in the long run. These factors may limit many groups from running long term campaigns and efforts. Many people still feel that conservation efforts should be left to huge and wealthy organizations where with their economic resources and political influence, these organizations can make a difference. In addition, many people still feel that as a mere individual, they are unable to positively affect the conservation effort.

The use of social media to encourage people to take small but actionable steps can help build an online community of users that are responsive and sensitive to ecological changes, focusing on individuals to be more willing to take the extra step to make a change. Environmental conservation is an overarching issue with many aspects to consider, thus people may feel a sense of hopelessness or detachment from the entire situation which acts as an inertia from taking action. Social media acts as a personal platform for people who are passionate about the environment to take small but actionable steps within their own capacity. For example, there has been a recent rise in eco-friendly instagram accounts which sell homemade eco-friendly items, encouraging people to be eco-friendly and even accounts which provide useful and related infographics. Given social media's strong presence in modern society, people are able to use these actions to engage their own group of friends or online followers to adopt small and actionable actions for those who feel that their actions will not make a difference to a larger cause. This creates a community of like-minded people which helps people, who feel that their actions will not make a difference, understand that a collective effort can indeed create a sizable impact. Many less known environmental NGOs like #TeamTrees and search engines like Ecosia and Lilo in France are engaging the community in conservation for the environment. Hence, social media can be used by individuals in an individual capacity to take small and actionable steps to care for the environment and encourage others to do the same.

However, we should take into account the ethical consideration of utilizing media due to the prevalent spread of fake news. Thus, people might take advantage of social media to spread environmental news that are exaggerated or alarmist in nature. This may deter users from supporting environmental efforts completely as they are unable to decipher the truth. Companies and organizations who still rely on funding from the massive fossil fuels industry are huge climate change deniers, coining terms like

“climate alarmism” and are actively promoting their views on both traditional and new media. The use of media remains a double-edged sword, especially since it hardly can be fully regulated. This has resulted in environment and conservation skeptics seizing on the very advantage of the media, its immense reach to slow down efforts to preserve our environment.

It is imperative that the importance of conservation be drilled into the minds of the younger generation as they would bear most of the responsibility and effort in preserving and conserving the environment. As a tool, the media is indeed useful for reaching out and educating the masses about the importance of Mother Earth. However, it is important to note the potential detrimental effects and as well as ethical concerns of utilizing media as a tool to help promote conservation. Greater care must be undertaken to ensure that media is not manipulated by unsavoury individuals which may derail the efforts of conservationists.