

Developing Family-Based Eco-Citizenship with Social Media: A Mixed Methods Collective Case Study of Families Looking to Adopt Ecologically Responsible Actions Using Facebook

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Abstract : Leading an ecologically responsible lifestyle represents a difficult challenge. Though research in environmental education does point to an increase in the intention to act more responsibly towards the environment, this intent does not seem to translate to concrete ecological action. This mixed methods collective case study explores the adoption of ecological actions in the family, a context of socio-ecological transformation rarely examined in the scientific literature. More specifically, it takes into account the popular use of social media today to explore the potential role social media, namely Facebook, in promoting environmental action. In other words, for families who are intent on adopting an ecologically friendly lifestyle, could the use of Facebook positively affect the way family members relate to the environment and bring about real change in their daily household actions? To answer this question, twenty-one families living in an urban setting were recruited and then divided them into two distinct groups. The first group of families attempted to lower their household electrical bill as part of a private Facebook group, while the other aimed to do the same, but without the directed use of social media. For both groups, we recorded the amount of kilowatt-hours used during the project as well as the amount used for the same months the previous year, adjusting for temperature variations. Exit interviews were also conducted with each family in order to try to understand the processes of eco-citizenship development in the context of family. Results seem to suggest that both virtual social networks and one-on-one support can help to increase environmental awareness in participating family. Interestingly, families from the Facebook group seemed to demonstrate a higher degree of environmental engagement, and younger family members in this group were more active in the processes of collective behavioral change.

Keywords : environmental education, family-based eco-citizenship, social media, case study

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