Can Podcasts Really Inspire Environmental Action?

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Background
- Podcast listenership continues to grow and is expected to increase in the future (Figure 1)
- Most educational podcasts follow the “educate, inspire, act” structure
- Individual behavior change plays a vital role in inspiring environmental action
- It’s worth considering whether podcasts can be used to inspire long-term change

Figure 1: This graph displays growth in podcast listeners since 2017 and the future projections of podcast listenership (Data Source: Statistica 2021)

Research Question
What are the best methods for including behavior change messaging in podcasts?

Internship and Methods
- This past summer, I interned with the University of Washington Bothell and Cascadia College
- My work involved producing a podcast mini-series for the Common Caws for Sustainability Podcast (Figure 2)
- I interviewed environmental podcast creators to better understand their own motivations

Results
Motivations
- All podcast creators I interviewed learned to love and appreciate nature from a young age
- Taking environmental action often stems from spending time in nature as a child
- We can play to these motivations using storytelling in podcasts

Podcast Structure
- First-hand stories and examples help build trust and credibility (Figure 3)
- Start by educating before transitioning to a call to action

Behavior Change
- Change in behavior formed by a habit or routine
- To change behavior, the change must be normal, easy, and beneficial
- Consider behavior change when using call to action or stories in podcasts

Figure 2: Learning about the benefits of biking in a discussion with Tamara Schmautz for Episode 2 of the Common Caws podcast

Implications
- Consider incorporating podcasts into classrooms to aid in environmental education (Figure 4)
- Educate children about the environment and encourage them to spend more time outdoors
- Include more stories and first-hand examples in environmental communication
- Motivate individuals to take small actions that are easy and routine to encourage behavior change

Figure 4: Research has shown that podcasts can reinforce lesson material in classroom settings (Photo Source: Common Sense Media)

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