ARRASSANG SOCIAL MEDIA TO INSPIRE ACTION: STRATECIES FOR IMPROVING SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION



Northern Illinois University



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A Survey to Start



AGENDA

1. Warm-Up Survey 2. Data on Social Media 3. How to be more effective 4. Discussion and Practice

WHY ARE WE HERE?

BEFORE WE BEGIN... A FEW CAVEATS

- A Political Scientist and an Environmental Studies undergraduate walk into ILCMA
 Focus on Environmental sustainability, but
- Focus on Environmental sustair lessons are transferable
- The social media environment is complex and rapidly changing
- We welcome questions and clarifications



Social Media is an opportunity for local governments to promote sustainable outcomes.

PERILS AND POSSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

PERILS

Government's role is not advocacy, but just provide services

Social media can be image with no substance

No funding for communication/outreach

No training on social media

Effectiveness is questionable and hard to measure

POSSIBILITIES

citizens and policymakers

Public validation

new audiences

Creation of new policy

- Cheap, easy, and widely accessible
- Can bring problems to the attention of
- Unique avenue for engagement and reach

What messaging strategies do government agencies use to encourage resource conservation?

What strategies did water districts in California use to try to convince their users to conserve water?











Policy Options





Voluntary Behavior Change

The Information-Motivation Behavioral Skills Model



Systematic Review of Household Water Conservation Interventions Using the Information-Motivation-**Behavioral Skills Model**

Phillip J. Ehret¹⁽⁰⁾, Heather E. Hodges¹⁽⁰⁾, Colin Kuehl², Cameron Brick^{3,4}, Sean Mueller¹, and Sarah E. Anderson¹00

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How Managers Can Reduce Household Water Use **Through Communication: A Field Experiment**

Heather Hodges Colin Kuehl Sarah E. Anderson Phillip J. Ehret **Cameron Brick**

CA Water Districs

Water conservation focused tweets from California water providers

- 205 of 348 public water providers(Water District, City Utility, and For-profit) have twitter accounts
- We focus on special districts
- Academic Twitter API (Pre-Elon) was used to collect all water district tweets from January 2010 to October 2022 (54,000)
 Drought focused tweets
 - Focus on the drought, water supply, or efforts to conserve
 - 30% of all tweets are drought focused (16,300)

nia water providers trict, City Utility, and

ts to conserve





Filter out Non Drought Related Tweets

Laws and Regulations

ie reminders of laws against washing cars, special water days, etc.

· Workshops and





Happy #EarthDay2021! S 😻 All it takes is one action to make a world of difference. Celebrate Earth Day every day by conserving water. Start today with these three simple water saving tips! #ACWDcares @Fremont CA @UnionCityCA Gov @WaterEdFdn @EPAwatersense disaveourwater.

....



Here are three simple tips:

Turn off the water when brushing teeth.

Fix leaks around the house.

Always run a full load of laundry.

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- In the case of water providers during the 2012-2017 California drought...
 - district messaging overwhelmingly focused on voluntary behavior change (94% of Tweets)
 - Basic information and skills were the most commonly Ο used, with providers rarely employing best practices of combining information, motivation, and behavioral skills

Iowa and Illinois Local Governments





Illinois and Iowa Local Governments with Twitter Handles



Illinois and Iowa Data

- 2015 to 2025 Tweets
- All handles pulled using US Census
 735 handles (619 active)
- 840k total tweets
 - Mean per account: 1,353
 - Median per account: 592
- Larger municipality more likely to be on Twitter and more likely to be active



Engagement ...it is lacking



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City of Decatur @AccessDecatur · Aug 22, 2018 Ø … Decatur City Council, Decatur Public School District 61 Board of Education and Decatur Park District will convene for the purpose of a Special Meeting for an Intergovernmental Work Session tonight at 5:30pm in the University Commons Banquet Room 302-A, located at Millikin.

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Environmental or Not: Tweets focused on human impacts and interactions with the natural world

Only around 15% of tweets in our training dataset are categorized as environmental

Linn Co Conservation 🔮 @LinnCoConserv - Jul 11, 2024 The lowa DNR has described the snapping turtle as a having "a big head, a long tail, and a nasty disposition." Can't say we disagree, as we've seen a few at the Wickiup Hill Learning Center. Please be nice, and enjoy them without interrupting their busy schedules.



City of LaSalle @CityofLaSalleIL · Jan 23, 2019 Ø ... Republic is pulling their drivers off the road. All garbage services will be delayed one day.

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Illinois and Iowa Tweet Categorization

- Issue Area
- Intent*
- Intensity





INFORMATION

?



SELF-PROMOTION



ENGAGEMENT



Environmental Issue Area

2.0

0

Waste and Recycling Nature, Green Spaces, and Outdoor Activities Ecology and Biodiversity **Public Health** Water Quality Sustainable Urban Living Water Conservation/Quantity **Climate Action and Resilience** Renewable Energy and Efficiency other Sustainable Agriculture and Soil Health

Environmental Issue





Tweet Intent



Intensity Level	Sample Tweet		
1: Neutral: Factual updates, no emotional tone.	"Garbage collection delayed one day."		
2: Mild Encouragement: Positive framing, awareness.	"Here are some great tips for saving water in winter."	60 -	Percer
3: Strong Advocacy: Emotional, urgent, persuasive.	"Say NO to single-use plastics! Sign the petition today!"	ŝ	
		Percentage of Twee	
	the second state of the se	0	

Tweet Intensity ntage of Tweets at Each Intensity Level 61.0 33.0 7.0 3

2 Intensity Level

Limitations and Future Research

- Twitter (X) is not representative of **SM and usage is declining**
- Analysis based only on text
- Comparison to national sample
- More work needed to understand what predicts effective messaging
- Alternative Machine Learning **Models**





- Government tweets mostly inform or remind, rarely advocating for action or engagement
- Use of social media is inconsistent
- Motivational messaging is not consistent with best practices from behavioral science

 Social media is often a missed opportunity for local governments to help accomplish broader goals





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MOTIVATION:

Social Media is an opportunity for local governments to promote sustainable outcomes.

PEOPLE ACT WHEN THEY:



Feel connected to the issue



See their peers doing it

Great sustainability communication doesn't just instruct, it inspires!



Believe the action is easy and worth doing



THE PROBLEM:

• Local governments are underusing SM for community connection and behavior change.

 Many LG accounts use social media like a bulletin board

They rarely use platform-specific strengths or engaging and resonant content.
They miss opportunities to build community, foster trust, highlight local features and promote sustainability!

City of Decatur @AccessDecatur · Aug 22, 2018

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ACTIVITY!

What is a social media post that has made

you feel motivated to act 'sustainably'? Why did it make you feel this way?



Add a sticky note to this padlet!



WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

• LGs have the ability to shape how people see and act on sustainability, both online and offline.

- Sustainability is local: different communities face different challenges and have unique capacities.
- Social Media makes sustainability visible and accessible.
- Behavior change often happens at the community level
 - Especially through shared identity, and social norms.



WHAT DOESN'T WORK?

Information dumps, generic content, and guilt are generally ineffective. Instruction alone doesn't always inspire action. People don't act merely because of facts. They act when they feel, relate, and when it makes them feel

- like they belong.
- barriers.

Emotional fatigue + apathy are real

Hope framing vs Fear framing



WHAT DOES WORK?

Engaging locally-based and community orientated content

- $^{\rm O}$ I know it's a hard ask
- ° Show, don't just tell
- Use hope, identity, community pride, humor, trends
- ° Storytelling
- Make people feel like they are part of the story
- °Trust building
 - "We're in this together"
- Aesthetic cohesion and consistency
- Our of the second se





♥ 48 Q ₹

oakparkil Hope you're enjoying National Bike Month this May! To mark the occasion, several Village Trustees joined Village staff for a bike ride around the Village prior to Tuesday's Village Board meeting. Find information about bicycling in Oak Park on the Village website at oak-park.us/bicycling. #oakpark #oakparkil

Platform	Primary age group Demographic	Strengths	Best Practices
Facebook	30-65+	Community engagement, event promotion, information dissemination	Use Facebook's reach to promote community events and initiatives. Engage with residents through interactive content and timely responses.
Instagram	18-34	Visual storytelling, 'brand' identity building, community building	Use Instagram's visual nature to showcase local sustainability efforts. Maintain consistent branding and engage with followers through interactive features like polls and live video sessions.
Twitter (X)	25-49	Real-time updates, public discourse, policy announcements	Use Twitter for timely announcements and to participate in broader civic conversations. Engage with the community through replies and retweets.
TikTok	16-24	Trend engagement, peer influence, short educational content	Use TikTok to create engaging and relatable content while aligning with current trends or using popular audios, video formats influence local sustainability efforts through storytelling, peer influence and community participation.
YouTube	Broad (25-55 core)	In-depth storytelling and educational content, archival	Use YouTube for comprehensive storytelling and educational content. that highlights local sustainability initiatives and provides resources for community involvement.

oakparkil Oak Park, Illinois



♥ 35 Q ₹ 2

oakparkil Plastic is SO last season! Make 2025 the year you pledge go plastic free at the Oak Park Farmers' Market. Not sure where to ... more



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oakparkil Oak Park, Illinois

oakparkil The Village Board recently approved new guidelines for residents interested in planting in the parkway between the street and sidewalk in front of or alongside their home.

LOCALIZE IT!

- ^o Use local landmarks, highlight local

 - environmental features and community members.
 - Collaborate with residents
- Inspire action offline and in the community,
- through individual AND collective efforts.
- ^o What makes your town special? What sort
- of content would you engage with as a
- resident? What does sutainability look like to
- your town?

• Content should feel like this place.

^o Representation matters!

REAL EXAMPLES

Let's analyze what works... and what doesn't through real local examples.



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Liked by earthcrum and others chicagoparks This past Saturday, @ChicagoParks welcomed more than 200 Park Advisory Council (PAC) members from across the city to our annual PAC Conference. This year's theme was "Parks for All" and included opportunities for PAC members to network and attend 12 informative sessions on a variety of



oakparkil 4/14/25

As part of its commitment to providing clean, safe drinking water for all residents, the Village recently launched an online portal at LeadFreeOakPark.com with easy-tounderstand information about water service lines, why they matter and what residents can do to reduce exposure to lead in drinking water. Property owners can also confirm water service line data for their address on an interactive Village-wide inventory map at leadfreeoakpark.com/villa....







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POST SHARED ON MAY 31





Oak Park Bike Pla 2024 Updat

We want to hear from you!

♥33 Q1 ₹

oakparkil We want to hear from you! The Village is undertaking a planning process to develop the Oak Park Bike Plan 2024 Update. The Bike Plan aims to improve the bicycle network in Oak Park by providing safe and accessible connections and improved bike infrastructure. Visit engageoakpark.com/bike-plan to learn more and to share your comments, suggestions, concerns and ideas. A #oakpark #oakparkil

WHAT LGs COULD BE DOING

- Strategic SM means using platforms to build connection, action, and trust.
 - Modeling sustainable norms
 - Fostering place-based environmental identity
 - Telling community stories
 - ° Posting consistently with warmth, relevance, and good design
 - ° Create space for resident voice and participation
 - Note feedback + adapt over time

Thank you!

Please stay in touch. Colin - ckuehl@niu.edu Hallela - z2004513@student.niu.edu

We thank the research assistance of the SIU Center for Predictive Analytics and NIU students Andrew Bailey, Ashley Urbanski, Briana Anders, Ryan Catalano, Sam Soria, and Tori Smith. This material is based upon work supported by the Illinois Innovation Network Seed Grant Award 117189.