



HAL
open science

When youth ecological commitment is hindered by identity issues

Jocelyn Lachance, Mathias Przygoda

► **To cite this version:**

Jocelyn Lachance, Mathias Przygoda. When youth ecological commitment is hindered by identity issues: the case of commitment visibility on social networks. *Convergence*, 2022, 29 (3), pp.555-569. 10.1177/13548565221123944 . hal-04541987v2

HAL Id: hal-04541987

<https://hal.science/hal-04541987v2>

Submitted on 17 Apr 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

When youth ecological commitment is hindered by identity issues.

The case of commitment visibility on social networks

Jocelyn LACHANCE*, Mathias PRZYGODA*,

* University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour, E2S UPPA, CNRS, TREE, Pau, France.

Brief summary

Using qualitative methodology, we identified some visibility strategies and problems that arise within digital spaces when young people wish to express their commitment in favor of environmental protection. If it is today necessary to address the topic in this context of ecological crisis, how can we account for their limits? Being torn between their desire to claim their ecological commitment on social networks as environmentalists on the one hand, and the risks related to their visibility on the other hand, young activists must assume their responsibilities as regards to their opinions. By contextualizing the analysis of the strategies in modern times, we will understand how their use of social networks fits into a broader debate stressing that the ecological commitment of young people can be held back for reasons pertaining to the shaping of their identity.

Introduction

In recent years, many key actors in environmental education (teachers, scientists, journalists etc.) have made great efforts to ensure that everyone has access to production of knowledge on environmental issues. (Comfort & Park, 2018; Bailey & al., 2014). The Internet and social networks are means of production and dissemination of environmental information, widely used by young people in particular. However, studies have shown that despite these efforts to disseminate scientific knowledge, people do not really commit themselves to protecting the environment. (Allum et al. 2008) Whereas others find that friendly relationships generally have more influence than scientists on how people perceive environmental issues. (Roser-Renouf, 2014, Roudet, 2004).

It is also necessary to question the relevance of tools for measuring involvement; since it seems that a change in involvement is taking place, leading young people to adopt new practices on social networks.

There is plenty of information in digital spaces made up of individuals sharing a common interest and offering exclusive types of visibility along with its consequences. (Granjon, 2017). The « common » young activist (Babeau, 2014) who commits himself to protecting the online environment finds himself in a new position of a content director. He/she also can discuss these issues online and speak his/her mind on these platforms, thus strengthening that sense of participation in a collective movement. (Balley, 2018). These communication tools offer new interactions, new forms of visibility.

Visibility and ecological movements

Thanks to ICTs, groups of activists have been trained online (Conroy, Feezell & Guerrero, 2012; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009) and virtual communities (Rheingold, 1993) where political issues and problems are discussed. (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009; Himelboim,

2011; Andersson & Olson, 2014; Andersson & Öhman, 2016). The example of *Friday For Future* is just striking. That movement became the symbol of a youth dedicated to environment. It gathers millions of young people around the world who responded to the call for a school strike and the mobilization launched by Greta Thunberg. Nominated by *Times Magazine*¹ as 2019 Leading Figure, this young Swedish citizen becomes a spokesperson and a true symbol of youth activism. *Friday For Future* has been gaining popularity in many countries since that first strike; it is as well a reference regarding young people's struggle to protect the environment. (Wahlstrom & al., 2019). These ecology movements managed to take advantage of the Internet and social networks to create types of civic participation (Dahlgren, 2009; Muxel, 2010; Bobineau, 2010; Becquet, 2014; Caron, 2014; Pleyers, 2016), thus inducing innovative methods of organization and commitment visibility. These digital spaces become real organizational supports where "resilient information-communication practices" develop. (Sedda, 2018). In other words, social networks are used by committed young people to promote the communication of information that will help them fight a mutual enemy.

Nevertheless, the role of ICTs in youth ecological commitment is put into perspective in the scientific community as several authors develop the idea that social media has not yet proven their ability to promote youth participation in all dimensions of public life. Although Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) help the most stigmatized to express their opinions (Denouel et al., 2014), online political commitment is more individualized and privatized (Pleyers, 2010; Dahlgren, 2012): the exchange of information via social networks would take place within relatively homogeneous groups in terms of the social inclusion of participants and their ideological affiliations. Studies, for example, show that these networks will favor less collective creativity of the movement than compel individuals to a model of commitment (Fenton and Barasi, 2011). Others, while using Twitter, show that social networks would consolidate social inequalities by increasing the visibility of public figures already visible in the public space (Fuchs, 2014).

Visibility and commitment

Young people are considered and judged by their peers on a daily basis through the signs and content they display online. (Aubert and Haroche, 2011). Their presentations of ecological commitment can be found at different scales, both public and individual (Granjon, 2017) and take ostentatious, silent, personalized, intimate or even invisible forms, that would escape all expressions in public and physical spaces (Becquet, 2009; Pleyers & Capitaine, 2016). The issue of changes in militant commitment practices in physical spaces has already been addressed (Ion, 1997; Marsh & al., 2007), yet few studies seem to explore the discrepancies between the visibility of youth commitment in digital spaces and the invisibility of their actions in previous public debate.

Studies have already shown that depending on the type of social network used and the audience the individual imagines reaching (Marwick et boyd, 2007), visibility strategies will be quite different. Other complementary studies add that there is a link between self-staging and the visibility offered by the platform, according to its "visibility design" (Cardon, 2019). Users work with the image they send in these spaces that can be configured according to the "imagined" audience. The interactions will not be the same if it is a network that brings together specialists in ecological activism or not, since the contents, the challenges but also the risks will be different. In any event, commitment visibility strategies are implemented by young people who no longer respond to the analytical frameworks of previous militant expression.

¹ <https://time.com/person-of-the-year-2019-greta-thunberg/>

We know that more and more expert, scientific or amateur information on environmental issues is being communicated and made visible with the arrival of the Internet. Similarly, with ICTs, ecological movements develop modes of organization, actions and communication strategies that articulate physical and digital spaces. These practices feed into the repertoire of actions of young environmentalists, offering them new opportunities to show their commitments in hybrid spaces. It seems particularly interesting to examine the different types of visibility found, in order to highlight the existing strategies and tensions. While the link between digital visibility and identity has been demonstrated by several researchers (Aubert and Haroche, 20110 ; Cardon, 2019), the link between online visibility of ecological commitment and identity needs to be established.

Methodology

This article is one of the results of the ECOTIC research project on young people's relationship to ecological commitment. This research has many objectives but they mainly relate to the acquisition of a more detailed knowledge of juvenile committed practices as well as the role played by ICTs. To do this, we have contacted young people who are already in associations and participate in collective actions for the defense of the environment in France. We also contacted via social networks, official accounts of local groups of ecological movements so that they open their networks and we can meet young people who say they are committed, who act by themselves, without necessarily being part of associations.

Our sample is therefore composed, on the one hand, of young people involved collectively in organizations, and on the other hand, of young people with individual practices in favor of ecology. In one respect, we looked for respondents who will take actions in associations, go to demonstrations, and in another respect, we looked for young people with more isolated practices who wanted to change consumption patterns or means of transport, for example. Such a methodological choice is explained by the results of Pleyers (2010), which propose to understand the contemporary juvenile ecological commitment as more individualized and privatized than before. According to him, the terms of commitment are changing. That is, they will take less traditional forms of expression, sometimes less collective, more discreet, which compels the researcher to broaden his scope of analysis. However, to participate in our survey, the youth interviewed had to define themselves as committed.

During this fieldwork, 62 semi-structured interviews were conducted. We interviewed 32 youths between the ages of 14 and 17 and 30 youths between the ages of 18 and 25. Among our respondents, we counted 30 boys and 32 girls. Approximately half of them said that they belong to associations or organizations committed to ecology. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or by telephone, thus removing the barrier of geographical distance between the researcher and the respondent. All youth have been interviewed once for a duration varying between 40 minutes or 90 minutes. Our protocol was divided into two parts: the first included questions about criteria for defining environmental commitment and the second included questions about the reception, dissemination and production of online environmental content to better understand the role of online information in their commitment.

All of the interviews were transcribed for analysis. Our analytical work was guided by an inductive approach, inspired by the stages of codification, categorization and connection as presented in the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss. We first carried out a careful labeling of the interviews to identify recurring units of meaning.

Subsequently, we grouped these units of meaning to produce the most significant categories among the young people interviewed. It appeared that the category of science, meaning

lexical field around scientific knowledge (visibility, the gaze of the other, attractive content, over-visibility, use of social networks, etc.) was omnipresent in the speech of our respondents.

Returning to the content of the interviews, this time with aim of finding the significant relationships between the category of science and other categories present in the speech of the respondents. This article presents and discusses what we have learned about the visibility (and invisibility) of the online practices of young people involved in ecology. We will also highlight the strategies and problems that were identified.

Results

1) The three types of ecological commitment visibility

In the course of our work, we have identified three types of visibility in the practices of the young people interviewed. The visibility of the environmental challenges appeared at first as preponderant to raise awareness. *"I publish things that say that ecology is good, it's important, we have to be careful, etc. If I publish this on the Internet, people will click on it and they will say, "Yes, he's right, it's an important issue,"* said Yamedou, 17. Many young people explain the importance of showing contemporary environmental issues and raising awareness through social networks. Through the publication of content (textual, photographic and audio-visual) on personal accounts and ecological groups, a lot of work is done to make the publications attractive. Margot, 17 years old, indicates that she makes an "effort" by putting "colors and fonts that make you want to read" when she posts content on one of the local *Youth For Climate* accounts. A revealing practice of this visibility often reported by young people is the use of these issues by social network celebrities. These Web 2.0 personalities offer considerable visibility due to their audience. Charlotte, 16, states that:

"Last year, there was a big ecological movement which is the trial of the century, with big Youtubers who shared this case and who joined the movement in relation to Green Peace to file a complaint against the government in relation to the climate inaction. So I thought that was very important because there were many people who were not aware of this and when they saw that these people filed a complaint against the government, they wanted to know why. And by knowing why, they understood the climate issues, they were able to see the changes that needed to be made and they integrated them, and then little by little, they began to understand" (Charlotte, 16 years old)

According to this respondent, by using his/her fame in favor of ecology, an Internet celebrity has a strong chance of raising awareness and changing people's behavior. These social network stars become prevention actors, spokespersons and also models for the defense of the environment among young people. One of the essential criteria of this type of publication is the justification of the comments. Many young people place more importance on the fact that the content is documented and justified by visible and scientific "evidence" (reports, figures, studies on the subject presented). Quite often, the disseminator reminds receivers that his/her justifications and evidence are available in the descriptions of his/her content.

The second type of visibility we took into consideration during our analysis was the presentation of the ecological movement on social networks (on behalf of the young moderators). Indeed, the use of these communication tools allows young people who are already initiated to make the movement known to many new individuals. This method seems to be effective since most of our respondents explain to us that they got involved thanks to a publication on social networks. For example, Louise, 19 years old, testifies that: *"if I hadn't seen that publication on Facebook at the time, I don't think I would have been as involved in ecology as I was in scouting, I wouldn't have had this opportunity to get involved"*. Another strategy developed by these

young account moderators on the networks is to put forward a range of ecological practices on the news feed of the pages: from eco-responsible behaviors to eco-gestures or even actions carried out, the goal is to show the dynamism of the movement as well as the possibilities of actions. Robin, 24 years old, during an action in favor of ecology, explains that:

"We took a picture to show that there was an association in Nantes that was doing urban agriculture, so to give them a little visibility. When we do the climate course, it's to show other young people that there are young people who act, so they could also come, be with us in the discussion and everything. So, it's really a way to make young people aware of what they can do to act" (Robin, 24 years old)

Raising awareness through visibility is in the heart of our respondents' discourse. The fact that a young person who is already committed sets an example on social networks by means of an official page, allows others who are not involved to become aware of the potential actions they can take. For greater efficiency, the young people publishing content on the movement's account try to adapt the message. Lise, 17 years old, explains that the publications of the collective account on the networks *"also depend on the targeted public interested in our work, I think it is important to adapt the content that we publish"*. These strategies aim to trigger ecological awareness and the desire for action. For a movement like *Youth For Climate*, this work is essential to reach a certain audience. Nathan, 17 years old, specifies that *"with Youth for Climate it's good because they are publications by young people and for young people"*. Arthur, 16 years old, uses even stronger terms when he talks about "the war for popularity". He is involved in *Youth For Climate* in Pau and is in charge, among other things, of taking pictures during the collective's actions and then proposing to publish them on the social networks' accounts. When we ask him how he chooses which photo to take, he answers:

"You say to yourself "take everything that might be useful to you at some point", the more you have the better. I made a little top 30 of 300. After making the top 30, we keep a few, and we put the ones we think are the strongest. For example, this one [showing a photo] is to show the number of people at the demonstration, because the more you tell people that there are people, the more they come. Then this one [showing a photo] for the convergence, this one [showing a photo] to show the poster... it depends on the message we want to pass. If we had wanted to put something a bit sillier like "we have to protect nature" we would have put this one [showing a photo], you put a flower in front of it" (Arthur, 16 years old)

This young man takes and stores many pictures with the idea of being able to propose the most adapted one according to the message that needs to be passed on during the diffusion of the content on the networks. But Arthur's reflections do not stop there as regards the concern of the image of the movement sent back. Indeed, he goes further by disagreeing with the rest of the group of moderators on some decisions, as for example the fact of not answering and deleting some searing comments, in order to smooth the image of the movement : *"the more you are going to go against the thing, the more people are going to see either that there is violence, or that you don't have any argument or that the other has more than you"*. It is by trying to put himself in the place of the receiver of the contents that he thinks he can best adapt the image sent back by the collective on the networks. Here he tells us about a decision concerning a *Youth for Climate* publication in Pau during the Halloween celebrations:

They proposed for that day to say "yes, be careful, the candies are made with pork meat, it's not good, etc.", and I told them that psychologically, people will be pissed off. "I told them that psychologically people will be pissed off. You shouldn't do that, in the sense that if you go against society you have to go with the people, not without them, using society but with the people. So the

parties are part of the culture, and I think they will be in the mode "yes we must be careful", but I will tell them the same thing, psychologically people must be with them not against them. (...) I'm careful about our image" (Arthur, 16 years old)

In this case again, Arthur is in a reflexive approach towards the receiver of the content by making an effort of projection not to send back a condemning image of the collective. The image sent back is meticulously worked by this young person, no detail is left to chance.

One of the common practices among moderators for attractive content is what might be called the aesthetization of the *feed*². This consists of working and arranging their publications in a certain way so that in the overall view, there is a coherence in the layout of the photos in the gallery (according to the colors, what is on the photo, the atmosphere, the style of photo, etc.). The goal is to make the whole thing look good, to attract the receiver's attention. For young people involved, the possibilities offered by the design of Instagram are particularly rich to expound in some way the cause defended. For a collective, the feed can be compared to the modern showcase of the movement. We can take the example of Margot, 17, moderator of an Instagram account *Youth For Climate*, who explains that for the publications of the page:

"We tend to make them more aesthetic, we try to explain things more because the purpose of this account is really to share information, to raise awareness (...) we have to explain, that it goes well, we can spend three hours on it, We try to make it look good, we want people to read and be interested, we try to make an effort. We don't do big visuals either, but we try to make it beautiful. You put on colors, fonts that make you want to read, it must attract the eye. It's a real job» (Margot, 17 years old)

This "work" aims to make all the available publications attractive and intelligible to all. It is also found on the individual accounts of the young people involved, but with a difference. This leads us to discuss the third and last type of visibility pertaining to personal visibility. Many young people tell us that they share ecological publications on a daily basis in order to raise awareness among those around them. Nevertheless, two committed young people have different opinions regarding visibility in relation to their commitment on Instagram:

"Stories almost have more visibility than posts, and that... I made a nice Instagram feed and I don't really want it to be attacked by ecological information (...) I made stories about the Amazon, it's not really current anymore so in post, I don't know if it would still be really relevant.

Q: Okay, because the information is no longer current?

A: Yes, that's it, the 24 hours of the story is good and after that, it's information that you can see in my front page stories dedicated to ecology" (Luka, 16 years old).

"When I put a permanent publication, people see it once, like it and move on (...) the story is the same, you only look at it once. So instead of adding content to my feed, rather than loading it, I prefer to put the information that interests me and that is clear in a story, plus the stories are cleaned every 24 hours so it looks better, cleaner" (Nicolas, 16 years old).

Being anxious to propose coherence as well as to aesthetize their feed, these two young people will publish ecological contents in ephemeral spaces that are the stories. This phenomenon raises the question of the image sent back to their peers. These two young people distribute thematic content on their profile according to the importance they attach to it. However, ecology seems not important, at least in ephemeral spaces, so that the identity sent back on their feed is more current with the image they have of themselves. Within their profile on the networks, a division of visibility is carried out by young people according to the issues of the published contents. This work of presentation to show oneself raises greater challenges than the mere ecological commitment of the young person, since this need of coherence on his profile is inherent to the construction of his identity by the validation of the peers. In other

words, young people reaffirm a sense of control over a multiple identity by updating and distributing the visibility of thematic content, associated with their personality.

But if this self-presentation is not adapted or at least not confirmed by the community, what will be the consequences? Can we talk about risks if the expectations and norms of ecological content visibility are not met? These online ecology issues do not turn out to be as simple as they may be described by the youth.

2) The risks related to visibility

There are two major obstacles to our respondents' visibility on social networks. The first one is related to the different risks that were explained to us by the young people when they try to make their ideals and actions in favor of ecology, which really hinders their commitment. The young people are induced to develop their commitment visibility management strategies in order to minimize the risks. The second is the questioning of the dialectic between visibility and sincerity, thus repositioning the dividing line of recognition on social networks.

We were able to identify three types of risk in our interviews. The first two that we will present are intimately linked: the risk of confrontation and the risk of marginalization. Many of our interviewees state that they do not dare to post ecological content on social networks for fear of clashing and being marginalized from their peer group. Marine, 23 years old, talks about "*the risk of being bothered, of being insulted, of being harassed*" when she posts an environment-related content. Some young people therefore seem to start censoring their own status as defenders of the planet for fear of a confrontation with their close relations. In this respect, the example of Anaïs, 16 years old, is quite striking:

« I don't write things with conviction even if sometimes I would like to, because there is a little bit of fear that people will see us in a certain way or come and answer with hateful things because there are really stupid people. That's why I prefer to share things that are not mine, because afterwards people can't say anything to me, even if they are things that I think, the fact that it's not me who wrote them is easier" (Anaïs, 16 years old) »

Another reason is given by this young activist in the visibility of her ecological ideals: Anaïs prefers using content produced by other individuals, to avoid negative feedback on her own work. She will later explain that the data she uses comes from accounts specialized in ecology, that she considers more legitimate to create content on these issues. Assuming the role of data disseminator thus induces less responsibility than being a producer in the eyes of this young person. Is it then possible to make a link between the assignment of responsibilities and risks and visibility? In any case, the status of the environmental defender can be stigmatizing, even marginalizing. This idea can be found in the words of Louise, 19 years old, when she says " I was *afraid of how others would look at me, of what they would think (...) afraid that they would look at me differently*" when she published ecological content on social networks. There is a real fear of other people's judgement when it comes to the production and distribution of ecological content, which can lead to forms of withdrawal or self-censorship. Another way that young people use to avoid the judgment of their peers is to use the collective account to pass on messages and to develop their commitment. The example of 17-year-old Aricie is illustrative. When we ask her if she produces and disseminates information about ecology, she replies:

"A: No except for YFC not as Aricie, but yes for the collective!
Q: Why?"

A: It's stupid but it's because I don't want everyone around me to see me as a big green and committed person and there are people I don't mind them seeing but others, they'll think I'm crazy, a delinquent or something like that and I also select the image I send back of myself according to the people I talk to. I'm not going to share my commitment with everyone on a network, because as long as you're not there with the person, they can interpret the message you want to put across differently, from what you wanted to say. So no, I don't share anything as Aricie" (Aricie, 17 years old).

Therefore, one ends up using different accounts to mislead the audience and protect one's personal identity. Despite the value of the cause defended by the young ecologists, those we met fear being blamed. If with the advent of digital technology screens could help keep away stigmatization, new forms of protection like using collective and legitimate accounts would appear to be necessary, in the future.

The last risk we wanted to talk about here concerns the professional future of activists. Indeed, several of them explain that they do not want to publish ecological content on their personal accounts for fear of compromising opportunities in their professional future. Valeria, 17 years old, says that she does not want to join *Extinction Rebellion* "for a simple reason: because I would like to integrate science po next year and if I ever get caught during a civil disobedience, it could be bad for my file". For fear that her ideologies, practices and convictions will be held against her later, this respondent denies herself a certain degree of commitment and action for the environment. Aricie, 17 years old, describes an even more advanced practice with regard to our convictions on the Internet about ecological publications: "I spent hours removing likes I had put on posts (...) I don't want people to say later in my professional life 'this girl liked this', to see what I did". The fear of being watched through digital data on the part of future employers appears to be an obstacle to commitment. A lot of young people are reluctant to expound their environmental, a common practice to avoid risks. On the contrary, Nathan, 17 years old, does not censor himself in the name of his convictions:

« I'm thinking that I could be blamed for this. Let's face it, in a few years I'm going to need to look for a job and if they go look on my Instagram account and see that, it might be displeasing. But I'm also in a reflective mode telling myself that this is me, this is who I am, this is my account, my struggles, my values so I'm willing to sacrifice almost everything for it so from there, I'm willing to sacrifice almost everything" (Nathan, 17)

The contrast between the degree of conviction and the fact of expounding personal commitment is highlighted in these examples. Nevertheless, there are two exceptions to these risks. Using common account with the name of the collective and not the name of the individual enables committed young people to speak their minds. The creation of closed groups on the Discord or Telegram applications provides digital spaces for environmental activists, which helps overcome fear. This can be explained by the fact that the audience on these communities shares the same interest in environmental advocacy. On these platforms, others may emerge. Here, the risk is rather being called to order and reprimanded by the moderators if the rules of communication and respect are not respected.

To this management of risk and visibility is added the evaluation of commitments among peers according to their visibility. Many of the young people interviewed assess themselves and prioritize their commitments according to their actions. For example, Daniel, 23 years old, explains that "liking" a publication is a form of "passive commitment", whereas commenting on it is a more committed practice that will "open a debate and why not (...) convince new people". A relationship between the degree of visibility (as well as the risks linked to it) and the prioritization of one's commitment is thus to be drawn: with this evaluation mechanism, the more risks the young person acting in favor of ecology takes by showing his commitment, the more he will be recognized by his peers as being involved.

While this relation between degree of internet visibility and personal commitment may be accurate in the case of our study, our respondents seem to question it. We were able to discuss the authenticity and sincerity of what was published on the profiles and according to our respondents, some would take advantage of the craze for ecology in recent years to gain recognition, self-esteem and popularity with their relatives. Tajule, 17, explains:

"It's no good just showing on video things that people don't do. I could show you videos, of someone who has thrown the garbage out of the garbage cans, he takes his camera, starts filming picking up garbage that he had thrown away himself. And as soon as he has made the video he leaves the waste there. So I've already written a few comments too, I had been a fool, I had insulted him. But I know this guy and what he does, he pretends" (Tajule, 17 years old).

In this example, a whole staging is elaborated by the video producer to give the illusion to his public that he is an active person for the defense of the environment. There is a dissociation here between what is shown in the physical space and what is shown in the digital space. The figure of the ecologically committed is diverted from the purpose of raising awareness. Several of our respondents talk about an ambient hypocrisy regarding the use of this image in relation to the inaction of certain people. However, these questions are not only about "ordinary" or "amateur" Internet users, since it appears that our respondents also question the sincerity of social network celebrities. This is one of the thoughts presented by Emmanuel, 20 years old:

"You have quite a few youtubers who will speak for ecological causes, things like that, or who will do it on their own to give themselves visibility without really being involved in it on a daily basis, however, I don't have a particular problem with that because for one day, or for one week, or for the duration of their ecological mission, they have done something for the environment" (Emmanuel, 20 years old)

We need to question the reasons for the ecological shift taken by influencers and other celebrities on social networks: are they producing ecological content because they are concerned and personally affected by the cause or are they using this popular issue for personal gain? For our interviewees, it is necessary to dissociate visibility and personal benefits which can be translated into recognition.

Discussion

Young environmentalists have succeeded to use social networks to make themselves heard and known to others. With these tools, they managed to broaden the impact of their awareness campaign by reaching larger circles in these new spaces, but also by opening up the modalities of activism in their repertoire of action. In fact, they have offered a type of commitment for young people who do not want to stand in front and get physically involved in the ecological movement, by offering a range of digital possibilities to support and join their groups and values. This phenomenon can partly explain the gap between the number of subscribers on Instagram, Facebook or TikTok pages and the number of young people coming to participate in public events. These processes of invisibility of the young people can be seen at the same time as defense mechanisms vis-a-vis the rising demands for transparency but also as a need for self experimentation while protecting one's identity.

If young people show different levels of commitment (those relating to the cause, the movement and their personal practices), emphasizing them in this work can help highlight deeper issues, going beyond the defense of the environment that is construction and affirmation

as social beings. The importance to work on the contents before their publication and the feed of the official pages or the authenticity and sincerity that must be behind each message, reflect our respondents' identity issues behind these visibility practices. The information disseminator must assume full responsibility of his image and the visibility coming with it, and as we have seen, whether on collective or individual accounts, it is not always easy for our respondents to bear the judgment of their peers who do not always share their values.

This logically leads us to a new question during this survey pertaining to the obstacles to ecological commitment. Such obstacles that are due to fears relate to identity shaping: the fear of the other's gaze, the fear of not being recognized, results in risks of confrontation, marginalization and alterations for one's personal and professional future. This is one of the reasons why some of our respondents prefer to go through specialized platforms, even if only committed people or peers meet there to discuss ecology issues and their daily commitments. From that judgment between peers, commitments are organized into hierarchy and the authenticity of actions is challenged.

Conclusion

For the respondents we interviewed, expounding one's ecological commitment in public means being willing to assume the issues and risks associated with it. When they decide to post ecological content, they must assume their responsibilities. The more visible the account on ecological content (involving large, non-expert audiences), the greater the responsibilities and the higher the risks. The articulation of visibility strategies and the discrepancies they entail respond to contemporary visibility but also place the young people involved in a broader debate—that of the affirmation of one's identity— in modern times.

This analysis of the role of visibility indicates that an environmental education provided by professionals should use both a critical approach to the notion of commitment (by moving away from traditional frames of analysis) and a work on the role of identity shaping (by not limiting itself to what is visible on social networks). It is precisely this role on the shaping of identity linked to the visibility of ecological commitment that enables us to open future reflections.

References

- Allum, Nick, Patrick Sturgis, Dimitra Tabourazi et Ian Brunton-Smith. « Science Knowledge and Attitudes across Cultures: A Meta-Analysis ». *Public Understanding of Science*, Vol. 17, n° 1, 2008, p. 35-54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662506070159>.
- Andersson, Erik et Öhman Johan. « Young people's conversations about environmental and sustainability issues in social media ». *Environmental Education Research*, Vol. 23, n°4, 2017, p ; 465-485. [10.1080/13504622.2016.1149551](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2016.1149551)
- Andersson, Erik., et Olson Maria. « Political Participation and Social Media as Public Pedagogy: Young People, Political Conversations and Education ». *Journal of Social Science Education*, Vol. 13, n° 4, 2014, p. 115-126. [110–121.10.2390/jsse-v13-i4-1366](https://doi.org/10.2390/jsse-v13-i4-1366)
- Aubert, Nicole et Haroche, Claudine (dir.). *Les tyrannies de la visibilité. Etre visible pour exister ?* Toulouse, Eres, 2011, 355p.

- Babeau, Frank. « La participation politique des citoyens « ordinaires » sur l'Internet. La plateforme Youtube comme lieu d'observation ». *Politiques de communication*, Vol. 2, n° 3, p. 125-150, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.3917/pdc.003.0125>
- Balleys, Claire. « [Socialisation adolescente et usages des médias sociaux: la question du genre](#) ». *Revue des politiques sociales et familiales*, numéro thématique Parcours adolescents : expériences et représentations, n°125, 2018, p. 33-44.
- Bailey, Adriana, Lorine Giangola, et Maxwell T. Boykoff. « How Grammatical Choice Shapes Media Representations of Climate (Un)Certainty ». *Environmental Communication*, Vol. 8, n° 2, 2014, p. 197-215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2014.906481>
- Becquet, Valérie. « L'engagement des jeunes dans l'espace public », in Roudet, Bernard (dir.), *Regard sur les jeunes en France*, INJEP, Presses de l'Université de Laval, 2009, 209p.
- Bobineau, Olivier. *Les formes élémentaires de l'engagement. Une anthropologie du sens*. Racines et Rupture, Pairs, 2010, 166p.
- Cardon, Dominique. *Culture numérique*. Paris, Presse de Science Politique, 2019, 432p.
- Caron, Caroline. « Les jeunes et l'expérience participative en ligne ». *Lien social et Politiques*, n° 71, 2014, p. 13-30. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1024736ar>
- Comfort, Suzannah Evans et Young Eun Park. « On the Field of Environmental Communication: A Systematic Review of the Peer-Reviewed Literature ». *Environmental Communication*, Vol. 12, n° 7, 2018, p. 862-875. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2018.1514315>
- Conroy, Meredith, Jessica T. Feezell, et Mario Guerrero. « Facebook and Political Engagement: A Study of Online Political Group Membership and Offline Political Engagement ». *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 28, n° 5, 2012, p. 1535-1546. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.03.012>
- Dahlgren, Peter. *Media and Political engagement, Citizens, communication and democracy*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 246p.
- . « Web et participation politique : quelles promesses et quels pièges ? ». *Questions de communication*, n° 21, 2012, p. 13-24. <https://doi.org/10.4000/questionsdecommunication.6545>
- [Denouel, Julie, Granjon Fabien et Aubert Aurélie. Médias numériques et participation. Entre engagement citoyen et production de soi. Pairs, Mare & Martin, 2014, 208p.](#)
- [Fenton, Nathalie et Barassi Veronica. « Alternative media and social networking sites : The politics of individuation and political participation ». *The Communication Review*, Vol. 13, n° 3, 2011, p. 179-196.](#)
- Fuchs, Christian. « Twitter and democracy : A new public sphere ? » in Fuchs C., *Social Media. A critical introduction*, Sage, Los Angeles, London, 2014, 304p.
- Glaser, Barney G. et Strauss Anselm L. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, New Brunswick, Aldine, 1967, 271p.
- Granjon, Fabien. « Résistance en ligne : mobilisation, émotion, identité ». *Variations*, Vol. 20, 2017, p. 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.4000/variations.819>

- Himmelboim, Itai. « Civil Society and Online Political Discourse: The Network Structure of Unrestricted Discussions ». *Communication Research*, Vol. 38, n° 5, 2011, p. 634–659. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210384853>
- Ion, Jacques. *La fin des militants ?*. Edition de l'Atelier, Paris, 1997, 124p.
- Marsh, David, O'Toole Therese, et Jones Su. *Young People and Politics in the UK. Apathy or alienation ?*. Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2007, 246p.
- Marwick, Alice E., et boyd danah. « I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately : Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience ». *New Media and Society*, Vol. 13, 2007, p. 115-133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313>
- Muxel, Anne. *L'expérience politique des jeunes*. Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2010, 190p.
- O'Neil, Brenda. « Indifferent or Just Different ? The Political and Civic Engagement of Young People in Canada ». *Political Science*, 2007, 48p.
- Pleyers, Geoffrey. *Alter-Globalization: Becoming Actors in the Global Age*. Polity, Cambridge, 2010, 316p.
- Pleyers, Goeffrey, et Capitaine Brieg. « Alteractivisme : comprendre l'engagement des jeunes ». *Agora débats/jeunesses*, Vol. 2, n° 73, 2016, p. 49-59. <https://doi.org/10.3917/agora.073.0049>
- Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, Massachusetts : Addison-Wesley, 1993, 480p.
- Roser-Renouf, Connie, Edward W. Maibach, Anthony Leiserowitz, et Xiaoquan Zhao. « The Genesis of Climate Change Activism: From Key Beliefs to Political Action ». *Climatic Change*, Vol. 125, n° 2, 2014, p. 163-178. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-014-1173-5>
- Roudet, Bernard. « Entre responsabilisation et individualisation : les évolutions de l'engagement associatif », *Lien social et politiques*, n°51, 2004, p. 17-27.
- Sedda, Paola. « La politisation de l'ordinaire. Enjeux et limites de la mobilisation numérique ». *Sciences de la société*, Vol. 94, 2015, p. 157-175. <https://doi.org/10.4000/sds.2521>
- Valenzuela, Sebastián, Arturo Arriagada, et Andrés Scherman. « The Social Media Basis of Youth Protest Behavior: The Case of Chile ». *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 62, n° 2, 2012, p. 299-314. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01635.x>
- [Wahlstrom, Mattias, Kocyba Piotr, De Vydt Michiel et De Moor Joost. « Protest for a future : Composition, mobilization and motives of the participants in Friday For Future climate protest on 15 March, 2019 in 13 European cities ». Retrieved from : <https://gup.ub.gu.se/file/207863> \(2019\). <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/XCNZH>](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01635.x)
- Wojcieszak, Magdalena E. et Mutz Diana C. « Online Groups and Political Discourse: Do Online Discussion Spaces Facilitate Exposure to Political Disagreement ? ». *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 59, n° 1, 2009, p. 40–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.01403.x>