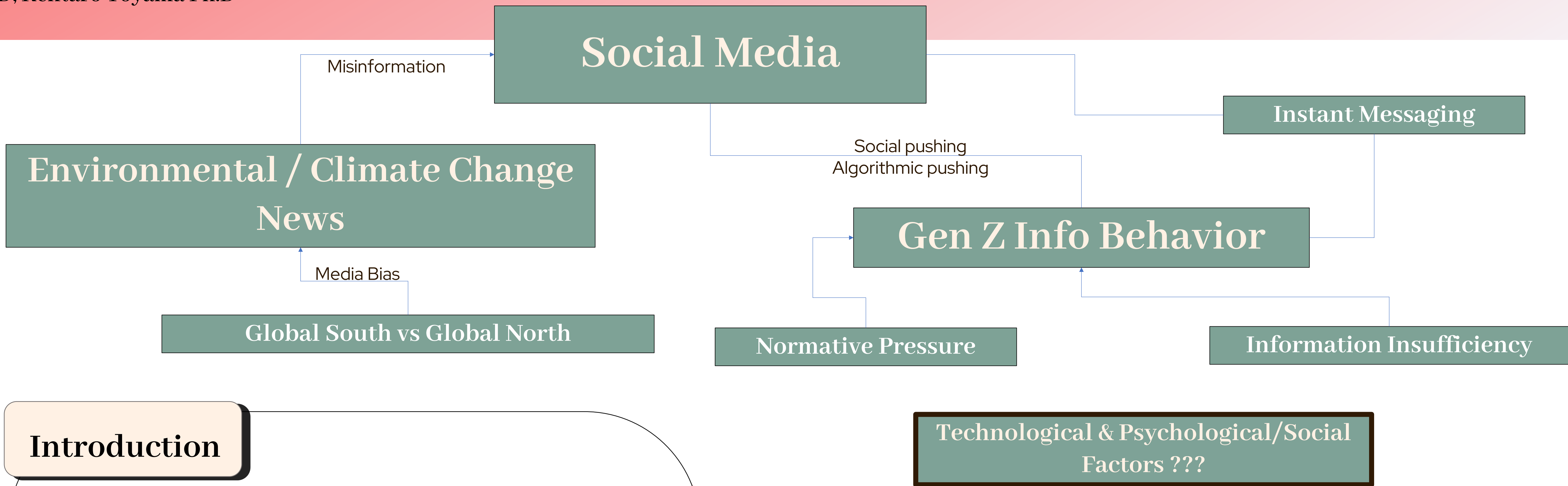


Environment News Seeking & Sharing Behaviors of Generation Z

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Introduction

Climate Change in the News

Traditional and digital media coverage of climate change (CC) tends to focus on Societal issues, and its impact on humans.¹⁰

- **Empathy gap** and **Information gap** that makes countries in the Global South most vulnerable to climate change, compared to Global North²²

Characterizing GenZ

Are they "Technological Addicts"?

Or just "**Digital Natives**", with which only the nature of Social Media use changing?

- GenZ smartphones (i.e., computers) enable Computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as **social media** (SM) and **instant messaging** (IM) applications.¹⁴
- **Exhibit higher emotional gratification** when using smartphones.
- More likely to "indicate that they have **friends from different backgrounds, races and beliefs**"¹⁸

Information Seeking Behavior (ISB)

Two Types:

- (1) Social information-seeking behavior (passive ISB)
- (2) Functional/cognitive information-seeking behavior (active ISB)
 - Compared to older users who align with more Type 2-seeking behavior, younger users are more inclined towards Type 1-seeking behavior²⁴

Stages¹³:

Initiation → Selection → Exploration → Formulation → Collection → Presentation

There is a call to support climate change communication and information sharing by focusing on "individuals' **social group, locality, and lifetime**"²⁰

Theories at Play

Network Society Theory

Based on the Social Identity Theory (SIT), this accounts for economic, political organization status, in addition to cultural, religious, and social status; these different **statuses inform the "network society"** that is based on information and communication networks that are facilitated by technology.⁶

Construal Level Theory

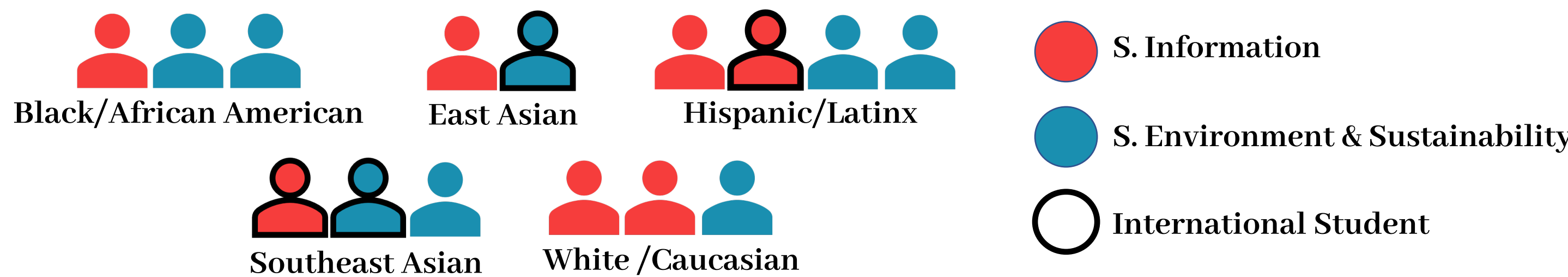
Psychological distance (perceiver's actual direct experience, geographic, temporal, societal) impacts how people view and react to **climate change news**.^{3,11}

Critical Race Theory

Because climate change is a global phenomenon, "human-centered" technology must take into consideration Earth's diverse population and **people of color who are most vulnerable to socio-technical changes** that are pushed by the HCI community.¹⁷

Research Methods

We **interviewed a diverse sample**, as many POC are not included in environmental conversations; we accounted for social backgrounds, citizenship status, and relations in or outside of the United States.



Results

(1) Proactive & Responsive Users

Information Seekers Type¹⁵:

- "**Responsive**" information seekers, exhibited **high perceptions of risk and strong efficacy**
- "**Proactive**" information seekers exhibited **strong efficacy by sharing climate change information** on their preferred SM platforms, but did feel **moderately low risk** in comparison
- **Behaviors**: cognitive/functional ISB and "active" SM use
- **Motivations**: sense of responsibility, empathy, and past personal experiences
- **Precautions**: cross-validating information to assess credibility

(2) Information Barriers

In order to seek and share environmental news online, GenZ participants must overcome three main obstacles:

- **Technological barriers**: Lack of internet access, Windows PC/Mac OS incompatibility, Slow loading speed of mobile applications
- **Self-presentation**: Dilemma of being authentically and genuinely present, Privacy concerns, Language barrier
- **Costs of assessing information**: Negative mental health impact, Cognitive overload, Finding credible info takes time & effort, Politics & Religion are regarded as controversial, Psychological distance (geography)

(3) Between Groups

- **S.EAS students** appeared to be more **desensitized** to news on SM, due to constant exposure from their discipline
- **International students** recalled more specific details of natural disasters and tended to **engage in civic participation on and offline more** than US citizens. This may be due to differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures.
- **All participants were highly aware of the SM's negative impact** on their mental health or on their peers

Discussion

Social Capital

Social Capital entails the **trust** that is built as people **form relationships**, and the prosocial behavior of **civic participation** within the real and digital world SM allows GenZ users to increase Social Capital.^{8,14} May not be equally available to non-Caucasian (POC) individuals and communities.⁵ The **effectiveness** of SM to establish social capital **depends on how GenZ utilize social media**:

- Consumptive or expressively²
- Instrumental vs ritualized use⁷
- Epistemic motivation or social motivation²³

"**Sense of community and relevant hazard experience**"²³ with trust in social media bolsters this information exchange and increases social capital amongst individuals with share personal experiences.

Aggregation of Information

GenZ users can seek and share information that has been aggregated by other SM users or algorithms

- **Aggregated by humans** is based on the "recommendations of people they trust" and the assumptions "that they intimately know the interests and needs of the people with whom they have strong ties" made by other SM users.¹
- **Aggregated by algorithms** allows for SM aggregators to be "continuously updated content on an automatic basis" while using user-generated information.¹²

While aggregation reduces the cost of information gathering on the SM users end, there is still **concern for real world biases to translate into the digital world**.

Design Implications

Functional and social affordances of location sensing technology and social network analysis should be explored to enhance SM applications.

- Ex: Instagram stories is a popular technology amongst GenZ, within the application, that could be used to push relevant environmental news affecting users and/or their friends and family in a given location. **GenZ will be able to better empathize with others** affected by natural disasters in different parts of the world **by decreasing psychological distance**.

~Collecting data from a small, highly-educated student population was the major limitation to this study. Future research should include non-student samples from more than one region of the U.S.

