MARKET
RESEARCH

OSU Student Sustainability Awareness

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Research Objectives:

Oklahoma State University was ranked in the top ten nationally by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for its contributions to sustainability. Despite this high ranking, it is unclear whether the students on Oklahoma State University's campus are aware of the many sustainable opportunities available.

Determining whether students are aware of Oklahoma State University's sustainability efforts is imperative. College-aged students are considered to be one of the most prevalent groups in providing an eco-friendlier environment. In order to solve this issue, it is essential to find out how Oklahoma State University students feel about sustainability and how they are informed.

The two main research objectives for this study are how aware are Oklahoma State University students about sustainability and what methods of communication are best for reaching Oklahoma State University students. These main research objectives will lead us to determining what social media platforms students use most, students' perceptions of different social media platforms, and students' preferred method of communication on these platforms. Furthermore, the research will answer questions such as how students feel about sustainability, what Oklahoma State sustainability organizations students are aware of, what Oklahoma State sustainability events students have attended, and what sustainability initiatives students are aware of on campus.

Method:

The method used to collect the research data was a survey on the Qualtrics website. The survey was exploratory in nature and was distributed through both snowball and convenience sampling. The survey consisted of 40 questions, which took respondents approximately 20 minutes to complete. A multitude of measurement scales was utilized in the survey to include nominal, interval, ratio, semantic differential, comparative rating, graphic rating, single item, and multiple item. The objective of the survey was to gain quantitative data to answer the research questions presented.

Key Findings:

After evaluating the results of the survey, it is clear that Oklahoma State students receive their information through social media sites. Even more so, the most relevant social media site to the respondents is Instagram. On a scale of 0 to 100, Instagram ranked the most relevant with a mean rating of 64.7. When observing sustainability and students' awareness of it, a majority of the respondents reported that they had never heard of a number of Oklahoma State sustainability organizations. Furthermore, when asked how familiar students are with Oklahoma State University's sustainability practices, the students provided a mean rating of 27.76 out of a scale of 100. This confirms the notion that

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SUMMARY

although students have positive feelings toward sustainability, they are not aware of Oklahoma State's efforts.

Conclusions & Recommendations:

In conclusion, it is evident that college-aged students regard sustainability with great importance. However, despite their care for the environment, Oklahoma State University has been unsuccessful in making students aware of the many eco-friendly opportunities on campus.

Based on the results of this study, we recommend that Oklahoma State University utilize the Instagram platform when desiring student engagement. Smaller sustainability organizations should partner with larger Oklahoma State University accounts to inform students of the University's sustainability efforts. Furthermore, Oklahoma State University should consider placing an emphasis on posts rather than reels or stories. The results of the study convey that students find posts to be the most engaging when compared to stories or reels. Finally, the main University account needs to create more posts that center around sustainability and maintaining an eco-friendly campus.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction:

Social media has created a new way of communication and information gathering among millennials and Generation Z in particular. Not only has social media become a place where people can share memories and photos with one another, but it has also become a place where people receive news. According to a study done by Statista, 42% of adults in the United States use social media as a source of news.

Oklahoma State has over 86,000 followers on their Instagram. Most of these posts talk about sports – mainly football – on campus and highlights of national holidays. There are also posts about larger events that take place on campus such as homecoming, and highlights of students' work in colleges that are aimed at OSU's land grant mission. OSU has said it is committed to being "economic, social and environmentally sustainable, to meet present needs and equip future generations." This was on the one post about sustainability on their Instagram from Earth day 2022.

OSU also has smaller organizations that solely work on sustainability around campus. Examples of these clubs are Greek Greeks, SGA Sustainability, and the US Green building Council. These social media accounts have about 1,000 followers or less.

Generation Z is the primary generation in college currently. Generation Z has become known as the sustainability generation, which was fueled by the COVID-19 Pandemic. According to an article by Forbes, "The pandemic didn't start the sustainability revolution, but it has put it into hyperdrive, and Gen Z is in the driver's seat." Many companies have started promoting more sustainability-friendly products, and companies that reuse items such as ThredUp have entered the spotlight as sustainability has become the forefront concern of this generation.

With all of this in mind, the goal of this research is to find the best methods of communication for reaching OSU students about sustainability on campus, and learn how aware OSU students are of sustainability practices currently in place.

Sources used:
https://www.statista.com/statistics/718019/social-media-news-source/
https://www.forbes.com/sites/gregpetro/2021/04/30/gen-z-is-emerging-as-the-sustainability-generation/?sh=3564704c8699

RESEARCH METHODS & PROCEDURES

Research Methods:

In an effort to address the key objectives of this study and obtain high quality data, we crafted an exploratory online survey and distributed it through a combination of the convenience and snowball sampling methods. The 40 question survey was created using Qualtrics surveying software and aimed to gain quantitative data concerning the following questions.

How do Oklahoma State students primarily receive their information?
- What platforms do students use the most?
- What perceptions do students hold about the different social media platforms?
- What method of information communication is the most preferred by students?

What level of awareness do students possess regarding OSU sustainability efforts and events?
- How do students feel about sustainability in general?
- What (if any) OSU sustainability organizations are students currently aware of?
- What OSU sustainability events have students previously attended?
- What sustainability initiatives are students aware of?

Qualtrics was the preferred platform to create our survey on because it allowed for the efficient creation and distribution of the survey as well as a simple and professional completion process for our respondents. After creating the survey, we obtained a link to the questions which was then able to be delivered via text message to willing participants.

Sample Method:

For the purpose of this research, we decided to target OSU-Stillwater students between the ages of 18 and 24. We chose this audience because they are ingrained within the student population of OSU and would be able to provide accurate information regarding the attitudes of OSU students. We set individual students as our sampling units and proceeded to use a combination of the nonprobability sampling methods known as convenience and snowball sampling to reach our target audience. We did so by first sending our survey to OSU students we know or ran across on campus (convenience sampling), and then we asked some of those participants to share the survey with other students in our target audience if they could (snowball sampling). We made the survey available for 2 weeks and hoped for a minimum of 30 responses. By the end of our sampling period we received a total of 37 responses from OSU-Stillwater students.

QUICK STAT:

37

STUDENT RESPONSES

RESEARCH METHODS & PROCEDURES

Research Objectives:

The survey itself was a 40-question online survey on Qualtrics that took about 20 minutes for our participants to complete. The survey aimed to gain quantitative data and featured a variety of measurement scales including nominal, interval, ratio, semantic differential, comparative rating, graphic rating, single-item and multiple-item scales. Including a wide variety of measurement scales not only allowed us to cater the question format to the type of information desired but also added interest to the survey to ensure respondents were reading carefully and not experiencing any fatigue. Each question on the survey was carefully thought out by the researchers and purposefully placed to gain a better understanding of our audience's attitudes and opinions toward the main research questions.

The first question gave an introduction to the survey and confirmed the respondent's desire to complete the survey. The following 25 questions proceeded to ask about the respondents' usage of and attitudes toward the social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, and Snapchat. The questions included in this section were carefully written by the researchers to address the first construct of the study, "How do Oklahoma State students primarily receive their information?" as well as the sub-questions listed under the construct. The next 10 questions then asked about the students' awareness, involvement and attitudes toward sustainability as a whole and more specifically toward OSU's sustainability initiatives. These 10 questions each addressed the second construct of the study, "What level of awareness do students possess regarding OSU sustainability efforts and events?" as well as the sub-questions listed under the construct. Finally, the last four questions of the survey were included to receive demographic data from each of the participants. While not directly addressing any of our research objectives, this demographic data gives us a better idea of who took our survey and how generalizable our results will be.

Secondary Data:

The majority of our data came from our primary research survey and prior knowledge of the subject matter and target audience, however, we did utilize some secondary research to gain insights into the background of our study. For instance, we explored various OSU social media pages to find out what kind of content is currently being posted and how that content is perceived by our target audience. We also utilized a couple of secondary sources, such as those from Statista and Setia et al., to better understand the broad history of sustainability and social media usage among our target population.
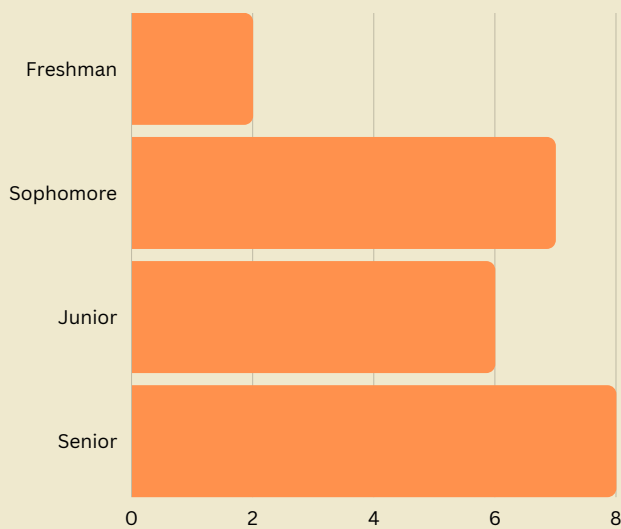
40 Questions

NOMINAL INTERVAL RATIO & OTHER SCALES USED
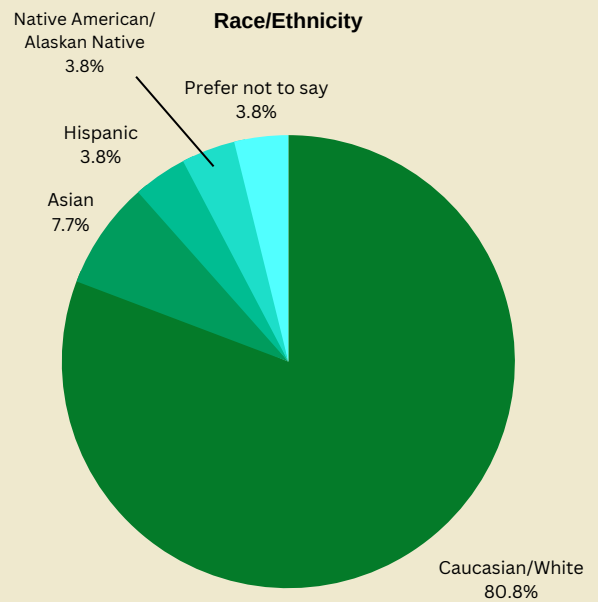
DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Demographics:

Using frequency, we determined basic demographic characteristics of our survey respondents. The majority of our respondents were white, female and between the ages of 19 and 20. These commonalities are mostly due to the fact that we took a convenience sample by sending out the survey to friends and most of the people in our social circles match these demographic characteristics.
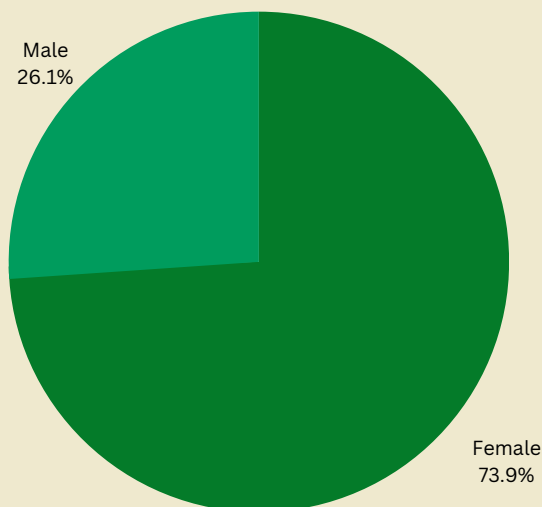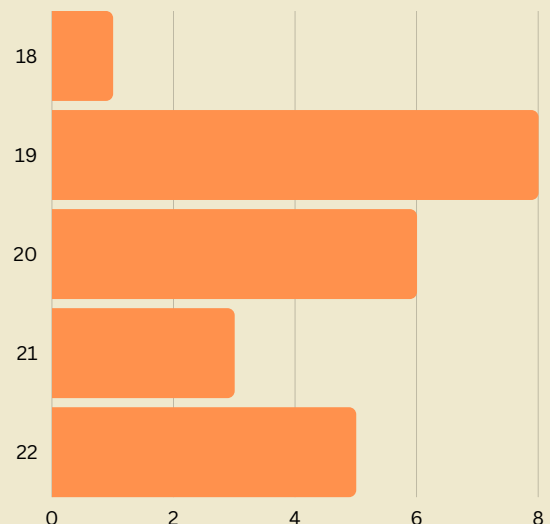
Classification

Classification	Value
Freshman	2
Sophomore	7
Junior	6
Senior	8

Race/Ethnicity

- Native American/Alaskan Native 3.8%
- Prefer not to say 3.8%
- Hispanic 3.8%
- Asian 7.7%
- Caucasian/White 80.8%

Gender

- Male 26.1%
- Female 73.9%

Age

| Age	Value
18	1
19	8
20	6
21	3
22	5

DATA ANALYSIS
& FINDINGS

Questions About Sustainability:

When asked how important sustainability was to them on a scale of 0 to 100, 0 being least important and 100 being most important, the average response was 57.27, with over 65% of respondents saying sustainability was above average importance to them. Additionally, many of our respondents say they participate in daily sustainability practices such as recycling and using reusable containers, suggesting the respondents care enough about sustainability to incorporate certain actions into their daily routines.

Despite this fairly high number, when asked how familiar they were with OSU sustainability practices on the same 100-point scale with 0 being not familiar and 100 being extremely familiar, the average response was 27.76, implying that the awareness of OSU sustainability practices is disproportionate to how important students consider sustainability. Additionally, about 65% of respondents have not heard of any OSU sustainability organizations. This suggests that one of the biggest problems that OSU faces when trying to encourage student participation in its sustainability initiatives is spreading awareness.

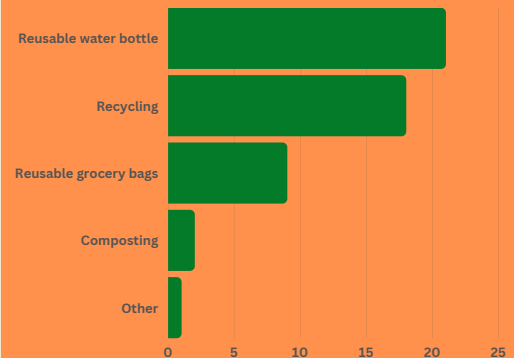### Which of these OSU Sustainability Organizations have you heard of?
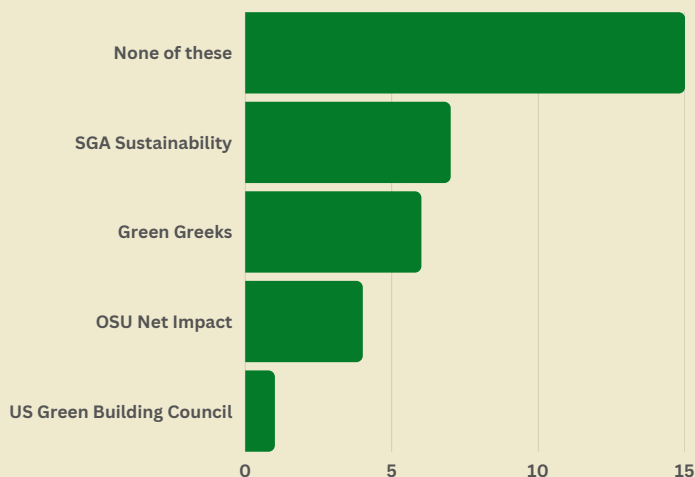
How Important is Sustainability to You?

57.27

WAS THE AVERAGE RESPONSE ON A SCALE OF LEAST IMPORTANT (0) TO MOST IMPORTANT (100)

Do you participate in any of these daily sustainable practices?

How familiar are you about OSU sustainability practices?

27.76

WAS THE AVERAGE RESPONSE ON A SCALE OF NOT FAMILIAR (0) TO EXTREMELY FAMILIAR (100)
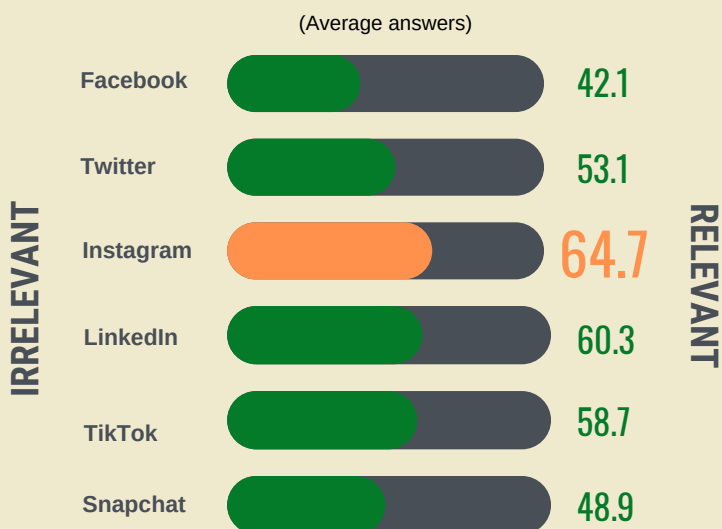
DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS
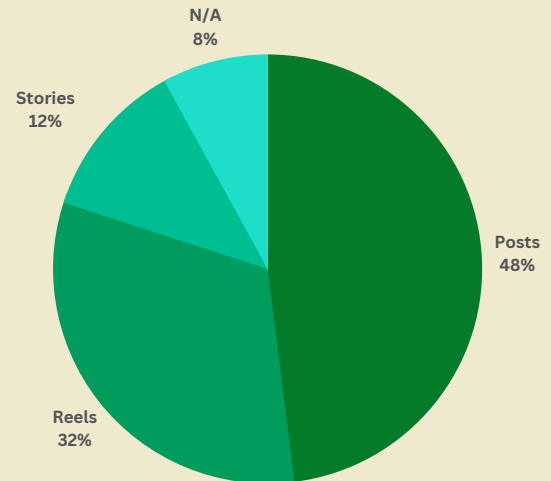
Questions About Social Media:

As a common method of communication and interpersonal relations for the student population, we asked questions about social media to determine which channels would be the most effective for spreading awareness about OSU sustainability initiatives.

Based on our survey results, Instagram posts seem to be the most effective way of spreading messages. Thirty-five out of our 37 respondents to the question "which of these social media platforms do you use" answered that they use Instagram, and 45.9% of respondents said Instagram is the platform they use the most. When asked what content on Instagram they found most engaging, 48% of respondents answered posts. Additionally, when asked about perceptions of the traits of different social media platforms, out of all the platforms, Instagram had the highest average for relevance, scoring 64.7 on a scale of 0 (irrelevant) to 100 (very relevant.)
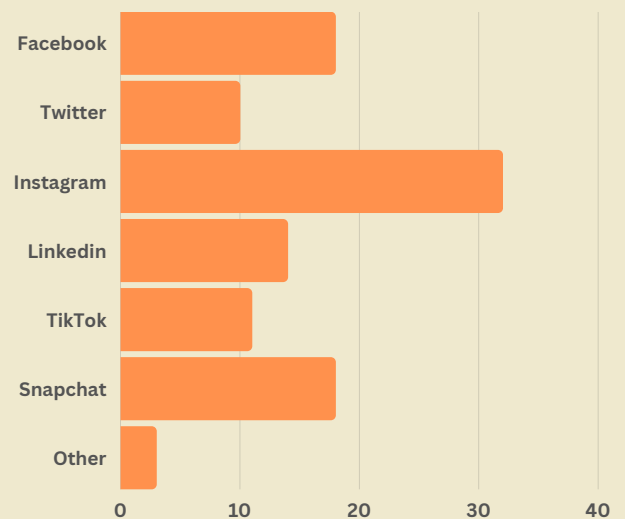
What format of media do you find most engaging on Instagram?

N/A 8%
Stories 12%
Posts 48%
Reels 32%

Which of these social media platforms do you use?

Facebook
Twitter
Instagram
Linkedin
TikTok
Snapchat
Other

0   10   20   30   40

How relevant are each of these social media platforms?

(Average answers)

IRRELEVANT — RELEVANT

Facebook 42.1
Twitter 53.1
Instagram 64.7
LinkedIn 60.3
TikTok 58.7
Snapchat 48.9

Which of these social media platforms do you use the most?

Other 5.4%
Facebook 2.7%
Twitter 5.4%
Linkedin 8.1%
TikTok 10.8%
Instagram 45.9%
Snapchat 21.6%
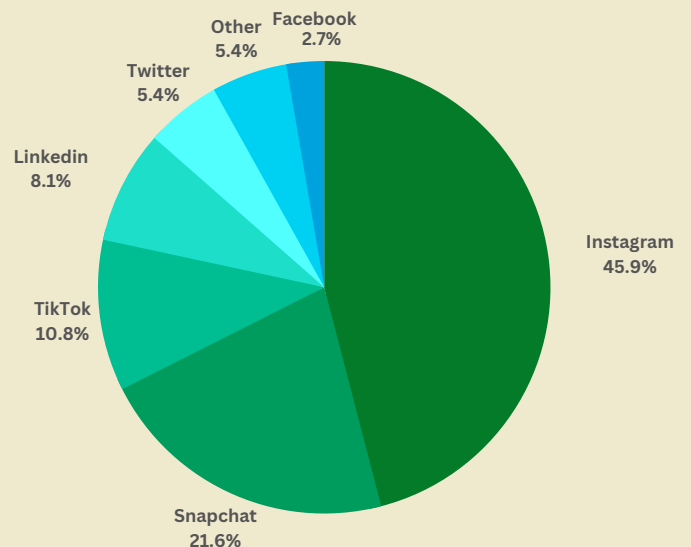
CONCLUSIONS

& RECOMMENDATIONS

Instagram is the most used platform among survey respondents, which suggests Instagram is the best way to reach the target audience. Almost 50% of instagram users found posts the most engaging.

Less than 30% of respondents knew of OSU's sustainability practices that are already in place. Less than 60% of respondents found sustainability important, which seemed lower than anticipated based on generational norms.

Our recommendations are for OSU to use Instagram posts to communicate their sustainability events and practices with their campus. Examples of these posts could include giveaways or partnerships with the smaller clubs that have events involving sustainability such as Green Greeks. We also recommend OSU increase its social media presence in promoting sustainability efforts. Most posts do not include any talk of sustainability, and less than 30% of respondents knew of practices they already have in place. By promoting their practices on Instagram posts, more of the campus can become aware of what is happening daily for the planet at OSU, and how they can help keep campus green.

INSTAGRAM IS THE MOST USED PLATFORM AMONG OSU SURVEY RESPONDENTS

LIMITATIONS

Though we are confident this study has brought new information to light and provided a great foundation for improvements to be made, our research was not perfect. We would now like to discuss some changes we could have made to make this report even stronger.

For starters, our research could have been improved by utilizing more than two sampling methods. By composing our sample using only the convenience and snowball nonprobability sampling methods, we ran the risk of introducing bias into our results and limiting the generalizability of our findings to the target population. In the future, incorporating more variable sampling methods into our design would serve to decrease the risk of biased results and make our findings more generalizable. Increasing the number of research participants would greatly improve the generalizability of our results as well.

Secondly, the structure of our questions could have been improved by incorporating both qualitative- and quantitative-focused questions, as well as eliminating questions with forced choice error. Because our study focused on obtaining only quantitative data, we missed out on some potentially insightful responses from our participants. Quantitative questions only allow for so much analysis, while the inclusion of open-ended qualitative questions gives researchers the opportunity to dive deeper into the respondents' attitudes and opinions toward the subject matter. Eliminating the occasional forced choice error included in our survey would also serve to better our results by increasing the accuracy of the participants' answers.

For instance, questions 3-20 asked respondents to rate their perceptions of the different social media platforms on a scale of 0-100 for relevance, authenticity, and attitude. However, these questions did not give an answer choice option for respondents who do not use the specified platform and/or are not familiar enough to rate those characteristics. The unfamiliar respondents are then forced to enter a random number in order to move on with the survey. The results received from these questions may have been invalid and not representative of the real attitudes of our target population. Moving forward, simply adding an opt-out answer choice for those questions would reduce this risk and establish more valid conclusions.

We also had a slight issue with nonresponse errors on our survey. When analyzing the data we received, it became very clear to us that some of our questions did not have an equal number of responses. For instance, some questions had 37 total responses, while others had only 13 or 26. While this could be due to participants experiencing response fatigue from a high quantity of complex questions, we believe there was an error with the Qualtrics platform utilized to take the survey. Although every question was marked as mandatory to answer in order to move on with the survey, some participants were able to somehow skip certain questions and continue taking the rest of the survey. Though this glitch issue was out of our control, precautions and measures should be taken in the future to ensure the well-being of any technology trusted to record data.

LIMITATIONS

Finally, the 2 overarching limitations of this study include time pressure and generalizability. As with most research studies, the more time allotted to the project the more accurate the results generally are. With more time you can recruit more participants, dive deeper into analysis, and eliminate avoidable errors. This study was under pressure to be completed within a short time frame, and thereby we had less time to review our design, recruit participants, and follow up with those participants upon completion of the survey. The issue of timing also goes hand-in-hand with the limited generalizability of our results. Had we had more time to eliminate measurement errors and recruit more than 37 participants, our results would have been that much more valid, reliable, and generalizable to all OSU students.

APPENDIX

Qualtrics was used to conduct our survey and collect our data.
Participants in our survey were reached via Groupme, text message, email and word of mouth.

Survey questions:

Would you like to participate in this survey about sustainability and the media at OSU? It will take approximately 20 minutes.
Yes
No

Which of these social media platforms do you use? (Check all that apply)
Facebook
Twitter
Instagram
LinkedIn
TikTok
Snapchat
Other (Please specify)

Which social media platform do you use the most?
Facebook
Twitter
Instagram
LinkedIn
TikTok
Snapchat
Other (Please specify)

What are your perceptions of Facebook?
Authenticity (0=negative - 10=positive)
Relevance (0=negative - 10=positive)
Attitude (0=negative - 10=positive)

What are your perceptions of Twitter?
Authenticity (0=negative - 10=positive)
Relevance (0=negative - 10=positive)
Attitude (0=negative - 10=positive)

What are your perceptions of Instagram?
Authenticity (0=negative - 10=positive)
Relevance (0=negative - 10=positive)
Attitude (0=negative - 10=positive)

What are your perceptions of LinkedIn?
Authenticity (0=negative - 10=positive)
Relevance (0=negative - 10=positive)
Attitude (0=negative - 10=positive)

What are your perceptions of TikTok?
Authenticity (0=negative - 10=positive)
Relevance (0=negative - 10=positive)
Attitude (0=negative - 10=positive)

What are your perceptions of Snapchat?
Authenticity (0=negative - 10=positive)
Relevance (0=negative - 10=positive)
Attitude (0=negative - 10=positive)

What format of media do you find most engaging on Instagram?
Posts
Reels
Stories
Instagram Live
Instagram Video
I do not use Instagram

APPENDIX

What format of media do you find most engaging on Facebook?
Posts
Stories
Livestreams
Facebook groups
Facebook news
Facebook events
I do not use Facebook

What format of media do you find most engaging on Twitter?
Posts/Tweets
Retweets
I do not use Twitter

What format of media do you find most engaging on LinkedIn?
Posts
Articles
Status updates
I do not use LinkedIn

What format of media do you find most engaging on Snapchat?
Direct Messaging
Stories
I do not use snapchat

How important is sustainability to you?
0 (least important) - 10 (most important)

Have you ever participated in a national sustainability event? (Ex: Plastic Free July, Earth Day, Arbor Day)
Yes
No

How concerned do you think OSU is about sustainability?
0 (not concerned) - 10 (very concerned)

Which of these OSU Sustainability Organizations have you heard of? (select all that apply)
OSU Net impact
Green Greeks
SGA Sustainability
Sustainability, Energy, and Resources collaborative
US Green Building Council
None of these

Which of these OSU Sustainability Organizations have you attended an event for? (select all that apply)
OSU Net impact
Green Greeks
SGA Sustainability
Sustainability, Energy, and Resources collaborative
US Green Building Council
None of these

Have you attended an OSU sponsored Sustainability event?
Yes (specify what event)
No

How familiar are you about OSU Sustainability practices?
0 (not familiar) - 10 (familiar)

How committed are you to daily sustainability practices?
0 (not committed) - 10 (very committed)

APPENDIX

Do you practice any of these daily sustainable
practices? (select all that apply)
Recycling
Reusable water bottles
Reusable grocery bags
Composting
Other (please specify)

What is your age?
(fill in the blank)

Gender
Male
Female
Non-binary
Prefer not to say
Other (please specify)

Race/Ethnicity (select all that apply)
Caucasian/White
black/African American
Hispanic
Asian
Native American/Alaskan Native
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
Prefer not to say
Other (please specify)

What is your classification?
Freshman
Sophomore
Junior
Senior
Graduate
Other (please specify)