



# Young People's Use of Social Networking Sites in Ireland

“Socially Anti-Social”

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### Abstract

There is little known about how and why most young people use online Social Networking Sites (SNS), from an Irish perspective. The purpose of this research dissertation is to present a qualitative study of online experiences of young people on social networking sites in Ireland. In this study 32 young people took part in two separate focus groups and semi structured interviews to explore their use of these SNSs. The voice of the young person was of vital importance throughout the research process. It was this voice that ensured that data relating to their media usage was from their perspective only and not that of the researcher. Herring (2008) maintains that media scholars view internet interactions through an adult lens and not that of the young person. Young people deem their media usage as quite ordinary and not in any way transformative. Results also indicate that young people use SNSs in a two-tiered manner. Facebook and Snapchat are the two most preferred sites. Facebook is used as a tool for surveillance of their networks and to “creep” on connections both within their network and outside their network. They engage with Facebook in a one-to-many method and this use of social media is seen in no way as transformative from the young person's perspective. They are both the author and the audience simultaneously on Facebook as they re-post content that they receive from connections in their network. Little time is spent in any meaningful way on Facebook, as most of their time on this platform is spent observing other's content rather than posting any original content themselves. Snapchat is used in a different way by young people. Young people communicate on this platform in a one-to-one method or a one-to-few method as the numbers of connections on Snapchat are considerably smaller than Facebook, with strong emotional ties to all connections on Snapchat.

These connections are friends in an offline environment and this platform is used for regular day to day communications. As these sites are used day to day they are taking shape as they develop, consistent with Baym (1995), who argues this environment should be understood to be organic. The use of these sites is discussed within the framework of Maffesoli's (1996) and Bennett's (1999) concept of tribes. These online social networks allow the introduction of the young person through public displays of connection to their peers (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Papacharissi, 2009). These and other online behaviours are investigated in this paper, including new behaviours such as back stalking (the act of re-surfacing old embarrassing content by commenting on their timeline) as discussed by Schoenebeck et al., 2016. Implications of the use of Social Networking Sites on the development of a young person's identity, peer relationships, online privacy and trust are discussed herein.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

*Whether we gain or not by this habit of profuse communication, it is not for us to say*

- Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 1922

The development of technology and subsequently the internet has had an impact on all aspects of society. In recent years the popularity of online social networking sites has developed to allow complete connectivity for young people to their networks. Technology has transformed the way information is transferred and shared with the introduction of new social media platforms, in real time and to a global audience. The Internet has transformed from being a source of information to a platform for communication across the globe. A social networking site (SNS) can be defined as an online platform that is used to build social networks with friends and other people that may share some of the same interests as the user that may or may not share a place based connection. Social networking sites represent new forms of communication and collaboration in modern society and have become a key feature in youth culture (Ito et al, 2008). Young people use SNS to present aspects of themselves to their network, while maintaining existing connections but also expressing their individuality (Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2010). Social Networking Sites support many types of connections and networks on various diverse platforms.

Young people have been socialised with the internet as part of their daily lives in contemporary culture. The generation that was born in the 1990s has grown up with the internet ever present and are more likely than previous generations to go online for their social interactions (Lenhart et al., 2005). Social networking sites are universally used by young people and they perceive these social networking sites to be a normal part of their daily routine.

The current embracing of digital media and social networking sites by young people is “happening in a unique historical moment, tied to longer term and systemic changes in sociability and culture” (Ito et al, 2008, p.1). In fact, these new attitudes and behaviours of young people regarding technology have been equated with the development of a large generational difference between young people and older generations and has led to the use of terms like ‘net generation’ (Tapscott, 1999), digital natives (Prensky,2006) and a ‘digital generation’ (Buckingham, 2006). There has been a new generation referred to when discussing technology – “Generation C”. This is a generation of people who integrate technology into their lives, regardless of their age. This cohort of people can share certain qualities online. This technologically advanced group can create and consume products in distinct ways. They can multi-screen from smartphone to laptop and engage in many different online platforms at the same time. However, Generation C are using these devices as tools to participate in an online world and they are not a passive audience as is the case with more traditional media such as print, television or radio.

The emergence of this new terminology referring to people online indicates that there are new types of behaviour and attitudes that young people are displaying that are distinct from older less technologically aware generations. Therefore, it is important that the effect of these digital technologies and social networking sites are examined in detail to understand how they affect youth culture. As this online environment changes quickly and sometimes privately, youth research online can be difficult to examine. Although there has been an increase in research of youth culture online, it has been difficult to stay abreast of these changes in online culture, specifically from an academic perspective.

Many previous studies examining the behaviour of youth on social networking sites, employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches of research to examine this online culture. Social Networking Sites have allowed the young person to self-represent themselves to many interconnected audiences. Boyd & Ellison (2007) argue that SNS are an important context for research scholars who investigate self-representation and performance management. In fact, Social Networking Sites provide many tools for the young person which can compromise their impression management and as the technology develops so will their ability to change their performance in line with a specific audience. However, there is a need for research that has examined youth culture relating to social networking sites from an Irish context. There is a gap in research studies that examine the attitudes of Ireland's youth in relation to social networking sites, especially considering that social networking sites such as Facebook attract almost two million users in Ireland (Eightytwenty, 2016). Specific research to date has focused on how friends connect and interact with each other (Boyd and Ellison 2008, Boyd 2007, Liu 2008) and online identity management has also become an area of academic research (Fraser and Dutta 2008, Boyd 2007).

Social Networking Sites constitute a rapidly growing area of research (Fraser and Dutta, 2008) and is increasing constantly in breadth and depth (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Youth research or research that is carried out with young people has many dimensions and can be described in many ways (Cieslik, 2001). Essentially, the function of youth research is to develop new theories and perspectives on the subject, add to the ideas that already exist and help in policy making into understanding the lives of young people (Cieslik, 2001). It can also be described as social research when it includes any process that collects and reports the views and experiences of children and young people (Alderson & Morrow, 2004).

Youth research has been significantly developing and evolving with transformations in the world environment, such as globalisation, new technological developments and cultural changes. Globalisation and technological advances have been particularly significant in influencing youth culture.

Technological advances, in particular, the Internet which has transformed the way young people talk, behave and has created new cultural spaces, such as social media, where social interactions are completed through messaging, likes and commenting on posts and shares. A new language has emerged from this new media, with words such as 'hashtag' and 'selfie'. These new cultural spaces have expanded the area for youth research. Ninety-four percent of young people in Ireland own a smartphone (Thinkhouse, 2014). These young people can often be understood to be the primary users of new technology. The behaviour of young people around technology is completely different to that of older adults, who have been introduced to these technological developments later in life (Herring, 2008). To explain this change in youth behaviour and attitudes, it has been argued that the future of youth research and studies will require new conceptual foundations, capable of bridging the gap between transitions and cultural approaches to examining youth (Bennett & Woodman, 2015).

This research examines the role of social networking sites in the development of youth culture in Ireland. This study also investigates how particular social networking sites have determined the behaviour and attitudes of young people in Ireland. This is achieved from the perspective of the young person and in their own words so that they can explain their experiences and interactions on social networking sites.

The purpose of the research study is not to evaluate how much time young people spend on sites or what smartphone they prefer, rather it is to hear their lived experiences online. The aim of the research is to take a ‘snap shot’ of how social networking sites are being used by young people in their everyday lives in their own words.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The overall aim of this research is to understand how the social networking sites are influencing youth culture in Ireland. More specifically, this research attempts to answer the following research questions.

- (i) How are young people engaging with social networking sites in Ireland?
- (ii) What is the nature of social interactions and connections on social networking sites and do these social interactions change on specific SNS platforms?
- (iii) Do social networking sites affect the self-representation of young people?
- (iv) Are there concerns regarding privacy on social networking sites?

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

The above aim has been accomplished by fulfilling the following research objectives:

1. Review of the existing literature concerning youth culture, both historically and in a contemporary context. Literature was also reviewed regarding media, audience theories and privacy online. This literature will be both international and national.
2. Research of the experiences of young people online through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. It is central to this study that the experiences of young people online are discovered through the young person and in their own words.

3. Comparison of findings from this research study to previous literature and to examine possible connections to long standing theories that were established in an offline setting.
4. Identification of further avenues for youth research in an online context for Ireland.

## **1.4 Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation has been divided into seven main chapters to give an overview of the background, literature, methodology, results and conclusions of the study. A summary of each of the chapters is given below.

Chapter One sets a brief background of the study introducing the research topic and explaining the purpose of this research. This chapter sets the research questions that this study will answer through research.

Chapter Two analyses the literature on youth research and youth culture that has been conducted previously. The chapter explains youth culture theories in detail so that a context to the study can be set.

Chapter Three analyses the literature from a media perspective on social networking sites and explains the relationship between youth and social media. The chapter explains how social networking sites have influenced the way people communicate and how the previous theories on media and identity can be applied to this new media.

Chapter Four explains the research approach and research methods that are used for the study. The data collection stages are described in detail along with the justification of why each of the research methods were chosen. The ethical considerations for the study are also discussed.

Chapter Five gives the results obtained from analysis of the data collected for the study. The chapter explains the results in certain key themes that emerged during the interviews and focus group discussions with the study participants.

Chapter Six discusses the results of the study and interprets them in the context of the previous theories and studies that were discussed in chapter two and three. This chapter is important in understanding how the behaviour of young people has changed because of social networking sites.

Chapter Seven is the final chapter of the dissertation that gives a summary of how the study was conducted and shows how the results of the study could achieve the research objectives. This chapter also gives suggestions for further research on this subject.



## **Chapter Two: Understanding Youth**

### **2.2 Introduction**

Youth research is a complex area of research that has many concepts and theories that should be examined before any study can be carried out in this field. This chapter reviews that history and subsequent development of youth research, what constitutes youth and the concepts that surround youth culture. The chapter begins with developments surrounding youth research and youth itself as a concept. This leads onto a discussion on youth culture, the evolution of youth culture and different theories associated with youth, such as functionalist and subcultural approaches. The theories of youth are further explained through various perspectives and understanding of previous literature. The concepts of tribe, scene and lifestyle which are developed in post-subcultural theories are also discussed as being of importance in this new digital age. An exploration of these previous research studies on this subject will offer a background to carry out this study and achieve the research objectives efficiently.

### **2.3 Youth as a Concept**

There are many reasons why a specific definition of youth is beneficial when considering the concept of youth, reasons such as informing social policy and developing the existing body of research into youth and youth culture. Researchers use a broad range of definitions to attempt to define what exactly constitutes “youth”. Youth as a concept is a relatively new one, only taking a seat at the sociological table in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The concept of youth first emerged in the context of psychological studies of adolescence in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century (Keniston, 1971).

This can be explained in part due to the rise of urbanised industrial societies which nullified the requirement for young children to be part of the labour force (Arnett 2006). This cultural change which also expanded leisure time allowed young people to become a separate entity from their parents. Institutions such as schools became locations where young people gathered in large numbers, matured amongst their peers and enjoyed this new experience of “leisure” time. In defining youth, the anthropologist Margaret Meade (1928) believed that it is our culture and socialisation process that ensures the concept of youth develops from one generation to the next. Meade asserts in ‘Coming of Age in Samoa’ (1928) that young people were not going through any period of stress but were coming to terms with maturing and developing new interests and activities. However, psychologist G Stanley Hall (1904) maintained that adolescence was indeed a difficult period to overcome with high levels of aggression and increased awareness of sexuality. This transition to adulthood was characterised by “confusion, trauma and upheaval” (Hall, 1904).

Definitions of youth have changed since the time of Hall and Meade, with some arguing that youth is now split into two distinct sections: adolescence and youth. Adolescence is considered ten to eighteen-year-olds, while youth may be defined as the eighteen to twenty-five-year-old age range. These new categories only serve to distort the distinctions between children, young people and adults (Ito et al., 2008). These changes in definition can also be linked to cultural changes in society and reflect the difficulties in specifying the exact parameters for the definition of youth. The United Nations for statistical purposes represents those persons between the ages of fifteen and twenty- four as youth.

However, in 2000 they also determined that the meaning of the term youth varies in different societies around the world, making a precise definition difficult (United Nations, 2013). They added that the definition of youth "is without prejudice to other definitions by the Member States" (UNDESA, 2014) indicating the importance of a country's individual culture when defining youth. With differing cultures, different interpretations of the concept of youth emerges. Jones maintains that as the world is changing, so does the very concept of youth (Jones, 2009 p. 24) commenting on the transitional nature of the definition of youth. Other academics such as Cieslik and Simpson (2013), maintain that youth can be defined as the transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. UNESCO (2016) state that youth is more of a fluid category rather than any fixed age group. This demonstrates an understanding of the individual differences in culture when defining youth and the age profile of the transition from childhood to adulthood. The introduction of new descriptive language such as "tween" (a term used to describe a young person between nine and twelve years old), may only add to the complexity of the discussion and the transformative nature of the concept of youth. Other contemporary terms such as millennial have also transformed in a short period of time. Once, referring to the generation born 1981 – 1997 (Pew, 2016), it has fragmented into two separate groups, namely, younger and older millennials. These new categories may only serve to distort the distinctions between children, young people and adults (Ito et al., 2008). Some argue that youth as a concept ends in the mid-twenties, with a new emergent adulthood developing before full adulthood is reached (Arnett, 2004). Arnett's (2000) concept of an emerging adulthood has been described as the period between eighteen to twenty -five where individuals are in a liminal space between childhood and adulthood.

This liminal space refers to the fact that the individual is in the middle stage of a ritual, where they no longer hold any pre-ritual status but have not begun the transition to the status (adulthood) they will hold when the ritual is complete (Hodkinson, 2007). This liminal space or emerging adulthood offers the young person more independence and freedom. Arnett (2000) argues that the young person has the space to change and explore issues that began to emerge during their adolescent phase such as love and their world views. This period of youth can be regarded as a liminal period of transition, characterised by insecurity, ambiguity and a state of 'not quite being' located in between childhood and adulthood, dependence and independence (Sibley 1995). This concept of having a transitional phase of emergent adulthood is an important concept in understanding the changing behaviour of youth during this phase. Arnett's (2004) definition of emergent adulthood during the mid-twenties is important to this study as the young people examined in this research fall within this age group. This is a period of emerging adulthood where young people continue to develop their own identity at a deeper level than as an adolescent (Arnett, 2000).

However, with the changing global economies and cultural practices, such as marriage and children now taking place later in life, youth can also be defined broadly regarding age (Cieslik & Simpson, 2013). Ito et al. (2008) maintain that youth is also increasingly defined through the commercial markets. Age as a factor has often been redrawn by marketing departments and can often cover a biological age up to forty years making the concept of youth a longer period in a person's life (Frith, 1993).

The category of teenager was similarly created by marketing companies from the 1940s and 1950s (Ito et al., 2008; Springhill, 1983). Giroux (2009) explains that all young people today are continuously exposed to market forces that try to commodify almost every aspect of a young person's life. In accordance with age as a factor in describing youth as a concept, work life in a cultural context was also important. The transition of young people into adulthood has been examined through many transitional theories in previous studies. These theories started with the understanding that the transition was from school to work. From the perspective of this study to understand the impact of social networking sites on transition of youth, this transition of age from young to old in modern day society, can now take place online and publicly.

These online platforms can serve as a public space, one whereby the young person assumes all the risk as they are no longer a dependent on a parent or guardian (Devlin, 2009). This sharing of their private life is now an acceptable part of public life on social media which also demonstrates the merging of the public and private life transitions among young people. This blurring of private and public life online can also mirror the blurring of the distinctions between youth and adulthood. There remains however, many definitions surrounding youth and the classification of youth itself in research. The many definitions provided herein only demonstrate the difficulties youth theorists and social policy makers have in classifying youth.

## 2.4 Youth and Culture

Youth and youth culture are inexorably linked throughout generations. Culture, as is youth is a “notoriously ambiguous concept” (Hebdige, 1979, p. 5). It refers to the processes by which symbolic systems are shared by groups of people in a geographically defined area. Culture has several often, contradictory meanings, and its ambiguity conceptually, is in its differing uses throughout history (Williams, 1961). Youth culture can be defined as a set of values and norms shared by young people that are distinctive from the mainstream culture of older generations. Youth practices that show distinctive styles, interests and behaviours are regarded as youth culture. Youth culture can also be defined as the processes in which industrial society detaches children from their families and prepares them for the wider social system (Frith, 1984). This youth culture, whose interests and behaviours can be observed on social networking sites, has a global aspect as geography is no longer an issue in the field of communications between young people. There are many perspectives when discussing youth culture, such as functional and cultural theories. A functionalist perspective of youth culture considers it as a way that young people can explore their social relationships and find their own identity during the transition from childhood to adulthood.

In this regard, youth culture is a way of life that includes ideas and all the material and social process around social relationships (Hall & Jefferson, 1975). Young people of the post-war generation were termed as the "new wave" and achieved a sense of momentum, a sense that life was moving forward (Jobs, 2007). Abrahams (1959) maintained that after World War II, young people became an important part of the economy due to their spending power, which not only provided another function in society but also created an unprecedented consumer market.

It was during this post war society that youth appeared as a new and developing category and was a fundamental expression of social change during that time (Hall & Jefferson, 1975). In fact, those years after the Second World War were marked by social and cultural change, with young people seen as an autonomous group to be targeted from a marketing perspective. There are many reasons for the emergence of a youth culture as a distinct category after World War II. Within the baby boomer generation (1946 – 1963) there was a demographic bulge (a stage of development where a country achieves success in reducing infant mortality but mothers still have a high fertility rate) increasing the population. Simultaneously, there was a rise in the leaving age for schools which also helped develop this new youth culture (Ito et al., 2008).

The idea of this new youth culture in contemporary society as a generation that is unified by its experiences is discussed by many academics, including Mannheim. Mannheim's work on explaining youth culture was a pivotal study in youth research that identified the emergence of a generational consciousness. Mannheim (1923) was concerned with the construct of youth and how young people viewed their lives as opposed to how the older generation considered theirs.

Mannheim's "generational consciousness" began with attitudes shaped by responses to social situations stating that once these views are shaped, they are capable of detaching from their "groups of origins" and becoming a new group with a generational style, due to shared and common experiences. These new groups now have a shared affinity with one another, capable of exercising appeal and a binding force (Hall & Jefferson, 1975, pp. 195-197).

Mannheim argues that these new groups now have shared common experiences within a defined geographical area and refers to these groups as “generation units” with the group having a shared consciousness (Mannheim 1952). Once the group has settled, it can develop a consciousness of its own and change and develop a new style of its own. Mannheim (1952) argues that people are significantly influenced by the "socio-historical environment" (such as notable events that actively involve them) which occur before their youth and cause them to become agents of change for the following generation. Mannheim (1952) argues that members of a generation are seen in ways that are not just linked to class, as youth often is but also to their location, history and culture. Class within these groups plays a part in how the young person is perceived, and how they understand situations themselves. These differing backgrounds can ensure that they do not become a homogenous grouping. This new group can develop a consciousness concerning the differences between their group and other groups, the generation gap and possible differences concerning social class.

Youth in contemporary society can be characterised as a generation unified by their experiences online and on social media. Mannheim’s understanding of youth culture provides an explanation for how young people can become aware of the generational gap. This generational gap between young and older generations can also play a specific and significant part in the development of the young person. The role or function that this generational consciousness can play in the lives of the young person can be numerous. This functional practice of youth as a concept is well documented.



## 2.5 Functionalist Theory and Youth

Functionalism is based on the works of sociologists such as Spencer, Parsons, Merton and Durkheim. According to functionalism, society is a set of interconnected parts, each playing their role in making that society work as a unit. Durkheim was particularly interested in how social order remains relatively stable, taking a macro view of society (Lee, 1983). This theory interprets each part of society regarding how it can contribute to the stability of society. Society is more than the sum of its components, like the human body, it has interrelated parts, where each social institution contributes essential functions in society. Functionalists focus on youth as a single form of culture. Within this functionalist school of thought, Eisenstaedt (1956), like Hall (1904), suggests that it is in fact culture that binds young people together, providing them with an outlet for any possible strife or tension in their lives. Shared social values are required to maintain cohesion and stability in the society. If there is ineffectiveness in the system itself, such as deviant behaviour, which may cause instability in society, that society must adjust to realise balance. Thus, the functionalist perspective of youth culture affirms that it is important to understand that embracing fashion, music and creativity all help the young person to explore their own identity, while defining themselves as an individual during the transition into adulthood (Brake, 2013).

Distinctive characteristics of youth culture can typically be amplified in relation to fashion and music as they can be less expensive and can develop to become part of a young person's culture (Petridis, 2014). If one area of society is dysfunctional or is challenged, it affects other areas within society creating social problems which can also lead to social change. The differing parts of society are comprised of social institutions all playing their part, designed to fulfil different needs of that community.

Institutions can include government, family, media, education and religion all of which serve an important function within society. For instance, the educational system offers functions within society which is, to educate young people (along with other attitudes and behaviours that are culturally required). The education system itself then becomes part of the socialisation process.

Sociologists have identified two types of functions (Merton 1968). Those are latent (unintended consequences) and manifest (intended consequences). An example of this is the school system, the manifest function is education and the latent function is school acting as a babysitter (Mooney, et al., 2007). As social media serves to connect people on a global scale, there are many functions that these online platforms can perform. The manifest function is the connection to whomever you want whenever you want, your profile is accessible to a world audience. The latent function which is not intended, can be a break down in your online community through negative comments and a dilution of privacy.

The functions of social media may be many, with the scope and reach of latent functions not necessarily understood in society due to the fast-paced environment that they inhabit. Social networking sites considered through the functionalist perspective can show both positive and negative functions for the young person.

## 2.6 Subcultural Theory and Youth

Following on from the functionalist perspective Subculture Theory is also observed within youth culture. Hall & Jefferson (2010) challenged the view that a general youth culture existed, and argued that Mannheim's theory both over emphasised and over simplified context and that even the possibility of a shared culture was misleading. They stressed that it was not just what young people got "in to" that formed the youth culture but rather there were different kinds of youth groups and social class was significant. The central theme of youth subculture is the relationship between social class and a young person's everyday lived experiences. A subculture should have certain characteristics, it must exhibit a distinctive shape and structure, must have certain material artefacts, values and behaviours that make them identifiably different from their "parent" culture (Hall & Jefferson, 1975, p. 13). These subsets are differentiated from their parent culture; they must also have values and behaviours that connect them to the wider society (Pearson, 1973; Hebdige, 1973).

The historical theorist Stephen Mitz (2006) argues that a youth subculture began in the mid- fifties, with the general concept expanded in the 1960s and 1970s (Roberts, 1978). Subcultural theories were built on the work of American sociologist Robert K Merton (1938) who adopted the theory of anomie to develop strain theory. This theory summarises the ways in which people are unhappy with their status or situation in life, particularly regarding their economic status and how they deal with the strain. It is not just restricted to those in the lower socio-economic classes. He asserts that anyone can become deviant, or conform to other groupings based on how they are feeling about society in general (Merton, 1938). There is a discrepancy between communities' goals and the appropriate means to achieve these targets for the individual.

Merton (1938) maintained that the differences between the cultural aims of the whole society may not be met by individual members of that society and can cause psychological strain for that individual. Merton's strain theory was developed further in 1955 by Cohen, who describes how even in the face of psychological unease, the individual will still maintain deviant behaviours as they give a new-found ease and contentment within the new subculture, which is consistent with Parson's theory. The University of Chicago researched subcultural theory between the 1920s and the 1940s, merging their academic work along with "functionalist theories of strain" (Williams, 2007 p.g. 573). The concept of subculture was advanced by the Chicago School and was a mechanism used to study patterns of social deviance (Merton, 1957). Although youth subculture was interrelated with deviance, it should be noted that early sociological research on youth subcultures in Chicago, concentrated only on the different aspects of youth (Williams, 2007). The Chicago-based research focused on the marginalised and the poor, within this demographic, issues such as crime and deviance came to the fore, and the subcultural concept became a useful theory in explaining the social challenges of the day (Williams, 2007). In this subculture theory, young people are recalcitrant in nature. The young person is trying to differentiate themselves from the world they inhabit.

This trying to differentiate themselves from the older generation can often be perceived by an older generation as a kind of transformative countercultural philosophy that needs to be shaped by older and more educated people (Fowler, 2008, Petridis, 2014). This need to differentiate themselves can be argued is a resistance to mainstream culture (Portfilio & Carr, 2010). This resistance to the parent culture, through fashion, dance and music can be identified in youth subculture, with groupings such as punks, goths (Ito et al., 2008).

Cohen (1955), argues that these new subcultures arise as people with the same issues and social problems come together. He maintains that there are now many more issues for the young person to deal with, such as new social factors that were not apparent before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cohen argues that working-class males who want to achieve success in the eyes of their mainstream culture cannot, due in part to educational failures. Frustration sets in, and there is little chance for development. Cohen maintains that this can lead them to reject the norms and values of the wider society and become part of a delinquent society. Unlike Cohen, Merton argues that with this status frustration they can turn to crime and as they develop within this group, they can achieve success. Within this subculture, the crime itself is not of any significance, rather the respect it can garner that had been unattainable in wider society. That psychological strain may result in the individual rejecting mainstream cultural ambitions which can in turn cause the formation of certain subcultures (Williams, 2007).

It was not until the late 1960s and into the 1970s when the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Britain took a subcultural approach to the study of working class youth (Sparks, 1998). The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was a proponent of critical ethnographic studies (Fishman, 2010). The CCCS developed a subcultural approach to youth culture as changes to the social environment (employment, local community re-development) occurred. It should be noted however, that these subcultural studies that took place in the CCCS only served to investigate the emergence of subculture in Britain after World War II and did not examine other subcultures such as those discussed in Chicago.

Subculture is specifically more concerned with the differences between young people based on their class rather than any age bracket. Working class subcultures are clearly “*articulated, composite structure – often near quasi-gangs*” (Hall & Jefferson, 1975, p. 60). Subcultures have specific characteristics, such as Punk using style to make a statement. Teddy Boys wore Edwardian clothing to show their contempt for the upper classes. The CCCS argues that not only did the young people want to differentiate themselves from a working-class culture they came from but they also wanted to distinguish themselves from the ruling elite. The CCCS maintain that subcultures experience the same type of problems as others in society but approach them in different ways. Subculture, the CCCS argue, was more to do with resistance to cultural hegemony than any other theory or strain the individual was experiencing. Hegemony works through ideology “*it does not consist of false ideas, perceptions, definitions*” (Hall & Jefferson, 1975, p. 39). These subcultures provided a symbolic resolution to working class youth (Clarke et al., 1976).

This symbolic resolution is purely that – symbolic and does not enhance their situation (working class) or life chances in any way. It is argued that hegemony is maintained by inserting the lower class into key institutions and structures that ultimately support the ruling elite. As some degree of consent is required to retain the status quo, these institutions can become the site of a class struggle. Marx (1979) suggests that the role of hegemony is to reproduce these categories, such as the lack of choices (or perceived lack) in the educational system for working class young people. The classes are continually “*birthed*” in their class of origin, be that the dominant ruling elite or the subordinate working class form.

In the educational system, Gramsci (1992) maintains that states use education and regulation to teach the ways of everyday life, to (or intending to) maintain the status quo with regards to the hegemonic ideology of the day. Gramsci (1992) contends that hegemony is how the dominant social class can maintain its position. This power struggle between the older and younger generation and indeed the classes can lead to young people finding commonalities and new subcultures. With changing forms of subcultural expression, the work of the CCCS still requires scrutiny today. Working class people for a sociological definition, act as an actual labour force and a potential labour force, and it is this that determines their social situation and structures and relationships, not their youth (Corrigan & Firth, 1975).

A study in Britain by Bernstein (1970) suggested that “*working class children are in effect, disadvantaged not just socially but also in schools*” (Atkinson, 2015, pp. 292-294). This research was followed up by an American study by Bowles and Gintis (1976) that maintained schools are institutions that teach young people their place in society. Paul Willis (1977) completed a study where he argued that it is the culture and values that surround working class children (twelve boys in the study) that informs them of their life choices. They in fact rally against the school system and create a subculture in their choices of behaviours, such as smoking and drinking to shore up their beliefs around working class values. This concurs with the view that Cohen (1972) held about educational failures, of there being little chance of development for working class young people. The French Sociologist Bourdieu's (1984) research demonstrated that a young person's life chances were dependent on such factors as their parent's occupation and level of education. He argues that those that are in a lower class never have the same opportunities as those that belong to a higher social class.

The CCCS had taken a Marxist perspective on subculture and focused on class and class conflicts as opposed to youth as a group. The CCCS maintained that the British subculture that was emergent was predominately working-class youths trying to extricate themselves from the culture they found themselves in (Williams, 2007). Hebdige (1979) maintains that subcultures are “authentic” as they represent a fundamental resistance to mainstream culture. Although they may not necessarily be region specific, subculture can develop when a critical mass of equally marginalised individuals is achieved in a specific geographical area, a subculture may emerge. However, it is noted in Cloward & Ohlin (1960) that particular types of subcultures tend to emerge in specific regions.

### 2.6.1 Criticisms of Subculture Theory

There are criticisms of the CCCS and subculture. Fowler (2008) argues that in fact young people in a subculture of, for example, punk are nothing more than a consumer who are targeted as a new demographic by older, more educated business men. Brake (1985) posits the notion that youth subcultures themselves are in fact an illusion, that youth trick themselves in their apparent rebellious acts and are merely trying to differentiate themselves from the previous generation. It has been suggested that no subculture has provided an escape from a working-class background, no matter the subculture or group, they are still working class (Brake, 1980). CCCS theorists recognise that there are developments within the concept of subculture. Namely, that there is a difference between subculture and deviant behaviour (Cohen, 1972). Other issues surrounding the idea of subculture include the sampling of young people that are researched.



Most young people never became part of any subculture and as such they are not indicative of a general youth culture. Those that were part of a subculture also may not have necessarily joined that group as a form of resistance (Williams, 2007). Academics such as Bennett (1999), Moore (2002) and Kahn-Harris, (2004) have criticised the CCCS studies, with others such as Hodgkinson (2002) arguing for its relevance today. Criticisms that the CCCS was Anglo-centric, although youth in Post-War Britain had certain freedoms the previous generation did not, they were inevitably never free of class structures when buying into these new commodities (Bennett, 1999).

Other criticisms included fragmentation and diversity around gender roles; which were argued to be around culture and socialisation as opposed to biology. Males were predominantly researched in subcultures by the CCCS as there were few females immersed in subculture which may distort research findings. McRobbie maintains that the female individualization is nothing more than a pretence that reinforces masculine hegemony (Atkinson, 2015). McRobbie (1980) asserts that subculture research was only interested in what happened on the streets, that there were no sociologists that cared what happened to the punk or the mod once they left the road and entered the confines of the family home. There is an argument to be made that subculture only happens "out in the street", and is not as important as what happens most of the time in a young person's life (Clarke et al., 1976). Resulting from the concept of subculture post subculture emerged as a concept to further research culture in a contemporary environment.

## 2.7 Post Subculture

Subculture is understood to be outdated in contemporary society and most academics believe more innovative and updated concepts should be investigated. The term post subculture was introduced as a conceptual framework for explaining youth and young people in culturally changing times. There is a “post sub-cultural turn” in the study of youth culture (Muggleton 2003, Bennett 2004). Bennett (1999) argues that the concept of a subculture can be problematic due to the rigid lines of differences between subcultures, which may imply a more stable group than often is the case. Within this culturally changing environment Bennett (1999) argues that even the term subculture has become so diluted, that it is a catch-all term for any analytical perspectives concerning any young person, their music or style. The term post subculture was first coined by Steve Redhead in 1990 to theorise and understand the possible breakdown of older subcultural divisions in cultures such as music. However, it was Muggleton (2000) that worked on and developed the theory into a more mainstream one.

Muggleton (2000) maintains that post subculture comes into its own in the 1980s and 1990s after years of fragmentation of other cultures and revivals of older ones. Bauman (1995) argues that this post subcultural turn highlights the possibilities and challenges that surround young people and their identity formation. Muggleton et al., (2003) indicate that core texts concerning post subculture theory, although having differing theoretical frameworks, ultimately contain a thematic unity which acknowledges the work of the CCCS, as a starting point for academics. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that the post subcultural turn can also be referred to as a post CCCS turn.

The development of post-subcultural theory has seen a range of frameworks employed to try and explain characteristics surrounding youth culture in modern society. While there are situations where subculture may still be relevant as a concept, there are times where it is not. Many academics and scholars have developed the concept of subculture further.

There are three accepted theoretical approaches that can replace subculture theory (Muggleton, 2003). These are: Maffesoli (1996) who introduces us to the idea of urban tribes, Bourdieu (1994) who introduces us to the concept of taste and Butler (1990;1993) who introduces the concept of "performativity" while constructing identity. It is the concept of tribes, where the focus is on fluidity that Bennett (1999) develops the concept further. It is this concept of tribes and the fluidity that surrounds the relationships and groups online that will be reviewed in this research.

## 2.8 Tribes

Bennett (1999, 2005) proposes the term “tribe” as an alternative to subcultural theory, he draws on Maffesoli’s (1996) concept of neo-tribes. Youth identities have become more reflexive, fluid and fragmented due to an increased amount of choice and therefore individualisation of the young person. Miles (1995) also argues that we have moved from a rigid and unified subculture in youth to one of individualism and competing styles. Bennett argues that the concept of subculture is “*unworkable as an objective analytical tool, for youth, music and style*” Bennett, (1999, p.599-p.617). He explains that subculture which is linked to social class is too rigid and fixed, that in today’s modern society notions of fluidity are characteristic of groups that have come together with the same taste in music and style. He offers the concept of “tribe” as being a framework to examine the relationships between youth, music, style and identity for the young person.

Previously, Maffesoli (1996) also argued that groups are no longer formed along rigid and unchanging lines, such as gender and class as they once were. There is importance placed on the “social”, as social networks are formed as young people move away from what they perceive to be mass media. Within neo tribes there is an emotional connection to each other within the group. These tribes according to Bennett (1999; 2000) can capture the sense of fluidity and hybridity that exists in youth culture today, particularly online. Tribes can work together, and young people can move between them with no great difficulty. Although Robards and Bennett (2011), maintain that there is a partial sense of belonging, or indeed belonging to many different groupings online, which demonstrates a clear post subcultural trend emerging in the reflexive construction of a young person’s identity online.

Robards and Bennett (2011) also argue that there are certain characteristics online that are more strongly aligned to subculture and there are also certain characteristics online that are more closely aligned with neo-tribalism than with any form of subculture. They argue that neo-tribalism which was proposed by Maffesoli (1996) and developed by Bennett (1999, 2000, 2004) there remain certain instances where neo tribalism is insufficient to describe online sociality. Tribes online can be defined as extremely active and participatory (Harfoush, 2016). Indeed, within the digital culture surrounding tribes, where there is a shared history within the group they can use specific jokes and shorthand within that group (Harfoush, 2016). Tribes online can similarly be described as those groups with high intimacy and long-term engagement. Participants in tribes are found to be highly engaged in the group and very active on all posts within that group as they place importance on the building of social networks. An example of a tribe online is one that has a connection of some sort, either focused on a particular activity such as a sports team or are engaged at an emotional level (Harfoush, 2016). These tribes can be seen to bridge the gap between offline and online mediated spaces such as Facebook or Snapchat as the connections can be considered more emotional. With smaller more fluid groups emerging, that have common interests which can help to maintain group dynamics as individuals strive to find new meaning in their lives. A shared social meaning or experience within a tribe is of far greater importance than individuality for some members of the group. What has now become culturally acceptable to that group (neo-tribe) only serves to strengthen the group. Bennett (1999) asserts that neo-tribes are not held or forced together because of class or gender but are held together because they have a shared sense of taste and a shared desire to be part of that group. He argues that certain music and styles can form a “sociality” rather than any particular fixed subcultural grouping.

McDonald (1999) maintains that struggles around subjectivity in tribes can lead to issues around the young person building their identity. McDonald (1999) argues that these tribes have morphed into “micro cultures” which tend to appear around leisure activities and personal experiences.

Bennett (2000) maintains that through a young person’s consumption patterns, it can allow the individual to create new socialites. It is through their consumer habits that a young person can express their individuality, especially through the online social networking environment. The concept of tribe many explain why young people are members of specific groups online and how they move between those groups in a fluid manner. A virtual community has been created by the young person themselves as they choose which groups to be members of online.

There have been, however, criticisms of Bennett’s concept of tribes, Bennett in his 2005 article "In defence of Neo-tribes" had to concede to criticisms from both Blackman and Hesmondhalgh that consumerism should not be "celebrated", rather it is an important means of how an individual can make decisions on how they want to form their social identity. Nilan and Feixa (2006) did however, contend that subcultural theories do not allow for the growing diversity and increasing global nature of youth consumption that young people experience today.

## 2.9 Scene, Lifestyle & Style

It could be argued that the concept of scene has become increasingly popular with academic literature. The scene can be defined as "transcending particular locations". Unlike subculture, your class or gender is not a factor in your new social community – your musical taste or your aesthetic choices are what brought people of different backgrounds together. This theory is rooted in popular music and youth, and *'this connection between the two has led to the concept of scene as an object of interest'* (Hesmondhalgh, 2005, p. 22). Scene is also fluid and does not depend on a geographical area to become a space for social connections. Originally introduced by Weber and developed by theorists such as Giddens in the 1990s, lifestyle as a concept garnered renewed interest in the 1990s due in part to the cultural turn as increased consumerism became a basis for the construction of identities. Giddens (1991) referred to this as "reflexive modernity". Bennett (2011) maintains that David Chaney developed this concept even further. Chaney differentiated between lifestyle and ways of life. He argued that lifestyles depended on "consumer competence" whereas "ways of life" was more fluid and the patterns of social norms within that community were shared. Contemporary theorists such as Miles (1995, 2000) agreed with this framework to examine cultural consumer patterns concerning young people.

Subsequent to Miles, Hodkinson (2004) argues that although there is a fluidity to the post subculture theory within postmodernity, there is a place for the more fixed and conventional subcultural perspectives about specific groups, such as goths. When subcultures, such as punks and goths, seek to understand the society they are in; conflict becomes routine. The manner in which this conflict is articulated Hebdige calls "style".

Subcultures carve meaning from the dominant narrative of society around them Phil Cohen (1972). Although, the genesis of these subcultures such as punk are questioned by Clarke (1981) who argues that they did not generate from a working-class background, rather they were developed through the “art school” population. The style that is part of the subculture is found in four distinct areas. These are dress, music, ritual and argot (or slang) within the group (Cohen, 1972). Punk style and fashion were appropriated by the fashion industry and then replicated for the mass media (Hebdige,1977). Hebdige (1977) uses both structuralist and Marxist concepts to understand youth culture.

Society, as presented by Hebdige (1979) is a complicated system with dependent parts, with the significance of people, places and things defined by a dominant consensus. This represents the way in which capitalism defuses dangerous youth sub-cultures. As subculture was normally identified in leisure time, it was in this leisure time that style came to the fore.

Style is a cumulative process drawn from two areas. One being the "situated" class culture that inhabits the family and the other the local neighbourhood, to the "mediated" symbols that tend to be given over by the entertainment industry (Murdock & McCron, 1975). CCCS theorists believe that the significance of style can be seen in how it can be used to solve problems (Williams, 2007). In describing what style is Clarke (1975) argues that it is the "re-ordering and re-contextualization of objects to create fresh meaning" (Clarke,1975 p. 177). Studying clothing has been commonplace in subcultural studies, as the distinctiveness is easily recognised in everyday life (Williams, 2007). In “Style” Clarke (1975) asserts that when something is created from a diverse range of things, a discourse had begun over time.



To preserve their working-class identity, it is argued that punks used bricolage (an object that has a certain meaning for the dominant culture is taken and given new meaning by a subculture) to show their resistance to capitalism. However, when the bricoleur changes the established use to one where the object may be worn differently or in a different manner, a new discourse is constituted (Clarke, 1975). Clothing can be a form of distinctive individuality (Muggleton, 2002). However, this common style can generate a collective identity that is experienced within the subculture itself (Brake, 1985).

## 2.10 Conclusion

This chapter explained the concept of youth culture and subculture in detail, along with the historical context and relevant theoretical theories related to them. Youth culture theories can give different perspectives about why and how youth culture has developed and evolved and the difficulties youth researchers have in defining youth into any particular category. These concepts can also explain why young people behave in the way that they do. Youth culture theories can give insights and understanding into the behaviour of youth and how they express themselves. The concept of tribes, one that emphasises the fluidity and reflexivity of young people today is particularly interesting in explaining social connections on social networking sites. Subcultural theory although useful in certain instances online, neo-tribalism is more beneficial conceptually when describing social interactions and connection online. The young person can negotiate these tribes online by staying connected through mutual interests and emotional connections. The next section will examine media concepts and theories that relate to young people, both in a historical context and a contemporary one.

## **Chapter Three: Media**

### **3. 2 Introduction**

After discussing theories of youth in the previous chapter, this chapter describes the various theories and studies that are related to young people and the media, both traditional and new media. This chapter begins with an introduction to how technology has changed the way we communicate with each other in society and a discussion whether this new communication has impacted on youth culture. Online behaviour is explored in relation to how young people are interacting with each other and how their attitudes are evolving. The chapter then moves on to examine some of the central concepts and issues related to social media and the youth culture young people inhabit. These include online surveillance, privacy, representation, identity, audience and an evolving online language.

There has been a significant advances in the way people communicate. In particular, how we communicate with each other over the internet and on social networking sites. Communication using the internet can include email, private messaging, texting and interacting on different social media sites (Lenhart, 2015). These online social media or networking sites began in the late 1990s and have gained widespread use by 2003 (Boyd, 2008). Indeed, the online phenomenon that are Social Networking Sites (SNS) continues to grow in popularity (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Media use provides a significant background for the social, emotional and cognitive development of youth, which can account for a sizeable portion of their time (Roberts, Foehr & Rideout, 2005). Although Social Networking Sites are increasingly becoming the focal topic in the communications area, academia has been slow to keep pace with this growth (Beer, 2008). These Social Networking Sites are designed to cultivate social interaction in an online environment.

Young people today inhabit an increasingly complex mobile and technologically advanced environment. Every technological development coincides with changes in what it means to be a human being and pushes the psychological borders that divide the unconscious and conscious mind from the world outside (Mendelson, 2016). Mendelson (2016) argues that although these intentional changes are not necessarily mirrored in technological advancement, technology has been quietly changing many aspects of the world that we live in.

Holmes (2005) maintains that these new technological transformations paved the way for a "second media age" which would see new media flourish and a departure from traditional media such as television, radio and print. The First Media Age centered around a small number of elites who spoke to many, as is theorised in Lazarsfeld's Two Step Flow model. This model of communication argues that ideas and content that are generated by the mass media flow to opinion leaders and are then communicated from these opinion leaders to the wider society. In this digital age with such platforms such as Facebook where many young people obtain information from online videos from celebrities, the celebrities can be identified as opinion leaders on social media sites influencing the wider youth culture, also known as social influencers. It was not until the digital revolution that the rate and scale of this shift became apparent. With rapid change in the online environment, there has also been a rapid shift in the offline environment. Postman (1992) offers some insight into how society and technology are merging into one another. Postman's argument originates from the premise that the uses of technology are determined by its characteristics –it is not only cultural, but also how we think about technology.

Postman (1992) explains that culture itself looks to technology for authorization, finds happiness in that technology and eventually takes its orders from technology. Postman (1992) claims that once introduced; each technology "plays out its hand" meaning that the user becomes part of the technology itself, therefore, becoming a blessing as well a burden on the user. Cultural and social factors play a major role in how these new technologies are used and developed. The loosening of boundaries that are prevalent in mass media may be transferred to online social networking sites, with privacy being diluted, time online not checked (due to technology such as mobile devices) or type of programming that is being watched (Postman, 1992). The impact of these weak boundaries is becoming less fixed, and can change cultural and social constructs within the area of youth cultures. With the rate of cultural change, Luke (2005) maintains that there is little research that connects the political and fundamental philosophical reading of these online mediated spaces.

Research, however, has been undertaken in many sectors, such as how people connect with friends on Social Networking sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Liu, 2008; Tong et al., 2008). Rather less, however, has been written about the significance of the personal, private spaces in young people's lives (Hodkinson and Lincoln, 2007). Boyd and Ellison (2007) argue that social networking sites are an important research area, in context, for investigating the process of impression management, self-presentation and indeed, friendship performance.

### 3.3 The Media and Society

The media systems are “one of society’s key set of institutions, industries and cultural practices” (Masteram, 2001, p. 16). Media are a significant influence in youth development, with young people spending over six hours per day engaged with media (Roberts et al, 2005). The dominant form of communication of the time carries with its many assumptions about the world around us – in effect, communication itself creates reality (Press & Williams, 2010). Media today, much like generations before, has become part of our cultural lives (Press & Williams, 2010). Still photography, the radio, television all developed into media for the masses and became a commercialised entity. This commercialisation took place just as leisure time was becoming culturally acceptable and the technology became more accessible to wider groups within society (Poser, 2011). As these changes were happening in society, the media mirrored these transformations and in some cases encouraged certain forms of leisure (Horgan, 2012). This mirroring of culture allows us to see ourselves as how we really are through a lens such as entertainment shows. Some scholars rightly argue that media is not only innocuous entertainment, but is reflective and constitutive of cultural conversations about our most intimate values, beliefs, ideas and confusions” (Press and Williams, 2001).

In line with Horgan (2012) and Press and Williams (2001) , Couldry (2003) when discussing central media such as television, print and radio states that the media become the way we see ourselves connected to the world we live in. In effect, media can reflect who we are as a people culturally at any given time in our history. Cultural norms of the time can be reflected on screen to a general audience, such as reality shows.

From a sociological point of view, there are many theories to explain and understand media and society. There are three main perspectives on the role of mass media (Dean, 2010). The first is Limited Effects Theory. This theory maintains that the audience will only decide what to watch based on their pre-existing beliefs. They will watch whom they feel most comfortable with. The second, Class Dominant Theory, argues that the media is in fact controlled by the elite - by corporations and big business. It maintains that news content is decided upon by those who are in power. The third of these perspectives is the Culturalist Theory. This theory combines the limited effects theory and class dominated theory. It is the newest theory, created and developed in the 1980s and 1990s. It maintains that the audience is no longer passive, they can interact with media as they wish and create their meanings from the images and messages that they receive. It is within the parameters of culturalist theory that will be employed in this thesis as social media has two-way interaction.

Contemporary society has undergone radical social change in recent years, McLuhan describing this period as an historical epoch, different from all other societies (McLuhan, 1994 [1967]). Postmodernists consider that conventional sociology is no longer relevant in today's world. This postmodern society can potentially offer more freedom to the young person in deciding how they make personal choices (Bennett, 2000). This new freedom can be exploited through new technology and in effect can change the way a young person views their own changing identity, both from a symbolic and cultural perspective. In the past, identity was based on structure, stability and a sense of place; you knew who you were. Castells (1996) argues that people's identities were once shaped by their occupation, gender, social class in modernity.

In today's postmodern society there is a perceived lack of structure, with each individual responsible for the construction of their own identity. It is not important how a person earns their money, but rather how they spend it; a person can define who they are by the choices they make in their buying power (Bennett, 2000). With a new sense of buying power, brands become a lifestyle statement on social media sites. New media has followed traditional media into a commercial arena. There is however, intrinsic value in the symbolic value of the brand on SNS. Vloggers and brand ambassadors (bloggers and vloggers) frequently make the most influential lists or “one to watch” lists in traditional media.

Indeed, the increasing popularity of blogging, or keeping a web based log has received considerable attention both among academics and journalists alike (Herring et al 2004). However, the day to day communication between young people on Social Media Sites is changing at a rapid pace, due to the developments in technology but also how young people are using the technology to communicate with each other and wider circles of friends. The era of social media has added many ways to communicate, with both text and visual choices available on most sites.

Young people have migrated to an online environment to connect with their friends and family (Boyd, 2014). In fact, Social Networking sites, with the noted exception of dating sites are most often used to connect with people that are already known to the young person offline, rather than meeting new people (Lampe, Ellison & Steinfield, 2007; Lenhart & Madden, 2007). This virtual space has changed the way young people express themselves, communicate and behave.

This online virtual space can be an area where these social interactions can address concerns that the young person may have in the phase of emerging adulthood such as friendships and peer to peer interactions. Some academics have drawn parallels with the online mediated space of social networking sites and the physical world of the young person's bedroom, in that both are deemed to be a private personal space (Hodkinson and Lincoln 2008). Academics such as Chandler and Roberts-Young (1998) and Walker (2000) maintain that although these online mediated spaces are public, it is the way that a young person controls that space that can replicate the status of their bedroom online. Hodkinson and Lincoln (2007) rightly concludes that this personal space, whether it be physical similar to the bedroom or virtual, such as online, these spaces can play an important and enabling role for the young person in the context of their symbolic social identity at a time when this liminal period of their life is uncertain and complicated. Hodkinson and Lincoln (2007) successfully argue that although primarily for socialisation purposes, online social networks should be recognised as not just online generic global sites, but rather sites with a more personal connection for the young person, as each time the site is visited the young person has rendered it into their own personal private space. This space is no less important than their offline environment and as such, acts as a crucial forum for social interactions. Although the young person may use their bedroom as a safe space to escape their world, their bedroom is in fact no longer an isolated space (Brown, Dykes, Steele and White 1994, Lincoln 2004).

These evolving mediated public spaces and their popularity among young people can change, as each new social networking site can gain popularity over another. Young people adapt to these new sites and technologies while at the same time learning new and acceptable ways to communicate with their friends on specific platforms.



Thus, this change of application of site can lead to a change in online behaviours and attitudes of young people (Lichy, 2012). Although youth research analysing the actions and attitudes of youth in face to face communication is quite complicated, social networking sites can further add to difficulties examining young people due to the perceived private nature of the interactions online.

### 3.4 Social Networking Sites

The term “digital native” is a widely-used term used to define young people that grew up with technology and was coined by the American author Marc Prensky in 2001. These digital natives are part of the taken-for-granted social and cultural fabric of learning, play and social communication (Ito et al., 2008). Baym (1995) argued that this virtual online community should be understood as emergent and taking shape somewhat organically as it grows. There are many reasons a young person will use SNS, such as to present aspects of themselves to those that they are connected to online. The young person can decide their own interests online by following certain pages and as such and establish and negotiate their own identity (Liu, 2007). As young people can be described as prolific communicators, they gravitate toward activities that encourage and strengthen social interaction (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). There are many social networking sites varying in both in popularity and content, with a personal profile visible depending on site and user discretion (Boyd, 2000). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Pinterest are some of the more well-known social media sites. Profile information of the user is clearly intended for others to read and as such can express a young person’s identity.

The importance of these social networking sites to both the public can be demonstrated with companies such as Microsoft purchasing the professional online networking site, LinkedIn for over 26 billion dollars (Microsoft, 2016) and Facebook purchasing Instagram in 2012. A study from Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe (2007), maintain that young people are engaged with Facebook on average between ten to thirty minutes daily. Today that number in Ireland alone is close to two million users logging on every day and it remains one of the largest social Networking sites (Kane, 2015). Snapchat is an application that is used to send pictures, which only last ten seconds on the receivers' screen and then gets deleted by the application itself.

Along with the popularity of social networking sites, technology itself has also advanced. This can be demonstrated as internet services are now available through phone service providers, and users can use social networking sites through applications on their smartphones. Statistics from Dublin-based research firm Statcounter show that Ireland has the highest penetration of phone internet users anywhere in Europe, North America or South America (Weckler, 2016). The amount of web traffic on mobile devices is almost a third higher than our nearest neighbour, Britain (Weckler, 2016). A 2015 Ipsos MRBI poll show that over half of the Irish population use social media every day, mostly on mobile devices as opposed to laptops or personal computers. This usage is expected to grow rapidly as those on older devices upgrade to larger handsets (Norton, 2016). Social Networking account ownership increased across all platforms up to January 2016 (Weckler,2016). Facebook accounts for sixty-three percent in account ownership, which does not include daily interactions with other sites.

The popularity of social networking sites continues to grow, and the available evidence seems to suggest that there will be no slowdown in the popularity of social networking sites from an Irish perspective anytime soon. With this growth of social networking sites, the distinction between traditional media and online media has blurred somewhat.

Online media is now just as commercial as traditional media such as print, advertising and followers online are now just as important as circulation, viewers or listenership figures of traditional media. Flew (2009) has criticised advocates of this commercialisation of media, in that they are still following McLuhan's (1964) theory by seeing the worth of technological advancement rather than its content. Indeed, Susan C. Herring describes how most adults "create and regulate the media technologies consumed by young people and profit financially from them", (Herring 2008 p. 4). Herring (2008) also makes the point that media scholars view the internet through an adult lens – they see the usage of the internet in an unprecedented way, one that is almost transformative.

### 3.5 Online Communities

Young people use online based communities for many different reasons. Some of these reasons are to share a public sphere to discuss careers and professional matters as well as maintaining their social connections. Social Networking Sites are used mainly for social interactions with friends from their offline network rather than making new online friendships (Ellison et al, 2007) These social connections on social media networks are forming new public spheres (Polterman, 2014).

A public sphere can be defined as an area of social or online life, where people can come together to discuss issues of the day, to effect change (Habermas, 1991, [1962]). Habermas (1991) maintained that this sphere is where society engages in critical public debate. On social networking sites, the digital public sphere is regarded as a public sphere one, that although acts quickly, can be polarising and ultimately has a short - term action (Polterman, 2014).

Besides the public sphere, there also exists a private sphere, online these public and private spheres can overlap and intersect. This merging of public and private spheres on mediums such as television have the “greatest impact on those that grow up with it” (Meyrowitz, 1985 p. 137). In an online environment, this can mean that subjects that once were only discussed offline and face to face with trusted members of the group now are visible on sites such as Facebook. These interactions now take place in a sphere (social media groups) that is available for all to see (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Young people allow access to their most private details online. As such, their public sphere has morphed into publicised privacy on social networking sites due to changing cultures and accepted behaviours on social networking sites (Polterman, 2014). This may be explained as certain studies suggest a young person today does not differentiate between online and offline communication (Boyd, 2014), when studying online social networking and youth, no major distinction should be made, as the young person does not make a distinction themselves. These spheres online for the young person at least, seem to have developed into one and the same, much like the blurring of distinction between traditional media and social media, these spheres seem to also have merged into one another with no clear rules or regulations (culture) to separate them online.

### 3.6 Young People and Online Media

Masuda (1985) predicted that the information society would be a new type of society, entirely different from the industrial society. The information technology revolution is also seen as transformative of our material culture by the works of a new technological paradigm organised around these new information technologies (Castell, 1997). Moreover, the mobile environment has become part of our everyday lives (Press & Williams, 2010). As part of our everyday lives, electronic media not only impacts young people, but will also reshape future generations' perception of how young people lived their lives (Buckingham, 2008). Young people are effectively chronicling their lives by recording/photographing events which remain online forever, with public access to a potential global audience. In effect, recording an event has become part of the event itself for the young person (Boerdam & Martinius, 1980). Young people have interfaced with social media to such an extent that Boyd (2008) asserts that social media itself has become an integral part of their social environment. As an integral part of their social environment, young people are often seen as experienced users of new technology and therefore more likely to live their lives on public fora as a result (Ito et al., 2008).

Corsaro (2011) rightly maintains that young people are at the forefront of staying abreast of the evolving digital technology. Young people have embraced online social media and created new cultures from which to operate in. Although not all of these new fora are a positive experience for the young person. Suziki & Calzo, (2004) found that many users spend time "lurking" or reading other people's posts without replying or getting involved (liking) the post in any way.

In addition to any negative experiences online Boyd (2008) argues that young people can also find online opportunities, to increase their popularity among friends and followers. This, it could be argued are why young people are using several different sites. An example of these specific opportunities can be demonstrated by examining popular social networking sites and specific accounts on Facebook or Instagram. These sites that have compelling content can have large groups of fans leading to increased visibility and reputation for the account holder. Many young people today have their own YouTube Channel (Sabur, 2015), showing beauty tips, hair care or any other subject they want to cover, which may ultimately lead to professional opportunities for the young person. With these new opportunities, online, young people are known for being early users or influencers on social media (Tucker, 2011).

Young people do not wait until they are in their teenage years to develop an understanding of technology (Corsaro, 2011). They are exposed to this at an early age by, initially their parents and subsequently school and peer groups. Due to this early digital socialisation, pre-adolescents and adolescents are also at the forefront of a constantly changing digital technology (Corsaro, 2011). Corsaro (2011) also maintains that sixty-four percent of eight to eighteen-year-olds use a computer specifically for entertainment purposes. The report also showed children aged eleven to eighteen spend an average of 2 hours and 45 minutes on a computer per day, validating his earlier claim that young people as young as eight are interacting with technology and are proficient in its use for entertainment purposes.

Hours spent per day on a computer has transferred to hours spent on mobile technology such as the smartphone. Lenhart et al. (2012) outline the usage of these mobile devices and the importance of the smart phone in the proliferation of social networking sites. Over ninety percent of adults aged eighteen to twenty-nine now own a mobile device that provides access to social networking sites and other online applications (Lenhart et al., 2012). The increase of usage of social networking sites can be demonstrated with a study from Rideout, Foehr & Roberts (2010). In the paper, they discuss two reports that were carried out six years apart (2004 and 2010) in the USA into the use of technology (not for schoolwork) on children (eight to eighteen years). Media usage had increased by one hour and seventeen minutes daily. The report outlined that over 2000 children surveyed had contact with media of some form for more than sixty-five percent of their waking hours. In line with these figures, a study referenced in Stack & Kelly by Buckingham (2007), identified that young people spend more time with media than any other form of expression or communication. Multitasking or two-screening (using more than one media at a time) and/or exposure to other media can result in the young person spending up to approximately ten hours per day engaging with different forms of media. Herring (2008) maintains that the members of this digital age are thought to be especially skilled at multitasking, which can result in shorter attention spans. This multi-tasking can also appear to be a tactic in how young people deal with information overload. This two screening or multi-tasking has been made significantly easier with the availability of Wi-Fi on smart phones. Irish people are spending more time on mobile devices than ever before (Weckler, 2016). A 2012 Irish study discovered that there is a huge reliance on Wi-Fi/4G, rather than older, slower services such as 3G, whereby most socialisation online happens in the home with a circle of peers or friends (Screenagers, 2012 p. 12).

Young people are also increasingly fragmenting their social networking experiences as most of those who use social networking sites say they have two or more different profiles (Lenhart et al., 2012). This may be explained in part by research carried out by the Pew Institute (2007) that demonstrated where both parent and young person are engaged in social media, for the most part they will “friend” each other. However, as young people are using many different sites for different groups of people, friending family members on Facebook has become benign for the young person.

Social network sites, online games and new technology are now fixtures of youth culture (Boyd, 2008). As most of today's youth has grown up with a rapidly developing technology they are growing up in parallel to this online world and are looking for new ways of not only communicating but also building friendships and self-expression online (Boyd, 2008). How young people use social networking sites can vary. Young adults use social networking sites primarily for peer to peer connections, including following groups that they have an interest in, as opposed to academic or work purposes (Agosto, Abbas and Naughton, 2010; Agosto and Abbas, 2009; Wellens & Hooley, 2009). Young people on social networking sites choose the people they want to connect with or follow. Therefore, by default, the content they read and engage with is selected for them by the network of people they have connected with. Agosto et al., (2012) demonstrates that users tended to prefer large SNS for all their communication with “weaker ties” and tended to text to communicate with people they had a “stronger tie” with. The terms weaker and stronger tie is connected to how close the young person is in the offline world. Stronger ties are those people that are communicated with daily, with no specific content, they are good friends and close family members (may exclude parents).



Weaker ties defined as those individuals that may be acquaintances in the offline environment but may also be connected by family or sports groups, or indeed may have no connection at all. Hodkinson (2015) concludes that young people online tend to restrict communication to limited familiar networks and individuals which demonstrates their day to day online interactions are dominated by smaller groups of close friends. Connections with stronger ties are maintained through different Social Networking Sites than those connections with weaker ties. Group identity online can then become fragmented (Castells, 1996). Along with differing ties (stronger or weaker) on specific sites, research by Forte et al (2013) suggested that when a young person is seeking information online through social media sites the information is either interest driven or friendship driven.

The type of information sought will determine if the young person will contact a weak or strong tie. (Forte et al 2013). This demonstrates that the young person is aware of the split in their social media accounts and uses both separately, depending on the information required.

This theory concurs with Lichy (2012) where it was argued that a change in application leads to a change in the young person's online behaviour and attitudes. Consistent with Agosto et al (2012), Hodkinson (2015) rightly concluded that a young person maintains the ability online to restrict most of their communication to familiar networks and indeed smaller groups of friends. These smaller groups, which afford a certain amount of familiarity may allow the young person to take advantage of social networking sites to discover their own identity while going through the transition from childhood to adulthood in a somewhat secure environment.

Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010) conclude that proof of the closeness of a young person's peer group is confirmed by both the amount and type of pictures displayed on their social networking sites. This may explain why sites such as snapchat are used to maintain communication with stronger ties such as their friends.

### 3.7 Education & Social Networking Sites

Although young people use social media primarily for social reasons (Agosto & Abbas, 2009; Agosto & Abbas, 2010) the numbers of young people that are engaging with the internet for education are growing, as traditional ways of teaching are being pushed aside (Martens, 2006). Social media has changed the way we access information (Muller, 2012). In comparison, older users of Facebook are much less likely to use Facebook to get information as opposed to their younger counterparts (Lampe et al., 2007). Giroux (2006) argues that young people accessing learning through online self-directed learning is increasing. In particular, online media is developing as a technologically mediated space that is changing in line with popular culture (Fiske, 1989). Boyd (2008) shares the premise that young people can use online social media to explore subjects that interest them that goes further than what they will have access to at school. There remains certain divisions in a young person's life from an educational perspective. Buckingham (2007) describes a digital divide between in-school digital learning life and out of school digital learning. Young people who accessed online learning digitally with adult supervision, such as in a school setting, were not given the freedom required to develop an interest in peer-driven learning.

### 3.8 Surveillance, Risk and Privacy

*“The rise of social media has created a generation of narcissists, eager to offer up their private images for public consumption like peacocks that spread their tails. This may feed their self-esteem but also can attract negative attention.” -Elementary, 2016.*

One of the more significant effects of the digital revolution is the concept of online surveillance. The emergence of social media has led to certain phenomena such as "back stalking" (the act of re-surfacing old embarrassing content by commenting on their timeline) and "creeping" (looking at someone else's timeline without their knowledge whether they are connected online or not to gather information about this person's life). New behaviour, such as back stalking can now be observed online by young people (Schoenebeck et al., 2016). These young people who communicate online have themselves become complicit in this new online behaviour, by taking part in creeping and backstalking (Medelson, 2015). It appears that young people partake in this behaviour whether they agree in principle with privacy online or not. It has become an accepted part of their online culture. Reasons for this new behaviour may include the fact that the young person is sharing memories with a group online, by commenting on and tagging people in older posts and this can lead to group cohesion through their shared experiences (Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2010). Carey (1975) regarded communication and the ritual that surrounds the communication itself to be one that helps to develop a sense of community through sharing specific common experiences and indeed, values. However, young people are taking part in back stalking and creeping in the knowledge that they too are also subject to this online behaviour.

In Bernard Harcourt's book "Exposed" he surveys possible changes within the privacy sphere that exists online (Harcourt, 2015). He maintains that we are not being surveilled as much as we think we are. Rather, we are knowingly and happily exposing ourselves online by sharing our personal information on public fora. Harcourt explains how we are waiting for "likes" and "shares" on statuses and have become "*permanent digital selves*" online while offline we remain "*mortal analogue selves*" (Harcourt, 2015, p.1-3). Harcourt (2015) describes a new type of psyche, one that means the young person is always seeking approval and popularity that can never be found offline. He asserts that this approval will never be found online as the constant updating of statuses have to remain current to seek approval and popularity. He maintains that through our updates we are always creating a narrative of our lives, an online psyche that sometimes is in competition with our "*conscientious, ethical selves*" (Harcourt, 2015).

Harcourt (2015) concludes that: "*It is precisely our desires and passions that have enslaved us, exposed us, and ensnared us in this digital shell as hard as steel*" (Harcourt, 2015 pp. 1). Harcourt uses the phrase "expository society" to describe our existing state of affairs, meaning that we no longer value privacy and using technology for surveillance has now been normalised within society. He deduces we "*have become dulled to the perils of digital transparency and enamoured of this exposure*" (Harcourt, 2015). Social media has become so important for young people today that they are not only giving information about their lives but are engaged in attaining information about their friends' and families' lives as well. Behaviours such as lurking and back stalking supports the premise that online surveillance is relatively commonplace.

This behaviour has become normalised through the socialisation process of young people and accepted by both the individual and society (Schoenbeck, 2016). With this accepted and normalised online surveillance, risks inevitably arise for the young person.

The concept of risk online has become a feature in many recent discussions (James and James, 2008). As accepted levels of privacy can change from one generation to the next, parents can assume that young people are not concerned about their privacy as they are willing to participate on public social media sites (James and James, 2008). Privacy and risk are related to each other online with notions of a public-private divide which are at the base of many social online theories. The private for the young person is both a way of escaping all aspects of public life and an area in which citizenship can be realised (Berriman & Thomson, 2015). There are similarities between a young person's privacy experiences and the strategies that they employ online as compared to how they negotiate their privacy offline (Hodkinson, 2015). The young person is trying to negotiate their public and private persona both in an offline environment and an online one. However, in this digital age, there is an argument that the fundamental stability of this public-private divide is disrupted (Nissenbaum, 2010). With this blending of public, private life, when private is made public through any social networking sites, "the nature of both experience and of privacy itself can be changed" (Baym & Boyd, 2012, p 322). Baym and Boyd (2012) state that there is little doubt that these new mediated spaces have increased the visibility of the young person more than ever before, but that the young person's content online is only consumed by a small number of people. Because of this, a user's post can be technically viewable to the world and yet no one may read the content (Boyd & Marwick, 2009).

Consistent with publicised privacy, groups that once would have only discussed their affairs in an offline environment are now taking advantage of these new online mediated spaces, such as Facebook. This can mean that interactions now take place in an open and unknown sphere, where online posts can possibly and unknowingly be viewed by a large audience (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). In effect, a young person can post to a large audience and the post may only be viewed by a small number of people, whereas conversely, a post that was meant for a smaller number of people can possibly be viewed by a large audience. There is also the concept that there is an unlimited audience possible online for the young person as opposed to the limited audience or groups that a person would interact with on a daily basis face to face, this is referred to as context collapse. The context collapse can demonstrate the immeasurable audience that is available to the young person online when they share their posts to a public platform. The young person is also at risk of over-sharing their information to a large audience as they focus on levels of interaction online and may engage in over-sharing personal information to grow their audience. Hodkinson (2015) argues that with uncontrolled context collapse and effectively an invisible audience the young person can never feel in control of their daily communications. Although Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010), argue that while information posted online is highly ritualised, they are also only for a specific audience, and not a mass global one.

There is also a phenomenon of oversharing of personal information to a global audience has been referred to as “the oversharing age” (Dewey, 2015). The oversharing of information increases the levels of risk to young people as the personal information of users can be accessed by anyone and used in any way. Specifically, the content is not particular to the audience and the audience is an unknown far reaching one.

A major factor for young people oversharing online is their lack of decision-making skills (Mann, et al., 1989). Contrary to Dewey's assertions Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010), argue that while information posted online are highly ritualised, as how they are made, they are also only for a specific audience, and not a mass global one. In the context of images posted online permanence is also a concern. The permanence of images created online creates a long -lasting importance for the young person (Houck, 2013). With constant interaction online and constant posting of content, there are negatives associated with social networking sites such as surveillance. Online surveillance can take on a completely different meaning online as opposed to offline. Surveillance can be carried out by anyone online, a parent may even investigate or observe news feeds for personal current information, albeit not for the purposes of back stalking per se. However, this surveillance may be hindered by a lack of knowledge to use social media by older adults. This is where a possible generational digital divide becomes evident. This divide refers to the perceived gap between those who not only have access to the latest information technologies, such as young people but also those who are also familiar with the evolving use of technology, as opposed to those who do not have either access to or education in these new technologies. Effectively, the online environment is divided between those are integrated completely into technology from as an early age and those that do not have access to technology (Compaine, 2001; Selwyn, 2004). This division is known as the digital divide and can be applied not only to a generational issue but also cultural ones.

As young people age, how they engage with social networking sites can also develop and change (Schoenebeck et al., 2016). Schoenebeck et al., (2016) revealed that young people, on retrospective assessment of their past online activities on Facebook have no issues surrounding privacy and the re-appearance of older posts.

There is little known about how young people themselves feel about their online behaviour being forever a click away and as something that may re-surface later in life (Schoenebeck et al., 2016). Social media can offer many gratifications such as social capital building, relationship maintenance, friendship formation and wider social connections that can provide support on a broad range of issues. Privacy can also be fluid on social networking sites, with certain behaviours such as back stalking taken for granted, the individual may not like the older posts, but do not have issues around back stalking other people in their network.

### 3.9 Dependency on Technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

*“There currently exists a virtual reality online containing cyber communities that act both as a metaphor for daily life in a cultural context and as a new method of communication.”*

-Jayasantha, 2012

Postman (1998) argues that we have been willing to shape our lives to fit the requirements of technology, as opposed to the requirements of how we live. Technological changes can have various consequences on society and for every advantage technology brings, there is a trade-off. In Technopoly (1993), Postman asks to whom the technology will give greater power and freedom?. Moreover, the question is also posed; whose power and freedom will be diluted by it. Although, Corsaro (2011) maintains that technology however it is used, does not produce any social change. Boyd (2011) rightly argues for the view that as society changes, culture changes. This can be demonstrated by the lack of freedom that young people have today in an offline world. To protect their children from unknown harms of the outside world, parents have unwittingly cocooned their children away from the physical world and incubated them in a virtual reality.



This effectively means there are less options to socialise offline, so they go online to socialise. Developments in technology and changing cultural norms are adjusting the age range of users on social media. This changing online behaviour and attitudes can modify the type of material that is available online. Although, relating to younger children, Postman (1985) argues that the reason that parents embraced such shows as Sesame Street was that it lessened their guilt for allowing their child to watch too much television.

The parent could rationalise the amount of time their child watched shows as they could be considered educational. This increase of interactions with technology from an early age only serves to socialise the young person to integrate technology into their lives. This behaviour could be considered a merging of technology and culture as the parents use one because of the other.

There is a general understanding that young people are no longer restricted to material that was designed for them (Kehily & Swann, 2003). Online content may include adult themes and as such, the young person may need parental guidance online. However, without this guidance, Abrams (1956) argues that young people have always preferred to engage with adult media in so far as they could gain access to it, although initially pertaining to traditional media, the premise can also be transferred to social media.

Adult content online without mature supervision may lead to a young person may not just engaging with unsuitable content but also posting unsuitable content themselves. Herring (2008) argues that this behaviour (posting inappropriate content), constitutes an implicit rejection of adult "moral panics". This availability of adult themed content and access may present a risk to young people regarding access to inappropriate and unsuitable content available on the internet.

### 3.10 Identity in an online environment

Online social networks allow the introduction of the young person through public displays of connection to their peers (Boyd & Eillison, 2007; Papacharissi, 2009). The presentation of the young person can be attained using a variety of online tools, such as Facebook “likes” or to follow a certain page in their network. These online strategies such as linking to groups can become a networked presentation of the self for the young person. How young people portray themselves online can be a means to both introducing themselves online and maintaining that identity. Profile information that is uploaded to their page on any of the platforms is clearly intended for others to read and as such is used to express their identity (Pempek, Yermolayeva, Calvert, 2009). The personal profile of young people can include information relating to religion, political ideology and other interests. Any topic that is germane to the development of their identity during emerging adulthood can be posted and can invite peer interaction (Pempek et al, 2009). Goffman (1959) uses the term “performance” to refer to all the “activity” of a given participant on a given occasion which served to influence in any way any of the other participants (p.15). Identity is performed in any context, either online, offline or in a mediated world (Buckingham, 2008). These peer to peer interactions can happen online by posting messages to each other in a public forum.

The mediated performance online such as being tagged in a group photograph or commenting on a post can draw attention to the young person from that interaction, maintaining their online identity. Constant screen time on social networking sites can also change how young people view themselves. As young people live their lives online and employ many online tools to present the self.

Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) maintain that young people are totally immersed online to such an extent that a participant in their research exclaimed that "I am a member of the net generation". It is interesting to note that the participant did not immediately refer to his generation by age bracket, rather referred to his generation a "net generation". In the same interview, the undergraduate (age 19), explained that the internet had a major influence on his generation (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005). Contradictorily, Herring (2008), makes the argument that findings such as an undergraduate student defining himself as a part of the 'net generation' is heavily influenced by academics on the subject, rather than the young person themselves. Herring asserts that the students are being socialised into academic models of writing on social media but, by default they are also being socialised into how to define themselves.

Although Herring is arguing the point in relation to a college student, information online is shared freely and this concept can make its way to young people not attending third level education. They can only see themselves and understand who they are through how they are seen online. Herring (2008) also argues the above example is not unique and concludes that there is a greater divide between an internet generation who have a "dual consciousness" of themselves in both their own and adult perspectives. Young people not only inhabit youth culture in an online environment but also simultaneously inhabit the larger adult world offline. Herring (2008) correctly concludes that what is important is not the technology itself but how young people mask their identity in different contexts and what are they getting out of a specific interaction.

### 3.11 From Back Stage to Centre Stage

For generations, the wealthy and powerful of society have documented their very existence and importance through the brush of the artist. We can garner insights into the fashions of the day, the status of the subject and the social awareness of both the subject and the artist using colour, background and attire. Self-portraits can be especially demonstrative as the artist is telling us through the utilisation of a visual aid, how they interpret themselves, indeed how they identify themselves. Subjects can also display levels of self-worth and vanity all in one picture (Rosen, 2014). Today, it is not just the wealthy and powerful that can document their existence, we have no need for the artist as our portraits are online, with the young person themselves becoming the artist. As such, the young person decides how they wish to be seen, so that very identity and the management of that identity have also expanded in the online environment. Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010), concluded that young people while taking pictures to post online did not use any sophisticated compositions, such as the rule of thirds or selective use of focus. Framing the picture was seldom seen and they use the term “self-shot” to describe a young person taking a picture of themselves for a Facebook post. I refer this this only to make the point that although this was only seven years ago, technology and indeed culture itself has changed entirely for the young person online.

The word selfie is now used as opposed to the term self-shot. The selfie is now posted frequently and managed through filters for most young people. Lenhart and Madden (2007) argue that most users on Social Networking Sites post a photograph of both themselves and their friends, although more females than males posted photographs.

These photographs that are posted, on Facebook in particular, are chosen specifically due to the user being happy with the content of the photograph. As the positive is always recorded over the negative with celebrations being of particular interest to record. As recording the event, in the case of a celebration, it is a social interaction and the ritual of the photography has become part of that event, and in some cases the most important part (Holland, 1991). The ritual of the post has now become online performance. Erving Goffman (1959) demonstrated parallels between a person's everyday life and a theatre performance. Goffman (1990, [1959]) was one of the first to emphasize the importance of impression management, which is explained as when "people engage in activities to convey an impression to others which is in their interests to convey", as the individual want to present themselves in the best way possible (Goffman, 1990, p. 4). On social media, impression management can describe a user's choice about what to post and what not to post, so that they express an idea for others to see. Interestingly, Goffman (1959) differentiates between impressions that are given on purpose and those impressions that are inadvertently "given off". Young people are managing the entirety of the representation that they post on social networking sites. This explicit and implicit communication on social networking sites has become a strategy for communication on individual sites (Schoenebeck, et al., 2016).

Goffman (1959) describes social life as a drama with many stages to perform on including a front stage in front of an audience and backstage preparing to perform for the audience. We perform different roles in different social situations while keeping in mind the makeup of the audience or the social media site they are using at the time. Although, the actions in these social situations are unconscious, young people change roles to adapt to the audience, the situation and the need for them to maintain their performance (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman (1959) explains that the performers seem to be changing how they interact on different platforms, and the very style of the interaction depends entirely on the type of audience that is being played to. However, there are criticisms of Goffman's theory, that although the individual must practice and rehearse to maintain their performance, the substance of the scripts and the stages themselves are relatively unchanging.

This concurs with more contemporary research that although the pictures that a young person post online may change, the general content does not (Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2010). Equally, the individual's behaviour may change online, but the way it changes, or the situations in which changes are called for, are usually constant (Meyrowitz, 1986). In his book, *No Sense of Place*, Meyrowitz (1985) laid out the challenges of people navigating multiple audiences as a result of media and technological developments. Boyd (2013) introduced the concept "collapsed contexts" which refers to the infinite audience that is possible in an online environment as opposed to the smaller, limited groups a person typically interacts with. Marwick and Boyd (2011), maintain that social media technologies change multiple audiences into a single context, making it difficult for people to use the same approach online that they do offline. In those physical interactions, people adjust their tone and presentation to fit social context. In context collapse, this adjusting becomes impossible as the audience becomes an unknown.

Meyrowitz (1986) argues that the mechanism through which electronic media affects social behaviour is not a sensory balance like McLuhan maintained, rather a rearrangement of the social stages on which we play our roles, which changes our actions through what we think is appropriate behaviour. As Meyrowitz (1986) puts it, "for when audiences change, so do the social performances" (Meyrowitz, 1986 p.4).

Meyrowitz (1986) argues that indeed different behaviours require distinct situations and uses the example of a restaurant manager, which although may be off duty if they were to eat in the restaurant they manage, they are too aware of possible problems. He argues that people who are "off duty" or "on their own time" would still generally try to be in their "own space" (Meyrowitz, 1986). The culture of this information society has a significant impact on individual behaviour. What was once a distinct situation with a particular audience, has now changed, and become a new situation with new audiences and new behaviours. There are stages to these new behaviours, as Goffman (1959) argues, there are certain stages in our backstage and onstage behaviours; we need the backstage to develop and rehearse who we are, either for a group or an individual. Although Goffman (1959) stages require face to face communications, social networking sites have replaced actual face to face interactions with online communications.

Within new media, the possibility of backstage behaviours change where areas that were once private and used for rehearsals have now become part of the onstage spectacle. When the dividing line between the two (onstage, backstage) ebbs and flows in either direction, the behaviour changes, individuals may develop a deeper backstage and a more forward onstage which will lead to a behaviour that is called "middle region" behaviours. Goffman (1959) argues that issues that were once kept backstage, such as sex and drugs, were now becoming public, from backstage to centre stage. People's interaction styles were moving with the times and indeed a youth culture arose across class, race, religious and even national lines. With these changes in behaviour came a loosening of long-held attitudes in line with Goffman (1959). Meyrowitz (1985) asserts that electronic media have exposed areas of backstage behaviour of many groups.

The information that was once one available to the group member through face to face contact has now adapted to information that is available online, not only to group members but also has become available to outsiders as well. This change of behaviour and a relaxing of what is acceptable information for public consumption can affect general societal attitudes. Meyrowitz (1985) explains that this backstage behaviour in the online environment is available to all and may change opinions in two ways: one: groups that are highly well regarded may become over-exposed and be seen as ordinary and two: groups that are feared become less so due to their exposure on such a social network.

This merging of public and private spheres has the "greatest impact on those that grow up with it" (Meyrowitz, 1985 p.137), as in the case of young people who are socialised with new media from an early age. The television era has redrawn group realignments as explained by Meyrowitz (1985). Groups and subgroups will become standard on digital platforms aligned with traditional media over time. Within these groups, impression management is of vital importance. Impression management on social networking sites may also be assisted by an online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004). According to Suler (2004), while online, some people can over-share or act in a manner that they would not offline and this behaviour is called the Disinhibition Effect. Suler (2004) argues that there are six factors that interact with each other to create this online trend. These are dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimization of authority (Suler, 2004). Suler (2004) maintains that individual personality is not a factor in this behaviour, nor is it a glimpse into one's true self, rather building a persona in a new cultural context within the online world.



When people are communicating face to face, there is a trade, with each trying to gain information about the other (Goffman, 1959) so he or she can in some ways have the upper hand in the interaction. Online users will tend to reveal more about themselves through pictures and symbols rather than through face to face interaction (Zhao & Grasmuck, 2008, Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010). As the community and connections are not face to face but online, the user can become less concerned with any social restrictions as there is a sense of disconnection and the face to face interaction that once regulated behaviour offline is missing. As people are in communication with each other, they are effectively vying for control of the impressions that they are conveying to others. Because of this they may be consciously or unconsciously changing and managing their actions and their behaviour. In tandem with how the young person wants to present themselves, other factors also play a part in how they do this. The visibility and persistence of content on Facebook influences what they decide to share on SNS (Schoenebeck, et al., 2016). Goffman (1959) states that the first expression given off is expressed during verbal communication and later through one's looks in general.

The rise of the selfie can give an indication to a strong link being present between the picture and impression management. McGill (2016) explains how selfies may be helping the women in their impression management in her 2016 TED talk on “*Young Women, Narcissism and the Selfie Phenomenon*”. McGill (2016) argues in her talk that rather than the subject being a narcissist, these selfies are taken in places of trust, such as a bedroom, and are helping women in society today to find out what exactly it means to be feminine.

Lasch (1979) connected narcissistic behaviours to a material culture, but maintained that the reasoning for this behaviour was not one of selfish desire, rather a chance to connect the self to society. These selfies can also help women to make sense of the different values in today's world around beauty.

However, Mendelson & Papacharissi, (2010) maintain that these selfies that women take are more likely to strike poses that were flirtatious or sexy. The young women are then recognised and complimented through the comments section of the post or picture. This demonstrates that young women are aware of the importance of the pose and have developed clear distinct ways of posing by the time they reach young adulthood. As their values and beliefs change, perceptions of oneself can also alter. These types of perceptions of oneself have been discussed by theorists E. Tory Higgins (1987). Higgins (1987) maintains that there are three individual types of "self-domains". These are (i) the actual self (your representation of the attributes that someone or yourself believe you possess) (ii) the ideal self (your representation of the attributes that you or someone else would like you to possess) (iii) The ought self (your representation of the attributes that you or anyone like you would ideally like to possess). It is the "ideal self" whereby the characteristics that are posted online tend to be ones that the user would like to possess and may not be a reality. It is the ought self that can provide necessary standards around self-regulation. It is this impression management and self-regulation that governs how our young people behave online.

Social Identity theory studies how personal identities are formed and how young people are developing new senses of identity and experimenting with all of these new identities (Ashforth, et al., 2008).

As Social networking sites have evolved, these social platforms provide the ability to present an identity through online posts of pictures, updates and interests that the user may have. This ability lets the user present themselves in any way they feel at that time. There are two identities which have been recognised on social media platforms. These are: I am different from others and I am similar to others (Liu, 2007). Both, it could be argued are groups that young people move in and out of as they change how they feel. There can be different levels to the lengths a person will go to in displaying a particular version of themselves (this is called self – monitoring, where the individual will regulate and control the content and their behaviour that will showcase traits that are desirable to others (Synder, 1974)). This self-monitoring could be argued the most relevant to impression management and one of the most researched (Fandt & Ferris, 1990). Goffman's theory that as the audience changes, so does the presentation of oneself is particularly challenging for young people on social networking sites concerning back stalking (the act of re-surfacing old embarrassing photos and posts by commenting on them). When the initial images were taken, both the user and the audience were more inexperienced (Schoenebeck, et al., 2016). Both Leggett (2014) and Miller (2014) have argued that there are issues concerning self-presentation goals and merging this presentation with older less sophisticated earlier posts that may emerge on their timeline through back stalking.

Social networking sites today are full of our thoughts on many different subjects; they are where we actively invite friends to comment on our portrayed life online. As these online interactions take place, the individual is forming a particular view of themselves which can then be mirrored back to the person from the interaction with their network.

When historical content reappears years later, the user has to balance old representations against that of today along with a change in audience, and closer family ties are seeing content that they may not have wanted to share (Schoenebeck, et al., 2016). Schoenebeck (2006) concludes that there are some changes in social networking use over time, such as: having fewer friends, posting fewer statuses, fewer pictures, and a general lowering of levels of interaction. Consequently, the participants did not delete any content concerning back stalking as they felt it was a more honest view of themselves, even when they felt the post was embarrassing. Impression management and self-presentation have a reciprocal relationship that has been researched for many years (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). Back stalking is becoming culturally accepted online and changing the nature of interactions online as old posts re-appear in news feeds with a different audience than first posted, impression management is not as important as it once was for the young person.

In daily life, people unconsciously and consciously endeavour to define the way they are perceived, in the hopes that there will be a positive impression of themselves. This can be demonstrated through emphasising certain positive attributes and minimising negative ones. We do this through how we dress, how we style our hair. Self-Presentation research has moved from private interactions to a world of mediated online platforms such as Facebook (Papacharissi, 2002). A young person can be very selective about what is posted, and may have pre-determined the image they wish to present. This selective process is not unlike how we present ourselves in an offline environment, as we can perform differently with our parents than we perform with school friends.

People use social networking sites to present aspects of themselves to their connections online and their networks. Liu (2007) argues that these social networking sites are to establish, present and negotiate identity through the tastes and interests that are expressed online.

### 3.12 Representation Online

Stuart Hall is understood to be one of the most influential writers to focus on representation. Hall (1997) states that "representation is one of the central practices which produce culture" and refers to culture as shared meanings. Representations matter as they can define what is normal, who belongs and who does not (Hall, 1997 p. 10) and can sometimes call our very identity into question. From a social media and cultural view, Hall says that "meanings float and cannot be fixed" (Hall, 1997 p. 228). Representations of a young person online can shape how young people see themselves and how they are viewed by society in general (Osgerby, 2008). Representation is something we undertake for us to understand the world in which we live. It is through this communication of our understanding of our lives that we can connect the systems of values and culture to our actual social world. The very process of how we understand can change the initial idea or practice (Hall, 1980). This representation can develop to a strict management of a young person's communication online. Young people in Ireland have grown up on social networking sites and have developed an online persona, one which is managed by them through many different social networking sites. The concept of media representation illustrates the ways in which different groups, such as, gender and race, are presented by the media. The media will re-represent images that signify an idea that the audience can already relate to (Gipsrud, 2005).

Young people will follow certain media sites whose content they generally agree with. This re-representation can maintain and develop beliefs that may have already been held by society. These media representations are in effect, stereotypes. Lippmann's (1922) definition of stereotypes is what we already have "in our head". The importance of media representation cannot be understated, and several studies have demonstrated that media coverage influences society and vice versa, indeed, some negatively such as Devlin (2000). Individual media producers argue the Internet Generation is "self-reliant" and "in charge", while other report in the mainstream media that young media users are vulnerable and in need of both their social protection and guidance (Herring, 2008). Some academics consider that the new generation is exceptionally curious, self-reliant, contrarian, smart, focused, able to adapt, high in self-esteem and has a global orientation (Tapscott et al., 1999). Tapscott argues that the young generation are in fact not masters of the technology they are using, rather they are merely "superficial users". While representing themselves online, they are, in effect, media producers themselves. Without them, the social network site would not thrive and develop. Communication online is not just text, but profile images can also be used as tools for representation. As pictures are now easily staged online, Boyd (2006) asserts that it is quite hard to tell what is an actual representation of behaviour or a re-representation of the young person themselves. It could be argued that this is due to the backstage shift (Goffman, 1989) that has occurred online. As the individual has focused less on the backstage and more on the front stage, they become adept at being able to move quickly between the two without the audience being aware of it. Pictures for online dating sites and picture sharing sites show the importance of one's profile picture and subsequent pictures into how a person is seen by their peers (Kenrick, 2015).

Hall (1997) also maintains that as globalisation has taken hold of the online social world and young people engage with technologies that can work to "deconstruct how meanings are produced". There is ample support for the use of many different self-presentations, where the individual can change how they represent themselves depending on how they feel and the specific situation (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Lee et al., 1999; Lewis & Neighbors 2005). In fact even having a presence on social networking sites can change how a person presents themselves. Foucault (1988) maintains that these technologies of the self are not only "inhabited by individuals" but also argues that they are in fact a "narrative of the self". As the young person has complete control over what is placed on their social media page they have total control over the narrative that is published. What they do not have control over is how that narrative is understood by third and unknown parties. This is especially important for young people and how their friends see them in their peer groups.

Social Networking Sites offer freedom online for self-expression but also for peer feedback. Peer feedback in the form of "likes" are vital for the young person (Schoenebeck, et al., 2016). The need to be liked is not a new concept, in Maslow's 1943 paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation", where he lists a hierarchy of needs, he argues that meeting the needs of one's self-esteem leads to feelings of confidence and satisfaction. With professional sites such as LinkedIn offering safety, Facebook can offer love (through likes) and belonging, a place where a person can connect with friends and family. With less popular sites such as Tumblr and BlogSpot can offer self-realisation, as a member can share their knowledge and interests along with their personal creative ideas on these platforms.

Not all sites are restricted to an individual stage of Maslow's Theory, and they may overlap. This is an important point, as this "love" that we require from Facebook can be demonstrated in the form of "likes" can determine how basic a requirement "likes" are for young people. Ashford (2008) maintains that it is an important part of being human to feel that connection to a larger group – to feel a sense of belonging. Indeed, Rutledge (2012) maintain that none of Maslow's needs can be met without a social connection.

Online Social Networking sites can offer that sense of belonging as there are pages and communities for all interests. It could be argued that groups are formed as much for a sense of belonging as opposed to the concrete groups that can be formed through a smaller group that may exercise a binding force over members. The young person stays within the group, not out of any apprehension but out of a sense of belonging and similar interests within the group as discussed by Bennett (2000).

### 3.13 Online Behaviour

As far back as Norman Triplett's fishing reel experiment (1898), it was argued that people behave differently when in the presence of someone else. Triplett (1898) observed that the presence of another contestant participating in a race serves to “liberate latent energy not ordinarily available”. Although his experiments may not pass scientific muster today, his theory could be transferred somewhat to social networking sites. That bodily presence that Triplett refers to could be transposed to the online world. Young people have a "presence" online and will possibly act with an energy that may not be available (or required) in their offline world.



This may be because the online identities are formed when a person is alone, normally in a place of trust initially, such as their bedroom, which may lead to a perception for the young person that there are no consequences to one's actions. A 2008 study commissioned by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy in America, highlighted that twenty percent of teens surveyed (thirteen to nineteen-year-olds) reported they had sent or posted nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves (Houck, 2013).

Mitchell et al. (2012) concluded that between one and two - point five percent of internet users had either appeared in or created a sext (the sending of sexy texts and images to another person for a textual turn on (Spun Out, 2016)). This 2008 research focused on internet users up to the age of seventeen, and they also included children as young as ten. From the age of seventeen, the figures significantly increased – with over forty percent engaged in this practice.

Between 2008 and 2012, the rate of sexting has doubled in the United States (Mitchell et al., 2012). From an Irish perspective, a recent (2016) study focused on investigating the practice of sexting discovered that this behaviour is now prevalent among young people in Ireland (Dublin City University, 2016). The study revealed that one in four secondary school children in Ireland has sent or received sexts. Young Irish people are also the fourth highest in the European Union for sexting (Dublin City University, 2016). It could be argued that this behaviour has been normalised from an early age, due to the socialisation process and the normalisation of these online behaviours within their peer groups.

### 3.14 The Audience

An audience is defined as a group of people who participate in a show or encounter a work of art. They can also be referred to as a 'public'. Traditionally, there are audiences that are personally involved in the communication, (face to face), those that are on the periphery, who are allowed access to the communication and allowed interact, and then there are those people within the communication that can hear but are not allowed be active within the communication (Goffman, 1981). There are many theories used to explain audiences and mass media.

The Active Audience Theory argues that media audiences do not just receive information passively, but are actively involved in making sense of the information within their social and cultural context (Livingstone, 2000). Social Networking sites and their audiences are very active in how they interact with each other. Other theories include the Encoding/Decoding theory and the Uses and Gratification theory. Previous research studies have found that factors such as Uses and Gratification theory have been significant in online media research (La Rose & Eastin, 2010). The Uses and Gratifications Theory is an approach to understanding why people (audience) seek out media and what they are getting from the interaction. Research has identified online audiences are discovering "new" types of gratification from their interactions with social networking sites as opposed to traditional media (Dunne 2010).

Uses and Gratifications Theory in conjunction with Bandura's Social Cognitive theory maintains that people learn from observing others and this can be used to research social media. People tend to follow the influences of other people that they can identify with, the more they identify with the other person, including common traits and emotions the more they will recreate that behaviour (Bandura, 1986).

Within a new online community on the Internet, status is all important, which was lacking in the traditional Uses and Gratifications research (Song et al., 2002). There are criticisms in relation to the Uses and Gratification Theory. These are the quantifying the differences between gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO) which can be difficult to research (Dunne, 2010). Hall (1996) maintains that the Uses and Gratification Theory can be seen through the lens of a more general psychological and sociological theories. He proposes that this approach may not be robust enough scientifically, although it can explain certain audience behaviour (Dunne, 2010).

Katz et al. (1974) maintain that audiences are active, that in mass media, in effect, the audience is goal orientated and that they have prior expectations on what particular content will offer them as an audience member. As discussed by Dunne (2010), findings indicate that participants are actively using online social networking sites for their personal motives and gratifications regarding how they represent themselves online and manage that identity. They, in effect, have a different persona in a social context and in a cultural context. As previously discussed, a young person online is not only the creator but the audience simultaneously. Within the sphere of social media, Livingstone (2005) argues that in fact we are all the audience, and the very definition of the audience has become over complicated due to this mediated online world. Some refer to audience as their public, Warner (2005) maintains that there are three definitions of publics. One: they can be described as everyone in the field in question, two: as a concrete audience and three: as the third sense of public: the public that only becomes real in the context of the text that is being communicated. It is this later public that is pertinent to social networking sites.

The audience can ebb and flow with the content and can never be quite quantifiable in the same way a theatre audience can be (Warner, 2002). Del Vicchio (1997) maintains that young people have changed, in that there are no longer any innocent, passive audiences; rather they are now seen as demanding media-wise customers and proving through usage and volume that the media in and of itself has now become a motivating factor. Livingstone (2005) argues that audiences have normally been aggregates, for example a group of people with no connection to each other in the cinema watching a movie. That private domain within the online community is not evident as there is little or no face to face contact so the young person cannot take any visual cues to temper their behaviour to a specific type of audience. As such the user then negotiates this mediated space without these important signals. With these interactions, the young person may believe these socially mediated spaces and publics (audiences) offer both a source of support but they also have the constant risk of conflict (Baym & Boyd, 2012). They argue that social media make it particularly difficult to understand "who is out there" and raises uncertainties around imagined and actual audiences (Baym & Boyd, 2012).

Livingstone (2005) correctly argues that the audience and the public are the same people, however, Baym & Boyd argue the very definition of public is changing online that; "social media complicate what it means to be public" (Baym & Boyd, 2012, p. 320). The audience has morphed into the producer of their own content online. An individual can upload their content online to be viewed by their followers (audience) at very little cost and with relatively high production values using smartphones. Rosen (2006) argues that the audience is less passive and more informed than ever before.

Rosen (2010) claims that there has been a slight shift in the balance of power, and the audience has a slightly better hand than it did prior to online media. The audience are changing in an online mediated space, as they have moved from a passive audience to an active audience.

### 3.15 Trust Online

Technological advances have made it easier to choose what we want to view and how we connect to that particular media (Dean, 2010). Given this diversity of the digital media landscape and the twenty-four-hour news cycle, people are staying up to date with news from many different sources (Suiter, 2016). Of nearly two million users on social media sites such as Facebook in Ireland, more than half receive their news through online social networking sites (Suiter, 2016). This data is indicative of a move away from more traditional media to an online mediated space for news gathering. One of the negatives of online networks is the concept of lack of trust and fake news. Different people can use the term to mean different things. Fake news is defined by the young person's information website, Spunout (2017), as "any story or article that is published to deliberately misinform the reader, even though the writer/publisher knows it not to be true". As far back as 2010, this category of news online garnered the attention of academics, as trends were beginning to form online.

They argued that social networking information is not always truthful, in fact, some commentators argue that posts online can be deceptive on purpose (Smith & Kidder, 2010). In fact, recent research demonstrates that trust for online content, from sources such as social media and blogs is a mere seven percent (Suiter, 2016).

Traditional sources of information are still trusted far more than any digital source, with trust levels at just under sixty percent (Suiter, 2016). This figure includes print media (printed and online), radio and Television news broadcasts.). With trust low for online news (7%), the question could be posed why are almost half of all people still accessing all their news directly from social media sites. Facebook can tailor a feed to reflect what they think should be on the feed through the use of algorithms, based on your past likes and dislikes. This effectively means you are only ever seeing a narrow focus on your likes, of subjects that you are already interested in, so you will never rarely read a post from a journalist that you may not agree with. Essentially, on Facebook people will only “follow” people they like or agree with and now Facebook is even removing possible articles that you may disagree with from your history, taking control of your feed. The publishing power has moved from news rooms and editors to online sites such as Facebook, without the user ever consciously being aware of the influence that sites such as Facebook have over their news feed. With this power, comes a change in how information is now disseminated to the public.

Information communicated to the public prior to the internet was, in some ways not very different to how we receive our news now, with one exception, that sources were confirmed prior to print. This lack of source checking has allowed SNS to become mediated spaces where truth and exaggeration may be published without consequence for the author. Whether the reasons to publish incorrect information is malicious or not, trust in online information is low.

### 3.16 Language

With the development of visual sites such as Snapchat, visual online communication is now part of everyday life of the young person. With this new technology, users have adapted their online communications to include new and faster ways to communicate with each other. Young people have utilised technology to benefit their day to day use of online communications, such as using filters on all their images prior to sending. Along with this change in how young people communicate, what they communicate is also changing. Language and use of language online have also changed considerably in recent years. Wannisinghe (2013) has asserted that young people are the most prevalent users of online social sites that send "short messages that ask simple questions give informal greetings, state viewpoints, opinions, attitudes and moods". Wannisinghe (2012) argues that because normal grammatical rules do not apply to online communication, this has created the very thing that has attracted the youth of today to it. There are in fact many short cuts that can be used in online communications – these are short or abbreviated words, numerals and emoticons. Language online is constantly changing, terms such as selfie and unfriend were unheard of ten years ago. We are communicating at such a pace, that the language itself has had to change (Reed, 2014). Platforms such as Snap Chat have changed how we communicate, by not sending just text but rather the use of emoticons in all communications.

Social media is changing how we communicate, as the platforms change we are not only adapting to the technology, but we are making the technology adapt to how we want to use it with new and emerging online cultures being created and accepted quickly.

### 3.17 Conclusion

Young people are quickly adapting to new technological advances on the internet and media communications. They have made technology an integral part of their youth culture and behaviour. This chapter explored how young people's behaviour and attitudes have been affected by this new media, specifically how communications are changing dependent on the site the young person is communicating on. The most important effects of social media have been observed through the dominance of social media in every aspect of a young person's life and the different types of online interactions.

Social media has established both acceptable and unacceptable behaviour online. An online culture has evolved where the young person may partake in behaviour they deem unacceptable such as back stalking and creeping, while at the same time not agreeing with them. In the process of adaptation to this new media, youth have amalgamated their public and private identities, with both becoming blurred online. Young people are struggling to keep up with their virtual identities on many different platforms. Impression management and representation are essential for the young person online and can be revealed with the level of control they exercise to ensure their images are perfect prior to posting. While social media offers many opportunities for young people to interact with the world and gather information, it also comes with its own set of challenges including the issues of privacy, surveillance and risk online.

This literature review on youth research as well as social media has been helpful in designing this research and selecting the research methods. These online behaviours will be explored further in the study in the following chapters. The next chapter explains the research methodology that is adhered to in this study and the rationale for choosing those specific methods of research.



## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

### 4.2 Introduction

The primary objective of this study is to gain insight and understanding into the online lives of young people in Ireland. Through the prism of social networking sites, the researcher aims to explore the real-life experiences of young people online, including concepts around youth, youth culture and the role social networking sites can play in their everyday lives. The previous chapters explained some of the key concepts around youth culture, subculture, post subculture and the impact of social networking sites on youth culture. This chapter describes the research approach and methods that are used in this study and why they were chosen. Issues surrounding data collection and analysis are discussed along with ethical considerations in research. This chapter aims to give a justification why certain research methods were examined and ultimately why a specific framework was chosen for this research and the theories that support those methods are discussed.

### 4.3 Research approach and design

The research methodology defines the direction of the research, explaining how and why an individual approach is taken for the study to be carried out efficiently. Creswell (2009) and Cohen et al. (2011), maintain the research methodology defines what the activity of the research is, how it should advance, how progress is calculated and how to determine the success of the study.

It is a strategic approach, rather than a list of data collection and analysis techniques (Wainright, 1997). Before the research method for the study is decided, the researcher must select a research philosophy.

According to Englander "*the chief criterion in determining what research method will be used should be the initial research questions, not tradition or norms*" (Englander, 2012, p. 15). The research design ensures that the researcher develops a richer and more complete insight into the collection and understanding of the data. Previous studies on examining the behaviour of young people on social networking sites have employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of research. For this study, a phenomenological approach was taken. The motives for a phenomenological approach are many.

In particular, a phenomenological approach is concerned with the "lived experiences" of the people involved (Groenewald, 2004; Greene, 1997). This is an approach that concentrates on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience. This approach examines the experiences of an individual from their perspective (Welman & Kruger, 1999). It is a paradigm that gives importance to subjectivity and personal interpretation (Lester, 1999). This specific approach is also helpful in understanding personal experiences of individuals and examining their motivations and actions without any taken-for-granted assumptions (Lester, 1999; Taylor et al., 2016).

Phenomenological research is very efficient at bringing to the fore the experiences of individuals (Lester, 1999). Adoption of this research philosophy for this study ensures that the personal experiences of the young person are heard, as it is that voice that will ultimately answer the research questions. Within the human sphere, phenomenological research design translates into gathering "deep" information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods (Lester, 1999).

Giorgi (1997) maintains that phenomenological research has three interlocking steps. They are: one: reduction (to suspend your judgment in relation to the world to instead focus on analysis of experience) two: description (describe the details of the participants lived experience, rather than explain it) and finally, three: the search for essences (set of attributes that make a person what they are fundamentally. These steps ensure that researchers adhere somewhat to the strict framework, although there are many variations on the theme (Finaly, 2009).

Smith's (2007) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) maintains that the research process itself is dynamic, and there is a two-stage interpretation within the research process. The participant is trying to make sense of their world, while the researcher is trying to make sense of them making sense of their world (Smith, 2007). Other academics maintain that phenomenology begins with a double insight (Dukes, 1984). The first is that human experience makes sense (logic) to those who live it before any third- party investigations. The second is that the sense of logic of human experience is "an inherent structural property" of the experience itself, not something constructed by an outside observer (Dukes, 1984).

It is a "subject" experience, not a subjective one, which means that the experience of something can be the same even if the details are different; for example, the death of a loved one. Although the details are different, the experience remains the same. Human experience is meaningful to those who live it, and that meaning can be captured by the researcher, without distortion (Dukes, 1984).

Interpretive phenomenology, with writings from Heidegger and others, maintain that “*the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in our interpretation due to our connection with the social world, language and our personal histories*” (Finlay, 1984, p.12). There are many ways to interpret a phenomenological research approach, but there seems to be a consensus that such an approach is required to be both aware of the phenomenon being investigated and the subjective interconnection between the researcher and the participant (Finlay, 2009). *Phenomenological human scientific research tends to choose the interview due to their interest in the meaning of a phenomenon as it is lived by other subjects*” (Englander, 2012, p. 14).

For this study, technology and social interactions are two of the main areas of interest. A phenomenological approach to the relationship between society and technology suggests that you cannot have one without the other, they are in some ways dependent on each other for a shared meaning (Heidegger 1975). As such, the researcher deemed this to be the most appropriate approach for this study. As the aim of this research is to seek out the personal lived experiences of young people on social networking sites, the research method used for this study should be able to examine young people's experiences in detail and with sufficient depth. A qualitative method of research allows the researcher to understand the participants' perspective on the subject and understand their point of view (Hennink et al., 2010). As the objective of this investigation required a detailed examination of the online experiences and behaviour of young people, qualitative methods were deemed the most appropriate research approach for this study. Qualitative research examines in-depth non-numerical data, which is collected through many research methods, such as interviews.

The phrase qualitative methods refer in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive information in a person's words (Taylor et al., 2016). For this study, the data collection was carried out using two qualitative research methods; these were focus group discussions and interviews.

Both of these methods are face to face data collection methods that can yield both quality and unexpected data as the researcher can use visual cues through a building of rapport, to expand on answers from participants and can employ follow up secondary questions immediately (Lee, 2004). Through careful moderation, the data can increase in both flow of data and quality of said data (O'Connor et al., 2008). Interviews provide a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon where a little is already known about the issue, and detailed insights are required from individual participants (Gill et al., 2008). Research interviews are methods that are used to explore the views, beliefs, values and motivations on a subject (Gill et al., 2008).

The phenomenologist researcher seeks to understand through qualitative methods such as interviews that yield descriptive data (Taylor, et al., 2016). Interviews allow the voice of the young person to be heard, and through their words, a richness of data can be gathered. The researcher noted that in qualitative studies, researchers can follow a flexible research design (Marshall and Rossman, 2011).

Interviews were chosen as the appropriate method for initial data collection as young people can give their views about their online experiences and behaviours on social networking sites in a confidential environment. There are three types of interviews: these are structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (LeGard et al., 2003; Creswell, 2013).

There are two ways to conduct an interview. These are a face-to-face interview and a request for a written or recorded account of the experience (Giorgi, 2009). It was deemed that face to face interviews was the most appropriate for this research study. Giorgi maintains that *“what one seeks from a research interview in phenomenological research is as complete a description as possible of the experience that a participant has lived through”* (Giorgi, 2009 p. 122). *As the “face-to-face interview is often longer and thus richer regarding nuances and depth”* (Englander, 2012, p.27), semi-structured interviews and focus groups were considered the most appropriate approach for this phenomenological research study. Face-to-face interviews are also deemed appropriate where *“depth of meaning is necessary, and the research is primarily focused on gaining insight and understanding”* (Gillman, 2000 p.11).

As the specific type of face-to-face interviews must be chosen, research was then carried out on the most appropriate type of interview for the phenomenological approach. Structured interviews are carried out using a list of pre-determined questions with no scope for elaboration on certain topics based on the participants' response were not chosen for this study. Semi-structured interviews, however, while also following a list of questions, have the flexibility to ask supplemental questions that were not on the original list of questions. The interviewer can follow up on the participants' responses, with questions to explore a subject of interest in further detail.

Unstructured interviews do not have a pre-determined list of questions. They can start with an initial question and progress is then based on the response of the participant and the interest of the researcher (LeGard et al., 2003; Creswell, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the most appropriate method for data collection as they would be able to provide rich data about the experiences of an individual allowing flexibility to ask follow up questions without the constraints of a structured interview process. Denscombe (2007), suggests that semi-structured interviews and the use of open-ended questions allow interviewees to "use their words and develop their thought" (Denscombe, 2007 p.176). According to Dawson, semi-structured interviews are perhaps the most common type of interview, in this type of interview the researcher wants to know "*specific information, which can be compared and contrasted with information gained in other interviews*" (Dawson, 2007 p.29). Thus, qualitative research through face to face semi-structured interviews was considered to be the best approach, due in part to the process allowing the interviewee to use their own words, and the process itself is flexible to suit the participant. Moreover, issues that the researcher may not have considered can be articulated into the discussion should the interviewee wish to do so. For these reasons, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were chosen by the researcher as a qualitative research method that was considered appropriate for a phenomenological paradigm.

#### 4.4 Data Collection

Data collection was carried out through an initial focus group discussion followed by interviews with twenty-two participants, and a final focus group discussion to record the experiences of a young person's online social networking life. During the data collection phase, it was of vital importance that the voice of the young person was heard and it was this voice that was fundamental in gathering the data herein.

Triangulation is a widely-used approach to ensure that research is both reliable and robust. Triangulation was achieved by three separate data collections for this research. The rationale for three distinct groups of participants is to get three sets of data that can be compared to contrast and validate the data to ascertain if it yields similar findings (Holloway, 1997; Bloor, 1997). "*Triangulation can operate within and across research strategy*" (Bryman, 2012 p. 392). Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspects of human behaviour.. In its original and literal sense, triangulation is a technique of physical measurement (Cohen et al 2007, p.141).

Two different techniques of data collection were employed in this study- focus groups and semi structured interviews, which yielded various types of data for this study. Data collection was conducted in differing phases with each phase building on and informing the next phase of the research. Thus, triangulation of data was achieved through these separate groupings. The first step used focus group discussion; the second stage used semi-structured interviews, and the third stage used a final focus group discussion again. In the first phase of the research, the focus group discussions were carried out to get an insight into the generalities of a young person's lived experiences online.

As this was a group setting, the participants were at ease quickly (as they knew each other from the college setting) and the data that was gathered from this initial group informed the basis of the questions for the second stage of data collection – the interview stage. A final focus group discussion was conducted, where the researcher followed up any outstanding questions that emerged from appraising the previous interview responses.



The questions for the focus groups, in addition to the interviews, remained open-ended to ensure that the participants' answers were as comprehensive as possible. These open-ended questions allow for respondents to "*answer them in any way they choose*" (Sekaran, 2003, p. 239). The questions for the initial focus group, which informed the semi-structured one to one interviews were less structured and more relaxed to allow the researcher to focus on certain aspects of interest that emerged from the group.

This research study was conducted within the environs of Institute of Technology, Carlow. The rationale for choosing this particular research site was the support the Institute of Technology, Carlow, offered regarding on-site counsellors from an ethical perspective for the participants that took part in the study. The college was also a safe and relaxed environment for the participants as they were familiar with the campus. To ensure the wellbeing and safety of the participants the researcher left decisions such as specific areas for the interview to take place up to the participant, once it offered a degree of privacy. The researcher felt that this control given to the participant quickly put them at ease as they chose areas they were very familiar with such as the canteen (quiet area).

The researcher also ensured that the participant led the tone and delivery of the questions. Some participants needed more time to have a chat and read over the informed consent forms than others. The researcher was in no way concerned with any time constraints during this process, ensuring at all stages the participant was happy to proceed. This lack of concern over time and location allowed the participant to feel very comfortable before any questions were asked, ensuring that they were relaxed during the process as they were stress-free.

#### 4.4.1 Reliability

The validity, reliability and triangulation of the research are of paramount importance. Reliability is associated with the methods of data collection, how the data collection should be consistent and not distort the findings in any way (Denscombe, 2003). Denscombe (2003) maintains that the reliability of research is demonstrated when “all things being equal, similar results are discovered”. Although as previously mentioned phenomenology is a paradigm that gives importance to subjectivity and personal interpretation (Lester, 1999), there are issues surrounding subjectivity. Daymon and Holloway (2011) state that subjectivity of the data can be overcome by maintaining an audit trail. The subjective issues surrounding this research referred to by Daymon and Holloway (2011) are the researcher’s background influences. An audit trail can ensure that the logic used in research is explained and understood. This method ensures that each research decision is understood by the reader and ensures validity of the results.

#### 4.4.2 Sample Population and Sampling

In every research study, it is important to define the sampling frame and the sampling techniques that are to be employed for the study (Cook, 2011). Well-developed sampling decisions are crucial for any study’s soundness (Marshall and Rossman 2006, p.64). The sampling frame is the cohort of people from which the researcher chooses the sample participants. “*Well developed sampling decisions are crucial for any study’s soundness*” (Marshall and Rossman 2006, p.64).

In this study, the sampling frame was limited to young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five years old. Another criterion for the sampling frame was the requirement for the young person to engage with at least one online social networking site. Sampling is a technique used to select the participants for the study from the sampling frame (Cook, 2011). This research study used both snowball sampling and convenience sampling for the selection process. Convenience sampling is defined as the participants are chosen because of ease of access and convenience for the researcher (Miller et al., 1998). Initial contact was made with a member of the Media Department of the Institute of Technology, Carlow as the researcher had been acquainted with one of the participants through a third party.

Once contact was made with the member of the media department, she volunteered to put the researcher in touch with other members of the department that she knew personally. This is referred to as snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is the technique when the existing sample of participants further recruit other sample participants for the study through their network of contacts (Bryman, 1999). This member of the media department effectively became the gatekeeper of other participants. The researcher was happy to maintain contact with the gatekeeper as a rapport had been developed over time and this allowed access to other potential participants. Further participants were contacted through the private messaging application on Facebook, once permission was received from the third party (Appendix A). Posters on college notice boards were also advertised (Appendix B) to ensure a wide variation of participants.

This study included a small sample size due to the qualitative nature of the research. Current research is limited on optimum numbers for a qualitative study such as this. However, previous studies do give some guidelines about the minimum sample sizes required for effective research. A 2010 study maintained only seven academic sources provided guidelines for actual sample sizes (Mason, 2010).

Phenomenological methods of research suggest that the investigation should aim to have less than twenty- five participants in their study, as more than that can lead to a saturation of the data collected (Creswell, 1998). Mason (2010) discusses the point of diminishing returns in qualitative academic research, which means that more data does not necessarily equate to more information. Bertaux (1981) argues fifteen participants should be the smallest sample size for qualitative research methods. For these reasons, a sample of twenty-two participants was selected for conducting the semi-structured interviews for this study.

Overall, the sample for this study included twenty-two participants for the semi-structured interviews, four participants for the focus group in the first stage of data collection and six participants for the focus group in the third stage of data collection. The participants in this study included both current and past students of Institute of Technology, Carlow and a small number of participants were members of sports teams that had connections to Institute of Technology, Carlow.

#### 4.4.3 Phase One: Focus Group

Focus groups can be defined as group discussions that are carried out by the researcher on a particular topic (Morgan, 1998). The researcher observes, guides and monitors the discussions while collecting data on the relevant subject. Focus group discussions are a useful tool for data collection when collective views on a subject are needed (Gill et al., 2008). Indeed, similar to interviews, focus groups can give a detailed understanding of a participants' beliefs, values and experiences (Morgan, 1998). This method of data collection was chosen for this study to understand the collective views of young people on their behaviour on social networking sites. The data collection was carried out in three stages. The details of data collection and data analysis are given in the following sections. In this first phase of data collection, an initial focus group was conducted with four participants to inform the next two stages of data collection. The rationale for this initial focus group was to gain insight and understanding into how young people today in Ireland live their lives online.

Focus groups are a form of group interview that takes advantage of the communication between participants to generate data (Kitzinger, 1995). A reflexive process emerged within the focus group discussion which allowed the participants to discuss any issue they may not have thought of themselves within the group.

As there were no time constraints, this reflexivity in the group allowed for the quality of data to emerge. The group discussion sometimes veered widely between subjects, but the participants were so involved in their discussions and animated by them, the researcher often remained in the background, taking extra notes on subjects that were worth returning to.

The group provided the researcher with an insight into their online lives, one that could not have been garnered without the participants sharing their online experiences. The researcher sometimes asked vague questions to ensure that the conversation went where the group decided it should go, not where the researcher thought it should go. These initial questions were selected based on the literature review of the subject (Appendix C).

It was vital to hear what was important to the young person while they were engaging with social networking sites and to hear their experiences online in their own words, following a phenomenological approach. The researcher maintained the role of moderator throughout the focus group. This focus group discussion lasted fifty minutes. The focus group discussion was audio recorded and later transcribed, along with additional notes taken by the researcher. The findings from the focus group discussion were helpful in guiding changes in the list of questions for the interviews in the second stage of data collection.

The changes for the semi-structured interview questions focused on different ways in which young people communicate with each other on various social networking sites. This continuous focusing is where the researcher adapted the data collection process as additional concepts, or new relationships appeared that needed further investigation (Stake, 1995). This focusing on new relationships and ideas by the researcher would not have been possible if the young person taking part did not feel relaxed and share their views with the researcher. This sharing of experiences in their own words allowed for a phenomenological approach to continue in this study.

#### 4.4.4 Phase Two: Semi-Structured Interviews

In the second phase of data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-two participants (Appendix D). These interviews remained flexible to allow for any unintended consequences (poorly worded questions) and were updated to include any areas that had not been included (Creswell, 2009). The interview structure changed during the process, whereby certain questions changed regarding both order and language. The researcher added questions in relation to how exactly they engage with particular social networking sites on a daily basis. Questions were also added concerning older groups to which they belonged online and their relative longevity on a particular social networking site.

These questions would not have been amended had young people in the initial focus group not shared their honest opinions and experiences. These interviews allowed the researcher explore the participants' online lived experiences, in their own words, as the interviewees were very open. The researcher ensured the participants own voice is heard during the interview stage by asking one question at a time and not interrupting the participant (Gibbs, 2009). The researcher was as non-directive as possible to the participant, with language such as "please describe..." used at the beginning of questions. Interviews took place in a comfortable setting chosen by the participant and lasted approximately forty to sixty minutes in duration and were conducted over three months.

The researcher maintained a phenomenological attitude while conducting these interviews as enough time was allocated to ensure the researcher could step back from the data when required and make adjustments to the line of questioning as required . Interviews were recorded and transcribed over a three-month period.

#### 4.4.5 Phase Three: Final Focus Group

This last stage of data collection comprised of a focus group discussion that was also conducted on the grounds of the Institute of Technology, Carlow campus, involving six participants. This focus group ensured any supplemental and follow-up questions that were raised at the interview stage were followed through, such as clarification surrounding the importance of Snapchat (Appendix E). Again, the participants were familiar with each other as they all attended the same classes and were comfortable in their surroundings.

These participants were not part of the media department and were contacted through a friend of a friend who had already contributed to the study. The researcher remained as moderator as in the first focus group discussion. The group, however, did not have any vague questions to answer as in the first focus group, the researcher guided the questions to seek clarification on certain points. This focus group lasted fifty minutes. The focus group discussions were audio recorded and later transcribed, along with any additional notes taken by the researcher.

#### 4.5 Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data, the researcher maintained a phenomenological attitude to ensure that the results “*reflect a careful description of precisely the features of the experienced phenomenon as they present themselves to the consciousness of the researcher*” (Giorgi, 2009, pp. 130–131). While maintaining this attitude throughout the analysis, a thematic coding approach was taken in conjunction with techniques as described by Gibbs (1998) and Silverman (2010).



Thematic analysis is a general approach to qualitative data, whereby all data is coded and subsequently grouped together by their respective codes (Robson, 2011). Once these units are coded, codes with the same label are grouped together as a theme (Robson, 2011, p.467). All dialogue with the two focus groups and interviews were read, and re-read and data was then grouped under the most common themes. The data was compared, which enabled the researcher to find commonalities. Once compared the researcher examined how often particular themes arose. The researcher subsequently utilised particular quotes from individual participants to illustrate and highlight specific themes. As a smaller scale study, themes were transferred to larger physical documents to examine and identify themes that emerged during the data collection process. In keeping with phenomenological research, the researcher set aside any prejudgments and bracketed personal experiences (Creswell, 1998). This bracketing involves the researcher focusing on the analysis of the experiences (Denzin, 1989). Reduction, even with critical self-awareness moved towards interpretive more than descriptive phenomenological research. This analysis of data took place over an extended period to ensure that an open attitude was maintained throughout the process. The method of reduction was employed during this process (Creswell, 1998). A phenomenological approach was employed for this study, which allows the data to emerge itself (Kensit, 2000). Miller and Crabtree (1996) have identified three modes of reading the text during the analysis stage; the importance for the researcher is to be aware that how they are reading the text should not be understated. With this in mind, the researcher then revisited certain codes and themes, by renaming some to ensure reliable results (Gibbs, 2008).

The researcher then used appropriate quotations to highlight certain recurring themes, which are employed in the findings chapter. In line with Giorgio (1997), the researcher ensured during the analysis process that they suspend judgment concerning the data.

The transcripts are purely descriptive, without any embellishment and the researcher endeavoured to find the essence within the data.

The themes that the researcher focused on were themes that emerged more than once, *once* there was a pattern to them. Themes such as specific sites used for specific types of communications , privacy and trust online.

#### 4.6 Ethical Considerations

This research study was designed under the ethical guidelines of The Institute of Technology, Carlow (IT Carlow, 2015). The researcher submitted a comprehensive (ten thousand words) ethics application to the Ethical Review Board. Ethical approval was received on 29th June 2015. No primary research was undertaken until ethical approval had been received by letter. Data collection commenced July 2015.

The general principles in ethical research from Institute of Technology Carlow (IT, Carlow 2016) are:

- A commitment to the wellbeing, protection and safety of participants
- A duty to respect the rights and wishes of participants
- An obligation to address the issue of who ought to receive the benefits of research and bear its burdens
- A responsibility to conduct high-quality research
- A commitment to communicate the results to stakeholders

There are four pillars of ethical research within the Institute of Technology, Carlow. These are respect for dignity, doing no harm, informed consent and voluntary participation. The researcher used these four pillars to frame all the ethical procedures that were adhered to during the data collection phase of the research. As this study examines the attitudes and behaviours of young people on social networking sites between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five and deals with issues around privacy, self-presentation and youth culture, it is paramount that the researcher is vigilant regarding the sensitivity of the topic and the importance of confidentiality of data at all times. The data that is provided by the participants is private information about them and their friends and families; information that will not be disclosed to anyone and will only be used for this research.

A phenomenological approach was taken for this study to ensure that participants shared their own personal and sometimes private experiences with the researcher. Semi-structured interviews allow for individuals to share thoughts and feelings they may have about certain subjects that are clearly private (Newton, 2010). While this allows for a quality of information to emerge it is also of the utmost importance that the researcher undertakes all relevant procedures to ensure strict adherence to ethical guidelines. The researcher consistently ensured the wellbeing of the participants by asking at regular intervals if they were happy to proceed. The wellbeing of all participants was taken into account from many perspectives. Interviews were held on campus, at locations and times that suited the participants, to ensure their safety and protection. Informed consent (Appendix F) with the understanding that the interview can cease at any time was also stressed to all participants. The responsibility for all ethical considerations lay with the researcher, a responsibility which was not taken lightly.

The researcher also ensured that participants were informed that the conversations would be audio-recorded. In the unusual event of a participant becoming upset due to the sometimes-personal nature of their online lives, support was available. All participants were reassured that the interview could be stopped at any time during the process at their request. It should be noted, however, that there was no requirement for any support for any of the participants during this research. The anonymity of all participants was protected under the Data Protection Acts (1988; 2003). All participants' names were replaced with ID codes once the data was transcribed from the recordings. All information was password protected and in a secure location at all times. Once transcribed, all recordings were deleted as per the Institute of Technology, Carlow ethical guidelines.

Every participant that took part in this study was also supplied with an information sheet (Appendix G) explaining the research study, and that informed consent was a prerequisite before any investigation could begin. This informed consent was taken to ensure the participants were aware of the nature of the research, the type of data that will be required from them and that they had a good understanding of how their data would be used for this research. Consent forms were given to all the participants to read, to ask any questions they may have and to sign if they were comfortable with progressing, before beginning any interview.

#### 4.7 Limitations of this Study

The goal of this study was to examine the experiences of young people on social networking sites in their everyday lives. Data was collected to answer four research questions. The data was reviewed, and many significant findings emerged from this research. There are however certain limitations to the research. As the research that was carried out was qualitative, there were certain limitations surrounding the interview stage of data collection. Namely, the participants were often distracted by their smartphones.

Subsequent to the third interview the researcher asked if the participants would agree to turn off their phone for the duration of the interview. All the participants agreed. This instruction was adhered to for all further interviews to ensure each participant remained focused for the interview process. It also demonstrated to the participant and to the interviewer the unconscious reliance the participant had in checking their phone. All participants said they were lost without it, even during a 45-minute interview process, with some participants uncomfortable without it and so this may have limited the research as the participant wanted to check their phones as soon as possible. This research was conducted with a sample of young adults aged eighteen to twenty-five years old, most of whom had an academic background. Therefore, the results of this study are relevant to a particular age group and academic background. Also, this research over-sampled young females due to the result of response bias, even though thorough sampling methods were used to minimise this.

## 4.8 Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of the research carried out. It provides rationale and justification for choosing a particular research philosophy and a specific research approach. This chapter also explained how data was collected and how data was analysed and how ethics were considered. Overall, this chapter has aimed to show the reasoning for choosing a methodology for research into young people's use of online social networks. The next chapter will describe the results from the data collection of this study.

## Chapter 5: Findings

### 5.2 Introduction

This qualitative study investigated the experiences of young people on social networking sites (SNS) in Ireland. This chapter describes the findings from data collection through focus group discussions and interviews carried out for this research. The findings explained in this section will be organised through themes and key issues that emerged during data collection. To ensure clarity and understanding of these online experiences, direct quotes will be included to describe the results as recommended by Lester (1999). The researcher will include both short quotes and longer, more extensive quotes to illustrate points that were made by the participants. These findings are in effect, the spoken words of young people and their experiences on social networking sites

The findings from the data analysis are explained under several key themes. These are:

- Use of social networking sites by young people
- Sites that are employed by young people
- Social Networking Sites and the everyday
- Privacy and Creeping on Social Networking Sites
- Self-Representation on Social Networking Sites
- Sharing news on Social Networking Sites

### 5.3 Social Networking Sites & Young People

What is the prevalence and use of social networking sites for young people in Ireland?

The number of connections on each of the two preferred sites (Facebook and Snapchat), varied significantly. Participants had a considerably larger network of friends on Facebook, ranging from a minimum of five hundred to one thousand friends per participant. An individual's network of friends on Snapchat was significantly smaller, with the average group of friends on the site ranging from a minimum of twenty to a maximum of eighty. Young people maintain close connections to their peers in Snapchat groups and interact with them many times a day. In some cases, group interaction on Snapchat was very high most days, with up to twenty to thirty interactions between friends, sometimes in the space of two hours. Facebook groups were varied, with each participant belonging to groups ranging from family, school friends, sports teams to educational groups (such as closed college groups). Groups on Facebook tend not to change and remain constant over long periods of time. Some of these longer established groups contain individuals that the young person has no common interests with. These groups and their members online remain the same over an extended period of time. There were no participants in this study that even considered changing or deleting groups on Facebook, as these groups were some of the first to be set up when they joined the platform. This may indicate that the criteria for connecting on Facebook is much less discriminating than other sites, specifically an emotional connection may not be required to connect online, explaining the high numbers of Facebook friends. As some of these more historic groups are still maintained young people explained that they did not want people to see them remove or block friends or acquaintances from their feed as they would *"feel bad especially since they all joined from Bebo"*.



The connections within these more established groups on Facebook also tend to remain the same as participants were concerned with deleting any friends from the group in case they were not kept up to date on certain issues, even if those issues were no longer relevant in their lives. Although some of their friends on these groups still interacted within the group, the participants in this study were “*happy just to check in now and again*”, maintaining the status quo within the group.

### 5.3.1 Social Networking Sites that are employed by Young People

The findings from these discussions demonstrate the popularity of smartphones and their importance for the young person in engaging with online social networking sites (SNS) at any time. All of the participants in this study had a smartphone and connected with social networking sites daily. From the first focus group discussion, it was discovered that young people use social networking sites as a communication tool. It is perceived by young people as a medium that is fast, free and fun. It is not seen as a choice to use social networking sites, but rather a regular part of their communication process, just like the smartphone itself. Young people are predominately using different sites for different reasons. The participants in the focus group discussions in conjunction with the interviews, were asked what social networking sites they engage with the most.

Preferred sites that were used by the participants were:

Facebook and Snapchat were used by participants the most, with both interacted with daily. Instagram and Pinterest were the next two preferred sites, however these were not used as a communication tool, rather as a platform to keep abreast of certain celebrities and fashions.

It was found that Snapchat is used differently than the more established social networking site Facebook. The data gathered in this study suggests that there is a two-tiered system of use among the top two sites. Facebook as a communication tool is replacing face to face interactions for the young person. This is borne out as participants explained they were not close (emotionally) to most groups they were part of on Facebook. However, Facebook was used to acquire information from these groups, such as sports groups (e.g. match times). There was only one difference in relation to gender and that was one of the males that participated in the group mentioned that You Tube was also viewed as a social networking site by him, although this was not borne out by any of the other males. Facebook was used to ensure they did not have to text or have a face to face interaction with a person from the group at a later stage to acquire the information. Although Facebook was used by participants every day and in most cases, many times a day, participants clearly preferred Snapchat as their "go to" online social media platform, especially for peer to peer emotional relationships.

Participants stated they have grown up with smartphones and online social media, and it has become part of their normal day to day routine and not in any way noteworthy.

*"It's just how I chat with friends; I've always done it this way – ever since the days of Bebo."*

- Participant FG1

*"It's just easier talk to people this way – and it's cheaper, it's just how it is done."*

- Participant FG1

*"Is there another way to stay connected" (laughs)?*

- Participant FG 1

### 5.3.2 Social Networking Sites and The Everyday

Young people interact with social networking sites to such an extent that two of the participants in the initial focus group declared they “*that they never ever left the phone down*”, they felt that being connected to social networking sites ‘*takes up almost one hundred percent of their lives*’. Young people are always connected to their social networking sites through their smartphones and are constantly updated through alerts they have set up. Young people view the amount of time they spend on social networking sites as being both unremarkable and completely normal. The evidence herein confirms that they view their social networking use as an extension of themselves. They feel they would not be a complete person without using these platforms, they explain this connection in the following quotes.

One participant in the first focus group emphasised the need for always to be connected to their smartphone:

*“I have to have my phone in my hand constantly. I feel alone without it in my hands.”*

- Participant 3 FG 1

*“I constantly check my phone, in the five minutes this group started, I've probably checked my phone five times.”*

- Participant 2 FG 1

Young people need to constantly have their smartphone turned on and close to their person constantly. This indicates that a large part of their daily communications may be taking place on their smartphone, through specific social networking sites. The participants in this study supplemented their face to face interactions with their peers through sites such as Snapchat.

They would connect offline later, but stayed in contact with each other throughout the day on the site, as one participant in FG1 said “*we send snaps to each other all the time, even though we’re both in college today*” referring to her friend who was also part of the focus group. When asked about their use of social networking sites they maintained that their smartphone was always on, always connected.

The smartphone was never physically far away; it was always within reach. Interviewees said:

*“I check before I get out of bed, and then I will constantly check all day, probably every 20 minutes”*

- Interviewee 2

*“I look at my phone close to 100 times per day, maybe more, it’s never really out of my hands”*

- Interviewee 12

*“I check about 80 times a day at least”*

- Interviewee 1

When participants were questioned why they felt the need to check their phone so often, they explained that social networking sites are their primary channel of communication with all their friends and relatives. Everything they need is at their fingertips, all the news, gossip and other information are on these applications, specifically social networking sites on their smartphone. Participants said they felt a “*lost connection*” if they were not able to access these social media platforms. One participant stated that she “*didn’t want to look sad*” if she was sitting on her own in a restaurant and that she felt the need to check for updates in case she missed some information.

That fear of missing out on updates ensured she stayed connected always when on her own.

*"I think phones are the way forward, it's so easy to communicate- It's what I use my phone most for – just to keep in touch with everyone."*

- Interviewee 5

*"I don't need anything but my phone, I would never read a paper or magazine, why would I? It's all on my phone."*

- Interviewee 17

There are however some disadvantages with being constantly connected. The need to always “check in” can also prove disruptive for the young person to carry on other offline activities.

If the young person is always connected online through their smartphone it can lead to sensory overload as described by a participant in the first focus group.

The voice of the participant was very clear and concise as she explained how she took a decision to delete all social media applications off her smartphone so all her time would not be spent online like her peers.

*"I had to make a conscious decision to stop checking Facebook and the like on my 'phone – in the end, I had to delete them all, I was wasting all day every day online"*

- Participant 4 FG 1

It should be noted however that this was the only person in both the focus groups and the interviews who voiced this opinion.

### 5.3.3 Facebook Friends and Snapchat Stories

What is the nature of social interactions and connection among young people on social networking sites and do these social interactions change on individual SNS platforms?

Although Facebook is used daily, it is mainly used for three distinct reasons.

1. Information gathering, such as checking for times of matches. These interactions with the site are infrequent and on an ad hoc basis with larger older groups such as a team
2. Creeping or covertly collecting personal information online about someone through their profile and is accessed without their prior knowledge
3. Posting infrequent pictures of a holiday or family occasion to larger groups

Facebook is used as a communication tool to gather information rather than share it. The participants in this study 'creeped' on their friends and family as well as acquaintances. Creeping is jargon for the act or practice of following someone persistently online to elicit information without their knowledge or consent. Young people that log onto Facebook, mostly only intend to post an image, they never intend to post an update. In fact, they only post photographs of a family gathering or a holiday image. Of those participants that do upload pictures on Facebook, they do so infrequently. Essentially half of the participants in this study never post anything (text or image) on Facebook.

Facebook as stated is used daily, it is used only to gather information about the activities of the users' network of friends, rather than to engage actively in any meaningful way with others on the platform.

*"I use Facebook for contact with college friends, creeping on others (friends) that I don't see that often. I also use it to keep up to date with clubs like camogie; I'm also friends with my Mam on Facebook – but Snapchat is my main one – it's is just for my close friends"*

- Participant 5 FG 2

*"Facebook has gone way down. Aunts and uncles of mine are on it now (cringing), it's all family stuff now, so I don't bother that much with it, I love Snapchat – everyone does"*

- Participant 3 FG 2

The social networking site Snapchat includes smaller groups of close friends and is consistently used to send pictures and connect to those close friends. The ephemeral nature of the messages sent however is not the reason for the site's popularity (although applications have been developed to undermine this unique selling point of the site). There is constant user engagement with Snapchat, that is not the case for Facebook. Snapchat has smaller circles of closer friends that are trusted, and because of this, the group has total control over the members within the group. Also, as interactions remain private the behaviours and attitudes of group members are more relaxed than they are on more public fora such as Facebook. The number of friends on Snapchat in this research did not increase over time as they might on Facebook. This may be explained as on Facebook friends of friends can add people to the group, whereas On Snapchat the group is managed more strictly. There is an immediate trust among all the users on Snapchat as they know each other very well in an offline environment. Participants said they *"were not worried about what they sent on Snapchat"*. As there are strong connections within groups on Snapchat, interactions are less self- managed than Facebook. Snapchat is perceived to be a private and more relaxed communication medium than Facebook.

The fact that it is a perceived private forum for young people to be themselves on may also be a large contributing factor to the site's popularity in conjunction with control over who joins their groups. Although there are applications online to record a snap, the trust within the group offsets any reservations that a member of the group may have.

*"As for Snapchat, I have a close bond with all my friends on there."*

- Interviewee 22

*"I like that you can have group shares so that it's private within the group and you can decide who's in the group. I like Snapchat the best as I'm a lot freer on it. I think it's much more intimate; I like that I can follow stories through pictures from my friends."*

- Interviewee 8

Another advantage given by the participants in the interviews was that Snapchat is a fast medium to communicate with friends and that it is easier to use as it is visual in nature. The user can just post a picture rather than spend time writing to communicate. The participants said it was "*hassle-free*". It could be argued that the young person values speed of the communication itself over any particular platform and the ease of use on Snapchat where text is not always required for the communication.

*"Facebook takes longer to read all the updates, so it's just quicker to send a snap."*

- Interviewee 20

Instagram and Pinterest are popular among young people, but do not seem to be used in the same way or extent as Snapchat. The results from this study reveal that Snapchat is perceived to be a more personal site with stronger connections. Facebook remains more instrumental in nature.



Snapchat has the option to add a line of text and filters quickly and easily to images which may also explain its popularity as users have high levels of engagement with their posts as they are individually creative and can have added humour. Participants explained however, that they do use either Instagram and Pinterest on a weekly basis to follow celebrity style, but they were not used as a communication tool to connect to each other. There is no peer to peer communication on these sites, merely they were just used as a “*check in and share*” with friends’ pictures of style items they found interesting. There was no further communication with each other, other than “*the odd like*”. Celebrity pages and style were followed the most by all participants, but there was no real user engagement from the young person’s point of view. Instagram according to many of the participants in this study did not like or understand the point of the site, they explained that the site ‘*was for vain people who used a lot of filters.*”

*"What is the point of pictures all the time? I just don't get Instagram"*

- Interviewee 4

*"Instagram – I'm of the opinion that nobody cares about it."*

- Interviewee 11

*"I don't like Instagram, I think it's just way too much hassle, I couldn't be bothered with all those filters."*

- Interviewee 17

Pinterest is perceived as boring by all the participants in this study. One participant in the second focus group said: "*I'm gone off Pinterest, it's really quite boring, there is never anything new or exciting, it's just really boring stuff.*" In agreement, another participant in the second focus group said” *I really don't like Pinterest either, the whole layout is strange. I guess it's about first impressions, and I just never took to it”.*

### 5.3.4 Facebook Foes

A participant in the second focus group discussion complained about the level of immature posts on Facebook. She said *"believe it or not, one of my least favourite sites is Facebook, it's just gone so noisy, I tend to steer away from it, it's just gone way too messy. Facebook is gone so negative; you're afraid to comment on anything, it's not nice, not nice at all...eugh!"*

Another interviewee said *"I'm thinking of leaving Facebook, it has just become a complaint site full of young people giving out. I'm so tired of it, all the posts are just so immature, all people are doing now is posting personal problems"* - Interviewee 5

The fact that Facebook is more accessible to many acquaintances in their network also made it an unpopular choice with young people in this study. They explained how they were annoyed that their parents or relatives can check their updates and they did not like this aspect of Facebook. One interviewee declared *"my uncle was able to tell me where I was last weekend – he lives in London"*. Other negative views of Facebook were provided such as issues surrounding their own privacy on the site. Also, there is an awareness of the possibility of negative reactions from a specific post they may have contributed to. One interviewee explained that she was afraid to give her opinion on any issues on Facebook because if her view differed significantly from that of the initial poster, or other posters in the comments section it might attract negative personal attention, so they would not risk this reaction from other users. From these findings, young people are also dissatisfied at the level of what they perceive as immature posts on Facebook.

It could be argued that not only has this cohort (18-25 year olds) issues surrounding the older generation on the site, they also have issues surrounding the younger generation on the site. Generational issues, once which were considered an offline concern now can be noted online with young people in this study verbalising issues with both the older and younger generations, which may be a function of age. Recently, the term millennial, which indicates the generation born 1981 – 1997 (Pew, 2016) has developed into a fragmented group - younger and older millennials. Those born earlier than 1988 have experienced a different connection with technology to those millennials born after 1989. One of the main differences is the development of mobile technology such as the smart phone. The older millennials remember a time with limited access to the internet and applications such as Facebook had not yet taken over, rather Bebo was just in its infancy. The younger millennial however has been socialised even more with social media and the smartphone and as such displays differing behaviours on social media than their older counterparts. Although, the participants in this study have somewhat disengaged with the site, (with the noted exception of creeping), Facebook may have become too big and too public to allow users to engage with the site at a personal and emotional level for fear of encouraging negative attention.

It is noteworthy to mention that the four sites mentioned above in the findings (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Pinterest) were the only sites discussed by all the participants in both the focus groups and the interviews. They did not engage with other sites such as the professional networking site LinkedIn or the micro-blogging site Twitter. One interviewee mentioned the international site Yak-Yak but did not think she would use it as no one else had downloaded it.

## 5.4 Closeness of SNS Groups

As discussed in the literature review, there can be occasions where there is generational divide online. Proof of the closeness of an individual's peer group is demonstrated by both the quantity and nature of pictures displayed (Mendleson and Papacharissi, 2010). Facebook is the principal site where both family members and young people interact online together. In this study, there did not seem to any major generational issues from the point of the young person allowing both young and old to connect with them on their profile. This may be because there was little interaction, save for some family photographs. Parents were not part of any snapchat group for all the participants.

The reasons given for this were: it is a site just for friends, and with smaller groups, there is a level of privacy and control that has not afforded them on larger sites such as Facebook.

*"Snapchat is just for me and a couple of good friends -it's private in the group and stays that way."*

- Participant FG 2

All the participants said there are absolutely no circumstances that they would allow parents on Snapchat.

*"There is no way I'd allow my mother onto Snapchat; it's just for my friends"*

- Participant FG 2

*"Are you joking, my mother does not want to see what we're talking about – she's got Facebook."*

- Participant FG 2

The level of trust within these smaller groups is quite high. There are also high levels of peer to peer regulation within the group.

Participants articulated examples where someone in the group had posted or commented inappropriately on a post, and a member of the group would call that person privately and ask them to delete or edit the original post.

*"If it was a close friend, yes, I would ask them to remove it, but if it was someone*

*I did not know I would not comment"*

- Interviewee 18

*"If anyone tried to share pictures to anyone outside our group – they're in trouble and they know they'd be in trouble, they just wouldn't do it"*

- Interview 19

These quotes signify the importance of group relations on Snapchat. The group will ensure that behaviour acceptable to the group is maintained. The threat of being blocked from communications in the real world is enough of a deterrent for the users that they all continue with and expect acceptable group behaviour. The participants felt happy to step in if they felt a friend was unreasonable on Snapchat. The same cannot be said for Facebook. The groups and posts are public on Facebook and they felt they did not need the aggravation of stepping into the middle of a post they did not know who would engage with the post. If the original post did not involve their friends, even if they disagreed with the substance of the post, they would still not intervene.

*"Why would I put myself out there like that, I'm not going to be the next person that gets slaughtered on a post if I disagree with something."*

- Participant FG 2

*"To be honest, I would not step into the middle of a post I disagreed with unless they were talking about something that was close to my heart or family. Other than that, it's their business what they post and none of my concern"*

- Interviewee 7

This demonstrates the non – personal nature of Facebook and the lack of engagement from the participants in this study. Group regulation which governs Snapchat groups do not seem to work with larger and more diverse groups on Facebook. However, participants did say that they would ask a friend to edit a post if they disagreed with the content on Facebook, or disliked a picture they were tagged in, but only in exceptional circumstances and where the original poster was a close friend. Interestingly, the participants maintained that they would make contact about editing the post either through other channels such as a text message or face to face but not online.

*"Yes, I would ask my friend to take down a pic if I was looking awful in it, I'd just tell her to take it down"*

- Participant FG 1

*"I'd only ask a close friend (to take down a post), wouldn't want someone I didn't really know to think I didn't like a picture of me"*

- Participant FG 2

*"No, don't think I would.... hold on..... the other day a friend of mine put up a post about selling a phone online, I called him immediately to take it down as it was against company rules, but only because we hang out together"*

- Interviewee 10

As the interactions on Snapchat are more private, more personal, those interactions are also less managed in relation to self-representation than other social networking sites. There are no issues around peer to peer interactions or identity creation or management on the site.

They are no concerns how they look or what they say as they are safe inside a trusted small private group. In comparison, participants were much more conscious of their posts on Facebook because of the wider network of friends and no control over groups and views of those posts.

*"On Facebook, I give a lot of thought about any picture I post, don't even think about it on Snapchat"*

- Interviewee 15

*"I give it a lot of time, I would look at things like grammar and double check the content – I always remember this will be online for life, so I think about that quite a lot before I post something on Facebook"*

- Interviewee 22

When asked about filters online most participants said they would use them, but only if they were posting a holiday picture on Facebook. Snapchat users were not at all concerned with how they looked.

*"My friends know what I look like, if I start using filters and photoshop they'll call me on it and ask me who did I think I was- but that's ok, as I'd do the same to them. On Snapchat its different, our snaps are private, and we all know that"*

- Participant 3 FG 2

The results from the interviews and focus group discussions show that there is a different type of identity management associated with Snapchat than there is on Facebook. On Facebook, the participants were careful that the images they posted give a positive impression to their large network of friends and family, without giving too much information. Therefore, they were careful about the content that they were sharing.

However, users were also careful not to appear too superficial in front of their friends on snapchat and were happy to have fun posting pictures that did not necessarily always show them in the best light.

## 5.5 Privacy and Creeping on Social Networking Sites

What are the concerns of young people regarding privacy of social networking sites?

Some sites are used for information gathering and specifically, covert information gathering that is termed “creeping”. Other sites are used for closer connections, expressly maintaining and developing those networks. The participants were conscious of their online security, with their privacy settings on high with some (less than a third) changing their name to the Irish version so as not to attract unwanted attention or new acquaintances or work colleagues to their page. This change in name was carried out to secure a new profile with more control who their friends will be, as a lot of the older more established friends groups migrated over to Facebook from Bebo.

*“I try to keep as much as possible online very private – wouldn’t plaster my life all over it like some people. Some of the people I know on FB actually have very personal family feuds online in front of everyone – I think they forget that everyone can see them. I wish they would just stop!”*

- Interviewee 9

*“Yes I have the highest set privacy, and as I mentioned above I have to approve tags about me, this goes the same for images and links”*

- Interviewee 10

*“Yes, especially with my personal details. I’m aware that they can also rob your picture, which is something that I’d be very concerned over”*

- Participant FG 2

*“I’m very concerned about this; all my posts are private for my friends only.”*

- Participant FG 2



All the participants although concerned about privacy online, revealed that they are happy to look at other people's profiles, without their knowledge, even though they were not friends with that person, they referred to this behaviour as creeping. They take part in this behaviour as many participants said, "*everyone does it*". They explained that they all just expect other people to creep on their profiles as well and that "*it's no big deal*". Some said they did this on ex-boyfriends, to keep up to date with their lives (and to see if their ex had a new boyfriend/girlfriend). They wanted to know this information "*just to know what was going on*"

*"Mainly I use Facebook to look at other people and their lives, I like looking at people I know and people I don't know – I don't really care, I just get sucked in looking."*

- Participant FG 1

*"I check Facebook for gossip and to check everyone else's lives - to see what's happening in other people's lives; everyone creeps on everyone."*

- Participant FG 2

*"I check Facebook- Just to be nosey, and it used to have some interesting links on the homepage sometimes."*

- Participant FG 3

*"I creep a lot on other people's accounts to see what they are doing. A friend of a friend posted holidays snaps last week, and I felt so bad I actually straight away booked a holiday to Greece for next year".*

- Interviewee 4

The participants in this study without exception "creeped" on friends and friends of friends many times a day, with no specific number, as it just depended on how busy their day was. They felt that this type of online behaviour was not a privacy issue, as Facebook is a public forum, but they understood that they too were more than likely being creeped on, even with their personal security settings high.

## 5.6 Trust Online

All participants said their trust levels were low for all posts online as they perceived them to be photo shopped in some way. If the image was not photo shopped then filters may have been used prior to the picture being posted.

*"No way, nothing online is true!! It's all filtered, photo shopped and it's just crazy what happens to pictures before you see them online as real."*

- Participant FG2

*"No, I really don't trust any pictures either as they're all photo shopped."*

- Participant FG2

*"No way, an online profile is the person they want to be, or they do it in a bid to get attention sometimes."*

- Participant FG 2

*"No, I don't, they're (pictures/selfies) all for show- most aren't even real."*

- Interviewee 12

Changing your image with Photoshop once participant said: *"Yes of course who doesn't, your profile*

*is the first impression of you, even if it doesn't really look like you as most profilers don't these days"*

- Participant FG1.

Once the subject of trust was introduced, all the participants spoke very negatively about social networking sites, in particular, Facebook and Instagram. Participants said that most images are photo shopped for online consumption and the celebrity style, and fashion pages they follow are just "not real". Trust among participants was low for all posts they engage with on social networking sites.

Young people do not trust images they see on Facebook (even from friends) and assume everything is stage-managed, while simultaneously taking part in the same practice themselves by managing their own images for Facebook.

## 5.7 Advertising on Social Networking Sites

Participants verbalised that there is too much going on, on their feed in relation to the amount of advertising. Facebook has birthday reminders for friends in your group to ensure maximum interaction with the site (which was perceived by the participants of this study as Facebook advertising Facebook). Participants felt that this was subtle advertising for the site itself and although most posted birthday wishes to their friend's timelines they were unhappy with the level of advertising, especially advertising that was personalised for them as a user specifically.

*"My feed is so busy; I'm sick and tired of all the ads and things popping up all the time."*

- Participant FG 2

*"There is so much advertising on Facebook now – I hate it."*

- Participant FG 1

*"Birthday posts are definitely something I do."*

- Interviewee 11

All bloggers that were followed on Facebook and Snapchat were celebrities from fashion and the reality television industry. Participants did not view product endorsements on these sites from bloggers as advertising.

The participants did not see themselves as the audience, rather part of the communication process. They were active in the process.

*"I don't think they (bloggers) get paid for most of what they write; I get good tips and ideas and some of the time will buy what they are wearing - if I can afford it.*

- Interviewee 17

Facebook can be utilised as a direct connection for advertisers to the end user, with options for direct responses for advertisers. It is developing new advertising formats (such as dynamic re-targeting and introducing cross-platform ads), primarily optimised for mobile users. Facebook is releasing new features on an almost daily basis for its advertisers, to gain traction in cross-platform social media advertising with direct and user-friendly links to leading websites. Participants were annoyed at the levels of advertising that was aimed at them on a continuous basis.

## 5.8 Representation on Social Networking Sites

How do social networking sites affect self-representation among young people?

Self-Representation on Facebook was an issue that was observed in the results from both the interviews and the focus group discussions. As mentioned earlier, Facebook is perceived as being “too busy” by many of the participants and so the users do not actively post updates on the site because the groups in this networking site are too public. However, participants said that they did not want to leave Facebook entirely as they still liked to follow certain sports teams and other groups. Group membership of specific groups tended not to change over extended periods of time, as the user did not want to unfollow the group, even when they no longer had any interest in that group's posts.

However, the group itself grew larger. This may be a contributing factor to friend numbers being so high in comparison with the other three sites. There was also a large number of friends that migrated over from older social media platforms that also have never been organised. A participant from the first focus group explained the need to always check social media in case one of her friends had posted something, or specifically if she had posted a picture, she needed to know how many "likes" or comments her post had received.

*"I feel like people are thinking about me if I am tagged or mentioned in a post. But if I throw up a picture, and I don't have any likes on it after ten minutes or so, it's coming down"*

- Participant 2 FG 1

*"I have to say I think a lot about the pictures I post too, but I also post latish (sic) at night – around eleven or twelve – more of my friends are online then so I will get as many likes as possible."*

- Participant 3 FG 2

The above quotes from these participants emphasise the importance of the very specific and functional use of online social networking sites. They also demonstrate an emotional connection to both other users on the platform and to the content shared within. It is important for the young person to be able to connect at any time but also to have an emotional connection to either the post or the other user. Representation online is important to the young person not only for their content, but even the time they post certain content to a specific platform. The numbers vary greatly also on specific platforms.

One participant when asked about knowing all their friends of Facebook said:

*“God NO, when all these sites like Facebook came after Bebo, everyone was adding everyone – so I had all old school friends that I wouldn’t necessarily keep in touch, but I can’t be rude and delete them either, but it would only go as far as friends of friends that I would add now”*

- Interviewee 20

This group membership can demonstrate why Facebook has remained so high in numbers of people logging into the site. The participants did not want to offend, or be seen to be rude by deleting either groups or acquaintances. This representation of themselves, although subtle, shows that they want to represent themselves in a way that is seen to be active and open to all friendship requests online. It was also borne out in the research that Facebook “likes” are still crucial to all users.

If a friend posts a picture and the group feels that there are not enough likes for the post, the group will organise friends to like the post. This management of likes typically takes place in an offline environment. Unlike Snapchat, Facebook pictures are filtered, and likes are sought out. One participant when asked about using filters said:

*"Am..... unfortunately, yes..... I use a lot of filters, doesn't everyone, though, I could take a load of photos to get a good one, one that I'd be cool with putting up."*

- Participant FG2

They will also ensure friends within their online social circle will “like” pictures that have been posted by a member of the group. Selfies are an important part of the communication process for peer to peer interaction, according to participants in this study.

*"I expect every picture to get at least 15 likes if it doesn't I won't be happy and start to wonder why and re-check everything, I will take it down if I don't get enough likes"*

- Interviewee 1

All participants maintained they would re-do their photo until they are happy with the image they present to their friends and the wider world. One participant when asked if they re-take pictures said: *"Yes, 100s of times – who hasn't!" One interviewee simply said, "Sadly, I have."*

Another Interviewee said: *"Yes, I re-take photos all the time, I'm not putting up something crap, nobody does"*

*"Of course, I use filters; you're posting it online and let's be honest once it's out there its worldwide!"*

- Interviewee 8

Self-representation was an important issue among all the participants in this study. They were aware of their backgrounds when taking pictures, and would re-take the photograph if they were unhappy with not just an element of themselves, but also if they were unhappy with an item in the background. They did not manage just their image but also the environment, ensuring the image was perfect.

The results from this study also found an interesting contradiction around self-representation on social networking sites. When participants spoke about Snapchat, there were no issues around self -presentation, unlike Facebook. In fact, the opposite was true. As these Snapchat groups are smaller and emotionally connected to each other, there are high levels of trust within the group and the group will regulate the members. Because of the high levels of trust (and initially the ephemeral nature of the site), users freely post whatever picture they take.

For some, it is a case of the worse the picture (selfie), the better the reaction. They would be seen within the group dynamic as “*cool with everything*” and “*not too precious*”. The funnier the selfie, the better the response from the group and they would try to better each other in subsequent posts. Young people re-take photos of themselves many times and use filters to ensure that they are posting the best image of themselves only on Facebook. They do not re-take photographs for self-representation purposes on Snapchat. The young person is expected to be “real” in front of their peers, as there are close connections to each other in an offline environment.

## 5.9 Sharing News and updates

The participants in this study use social networking sites to communicate with friends and family. They also use it as a news site, as friends can post news articles they have found interesting. There are no issues from any of the participants in relation to trust for news updates that appeared on their timeline. Although they had no trust for regular posts online such as images they made a distinction between the two. All the participants had high levels of trust for news stories, regardless of who shared them or where they originated from.

*“I get all my news online from my friends of course, I trust it (news), how can it not be true, it's news.” - Interviewee 12*

Many of the participants said they re-post news articles from a friend, even if they have not read the full article. This type of news sharing is common among all groups.

*“...come to think of it, I don't actually share anything new myself, just re-post news.”*

- Interviewee 15



Another participant from the second focus group said: *“I get all my news from someone else's feed, normally on Facebook.”*

*“Facebook is where I get news; it tends to be posts that my friends have already shared to my timeline that they liked themselves.”*

- Interviewee 21

Facebook was the main site where news stories were shared and re-shared among friends. The participants did not check to see where current affairs post originated from or which friend re-shared it as they trusted the content because it was a news story.

## 5.10 Conclusion

This chapter described the findings of the interviews and focus group discussions with young people on their experiences of social networking sites. The study showed interesting results regarding the use of social networking sites by young people and their behaviour and interactions on these sites. Young people communicate on certain social networking sites using a one to many network, where they are also the creator and the publisher of content they share online. This sharing of information is typically from another friend in their network, where sometimes the content was simply re-posted. However, time on Facebook was spent information gathering on the site rather than posting any content themselves. Snapchat was primarily used for social interaction with their friends, where these connections were also friends in an offline environment.

Young people are also choosing to use specific media platforms to express their identity, as opposed to any historical identity markers of an emergent adulthood such as political ideology. In the findings, Facebook and Snapchat emerged as the two most popular social networking sites, each with its unique associated online behaviour among young people. A two-tiered use of Social Networking Sites emerged. Facebook tended to have older more public groups with each user having an extensive and varied network of friends. Many findings proved to be contradictory. Facebook experiences consisted for the most part of creeping and posting images infrequently. It is also the site that is viewed as their parent's social media platform. Participants had issues relating to the younger generation on the site in respect of what they deemed to be immature posts.

Although they log on to the site every day, the quality of engagement with the site is not evident. They only use Facebook to “check in” and creep on other people’s profiles. They will also use it to keep up do date with sporting events and groups that they may once have been interested in, however these interactions are on an ad-hoc basis. However, young people are constantly engaged with Snapchat with the types of communication ranging from taking and sending selfies on Snapchat to following stories. As Snapchat is used for communications with their peers, they will stay involved in their groups daily and work at staying connected. The social capital on Snapchat remains high as all the young people are invested in the groups on the site. As posts and interactions on the site remain private, there seemed to be a more relaxed attitude to interactions among group members as they expected those interactions to remain private. Within these neo tribes online, there is an emphasis on emotional connections and maintaining those connections, rather than any instrumental or rational one. The participants in this study were mindful as to how they represented themselves on Facebook, while contradictorily, having no concerns relating to their self-representation on Snapchat.

They stage-managed their identity differently across each platform, depending on the group they are engaging with. Facebook was the site for photoshop and Snapchat was considered to be the site for fun images rather the funnier the image (using snapchat filters) sent the better. For those that did post images on Facebook likes and shares were very important, with some saying they would delete an image rather than leaving it online with no likes (or not enough likes). Groups managed likes in an offline scenario as already mentioned, if a friend had not received the required number of likes they would contact other members of the group either through texts or face to face to ensure they went online and liked the specific image.

Group membership of other less used groups also proved important for the participants. They will not change or delete any of these older groups on Facebook so these groups remain unchanged for long periods of time. Reasons for this ranged from not wanting to miss out on information to not wanting people to see them online deleting a group. Posts on Facebook were very infrequent and much less personal as compared to the content and frequency of posts on Snapchat.

Snapchat consisted of smaller, more private groups of close friends with many peers to peer interactions. Young people are using these online platforms believing they are nothing new, not transformative in any way, merely, part of how they were socialised. They are using this sites on a constant basis and they are perfectly ordinary and mundane to them. Snapchat proved to be their social media platform of choice, they are constantly engaged with this site. It is used for communication between friends, predominately using images to communicate. They consider Snapchat to be fast, fun and free.

The results also showed concerns about privacy issues on social networking sites, with a significant number of participants changing or adding another profile online. Even with this concern for privacy, all the participants have no issue creeping on other people's profiles and accepted that although their own privacy settings were high, they too were probably being creaped on. Issues emerged in the study relating to their views of targeted online advertising. All the participants in this study had a negative opinion of this type of targeted online advertising and in some cases contemplated leaving the site altogether.

The next chapter on discussion will compare the findings of this study with the literature that was examined in the literature review. This will ensure understanding of how the present study supports or contradicts previous research and theories.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

### 6.2 Introduction

The previous chapter described the findings from the interviews and focus group discussions that were carried out for this study. The study revealed interesting findings regarding youth culture and in what way this culture has evolved under the influence of social networking sites (SNS). This chapter will explain these findings in the context of previous studies that have been discussed on the subject. Themes that are discussed in this chapter are; social networking sites and young people, interactions of groups on SNS, an exploration of self-representation of young people on SNS and finally a discussion relating to privacy on SNS.

### 6.3 Social Networking Sites and Young People

The literature review relating to social media discussed how technology has become an inherent part of the lives of young people as they have adapted to this new media from an early age (Ito et al, 2008). This adaptation to new media can signify the way the young people perceive and use technology and social media is different from that of older adults who use technology in their daily lives (Herring, 2008). This new way to connect to friends and to communicate suggests a major culture shift in youth culture. As discussed in the literature review a study from Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe (2007) maintain that young people are engaged with Facebook on average between ten to thirty minutes daily. Since 2007, young people engage with social networking sites such as Facebook significantly more than 30 minutes per day as was the findings in this study.

Motives for engaging with others on social networking sites are many and include the cultural practices of the young person's generations. Hebdige (1979), maintains this youth culture is a set of shared values and beliefs by young people that differentiate them from the mainstream culture of older generations. The use of social media can be considered a distinctive activity that is generally adhered to by young people, typically from a younger generation. This study demonstrates that technology is also an important part of a young person's life as each one of the participants interviewed for this study operated a smartphone and was engaged in many social networking sites on their mobile technology. Meade (1928), argues it is the exploration of new interests and activities that benefits a young person to develop independently from the previous generation, which may explain these new connections on social networking sites. The use of social networking sites can be considered a way through which the young person is defining their generation from other generations, it can also be considered a symbol of their transition from childhood to adulthood. Social media is a platform that provides easy access to the outside world, one that is not sheltered by parents and families as an individual is going through this important transition to adulthood (Devlin, 2009), giving the young person that required independence. These parental restrictions offline, can encourage young people to engage in socializing online (Boyd, 2011) as was confirmed in this study. Thus, the prevalent use of social media is a key feature that has been influential in changing the youth culture in modern society for many reasons.

Postman (1992) suggests that cultural and social factors have an important role in the function of new technologies. Social pressure to engage with social media has also been somewhat influential in ensuring that social networking becomes a regular activity for young people.

It was established that participants were using specific social networking sites as a primary means of communication with their friends and were constantly checking for any communication messages or notifications on these SNS applications. The participants demonstrated a need to check their smartphones for notifications, so much so that they would constantly have to check their phone. Participants disclosed that they felt lonely without their phones because they do not feel connected with their friends when they are not being constantly updated. This suggests that social networking sites are considered a necessity by the young person, a necessity that provides access to their group of friends at all times. Postman (1992) explains this phenomenon through the concept of technopoly which he *'finds is not only a state of culture but also a state of mind'*. According to Postman (1992), when culture is born out of technology, it can develop and become so dependent on technology that technology becomes a blessing as well as a burden on the user. This can be demonstrated in this study by the high levels of frustration that this technology can cause the young person. Frustrations with regards to levels of interaction and pressure to play a specific role on these sites. As mentioned in the literature review, Generation C have integrated technology into their lives and have done so regardless of age. They multi-screen and move seamlessly between both devices as platforms. In Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) research demonstrated that indeed young people see themselves as a net generation, one that is constantly connected to technology, a premise that was borne out in this research.

The constant interconnectedness with technology and social networking sites show that these young people are truly a net generation. A generation so connected to social media sites that one of the participants in this study complained how she could not stop herself from checking the SNS application on her smartphone for updates.

The participant was so frustrated with the constant checking that she subsequently had to delete the applications from her phone so she could concentrate on other areas of her life. Thus, the embracing of social media by young people started as a way for the young person to explore new ideas and engage in an activity that was distinct from the mainstream culture of adults. This activity has now become an integral part of youth culture and has even been adopted by older adults to some extent. Although the use of social media may no longer be a phenomenon exclusive to youth culture, the non-stop need of the young person to use social networking sites to construct their online persona has become normalised youth behaviour and part of youth culture.

#### 6.4 Interactions of young people on SNS

Types of interactions among the young people are changing. Instead of face to face interactions, the social networking sites have provided a new medium of communication. With the popularity of this new media, social networking applications have also become more diverse in terms of offering different ways to communicate, not just by the way of text but also images, voice recordings and videos. The top four social networking websites that were found to be most used by the participants of this study were Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Pinterest. While Facebook allows communication mainly through text or photographs, Snapchat was exclusively used for sending photos or videos called “snaps”. Instagram and Pinterest were also visual sites that allowed users to share pictures, however it is worth noting that these two sites had no peer to peer interactions.



Young people make use of SNS to mediate multiple aspects of their daily lives, in terms of the accumulation of information, news and engagement with their friends and peers. The findings indicate that the two main sites used by participants, Facebook and Snapchat, are understood as serving different roles and fulfilling different needs for the young person involved. Herring (2008) argues that what is important to the young person is not the technology itself, it is merely an ends to a means. Herring (2008) explains young people in the digital age may also develop shorter attention spans because they must process a lot of information in a short amount of time through social media.

Herring (2008) also asserts that these members of the digital age are especially skilled at multi-tasking. However it may be this multi-tasking that can lead to an over exposure of information for the young person and as a tactic to deal with this, they can simply leave the site if they feel over whelmed, which was the case in this study. This information overload can indicate that the individual is unable to give their attention to one task for a long amount of time (Herring, 2008). This concept may also explain the move between different social networking sites. Image based social networking sites take less time to understand and process each communication as compared to text communications. This may also explain why young people are moving from text based SNS to image based SNS, it is the fact that one platform is easier to use than the other. As one participant said in relation to Snapchat “It’s fast, fun and free” Online users will also tend to reveal more about themselves through pictures and symbols rather than face to face interaction (Zhao & Grasmuck, 2008). This may explain the popularity of online image based platforms such as Snapchat over older sites as was the case in this study. Their offline face to face interactions are being supplemented by SNS, as sites such as Snapchat are being engaged with constantly with close (emotionally) friends.

Facebook is being used in part for information gathering (such as sports) as young people are replacing face to face interactions with this behaviour, just with weaker ties on the larger platforms.

The number of SNS that have been introduced implies that young people must constantly acquaint themselves with application to use and learn the acceptable way to communicate with their friends through these channels (Lichy, 2012). Lichy (2012) insists that the change in the use of SNS also changes the online behaviours and attitudes of young people on each of these channels. This was observed in this study through the interactions that the study participants had on Facebook as compared to their interactions on Snapchat.

In this culture of over sharing (Suler, 2004; Dewey, 2015) young people in this study managed their online activities by ensuring high privacy settings and engaging the most with the site that was most private. The study found that the young people had different connections with people in their groups on both sites. On Facebook, young people had a larger network of friends that included close friends and family. Young people perceived Facebook to be the site of choice for their parent's generation, which was one reason they did not engage with the site in any meaningful way as they did not want to share information with family members. They also had issues surrounding the younger generation on Facebook as they felt their posts were immature. The generational distinctions that the participants of this study made between not only the older generation online but also the younger generation online can establish how the young people view themselves in relation to the concept of youth.

They view the younger generation as young people and they remain in between the two in terms of their behaviours and attitudes online.

Their views on generational issues that they perceive problematic reflect Mannheim's (1952) views on generational consciousness, albeit without the constraints of a defined geographical area. Hall & Jefferson's (1975) opinions on groups sharing an affinity with one another and are capable of exercising appeal and a binding force can be demonstrated on Snapchat. The group will self-regulate and due to strong emotional ties to each other will by default have a shared affinity. Snapchat included only very close trusted friends of the individual. Therefore, the audience for the social networking sites is constantly changing with different platforms which further adds complexity for the young people to understand the nature of interactions that they should have with each of these SNS groups. This study demonstrates there was in effect a two-tiered use of their social networking sites.

Facebook and Snapchat were engaged with at different levels, concurring with Agosto et al (2012) which proved that young people tend to prefer large SNS for all their communication with "weaker ties" and tended to use text or privately message to communicate with people they had a "stronger tie" with. In this study, text based communication, such as on a mobile telephone have been replaced with an online platform. In this study the study participants explained that they used Facebook to connect with a larger network of friends and family or 'weaker ties' but they rarely undertook any activities on Facebook to interact with any of these groups. The 'stronger ties' of close friends was present on Snapchat that was used frequently by the users as it provided a more private channel for communication.

This also concurs with Ellison et al (2007) where they maintained that Social Networking Sites are used mainly for social interactions with friends from their offline network rather than making new online friendships. For instance, a young person on Facebook would only show activity for certain specific posts (birthday wish posts of parents etc.) where the user will like certain updates and post images on an ad hoc basis. In case of Facebook, there is no real connection to the site or the profiles that they are linked to online.

The one noted exception being of close family, where private messages are sent infrequently. However, with Snapchat the wide network of friends has been established for smaller and closer groups and these groups demonstrate high levels of interaction and trust within that group with no privacy concerns. This separation of platforms may display how the young person is dealing with context collapse. They cannot identify the online audience as they would be able to in an offline environment and in the offline environment would adjust their tone and presentation to fit social the context. For an un-identifiable audience online it is possible that the young person is choosing which platform to use as they can identify the audience to an extent and regulate their tone and presentation accordingly. The role played by a young person on Snapchat is of immense importance as compared to the role they play on Facebook. This may be because Snapchat is used as a communication tool with their closest friends, where there is a level of implied trust within the group. Snapchat interactions with friends remain non-stop, but the importance for the young person is not necessarily the image that they send, rather the connection itself. Snapchat also affords private communication online among a close group of friends at no cost. The privacy that is afforded to them on the site allows them to be their actual self, with there being a clear distinction between the public and private spheres.

Young people use this platform not only to communicate the silly, the funny, but the private and the important too. Snapchat has therefore become the most preferred site among young persons who do not perceive a privacy risk to them or their contacts on the site. Interestingly the ephemeral nature of the site or indeed the no cost element was not a deciding factor as to it being their preferred SNS of choice, it was the closeness and control that the smaller private groups afforded.

The visual nature and the speed at which communications can be delivered on Snapchat is also highly important for the young person, in line with previous research. As mentioned in the literature review Hodkinson and Lincoln (2007) successfully argue that although primarily for socialisation purposes, online social networks should be recognised as not just online generic global sites, but rather sites with a more personal connection for the young person, as each time the site is visited the young person has rendered it into their own personal private space. This is the case for the neo-tribes online as they view snapchat in particular their private space demonstrated by their use of Social Networking Sites and who they allow connect with them in the site, i.e. no parents. The different types of communication on different SNS platforms concurs with Meyrowitz (1985) theory that state social performances of a person changes with the audience in particular where isolated and chosen audiences take part in the communication. These isolated audiences can be decided by the young person themselves, so the interaction by default changes in line with the audience. Snapchat can be a young person's way of separating the audience as the audience has become too large and diverse on Facebook. On Facebook, there are newly emergent patterns of behaviour that lack the extremes of previously distinct encounters in an offline environment.

Indeed, as Baym (1995) argued that this virtual online community should be understood as emergent, taking shape somewhat organically, the participants of this study were determining their audience depending on which SNS they choose daily. This is also supported by Goffman (1959) stating many decades earlier that the interaction of an individual changes on different platforms and each type of interaction depends on the type of audience. In the case of Instagram and Pinterest where celebrities were “followed”, there was no peer to peer interaction on these sites. They were not being used as a communication tool, rather just to follow a celebrity and their style.

The use of different SNS among different groups can also be considered comparable to the concept of tribes in youth culture. Tribes are flexible, fluid and short-lived groups of people with shared social meanings and experiences (Maffesoli, 1996; Bennett, 2000). The members of a tribe must contribute to the work and share the beliefs and values of the group to retain their membership. There are often individuals that can easily move in or out of the tribe, as they are fluid within the group structure (Maffesoli, 1996). Groups on Snapchat follow a similar pattern and behaviour to the concept of tribe, where groups are formed among close friends, with shared experiences and common interests and members can come and go. Members of these tribes on Snapchat can ensure high visibility by posting “snaps” in order to remain a visible member of the tribe. This Snapchat tribe is distinct from Facebook groups where the rules of communication are different and the members do not post updates on a regular basis. Tribes online in this research have proven to have high intimacy and long-term engagement within the group. Participants in this study demonstrated that tribes are found to be highly engaged in their group and very active on all posts within that group as they place importance on the building of social network and maintaining those connections offline.

This study also revealed that groups on Facebook have become unchanging over time with participants explaining their unwillingness to delete older groups on the site. There are certainly some subcultural characteristics (not related to class) within Facebook groups. This study revealed characteristics attributed to the concept of tribe that were observed on Snapchat. Therefore, youth culture is continuously evolving for the types of groups that are forming on different social networking sites. This is resulting in different categories of communication and uses for the young people for each individual platform and group.

### 6.5 Group Regulation on SNS

Groups on social networking sites maintain a culture consistent with the concept of tribes. These groups are regulated by certain regulations and it is important that these rules are followed by all members to keep the membership of the tribe. This group regulation was observed in this study when participants stated that they would tell their close friends if they did not appreciate a post or an image that their friend had uploaded on any platform. They would insist that it be taken down immediately and in some cases would deal with the issue purely offline. This regulation within the group was only observed for friends who are close, which may confirm they were a member of a tribe rather than a larger group on a different platform. Snapchat was regulated through implied trust within the group and if someone in the group is inappropriate in some way, the group ensure that the behaviour is stopped immediately. If the person does not comply by the group rules, there is an imminent threat that they would be removed from the SNS group and can no longer participate in the social communication. This behaviour is similar to those of tribes as explained by Bennett (1999) that was discussed in the literature review. According to Bennett (1999), it is more important for the tribes to share experiences together rather than express their individuality.

This regulation is easier to manage on Snapchat as the groups are smaller, with trust high and normally involve close friends that are geographically close in most cases. The threat of removal from the group is high enough for all the group members to follow the group rules and keep the communication content private and appropriate within the group.

Groups on Facebook did not follow the same set of regulations and if a person posted inappropriate or offensive content, the people in the group did not feel compelled to inform the person to remove their post. As the groups on Facebook are public, the participants did not want to give a negative opinion in public to avoid confrontation or did not think it was any of their concern. This behaviour again shows the nature of weaker ties of people on Facebook groups because the people on Facebook groups are not close friends and may be complete strangers, in some cases. The young people on Facebook would only intervene on offensive content if it was their close friends. This intervention would also only happen offline and not in any public fora. In other cases, where the poster was not a very close friend they would not intervene and indeed expect the same from others if they posted any such content.

## 6.6 Self-representation on SNS

The appropriate representation of oneself is a central practice in any culture (Hall, 1997) which has become a constant goal for young people on social networking sites. As discussed earlier, the young person can change their behaviour on different SNS platforms according to the audience. From the functionalist theory perspective, it can be argued that the importance of self-representation for the young person indicates that they are trying to explore their own identity using social media.



Harcourt (2015), argues that the social networking sites provide a platform for young people to seek approval and popularity from their peer groups that may not be found from face to face interactions or other offline channels.

This may explain why this study found that the young people must constantly check and re-check the texts and images that they post online. One participant even explained how she used spelling and grammatical checks for all her posts and then re-checked them again prior to posting anything online. The posting of images is also an important issue for self-representation as the participants in this study state that they took images like selfies many times over to capture the perfect image before they posted it on any SNS channel. This conscious decision making from young people about the content to take and re-take a selfie can demonstrate their efforts around impression management. According to Goffman (1959), a person gives their first impression through verbal communication and subsequently through face to face communication. For social media, the verbal communication translates into text posts and the looks (profile picture) of a person which can be revealed through their own images, posts and selfies. These posts may explain the popularity of selfies on social media, especially on more public platforms like Facebook where individuals are trying to make a positive impression and receive likes, as was also established in Schoenebeck et al., (2006).

This research study demonstrates that the same type of consciousness was not present for images that were sent on Snapchat. The participants stated that on Snapchat, they could not send their friends edited or filtered images of themselves. They explained that this is because their close friends can easily tell the difference between their real self and the photo-shopped and filtered image and their friends would accuse them of being superficial.

This implies that the young people have a different kind of consciousness while communicating with their friends on Snapchat as they want to appear their own self to their close friends. In fact, the use of filters on Snapchat is used primarily for fun and not to enhance the image of the poster as is the case of other networking sites, such as Facebook. This difference in impression management on Facebook and Snapchat can be explained using the identity theory given by Higgins (1987) where he states that every individual has three types of self domains- actual self, ideal self and ought self. On Facebook, the young person is trying to project their ideal self, one that possesses attributes that the individual would like to have. On Snapchat, the young person is attempting to show their actual self which is the representation of the attributes that they actually possess.

Facebook is a more public SNS where the participants are more aware regarding impression management, there is huge importance given to the number of 'likes' that a post receives on Facebook, further confirming the finding that young people seek approval and popularity through their posts on SNS. Some of the study participants shared that they would take down a photo from the SNS channel if it did not receive certain number of likes within 10 minutes of posting the image. The participants were conscious of the tiniest details in the posted photos including the background of the image, the lighting and the time of the day that it was posted to get maximum number of likes.

On Facebook, close friends will ensure that other friends' posts and pictures are liked immediately. This was sometimes ensured by using private messages to ensure that members of the group liked each post. The reliance of young people on 'likes' for gaining approval of their friends is referred to as them being 'permanent digital slaves' by Harcourt (2015). He explains that while the young people on SNS are showing one aspect of their identity in the online world, they remain their 'mortal analogue selves' in their offline lives (Harcourt, 2015).

These two identities- the online identity and offline identity- can sometimes come into conflict with each other, when the young person gives more importance to their online popularity than their personality in the real world (Harcourt, 2015). This was certainly the case with the participants in this study who took multiple images prior to sharing their best self-image on the SNS network. Or indeed young people who did not intervene or comment on their friends' posts that they may find offensive. Online youth culture has almost bound youth or restricted them to show their true selves for the most part and instead follow the cultural expectations. Even on Snapchat where they feel they can be their "real selves" there is still an expectation within the group that posts should be light hearted.

The findings of this study were also consistent with research by Liu (2007) who proposes that there are two types of identities of young people on Facebook- I am like others and I am different to others. These two identities express themselves at different levels in every individual and it is hard for anyone to tell whether a person is being the actual self or the ideal self (Higgins, 1987). Many participants in this study believed very few, if any of the posts or images of any individual on SNS can be trusted to be authentic.

Most participants believed that the images of their friends were edited on most sites. Schoeneback et al (2016) explains that the content of the posts shared by young people is based on the visibility and persistence of the content posted by their friends. Therefore, the use of SNS started as a way to show a young person's identity has now evolved into a culture that is common across all young people and depends on approval and popularity. The youth culture on social networking sites is trying to be distinct from the older generations, while at the same time being consistent and similar in their behaviour within their peer groups.

## 6.7 Privacy on SNS

It was demonstrated in this research that the extent of either privacy or exposure that social networking sites provide to young people, is of vital importance in determining their behaviour online. The level of privacy afforded to young people online from certain social networking sites is often the reason why they interact in certain ways, with particular sites, how they share their posts and the way they use social networking sites in general.

There are two dimensions to privacy for young people online. These are:

1. Privacy among connections who belong to their peer groups on different Social Networking Sites
2. Privacy surrounding third parties, such as people outside their peer group, for example: advertisers. These dimensions will be discussed separately.

### 6.7.1 Privacy within SNS groups

Social networking sites can be loosely compared to the idea of a public sphere proposed by Habermas (1991), where young people share a common platform to share ideas and experiences. As discussed in previous sections, this study found that the very nature of SNS has a public element of giving information about oneself to others and these SNSs are now part of a new youth culture. However, these public fora allow for private conversations and interactions that exist between smaller groups, to be shared with other people present on their SNS network. This has led to a blurring of private and public interactions and spheres on social networking sites and the nature of privacy has changed (Baym and Boyd, 2012). Although the information shared may be private, it can always be made public. As discussed by Polterman (2014) young people are allowing access to their most private details online, this public sphere has morphed into publicised privacy due to changing cultures and accepted behaviours on social networking sites between young people. This fact was established in this study, although noted that each person was aware of the issues surrounding their private posts online, nevertheless they still engaged in this behaviour. They did however endeavour to minimise their risk by other means. This was achieved with a two-tiered use of SNS that has evolved on social networking sites. Young people are undertaking to keeping their private lives somewhat private by the choice of SNS they engage with. They have also minimised the dilution of online privacy by forming different types of groups on social networking sites.

For instance, the closer groups for the participants in this study were generally formed on Snapchat while the larger groups with distant connections were formed on Facebook.

As a result, the type and frequency of interactions on each of these channels is very different.

The nature of privacy on Snapchat is simple because only selected number of people can be added to the group and the people in the group follow certain regulations to remain in the group. However, the management of privacy on Facebook is difficult for the young person because group members also include their parents and relatives who they may not want to offend by not adding them to their group.

The quantity of people on Facebook was also found to be important to the young person as higher numbers of followers is perceived to be a measure of their popularity. The findings showed young people have addressed the problem of privacy on Facebook by posting less content on Facebook and only using it to stay updated on information posted by their friends. Some of the participants also said that they maintain more than one profile on Facebook using Irish monikers on their second profile to ensure that third parties and individuals who search for them online would not find their personal profiles. Schoeneback et al (2016) also found that young people do not have privacy issues when it came to reappearance of their past online activities on their present SNS timeline. Users do not delete historical content on their profile to ensure they appear as authentic as possible to their group (Schoeneback et al, 2016). A similar phenomenon as backstalking is called 'creeping' which was also observed in this study. Creeping refers to finding out information about a person from the SNS profile without their knowledge. All participants engaged in creeping on their friends, acquaintances and even strangers, and openly admitted to doing so on a very regular basis. The behaviour of creeping is a further step in proving the fluidity of privacy on SNS as unlike backstalking, creeping is done without the prior knowledge of the person.

This practice is accepted social behaviour on social networking sites, as all participants in this study accepted that they too would be creeped on (even with privacy settings high). This is because SNS such as Facebook are public platforms that provide access to private information and a person signing up to such a website is aware that others can gain access to their information. This also confirms the Suzuki & Calso, (2004) findings where many users spend time “lurking” or reading other people’s posts without replying or getting involved (liking) the post in any way. This lurking behaviour has progressed to creeping on a daily basis on many people in their network. The concept of privacy within groups on SNS is a complex concept and one that is constantly changing. Behaviours such as backstalking and creeping are activities that may not be accepted in an offline environment, even if possible, but are accepted online because private information has now become a part of this public sphere. In addition, there is no distinction for the young person between their offline selves and their online selves in this study, there are one and the same. Thus, the dimension of privacy in the online world has changed due to the influence of youth culture. In turn, privacy has also influenced youth culture and social behaviour of young people.

### 6.7.2 Privacy outside SNS groups

Privacy outside their social networking sites groups refers to concerns relating to privacy in a general sense online from advertisers and strangers. This study showed that there were many participants who were concerned that their information on SNS could be used by someone outside their group and can have negative consequences for them.

Harcourt (2015) explains the development of technology and internet makes most of the people think that they are being surveilled through many platforms.

However, he argues that people are not being surveilled as much as they think and it is the people themselves who are providing their information on social networking sites (Harcourt, 2015). Marwick and Boyd (2010) found that interactions that used to be carried out privately through face to face conversations have now become public due to the use of SNS. The participants in this study were very vigilant about the information that they had posted online. Many participants had their privacy settings on high so that no other person outside their group on Facebook could access the information they posted online. Facebook was particularly perceived as an SNS that had more issues with privacy as compared to Snapchat.

This research found that the young people today believed that Facebook has too much advertising on it for them – the site has become too busy, and because of this, they are not interested in it. Many of them had stopped using Facebook because of the number of advertisements. The prevalence of targeted advertising on Facebook is one of the main reasons why Facebook was not perceived as offering as much privacy as other SNS.

## 6.8 Trust on Social Networking Sites

Another interesting and contradictory finding of this research discovered was the levels of trust on SNSs. Suiter (2016) states that with the popularity of SNS and digital media, increasing numbers of people are getting their news through these channels. However, Suiter (2016) also established that only fifty percent of the people showed trust in the news and information that they got online. This study discovered that participants had trust only for news stories that were re-shared by their friends.

They had no concerns over who shared the news story and there was an assumption that once it was a news story it was true regardless of its foundation and subsequent re-shares.



Separately, young people also follow celebrities on SNS, and have high levels of trust for the celebrities' posts and online recommendations. In Lazarsfeld's (1944) Two step flow model of communication the public form their opinions from opinion leaders who are in turn influenced by the media. This model in a contemporary online environment is observed online. The opinion leaders are now celebrities who influence young people, and in turn are influenced themselves by the mass media (such as sponsorship of goods).

## 6.9 Conclusion – From Neo-tribes to Techno-tribes

This study provided some interesting insights into the online behaviour of young people on social networking sites and how these SNS have produced a new and evolving youth culture. This chapter discussed the main findings from this study and compared them with the theoretical concepts and previous studies that were reviewed in the previous chapters on this dissertation. The main findings of this study are young people are using social networking sites in a two-tiered manner. They have moved from the fluidity of the concept of tribes to an openness and fluidity between specific social networking sites and technology itself. They use specific sites for specific communications with specific groups of people. They do this consciously and as digital natives have evolved from neo tribes to techno tribes. Facebook is used for larger, non- personal rigid groupings and Snapchat is used for smaller more connected communications between friends. These social networking sites have become an inherent part of youth culture.

Young people are using SNS to define themselves from older generations and are exploring new and different ways of communicating with each other. Out of the many SNS platforms that are present on the internet, this study found that Facebook and Snapchat were the two main SNS channels used by young people.

The groups and interactions on these two channels are very different as Facebook tends to be a more public channel with more rigid groups while Snapchat is used for private image based communication with groups that are fluid. Many contradictions arose in these findings. Groups on both these SNS show different type of behaviour in terms of self-representation and group regulation. There are certain characteristics pertaining to subculture on Facebook, with groups on the platform structured and rigid. Snapchat had characteristics of neo-tribes where movement from groups and discussion were fluid, however the emotional connections on this site were stronger than on Facebook, concurring with previous research from Agosto et al (2012).

Social networking sites are heavily influenced by privacy concerns of young people yet the very same young people are happy to infringe on other user's privacy online. Overall, this study has been able to demonstrate the development of youth culture online due to the influence of social networking sites and examine some of the online practices of young people in detail. This evolving youth culture online will develop rapidly with the changing nature of social networking sites as is in case for Facebook as they are reportedly working to debut premium Television shows in July 2017. This also confirms data from this research that they have reached maximum levels of advertising on their news feed for users. They now can target advertisers and their revenue stream that were once the preserve of traditional media. The next chapter concludes the entire study and gives suggestions for further research.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **7.2 Introduction**

This chapter discusses each research question in relation to the research findings and furnish recommendations for further investigation of social networking sites and young people in Ireland. The aim of this chapter is to conclude the primary and secondary findings discussed in the dissertation and to provide appropriate and valuable recommendations related to the research objectives.

### **7.3 Conclusion of the Study**

The overall aim of this research was to take a “snap shot” of how social networking sites (SNS) are being used in general by young people in Ireland. This research will add to literature relating to social networking sites and how young people interact with their connections through these sites on a daily basis. The study commenced with an outline of youth and youth culture. Different youth culture theories were discussed in detail to understand how the concept of youth culture has developed and is understood through different theoretical lenses. The concept of youth is particularly difficult to define, with changing definitions throughout generations. The literature review also discussed the various media theories and if social networking sites are transforming youth behaviour by examining some of the previous studies on the subject. The literature review was helpful in providing a background for the study and helped in designing the research.

The study took a qualitative approach to the research and the data collection was conducted in three stages- focus group discussion in stage one, interviews in stage two and a final focus group discussion in stage three with thirty two participants taking part.

The data collected provided interesting and often contradictory results and insights into the behaviour and attitudes of young people engaging with social networking sites.

Question 1: How are young people engaging with social networking sites in Ireland?

The increasingly dominant role that social networking sites play in the lives of young people has been established in this research study. Young people are engaging with social networking sites through their mobile devices where the Wi-Fi plan is more important than the rate of a telephone call. They are constantly checking in for updates and they fear they will miss something if they do not stay connected to their online network of friends. Social networking sites involve different types of behaviour. Social networking sites have essentially become fragmented, with a two-tiered use evolving. This research demonstrated the top four sites are Facebook and Snapchat both equal to each other, with Instagram and Pinterest second and third preferences for the young person. According to Meyrowitz (1985) once the audience changes so does the social performance.

In this study, participants changed their audience by choosing which site to use and maintained control over the audience by their behaviour and the information posted on that site. Facebook as previously discussed proved to be the site with the largest friend network, but these connections are loose and interactions on the site have become infrequent. In essence, young people spend more time on Facebook observing content rather than posting content.

Question 2: What is the nature of social interactions and connections on social networking sites and do these social interactions change on specific SNS platforms?

Facebook is used daily for two reasons. These are :

- 1: Information gathering, such as sports timetables
- 2: Surveillance (creeping) on others without their prior knowledge

Young people in this study participated in both information gathering and creeping behaviour on the site. Contradictory to this, they also verbalised concerns relating to their own privacy and to minimise their risk online of others accessing their information they would change their profile name to ensure they would not be found on a search. Groups are considered somewhat unchangeable on Facebook as they are longer established and rigid. There is no meaningful peer to peer communications on Facebook. Facebook is also viewed in a negative light by the participants of this study in relation to the amount of personally targeted advertising, with some contemplating leaving Facebook completely due to this unwanted activity by the site.

The concept of youth is also difficult to quantify as the young people in this study made distinctions not only between themselves and the older generation online but also the younger generation online. Snapchat was found to be the most preferred social networking site to communicate with friends. These communications from peer to peer are constant, in some case upwards of 80 times a day. There are no issues in relation to privacy or trust within their groups on Snapchat. This trust is not because of the ephemeral nature of the site, rather it is due to the groups being much smaller with regular offline contact where they can regulate the group behaviour as they are all close friends. Indeed, it is the private nature of the site that affords the young person space to perceive to be their actual self.

Question 3: Do social networking sites affect self-representation of young people?

Groups can transform into many different iterations on Snapchat, with users moving in and out of groups as they wish as described by Bennett (2000) and the concept of tribes. This concept of tribes with emotional connections to their network can also allow the young person use SNS to present aspects of themselves to their network, while maintaining existing connections but also expressing their individuality (Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2010). Snapchat is the site that is used for emotional and close communications with their friends. Self-representation is not as important to the young person on Snapchat. However, on Facebook self-representation is still of the utmost importance. Young people take and re-take pictures before they post one online to ensure they get the maximum number of likes. The number of likes is seen as a barometer of how much the young person is liked in their group. The time of the post, background in the post all the minute details are thought of before a young person will post a picture to Facebook. Young people have evolved to become both the audience and the author on this site. Snapchat is being utilised by the young person as a communication tool to supplement their face to face interactions, especially with close friends, where self-representation is not as important. Snapchat is also developing applications at pace to augment the site and keep its young audience interested. Instagram and Pinterest are not used as communication tools. There was no peer to peer communication, rather they were used with the sole purpose of following celebrity style and fashion.

Question 4: Are there concerns regarding privacy on social networking sites?

Privacy and trust among social networking sites was low for image based posts. The participants in this research claimed that everything online is photo-shopped, while some simultaneously were taking part in the behaviour of using photoshop themselves on Facebook. News is received through shares from their online friends with trust for the news stories high. Privacy is not a given online with such practices as creeping and backstalking. Privacy is regarded to be high due to online settings, although all the participants both took part in this online surveillance but also expected it too. Concerns regarding privacy are an issue for the young person, but it seems not when they want to creep on somebody else's profile.

Thus, the findings of the study fulfilled the aim of this research and answered the research questions set at the beginning of this study. These findings are important for youth research and research relating to social networking sites in Ireland.

#### 7.4 Recommendations

This dissertation has demonstrated the significant role social networking sites have in the lives of young people in contemporary Ireland. Further research of these online experiences of young people is warranted. The participants in this study were predominately from an academic background and principally female, a wider cross section of society may prove beneficial.

A larger scale study is recommended to take a wider view of the role of social networking sites in the lives of young people, in particular those young people that are considered young millennials in modern society in Ireland today. Researched both from a social and professional perspective as how young people are integrating SNS into their professional lives, in particular the new professional social group online from Facebook called Workplace by Facebook. This would be a particularly interesting line of research as young people involved in this study did not use LinkedIn or any other professional network. New applications are developing continually, such as Snapchat's new feature Snap Map, which is a geo location sharing feature on the application. The idea being that you can meet up with your friends in real life and of course they can see where you are and follow your movements as well as your snaps. Ongoing research to explore how young people are going to embrace these new applications into their daily lives is warranted due to the ever changing digital landscape to discover if use of social networking sites remain socially anti-social.



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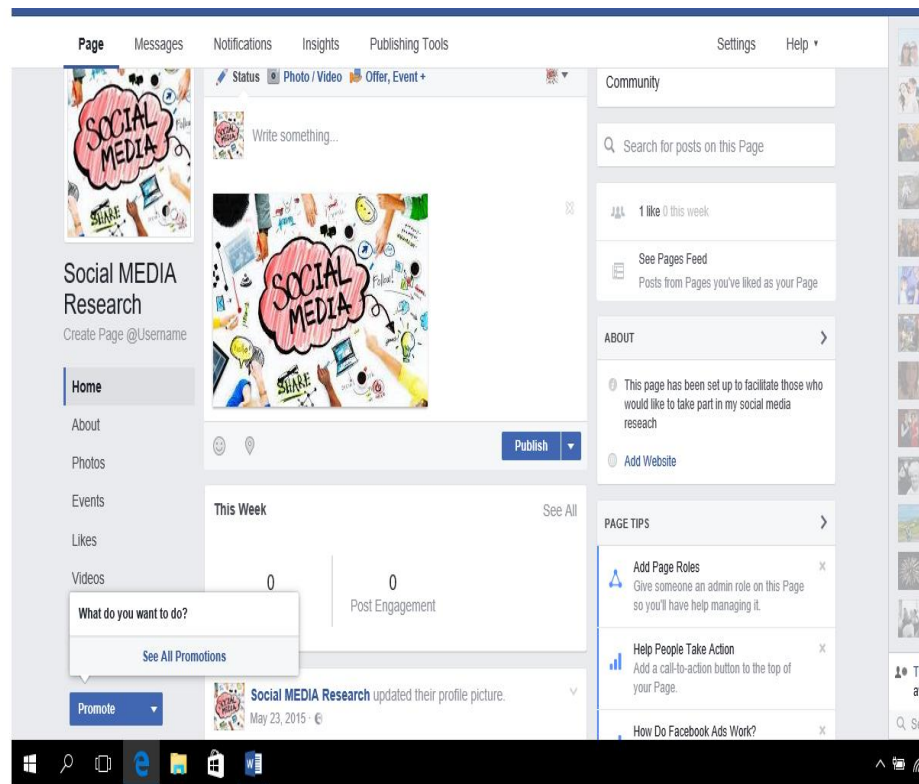
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# Appendix A Screen Shot of Facebook Page



## Appendix B Poster

### Poster

**Would you volunteer to take part in research that investigates how young people in Ireland are using online social media?**



#### **Project Title: Young people's use of social networking sites in Ireland**

My name is Lorraine Caffrey, I am currently a Masters by research student in Carlow IT. As part of my Masters, I am undertaking a research project which is investigating the reasons why young people interact with online social media. What factors influence what sites you visit and how you interact with Social Networking Sites.

#### **To participate you must be**

- 18 – 25 years old
- Use social media
- Available for face to face interview on campus (at a time that suits you)

#### **Benefits of the study**

The purpose of this research is to explore why young people (18 -25 year olds) use and participate in social networking sites (SNS). Are young people engaging with more traditional forms of media or only online. How young people represent themselves online, do they trust online information? This research will give an insight into the social and cultural ecology of young people in Ireland.

#### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

Confidentiality is assured always. Names and identifying information will not be used at any stage of this research study in accordance with data protection.

**PLEASE CONTACT ME ANYTIME SHOULD YOU WISH TO TAKE PART LORRAINE CAFFREY  
087 7757550 [lorraine.caffrey@itcarlow.ie](mailto:lorraine.caffrey@itcarlow.ie)**

## Appendix C Interview Questions

### List of Interview Questions (First Focus Group)

1. How many social networking sites do you use daily?
2. What sites do you use/like, why?
3. What sites do you not like, why?
4. What do you use SNS for?
5. Who do you communicate with on these sites?
6. How many friends/followers do you have online?
7. Do you personally know them all?
8. What information do you post online?
9. Are you concerned about your privacy online?
10. How much thought do you give a post before posting online, if any?
11. Is there anything you would not post online?
12. Are you concerned about privacy issues?
13. Would you tell a friend if you thought their post was somehow inappropriate? If not, what would you do, if anything?
14. How many times a day do you check –in online?
15. Is your phone set for updates?
16. What are your reasons for using social networking sites?
17. Do you feel you have to “keep up with the Jones” or in this case the Kardashians?
18. Would you take down a post if it did not get the amount of “likes” you were hoping for?
19. On a night out do you feel you should post updates?
20. Have you re-taken a photo (selfie) that you were not happy with to post online?
21. Do you trust all the updates you see online?
22. Do you interact with any form of traditional media? (newspaper, radio, TV)
23. Where do you get your news?
24. When was the last time you bought or read a newspaper?

## Appendix D Questions Semi -structured Interviews

### **List of Interview Questions (Semi Structured Interviews)**

1. How many social networking sites do you use daily?
2. What sites do you use/like, why?
3. What sites do you not like, why?
4. Please describe why you do not like these sites
5. What do you use SNS for-please describe in detail
6. Please describe what interactions take place on SNS?
7. Is snapchat preferred for personal communication?
8. Why do you feel the need to constantly check your phone/SNS?
9. Please describe if you prefer to be without or Facebook or Snapchat and why?
10. Please let me know if you delete many friends on Facebook?
11. Who do you communicate with on these sites?
12. How many friends/followers do you have online?
13. Do you personally know them all?
14. What information do you post online?
15. Are you concerned about your privacy online?
16. Please describe how much thought do you give a post before posting online, if any?
17. Is there anything you would not post online?
18. Are you concerned about privacy issues?
19. Would you tell a friend if you thought their post was somehow inappropriate? If not, what would you do, if anything?
20. How many times a day do you check –in online?
21. Is your phone set for updates?
22. What are your reasons for using social networking sites?
23. Do you communicate with different people on different sites?
24. When was the last time you deleted a friend on Facebook?
25. Which do you interact with more often: Facebook or Snapchat?
26. Do you have a lot of different groups on Snapchat?

27. How do you interact with friends on these sites?
28. How connected do you stay on Snapchat as opposed to Facebook?
29. Do you feel you have to “keep up with the Jones” or in this case the Kardashians?
30. Would you take down a post if it did not get the amount of “likes” you were hoping for?
31. On a night out do you feel you should post updates?
32. Have you re-taken a photo (selfie) that you were not happy with to post online?
33. Do you trust all the updates you see online?
34. Do you interact with any form of traditional media? (newspaper, radio, TV)
35. Where do you get your news? Do you trust the news you read online?
36. Do you believe all your updates online?
37. When was the last time you bought or read a newspaper?



## Appendix E Interview Questions Second Focus Group

### List of Interview Questions (Second Focus Group)

1. Why do you prefer Snapchat?
2. When was the last time you deleted a friend from Facebook?
3. Have your groups changed much on Facebook?
4. Do you feel you work harder at staying connected on Facebook or Snapchat?
5. Are you involved in many groups on Snapchat?
6. Please describe why you prefer Snapchat?
7. Please describe how your groups interact on Snapchat?
8. What types of groups are you involved in on Facebook and Snapchat?
9. Do you think advertising is the same on Facebook and Snapchat?
10. Which would you prefer to be without -Facebook or Snapchat?
11. What information do you post online?
12. Do you post different types of information on Facebook and on Snapchat?
13. Are you concerned about your privacy online?
14. How much thought do you give a post before posting online, if any?
15. Is there anything you would not post online?
16. Are you concerned about privacy issues?
17. Would you tell a friend if you thought their post was somehow inappropriate? If not, what would you do, if anything?
18. How many times a day do you check –in online?
19. Is your phone set for updates?
20. What are your reasons for using social networking sites?
21. Do you feel you have to “keep up with the Jones” or in this case the Kardashians?
22. Would you take down a post of it did not get the amount of “likes” you were hoping for?
23. On a night out do you feel you should post updates?
24. Have you re-taken a photo (selfie) that you were not happy with to post online?

25. Do you trust all the updates you see online? Are there particular updates that you do/don't trust?
26. Do you interact with any form of traditional media? (newspaper, radio, TV)
27. Where do you get your news?
28. Do you trust all the news you read online?
29. When was the last time you bought or read a newspaper?



## Appendix F Informed Consent Form

### Qualitative research – Informed Consent Form

**Name of the Study:** Young People’s Use of Social Networking Sites in Ireland

**Introduction to the study:**

My name is Lorraine Caffrey, I am currently a Masters by research student in Carlow IT. As part of my Masters, I am undertaking a research project which is investigating the reasons why young people interact with online social media. What factors influence what sites you visit and your opinions on traditional media.

**Purpose of the study**

Part of this research is to ask participants about their experiences online. I am interested in finding out your opinions to gain a better insight, into the reasons why some 18 – 25 year olds use certain social networking sites, why you use social networking sites in general and is there a place for traditional media in your day to day life. I am also interested in finding out how you represent yourself online on social networking sites like Facebook. The aim of this study is to take a “snap shot” into the lives and experiences of young people on social networking sites in Ireland.

**Benefits of the study**

The purpose of this research is to explore why young people (18 -25 year olds) use and participate in social networking sites (SNS). Are young people engaging with more traditional forms of media or only online. How young people represent themselves online, do they trust online information? This research will give an insight into the social and cultural ecology of young people in Ireland.

*Please note: If you already taking part in another research study you should not sign to volunteer to take part in this study.*

**Will the interview/focus group take long?**

The focus group should take no more than 45 minutes

The Interview will take no more than 50 minutes

**What about confidentiality?**

Confidentiality and anonymity is assured by the researcher as no individual will be identifiable in the results, as I will only need your thoughts, views and opinions. All information collected will be held on a password protected computer, will be stored in line with the policies and procedures for data storage of IT Carlow, which specify that data should be retained for a maximum of five years

**Do I have to take part?**

No, participation in the study is on a voluntary basis and you have a right to withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences.

**Where can I find out more about the research?**

**You can contact me anytime Lorraine Caffrey (087) 7757550**

[lorraine.caffrey@itcarlow.ie](mailto:lorraine.caffrey@itcarlow.ie)

I have read and understand the purpose of this research and agree to participate in the study. I am also aware that I can withdraw from the research at any time without any consequence.

DATE OF BIRTH: \_\_\_\_\_

DEBRIF OFFERED: \_\_\_\_\_

(Included: Counsellor, Information on safety online)

SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE PRINT NAME \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix G Information Sheet

### **Information Sheet**

Name of Study: Young People's Use of Social Networking Sites in Ireland

#### **Introduction**

My name is Lorraine Caffrey and I am currently undertaking a Master's Degree by research in Institute of Technology, Carlow. I would like to invite participants (male or female) between the ages of 18 – 25 to take part in this research. No other criteria are required to take part in this research except for the participant being engaged with and using social networking sites.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

This research is to investigate the online lives of young people online in Ireland today. This research aims to examine what sites are used and why, how often young people engage with social media and most importantly, hear of young people's experiences on social networking sites in their own words. Ireland. This research also aims to investigate how young people represent themselves online. This research also aims to discover how young people today are using social networks. The aim of the study is to take a "snap shot" into the lives and experiences of young people on social networking sites.

#### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Before the interview begins, your informed consent will be sought to participate in this research. You will also be given an information sheet prior to any recording beginning. Participation in this research study is on a voluntary basis and no risks have been anticipated for participants. However, if some participants find aspects of the research upsetting, support will be immediately offered. All participants have the right to confidentiality and anonymity. All participants will be referred to by number and will at no stage be identifiable in the research study. All personal data collected from the interviews will be kept on a password protected computer, in a secure office and upon completion of the interview all data recorded will be erased. All interview transcripts will be held in a locked filing cabinet and will be stored in line with the policies and procedures for data storage of Institute of Technology, Carlow.

All participants have the right to withdraw from this research study, without explanation or consequence at any stage.

1. What SNS do you interact with most?
  2. Why?
  3. When did you start using SNS?
  4. What do you use them for exactly?
  5. Do you like using SNS?
  6. Do you think you must use them today?
  7. What do you “get” out of using them?
  8. Would you stay offline for a week? Have you?
  9. Do you have a different offline and online life?
  10. Do you feel any pressure to be perfect online?
  11. Are you concerned about how people see you online?
  12. Are you more comfortable communicating online? Is it easier for you?
  13. What SNS sites do you dislike?
  14. What sites do you trust the most?
  15. What way are your settings set for privacy?
  16. Do you trust or believe everything you see online?
  17. Do you still have the same “groups” you had 12 months ago?
  18. Do you communicate with your family online?
  19. Do you post selfies?
  20. Do you worry or care if you get a certain number of likes?
  21. How do you manage your image online?
  22. If a friend did not get any likes on a picture, would you do anything?
  23. Would you take down a picture if it did not get enough likes?
  24. How often are you online?
  25. Do you ever look at other people’s profiles that you are not friends with online?
  26. Do you ever have to explain a comment online (maybe someone didn’t get your sense of humour)?
  27. Are notifications annoying? Do you take that into consideration before posting?
- Initial list of Questions on Poster

Please call Lorraine Caffrey on 087 7757 550 or [Lorraine.caffrey@itcarlow.ie](mailto:Lorraine.caffrey@itcarlow.ie) anytime, if you would like to take part in this research study.

Please note that there will be no payment or direct benefits for taking part in this research. Your contribution will be on a voluntary basis. If you are taking part in any other research project, you should not volunteer to take part in this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet