

# Social listening approaches: new ways to identify drivers for environmental activism.

Federica Carbone<sup>1</sup>,  
<sup>1</sup>Catholic University of the Sacred Heart,  
[1federica.carbone1@unicatt.it](mailto:federica.carbone1@unicatt.it)

**Keywords:** social listening, environmental activism, online opinions

In this work, the focus has been placed on digital media and data analysis methods such as social listening: this term refers to the set of practices for listening to online discussions of audiences (Galli, 2018). It is undeniable that the online channels are becoming important collectors of interesting opinions from people on different topics, such as sustainability. This method (promoted by the Blogmeter Suite) suits perfectly to the need of answering a long-standing question:

1. *Why the online spread of actions on "climate activism" is sometimes problematic for gathering different generations?*

Thinking of the Fridays for Future movement, we can confirm how it is representative of many environmentalist realities, such as Ultima Generazione and similar (Beckh, 2022). We will attempt to reconstruct, by mapping the digital landscape where the topic of environmentalism is debated, the crucial thoughts regarding activism and green associationism.

Starting from an evidence-based negativity of the opinions expressed by people on their social media in the 2023 (figure 1) when talking about environmental movements, we aim at reflecting on how the spreading of online contents on the topic can promote not only complaints towards the movements' actions, but also a positive conception of an environmental movement, trying to engage as much as possible different generations.

So, which are the communicative limits of these actions, usually negatively considered by old people? A hypothesis is that the main critics may be conceived as a misconception from the older generations about the actions taken by young activists and the ways in which they use the web, usually defined as irresponsible, not really caring about the environment.

This is unreal: it seems more than oldest people are "scared" to be taught something from the youngest, deemed as immature and shallow, using the social media only for fun.

Starting from this consideration, although the *sentiment* on environmental activism online is generally negative (figure 2), it's unfair to ignore the potential that web and social channels - mostly used by adolescents- could have in promoting a strong sense of civic participation, mass engagement towards environmental causes, instilling positive beliefs regarding typically wide-ranging and often stressful topics such as environmental protection and its subsequent consequences, e.g. the phenomenon of eco-anxiety (Wallis, 2021).

Perhaps, it is time to start recognizing the actions of young people as having the potential for change, and it is time for the older generation to change their approach to what they see on social media: instead of a (sometimes) closed approach, it would be appropriate for them to dig beyond the surface of the contents published by every environmental movement, thinking of the social platforms not as made-up places abused by youth for fun (e.g. TikTok), but more as a wider place that young people are able to use widely, promoting actions that urgently need to be acted upon and are addressed to all the generations, because environmental matters involve everyone.

## Bibliography:

- Galli, B. (2018). *Web listening: conoscere per agire*, Franco Angeli, Milan.
- Beckh, P., Limmer, A. (2022). *The Fridays for Future Phenomenon*. In: Wilderer, P.A., Grambow, M., Molls, M., Oexle, K. (eds) *Strategies for Sustainability of the Earth System*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-74458-8\\_28](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-74458-8_28)
- Wallis, H., & Loy, L. S. (2021). *What drives pro-environmental activism of young people? A survey study on the Fridays For Future movement*. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 74, 101581. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2021.101581>

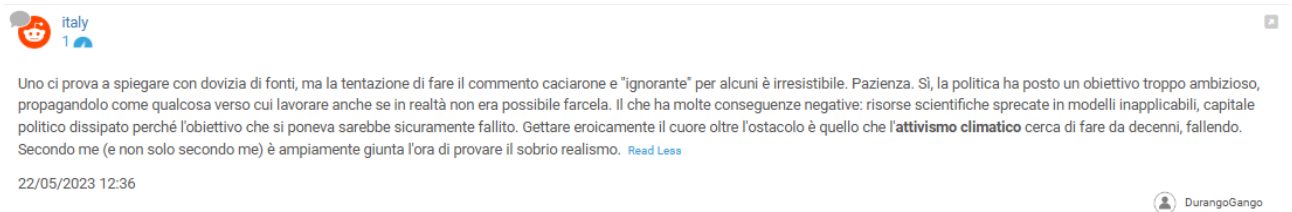


Figure 1; comment on Reddit (source: Blogmeter Suite, 2023)

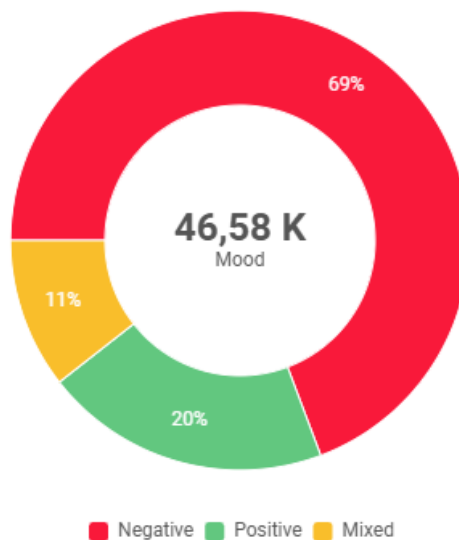


Figure 2: sentiment pie on the topic (source: Blogmeter Suite, 2023)