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CREAFTA 2026 (International Conference on Creative Practices in Film, Theatre, and Animation) is an academic platform that brings together scholars, practitioners, and industry experts to present and discuss current research, innovation, and practices in the fields of film, theatre, animation, and creative arts. The conference aims to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, encourage creative research dissemination, and strengthen regional and international collaboration in the creative industries.

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These proceeding compiles peer-reviewed papers presented at CREAFTA 2026, representing diverse perspectives and research contributions across creative practices in film, theatre, animation, and related disciplines.

Becoming an Ecological Cyborg Sumatera Elephant Animator: Creative Storytelling Practice in Social Media Instagram

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ABSTRACT

Sumatran elephants (*Elephas maximus sumatranus*) are one of Indonesia's most endangered species, facing rapid population decline due to deforestation, human–wildlife conflict, and illegal poaching. In West Sumatra, habitat fragmentation caused by palm oil plantations and infrastructure expansion has increasingly isolated elephant populations, leading to frequent encounters with local communities. This ecological crisis has inspired creative practitioners to raise awareness through digital storytelling. This study explores how an animator, through the lens of *cyborg anthropology*, becomes an "ecological cyborg," a hybrid being that connects humans, technology, and nature to represent and advocate for Sumatran elephants on Instagram. The research employs a hybrid methodology, combining online and offline ethnography. Online research involves digital observation and content analysis of animation works shared on Instagram, focusing on visual narratives, audience interaction, and algorithmic engagement. Offline research includes semi-structured interviews with the animator and local conservation activists in West Sumatra to understand the contextual meaning and ecological motivations behind the artwork. This methodological combination allows an exploration of how digital media practices intertwine with real-world environmental advocacy. The results indicate that the animator's creative process operates as an act of *technological embodiment*, where human intention and digital tools merge to reanimate ecological narratives. The storytelling of the Sumatran elephant on Instagram not only amplifies awareness but also reconstructs emotional connections between humans and nature through mediated experiences. This study concludes that creative digital practices can act as a form of ecological communication, blurring the boundaries between art, activism, and technology. The findings highlight the significance of viewing digital creators as *ecological cyborgs* who mediate environmental consciousness in the age of social media.

Keywords: *Cyborg Anthropology; Sumatran Elephant*; *Digital Storytelling*; *Instagram*; *Ecological Art*

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores wider applications of how digital storytelling, particularly animation can be used as a tool to address the disparity between ecological realities and public knowledge, specifically in the context of the Sumatran elephant crisis. This method seeks to leverage the power of narrative and animation images to evoke empathy as well as increase community knowledge about

complex environmental issues, which have not been extensively examined in details in local context (Evita et al., 2024; Fauzi et al., 2025). Digital animation can function as a mode of critical "thinking with care" about the Anthropocene, challenging the human–nature dichotomy and enabling the imagination of transformative futures through graphic architecture, sound, and virtual environments. The creation process of animated works cannot be separated from the role of digital technology and the tools involved. Devices such as smartphones, drawing tablets, and personal computers become extensions of the animator's body in the production process. Mobile- and desktop-based animation applications enable drawing, animating, editing, and distributing works to be carried out independently and flexibly. nstagram was chosen as the main dissemination tool for the works, thanks to its visual nature and its participatory aspect. By means of this vehicle, we are able to spread animations regarding the Sumatran elephants to everyone regardless of region, age and culture. Tools like feeds, reels and stories are also strategically deployed to tell different kinds of narratives with different tempos and depths: Reels might grab your attention quickly with something fast-moving but visually arresting; a feed is an ongoing archive of the work; a story creates room for smaller, more personal or ephemeral interactions. The audience's reaction and response to the staged content becomes a part of the creative process. Comments, DMs and interaction in response demonstrate how the works can create emotional and cognitive resonance. "I think for a lot of people, those cartoons provide an entry point to understanding the crisis facing Sumatran elephants.

Urgency study This lies in the need to develop a deeper understanding of how digital technology–based creative practices can play a strategic role in responding to increasingly complex ecological crises, particularly in the context of Sumatran elephant conservation. Amid the acceleration of digital transformation and the dominance of social media in shaping public perception, conservation approaches can no longer rely solely on policies, formal campaigns, or top-down scientific narratives. This is important because it offers an alternative perspective that positions the animation creation process as a hybrid cultural practice in which human bodies, technology, and nature are dynamically intertwined. Using cyborg anthropology as the theoretical apparatus, this study contributes to a gap in previous research that has heavily centered on content effects and placed minimal focus on the hybrid subject lived experiences of creators. Moreover, this research is needed because it records creative systems that play out according to technical constraints, infrastructural conditions, and the logics of social media algorithms circumstances which tend to elude traditional forms of conservation analysis. Accordingly, in theoretical terms the findings of this project also advance cyborg anthropology as a framing device for art and environmental studies but has informed practical and ecological considerations that can be applied to developing localised, participatory and sustainable conservation communication strategies for the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through approach this, digital animation can bridge crisis deep-rooted imagination in premise modernity, offering ways alternative for understand and interact with nature, as exemplified by the concept of *'animism critical'* (Yoneyama, 2021). This Hayao Miyazaki-modeled view envisions that nature is an un-dualistic combination of material and spirit-world with the strong attachment to place as a point of emphasis (Yoneyama, 2021). The visual storytelling strategy makes it possible for a populace to better absorb environmental information through the filter of culture, which encourages more profound understanding and sustainable behavioral shift. This is also consistent with studies suggesting that animation can promote environmental consciousness via aesthetic involvement and audience attitudes (Wu et al., 2018). Animated films, strongly exemplified in those of Hayao Miyazaki, have been demonstrated to play a major role in reinforcing environmental consciousness by highlighting the healing potential of natural landscapes and their importance for human life.

Through solid storytelling frameworks, these pieces reintroduce humans to nature in ways that traditional scientific communication often cannot, and can inspire changes of perception and have a real impact on public opinion (Pan, 2020). Use of such anticipated medium can open up discourse more public, inclusive and active towards behaviour changes for real conservation sustainability Sumatran elephant (Burgos et al., 2023; Díaz, 2023). With a strong visual power of expression, digital animation can contribute to the realization of the local cultural and ecological value as vivid visual images that are sacred and transcendental, to create a sense of mystery and meditation on nature. Through the use of narrative and visuals as a method of digital storytelling, animation offers an effective means to communicate complex environmental issues in an accessible and engaging manner, thereby encouraging emotional engagement, empathy and better understanding. The use of digital animation for environmental education has also been shown to facilitate the transfer of visual information faster and more sustainably than other verbal or written methods (Nadya & Erlyana, 2020). Through digital storytelling, environmental educators can construct strong and memorable narratives that connect individuals to environmental issues in more personal and emotional ways (Herutomo et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach through social media ethnography, treating Instagram as a digital "field site" where socio-cultural practices are formed and negotiated. Social media is understood not merely as a communication tool but as part of a broader cultural ecosystem in which identities, relationships, emotions, technologies, and meanings are continuously produced and reconfigured through everyday practices (Pink et al., 2016). In this aspect, Instagram is regarded as a place that revolves around the human body, visual technologies, platform's algorithm and users' everyday creative practices. Three weeks of intensive passive participant observation were conducted. The researcher traced the informants' stories and feeds, documenting feed posts, reels, stories, captions, hashtag usage, posting frequency, and interactions in both comment sections and direct messages. Attention was given not only to what was communicated but also to how the content was created, disseminated, and responded to within the digital network. This analysis was also complemented by digital field notes that recorded such factors as daily dynamics, narrative changes and shifts in the degree of interaction, as well as instances that suggested shifts in meaning or audience involvement. Throughout the process, the researcher adopted a reflexive stance, recognizing that visibility aninteraction and thus digital practices themselves (what Instagram comes to "mean" in differentcontexts) are shaped by visual norms and the popularity logics embedded in platform algorithms.The analysis employs cyborg anthropology as a lens to understand social media practices as hybridizations of the human and the technical. From this perspective, digital tools and platforms are not viewed as "external resources" but as elements interwoven with the body, emotions, and everyday practices of the informants, forming fluid and mutually constitutive relationships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study reveals that Sumatran elephant animations on Instagram emerge in diverse and non-homogeneous visual forms, shaped by each animator's creative intentions, emotional approaches, and technological environments. Instead of portraying elephants merely as symbolic conservation icons, the animations present them as non-human subjects with emotions and lived experiences, enabling audiences to engage affectively with extinction an experience that, as Heise (2014) argues, becomes graspable not through rational data but through sensory and emotional cues. Across creators, the animations generally rely on 2D techniques of small to moderate complexity. Movements are

intentionally minimal simple trunk lifts, repeated walking loops, blinking eyes yet this very simplicity breathes life into the characters. The stylized anatomical reduction into basic shapes and sparse textures reflects both aesthetic preference and the necessity of accommodating mobile-based production constraints. Among the dominant visual tendencies are symbolic and reflective styles marked by quiet tones, negative space, and a serene slowness reminiscent of early overhead-view games, as well as more expressive narrative-driven styles tailored for Reels, which use higher contrast, quicker pacing, and single-cut compositions. Some animators focus on repetitive daily gestures, while others turn toward brighter colors, faster rhythms and exaggerated expressions to evoke joyous emotional responses, strengthening the role of visual affect in environmental engagement as supported by Wu et al. (2018).

These stylistic variations are closely linked to each animator's communicative aim. As expressed by informants such as @nanarteu and @babydoojoyworld, the choice to be slow and contemplative, or joyful and playful, reflects distinct strategies for eliciting empathy and shaping how audiences emotionally relate to environmental concerns. Instagram becomes the site where such negotiations unfold—a platform that entangles creators, technologies, and ecological narratives in a posthuman relational space (Haraway, 1991). The creative process behind these works further demonstrates that technology is not a neutral medium. Animators work independently through all production stages, from conceptual sketching on tablets or smartphones to movement construction via frame-by-frame apps like FlipaClip or automated timeline software such as CapCut or After Effects. Differences in device capabilities produce visible variations in precision, line work, and detail. Technical limitations—restricted layers, limited storage, small screens—paradoxically shape the aesthetic outcomes, encouraging simplified forms, restrained movement, and looped animations. As Pink et al. (2016) suggests, the daily digital practices of touching screens, repeating frames, or adjusting rhythm become embodied actions that fuse the artist's body with technological constraints, producing meaning through a hybrid human–machine process.

Instagram itself operates as an interactive cultural environment rather than merely a distribution channel. Feeds act as reflective archives, Reels expand reach through dynamic, child-friendly visuals, and Stories nurture casual intimacy between creator and followers. Audience responses are multilayered: contemplative styles often attract long, emotional comments expressing sadness, reflection, or empathy, while colorful expressive animations draw higher metric engagement, particularly from children who repeatedly watch them and ask questions about elephants. Direct messages reveal deeper, personal connections, including stories of encounters with elephants or feelings of grief and concern. These interactions illustrate danah boyd's (2010) concept of networked publics, where meanings emerge collectively through digital participation, and reaffirm Wu et al.'s (2018) argument that emotional visual experiences can heighten ecological awareness. Considering these practices through Haraway's (1991) cyborg framework, animators function as cyborg subjects whose creativity is inseparable from digital tools, interfaces, and platform logics. As they draw, tap, or repeat frames, their bodies merge with devices, enabling them to "lend" their voice and empathy to non-human beings. Technology becomes an affective mediator between humans and elephants, fostering interspecies connection in line with Haraway's later notion of making kin (2016). The animations thus enact more-than-human storytelling (Tsing, 2015), in which elephants are presented as feeling subjects whose experiences can be emotionally understood through stylized movement and atmosphere.

This embodied ecological communication is not about delivering scientific facts, but about evoking sensations silence, loneliness, joy that allow audiences to feel the stakes of habitat loss and conflict. Animators describe their work as attempts to "transfer feelings," crafting atmospheres that allow viewers to sense the presence and vulnerability of elephants. Such emotional triggers act as

forms of soft advocacy, generating awareness and conversation without explicit persuasion, echoing the findings of Wu et al. (2018).

Ultimately, Instagram emerges as a participatory conservation space where ecological meanings are co-constructed by creators, technologies, and audiences. Comments, shares, and repeated viewings are not just indicators of popularity but expressions of collective ecological concern within a deeply mediatized environment (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Rather than reinforcing human superiority, these digital encounters cultivate egalitarian, empathetic relations between species, embodying Haraway's (2016) call for kin-making in times of ecological crisis. Conservation, therefore, unfolds not only in forests or policy arenas but within everyday digital interactions where animation, technology, and human emotion intertwine to shape awareness of the Sumatran elephant's precarious existence.

CONCLUSION

The results demonstrate that animation functions not only as a representation of environmental problems but also as an emotional mediator between humans and non- humans. By drawing on a cyborg anthropology lens, this study shows how animators are hybrid subjects whose creative labor is materialized at the intersection of the human body, digital technologies and social media platforms. Digital hardware and software are not neutral: they are agents that form visual aesthetics, narrative timbres, and modes of ecological storytelling. Here the creative process is an embodied practice of making and communicating eco-narratives.In addition, Instagram is a participatory cultural–technological space of meaning co- production through its audiences' liking, commenting and direct messaging. Such modes of engagement not only broaden what animation can countenance as individual artistic expression but also puts the form squarely in the service of soft environmental advocacy, gently nurturing empathy and collective contemplation rather than proselytizing outright.

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