

# Analyzing the potential impact of social media on youth opinion and advocacy for climate change

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## Introduction

Climate change (changes in climate patterns generally attributed to human activity) has and will continue to have environmental and social impacts on our world, so it is important to disrupt current climate change trends. Youth are especially affected because they will inherit today's world; social media is a critical conductor for information to young adults.

### Purpose

This study seeks to determine if and how social media influences adolescents' attitudes and personal roles in preventing further climate change.

## Background Information

The term climate change has come to refer to changes in climate patterns during the last century and it is generally attributed to **human activities** (Annalakshmi et al.) Efforts to **address** and **educate** the public, thus, about climate change are imperative to solving climate change, and it's especially important that youth are educated on and take action towards climate change because they will be most affected by it (Sulistyawati et al.) How can we reach out to youth most effectively, then, if effective outreach is so crucial to climate change efforts? Social media may be the answer, as social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, etc. are reported to be, increasingly, where youth get their news and information (El Zoghbi and El Ansari). However, some questions remain yet to be answered, such as:

- Is social media actually influencing youth opinion and knowledge about climate change?
- Is social media influencing youth opinions/beliefs in a positive or negative manner?
- How does social media compare to other common news sources, and why?

## Hypothesis

If social media is highly influential on someone's beliefs towards climate change, then they will be generally pessimistic towards climate change and unwilling to take action on part of it. This would be because of the prevalence of "doomsday" (overly pessimistic) messaging on social media.

## Procedure

A 3-part survey was administered to participants, who were high school students at Amity Regional High School.

### Part I: Sources of information

Likert scales asking participants to rate specific sources of news/information on how much their opinions/knowledge about climate change have been influenced by them (including social media, but not outright referencing it)

### Part II: Knowledge inventory

Multiple-choice quiz assessing basic climate change information

### Part III: Beliefs, perspectives, and actions

Likert scales, participants asked to rate statements from 1 to 5 based on how much they agree with the statement

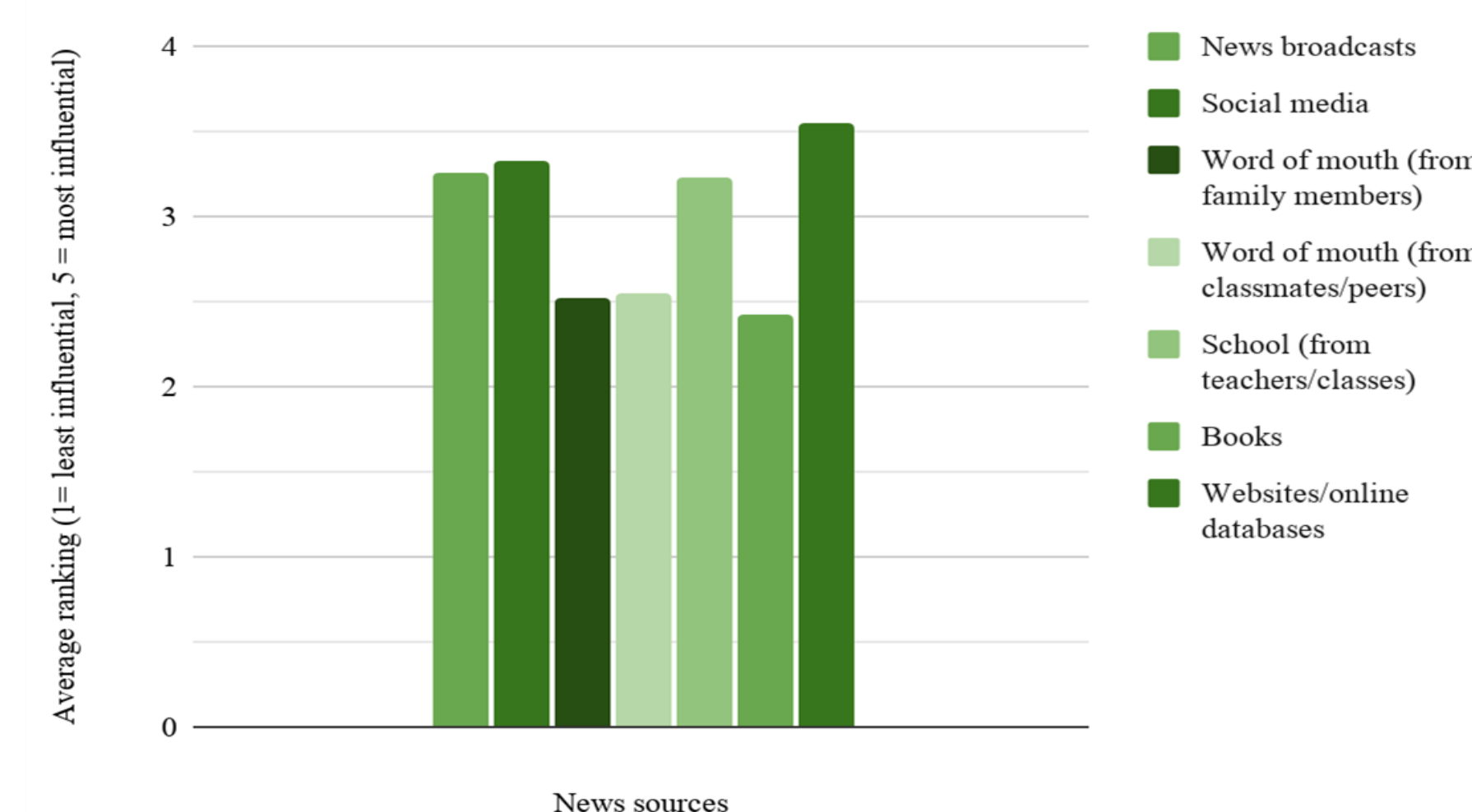
The data from part 1 and part 3 was compared to determine if/how social media has a noticeable impact on youth opinion/advocacy and how it compares to other sources of information. The responses for part 2 were largely homogenous, so it was not included in the comparison.

For the charts/data comparing different news sources to each other, the responses from those who rated a specific news source as a 4 or a 5 (signifying a **high influence** of that news source on them) were compared.

## Results

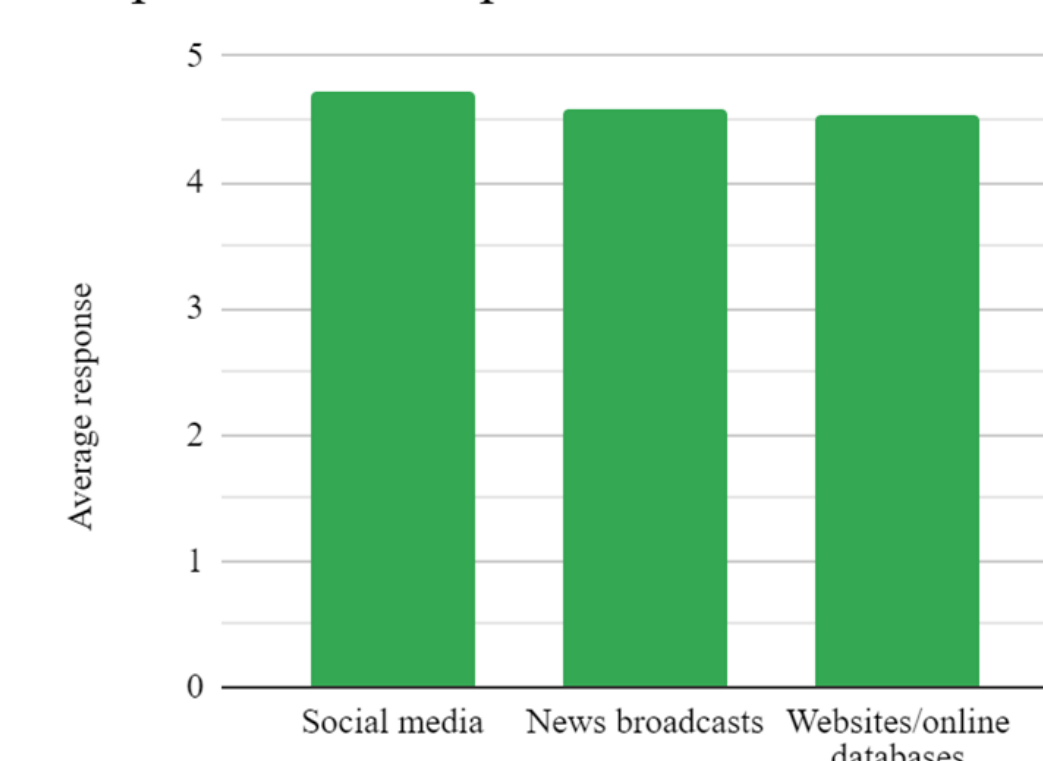
### Information sources

The three information sources participants rated as being most influential towards their opinions/beliefs on climate change were: 1) websites/online databases, 2) social media, and 3) news broadcasts.

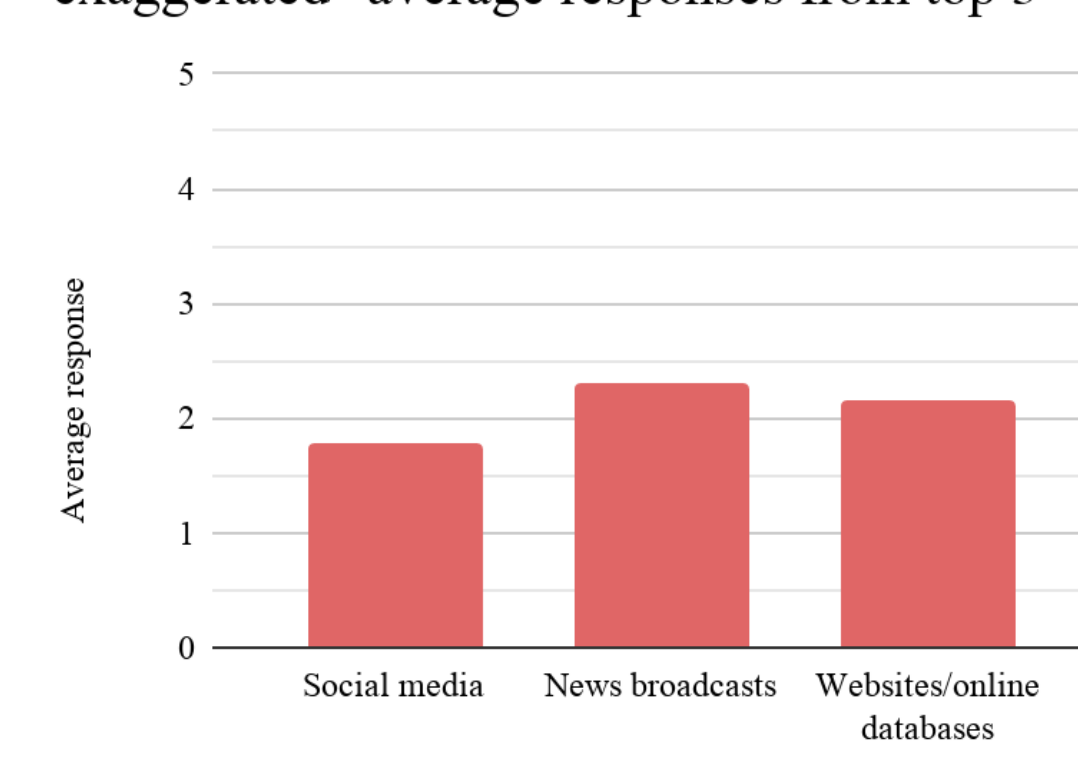


### Perception of severity

"Climate change is a serious problem" responses from top 3 news sources



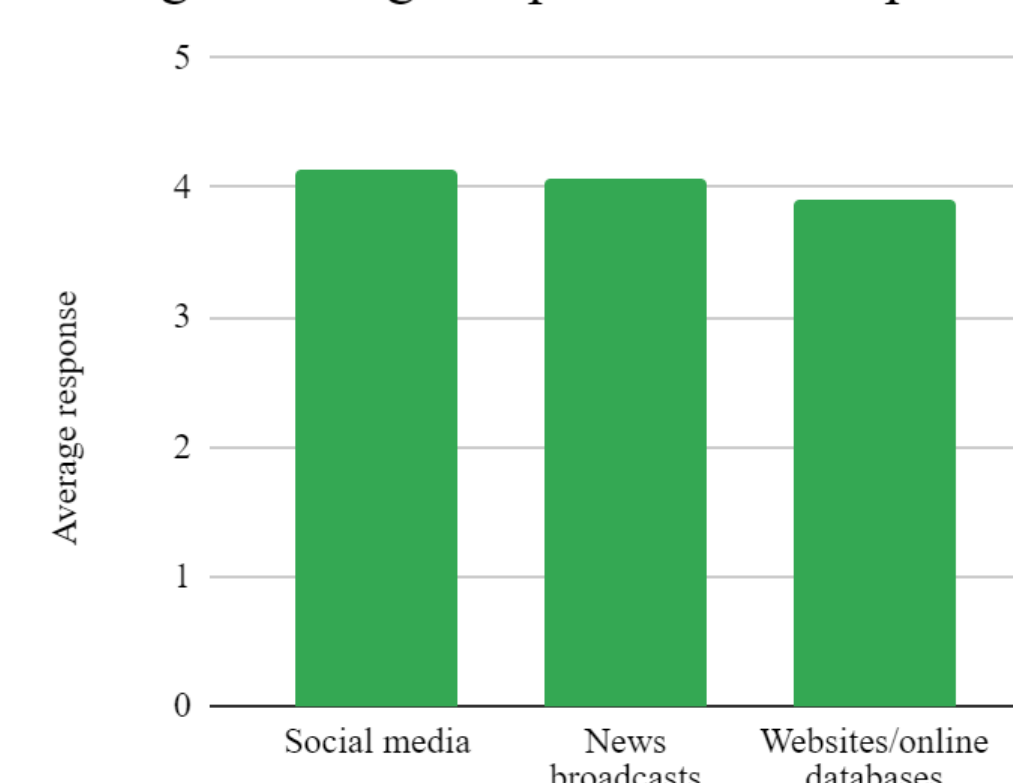
"Claims about the changing climate are exaggerated" average responses from top 3



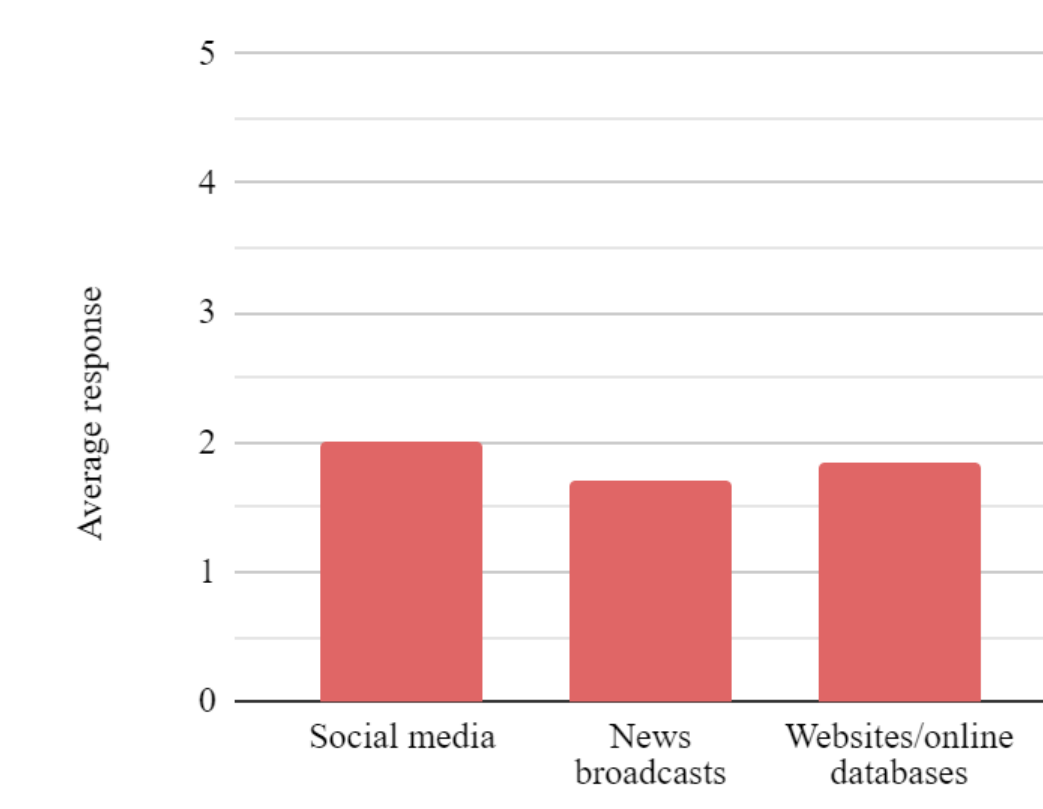
Those whose main source of information was social media were the most likely to strongly agree that climate change was a serious problem; they were also the least likely to agree with the statement that claims about the changing climate are exaggerated.

### Personal concern

"I am very concerned about climate change" average responses from top 3...



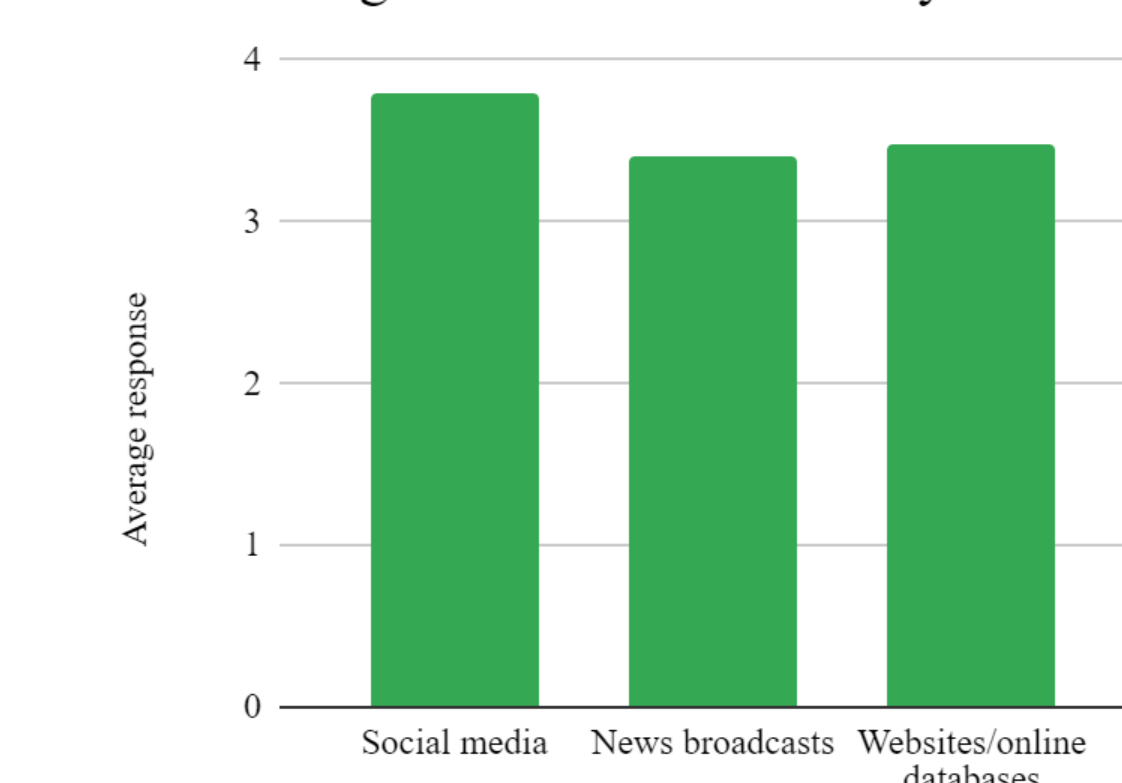
"I believe that climate change is a concern, but it does not affect me" average responses from top 3 news sources



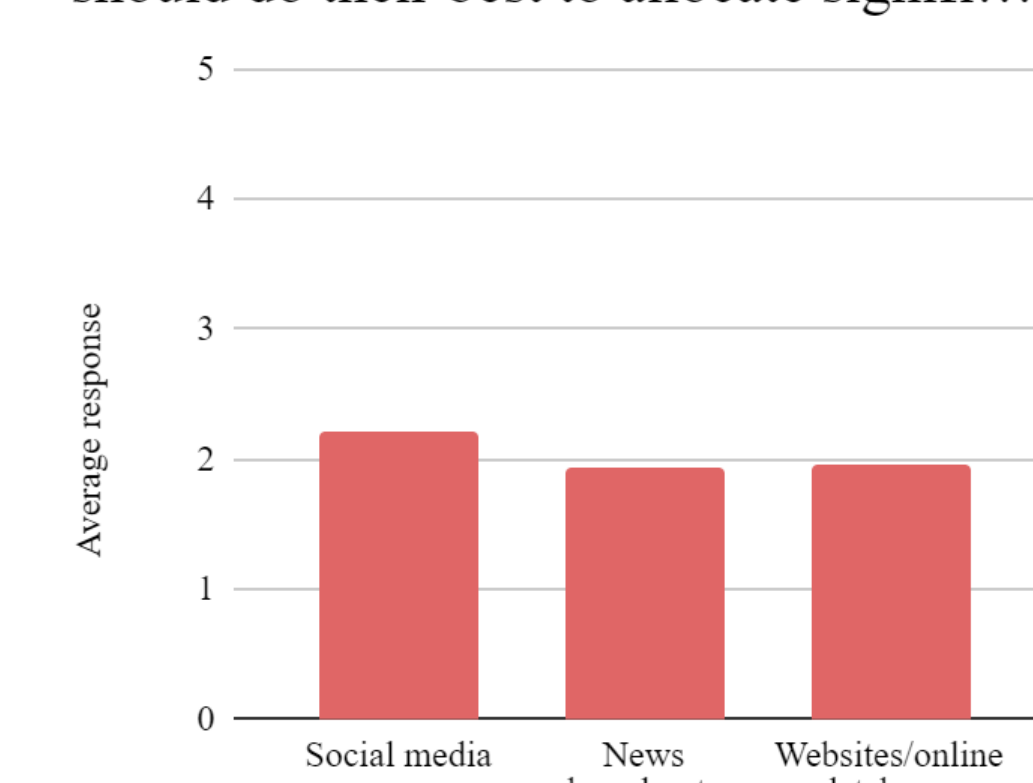
Participants that cited social media as having influenced them the most were more inclined to agree that they were very concerned about climate change. They were also more likely to agree that climate change, while being a concern, did not affect them personally. These results, in tandem, are intriguing, because it shows that these participants were less perhaps less self-motivated to act on climate change.

### Personal responsibility

"I believe that I should do my best to allocate significant amounts of my own..."



"I believe others and NOT myself should do their best to allocate significant amounts of my own..."



Participants that cited social media as their main source of information seemed to hold a greater sense of personal responsibility towards climate change, but they were also more likely to believe that others (and not themselves) should be held responsible as well.

## Conclusion

The given hypothesis is suggested to **not be accurate** based on the data. From the results, those who cited social media as their main influence on climate change were generally actually more likely to be concerned about and advocate for conservation efforts. In general, however, students indicated that they were well-informed about climate change and willing contributors towards climate change efforts.

### Limitations

This study is not indicative of youth in general; participants were limited to being students at Amity Regional High School, and of these students, most of them were sophomores in honors/AP classes.

## Future Implications

This study provides further insight into how we can encourage and spur the future generation to make efforts to solve/slow climate change; to pick up where this study left off, it would be interesting and important to analyze why this study's results showed that social media was more effective than other news sources at encouraging climate change advocacy and enforcing strong beliefs. Further studies into this subject would glean better methods and ways to educate youth about other important matters in ways/methods that youth are actually receptive towards, which would be very worth taking a look into.

## Works Cited

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