CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

Master thesis

2022   **Maja Olivia Markus**

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Social media activism: an analysis of how climate activists use Instagram and encourage green behaviour of their followers

Master Thesis

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Author: Maja Olivia Markus

Supervisor: prof. Annamária Neág, Ph.D.

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Bibliographic note

Abstract

Climate crisis is arguably one of the most pressing issues of our societies currently. As social media has become an important part of our everyday lives and is a tool with the capacity to influence the opinion and behaviour of people, this master thesis wants to explore how climate activists portray themselves on the visual social media platform Instagram and encourage offline green action among their followers. The research is based on the qualitative content analysis of 12 semi-structured interviews with young climate activists who use Instagram and the analysis of their posts. The thesis uses Goffman's presentation of self in an online context, internet activism, the personalisation of politics, social media influencers and climate communication as its theoretical framework. Results showed that climate activists not only use social media strategies of influencers on Instagram (often unwillingly), but also heavily rely on the personification of their messages and sharing aspects of their personal lives to establish connections with their followers. Climate activists interviewed qualified as micro-influencers, which allowed them to form deep relationships with their audience because of the small follower base and gave them the possibility to assess the extent of their impact on their audience's green behaviours and actions.

Keywords

Abstrakt

Klimatická krize je v současnosti pravděpodobně jedním z nejpalčivějších problémů naší společnosti. Sociální sítě se staly důležitou součástí našeho každodenního života a jsou nástrojem, který má schopnost ovlivňovat názory a chování lidí. Proto chce tato magisterská práce prozkoumat, jak se klimatičtí aktivisté prezentují na vizuální platformě sociálních sítí Instagram a jak podporují ekologické chování svých sledujících. Výzkum je založen na kvalitativní obsahové analýze čítající 12 polostrukturovaných rozhovorů s mladými klimatickými aktivisty, kteří používají Instagram, a na analýze jejich příspěvků. Práce využívá jako teoretický rámec Goffmanovu prezentaci sebe sama v online kontextu, internetový aktivismus, personalizaci politiky, influencery sociálních médií a klimatickou komunikaci. Výsledky ukázaly, že klimatičtí aktivisté nejenže využívají strategie influencerů na sociálních sítích Instagram (často nechtěně), ale také ve velké míře spoléhají na personifikaci svých sdělení a sdílení aspektů svého osobního života, aby navázali spojení se svými sledujícími. Dotazovaní klimatičtí aktivisté se kvalifikovali jako mikroinfluenceři, což jim umožnilo navázat hluboké vztahy s jejich publikem díky malé základně sledujících a dalo jim možnost posoudit míru jejich vlivu na ekologické chování jejich publika.

Klíčová slova

sociální média, Instagram, klimatičtí aktivisté, influenceři, mikroinfluenceři, životní prostředí, sebeprezentace, personalizace politiky, ekologické chování

Range of thesis: 90 pages and 142.648 characters

Compared to the approved research proposal, the final master thesis has a new title, as it reflects more accurately the results of the research.

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.

2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.

3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague 1 August 2022   **Maja Olivia Markus**

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my parents who have always believed in me even when I slack, my friends who have continuously checked in on me and encouraged me along the process of writing this master's thesis and prof. Annamária Neág, Ph.D. for her help in pushing me to approach my thesis astutely. I would also like to thank the kindness, patience and time of the climate activists interviewed and the interest they took in the thesis. Finally, a special thank you to the comradery of my classmates, thanks to whom working day and night at the Jan Palach library of Prague made the process of writing a master thesis a bit less lonely, and a rather pleasant experience.

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism FSV UK
Research proposal for Erasmus Mundus Journalism Diploma Thesis

THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY STUDENT:	
Student's surname and given name: Markus Maja Olivia	**Registry stamp: / Razítko podatelny:**
Start of studies for EMJ (in Aarhus) 2020	Univerzita Karlova Fakulta sociálních věd
Your faculty e-mail: 56457070@fsv.cuni.cz	Došlo dne: **1 5 -11- 2021** -1-
Study program/form of study: **Erasmus Mundus Journalism**	Čj: **404** Příloh: Přidělano:

Thesis title in English:

Social media activism: how do climate activists use Instagram to encourage offline political action among their followers?

Expected date of submission (semester, academic year – example: *SS 2021/2022*)
(Thesis must be submitted according to the Academic Calendar.)

SS 2021/2022

Main research question (max. 250 characters):

RQ: How do climate activists portray themselves on their Instagram platforms and encourage offline political action of their followers?

Q1: What are the main reasons and motivations behind the climate activists' online presentation of self?
Q2: What strategies do the climate activists apply when using their Instagram profile and communicate with their followers?
Q3: How do climate activists actively encourage offline political action of their followers?

Current state of research on the topic (max. 1800 characters):

According to Hensby (2017), much has been written in recent years about the growing impact of social media on social movements. However, while research has mostly focused on social media channels' organisational and informational aspects for a range of movements, evidence remains scarce as to under what conditions social media is most effective at engaging and mobilising the wider public. As Jost et al. (2018) argue, social media and political protest is an emerging research program, becoming salient because of "the rise to ubiquity of social media" (p. 87). When it comes to Instagram being a social media channel with an impact on political engagement, and more specifically climate activism and citizenship, research is even more scarce.

Expected theoretical framework (max. 1800 characters):

This research will use for its theoretical framework the personalisation of politics and internet activism. Bennett (2012) explains that in the recent period we have entered an 'era of personalisation', where topics such as politics, societal issues, and the economy have been 'up close and personal' (p. 21) meaning that individuals are mobilized around personal lifestyle values when engaging with multiple causes, such as environmental protection. Very often, political establishments and actors use social media to engage and communicate with citizens and persuade potential voters (Deželan et al., 2014; Oblak and Prodnik, 2014; Maksuti and Deželan, 2016) and adopt personalization techniques (Tomanic´ Trivundža, 2014). Therefore, environmental activists who want to educate, and potentially encourage to become active political citizens are most likely engaging in their own version of the personalization of politics as well. According to Tatarchevskiy (2011), the internet has been considered a powerful tool for the connection and mobilization of citizens. Political sociologists and political scientists have studied Internet activism as a form of civic engagement (Norris, 2002) while communication scholars and some political scientists (Flanagin et al., 2005) have analyzed Internet activism as a type of politically oriented collective action. Earl et al. (2010) remarked that the effect of Internet on social movements is still debated: some scholars argue that the Internet has no effect on social movement processes (Tarrow, 1998; Diani, 2000; Tilly, 2004) while others argue that uses of the Internet may actually change the dynamics of activism in important ways. The study of Luo et al. (2016) also suggests that Internet activism can be an important alternative to strengthen civil society and produce social change.

Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis (max. 1800 characters):

The research design would be two-fold:
1. Qualitative content analysis of Instagram posts of climate activists and climate movements, who have at least 1.000 followers.
2. Semi-structured interviews with 10-15 climate activists and climate movements to explain the data gathered through qualitative content analysis and to verify personalization features and strategies used. Furthermore, to explore the effect that their online actions have on their followers' environmental citizenship.

Expected research design (data to be analyzed, for example, the titles of analyzed newspapers and selected time period):

- The qualitative content analysis, covering the period August 2021-December 2021 (includes period before and after the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26)), will allow coded data to reveal patterns, themes, and relationships. Data would reveal answers to these questions: How many followers do the activists have? How many comments and/or likes do their posts generate? What type of posts do they use and which ones were the most popular?
- The interviews will be transcribed and analysed according to the grounded theory framework.

Expected thesis structure (chapters and subchapters with brief description of their content):
1. Introduction: this part of the paper will introduce the reader to the topic and overall of the master's thesis, mentioning the research question and describing the paper's structure.
2. Literature review: this part will explain the theoretical framework the paper is built on (presentation of self by Goffman and environmental citizenship by Dobson) and the existing

3. Methodology: the methodology part will explain the research question and how it is aimed to be answered through qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews.
4. Findings and Discussion: this part will reflect on the findings and how they connect to the previously presented literature review.
5. Conclusion: the conclusion will reintroduce how the research question is answered by the research done and what further research can be done in the field.
6. References
7. Appendices

Basic literature list (at least 5 most important works related to the topic and the method(s) of analysis; all works should be briefly characterized on 2-5 lines):

Askanius, T., & Uldam, J. (2011). Online social media for radical politics: climate change activism on YouTube. International journal of electronic governance, 4(1-2), 69-84.
- The paper draws on a case study of the 'Never Trust a Cop' (NTAC) network and its uses of YouTube to mobilise for protests against COP15. It analyses NTAC's mobilisation video promoted on YouTube, 'War on Capitalism', as well as interviews with key actors affiliated with the protests organised around the COP15 Conference, asking: How can possibilities for promoting mobilisation videos in online social media be seen as shaping collective action practices in the context of large-scale political summits? Methods used: analysis of NTAC's War on Capitalism video and interviews with activists from the COP15 protests.

Hensby, A. (2017). Open networks and secret Facebook groups: exploring cycle effects on activists' social media use in the 2010/11 UK student protests. Social Movement Studies, 16(4), 466-478.
- Hensby investigated activists' social media use in the 2010/11 UK student protests and found that social media have the power to facilitate connective engagement and offline protest mobilisation, enabling grass-roots campaigns to build quickly and effectively. Methods used: Qualitative research, 42 student interviews.

Holt, K., Shehata, A., Strömbäck, J., & Ljungberg, E. (2013). Age and the effects of news media attention and social media use on political interest and participation: Do social media function as leveller?. European journal of communication, 28(1), 19-34.
- The study suggests that frequent social media use among young citizens can function as a leveller in terms of motivating political participation. Methods used: four-wave panel study conducted during the 2010 Swedish national election campaign (stratified probability sampling from a database of approximately 28,000 citizens).

Kettunen, M. (2020). "We need to make our voices heard": Claiming space for young people's everyday environmental politics in northern Finland. Nordia Geographical Publications, 49(5), 32-48.
- The paper sheds light on the myriad of ways in which young people practice environmental politics and construct their environmental citizenship and also discusses young people's political action in relation to the friction and resistance their participation stirs up in the local communities. Methods used: ethnographic fieldwork.

Velasquez, A., & LaRose, R. (2015). Social media for social change: Social media political efficacy and activism in student activist groups. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 59(3), 456-474.
- A survey (n = 222) of members of 3 student activist groups showed that social media political efficacy was positively related to successful experiences using social media for activism. The relationship between social media political efficacy and social media activism was stronger than that between the concept of political efficacy employed in prior research and social media activism.

Methods

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative research in psychology, 3(2), 77-101.
- Gray, L. M., Wong-Wylie, G., Rempel, G. R., & Cook, K. (2020). Expanding qualitative research interviewing strategies: Zoom video communications. The Qualitative Report, 25(5), 1292-1301

Further literature
- Harper, K. (2006). Wild capitalism: Environmental activism and postsocialist political ecology in Hungary. Anthropology Department Faculty Publication Series, 81.
- Molaei, H. (2015). Discursive opportunity structure and the contribution of social media to the success of social movements in Indonesia. Information, Communication & Society, 18(1), 94-108.
- Valenzuela, S., Arriagada, A., & Scherman, A. (2012). The social media basis of youth protest behavior: The case of Chile. Journal of communication, 62(2), 299-314.
- DeLuca, K. M., Lawson, S., & Sun, Y. (2012). Occupy Wall Street on the public screens of social media: The many framings of the birth of a protest movement. Communication, Culture & Critique, 5(4), 483-509.
- Jost, J. T., Barberá, P., Bonneau, R., Langer, M., Metzger, M., Nagler, J., ... & Tucker, J. A. (2018). How social media facilitates political protest: Information, motivation, and social networks. Political psychology, 39, 85-118.
- Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. Information, communication & society, 15(5), 739-768.

Related theses and dissertations (list of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. theses defended at Charles University or other academic institutions in the last five years):

- Duncan, A. (2020). How do luxury brands present environmental sustainability on social media surrounding the carbon neutral fashion shows of Autumn 2019?. Bournemouth University, MA Media and Communication, Faculty of Media and Communication, Department of Communication and Journalism.
- Lehbrink, M. (2020). Being green on Instagram: A qualitative study on how green influencers are composing their messages and arguments of sustainability in their Instagram posts. Bachelor Thesis Communication Science, BMS Faculty, University of Twente.

Date / Signature of the student:

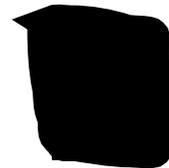15/11 / 2021

....

THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY THE ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR:

I confirm that I have consulted this research proposal with the author and that the proposal is related to my field of expertise at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

I agree to be the Thesis supervisor.

Dr Annamária Neag, 10.11.2021

Surname and name of the supervisor	Date / Signature of the supervisor

Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis: Further recommendations are being added in the Miro tool used by the supervisor and the supervisee.

Further recommendations of literature related to the topic: See above.

The research proposal has to be printed, signed and submitted to the FSV UK registry office (podatelna) in two copies, **by November 15, 2021**, addressed to the Program Coordinator. Accepted research proposals have to be picked up at the Program Coordinator's Office, Mgr. Sandra Štefaniková. The accepted research proposal needs to be included in the hard copy version of the submitted thesis.

<u>RESEARCH PROPOSALS NEED TO BE APPROVED BY THE HEAD OF ERASMUS MUNDUS JOURNALISM PROGRAM.</u>

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Introduction

'This could be the coolest summer of the rest of your life', 'Climate change is driving 2022 extreme heat and flooding', 'Heat Waves Around the World Push People and Nations 'to the Edge'' (Jones, 2022; Dickie, 2022; Zhong, 2022). These are article that readers were met on the daily during the summer of 2022. Year by year, the effects of climate change are worsening, and records are being broken more frequently. In the US, more than 1,300 people die each year from extreme heat (Jones, 2022), more and more people migrate to avoid the impacts of climate change (Wu, 2022), and 2022 was a record year with the most forest fires in Europe (Kirk et al., 2022), just to name a few examples. Clearly, climate change and its consequences are one of the most pressing issues of our lives today. To halt its effects, many organisations but also individuals embark on a mission to educate people on the climate crisis and show them how they can individually contribute to make a positive change. Indeed, Fridays for Future, a youth-lead movement with the aim of putting climate crisis on the political agenda has become a global phenomenon.

An important tool for the organisation of movements and to spread awareness in social issues is the internet and social media. The internet has become an incremental part of our lives, serving diverse recreational purposes like keeping in touch with family and friends, but also serving greater purposes, such as mobilising people for a cause or educating others about current issues. Indeed, in this digital age, the internet has emerged as a critical platform for political information, expression, and participation (Hestres, 2015) as it allows to coordinate political activities that overcome limits of time and space which would not occur by other means (Bennett, 2003). The internet and social media have the power to significantly reduce the costs of participating in collective action (Earl et al., 2010; Luo, 2016), and compared to traditional media, allow activists to freely share their ideas, thoughts and mobilise people. Social media networks have become essential tools for organising movements, coordinating protests, engaging and mobilising audiences online and offline through a personalised and interactive communication (Hermida, 2020; Jost et al., 2018; Kramer, 2017).

When it comes to the topic of climate change, research indicates that the internet can also be a channel of environmental change as information coming from media is the first step in the process of environmental education (Ostman & Parker, 1987 as cited in Luck & Ginanti, 2013) and an increasing amount of environmental communication

coming from the internet and social media facilitates the growth of a green public sphere. Indeed, already in the 1990s, Torgerson (as cited in Luck & Ginanti, 2013), observed that blogs have offered environmentalists or individuals with „green" orientations an environment to express green concerns that allows environmental problems to be discussed in substantial ways. Years later, Dobson (2007) observed that environmental blogs enforce the environmental citizenship of their readers, and Luck and Ginanti (2013, p.14) found that blogs as new media will become an important tool for green bloggers to disseminate knowledge on the environment and give people a bigger platform to make a change in the world.

As of December 2021, Instagram is one of the most widely used social media channels with 2 billion active users worldwide (Dixon, 2022). Climate activists, usually young individuals involved in climate movements such as Fridays for Future, also figure among the users of social media and Instagram with the aim of spreading their messages about climate change or to keep in touch with their audience. More and more people are starting to use Instagram as their main platform for activism, and using methods to gain followers (Emagazine.com, 2021). Previous research has looked into the relationship of green topics and social media from different perspectives, however, few looked into the intersection of climate activists on Instagram and how or why they use their platforms to educate their followers. As such, this master thesis wants to explore how climate activists portray themselves on their Instagram platforms and encourage green behaviour among their followers. To answer this question, the thesis will look into the concepts of internet activism, Goffman's presentation of self, the personalisation of politics, environment communication and social media influencers. Covering these theoretical perspectives was important to gain an understanding of the multifaceted condition of climate activists online. Not only do they engage in political processes in real life but behave as influencers on Instagram, which is why a range of theories is explained in the section that follows.

1. Literature review

1.1 Internet activism

"In the last decade, the use of the internet for activism has exploded" say Earl et al. (2010, p. 425), next to academic interest in 'internet activism'. However, the extent to which internet activism influences collective action has been greatly contested by researchers. Some think that over the last decades, the internet has been considered a powerful tool for the connection and mobilisation of citizens, especially for activism (Earl et al., 2010; Tatarchevskiy, 2011), while others see no real lasting effect of internet usage on social movement processes (Tarrow, 1998; Diani, 2000; Tilly, 2004 as cited in Earl et al., 2010). Scholars of different fields researched the topic from varying perspectives: political sociologists and political scientists have studied internet activism as a form of civic engagement (Norris, 2002) while communication scholars and some political scientists (Flanagin et al., 2005) have analysed internet activism as a type of politically oriented collective action. The study of Luo et al. (2016) also suggests that internet activism can be an important alternative to strengthen civil society and produce social change. While on the other hand, Foot and Schneider (2002) see internet usage as only accentuating or accelerating well-known processes driving activism and protest. And others more sceptical, argue that social media generates a kind of lazy, pseudo-activism or 'slacktivism', where liking and sharing posts becomes a substitute for meaningful yet exhausting, real-world action (Morozov, 2009) and claim that social media does not encourage political action (Miller, 1995).

Because of such different findings, Earl et al. (2010) contest that researchers of different backgrounds have been studying qualitatively different kinds of internet activism. They introduce a four-category typology to distinguish between broad types of activism found in literature: brochure-ware (using the internet as a broadcast channel for information distribution through websites), online participation (participation in online protest actions such as online petitions, email campaigns), online organising (entire campaigns and/or movements are organised online, also called "e-movements"), and online facilitation of offline activism. The latter is the most frequently studied type of internet activism, where websites are primarily information distribution channels, simply a space for organising and coordinating offline protests. The authors conclude that the

differentiation between the different types of internet activism is crucial to properly evaluate the impact of the internet on activism.

Collective action and mobilisation on the internet has also been looked at by Luo et al. (2016) although from a corporate perspective. They used the case of the 2008 earthquake in the Sichuan Province of China to look into how and why internet activism can affect corporate response over an issue. Their research showed that internet activism can pressure corporations for appropriate responses and could potentially undermine their public image. Indeed, corporate donations were triggered by internet activism which challenged corporations to contribute to the good of the community. Furthermore, they suggest that "internet activism can be an important alternative to strengthen civil society under tight government control, check powerful businesses, and produce social change" (Luo et al., 2016, p. 2).

1.1.1   Personalisation of politics

Closely related to internet activism is the intersection between social media and participation – the personalisation of politics (Bennett, 2012). As Bennett says (2012, p. 21): "The focus of a great deal of social, political, and economic life in the recent era has been up close and personal" and individual personal actions have become more important than collective actions. For example, during protests, individuals are often mobilised around personal lifestyle values to engage with multiple causes. Indeed, Bennett (2012) argues that people are engaging in personalised forms of politics when they mobilise around lifestyle values, such as consumer action. He also emphasises that the personalisation of politics is particularly observed among younger generations (Bennett, 2012). However, he criticises celebrity activism which rather pushes for consumer action instead of a systemic change, in turn legitimising ways of thinking about issues far from reality.

Bennett (2003, 2012) has conducted ample research on the personalisation of politics and the relationship between the internet and activism. Indeed, he argues that there is a gap in research about understanding the many contexts that make new media potentially significant to enhance global activist movements. He argues that activist networks have used new media to coordinate activities, plan protests, and publicise often high-quality information about their causes. This aspect of internet activism - being connected - is defined by him as a 'connected logic', whereby taking public action or

contributing to a common good "becomes an act of personal expression and recognition or self-validation" (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013, p. 752).

Additionally, activists also know how to get their messages into mass media channels. The latter is indeed significant, as German political scientist Joachim Raschke says: "A movement that does not make it into the media is non-existent." (Bennett, 2003, p.2). According to Bennett (2003), the power of the internet in global protests comes down to three factors: the willingness of activists to share, merge and tolerate diverse political identities, the perception of activists that complex problems require to be moved from the grasp of governments and nations to protest activities, and the growing permeability of all media that enables viral messages to travel through cyber-time and space and to reach large publics.

According to Bennett (2003), the internet is a medium that easily links others in search of collective actions without challenging their identities. In turn, it allows global activist networks to direct action while respecting the many identities of their followers. As such, identity is central to the internet and the correlation of activist movements and their audiences: according to Castells (1997, cited in Bennett, 2003), the power of the internet is bound to the transformation of identity itself and communication technologies cannot be understood without understanding the identities of the people using them.

1.2 *Presentation of self in everyday life*

It is often said that on Instagram each individual puts on their best self, posting their highlights of the day while hiding their existence's less glamorous aspects. Many times, what we portray on social media, is regarded as not 'real', some might even put up a different identity, far from reality. Goffman wrote about the presentation of self in everyday life back in 1956 (Goffman, 1956). He explains that an individual acts in two ways: how they express themselves (verbally or else to convey information) and how others perceive this individual's expression. Another term that Goffman has introduced is 'impression management': how individuals give a 'performance' front stage, in front of an audience, and 'backstage', where they have no audience. A performance could be any activity of an individual which aims to influence others. This analysis of individuals' action can be compared to a dramaturgical analysis according to Goffman, meaning that every part of our social life could be regarded as a theatre. According to Goffman (1956), the way an individual appears in front of others can be regarded as calculating, since they

will consciously alter their way of presenting themselves to make an impression, perhaps to evoke a specific response from the audience and eventually influence them.

This concept of Goffman has been applied in the context of the internet age by several authors (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Hogan, 2010; Miller, 1995). Miller (1995) introduces Stone's (1991) 'electronic selves' and explores how the presentation of self is reflected in personal homepages on the World Wide Web. According to Miller, on personal homepages, people need to present themselves as someone who is acceptable, with considerations, is morally unblemished, and has a certain kind of expertise. These personal homepages have become new kinds of personal presentation in a new medium. Just as Goffman's theory on impression management, Boellstorff (2015) claims that regardless of intentions, people behave slightly differently when interacting online. Overall, an electronic interaction and presentation of self can be regarded as a natural extension of Goffman's theory.

1.2.1   Further application of Goffman's theory in the digital age

Hogan (2010) further emphasises that Goffman's dramaturgical approach to how someone presents themselves is rather an 'idealised' than an authentic presentation of themselves. Additionally, it is in the 'backstage' that most of the work is made to keep up appearances performed at the front stage. This front that has been formed in the backstage is then further modified because of an audience's presence. This theory is therefore particularly useful to understand how individuals present themselves online. Previous research using Goffman's presentation of self, such as Schroeder (2002) for virtual worlds, Hewitt and Forte (2006) for identity production on Facebook have the common thread of employing impression management to present an idealised self. According to Hogan (2010), a well curated exhibition of the self is presenting things with coherence to the user that they find relevant or interesting. People can portray themselves through online content or also called 'artifacts', which then will be curated, especially in front of a friend circle. Curators use their list of friends who are part of their online profiles to determine how to properly distribute content.

Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) have conducted research on bloggers' online identities and found that one individual can have several identities maintained on different blogs, which reflects Goffman's claim that we adopt multiple roles and multiple identities in our everyday life. They found that participants re-created their offline self online, and

edited facets of themselves, further emphasising that when in 'front stage', people deliberately chose to project a given identity (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). As such, Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) conclude that the online environment could be seen as a stage with the offline life as the backstage, again falling in line with Goffman's theory. When it comes to how bloggers present themselves, they consciously make an effort to be fun and creative online, honest or candid, while others make an effort to appear professional for their career, which could manifest itself by the removal of blogposts that appear 'silly or like nonsense' (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). Bloggers would also 'embellish their self', meaning that even though they reproduced their offline selves online, they would rather just highlight aspects of their personality. In other words, the offline self is divided up into aspects of self, and only some of these aspects are presented online, emphasising some parts of the self and censoring others, and overall presenting an edited version of the self (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). Although the online self might not change compared to the offline one, it is still embellished, curated, and informed by the offline self (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

However, the line between online and offline persona can be thin: Baptista (2003) posits that online personas and identities are not newly created but are part of a wider, offline identity. Similarly, Waggoner (2009) argues that virtual identities may be just as real to users as their non-virtual identities and are simply the same entity in different contexts. Furthermore, the disparity between the two selves is minimal since users want to be honest and direct with others, and participants would rather re-create their offline selves online than actively adopting new personae. Indeed, in Yilmaz' (2020, p. 3038) research on Instagram travel influencers' experience, one participant claimed to be "happier when reflecting his/her own tastes instead of trying to resemble someone else".

According to Tafesse and Wood (2021), social media influencers have the ability to create a powerful online identity by "packaging and communicating authentic personal narratives that combine photos, videos, and activities with the interactive affordances of social media" (p.2). The online persona of influencers helps to attract followers and engage them on an ongoing basis. Not only influencers themselves, but followers also actively participate in the construction and legitimation of influencers' online identities: "they follow, engage with, advocate for, and support influencers, which play a crucial role in legitimising and affirming influencers' status while also expanding the reach and impact of their messages" (Tafesse & Wood, 2021, p.2).

1.3 Instagram influencers

Internet activism can cross over many platforms and media channels, for instance a visual content sharing online social network like Instagram. As of December 2021, Instagram has reached a new milestone of 2 billion active users worldwide (Dixon, 2022). The focus of this master thesis is Instagram, since it is regarded as a powerful visual platform which can potentially push for offline action (Tuli & Danish, 2021). Indeed, Tuli and Danish (2021), have observe in their research on environmental activism, that the platform can keep issues temporarily powerful and influence people's behaviour to act when it comes to environmental issues.

At the centre of who has the power to influence peoples' behaviour on Instagram are its so-called 'influencers'. An increasing trend in the digital age and internet platforms is the presence of these micro-celebrities, viewed as experts in specific domains of interest (Tafesse & Wood, 2021) who like traditional celebrities possess a personal brand (Kay et al., 2020). Influencers are defined as independent users of social media who shape the behaviour of a mass by using the communication channels provided by a platform (Freberg et al., 2010). Therefore, they are also commonly referred as opinion leaders – people who communicate with and influence a sizeable social network of people following them (Boerman, 2020; Jalali & Khalid, 2021; Yılmaz et al., 2020). As opinion leaders, influencers can shape public preferences, inform fellow citizens, and alter their behaviour (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009). Because of this reason, they are especially interesting for brands as they receive information about products and services and try them earlier than other social media users (Yılmaz et al., 2020). Scholars have therefore mostly investigated influencers on Instagram in the fields of marketing, be it fashion or other brands.

As such, in the context of environmental campaigns and the climate cause for instance, social influencers can be extremely resourceful to influence their audience (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009) and push them to perform green actions. As each individual in possession of an Instagram account has an audience, and climate activists want to influence their behaviour and knowledge on climate change, they are behaving as influencers on the platform. Against this backdrop, the question arises how climate activists could potentially push their followers to perform green actions and behaviours to become more mobilised offline.

1.3.1 Characteristics of Instagram influencers

Instagram influencers are often also referred as 'opinion leaders' since opinion leaders are defined as "individuals who have a great amount of influence on the decision making of other people and on their attitudes and behaviours" (Casaló et al., 2020, p.511). Casaló et al. (2020) looked at what it entails being an opinion leader and an influencer on Instagram in the fashion industry. According to them, Instagram is the most used platform by opinion leaders and influencers because of the sense of immediacy it allows and the ability to create communities online. Even before the appearance of Instagram, Miller and Shepherd (2004) explained that people want to share their stories in a public medium like a blog because posts are usually brief and frequent and tend to convey a sense of immediacy which makes them seem intimate and spontaneous. Bloggers show their 'true identity' online and use this attention to influence others through advocacy (Sepp et al., 2011). These elements of blogs can be applied to a new platform like Instagram, as the application is built on short posts and immediacy.

On Instagram, originality and uniqueness are crucial factors if a user is to be perceived as an opinion leader. The platform has one of the highest engagement rates compared to other social networking sites, only lagging behind TikTok (Cucu, 2022), a percentage which is greater in the case of influencers (Casaló et al., 2020). Social media engagement is a measure of how people are interacting with social media accounts and content, and can include actions such as likes, comments, direct messages, replies, shares and retweets, saves and mentions (Eckstein, 2022). Previous research about opinion leadership, both offline and online, has followed two streams: (1) identifying the characteristics and motivations of opinion leaders, and the role of personal traits and (2) outlining opinion leaders' influence on areas such as decision making (Casaló et al., 2020).

According to several researchers, Instagram influencers can substantially affect the purchasing behaviour of users (Yılmaz et al., 2020), especially non-traditional celebrities as they are perceived more credible (Casaló et al., 2020). They refer to social media users as 'consumers', since their research mainly focuses on how influencers can potentially alter the consumption behaviour of their followers. Credibility is highlighted as a main driver of influence on followers, as when perceived credible, followers will be more willing to try out products reviewed and endorsed by the influencer (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019; Nandagiri & Philip, 2018). Creating original and authentic content is also

a way for influencers to resonate with their audiences, increase perceived credibility (Casaló et al., 2020), and crucial to gain followers' attention and motivate them to engage with content (Uusitalo, 2020). For example, social media influencers who promote a lifestyle brand are most successful interacting with social media users when they are authentic, confident, and interactive in their content (Glucksman, 2017).

Qualities such as assertiveness, comprehensiveness of the content and level of talkativeness have been associated with characteristics of opinion leaders and influencers (Casaló et al., 2020). But characteristics such as attractiveness, reliability, quality of information, connection and sincerity are also important to define the effect of influencers on their audience and potential consumers (Yılmaz et al., 2020). The influence of the opinion leader on their followers is heightened when their thoughts and personality are congruent. Influencers will have a closer psychological bond with their audience when sharing highly personal content that revolves around their lifestyle and interests (Casaló et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). As such, when the content of the influencer matches an individual's values, interests and personality, followers will perceive it as fitting with their personal interests and will tend to follow to a greater extent the ideas and behaviours suggested by the influencer (Casaló et al., 2020).

1.3.2 Number of followers equals size of influence?

In the definition of influencers by Jalali and Khalid (2021), an influencer has inherently a large number of followers who tend to trust them. However, whether audience size really matters for influencing behavioural intentions have been contended by multiple scholars, one side claiming that audience size is a poor metric for influence and there are no big differences (Boerman, 2020; Segev et al., 2018), and the other side finding that a smaller audience size has a higher influence on the followers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Gupta & Mahajan, 2019; Kay et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021, Ware, 2016). According to Okuah et al. (2019), although having a large follower count is beneficial, it is not a guarantee for influencing and changing peoples' perception about the environment.

In general, social media influencers are segmented based on their following, with some researchers suggesting they can be classified as micro-, macro- or mega-influencers (Boerman, 2020; Dhanik, 2016; Gupta & Mahajan, 2019; Hatton, 2018; Kay et al., 2020; Porteous, 2018; Yılmaz et al., 2020). Most of the time, in academia and practice, only the first two levels are used to classify influencers, since mega-influencers refer to traditional

mainstream celebrities. Although the categorisation is somewhat consistent in the literature, the number of followers each group contains is rather flexible and subjective (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019). For instance, the categorisation of Yilmaz et al. (2020) is as follows:

- Micro-influencers are social media users whose number of followers is between 1,000 and 100,000 and have an average 25%–50% engagement rate per post.
- Macro-influencers are users who have between 100,000 and 1 million followers and have an average 5%–25% engagement rate per post.
- Mega-influencers are celebrities who have over one million followers and have an average 2%–5% engagement rate per post.

However, micro-influencers are typically defined as having less than 10,000 followers (Boerman, 2020; Casaló et al., 2020; Gupta & Mahajan, 2019) and macro influencers as having between 10,000 and 1 million followers (Boerman, 2020). For the purpose of this research, micro-influencers will be capped to having up to 50.000 followers (Gómez, 2019).

1.3.3 Micro-influencers having macro effects

The largest group of influencers is that of the micro-influencer, normal people who turned 'Instafamous' (Boerman, 2020). They are often called micro-celebrities, positioned between common social media users and celebrities (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019) and tend to be very knowledgeable as they typically specialise in a particular area of interest (Gómez, 2019). This category of influencers is at the focus of this research since a smaller follower count gives a more targeted follower base (Gómez, 2019), and has been regarded as positively associated with follower engagement and a stronger and more personal relationship with the audience (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019; Kay et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). According to Ware (2016), influencers between 10-100 thousand followers offer the best combination of engagement and broad reach. Engagement also serves to validate influencers' social status and social capital in the so-called "attention economy" (Cotter, 2019). Indeed, micro-influencers who engage more with their followers are found to be more effective than their macro-influencer counterparts: they are perceived as more authentic, accessible, relatable and overall, more

'real' as they are cultivating a sense of intimacy and proximity (Cotter, 2019; Gupta & Mahajan, 2019; Kay et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). With these characteristics, they establish a better connection with their audience, which leads to greater levels of persuasion and eventually resulting in higher purchase intentions than their macro-influencer counterparts (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019; Kay et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021).

Another important characteristic of micro-influencers is the relationship and trust they have with their followers. As Gupta and Mahajan (2019, p.189) argue: "micro-celebrities form a bidirectional relation, which offers an insight into their private lives whereas traditional celebrities interact with huge fan base but form rare personal link." As such, Instagram users tend to trust influencers with more modest numbers of followers than those with larger follower bases (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Gupta & Mahajan, 2019). Conversely, as the number of followers increases, influencers start to resemble traditional celebrities thus weakening followers' identification with them and diminishing their engagement with influencers (Tafesse & Wood, 2021).

Cotter (2019) introduces the concept of 'relational influence', whereby influencers personally engage with followers and create intimate relationships. Relational influencers truly rely on the 'social' element of social media as they would rather establish real and human relationships. According to Cotter's (2019, p. 905) research, "relational influencers believe that good original content leads to engagement by providing value to followers". They rather focus on establishing authentic reciprocal relationships, and prioritise quality over quantity, which in practice means having fewer deep relationships instead of a large number of followers and engagement. Not only is for influencers more beneficial to have authentic connections, but according to them, the algorithm of Instagram also discerns authentic connectivity, a foundation for influence and to stay visible on the platform (Cotter, 2019).

1.4 *The importance of imagery in environmental discourses*

As social media influencers on Instagram, particularly micro-influencers seem to establish strong connections with their followers and in turn affect their behaviour, the question arises how climate activists use social media and imagery to their advantage. According to Anderson (2009, p. 177), "the involvement of celebrities is increasingly becoming a means through which the newsworthiness of environmental stories is

enhanced." Although the representation of climate change in mainstream media has been widely studied, there is little research on representations in other platforms, such as social media (Uusitalo, 2020). According to Askanius and Uldam (2011), a video-based platform like Youtube can be a space which contests dominant discourses. Although videos are thought to be more effective in touching people's feelings than text, and are helpful to mobilise activists, they are not enough to motivate direct action, and remain just one piece of the puzzle (Askanius & Uldam, 2011).

Previous research has shown that climate change imagery is distant, abstract, sometimes fear inducing and ineffective at motivating personal engagement with the issue (Uusitalo, 2020). One of the most central representations of the current discourse on climate change is that of climate strikes, such as the Fridays for Future initiated by Greta Thunberg. However, according to Uusitalo (2020), the imagery from these mass demonstrations does not empower or inspire everyone equally to be interested in the climate cause. Overall, this shows that there might be a problem with connecting visuals on climate change to people's everyday lives as in particular mass media does not portray realistic options for action (Uusitalo, 2020).

On the other hand, it is argued that visuals are important since sight is the most dominant sense in the Western culture (Doyle, 2007), they involve personal narratives, and images have the capacity to affect people emotionally and to become powerful icons (Anderson, 2009; Uusitalo, 2020). Emotions are important to trigger as they can lead people and potential consumers to take action (Page & Mapstone, 2010 as cited in Luck & Ginanti, 2013). Specifically Instagram is considered a powerful visual platform which can elicit emotions, thus could potentially push for offline action (Tuli & Danish, 2021). Indeed, according to the research of Askanius and Uldam (2011), social media have the power to spread activist videos outside their echo chambers and stir debate among a broader audience. They analysed mobilisation videos promoted on YouTube and conducted interviews with key actors of protests organised around the COP15 Conference. The visual analysis of videos showed that mobilisation videos tend to trigger emotions in the viewer, by being dramatic while having a simple narrative. The aesthetics also played an important role, be it pictorial or linguistic, as it aimed at cultivating specific emotions and calls upon action, which again trigger emotions such as anger, passion or indignation.

1.4.1 Challenges of climate imagery

As such, the relevancy of studying Instagram, a visual image-sharing site, is rather important to discover its use by climate activists and their potential to stir the discourse on climate change. Tuli and Danish (2021) have conducted research on virtual environmental activism on Instagram by looking at two case-studies that gained prominence in India. In these case-studies, Instagram posts were used to spread awareness about the disasters and to gather funds for the affected community. They found that the result of the cases was both due to people exhibiting consumer behaviour and a genuine demand for environmental justice.

However, visually representing climate change comes with its own challenges. A former Environment Correspondent for BBC News observed in 1990: "Above all, environmental stories really need good pictures... global warming is very difficult because you can't actually see global warming." (Anderson, 2009, p. 178).

In 'Picturing the clima(c)tic: Greenpeace and the representational politics of climate change communication', Doyle (2007) explains how visuals can be problematic to communicate climate change. By analysing the visual campaigns of Greenpeace from the early 1990s to 2007, the researcher warns that climate change is more of an 'invisible' issue since it happens over a long period of time, therefore representing it in pictures and influencing people to act when nothing dramatically visible is happening is difficult. The real challenge is bringing attention to climate change before its impacts could be seen: „Images might not be as impactful on the long term as the moment climate change can be photographed is the moment it becomes visible as a symptom and thus too late for preventative action." (Doyle, 2007, p. 146). Because of photography's 'here and now' nature, a prioritisation of the visible goes at the expense of the hidden, thus reinforcing the view that 'seeing is believing'. Therefore, Doyle (2007) concludes that it might be more useful to persuade the audience that most of the time climate change and environmental problems are not visible.

1.5 Climate activists and influencers on Instagram

So how do climate activists spread climate imagery online and what techniques do they use on Instagram to engage their audience? It becomes apparent that the line between climate activists and influencers is thin. Nisbet and Kotcher (2009) divided environmental bloggers in two categories: the agitators who spark discussions about

environmental issues and synthetisers who compile and make sense of new scientific reports and other materials. A decade later, Okuah et al. (2019) developed a conceptual model which shows the relationships between the social media influencers' characteristics and the techniques used by them for influencing the public regarding environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour. Their analysis of 398 articles categorised influencers' characteristics into reach (popularity, proximity, and potential impact), relevance (authority, trust, affinity) and resonance (frequency, period, amplitude). When it comes to the techniques used for engaging the public, the categories were: direct engagement, collaborative tagging and hashtags, the use of emoji for engagement, social timing and content curation and the use of incentive appeals (Okuah et al., 2019). On the other hand, marketing specialist Nick Baklanov (2019) created groups of influencers according to topics: climate change, zero waste, plastic free and sustainable living. According to him the most popular themes of climate influencers are zero waste and sustainable living, but it is rather difficult to group them together as many influencers focus on multiple themes and green topics.

It is especially important to focus on people's consumption since it is one of the main reasons for environmental degradation. Influencers displaying their actions online inspire individuals to engage in green behaviour and participate in environment protection (Sun et al., 2019 as cited in Jalali & Khalid, 2021). When it comes to the effect of Instagram influencers' activity on green consumption, Jalali and Khalid (2021) posit that they influence the attitude, mindset, opinion, intention and behaviour of followers, mainly attributed to the content of photos and videos shared on Instagram. Especially media exposure to environmental messages increases environmental concerns, awareness and can predict the green behaviour of young, educated audiences (Carmela & Fiorillo, 2017; Joshi & Rahman, 2016 as cited in Jalali & Khalid, 2021). When influencers express their concerns about environmental issues via photo content, the followers will usually receive the message positively which will affect their own green consumption intentions (Jalali & Khalid, 2021). Since influencers represent a new type of leaders who shape an audience's attitudes by creating content and sharing it on social media channels (Glucksman, 2017), Instagram could play a major role in increasing awareness and promoting environmentally friendly behaviour. As such, presenting personal experiences, alternatives to how one can change their everyday behaviour and educating on the environment long-term might be the most effective ways to push people to be more climate conscious and engage in green behaviours and actions.

2. Methodology

The aim of this research is to discover how climate activists portray themselves on Instagram and encourage offline green actions of their followers. To answer this question, this master thesis uses a qualitative research method by analysing semi-structured interviews and climate activists' Instagram posts. Since qualitative content analysis can be used to analyse written, verbal and visual communication messages (Cole, 1988 as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), it is the chosen method of this master's thesis. Qualitative content analysis aims to identify recurring themes, subthemes and relationships in the data set. Themes and codes were discovered inductively, meaning that they were derived directly from the data, with no intention to test previous theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

The interviewees were selected through extensive online research on climate activists using Instagram, research into current young climate activists globally, and using the Instagram function of discovering similar users. Websites consulted included lists such as "10 Environmental Activists to Follow on Instagram" (Hannah, 2021), "7 inspiring environmental Instagram accounts you need to follow now" (Chan, 2021), and "5 Climate Activists You Should Follow On Instagram" (The Environmental Magazine, 2021). Apart from these websites, the Instagram page @eco.tok was used to search for more respondents, described as a 'collaboration of creators providing education on climate change, activism, & science'. From a combination of these methods, a list of 45 climate activists and environmental influencers came about from different geographical locations and a follower base ranging from two thousand to 14 million. Getting in touch with the potential interviewees became the most challenging part; their email address was on occasion mentioned in their Instagram biography, however it became apparent that climate activists were more responsive via their Instagram direct messages. Those positively responding to the interview call had without exception a follower base under 50.000, qualifying in the category of micro-influencers (Gómez, 2019), and confirming that a smaller follower base creates a stronger and more personal relationship with the audience (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019; Kay et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Additionally, at the end of each interview, subjects were asked for recommendations through the snowballing method, which yielded positive results, as they occasionally referenced each other.

In total, 12 interviews were secured with climate activists. Since respondents were geographically dispersed with sometimes large time differences, each interview was conducted via Zoom. The only setback of conducting the interviews via this program is that it might compromise the quality of data when compared to face-to-face interviews (Gray et al., 2020). Respondents were provided with a consent form which gave permission to record the interviews and gave their consent for their name and surname to be used in this master's thesis. The audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim and re-read several times. Lastly, interviews lasted from 23 to 60 minutes and were all conducted in English with the exception of 3 Belgian respondents which were conducted in French:

Figure 1: Interview subjects

Date	Name	Username	Country	Number of followers	Audience	Time
03/03/2022	Elizabeth Sherr	@lizlivingblue	USA	3.7k	18-24 Mainly USA	27:00
09/03/2022	Caulin Donaldson	@trashcaulin	USA	6k	18-24 68% female	23:39
15/03/2022	Shane Coopersmith	@sustainable.shane	USA	7.3k	18-24 45% female	22:58
16/03/2022	Lucie Morauw	@luciemorauw	Belgium	798	18-24 64% female Mainly Belgium	28:53
17/03/2022	Chloé Mikolajczak	@thegreenmonki	Belgium	10.7k	25-34 78% female	29:01
17/02/2022	Elisha Winckel	@watermelonactivist	Luxembourg	1.3k	18-24 53% female Mainly Luxembourg	01:04:24
21/03/2022	Colas Van Moorsel	@colas_van_moorsel_	Belgium	1.2k	18-24 60% female Mainly Belgium	51:56
28/03/2022	Laura Young	@lesswastelaura	Scotland, UK	41.7k	25-34 86% female Mainly UK	46:51
01/04/2022	Carissa Cabrera	@carissaandclimate	USA	5.5k	25-34 Mostly women Mainly USA	29:58
02/04/2022	Ridhima Pandey	@ridhimapandeyy	India	7.4k	18-24 or younger	34:45
04/04/2022	Samia Dumbuya	@samiaalexandra	England, UK	2.8k	18-24 Mostly women Mainly UK	54:00
20/04/2022	Laurie Pazienza	@goodmorninglau	Belgium	6.6k	87% female Mainly Belgium	37:44

Before each interview, respondents were asked to send 3 of their most influential posts, usually those with the highest engagement rates and the best received by their audience. One post per respondent has been selected and added in the appendices list of the thesis. Opening the interviews with respondents' own posts allowed them to reflect on their work, both online and offline, stirred deeper discussions about their journey to activism and their thought process behind their social media habits. Also called photo-elicitation - the use of photographs during the interview process - (Collier & Collier, 1986, p.99-125 as cited in Lapenta, 2011, p.2) this method is an open-ended interviewing process which favours collaboration between researcher and respondent. Photo-elicitation has mainly been adopted in interviews as an 'ice breaker' to "create a comfortable space for discussion, and as a tool to 'invoke comments, memory, and discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview'" (Banks, 2001, p.87, as cited in Lapenta, 2011, p.5). According to Lapenta (2011), images invite people to take the lead during the interview process, making full use of their expertise and explaining subjects otherwise too complex to explore. They allow the interviewee greater space for self-expression, personal interpretations and responses by explaining the image's contents and telling 'their own stories' (Collier & Collier, 1986, p.105 as cited in Lapenta, 2011, p.2). Furthermore, the use of photographs helps build trust with the researcher, which allows increased access to information. Furthermore, photographs can represent subjects that only the interviewee can see, triggering meanings and interpretations invisible to the interviewer (Schwartz, 1989 as cited in Lapenta, 2011, p.2).

Within photo-elicitation, several approaches exist when it comes to the source of the images. In this research all fall in the category of respondent-generated photo-elicitation, or 'reflexive photography', where respondents elaborate on the content and meaning of photographs they produced themselves (Lapenta, 2011). An advantage of reflexive photography is that it reduces researcher bias stemming from the selection of specific images, subjects, and themes used in the interviews.

Apart from photo-elicitation, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used for the research. This method allows interviewees to answer questions flexibly and expand on topics in which they are interested (Bryman, 2008). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand activists' thought processes behind their use of Instagram and their personal experiences online and offline. Semi-structured interviews are a great way to find out about the 'why', 'how many' and 'how

much', especially because of the method's flexibility (Fylan, 2005). The questions asked aimed to answer the main research question and its sub questions:

1. Presentation of self
- How do you define yourself? Both online and offline?
- What is your main message/cause?
- How are you presenting yourself on Instagram? Is it any different from the real you?
- Who is your audience?

2. Social media use
- What is your motivation behind using Instagram? Do you have a goal in mind?
- Do you have a certain thought process or strategy before posting on Instagram?

3. Perceived impact
- What types of posts have worked the best according to you?
- What feedback do you get from your audience and how?
- Have you seen how your actions influenced your audience? What about the 3 posts you sent?

The interviews were transcribed, read through several times to discover units of meaning then condensed into codes, which were compared to each other and used to generate themes. Next to analysing the transcribed interviews, this master's thesis also makes use of the 3 posts chosen by climate activists. Below are a description of the themes and codes which answer RQ2 on what strategies climate activists use on Instagram and R3 on how activists assess their impact on their audiences:

Figure 2: Themes and codes

Strategies employed		Perceived impact	
Authenticity	Personal, daily life	Unseen	
	Showing past experiences	Engagement	Comment
	Thoughts		Direct Messages
	Feelings and emotions		Saves
	Openness/accessibility		Shares in Stories
			Likes
Social media strategy	Intentional	Media spillover	Newspaper
	Spontaneous		Twitter
	Emojis		Facebook
	Hashtags		Blog
	Tags		Zoom
	Call To Action	Connection with audience	Conversation
	Link in bio		Offline relation
	Consistency		Direct shares
	Ads		
	Diversity: aesthetic/content		
	Cross platform promotion		
	Community of activists: learning		
Language	Positive		
	Easy		
	Simple		
	Direct		
	Redrafting/explaining		
	Motivational		
	Angry		
	Negative		
Immediacy	Behind the scenes		
	Virality		
	Controverse		
	Story		
	Current news		
Medium	Photo		
	Video		
	Graphic		
	Reel		
	Story		
	Lives		

3. Analysis

The aim of the interviews with climate activists is to gain an insight into how they portray themselves on Instagram and encourage offline green actions of their followers, be it political participation at protests or lifestyle changes. To answer this question, the following sub questions were used to guide the analysis:

- Q1: How do climate activists portray themselves on Instagram and what are their motivations for using the platform?
- Q2: What strategies do climate activists use to communicate with their Instagram followers?
- Q3: How do climate activists assess the impact they have on their followers' green practices?

3. 1. *Presentation of self*

A central part of Goffman's presentation of self in everyday life is the act of 'impression management' or representing oneself differently on and off stage - in front of an audience, or far from public scrutiny (Goffman, 1956). Researchers in recent times have debated how the online sphere can become one's 'stage', a place to perform and potentially represent oneself differently compared to behind the scenes (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Hogan, 2010; Miller, 1995). Some argue that one's online presentation is not different from their 'real' self (Waggoner, 2009; Yilmaz, 2020), while on the other hand others argue that online presentations are curated and differ at least slightly from our offline selves (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013, Hewitt and Forte, 2006; Hogan, 2010; Schroeder, 2002).

3. 1.1. Different definitions: climate activist or influencer?

Before looking into how climate activists portray themselves online and what methods they use to influence their audience, it was important to investigate whether the way they interpret their role as an activist is in accordance with what they portray online and if they consider themselves as influencers. The interviews with the 12 climate

activists first showed that their definition of selves differs greatly: some are not comfortable fully defining themselves as climate activists, others accept their position of both activist and influencer, while others categorically reject being referred as influencers, or don't mind not bearing any specific label. Therefore, it has become apparent early in the interview process that the line between an activist and an influencer is thin, and climate activists online embody characteristics of influencers even though it might not be their primary goal by using Instagram.

Elizabeth Sherr (@lizlivingblue), said she often changes her biography on Instagram 'because people have called me different things and I have to think what I call myself.' Liz started a trash picking project on TikTok, a video-sharing social media platform, especially popular among younger users (D'Souza, 2022) after she saw important amounts of debris washed up and left on the beaches of Barcelona. She thought by sharing her experience on social media, she will reach more people and will have a better impact, which indeed eventually lead to a community developing around the issue and the European Parliament getting in touch with her for a collaboration:

"So I started this project on TikTok where I said for every follow, I'll pick up one piece of trash, which went kind of viral and caused a lot of attention at the European Parliament. I was able to gather attention with the help of the European Parliament, the help of social media and others, to raise awareness on this issue around the world. And invite people to pick up trash in their own communities and report back to us." (L. Sherr, personal communication, 2022).

Currently, she uses the term 'ocean activist' in her biography, but also refers to herself in real life as 'sustainable communicator' and 'eco communicator'. This latter aspect – communication, is highlighted by other interviewees as well. According to Liz, using the word communication is essential, as she not only shows pictures and tells the audience what to do, but also explains why and how to make a change.

Similarly to Liz, Caulin (@trashcaulin) started a 'pick a toy, leave a toy box' project in California, first on TikTok. After noticing left behind plastic toys at the beach, he asked his audience for advice on what he should do, from which stemmed the idea of the project. Just as Liz, he rather defines himself as a communicator, although his biography states he is an 'eco activist and creator'. Because of a lack of a college degree related to climate sciences, he wouldn't define himself as an expert, but rather a

communicator, or an ocean environmental activist creator focused on education and entertainment. Being an educator can also be the sole focus and role for some, such as for Shane (@sustainableshane). He defines himself as a lifestyle expert in sustainability, helping to make easy sustainable switches at home. In his biography, he is a 'local expert on sustainability', but overall describes himself as an environmental educator: "I'm not just an influencer, I'm not just an environmentalist. I educate whether it's on social media to companies, to businesses, to schools. I'm an educator." (S. Coopersmith, personal communication, 2022).

Others are happy to take on several definitions, sometimes because of their diverse backgrounds. This also means that on various platforms and in front of different audiences, they would define themselves differently. In her biography, Laura (@lesswastelaura) rather lists her achievements, such as being a founder, contributor, creator and TED speaker. She indeed arguments that many different definitions fit her, because 'there is no term for what I do'. Indeed, because of an environmental science degree, she accepts being called an environmental scientist, but depending on the platform she switches between environmental campaigner, climate activist, and ethical influencer. Another aspect which could influence how she defines herself is whether she needs to be taken more seriously, for example if invited on TV, she would introduce herself as an environmental scientist instead of a climate activist:

"If I go on to Sky News, I'm like, call me an environmental scientist because you need to prove yourself. Whereas if you're a climate activist, they might just not take you seriously. But I'm like, no, you will refer to me with everything because some spaces it's important to do that. Whereas if I go speak to school, they're not caring what my job is. Just call me a climate activist, call me whatever, because they don't care, they're just interested in what I'm there to say." (L. Young, personal communication, 2022)

Some also see themselves between the line of an influencer and an activist, such as Carissa (@carissaandclimate). She lets people put her in different boxes, such as being an activist, a conservation or climate communicator, or as Laura, because of her degree, being called a marine biologist. Furthermore, she is comfortable being called an influencer by brands for collaborations. Another aspect she emphasised on is that her main goal is to teach people just as other interviewees like Shane and Caulin.

Other respondents were also comfortable being called both an influencer and an activist. Laurie (@goodmorninglau) even goes as far to say that some people could be annoyed because she doesn't care about labels. Laurie is engineer full time, but on Instagram goes with the description 'consciously engaged girl' and still would define herself as half an influencer half an activist:

"People can't put me in a box because they don't really know if I am an influencer or an activist. Because actually it's very mixed, and it's exactly the person that I am. So it's great this way." (L. Pazienza, personal communication, 2022)

However, just like for Laura and Carissa, the way she presents herself depends on the platform and audience she talks to: she would be an influencer if in discussions with a brand, an engineer when in an important conversation about energy and an activist if she is being interviewed by a magazine or a political party.

On the other hand, Samia (@samiaalexandra) rather expressed her discomfort with being labelled a climate activist even though her Instagram biography states that she is one. Indeed, she is a campaigner full time and works as a campaign advisor for a worldwide petition website. During the interview, she emphasised that after having a master's degree she'll feel more comfortable being called an activist, until then she'd rather define herself as a climate conscious person. Furthermore, she is not comfortable with the social media branding of activists, because of the commodification of the term by Instagram.

While some have quite flexible definitions of themselves on the spectrum of educator, influencer or climate conscious person, others categorically define themselves as climate (justice) activists. Indeed, Chloé (@thegreenmonki) defines herself as a climate justice activist on her Instagram profile, and for her being an activist is taking up every aspect of her life, where there is no difference in who she is online or offline:

"This is not just something on social media, it's also in my private life, most of what I do is related to activism. And my actual job is you could call it professional activism. I'm a campaigner for NGOs. I'm actually paid to be an activist on a specific topic. So activism definitely is my life. I've always been very driven by what I found to be unfair. I think it has infused in every aspect of my life, whether it's online, like social

media, my professional life and in my personal life" (C. Mikolajczak, personal communication, 2022)

Others also take into account who they are in their everyday lives, especially when still having a student status: Ridhima (@ridhimapanday) is a 14-year-old Indian climate activist, Lucie (@luciemorauw) and Colas (@colas_van_moorsel_) are Youth For Climate activists in Belgium. All of them emphasised they are students and activists at the same time, but first climate activists. Colas expected that people would look at him differently once he started embodying the role of an activist, so he consulted his friends and family about how to stay true to himself. Elisha (@watermelonactivist) also sees himself as a climate justice activist, but also emphasises that his focus is on systemic issues. Indeed, he even expressed his discontent with environmental influencers and their focus on promoting individual changes and ethical consumerism instead of having a more holistic approach.

While all interviewees are dealing with climate and sustainability issues, the way they define themselves and what they feel comfortable being called as greatly differs. On some occasions, there is also a dissonance between what the interviewees portray in their online biographies and how they personally define themselves, and even in real life they might adapt how they are called depending on the situation or audience. The climate activists' definition of self is therefore quite malleable, few going with only one label, and not only could it change because of the environment, but also because of a changing identity through time. Most importantly, not all climate activists consider themselves influencers, even if their primary goal is to influence people for the climate justice cause. As Freberg et al. (2010) say, influencers are defined as independent users of social media who shape the behaviour of a mass by using the communication channels provided by a platform.

3. 1.2. Presentation on Instagram

The research also showed that interviewees have different approaches to how they present themselves online and offline. Many emphasised that they do not consciously present themselves differently, simply because often they do not have time to think about it or because developing an image would require too much effort next to other commitments such as studying on the side, having a full-time job, or being an active

campaigner in real life. However, it is apparent that although climate activists aim to stay true to their real selves online, a level of curation inevitably takes place for various reasons.

3.1.2.1 Staying true to oneself

One of the most noticeable differences between interviewees is how one has started their activist profiles on Instagram: the vast majority had an organic transition from a personal profile to an activist one, while others set up a profile specifically for their activism. For Laura, it was an important and deliberate choice to keep her personal account separate: she didn't want her friends and family to be exposed to information they don't care about, and for privacy reasons, preferred not to expose them to her large audience. She also likes to take a step back from her activist account occasionally instead of using it on a day-to-day basis. Although she has two separate accounts, Laura claims she tries to stay the exact same person online, and 'brings her whole self' to her activist account. Similarly, Lucie and Colas both have a separate private account. Colas has also changed his previous username to appear more serious, but he still wants to show people that he is himself. Lucie has started to talk less on her public account about her studies, hobbies and family and talks much more about activism: "I think this page is becoming more and more an activist page and not one of my personality" (L. Morauw, personal communication, 2022). Although her account is purely dedicated to activism, she still tries to show that she is a young student by bringing elements of her personality like humour 'on stage'.

As Glucksman (2017) and Yilmaz et al. (2020) observed with social media influencers, all interviewees acknowledged that the most important in their presentation on Instagram was to be genuine and show their real selves to their audience, but also admitted that a small curation takes place. Characteristics such as being positive, honest, reflecting true emotions, feelings and thoughts, while being motivating were the most often brought up ways how climate activists presented themselves on Instagram, falling in line with how influencers present themselves online.

Many emphasised that they didn't want to fake a persona, and instead be an example of standing behind what they say online. Being genuine, letting their audience see all aspects of their personal lives and showing the range of emotions of the human condition was a recurring theme:

"It's really just me waking up, going to pick up trash and taking videos of it. And I try to be positive. I do have some posts where I am sad or mad about one day when the trash is crazy. But that's also real. I think if people see reality, it makes it more believable. If you are honest and yourself - sounds cheesy - but people can see it." (L. Sherr, personal communication, 2022)."

Sharing highly personal content revolving around one's lifestyle and interests has been observed by researchers to establish a closer psychological bond with their followers (Casaló et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Indeed, Samia explains that her main activist account is also the most personal one she has: she uses her Instagram page to show that she's a human being with different interests, different thoughts tied to climate justice, but that is not all she is. To her, the label of a climate activist came naturally because she was always an outspoken person, therefore the two people – online and offline - are the same. To appear genuine can also be a conscious effort made by some, for example Chloé is making an active effort to reflect how she truly feels and show the different struggles in her personal life, such as having a medical condition. She is more conscious to not appear as having a perfect life, which also made her pay greater attention to how she has posted in the past few years. However, Chloé also reflects that without knowing she might have appeared different than her real self in the past:

"We always want to appear on our best, I would say. And this is something I've been trying to fight for the past two years because before I didn't realise it. It was always the prettiest picture and the nicest, most inspirational caption." (C. Mikolajczak, personal communication, 2022)

3.1.2.2 Different selves, different curations

Some respondents expressed that they could feel a disconnect between their selves behind the scenes and at front stage online. According to Kay et al. (2020), influencers are experts in specific domains of interest (here, the climate) and have also developed a so-called 'human brand'. Indeed, one of the interviewees highlighted that he has his own 'brand' whereby he is 'just the dude': "I'm like a skater surfer, and then I'm also an environmentalist who loves gardening and composting and all that." (Shane). Although

he thinks he is himself '95% of the time', Shane also acknowledged that there's a small part of him that is acted up for social media:

"I was like, all right. I mean, listen, you got to talk high. You got to hold your phone up. You got to yell at the camera. You got to be upbeat. You know what I mean? Like I don't always talk like that. I act that up for the camera. But it's just that the world's a stage, right?" (S. Coopersmith, personal communication, 2022)

Other interviewees feel the need to change their real selves and curate their presentation on Instagram, for instance to avoid criticism. Lucie for example acknowledges that there is a thought process before she posts because people she doesn't know will watch her, meaning she is conscious of a 'front stage' as per the theory of Goffman (1956). Although since humour is a big part of her personality, she is also trying to translate this characteristic on Instagram [1] and show that she is a fun and humorous person. Compared to Lucie, Ridhima feels she is a different person on Instagram: while she considers herself a fun person, she doesn't know how to translate it in her posts, which is why her account solely serves as a page on her activism. Because of this, she doesn't feel comfortable posting about herself, as it would stand out from an overall professional, activist account. Furthermore, criticism gets in the way on how she presents herself:

"People used to take my interviews and post them. And I read the comments and it was not that great. Yeah, that is still there in my mind somewhere. I just try to be as precise and formal as I can on social media, even though I want to be fun." (R. Pandey, personal communication, 2022)

Similarly, Lucie also curated her Instagram page to avoid criticism by removing very personal pictures like holiday photos, which means she is not entirely herself online: "better to remove them to avoid unnecessary criticism, even though they will always find something to criticise." (L. Morauw, personal communication, 2022). If they come to criticise my personal life and not my activism, it's better to separate the two and put it somewhere else." On the other hand, others embrace the fact that they might be criticised and explain that perfectionism, overly curating oneself could come in the way of doing nothing. As Colas say: "there will always be people who critique, but you do this or nothing" (C. Van Moorsel, personal communication, 2022). This part of the curation

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[1] Appendix 4

reflects how bloggers also removed blogposts that appeared 'silly or like nonsense' in Bullingham and Vasconcelos' (2013) research.

Overall, just like when analysing bloggers and influencers, climate activists use Instagram to show their 'true identity' online to influence others through advocacy (Sepp et al., 2011). They often portray themselves as their real selves online (Yilmaz, 2020), keeping their main characteristics the same way, but on occasion performing small acts of curation for their 'front stage' presentation by the removal of posts, or concealing certain parts of their personality to appear more professional (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Hogan, 2010).

3. 2. *Strategies of climate activists*

3. 2.1. Why Instagram?

The motivation behind using Instagram as a platform for climate activist endeavours was different for each respondent. For some, Instagram can be a source of revenue that can support their voluntary work, where activists would be paid after sponsored posts or collaborations, while for others it is a tool to raise awareness and mobilise people. Overall, all activists agreed that they were using Instagram to raise awareness with the goal in mind to mobilise their followers and inspire them to make small environmentally friendly changes in their lifestyles or become aware of important political processes. For example, Liz says:

"From awareness comes a motivated action. Through awareness you can change someone's thought on the topic. Once they understand the issue, or once they become interested in it, that's when they can change their behaviour and you can get action. So first it is a thought change and then a behaviour change." (L. Sherr, personal communication, 2022)

This translates as an element of internet activism, as Luo et al. (2016) suggest that internet activism can be an important alternative to strengthen civil society and produce social change. As Elisha says: "by being able to inspire more people, you can create a bigger kind of change." (E. Winckel, personal communication, 2022). Nonetheless, some have also reflected on the fact whether using Instagram and posting content on the social media platform makes any difference. However, they still agreed that being active on social media is still better than being completely inactive: "We can tell ourselves that the

fight is lost in advance, what's the point of making a little video, petitions and the like. But then I tell myself, no, if everyone thinks like that then we're really in trouble." (C. Van Moorsel, personal communication, 2022).

However, the road towards using Instagram as a platform for their activism differs from person to person. As mentioned earlier, how the subjects' activist accounts developed could stem from a personal account that gradually changed into a more professional one, or by purposefully creating a separate activist account. Some also started to use their accounts more because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which on occasion lead to an increase in their follower base. Some climate activists preferred using Instagram compared to other social media platforms because of its more personal nature, and because the application allows to deeply connect with their audiences.

A few of the interviewees naturally transitioned from being bloggers to using Instagram. As Luck and Ginanti (2013) observed, environmentalists or people with 'green' orientations use blogs to express their concerns and discuss them. Chloé started her Instagram account as a personal one, then created a blog on sustainability. As she became more involved in activism, her Instagram page changed to promote the blog, until the blog disappeared, and the Instagram page is the only platform through which she encourages people to become more climate conscious. On the other hand, Laurie started her blog supporting her Instagram page at the same time and both are still functioning in symbiosis.

Another reason why climate activists keep on using Instagram is that it allows them to translate and transmit knowledge that might be complicated for a lay person, especially since the climate crisis is a complex issue with several layers. As Carissa says:

"Nowadays, if I want to learn more about a topic, I'm going to follow creators that share about that topic. I can read articles all day, but if I want to commit to learning all the time, that's what you do. And I think that's really cool because I've learned a lot from a lot of people who live different lives in different areas of the world." (C. Cabrera, personal communication, 2022)

However, according to Samia, on social media it is rather difficult to engage people with an issue, especially climate justice topics, because they are rather complex and niche. As Doyle (2007) observed, climate change imagery comes with its own challenges, the most difficult being to bring attention to the problem before its visible

impact. Therefore, if talking about climate justice topics, it is better to focus on one specific aspect. Climate activists when focusing on a niche topic can therefore behave as experts of their fields (Tafesse & Wood, 2021), able to shape the behaviour of their audience by using the communication channels of social media (Freberg et al., 2010). This 'role' taken up by climate influencers has been observed in environmental bloggers' characteristics by Nisbet and Kotcher (2009) who defined agitators as bloggers who spark discussions about environmental issues and synthetisers who compile and make sense of new scientific reports and other materials. For instance, Caulin emphasises that the knowledge he has gained through his activist circle is meant to be put in a digestible way for his audience. Liz's aim with her Instagram page is to fill a gap between science and communication:

"As a person who studied science, the most important thing is to communicate science with the rest of the world. That is what scientists have to do and often there is a gap where it is not well communicated in terms of research or advice." (L. Sherr, personal communication, 2022).

Similarly, Chloé has found a niche within the climate discourse by mostly focusing on EU policymaking, as the big majority of environmental regulations come from EU institutions and it is a field that is not very accessible to most citizens:

"I think this is where I'm the most useful, trying to translate what's happening at the EU level, or at least at the policy level in general, and then try to empower people to get engaged in policymaking. Because EU policymaking is not designed to be understandable by normal people" (C. Mikolajczak, personal communication, 2022).

Apart from educating and raising awareness, Instagram is also seen as a natural extension of climate activists' work, simply a 'tool in a toolbox', the 'glue', 'a landing page' and an 'amplifier' of their work as defined by the interviewees. Many have also voiced that it is a 'need' to use Instagram for their activism. This ties back to the claim that internet usage is only accentuating or accelerating well-known processes driving activism and protests (Foot & Schneider, 2002). In the case of Ridhima, creating an Instagram page became an extension of her real life activism as she created her Instagram page at the same time as she started being involved in climate issues:

"When I got into activism, and I started taking real actions, when I understood the urgency of creating awareness from the very first day, I started posting on Instagram about what I've been doing and where I've been going to school and what I've been talking to the kids." (R. Pandey, personal communication, 2022).

Therefore, Instagram is rather a necessary part of activism as it allows to reach people beyond their means (Earl et al., 2010; Tatarchevskiy, 2011) while becoming a professional profile of their activist work. Indeed, for Samia, social media is just a space where she can talk about activism, although on a lower level than in other aspects of her life. It is rather a landing page for people to get to know her work as an activist, start the conversation and then bring it into real life. As she says social media are just amplifiers showing some aspects of a person's activism, and gluing together activists' work which in turn gets people involved:

"They're like the amplifiers of what's happening. The people I see who are very successful with being an activist on social media are the ones who are already doing lots of work on the issue and then just using their Instagram to amplify it, like documenting these things. And Instagram and social media platforms, they glue the activism together because you can go on someone's bio where they have a link tree or something similar and they can access all the work, all the actions they've done. It just brings everything into one place. And I think that's what gets people more involved." (S. Dumbuya, personal communication, 2022)

As such, most of the respondents see Instagram as an invaluable toolkit, or an asset to their activism, but sometimes only out of necessity. Laura has highlighted that Instagram is an easy way to raise awareness and reach people 'beyond what we could ever do', however even though she feels it is a need to use the platform, she has noticed others are also successful without it. Colas also adds that Instagram brings visibility, as it becomes the visible part of someone's commitment. Carissa adds that her Instagram page is a more 'buttoned-up' version of someone's online brand, putting a lot more thought into her posts compared to TikTok, where she would share less polished content. This again confirms that depending on the platform and intention, one presents themselves

differently, in this case portraying a more professional identity (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

An important part of Instagram is its community aspect, whereby some activists might exclusively use the platform to keep in touch with their own community and network of other activists to learn from each other. Lucie for instance highlighted that she is only using Instagram for her activism and to keep herself informed: "That's really the only reason why I keep my social media, to know what's going on in the world, what all my activist friends are doing, what's going on, know about the big campaigns, and main ongoing actions." (L. Morauw, personal communication, 2022). Instagram is therefore also feeding the knowledge of activists themselves and isn't only a one directional relation between activists and followers. Instagram still serves as a source of inspiration for activists. Colas for example claims that he started his own Instagram profile because he was inspired by other activists' accounts:

"I was made aware by Instagram actually. It's thanks to the fact that I saw other young people on Instagram in Belgium, they were all super cool and I was doing nothing at all. Then at a certain point, it unblocked something in me. I think the more activism there is on Instagram, the more people see it on their news feed, the more it will be democratized." (C. Van Moorsel, personal communication, 2022).

While Samia also highlights that social media brings a global connection between activists and believes it has an impact on mobilisation: "There's so many people who became activists because of social media. I have climate activist friends from indigenous communities from remote islands because of social media, and that wouldn't have happened before the era of social media. So I think social media has definitely played a part in movement building." (S. Dumbuya, personal communication, 2022).

This link between global activist networks, internet activism and the personalisation of politics was researched by Bennett (2003, 2012), who argued that global activist networks have the ability to direct action while respecting the many identities of their followers. From an opposite perspective, Laura has also highlighted that local projects become global ones because social media has no barriers with information travelling through time and space (Bennett, 2003).

Finally, one of the main reasons why climate activists preferred using Instagram compared to other platforms was that it allows to build online relationships, establish a better connection with their audience and higher engagement compared to traditional media or other social media platforms like TikTok. Social media allow activists to become independent of traditional media as argued by Earl et al. (2010) and Luo et al. (2016). Furthermore, social media allows immediate feedback from the audience while being very engaging and as Casaló et al. (2020) observed, Instagram is the most used platform by influencers because of its sense of immediacy, spontaneity, and intimacy:

"What's interesting about social media nowadays is I'm able to post a video, get immediate feedback and tomorrow or whenever I'm going to make my next video, craft that into the next and add that into the next thing. So it's super engaging. It's really a push and pull between me and my audience of me creating, them telling me what they want, and then me doing that. It's like a back and forth which has really been amazing to work with." (C. Donaldson, personal communication, 2022).

This push and pull aspect closely relates to what Tafesse and Wood (2021) observed, whereby followers actively participate in the construction and legitimation of influencers' online identities by following and engaging with the influencer while also expanding the reach and impact of their messages. How activists can maintain connections with their followers and what experiences they have with them will be dealt with in the chapter that follows.

3. 2.2. Strategies employed

But how do climate activists really build a relationship online? What strategies do they employ to spread their message and eventually make an impact through a more personal relationship? According to the research of Okuah et al. (2019), techniques used by social media influencers to engage with the public include direct engagement, collaborative tagging and hashtags, the use of emoji for engagement, social timing, content curation and the use of incentive appeals. Many highlighted that they do not follow a specific strategy because they do not have to time to build one or are not 'savvy' enough, which showed itself during the interviews as some had a hard time to find the insights tab of the Instagram application. However, a few of the respondents also

mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic allowed them to post more frequently and to become more active on social media than usually. The recurring strategies (whether consciously or unconsciously applied) were reflecting some elements of the 5 categorisations of Okuah et al. (2019), and additionally further trends came out such as adopting a positive, motivational and easy language, being authentic and approachable, relying on the here and now of social media, and sharing resources. Some other strategic elements proper to the Instagram platform were the use of hashtags, emojis and tagging accounts, although these aspects weren't highlighted as much as others.

Instead, within the theme of 'social media strategy' the majority of respondents rather mentioned their lack of strategy when it comes to content management of their Instagram page, even though they are all aware of existing social media strategies such as posting on a certain day of the week at a certain time, using relevant hashtags in the captions of their posts, tagging other accounts, cross-promoting on other platforms or boosting the platform's algorithm by asking for certain types of comments under their posts. As such, even though Okuah et al. (2019) introduce 'social timing' as one of the strategies of influencers, climate activists do usually not pay attention whether they post at the times when posts could get the most likes, such as on Saturdays and Sundays or in the evening hours on Instagram. However, apart from not having the time to build a social media strategy, many are not looking for an increase in the follower count or becoming an influencer in its classical terms: "I am aware of the strategic things you could do in order to gain more traction faster. But then on the other hand, I also don't want to just be a person that creates content for content." (E. Winckel, personal communication, 2022). An exception to this are collaborations with campaigns or paid posts, where activists usually have to follow an editorial line and a strategy set by the company or brand. Carissa for example has built a social media strategy around a campaign for 'April Earth Month' as part of her company. They had a strategy built entirely on reels where they posted a video every weekday for the whole month on her Instagram page. Their strategy was to be short, brief and concise while positive, and focusing on solutions to 'make people feel good'. Captions accompanying the videos included additional information to give more context on the topic.

Instead of having a well-defined strategy, respondents rather adopted a 'spontaneous' approach when posting online, although elements used were reminiscent of the strategies employed by Carissa's team for the April Earth Month campaign. As Miller and Shepherd (2004) explained, people sharing their stories online seem intimate

and spontaneous because of the platform's sense of immediacy. The spontaneity of the posts stemmed from the fact of having no thought process before posting, but rather posting what feels right in the moment, and what activists subjectively think is important:

"People have advised me to look up for a time on which most of the people use Instagram and post at that particular time or do certain things. But I find I would just lose track and I just can't keep up with all those things. I just post the time when I feel like it and I do it the way I am very comfortable." (R. Pandey, personal communication, 2022)

Colas on the other hand tries to follow when is better to post, but overall also just posts 'how he feels' and would rather invest his time in being more active in real life than online. Not having a defined strategy behind posting and rather adapting a 'spontaneous' behaviour is further supported by the unpredictability of the Instagram algorithm. Indeed, according to the respondents' anecdotes, the platform decides which posts are favoured with no reliable logic behind it:

"Social media is really a hit in the dark. I think if I chronologically timed everything out to a science, it would do pretty well. And then if I also spontaneously just got inspired and posted things along the way, it would do well too. So, I think it's just a combination of both. (S. Coopersmith personal communication, 2022)

"It doesn't make sense, to be honest. Sometimes you think you get a really great post and it gets no likes, no comments, no one sees it. Sometimes you do a shitty random post and it gets hundreds of likes, even sometimes thousands. So I couldn't explain. Honestly, I really couldn't explain. (C. Mikolajczak, personal communication, 2022)

Another social media strategy used by climate activists was to include so-called Call To Actions at the end of captions next to posts (usually mentioning a link in their biographies or even in stories). These are short, motivating sentences that push people in taking real life actions for example by signing petitions or sending an email to a politician, reaching out to local governments and officials. For example, Carissa encourages people to "spend 1 minute going to the link in my bio" and to "Contact your local responder if you see oiled wildlife in the area" in the end of one of her posts on oil spills in California (Figure 3).
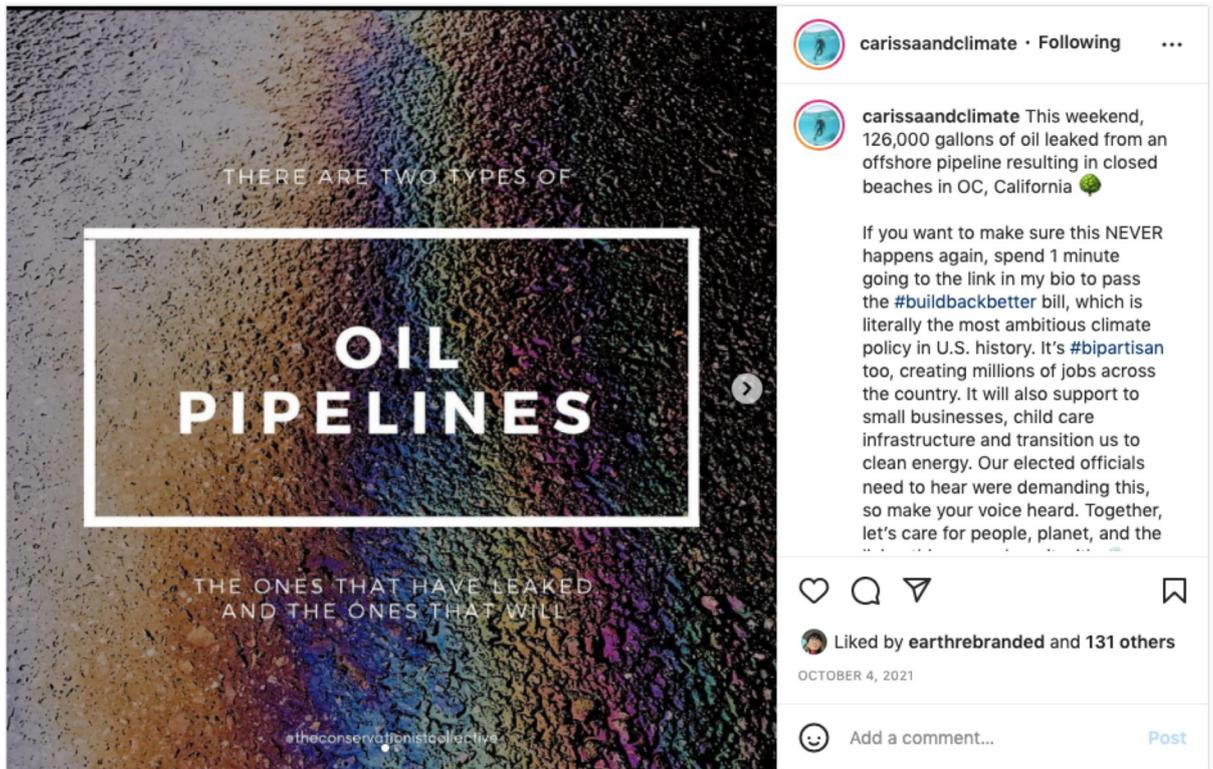
Figure 3: Carissa's graphic post she made herself on oil pipelines in the US

Samia also ends her video post by encouraging people to write letters to Tesco because of the company's impact on indigenous communities: "Will you join me to take action on this? @greenpeaceuk have created an action pack which you can order for free. It contains resources and tips on how to pressure Tesco to stop causing forest fires in the Amazon. Click the link in my bio to get access to the action pack and join me and many others in this fight to save our global community 👊" (Figure 4).
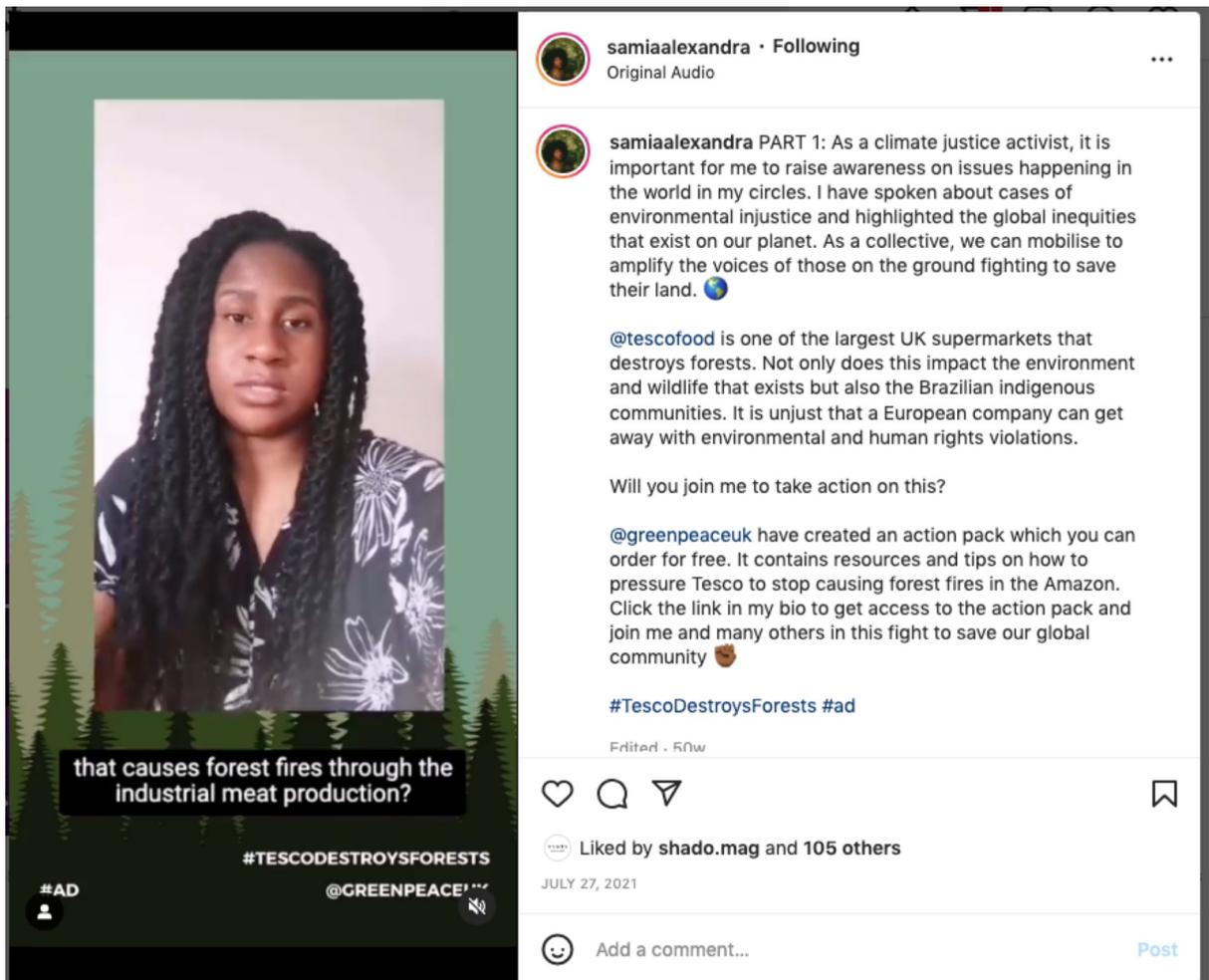
Figure 4: Samia's post on taking action against Tesco

The post features many elements of a 'classic' social media strategy: relevant hashtags, tagging other accounts, and being a collaboration in the form of an advertisement for Greenpeace UK. According to Samia, Call To Actions make people feel like they're personally making a change: Followers are "more likely to engage and interact with the post just simply because they are going to be more empowered and it's not going to be a superficial action." (S. Dumbuya, personal communication, 2022). This remark goes in line with Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) observation on internet activism, which says that contributing to a common good is an act of personal recognition and self-validation.

Another strategy used by activists is using different platforms to spread their message, as one of the ways activists can gain more awareness about their causes and reach outside the walls of Instagram. Having different platforms feeds the same message and further amplifies engagement on Instagram. For example, Caulin employs a cycle between his content on Tiktok and Instagram: "Instagram feeds my TikTok content and

then I bring the TikTok content back to Instagram and open it up in a different way where people can again suggest ideas or talk about what they want to talk about." Other significant ways Instagram is the basis of more awareness raising is for example how Laura's viral post travelled through Twitter and Facebook and was picked up by mainstream media which lead to further discussions with the companies. Samia also highlighted how she would organise workshops and Zoom events and try to bring people into a wider discussion off the platform. Finally, Laura's blog is advertising her Instagram page and vice versa.

Some were also curating their posts for aesthetic reasons, such as Chloé who paid more attention to the colour scheme of her posts but isn't doing it anymore due to time constraints. Another part of aesthetic curation that is still used by some activists and communicators is paying attention to diversity, for instance alternating posts portraying people with explainers or photos and videos. Naturally, some are exception to this rule such as Caulin, Colas or Laurie whose content is heavily video-based. Apart from being visually varied, the posts can also be content-wise diverse, which reflects the variety of issues and approaches within climate activism:

"I kind of want people to be doing things at all levels. So that's why I still post about plastic free swaps, that's why I post about petitions that people can sign and it's also why I post about things that people can go to. It's like a whole variety" (L. Young, personal communication, 2022).

Finally, another social media strategy they use on Instagram is by supporting each other on the platform. Activists not only have a community of followers, but also of activists who would support each other's content by liking, commenting, replying to stories, or tagging each other. Okuah et al. (2019) has defined this strategy as 'collaborative tagging' which is one of the most successful techniques to maximise exposure and make content more visible to social media users. Furthermore, having a community is appreciated by the activists, as it can get 'heavy' when doing it alone according to Liz. The activist community is also constant inspiration for the activists for new posts, a way of learning from each other and a way to be updated from the latest issues.

Indeed, the next main theme that emerged from the interviews was that activists rely on the 'immediacy' and 'timeliness' of news and events for their online activities.

Activists would translate current news, and what is viral or talked about at the moment. For example, the interview process collided with the International Women's Day, and several respondents reflected on their posts made for the day [2]. Laura for example would create a post when a bigger event is coming up such as Black Friday, or when companies launch a new initiative, overall, trying to cover topics that are timely. Carissa gave the example of giving her opinion online about the controversial documentary Seaspiracy, which went viral both because at the time the content was highly discussed about and engaged with and because of her marine biologist degree. Indeed, in one of her posts [3], she writes: "my college focus was actually in evolution and ecology before specialising in marine science." Relying on her degree in the field ties back to credibility being a main driver of influence on followers (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019; Nandagiri & Philip, 2018), while influencing the audience's opinion by informing them is a main characteristic of opinion leaders (Boerman, 2020; Jalali & Khalid, 2021; Yılmaz et al., 2020). As Samia explains, there is a science to campaigns, which relies on being reactive to current news and crisis:

"When a crisis hits, you need to jump on it straight away because people are scrambling for information. They want to know more and they want you to break it down for them. And then after that, you kind of tell them what they can do to alleviate this issue. And we noticed that people were more likely to engage and interact with these kinds of posts just because it was in the moment. Everyone's talking about it. I have to talk to journalists every week to jump on moments and seize the moments because you can't let things die down. Because at that hot point, that peak moment of crisis, everyone's eyes is on the crisis. If you leave it too late, people move on to the next thing. So, yeah, that's like the science of getting a lot of engagement." (S. Dumbuya, personal communication, 2022)

Controversial and divisive topics are also observed to bring more engagement and views, whether because of negative or positive reasons:

"The divisive topics are kind of the buzz topics. It's going to get a lot of views, so it's going to give visibility to your account. But also, it opens the door to all your haters. Because the more views you get, the more people are unhappy about what you said." (L. Pazienza, personal communication, 2022).

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[2] Appendix 12
[3] Appendix 9

Laura also recalled how one of her posts calling out a well-known alternative milk brand went viral and reached over 340.000 people on Instagram, but also started a conversation on Twitter, and mainstream media which resulted in cafes, independent shops and people stopping buying their products, ending up with the company itself getting in touch with her (Figure 5). This confirms as Tuli and Danish (2021) observed, that the virality of the cases on the platform had the ability to keep the issues temporarily powerful and potentially translate it into consumer action.

Figure 5: Laura's post about Oatly which became viral

Within the 'timeliness' theme, many activists make an effort to bring the viewer behind the scenes of their work, for example when on the spot at a protest or participating in an action which is only accessible to a select few. This brings the followers the benefits of social media's immediacy and 'here and now' nature. For example, Laura was documenting every moment at the COP26 conference in Glasgow[4]:

"I wanted to use my social media like a space to share about what was going on and what it was like inside, just to try and break down some barriers. There was just tons of people learning about what was happening inside COP, getting a bit of an inside view instead of just watching the news and hearing what were the top things discussed." (L. Young, personal communication, 2022)

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[4] Appendix 8

Being able to bring the viewer behind the scenes is also achieved by using the 'stories' function of Instagram, where users can post pictures and videos that can be seen for a 24-hour time limit. Colas has the impression that often times people don't really care about the content of what he says but are rather interested in what he does, which is why he uses the stories function to show all details of his daily life and including the people he meets on the daily. Liz adds that being consistent in her posts and showing what she does everyday acts as a daily reminder and creates the most impact, as consistency makes 'your eyes become more habitual to the problem.' Caulin also adds that Instagram feels more personal to him compared to TikTok, because he doesn't have the impression of oversharing by sharing his daily life on his stories, while on TikTok being equally active would be 'pushing it'.

And indeed, activists do not only show the behind the scenes of their work, but they also let the viewer in every aspect of their personal lives which translated in the theme of 'authenticity' with elements of being personal, sharing emotions, feelings and thoughts, and showing past experiences. In fact, by sharing highly personal content that revolves around their lifestyle and interests, influencers create a more in-depth and intimate bond with their followers (Casaló et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Chloé says that sharing personal posts is important because "you're not a newspaper at the end of the day, you're not just there to provide information, you're a real person sharing the journey to life." (C. Mikolajczak, personal communication, 2022). According to Liz, showing the truth, being real, sharing own experiences and showing people what they see through their own eyes is essential, next to showing one's passion as "People can see passion through your stories and how you communicate." (L. Sherr, personal communication, 2022). Being personal by sharing emotions and feelings, be it for example tied to anxiety or bad days was just as important as showing an imperfect life, for example not having followed a sustainable lifestyle previously, or including personal anecdotes and humour in the case of Lucie. According to respondents, these types of posts usually also performed the best: "Personal posts, let's say, like a selfie of me and feeling extremely depressed, that gets people's attention for sure." (C. Mikolajczak, personal communication, 2022)

However, sharing personal thoughts also makes the influencer more vulnerable to criticism, but Laurie highlights that having a clear opinion and positioning oneself politically is essential to make followers more engaged with the activists' message: "It's my life they follow, my thoughts. It's very personal. Even when I politicise the debate it's

still my opinion. It's my Instagram account, my page. It's my opinion and people take it or not." (L. Pazienza, personal communication, 2022).

When it comes to the language and tone of posts, being positive and motivating on the platform were the most important strategies the interviewees highlighted. According to Okuah et al. (2019), influencers have the possibility to use both positive and negative appeals or messages to persuade people. They also add that an incremental characteristic of social media influencers is humour, but only Lucie mentioned it as part of her strategy – also because it is an important part of her offline personality. However, the interviews have shown that activists preferred to keep their communication rather positive: Colas explains that what frustrated him most within climate communication was that it was either blaming people or extremely negative. Caulin further explains:

"People resonate with positive affirmations more than they do if you are shaming them or yelling at them, they're going to be defensive as opposed to being open to the idea. So just try to be really wholesome, really positive and really understanding and empathetic and you'll see more people taking action and wanting to support you as opposed to feeling offended by or defensive." (C. Donaldson, personal communication, 2022)

However, for some the tone of their posts rather reflected their frustrations, instead of sugar-coating the negative effects of climate change such as for Chloé and Laurie, which just ties back to being authentic and expressing true emotions and feelings. Many explained that putting a positive spin on a negative issue motivates people better and others add the importance of showing how easy and accessible it is to be engaged: "I just want people to understand it better in an easy and sometimes fun way and feel motivated. (…) Like right now, it's not that hard. It's a link in bio, it's contacting a representative, it's signing something." (C. Cabrera, personal communication, 2022). "I try to make things like 'you can do this'. Every single person can do some kind of action". (L. Sherr, personal communication, 2022)

Overall, the language of the captions accompanying the posts was usually meant to be easily understood, simple, direct and inclusive by getting rid of complicated scientific jargon. According to Samia, 'people don't come to Instagram to go to school' so she argues that information provided should be concise, condensed with key highlights of what people should know (for example when simplifying and redrafting academic papers or news) while showing that the information was well researched and is credible.

Laura also adds that she rather writes in informally so the information is clear and easily understood, but it doesn't mean that there's no 'science behind it'.

3.2.3. Relationship with the audience

Finally, one of the most important strategies activists employ is to portray themselves as accessible and open to personal communication. This often also gives the activists to assess their impact, as they receive direct feedback from their followers through various means. Activists also emphasised that being in touch with their followers was one of the most important and fulfilling part of their work. Indeed, many emphasised they preferred having conversations in private, through direct messages, or better, in person, compared to Okuah's (2019) category of direct engagement technique which only included engagement through the comment section. Activists would actually encourage followers to get in touch with them on Instagram, because of its more personal layout which allows better engagement with their followers and deeper connections:

"On Instagram the following ratio is way different so it's way more personal. I can talk to people in my DMs and actually see them and reply to things when people reach out. That's why I really push people who want to reach out to me or really want to contact me in any type of way to reach out on Instagram. I'll see it." (C. Donaldson, personal communication, 2022)

Indeed, not only Caulin but other respondents have noticed that Instagram has a higher engagement rate than TikTok, which would rather provide more 'meaningless' views and would imply that an audience on Instagram is following their accounts because they are truly interested in their content. This challenges claims that TikTok is the social media platform with the highest engagement rates and Instagram being the second (Cucu, 2022).

Samia also emphasises that being open and accessible should eventually lead to broadening up the discussion, beyond the walls of social media. Indeed, relational influencers believe in creating intimate relationships with their audience and having real and human relationships by creating 'relational influence' (Cotter, 2019). She argues that her DMs are always open to talk in private because social media can 'feel static', where people are limited to just connect in the comment section of posts. Indeed, the conversation is broadened up when people are directed to events or talks, or in other

words, interaction in other situations and eventually offline. Under her post on applying for a climate program[5], she indeed writes: 'Don't be shy and apply via the link in my bio. If you have any questions, just DM me.' Many also mention how receiving private messages about questions of their work or just encouraging messages makes them happy. Carissa mentions how "Message requests are the best feeling ever. They're like young girls often asking for advice all the time about marine bio and being very warm and complimentary." (C. Cabrera, personal communication, 2022).

One of the reasons why climate activists interviewed are able to establish close relationships with their followers is because of their small follower base. As all respondents have under 50.000 followers which qualifies them as micro-influencers (Gómez, 2019), they are able to establish authentic reciprocal relationships (Cotter, 2019). They engage personally with their followers and create intimate relationships. Engaging in reciprocal relationships also mean a prioritisation of quality over quantity, which in practice means having fewer deep relationships instead of a large number of followers and engagement. Indeed, a smaller follower count has been regarded as positively associated with follower engagement and a stronger and more personal relationship with the audience (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019; Kay et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Climate activists are therefore able to form a bidirectional relation with their audience, by giving an insight in their private lives compared to traditional celebrities with larger audiences (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019). Activists interviewed have actually voiced a preference for fewer followers and deeper relationships:

"I actually love the size that it is because I get back to people, I find people's messages, I'm able to see things. And I'm pretty sure if I had double, triple or quadruple the amount of followers, I'd really struggle to see what people are saying and connect with people." (L. Young, personal communication, 2022).

3. 2.3.1.   Perceived (offline) impact

So how do activists assess their impact on their followers? Do they see the effect they have on their behaviour and whether they make personal changes in their lives? Through the interviews, it has become apparent that it is mainly through the last strategy described above – personal communication - that activists are able to assess their impact.

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[5] Appendix 11

Feedback from their audience and a proof of their work's impact happens through classic social media engagement techniques such as comments, likes, replies to stories, and saving posts, but most importantly, direct communication through the direct messages function of Instagram. Numerical measures such as the number of likes might not be the most effective measure for impact, but instead reach and personal conversations according to interviewees. For example, one of Samia's posts has only received 155 likes, but she mentions that many people reached out to her in the direct messages section for clarification on the issue and the post reached over 5000 accounts [6]. By being open and accessible, and engaging in private conversations is how activists are eventually able to build a community not only online, but also offline and receive feedback from their work. Both Laura and Samia have mentioned they have met and recognised their followers at events:

"I love being able to recognise. And I've been at events where people come up and go, 'I follow you on Instagram, I know who you are! I recognise you, we've spoken!'. And I think that's what I like, is being able to connect other people up. That's what I love. That's the best piece of campaigning I can do." (L. Young, personal communication, 2022).

Although activists clearly have a strong relationship with their followers, many respondents have brought up how little they can see the direct effects of their online activity: "It is a real block with many activists, that most of the things we are doing, we never see direct effects. But this is also not why we are doing what we do." (C. Van Moorsel, personal communication, 2022). Elisha also says that even though he sees if a follower has clicked on the link of a petition he sent, he can't oversee whether they have actually filled it out. Laurie also brings up that there is no tool to measure impact or indicators, but she still sees her community grow and receives people's reactions:

"I get messages from people saying 'Thanks to you, I stopped fast fashion, 'Thanks to you I stopped eating meat'. They say thanks to me, but it's not only thanks to me, it's mostly thanks to them. But you see, I may have been the little nudge in the back that allowed them to take the plunge." (L. Pazienza, personal communication, 2022).

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[6] https://www.instagram.com/p/CPjE6vTHt97/

Similarly, Laura also receives rather anecdotal feedback, such as saying what they have done for their school or in their house but mentions that a lot of it goes unseen:

"And I don't mind that, knowing that, just trusting that people are taking this on and doing it. And sometimes you find out years later. Do you know what I mean? Like years and years and years later. That's why I just trust the process." (L. Young, personal communication, 2022).

However, there are individual cases where activists could see direct and sometimes offline impact of their posts. Liz for instance received pictures of people picking up trash in their communities (Figure 6), similarly, Caulin receives videos of his friends and followers picking up trash. Furthermore, he has collected 5.500 signatures for a petition which was sent to the town council that removed the 'take a toy, leave a toy box'[7] in his area. Caulin also organises beach clean ups that he advertises on Instagram and through which his followers join him. Some also receive direct messages about expressing their interest in joining the climate movement like Lucie, while Colas includes his followers in the content he creates. For example, when a follower texted him that he wanted to be engaged, they ended up doing a video together, while for another video about encouraging people to join a climate march, he included people from his school in his video. According to him, this incites people to share the video in their stories, bringing more views and engagement to the initial reel[8].

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[7] Appendix 2
[8] Appendix 7

Figure 6: Liz receiving images from followers who picked up trash in their communities.

Chloé also highlights that her main aim is to get people engaged in policymaking whether it is influencing policymakers or getting in touch with them. According to her experience, hundreds of people are replying to her polls on her stories when she asks who wants to help her contact policymakers, but eventually only a group of four or five very motivated people help her. As she says: "We're not engaging hundreds of thousands of people, of course. But if we're already able to engage hundreds of people, I think that's already a success." (C. Mikolajczak, personal communication, 2022). Laura for example has seen her posts having an impact on several layers: after posting about going to Uganda with an organisation, over 1000 people started following the charity's page she talked about, which lead to more donations, support and awareness. She reflects that this was the moment when she realised that her social media can have an impact on organisations. Furthermore, her post about Oatly impacted people's purchasing behaviour, while a post about Asda, a supermarket in the United Kingdom sparked a conversation on several platforms about sustainability. Both issues were picked up by mainstream media, and as German political scientist Joachim Raschke says: "A movement that does not make it into the media is non-existent." (Bennett, 2003, p.2). Laura has also observed that being active on social media brought her posts to the attention of journalists, similarly, Liz' online

activity brought the attention of the European Parliament [9] which lead to establish the World Ocean Day Trash Challenge in which people from 33 countries helped collect over 800.000 pieces of trash in 11 days. Samia also received mainstream media attention via an article which gather climate activists to follow online, and she also has received several applications to join a program about climate crisis through a link she posted on her Instagram page.

Overall, there are several ways activists received feedback from their audience on their messages be it through encouraging comments, interactions in direct messages, reactions to stories and other engagement techniques, offline meet ups, marches and other public spaces. However, many have voiced their concern that measuring impact cannot go beyond these feedbacks, so long-term lifestyle changes of followers are still unseen. Furthermore, as Laurie says, everyone has an impact on their surroundings as it is the essence of social interactions, even someone who has only 200 followers, the goal is that the impact has to be collective.

3. 2.4. What posts bring the most engagement?

So how do climate activists put into practice all the strategies described above? Which posts have been the most successful at engaging people and why? Before interview took place, respondents were asked to send 3 posts which they deemed the most influential or having the most engagement. This created a discussion around their best working posts or most personal ones, and why they started their activism in the first place. The majority thought that the types of posts that worked the best were short videos, or as called on Instagram, 'reels'. Many have observed that reels bring the most engagement and reach although suspected to be because of the platform's algorithm which puts them at the forefront. Instagram also allows to reach people outside of their audience by putting the post on 'only share to my feed' or 'share to the reel feed'. Overall short videos, more interactive, and engaging content are sought after (Figure 7). As Askanius and Uldam (2011) found out in their research, videos specifically speak to one's feelings more than text and are helpful to mobilise activists. In fact, many have adapted these types of posts, for example Laurie has only posted reels since the end of 2021. According to Carissa, the Instagram algorithm significantly pushes more the reels because they are trying to be a

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[9] https://www.instagram.com/p/CP23eIWj7RS/

video platform. Indeed, Laura also reflected on one of her most viewed videos which received 445,000 views:

"I think that was like an example of where it was kind of like a fun little video but showing something sustainable. The reason I think it was successful is because Instagram was also, if you look at the algorithm, they were pushing reels, making them really come up to the top on people's feed. Because they wanted TikTok to go away, it is the theory. But I think it was a mixture of the right timing, the right subject, the right whatever." (L. Young, personal communication, 2022)

"Videos are a great tool to raise awareness because you get people's attention and you can explain a lot more in a 1.5 to two minutes video than you can in a small post. But at the same time it takes a lot of work." (C. Mikolajczak, personal communication, 2022)
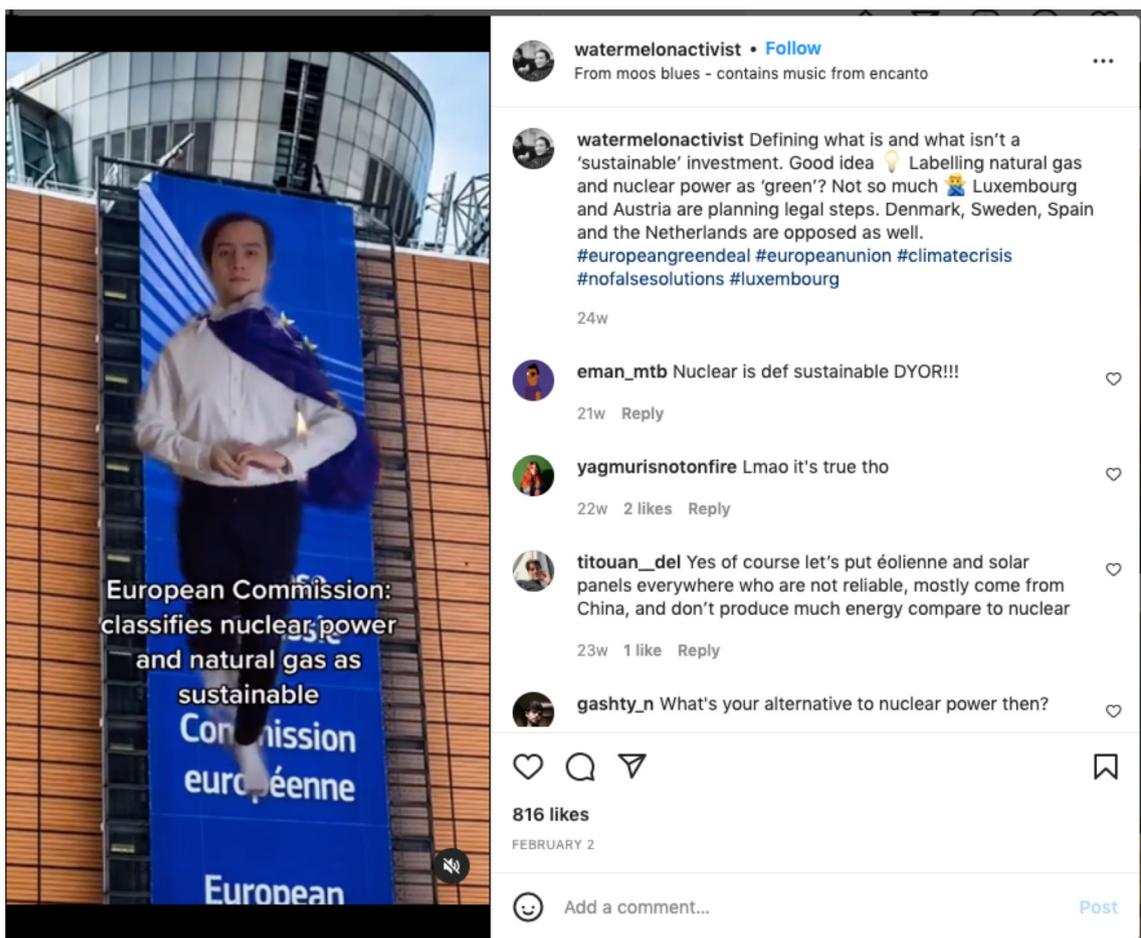
Figure 7: Elisha's Reel on the European Commission: 12,600 plays, 800 likes, 15 forwards and 36 saves.

Apart from reels, Samia also mentions that Instagram's algorithm has affected the way she posts and is more likely to post in her stories because she has more reach and more interactions there:

"Instagram is no longer chronological. So for example, if a crisis comes out, everyone rushes to the stories because there's more engagement talks, discussions about it in people's stories because it's happening right here, right now. Whereas with the grid you kind of have to put more thought into what you're posting and that takes time. So more reactive things tend to happen on Instagram stories, especially on personal accounts." (S. Dumbuya, personal communication, 2022).

Another type of post that is regarded as bringing engagement are more informative posts, explainers or photo montages, on occasion created by the activists themselves. For example, Elisha's post 'I am done' performed very well because it's short, concise and very emotional (348 likes, 13 comments, but 249 forwards). Lucie's photomontage was her post with the most reach, according to her because of its simplicity (Figure 8). As Uusitalo (2020) and Casaló et al. (2020) explain, creating original content is crucial to gain followers' attention and motivate them to engage with the content since it increases relatability and credibility. Lucie's photomontage is original, creative, and relatable as any person using a smartphone is reminded about how obvious climate crisis is, just as a phone notification.
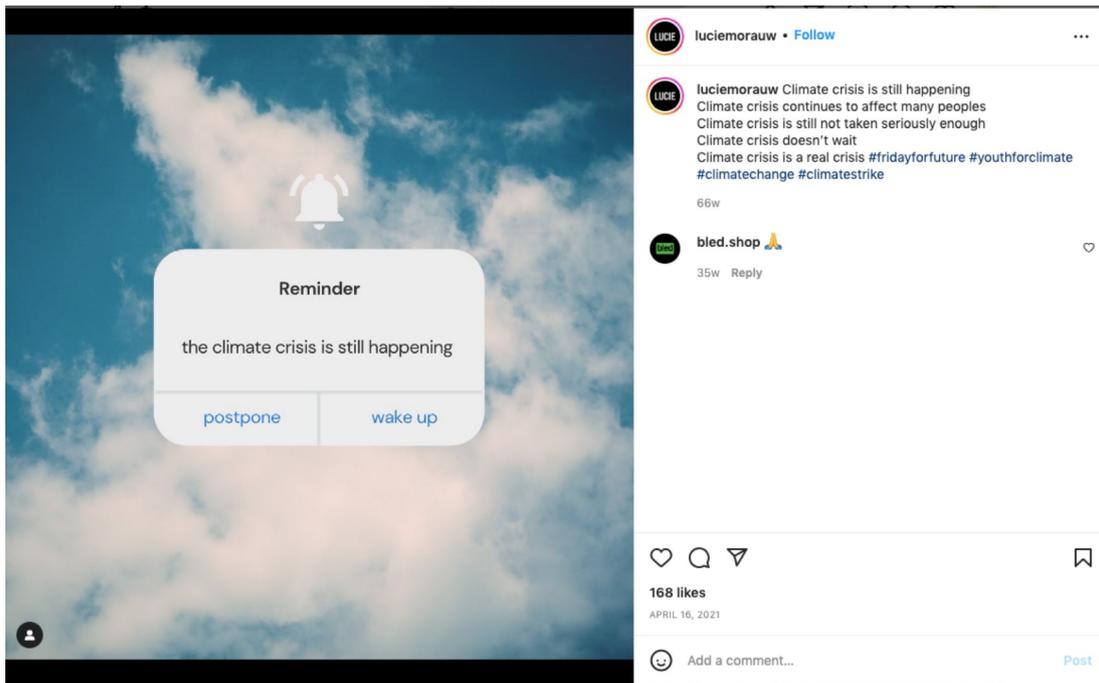
Figure 8: Lucie's photomontage

Finally, just as being authentic and personal are part of activists' strategies online, the very personal and emotional posts seemed to be some that worked the best. Just as Chloé mentioned that posts where she was very emotional performed the best, Shane noticed that lifestyle posts worked well for him, where he just shows what he does on the daily. Sometimes, posts are not related to climate or green topics, but rather the personal lives and struggles of activists represented by a simple picture of them, which is meant to be relatable to any follower, such as the one of Chloé below (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Chloé's post on her personal thoughts

3. 3.   The climate cause – many layers, many communications

A couple of themes that came out of the research included intersectionality and gender in the climate conversation, the algorithm and the life cycle of an application. Indeed, the respondents had different approaches to the same issue – climate change – but some highlighted that climate change is not only about biodiversity, sustainable lifestyle, or the environment, but is also part of a link of several societal issues, such as racial injustices and feminism, meaning that intersectionality cannot be neglected. The term intersectionality was introduced by Kimberlé Crenchaw in 1989, or the "idea that when it comes to thinking about how inequalities persist, categories like gender, race, and class are best understood as overlapping and mutually constitutive rather than isolated and distinct." (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Today according to Crenshaw, intersectionality is a way of seeing where power comes from. Indeed, many emphasised how it is necessary to bring politics in the environmental debate, focusing on systemic issues and justice. Laurie argues that real impact comes from changing the political discourse: "When you position yourself in an ecological way, it's impossible not to politicise the debate and it's even absurd not to do it because that's where everything is linked and that's the source." (L. Pazienza, personal communication, 2022). Chloé also adds that individual changes are necessary, but making political changes is the most important:

"It's also changing the belief that it's not just about individual change. Because a lot of people are like, well, I stopped using plastic, I don't fly, I don't eat meat, I only buy second hand. And it's all great, don't get me wrong, and it's all necessary. We need individual change. But the thing is, even if we put individual change altogether and everybody was perfect, it would only represent 25% of global emissions. What we need is actually the systematic change, the industry change, the policy change. And a lot of people don't necessarily either realise that or understand how they can impact that level. And I think it's really important to try to bridge that gap and say, yes, what you're doing is great. It's absolutely amazing. But you also need to mobilise on the policy level. Otherwise all your efforts… it's not that it's useless but it's you on your own doing it." (C. Mikolajczak, personal communication, 2022).

Very often, climate activists indeed took on different societal issues on their Instagram pages, such as feminism. Recognising that environmentalism not only means advocating for justice of the planet but also for marginalized communities and identifying how they are interconnected is defined as intersectional environmentalism (Hendriksen, n.d.). Laurie for example uses in her posts the hashtag 'intersectionalenvironmentalism' and one of Elisha's best working post with the title 'I am done' is about sexual harassment[10]. But many activists have also posted about the International Women's Day as it collided with the interview period [11]. Samia also greatly focuses on environmental racism and she argues that having a more holistic approach to the climate crisis could even bring in people from outside their usual follower base.

Not only is intersectional environmentalism taken upon as a topic of discussion by activists, but respondents from all genders have also highlighted how climate topics are heavily dominated by people identifying as women. Both in the realm of activists and people interested in climate topics, as all respondents had a majority of female followers. Female activists are also more likely to be victims of online harassment; Colas even recalls that during his one-year presence on social media he has never received negative comments compared to his female peers. Indeed, Ridhima has faced online criticism and trolling, and Laurie recalls that the majority of her negative comments and online harassers are from cis-gender white men. As mentioned earlier, both Ridhima and Lucie

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[10] Appendix 6
[11] Appendix 12

have engaged in curation practices of their Instagram pages to avoid criticism and bullying, and Laurie also deletes comments which she judges not appropriate. Since the climate sphere is heavily dominated by women, and from those interviewed those who voiced facing criticism and bullying are exclusively women, this could also mean that climate activists identifying as women are more likely to curate their profile and portray themselves differently on social media than men.

Finally, throughout the interview process, a recurring element was the dependence on the platform's algorithm. The Instagram algorithm is known to change through time, but it is not known how it functions, apart from observing which posts are put at the forefront. As Chloé observed: "The algorithm is so bad these days, it's nothing compared to two years ago. Two years ago, I could get 500, 600 likes on a post. And now if it goes beyond 200, it's a miracle." (C. Mikolajczak, personal communication, 2022). Not only did activists observe a change in the number of likes they can get, but the algorithm also decides what posts are seen first and what type of medium is favoured (currently reels). The algorithm also creates an echo chamber according to activists' account. As Caulin says, people who are following activists profiles are already aware of the climate crisis and might find themselves in a bubble:

"When you're on Instagram, YouTube, and you're making videos to raise awareness about environmental issues, a lot of times you are talking to your following. So one, already cares about it, two, already knows about this, and three, they're kind of saying the same thing." (C. Donaldson, personal communication, 2022).

For instance, Colas also adds that he is only subscribed to activists, so he finds himself in an echonchamber: "And sometimes I just wonder about how many unaware people there are." (C. Van Moorsel, personal communication, 2022). As such, even though Askanius and Uldam (2011) claim that social media have the power to spread content outside their echo chambers and stir debate among a broader audience, this might not always be true. A remedy to this bubble could be TikTok, which is a platform still actively used by Liz, Carissa and Caulin. Although Instagram is thought to create more and deeper relationships with followers, TikTok brings more views and followers at large:

"TikTok is putting you in front of people that may have never wanted to see you or may have never stopped to find you. You're being able to spread this message for

people who may not have considered this before. You're breaking out of the echo chamber of this environmental bubble of eco creators who care versus people who should be hearing this, who necessarily haven't found that content." (C. Donaldson, personal communication, 2022)

Carissa also adds that Instagram is a good asset, but it might fade out in favour of TikTok with time. As such, the life cycle of a platform comes to question, since experience shows that many have transitioned from being bloggers to using Instagram, therefore, Instagram could be replaced by another platform such as TikTok as the primary communications platform. On the other hand, this might also depend on the geographical location, as at the time of the research, TikTok is more popular in the USA with 136 million users compared to 23 million in the UK (Ceci, 2022).

4. Discussion

This master thesis investigated how climate activists portray themselves on Instagram and encourage offline green actions of their followers. The interviews showed the many ways that climate activists' work correlate with that of influencers, on occasion the interviewees themselves found it hard to define themselves and find a difference between the two terms and functions. Other aspects of the interviews included the strategies activists use on their Instagram platforms, the way they connect and receive feedback from their audience, the offline impact they perceive they have, and the potential threats and struggles activists face on social media.

The semi-structured interviews first revealed how people who communicate about climate change and sustainability can be defined in many ways, ranging from climate activists to green communicators. Respondents themselves change how they define and present themselves according to their audience and real-life situations, confirming Goffman's theory on the presentation of self within climate activists online. Instagram is used as a 'front stage' where climate activists occasionally portray themselves differently through curation but make an active effort to stay their authentic, behind the scenes selves on the platform. Some would even remove their posts which they thought would appear not professional enough or could draw in criticism which is similar to how bloggers would remove their posts which appear 'silly or like nonsense' (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). However, as mostly female respondents voiced that they have faced criticism

online, the question arises whether they are also more susceptible to curate their profile to avoid bullying and negative comments. As Glucksman (2017) and Yilmaz et al. (2020) observed with social media influencers, all interviewees acknowledged that the most important in their presentation on Instagram was to be genuine and show their real selves to their audience. Characteristics such as being positive, honest, reflecting true emotions, feelings and thoughts, while being motivating were the most often brought up ways how climate activists presented themselves on Instagram. This further confirms that Bennett's personalisation of politics (2012) is used online by climate activists, since the main strategy they employ is being personal and showing their personal lifestyle values to encourage behaviour change – be it individual or political.

To the research question 'How do climate activists portray themselves on Instagram and what are their motivations for using it?', results showed that all activists were using Instagram to raise awareness and eventually mobilise their followers and inspire them to make small changes in their lifestyles or become aware of important political processes regarding climate change and sustainability topics. As to why Instagram is still a platform used by activists despite the rise of other more popular applications, respondents argued they preferred to use Instagram because of its more personal nature and higher engagement rates, also due to their small follower base reminiscent of micro-influencers (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019; Kay et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). The application allows to deeply connect with their audience (Casaló et al., 2020) and has a sense of intimacy, spontaneity and immediacy, while allowing to reach people beyond their means (Earl et al., 2010; Tatarchevskiy, 2011) and let local issues become global. Other reasons for using Instagram included its community of activists which help and support each other, and keeps the activists informed about latest issues and developments. Social media and Instagram are therefore creating a cycle of knowledge, where activists not only raise awareness for their followers but keep themselves educated through their network and share what they have learned. Furthermore, as Caulin explained, he experiences a 'push and pull' effect with his audience, by implementing changes suggested by them. As Tafesse and Wood (2021) observed, followers actively participate in the construction and legitimation of influencers' online identities by following and engaging with the influencer while also expanding the reach and impact of their messages. Finally, for some activists, Instagram is an essential tool to amplify their offline work and necessary to use in today's age which relies on social media. But many also say Instagram is just one element of their activism,

helping to show their offline work, which as said by Foot and Schneider (2002) could mean that internet usage is only accentuating or accelerating well-known processes driving activism and protests. Overall, Instagram indeed amplifies the work of activists, but by doing so has the possibility to not only educate and reach their own audiences but also those who are outside of their bubble or even outside of social media. Indeed, in many instances, the messages of climate activists posted on Instagram had the ability to spill over into mass media, in turn reaching those who need to be made aware the most. Therefore, as Luo et al. (2016) observed, internet activism can be an important alternative to strengthen civil society and produce social change, in this case in the realm of climate change. Furthermore, Luck and Ginanti's research (2013) showed that the internet is the 'tool of choice' for information and organisation of people for environmental activism. The master thesis shows that this tool of choice of activists can be more detailed and defined as a platform, such as Instagram. However, as times change, Instagram could be replaced by another platform.

To the research question 'What strategies do climate activists apply when using their Instagram profile and communicate with their followers?', results showed that techniques used by climate activists are mostly the same as what influencers use (even though most of them emphasised they don't follow a strategy). Okuah's (2019) techniques for engaging the public (direct engagement, collaborative tagging and hashtags, the use of emoji for engagement, social timing and content curation and the use of incentive appeals) were confirmed and completed with additional elements according to climate activists' recounts. Most activists were aware of classic social media strategies, but were not consciously applying them, only in the case of paid posts or collaborations. In general, they were rather using Instagram in a spontaneous manner, heavily relying on how they are feeling at the moment. One of the most important techniques they have employed is indeed being very authentic and personal, both in the sense of documenting the behind the scenes of their professional work and climate actions and sharing highly personal content that revolves around their emotions and thoughts. Relying on authenticity and honesty creates a more in-depth and intimate bond with their followers as previous research has shown (Casaló et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Another important aspect of their Instagram use was using the platform's immediacy, in the sense of sharing current news, discussing controversial topics and encouraging the potential virality of posts. These types of posts have also the most likelihood to travel to other social media platforms, or even mainstream media. Relying on virality for the climate topic was

observed by Tuli and Danish (2021) to have the ability to keep issues temporarily powerful and potentially translate it into consumer action. According to Doyle (2007), one of the most challenging aspects of climate imagery is bringing attention to the problem before it is too late. She argues that photography might not be as impactful on the long term because it prioritises what is seen at the moment and goes at the expense of the invisible effects of climate change. This argument is therefore partly reflected in climate activists' use of Instagram, since the more immediate posts seem to gain the most engagement. However, activists' use of Instagram on a consistent basis and exposing their followers to climate communication and accessible lifestyle changes on the daily might be a solution to this problem. Indeed, according to Bennett's personalisation of politics theory (2012), people often mobilise around personal lifestyle values and influencers are successful establishing a stronger bond with their followers when sharing highly personal content that revolved around their lifestyle (Casaló et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). The continued exposure to Instagram influencers' visual environmental messages has an effect on the attitude, mindset and consumption behaviour of followers, and increases environmental concerns and awareness among young people (Jalali & Khalid, 2021), therefore if they show their green lifestyles, activists can have a true effect on their followers' green actions.

Activists would also use other platforms next to Instagram and share or 'recycle' their posts to increase their visibility and rely on a community of activists both as source of inspiration and support through mutual tagging, commenting and other engagement techniques. Respondents also highlighted how language and attitude mattered in their posts, many encouraging their followers and highlighting how everyone has a role to play in making a change. However, while some emphasised on being positive and motivational, emphasising on the 'you can do it' aspect of climate action, others rather kept their communication matter of fact and didn't shy away from sharing how frustrating and difficult it is to make a change. Overall, according to activists, negative language which blames people is counterproductive. According to Uusitalo (2020), climate change imagery is sometimes fear inducing and ineffective at motivating personal engagement with the issue, which is further confirmed by climate activists' type of posts and way of communicating. Since some aspects of the climate crisis are rather complex and hard to grasp, respondents also rather focused on writing easy to understand captions next to their posts, which simplify complicated scientific jargon. Another important way they engaged their followers is with the use of Calls To Action, such as links to petitions. Posts were

also occasionally curated by alternating pictures of humans with explainers or diversifying the content of the post. Finally, activists aimed to remain open and accessible, encouraging private conversations through direct messages which in some cases even translates to offline meet-ups or collaborations. On the other hand, activists also expressed their disapproval of the Instagram algorithm, which selects which posts are prioritised on the platform. What has been observed is that apart from very personal and emotional posts, video content and 'reels' with engaging and concise information bring the most engagement and reach although suspected to be because of the platform's algorithm which puts them at the forefront. Others also emphasised that stories are an important function of Instagram as it is quicker and brings even more engagement than regular posts. As Samia said, Instagram stories tend to be the place where more reactive things happen, again emphasising the need for fast and immediate information, even though only temporary. The question then arises whether counting likes and numbers on permanent posts is useful, especially as Instagram allows to hide them and there is more engagement in the stories which disappear after 24 hours.

Finally, to the question 'How do climate activists assess the impact they have on their followers' green behaviours?' the research looked at the perceived impact activists have on their followers. The master thesis looked at perceived impact since real impact is rather difficult to measure, especially offline, as mentioned by the interviewees themselves. Indeed, as Laura mentions, she just 'trusts the process' and others are also hopeful that people following them align with their values and thoughts. In fact, when followers' values, interests and personality correspond with those of the 'opinion leader' or in this case the climate activists, they will be more likely to follow the ideas and behaviours presented to them (Casaló et al., 2020). The close and intimate relationship climate activists establish with their followers (Cotter, 2019), partly due to the small follower base, points at the fact that the two parties do share common values which leads to a great probability climate activists influence their followers' green practices. Although climate activists create strong relationships with their followers, they are not able to see the direct effects their online actions have on them. Therefore, perceived impact was measured through anecdotal recounts of followers' feedback, specific stories and occurrences which give the 'story behind the data' (Weaver, 2022). In this case, perceived impact translates to whether activists noticed that their followers become more environmentally and engaged in offline green practices, like political participation or lifestyle changes. Indeed, climate activists mentioned they are not able to measure their

impact in numbers, but they still see their community grow, they receive direct feedback from their audience in the form of people conversing in their Instagram posts' comment section or other social media platforms, clicking on petitions, meeting them at real-life events and marches, sending encouraging messages or pictures of their activities such as picking up trash at the beach, and even mainstream media picking up issues which eventually reaches people beyond their limits and increases awareness of people outside their bubble.

The research however comes with its own limitations, such as the diverse sample size. Instead, having respondents who are climate activists in the same country and within the same organisation, could yield more accurate results. The geographical disparity of respondents could also mean that Instagram is used by different audiences, in some countries being more popular than others and therefore having different reaches and impact on followers. Furthermore, the research's only viewpoint is that of activists themselves which might be too biased, therefore asking the audience on their opinions and how they were individually impacted might be more useful.

Conclusion

The aim of this master thesis was to discover how climate activists portray themselves on Instagram and encourage offline green actions of their followers. Through semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis of Instagram posts, results showed the many ways climate activists engage their followers through their Instagram profile and receive feedback on their work aimed to influence their followers' offline green actions. While sceptics argue that social media do not encourage meaningful, real-world action (Morozov, 2009; Miller, 1995), results showed that climate activists support internet activism on an individual level, which could be an important alternative to strengthen civil society and produce social change (Luo et al., 2016). Activists emphasised on several counts not wanting to fake a persona and would rather portray themselves online as their most authentic selves while being transparent with their followers. However, activists still 'perform' on a stage as Goffman's theory on presentation of self says as they curate their posts to some degree, even more heavily when wanting to avoid criticism or bullying. Activists particularly liked using Instagram for their activism for several reasons: be it a natural transition from their personal profile, the platform being an amplifier and essential tool of their activist work, enjoying the

global connections and network of activists it allows and the deeper connections and engagement activists can create compared to other platforms such as TikTok. Most importantly, the interviews showed that climate activists behave as influencers online since they utilise classic social media engagement techniques, although very often not on purpose. Beyond these classic techniques such as comments, likes, or Calls To Action, climate activists rather use their Instagram platform in a spontaneous way by relying on feelings and emotions. They prefer prioritising true connections with their audience which can eventually translate to an offline connection, furthermore, activists also expressed a liking for a small follower base which strengthens their relationship with their audience. However, the extent to which climate activists can assess the impact they have on their audience is limited: they rely on feedback from personal communication which plays out in the direct messages function of Instagram, and which according to interviewees is more useful to assess impact than numerical measure such as likes. Especially because of Instagram's algorithm bias, activists deem personal communication as more reliable since the algorithm changes often, currently favouring videos and reels. Apart from video content, posts which created the most engagement included original content such as photo montages and explainers, highly personal or emotional content next to content in the stories function. Overall, the research showed that climate activists do have influence on their Instagram followers' offline green actions, be it political or individual lifestyle changes and receive active feedback from their audience to assess their impact. For many activists, systemic and political action are at the core of their activism which is why they include other topics apart from climate change in their content such as feminism or racism. Additional research could look into whether having a more intersectional approach can also attract a larger audience who can potentially be also concerned about the issue of climate change. Furthermore, because of female activists' recounts of criticism which influenced their online behaviour, the role of gender in the climate discourse online can be interesting to explore: is it more dominated by males even though there are more females working in the climate sphere and interested in the topic? As the algorithm has been brought up several times as an element of Instagram which influences how climate activists post and can potentially create echo chambers, future research could also focus on whether TikTok is more effective for climate activists to reach people outside their bubble, especially those who are the most sceptical on the issue of climate change.

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List of appendices

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Appendix 7: @colas_van_moorsel_

Appendix 8: @lesswastelaura

Appendix 9: @carissaandclimate

Appendix 10: @ridhimapandeyy

Appendix 11: @samiaalexandra

Appendix 12: @goodmorninglau

Appendices
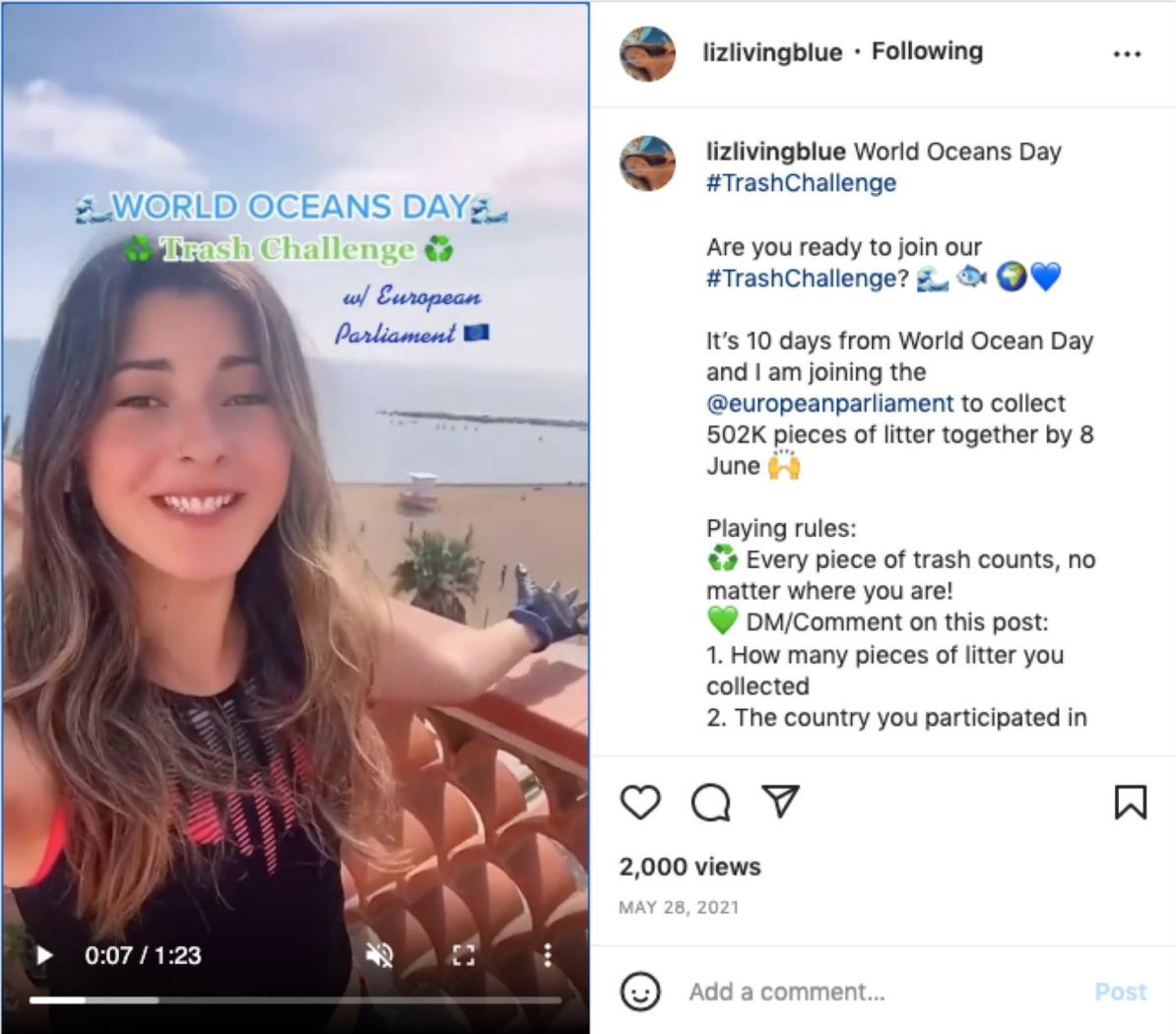
Appendix 1: @lizlivingblue

World Oceans Day #TrashChallenge
Are you ready to join our #TrashChallenge?🏖🐟 🌍💙
It's 10 days from World Ocean Day and I am joining the @europeanparliament to collect 502K pieces of litter together by 8 June🙌
Playing rules:
♻️ Every piece of trash counts, no matter where you are!
💚 DM/Comment on this post:
1. How many pieces of litter you collected
2. The country you participated in
📸 Tag @europeanparliament if you post a picture and want to be featured
✋ Use gloves when picking up waste
🏖 Tag your friends to invite them to take part in the challenge
#WorldOceanDay #everypieceoftrashcounts

Appendix 2: @trashcaulin
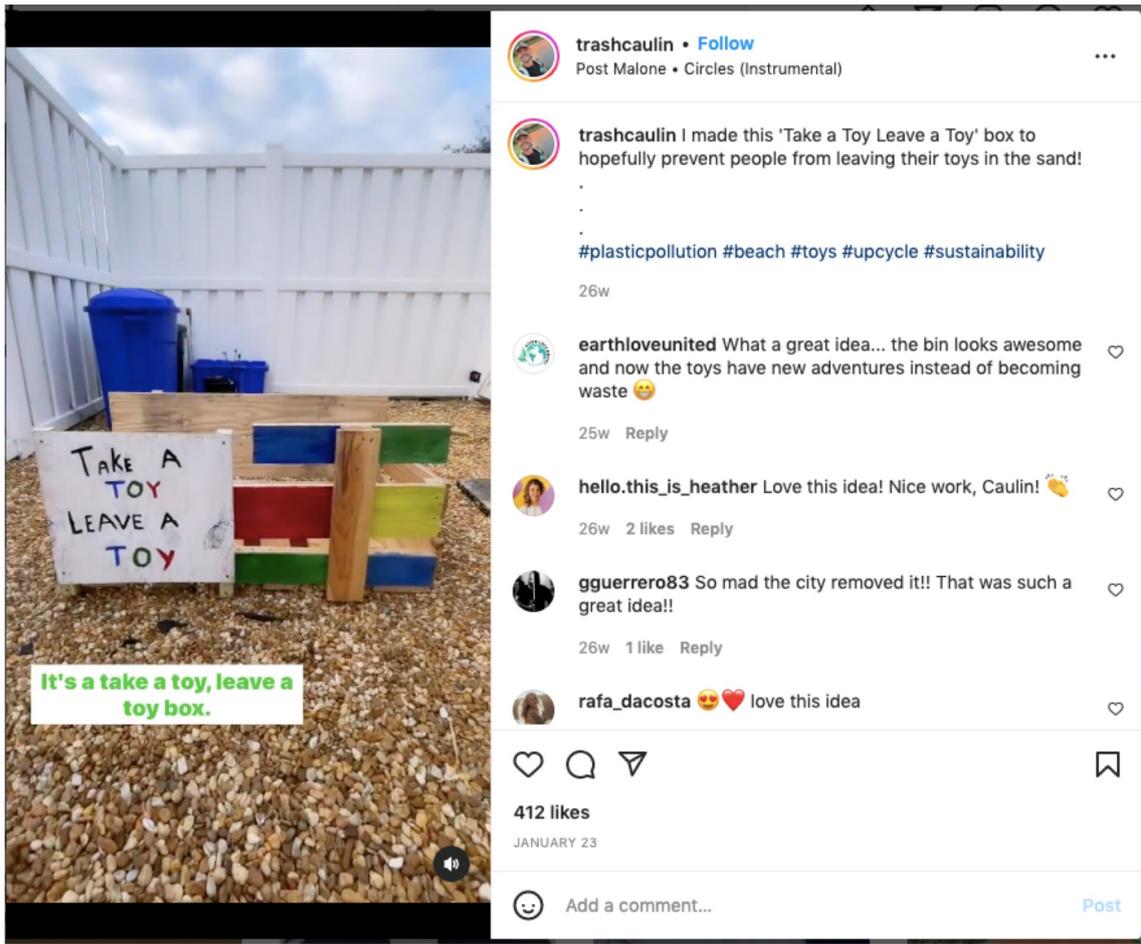
I made this 'Take a Toy Leave a Toy' box to hopefully prevent people from leaving their toys in the sand!
.
#plasticpollution #beach #toys #upcycle #sustainability

Appendix 3: @sustainable.shane

Three easy sustainable switches🌱♻️🌍
👋Goodbye plastic toothpaste tubes
👏Hello toothpaste tablets
👋Goodbye synthetic sponge
👏Hello biodegradable sponge
👋Goodbye plastic produce bag
👏Hello reusable produce bag
❓What do you think of these switches?
•
#easy #sustainableswitches #kitchen #sponge #toothpaste #reusablebag #fyp #foryourpage #climatechange #globalwarming #sustainableshane #sustainableliving #sustainablelifestyle #sustainablefuture #sustainableblogger #sustainableinfluencers #sustainablesolutions #sustainableconsumption #sustainablepractices #sustainablegoals #sustainableworld #zerowastelifestyle #environmentalscience

Appendix 4: @luciemorauw

Comme dirait Obelix « Je suis tombée dedans quand j'étais petite » 🐒 (As Obelix would say „I fell in it when I was small")

Appendix 5: @thegreenmonki

I am sick and tired of being gas lighted for being "too radical" by people claiming they're "realist" and understand how "the system works"🤷‍♀️

Well flash news people, just as the market doesn't regulate itself, the very same political and economic system based on exploitation, extraction and destruction that created this mess isn't going to solve it❌

If your house was falling apart because the builder was a crook and left with the money before finishing would you go back to him for solutions? Don't think so.

Yet, even within the green movement that I have over-idealised for so long, many - many people claim that, to achieve results we need to be more "moderate", "tone down our demands", not "alienate those in power", "understand how the system works" and be "more realistic in terms of what can realistically be achieved".

Guess what? I am being realistic. Activists around the world who have radical demands are realistic, businesses that are turning their business models upside down are realistic, not believing in eternal growth is realistic, thinking that we should care for each other and the living world is realistic - freaking believing science IS realistic 🔥

Not wanting to ruffle feathers or thinking about the next political move ISNT. It's denial and suicidal. We can't be divided right now. We need to listen and follow the voices of the most affected people and areas. And trust me - they're being realistic when they say we can't compromise anymore and need a radical system change.

Because for them and later for us, a difference of a few hundredth of a degree is the difference between life and death.

So it's ok not to get your hopes up about #COP26 but be ready to seriously fight for when our leaders deceive us once again because they're "being realistic" ✊

Appendix 6: @watermelonactivist
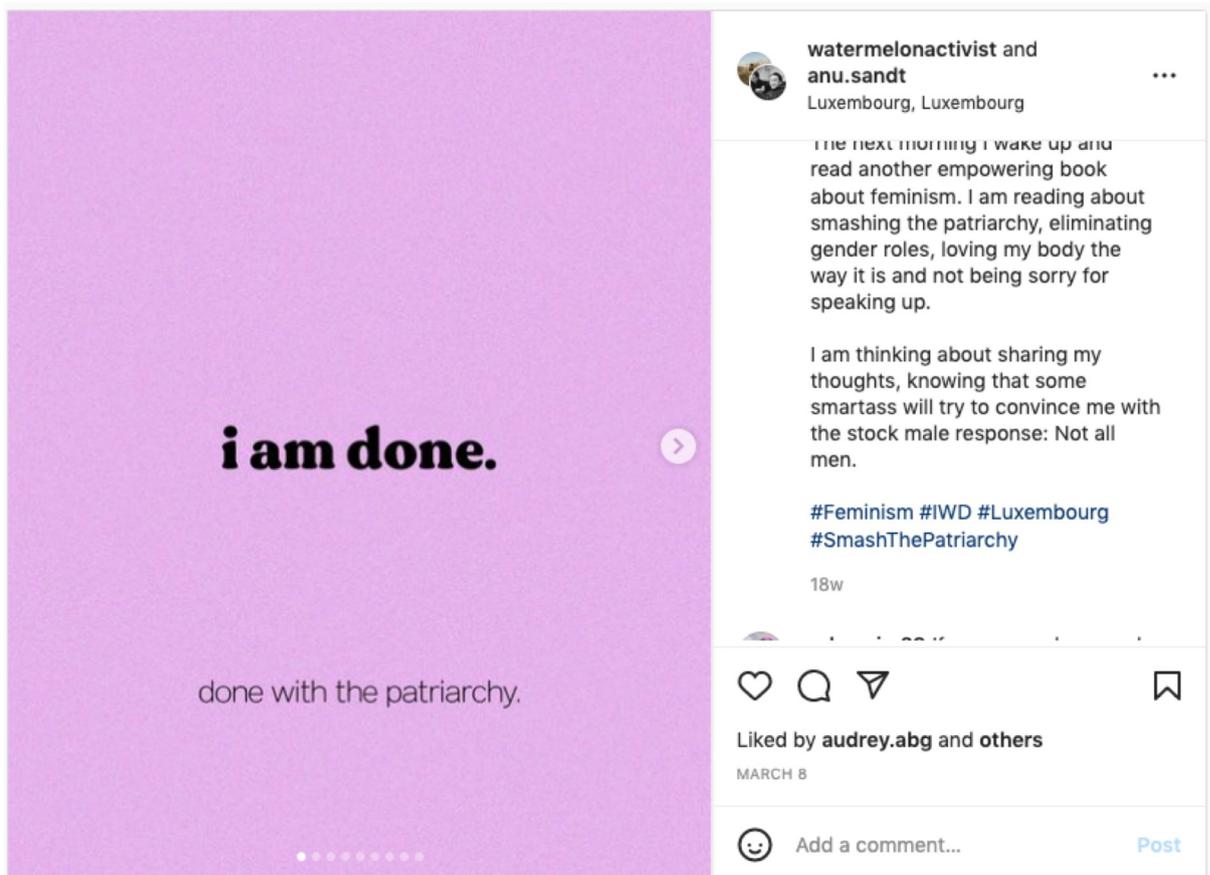
2 am. I am standing in the cold waiting for my bus to arrive.

'Why don't you smile?' asks the old man standing next to me. I pretend I didn't hear him and walk to the next bus stop.

Someone's whistling at me. I walk faster, hoping he won't follow me. I grab the keys in my pocket knowing exactly that they would be useless. Yet they make me feel safer.

Two men are staring at me from the next bus stop, I can already hear their unnecessary comments in my mind. Why is it so difficult to just shut up? Why is it so hard to not make me feel uncomfortable?

I decide to cross the street, looking for a place to hide. 'Should I call a Uber? All by myself? What if the driver harrasses me?' I continue walking, having one of my pretend calls with a friend that feel so natural by now. I am cold, I am tired, I am scared.

As I finally reach the next bus stop, I am thinking about the hands that grabbed my waist in the club just an hour ago. He didn't ask. But why was it so hard to stop him? Why didn't anybody help?

The bus finally arrives and I immediately look for the safest place I can find. The one close to the exit and other women. But what if someone sits next to me? Shouldn't I get out and call my friend? Too late, the bus drives off.

This is my stop. I get out. Only 10 minutes walking and your home. Should I run? Running would make it safer, no? I decide to run, randomly crossing the streets and looking behind me every few steps. I am cold, I am tired, I am scared.

3 am. I'm lying in my bed, shaking, whispering to myself: You are safe now.
Slowly I am falling asleep, blaming
myself for so many things. Blaming myself for going out alone at night, blaming myself for wearing what makes me feel good, blaming myself for having fun. Maybe I shouldn't go out at all next time?

The next morning I wake up and read another empowering book about feminism. I am reading about smashing the patriarchy, eliminating gender roles, loving my body the way it is and not being sorry for speaking up.

I am thinking about sharing my thoughts, knowing that some smartass will try to convince me with the stock male response: Not all men.

#Feminism #IWD #Luxembourg #SmashThePatriarchy

Appendix 7: @colas_van_moorsel_

Alors tu viens ? 🎱 Rendez-vous le 25 Mars 13h Gare centrale pour la Global Strike ! @youth.for.climate @fridaysforfuture.europe @fridaysforfuture @ihecs #climateaction #peoplenotprofit #climatemarch #
(So, are you coming? Meet-up on the 25th of March at 1pm Central Station for the Global Strike!

Appendix 8: @lesswastelaura

Hello from inside #COP26 🌍👏

Looking forward to two weeks dedicated to climate action, campaigning for climate justice, and meeting with thousands of other activists from around the world. Community is everything!

While I'm here I want to share as much of this as possible. This COP has not been as inclusive as it could have been. Many from around the world and even locally in Glasgow haven't had access to it. How can I use this platform to share it out? What questions do you have? What parts would you like to see?

I'll share more from my time over the next couple of weeks but for today it's time to head home for some rest (and a burrito) before going live tonight on @BBCRadio1 to talk about what's been happening so far!

Appendix 9: @carissaandclimate

this is me, officially stating, that geo engineered climate solutions are not what our focus should be put to.

working WITH natural processes, rather than controlling and manipulating them, is the most effective and fastest way to mitigate the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

my college focus was actually in evolution and ecology before specializing in marine science. And let me tell you, we need some humility. we need to realize we are brand new to this planet in an evolutionary scale, and our "new" technology PALES in comparison to leaning on the natural climate regulation systems that evolved over billions of years.

a restored mangrove forest, rebuilt megafauna populations, preserved biodiversity, circular and localized food systems, materials made from the earth, these are the climate solutions that will carry us through. it's time to act like we apart of this system, rather than above it.

Appendix 10: @ridhimapandeyy

I am delighted to share this news with you all that after 49 days of hunger strike by Br. Atmabodhanad ji, Yesterday the district magistrate of Haridwar , met with him and assured them to stop mining in Ganga. He also said that they will be going to work on all their demands to save Ganga asap.

I was very worried for his health and life and that's why I wrote a letter on dated 29th September 2021 to @narendramodi and @pushkardhami_official so that they take immediate action to save the valuable life of Br. Atmabodhanad ji who is working selflessly to save the Ganga !!

Also a huge thankyou to everyone who support this noble cause !! 🙏🙏

#savebiodiversity #saveganga #aviralganga #plasticfree #stopplasticpollution #climateaction #cleanair

Appendix 11: @samiaalexandra

Hello, hello, hello! The moment has finally arrived. We are recruiting for the Climate Resilience: London 2021 project 🎉

I'll be co-hosting an 8-week programme aimed at young people of colour who engage in climate activism with my partner in crime @i.amarah. You don't have to be a hardcore activist to apply. We welcome people who care about the climate crisis and want to do more climate action whilst protecting their mental health.

As we all know, the world is going through it. As young people, it can feel overwhelming, frustrating and just too damn much. The purpose of this programme is to equip you with the tools and skills to become more resilient and learn how to deal with eco-anxiety and burnout.

We're doing this because the climate crisis shouldn't be on your shoulders. We understand how the climate crisis can have negative impacts on your mental health and we want to reassure you that there are ways we can alleviate those impacts and move forward as a collective 🧡

We will have sessions with some AMAZING experts (you don't want to miss this!) and you get to meet other cool activists in your city.

Don't be shy and apply via the link in my bio. If you have any questions, just DM me. The deadline is the 1st September 2021. This is a free programme. Hope you can join our circle! 💜

If you're not based in London, there are other circles happening in Manchester, Bristol, Glasgow and Cardiff. Let me know if you want their details and I'll send you the link.

Image description in the comments section.

#ClimateJustice #ClimateResilience #EcoAnxiety #MentalHealth

Appendix 12: @goodmorninglau

le 8 mars c'est la journée internationale DES DROITS des femmes, on oublie pas « les droits » svp pcq oui il est toujours question de ça en 2022 🙃 cette année le rapport du giec a même mentionné que les femmes et les minorités seront les plus touché.e.s par la crise climatique car ce sont les plus précarisé.e.s. Alors on arrête de nous prendre pour des neuneus en nous offrant -20% sur des machines à laver, c'est un manque de respect total. On évite aussi de nous proposer des « cadeaux » (lol) qui ont un impact dégueulasse sur l'environnement et sur d'autres femmes, c'est un peu contreproductif tu vois 🙃 #womenrightsday #womenrights

(in comment section)
#noplanetb #sustainability #consciousblogger #belgianblogger #greenlifestyle #ecoblogger #ecowarrior #lowimpact #ecoactivist #ecofriendly #slowliving #sustainable #brussels #climateactivist #climateactivism #activism #climatechange #climatebreakdown #bruxelles #europe #nature #adventure #shell #intersectionalenvironmentalism