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Tweens Logged In: How Social Norms and Media Literacy Relate to Children's Usage of Social Media

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MSc in Media and Communications

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Kalina Asparouhova

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this research is to establish a better understanding of the ways in which social norms and media literacy affect the social media usage patterns of children between the ages of 10 and 12. This age group, also referred to as 'tweens', represents one of the first digital generations and has thus become of major interest to academia in recent times. Seventeen participants were individually interviewed on their usage and knowledge of social media platforms. Their responses were then coded and analyzed according to the method of thematic analysis. The main themes, emergent from the collected data, suggested that children participate online in order to maintain personal relations, they post what they like, they are highly cautious of using 'too much' social media and they select a communication channel based on the type of information they have to share. These four patterns were studied with the help of the interplay between multiple theories on privacy, social context and imagined audiences. The analysis suggested that children possess rather shallow social media literacy, limited to a basic know-how of the main content management functions of platforms which has an impact on their degree of involvement online. The obtained results further indicated that there are social norms with respect to the communication channel children choose and the information they share to one another online. Moreover, they illuminated the existence of a rather unstable norm regarding children's frequency of social media usage. These conclusions could serve as a useful starting point for future research which could either focus on examining the target group of parents and the impact their knowledge and usage patterns have on children, or select a greater sample, in order to establish whether the current findings are representative of the broader population of tweens or not.

INTRODUCTION

‘The core value of social network sites lies in the associated relationship-building: making friends and participating in social organizations, communities and even trivial interactions and exchanges’. (Jin, 2015: 501)

Social network sites (SNSs) are constructed around the concept of personal profiles that resemble a home page and serve to provide a general description of each individual platform participant (Boyd, 2007). According to recent studies, the most popular social media platforms among teenagers are Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat (Lenhart, April 2015). Online participation has appealed to teens and young adults due to a multiplicity of reasons such as an individual’s need to maintain personal relations with others, their desire to experiment with the construction of an alternative and improved self or simply because it allows for interactions not bound by time and space (Turkle, 1995; Boyd, 2014). Yet, there appears to be less research on the younger group of users, namely that of children between the ages of 10 and 12, who are also referred to as ‘tweens’ (Kaare, 2007). At the same time, this age group is representative of the first generation with no experience of living in a world without social media. With children discovering social media platforms at an increasingly younger age, tweens are also found to spend most of their free time engaging with new media (de Haan & Huysmans, 2004), which places them ‘at the vanguard of a revolution in both technology and culture’ (Heim & Brandtzæg, 2007: 50). Therefore, the undertaken study aims to shed light on the social media usage of the aforementioned age group, while further exploring the influence that social norms and media literacy might exercise on such usage.

The reasons behind this choice lay in the fact that most research concerning children and social media has been focusing on matters of age, gender and online bullying. Furthermore, the particular interest in this age group stems from personal curiosity and a strong belief in the underestimated abilities of tweens in navigating the online space. Thus, this study seeks to gain a general understanding of the main social media platforms tweens participate in, as well as the standard patterns of usage they possess. Moreover, by employing relevant theories on privacy, social context and technical skills, it aims at comprehending the amount of media literacy children have in regards to social media platforms, the way they have obtained it and the degree to which it shows influence on their online usage. Furthermore, this research intends to explore the existence of a socially established framework, guiding tweens’ SNS usage and to provide additional insight into the impact such social norms reveal on children’s participation, choice of platform, management of content and degree of involvement online.

The above mentioned goals will be achieved through the use of theories on self-construction and imagined audiences.

This paper is divided into three main chapters. The first one provides the reader with a broad understanding of the various theories relevant to the debate around children and social media usage, followed by an overview of the conceptual framework employed in this dissertation. The second one presents a detailed outline of the methodology used in this research, as well as a comprehensive justification for the design of the study. The final chapter outlines and analyses the major findings that this paper has discovered after conducting 17 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with representatives of the aforementioned age group and concludes with a few suggestions for future academic consideration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Comprehending the reasons behind young children's social media usage and establishing an understanding of the literacy they possess in this regard, can prove to be a difficult task without any previous knowledge on the matter, which is what this study will be looking at. Thorough research has been done on the link between age, gender and new media (Heim & Brandtzæg, 2007). However, this paper will focus on the interplay between social norms, media literacy and children's social media usage, in order to complement that section of literature that has been less explored. Therefore, the following chapter will outline the main ideas related to these concepts and emergent from existing research on young people and social media. These will guide the rest of the paper and will serve as a basis for the construction of a conceptual framework.

Social norms

A social network is 'a configuration of people connected to one another through interpersonal means, such as friendship, common interests, or ideas' (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008: 13). An important distinction between 'social network site' and 'social networking site' is the fact that the latter supposes the initiation of new relationships via a given social medium and is thus not the sort of site this paper will be studying (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Children between the ages of 10 and 12 appear to spend most of their free time engaging with some sort of new media and with social network sites (SNSs) being one of the most popular types of such

media nowadays, it seems relevant to look into the literature on the way usage of these platforms is perceived and socially influenced.

Image of SNSs

Social media has often been connected to the notion of social capital which generally refers to the variety of resources generated through the interactions between people (Coleman, 1988) and can differ in its shape and function based on the relationships themselves. Various scholars such as Hampton and Wellman (2003) and Kavanaugh et al. (2005) have determined that computer-mediated communication has had a positive influence on multiple factors related to the sustainment of a community due to the fact that such interactions offer individuals the freedom of communication not bound by time and space. In support of this positive image of online contact stands the Internet paradox, studied by Kraut (1998b), which primarily stated that a higher use of internet would lead to an individual's decreased social involvement and increased feeling of loneliness, yet when revisited by the same academic a few years later, a case was built against its earlier findings, expounding that instead of isolating children online, interactions function as a powerful communication tool that increases their feeling of connectedness with others (Kraut et al., 2002). Colwell's research, which established that heavy online game players were actually more likely to interact with their friends in their leisure time, contributes further to this positive understanding of social media usage (Colwell et al., 1995).

However, it still appears that social media communication maintains a rather negative image among adults which is why this paper will research what the case is among tweens. Associated with worsening of school performance and a child's emotional development, it is compared to an 'addiction', represented by 'the overarching media narrative that teens lack the capacity to maintain a healthy relationship with social media' (Boyd D., 2014: 78-79) and supported by Kiesler and Kraut's work, who point out online communication's capacity for evoking negative emotions due to the lack of physical closeness (1999). According to Boyd (2014), a lot of parents also link the rise of digital technology to an inevitable decline in their children's social and intellectual development, which could explain why a recent study, conducted in a number of European countries, has shown that many children personally admit they spend a lot of time online and feel guilty for devoting less time to studying or reading (Smahel & Wright, 2014). Others admit they get overwhelmed by the amount of communication online and eventually grow tired of social media (Haddon & Livingstone, 2014). Yet, it is important to note that adults tend to romanticize their own childhoods, thus presenting a rather biased view of new technologies to their children (Boyd D., 2014). Moreover, account should be taken of the fact that excessive social media usage has a

potentially bad influence not only on children's social lives but also on that of adults (Marwick, 2013).

Nonetheless, it appears that this negative stereotyping of online games is very persistent among children, especially those who are seldom users of a computer or not users at all (Schott & Selwyn, 2000). Livingstone's findings support this notion heavily by relating children's age and experience with SNSs to their view of social media usage, thus revealing a lower interest in social media and a greater preference for face-to-face communication among younger children who are less experienced online, as opposed to 12-13 year-olds, who tend to see SNSs as a commonplace (2014). So what is so appealing about social media platforms when children overall tend to prefer communicating face-to-face (Kaare, 2007)?

Reasons to Engage

'It is only possible to understand the origins of a child's excessive internet use by locating a child's online behaviour within that child's broader social and psychological context, and with reference to how the young person uses the internet in general' (Smahel et al., 2012: 4-5).

Thus, the following section will note a number of different theories on children's interest in social media.

Mehroof (2010), Griffiths (2009) and Zuckerman (1994) have all looked at the different personality traits that may be connected to online gaming within the psychological theory of 'needs compensation', concluding that sensation-seeking, depression and low self-esteem might be linked to excessive use of the internet. Evidently their research shows great depth, yet one must take into consideration the lack of agreement as to which comes first – the emotional problems or the increased Internet usage. Therefore, we need to also consider Helsper's research on the link between online participation and resources, in support of the main 'digital inclusion' theory argument, which claims that extensive use of online media can be highly beneficial to those involved, because it allows children to mature in their online behaviour and, consequently, make better use of the technology in the first place (2012). However, due to limited space, this dissertation will focus on a different angle.

Without disregarding existing research, a number of theorists have proposed an alternative approach to the matter. According to Boyd 'teens are passionate about finding their place in society' (2014: 8), which is why they connect to one another online, constituting a networked public, naturally restricted by the bounds of the specific network they are using. Thereupon,

this new perspective argues that teenagers are motivated to communicate online, first of all, because they want to participate in such publics and become a part of the broader world, and second of all, because they want to keep their friendships (Boyd, 2014; Drotner, 2000). A look at Ellison's study on Facebook (2006) and Pfeil's work on the link between social capital and social networks (2009) further reinforces a positive influence of social media on maintaining personal relationships and supports the idea of personal relations as the main motivator for social media usage.

However, Giddens (1991) and Buchner (1995) present another argument, disputing the notion of the online realm as a place where individuals can create, experiment and present a certain personal projection, which is visible to their friends and is not subject to adult surveillance. Turkle openly supports this idea, adding the element of self-improvement, whereby people go online in order to present a better version of their selves (1995), also described by Sunden as the process of 'typing oneself into being' (2003). An individual's desire for validation might be one way of explaining why the idea of molding one's self online seems so appealing and the fact that the structures of some social media platforms allow for identity voyeurism could drive people's participation online even further (Boyd D. , 2014). Another possible explanation has been put forward by Marwick. Introducing the notion of FOMO, or the 'fear of missing out', she suggests that people participate in social media because of their desire to stay up to date with all developments (2013), which could be directly linked to children's feeling of frustration when they cannot go online (Smahel et al., 2012: 4). Likewise, a person's frequent social media usage could be based in a certain socially imposed necessity for such behaviour, in which case individuals participate online so as to maintain their social status (Marwick, 2013).

Yet one might argue that children's social media usage is guided by less complex notions such as the fact that their socializing is bound by the home (Boyd D., 2014) or that they develop tech savviness with age and are more interested in playing games online than chatting with one another (Kaare, 2007; Livingstone S., 2003), with computer games being the top media activity children are engaged with online (Brandtzaeg et al., 2004b; Livingstone & Bovill, 2001; Villani, 2001).

Choice of Content

When exploring the type of online content children mostly post on their social media profiles it is paramount to note that 'designing a profile is not solely a matter of individual choice' (Livingstone, 2008: 407) but it is highly reliant on friends and peers, meaning that children tailor their content online according to what their friends might like to see (2008). Moreover,

they tend to present that side of themselves which they believe will be most likely to get accepted by others online (Boyd D., 2007), taking us further towards Marwick's idea of building a social status online, whereby individuals, generate and modify content in order to support their self-brand and represent themselves within what is expected of them (2013).

Nonetheless, one must note that such online behaviour has the potential to lead to a perception of life as an ongoing performance, whereby a person is constantly changing content also based on whether it is addressed at a single person or at a bigger audience (Marwick, 2013). Yet, it is only natural to alter texts and images online the same way one uses various gestures and language when managing face-to-face communication with different people and in different settings (Banaji & Prentice, 1994). Hereof, Boyd's research shows a clear example of the difficulties children tend to experience in managing different contexts (2014). As opposed to face-to-face communication, contexts seem to merge online, bringing about additional struggles among tweens in regards to the ways they tailor information addressed at family members or friends. Her arguments regarding tweens' feelings of frustration with relatives' behaviour online or the troubles they experience when aiming certain content at specific people, suggest the notion of imagined audiences that guide children's content, which is one of the main issues this dissertation would like to focus on.

A final look at the ways this age group communicates sensitive matters online will give us a better understanding of tweens' online content management. On average, children are much less eager to deliver highly emotional information and unpleasant news to others or treat individuals in an unfriendly manner in person than they are online (LaRose et al., 2003; Kaare, 2007), leading us to believe that social media platforms would be the place where they would discuss secrets and address each other's issues. This notion is further supported by Turkle, who suggests that people are moving away from face-to-face communication and are "alone together" in the increasingly online day-to-day (2011). However, when personal communication is encoded in textual or visual form online, it becomes visible to an uncertain audience, leaving the content exposed to easy replication, reconstruction or re-contextualization, thus setting the creator of the message in a rather unpleasant situation (Boyd D., 2014), which could explain why teenagers tend to prefer to conduct private conversations face-to-face to talking online, with younger teens still leaning towards online communication as a means of avoiding conflict (Livingstone & Bober, 2003). This concern with replication could also fuel children's occasional unease at having their photos uploaded without their consent (Livingstone S., 2014), raising further questions in regards to the interplay between children's social media usage and their social media literacy.

Media Literacy

‘A media literate person...can decode, evaluate, analyze and produce both print and electronic media’ (Aufderheide, 1993: 1). However, the emergence of the internet has potentially transformed these conventions and complicated the matter of critical engagement and general literacy even further (Livingstone S., 2003). This paper will thus focus on a smaller facet of this term, namely social media literacy, examining how children get acquainted with social media and what their capacity to understand and govern such platforms really is.

Social Media Discovery

Many scholars have argued that children and young people are digital natives due to the age they were born in, but in order to truly understand tweens’ social media usage, we must take a step backwards and look at the broader process of social media adoption and the ways in which this group of individuals has found about online communication platforms in the first place. Even though a lot of nine to 16-year-olds are now actively engaged online, with some children being unable to limit their usage to a specific amount of hours a day (Kaare, 2007), on average, children start participating in such platforms from the age of 13 onwards (Livingstone et al., 2013). Despite been criticized for being too structural, this view suggests the general tendency among children, whereby the younger they are, the less they get involved with social media. This notion seems to be directly related to the nature of social contexts this age group is involved in and the environment they are surrounded by, which are normally greatly focused on family, friends and school demands (Livingstone S., 2014). Moreover, it appears that younger children have a more dualistic view of online social interactions where ‘the risk of harm is imagined to originate online and extend offline’ (Livingstone S., 2014: 291).

According to Schmidbauer and Lohr, children rely more on their friends than on their parents or school as a locus of information on different communication technologies (1999). And, in fact, that appears to be valid for SNSs as well, seeing that most children learn about and join a social media platform because they have been invited to do so by their friends (Boyd, 2007). Hence, the choice of platform, as well as the decision to stay on it, is also highly dependent on children’s social circle and the SNSs that their friends are already using (Livingstone S., 2008). Nonetheless, children might be interested in engaging with different online platforms because they are looking for different kinds of communication – either private or public (Kaare, 2007; Boyd D., 2014). Yet Boyd points out that some SNSs such as Facebook have a public-by-default framework, which results in a lot of private messages being posted publically by children, which is not that surprising since the same technology

could be used for different purposes, and different technologies could be used for the same purpose (Brandtzaeg et al., 2004b). However, how knowledgeable are children about the technicalities of social platforms in practice?

Platform Affordances and Privacy Online

The notion of ‘affordances’ has been previously theorized by Donald Norman (2002) and later criticized in ‘The Problem with Affordances’ (Oliver, 2005). However, it still serves as a useful construct, describing the specific characteristics of any environment, in this particular case - the online environment of SNSs. According to Hutchby, these characteristics frame an individual’s possibilities within the environment and are thus essential to the practices people use to interact with one another (2001). Therefore, competent use of social media platforms can be recognized only when children understand what they can and cannot do online and is thus an important issue to study.

However, what appears to be paradoxical is the fact that contemporary technologies are tailored to make every-day interactions as easy as possible, offering platforms which require little technical or functional knowledge, potentially leading to a disinterested and automatized crowd of online users that does not necessarily possess a good grasp of the SNSs’ affordances (Boyd D., 2014). Moreover, it is of relevant importance to note that the level of access children have to different media has the potential to influence their technical skills and their understanding of a platform’s affordances (Boyd D., 2014). Hence, it might be dangerous to presume that a child is automatically literate simply because they are part of a certain generation, since matters of personal curiosity, family/friends environment and purposes of use could be influential. The matter of an existing digital divide between parents and children is becoming increasingly prominent, problematizing children’s social media literacy even more (Livingstone S., 2003: 3). Livingstone additionally directs our attention to the ways, in which age plays into questions of grasping affordances, revealing that, as opposed to the younger group of 9-11 year-olds, older children are much more concerned with how their personal images and information are handled by others online (2014).

The fact that modern-day technological affordances have enabled a quick and easy, yet sometimes irreversible spread of content, suggests a consideration of broader questions of privacy in relation to social media platforms. What appears to be of high relevance here is Livingstone’s claim on privacy and the ways in which it is currently defined by the control over who can access an individual’s content online, rather than by the type of content disclosed (2006). This new perspective on children’s perception of online social interactions

and privacy is supported by Stein and Sinha's definition of the matter¹ and provides a direct reflection of Boyd's argument on the rather public-driven framework of some social media platforms mentioned earlier (2014). However, there is still not enough evidence to substantiate a theory, which would explain children's understanding of social media affordances and privacy issues. Livingstone's contrasting findings of children who are relatively interested in privacy matters, yet lack the knowledge to grasp these fully, shows precisely the contradictory nature of the debate (2008).

Even though the scholarly work discussed so far has shown space for much improvement of tweens' knowledge on social media affordances and privacy management, it is important to note that children still take precautions in regards to the personal content they post online. As Boyd's research shows, many of the younger social media participants do not upload their real personal information in order to protect themselves from potential misuse by others (2007; 2014). This tendency seems to have been captured already prior to modern-day SNSs by Abbott, who elaborates on teenagers' propensity to decrease the amount of visible personal information on their own websites as they mature (1999). Yet, returning to the matter of affordances, one must consider the influential power of online platforms' structures to enable or limit the type of personal content shared (Livingstone S., 2008).

Conceptual Framework

The literature analyzed thus far has provided us with a broad understanding of the complex debate around children and social media usage. Nonetheless, the underlying goal of this dissertation is to understand specifically how and why children between the ages of 10 and 12 use social media platforms, in what ways their usage is related to an existing set of socially established guidelines and what their level of literacy is in regards to the platforms they participate in. Therefore, after establishing the main social media platforms and standard usage patterns popular among tweens in Bulgaria, this paper will use a set of selected concepts related to both social norms and media literacy in order to conduct the analysis to follow.

The notion of negative social media stereotyping, described by Boyd (2014), together with Livingstone's theory on social context and the role it plays in children's view of SNSs (2014), will provide this study with the necessary basis for a further evaluation of whether it is the need to maintain personal relationships (Boyd D., 2014) or the need to present an improved

¹ According to Stein and Sinha, privacy is 'the rights of individuals to enjoy autonomy, to be left alone, and to

version of the self (Turkle, 1995) which maintains children's interest in social media platforms. Moving on to the type of content children exchange online, this research will explore Marwick's concept of imagined audiences (2013), thus investigating the power of the social over children's posting choices and their tendency to be more outspoken online than offline (Kaare, 2007; Livingstone & Bober, 2003), while further challenging Turkle's notion of online communication taking over face-to-face interactions (2011).

When discussing media literacy, this research will first look at why children choose certain platforms over others and why they keep using them, relying on Livingstone's (2008, 2014) and Boyd's (2014) theories on the importance of an individual's social circle. Afterwards, the study will evaluate participants' knowledge of platform affordances, using Boyd's theory on the link between ease of platform use and level of technological skills (2014). Finally, this paper will investigate online privacy by employing Livingstone's (2006) concept on the matter which redirects the previous focus on content type to matters of access.

Employing these concepts will allow the emergence of a more detailed image of tweens' social media usage within the limited space of this dissertation, thus shedding an additional ray of light on the interplay between social norms, social media literacy and children's use of social media platforms.

Research Objectives

Consequential to the contradictory findings from existing research and the changing nature of the target group's social media usage, this research will take a rather exploratory approach, aiming at generating a better understanding of tweens' social media usage and their social media literacy. Hence, the research question that emerges from the discussed literature and conceptual framework is as follows:

RQ: How are questions of social norms and media literacy tied in to tweens' use of social media?

Two sub-questions have been derived for further clarity:

Q1: What is children's social media literacy and how does it influence their social media usage?

determine whether and how information about one's self is revealed to others' (2002: 414)

Q2: In what ways is children's social media usage influenced by socially established norms?

By studying an age-group of users that has rather recently become of interest to academia, this study seeks to provide new insight into areas of social media participation, children and literacy studies, with a focus on social norms and social media literacy, thus contributing to the existing body of knowledge, most of which has focused on different matters such as gender and online bullying.

METHODOLOGY

In order to obtain the necessary results that will allow an examination of the aforementioned matters, a qualitative methodology has been employed, in particular – semi-structured interviews, which have been conducted individually and face-to-face, then transcribed, coded and analyzed according to the principles of thematic analysis, further discussed in the following chapter.

Research Strategy

While recognizing that this study is not aimed at measuring existing and well-known patterns, the data collection method of interviewing has been chosen due to the fact that it does not assume a quantitative analysis but is rather concerned with establishing new themes and 'exploring the range of opinions, the different representations of the issue' (Atkinson, Bauer, & Gaskell, 2000: 41). This qualitative choice has been further supported by other successful research in this area which has also used such type of collection method (Haddon & Livingstone, 2014; Livingstone S., 2008; Lobe et al., 2011). Likewise, a qualitative approach appeared to be more suitable for the purposes of this research that seek to grasp similarities within a certain group of individuals, rather than to distinguish differences among them.

Quantitative methods such as surveys were disregarded due to the nature of the respondents' group, namely children between the ages of 10 and 12, who are characterized by holding a shorter attention span and having greater difficulties focusing for long periods of time. Therefore, communicating with them in person proved to be more effective, since it allowed for interactivity and the employment of creative tools such as writing, drawing and arranging images to maintain the respondents' focus throughout the interviews. Furthermore, this

method enabled the detection of certain attitudes and feelings of respondents which helped me lead the conversation in a different direction when necessary, and follow up certain patterns with additional questions (Berger A. , 1998).

It is at this point important to elaborate on the specificities of the interviewing at hand and justify the choice for semi-structured interviews as opposed to informal, unstructured and structured interviews (Berger A. , 2011). Seeing that the main goal of this research supposes discovering new patterns I needed a method which would allow those to emerge from each individual conversation. Hence structured interviews would have been restrictive in this sense, leaving no space for previously unconsidered issues (Bryman, 2004). Fully unstructured and informal interviews, on the other hand, might have proven to lack too much focus to be useful for the purposes of this study. Therefore, the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews appeared to offer the most fruitful conditions for the success of this research. Likewise, this individual data collection method was chosen over its collective counterpart – focus groups - based on the specificities of the respondents' group and in an attempt to eliminate any sign of peer pressure.

Nonetheless, as much as it is important to rationalize how this methodology fits the research at hand, it is crucial to mention some of its weaknesses. Since the general aim of this dissertation is to generate new knowledge in regards to social media usage patterns, even the rather adaptable structure of the interviews could potentially still influence the conversation and shift the focus from more important notions that can otherwise emerge. Moreover, the fact that I interacted with the respondents face to face could hypothetically jeopardize the objectivity of their answers, yielding socially desirable replies (Berger A. , 2011), with an equally prominent potential of error on my own side, whereby, as an interviewer, I could unintentionally project meanings and ideas on to the interviewees (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). Thus, in order to maintain the objectivity of this research, I kept the above mentioned issues in mind, making sure I am constantly reflexive, I don't foment my personal biases on the interviewees and I tailor the sequence of questions to their specific social media preferences, while still leaving enough room for children's own hypotheses to emerge.

Due to the limited scope of this dissertation, there has been only one data collection method employed, entailing that the results of the following analysis cannot be considered viable for the broader population of children between the ages of 10 to 12 but could provide a more comprehensive look at the matter than quantitative outcomes. With this in mind, the useful points of interviewing outweighed its shortcomings, allowing me to generate new findings and contribute to the existing body of knowledge by revealing an additional perspective on

children and their social media usage. No unexpected issues arose during the conducting of the interviews.

Method

The age group of 10 – 12 year old children was specifically chosen for the purposes of this study due to the fact that it is representative of the first generation to be born in a digital age, with no experience of life without social media and the Internet. Moreover, these children are known to be active users of social media throughout the whole of Europe (Lobe et al., 2011) and appear to be of further interest to researchers due to the fact that they are in-between being children and teenagers – a phase crucial to one’s personal development later on in life. The research was conducted in Bulgaria for several reasons. Being a Bulgarian myself, this circumstance gave me the opportunity to gain easier access to the target group, and to be much more aware of the cultural background of the interviewees, thus also being more certain I am accurately framing my questions towards them. Moreover, the country has been listed among the top in Europe in regards to Internet usage by children between the ages of nine and 16, with 83% of Bulgarian kids going online on a daily basis and 44% of this age group using Internet excessively², with only Estonian children scoring greater in this category from all researched countries (Haddon et al., 2012: 9).

Considering Gaskel’s work on individual and group interviewing (2000), this research has conducted a total of seventeen interviews, fitting well within the upper limit of 15 to 25 and including three pilot interviews. The sample has been selected based on its relevance to the study topic, whereby I approached the management of one of the top primary schools in the capital, Sofia, in order to gain access to representatives of the above mentioned age group. This has been done in full consciousness of the fact that the school’s reputation supposes a higher economic status of the children and perhaps a higher number of students who possess new media technology such as smartphones. Yet, this fact allowed me to research what one could expect in a group of children with some of the highest social media usage in the country. The selection process for the individual participants in the study was based on the method of simple random sampling, whereby all the students who fell in the age range of 10-12 years old, were informed about this study by the school’s management, thus ensuring every potential participant could make an informed decision about taking part or not and has equal chances in such partaking. The final sample consisted of ten girls and seven boys.

² This data is the result of thorough research on Internet-using children aged 9-16 across 25 European countries.

Based on the main theories and concepts this research is aimed at investigating, an interview guide, divided into different parts, was designed. Commencing with easier questions, related to demographics and evolving through matters of social media presence, usage habits and platform perception, the guide suggested more complex queries, seeking to establish an understanding of children's knowledge of social media platforms and their affordances, concluding with a set of questions regarding the participants' experience with and opinion of the interview itself. The majority of questions, concerning matters of social pressure and social media usage, have been framed as directed towards participants' friends rather than at the interviewees themselves, in order to avoid evoking any feelings of pressure.

The particular social media platforms which this dissertation is interested in looking at have been chosen based on existing research that distinguished Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat as the most popular SNSs among teens (Lenhart, April 2015). However, after conducting the pilot study, I adjusted the initial interview guide by adding Viber and Whatsapp as supplementary online communication platforms, while also devising an extra part of the interview dedicated to the link between children's communication channel preferences (online or face-to-face) and the types of information they convey.

The analytical method this research used is thematic analysis. Due to the fact that it allowed the discovery of new patterns, it appeared suitable for the interview data I had obtained. Furthermore, it was not aimed at evaluating the content or inductively constructing new theories, the way Grounded Theory operates (Glaser & Strauss, 2012), but rather focused on outlining general themes (Neice, 2000). For the purpose of testing existing concepts, while also detecting new hypotheses, I employed both inductive and deductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The interviews were recorded with a recording device and later transcribed verbatim. The written transcripts were afterwards coded, based on the previously established coding-scheme and with the help of the qualitative analysis programme NVivo. Data was then analyzed by carefully searching for recurring answers, grouping those together and looking for emerging trends. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that there was a constant interplay between data and codes, due to the exploratory nature of this research.

Ethics

In accordance with the requirements of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), an ethics proposal was submitted and accepted for the purposes of this research. The collected data has been handled exclusively by me and is strictly anonymous

and confidential, which is why the real names of the respondents have been replaced. Due to the sensitive nature of the respondents' group, the interviews were conducted on the premises of the school and under the supervision of the institution's psychologist. The school management, the parents and the participants themselves were informed in detail about the purposes and processes of this research and all gave written consent to participate in this project.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The following chapter comprises the main findings of this research, while providing an analysis of these results based on the previously mentioned theoretical framework. Due to the qualitative nature of the obtained data, the results and interpretations have been intertwined and presented in conjunction with each other. Four themes emerged from the interviews, namely 'communicate with friends', 'do not overdo it', 'post what you like' and 'say it in person'.

Communicate with friends

What appears to lie at the core of children's social media usage is their desire to communicate with friends and maintain strong social relations, clearly shown by the way they reason their preference for different platforms:

I like Facebook, for instance, because I can talk to people there, I can add my friends on it, I can upload some photos of mine, whereas Instagram...I don't know, I don't find it that interesting because I can't talk to anyone, there are no friends there and I can only upload photos (Maria, 12)

I like Viber, because I can talk to friends there, discuss different things and we can send funny stuff to each other (Jane, 10)

Representative of the first main theme, the responses above convey clearly how children grade what is important for them online, placing greater prominence on communication with friends than on the exchange of entertaining content or images. Furthermore, when asked to arrange a number of SNSs according to their personal liking, the majority of interviewees pointed to Facebook, Viber or WhatsApp as their top choices, followed by Instagram and Snapchat, suggesting that platforms which do not prioritize personal communication appeal

less to children, unless they have a particular interest that can be satisfied by a different platform.

Yet, it is interesting to note that 12-year-olds reported a broader knowledge of different platforms as opposed to their younger schoolmates, with most of them mentioning additional ones such as Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube:

Most of my friends use Facebook, a few are familiar with Twitter and almost all of them are on YouTube (Eva, 12)

I mostly use Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest and sometimes YouTube. I follow a lot of bloggers and Twitter is what they use the most, so I follow them there (Ana, 12)

Even though older tweens discussed a multitude of social platforms, they still appeared to first and foremost consider Facebook before considering any other social network. The implications of this notion are thus clear - personal interactions with friends are what tweens are looking for mostly online. Considering Boyd's definition of social media as a public space to meet and maintain friendships (2014: 10), the incipient theme comes as no surprise. Nevertheless, an emergent sub-theme, based on a difference within the studied age group, appears to astound, pointing out that children closer to adolescence (12-year-olds), are more likely to adopt an outward-oriented social media behaviour and show interest in platforms which explore the unknown world than their younger friends. Echoing Livingstone's thoughts on the influence a child's social context has on their online behaviour, this notion could be explained by the fact that younger children are significantly more bound by their family's and friends' surroundings, with most ten-year-olds' friends online consisting of siblings, parents and classmates (2014: 5).

Moreover, their tendency to show little to no interest in exploring new online realms could be directly connected to the knowledge they possess regarding potential dangers online. During the interviews, notice was made of the fact that all ten-year-olds appeared to be much more cautious in their use of social media than their older schoolmates and rather reluctant to engage with new people and platforms, defining social interactions with strangers as 'dangerous for my age' or relating these to offline consequences such as being kidnapped or robbed:

I mostly use Viber because my mom has told me about some things that might go wrong online and I think it is dangerous for my age (Jane, 10)

I don't want to come across someone crazy who would steal me away or come to my house and rob it (Maya, 10)

What evolves as a prominent notion from these responses is the fact that younger children tend to form a direct link between online engagement and offline dangers, consequently feeling no need to explore different platforms than the ones they are using already. Thus Viber and its structure which allows one to contact only people whose phone numbers they already have, also appeals more to children, since it offers them a safe space to talk. These findings reaffirm Livingstone's discovery on 9- to 11- year-olds and their way of conceptualizing the online realm as a multiplicity of binaries like online/offline and risky/safe (2014).

Additionally, interviewees' propensity for stating they are afraid someone will hack their profile and abuse their information, pointed to their limited knowledge of online data protection. All respondents displayed a well-developed understanding of the affordances of social media platforms (those being the uploading of photos, writing of posts, liking of content and adding of friends as determined by interviewees themselves) but only a few children distinguished more complex functions such as blocking people, limiting people's access to content or locking their photos. Perhaps this pattern could be explained by the fact that, on average, respondents have learned how to use social media platforms by exploring those themselves, with just a few interviewees stating they have been instructed by a family member. Henceforth, due to the simple technical structures of SNSs, which enable an easy and quick exchange of information on a daily basis, children do not seek to grasp any further functions of such platforms that go beyond the knowledge they require to support regular interactions (Boyd D., 2014: 183) and are navigating through social media platforms based on the literacy they have independently established.

However, it appears that the practice through which children decide to participate in a certain online platform, is multi-faceted and connected to several factors. Both Boyd (2007) and Livingstone (2008) have explored the reasons behind tweens' engagement with specific SNSs over others, arguing that the creation of a profile online is an individual decision based on collective grounds. A further look into interviewees' platform selection methods provides us with a clear understanding of this process, substantiating the above mentioned concept. When asked for a justification of their personal platform choice, most children stated that they are using Facebook due to the fact that the majority of their friends were there, while others noted they downloaded a new program because that was the only way they could keep in touch with a certain friend. Thus, what surfaces as an idea here is the obvious prevailing of

social relations as the main element influencing not only children's initial decision to use social network sites but also their choice of a particular platform.

In order to explore the accuracy of this concept, interviewees were further asked about the different social media platforms they have chosen to ignore, questioning whether they feel any sort of pressure, imposed by friends of theirs, to start participating or not.

Some of them tell me 'come on, come on, get a profile there'. But I don't want to. If I don't want to, there is nobody who can change my mind (Jess, 10)

I don't think anyone could influence me in making a profile there, since my step-brother constantly tells me I should make one and I have been telling him for a very long time now that I don't want to, but he keeps on telling me, but I don't want to and up to now I haven't (Ana, 12)

What these answers suggest is the rather interesting ability of children to resist peer pressure, in regards to their personal use of different online platforms, but only to an extent that would not hinder their actual communication with friends. If that becomes the case, tweens have the tendency to follow the majority of their friends online and are readily open to using new platforms, in order to assure an online communication channel with all individuals they want to keep in touch with.

Do not overdo it

The second distinctly emergent theme is vigorously related to the matter of stereotyping excessive social media usage, in which case the majority of respondents showed an apparent depreciation of 'too much' social media participation and a clear desire of dissociation with such behaviour:

Using social media is pretty normal but you shouldn't overdo it (Peter, 11)

Yeah, we sometimes discuss homework, but I try not to stay online too much, I usually try to log out quickly from all those applications (Maria, 12)

I am not the kind of person who's on Facebook all day long, I mean, even in school, while I am studying, I am not on Facebook (Jack, 11)

It's not weird to use Facebook every day, but I think you could do something more useful, it's a waste of time, I don't want to get addicted (Jane, 10)

These responses provide us with a clear sense of children's negative evaluations of excessive social media usage which simultaneously illustrate the normativity of this sort of communication. Defining daily social media usage as 'pretty normal' or 'not weird', points to the rather common nature of this sort of interaction and confirms the integrality of SNSs in children's lives (Boyd D., 2014: 8). Nonetheless, the way Peter warns us to not 'overdo it' and the fear of Facebook addiction that Jane displays, suggest respondents' sense of caution and motivation to avoid any undesirable consequences related to this type of online participation. Such a defensive approach towards the frequent use of social media supports Smahel and Wright's findings on a general feeling of guilt among children for spending too much time online rather than doing something more productive (2014).

At this point, it is crucial to note that all of the interviewees reported different frequencies of usage, ranging from going online once or twice a month, to checking one's profile every few hours, so it seems that there is no clear definition of what 'overdoing it' actually entails. Regardless of the specific degree of involvement with social media platforms, the majority of respondents qualified their personal usage habits as average or below average. This fact puts forward the notion of an existent social stigma around using online media too much which urges children to defend their individual usage patterns the way Jack has done in his answer ('I am not that kind of person') and fail to even consider their personal online engagement as 'too much'.

Highly intrigued by these results, I looked into the ways respondents of this study found out about social media in the first place, in order to understand how such a negative image of high usage had been formed. Interesting enough, most interviewees reported to have discovered their first social media platform through their parents or siblings who were already users.

I kind of got an idea of Facebook because I was watching my mom use it. She doesn't post photos but she doesn't comment either, she just looks at what her friends are doing (Maya, 10)

To be honest, I found out about Facebook from my older sister and I really wanted to get a profile because she was also playing a really cool game and I wanted to be on as well, then slowly almost all of my friends started using it (Sam, 11)

My dad told me about Facebook because before moving to our current apartment, we used to live far away and my dad showed me my mom's profile and told me I could use it (Jane, 10)

Due to the fact that, on average, interview participants used their siblings' or parents' Facebook profiles as the first example of such media, I feel confident to argue that tweens' negative view of excessive social media usage might be rooted in their family's conceptions of the matter. This idea relates very strongly to Boyd's observations of adults and their tendency to link the rise of digital technology to an inevitable decline in their children's individual development (2014). In the light of my study, such propensity would further imply that parents have failed to educate their children in regards to the actual functioning of SNSs, as discussed in the previous theme, yet have managed to imprint their own negative stereotypes surrounding social media usage onto the respondents when introducing them to online platforms. Based on these deductions, I tend to consider the notion of a digital divide between children and their parents as a relevant explanation for the above mentioned tendency. The assumption that children are more knowledgeable about the functionalities of new media than their parents (Livingstone S., 2003: 3) implies that tweens are failing to receive any parental guidance on the profound navigation of SNSs and are thus limited to what they manage to explore on their own which is what appears to be happening in my sample.

Yet, returning to the main theme in discussion, the negative image of excessive online usage appears to be of lower importance when it pertains to a child's relationship with friends than when their individual view of themselves is the main concern.

I wouldn't unfriend someone because they post too much, no, that doesn't concern me (Jess, 10)

No, I wouldn't unfriend them if they are very active, only if we get into an argument, and he insults me and I insult him and we start having more arguments, just when we are not friends in person I don't see a point in being friends online (Maria, 12)

I would unfriend someone if their behaviour becomes aggressive and they have changed but not if they post very often, that would be too much (Valerie, 11)

As shown by the quotes above, respondents reported a common tolerance for the online behaviour of their friends, whereby higher levels of social media usage lose their negative connotation and appear to be less prominent when personal relations are at stake. Moreover, it seems that the only issue capable of disrupting interviewees' friendships online is a change

in children's individual bearing with one another that would impel unpleasant feelings such as that of being offended. This notion, yet again, underlines the prominence of friend relations in tweens' lives, reaffirming the previously discussed theme.

Post what you like

During the interviews, children were asked in detail about the sorts of content they post on social platforms and the degree to which the presence of their friends online would matter in that regard, in an attempt to explore whether their uploads are influenced by any socially established norms or not. According to Turkle, children use the online space to construct an improved representation of themselves. In the present case, that would imply that the content tweens upload on to their profiles would also be related to such self-presentation and influenced by certain modes of conduct imposed by peer groups (1995). Such a notion leads us to discussing a subsequent theme, namely the discovery that children's content online tends to reflect their individual interests and is not influenced by external opinions.

Well, if I enjoy it and I want to upload it and I like what I am uploading, I don't think I would care much about how other people would react (Peter, 11)

Overall, I don't care much about what others think about my stuff, because my friends are friends of mine anyways and when I am uploading I do so and it's up to them to decide if they want to see it or not. If they don't like it- they don't like it. (Eva, 12)

The fact that respondents showed little concern regarding the evaluation of their online content by others, suggests that they do not feel the pressure of providing a specific set of images or narratives in order to fit within a sort of social matrix. On the contrary, when interviewees were further asked if they would post any material related to the opposite gender (girls were asked if they would upload stereotypically masculine content such as the results of a football game and boys were asked if they would upload stereotypically feminine content such as make-up tips), the majority of them gave the impression of being very open to this notion, stating that if they find the information interesting they would post it regardless of what others might think. These results clearly indicate that tweens are hardly 'writing themselves down' (Sunden, 2003) in an attempt to construct a better or simply different self online than the one they have offline (Turkle, 1995) but are using the online space to share what interests them.

Nevertheless, respondents appeared to be relatively aware of the fact that their friends online are capable of viewing their content which illustrates the existence of what Marwick has

identified as an ‘invisible audience’ (2013). When asked to think about their friends on social media platforms, children had no difficulty organizing their contacts online in different groups, the most distinct of which were family/relatives, schoolmates and friends from extracurricular activities such as sports or dance classes. The majority of interviewees gave a negative response to my question regarding whether they alter their content depending on the fact that all of their friends will see it or not, which led me to investigate that further, and explore if children actually adjust their content in practice or not. To do so, I asked all the participants to write down what they think of the latest movie they have seen and frame their thoughts as if they were sending a private message to their closest friend. Afterwards, children were asked to do the same activity, except while imagining they are going to make their thoughts public to all of their friends online.

The outcome of this small-scale experiment reinforced the notion that tweens do not allow the online presence of others to influence their content, revealing a negligible difference in the framing of children’s opinions, mostly explained by the fact that, in the first case, interviewees were addressing a single person and, in the second, an audience of multiple individuals. Overall, the content of all messages stayed exactly the same, with children systematically commenting on how they either like the movie or not. This fact seems to prove once again that children care little about how their content is evaluated by others, while further rejecting the existence of a set of social norms influencing their content creation processes. However, it appeared later that the so-called “invisible audience” does matter when children make a choice regarding the platform they would use to convey certain information. That is why this notion will be further developed in the following paragraph.

While discussing children’s friend groups online, I came upon an interesting sub-theme that pointed to the importance of privacy and content access in children’s social media usage. Throughout our conversations, the majority of interviewees showed concern about someone “unwanted” seeing their content, stating that is the reason why they would send their information privately on Facebook or through applications such as Viber and WhatsApp instead of making it public, in order to guarantee the discretion of their message.

I like it (Viber) because it’s just for the two of us. Nobody else could read any of it (Claire, 12)

On Facebook, all you write and all the photos you upload can be seen by anyone, all of your friends, it can’t stay hidden, unless you are messaging with someone separately, but if someone logs on to your profile they can still see it, while Viber is more personal (Eva, 12)

The answers above relate very well to Livingstone's conceptualization of privacy as children's control over access to their information (2006), further indicating interviewees' propensity to use different platforms for different purposes. The choice of SNS seems to be based on children's consideration of the 'invisible audience' and thus directly linked to a platform's affordances. Respondents' concern over privacy could also explain the previously mentioned tendency of participants to mostly explore online functions such as blocking, locking and restricting access to content of theirs besides the basic ones.

What unfolded additionally in regards to social norms was children's tendency to consider non-social media usage just as normal as social media usage. When asked for an opinion of a friend of theirs who would quit using Facebook, children responded:

I think it's something positive, as in, she would now have more time to read books, watch movies and I wouldn't think she's weird or anything (Sonia, 11)

It's their call if they want to have it or not, but it wouldn't change the way I feel about them (Sam, 11)

Well, that wouldn't change anything, they are the same and nothing has changed (Jack, 11)

The way interviewees described such friends of theirs as 'not weird' and the fact that their decision to quit using a certain SNS appears also to not alter the personal relations children have with one another leads us to believe that tweens do not experience any sort of social pressure which would force them to participate online, in order to maintain a specific interactional status with their fellows as is the case among young adults (Marwick, 2013).

Say it in person

Heretofore, we have established that children use social media primarily to communicate with their friends, that they are highly aware of and seek to avoid the negative stereotypes surrounding excessive social media usage, and that they are not influenced by any external factors in regards to the content they share on their profiles. What connects the aforementioned themes is the fact that they all relate solely to the online interactions between tweens. Therefore, I decided to explore how children perceive online communication in regards to offline interactions and if there are any differences regarding the type of content they convey to one another via the two channels. With no exception, all interviewees stated they would prefer seeing their friends in person rather than talking to them online if they were given the choice, with some responses being:

Usually, of course I prefer meeting up in person, but sometimes I can't, like when the weather is bad or they are busy with something else (Jack, 11)

I think it's better to see each other in person, because then we can tell stories to one another, we can show each other what someone else has made, like if they have made a funny face, something that we can show one another that we can't see if we talk online, but if we can't meet, social networks are an option (Sonia, 10)

I prefer talking in person. I chat with my friends via Facebook Messenger because we can't meet up (Maria, 12)

These results appeared to directly contradict Turkle's theory of a fundamental change in people's communication with one another, in which case new technologies and machine-mediated relationships become a substitute for face-to-face interactions (2011). The mere fact that most respondents justified their use of social media as an alternative to meeting with their friends in person, registers a hopeful tendency among tweens, signified by their affinity for face-to-face communication over the mediated kind.

Following up on these matters, I came across an additional sub-theme, rooting interviewees' communication channel preference in SNSs' incapacity to truthfully convey individual reactions, whence respondents stated they dislike online communication because it allows their friends to say one thing but mean something vastly different in reality. What arises from this observation is the fact that, even though interviewees use social media platforms to primarily communicate with their friends, they are very aware of the distance such interaction creates between individuals, which leads them to question the truthfulness of the responses they receive. Hence, I became highly interested in the implications of this notion, more particularly, in regards to any potential difference in the type of messages children are willing to share online as opposed to offline. As a result, I inquired of interviewees about what channel they would use to disclose exciting as opposed to upsetting news to a friend of theirs.

If it's not nice, I'd rather say it in person, because he might take it better than online. When I write it, I actually don't know how my friend is reacting and if they reacted the way they said or if they took a while to respond (Ana, 12)

Bad things I would prefer to say in person because you could express your feelings better that way (Maya, 10)

If it's good news it doesn't really matter how I tell them (Jane, 10)

For good news it depends, if I want to tell him quickly it wouldn't really matter and I might just text them (Peter, 11)

Better to say it face-to-face cause online they can always take a screenshot and send it to someone else (Sam, 11)

These responses manifested several intriguing sub-themes, the first of which illustrated children's tendency to focus on their friends' reactions ('he might take it better online'; 'I don't know how my friend is reacting') and identify social media as inappropriate for communicating unpleasant information, with the majority of interviewees (12 out of 17) expressing similar views. In a way, it could be inferred that, in regards to sensitive information, interviewees tend to perceive the advantages of face-to-face communication, which allow for a clearer self-expression ('you could express your feelings better') and a more gentle approach to unpleasant news, as outweighing those of social media channels. Sam's answer appeared to outline yet another reason why respondents prefer communicating in person, namely social media's affordance, which allows for the easy replication and distribution of content, which is something children are cautious of.

Thus Turkle's statement that teenagers 'would rather text than talk' (Turkle, 2011: 11) seems vaguely applicable to the age group of tweens, leading us to believe that, even though interviewees were born in the age of digital technologies, they still know the values of face-to-face communication, perhaps better than their teen fellows who have gradually eased into a world prevailed by social media. Further connotations point to the importance of informational context in regards to children's communication channel preference, with most respondents noting that when they like to convey enjoyable information, they tend to choose a channel based on the delivery speed, whereas when they need to communicate unwelcome news, recipients' reactions begin to count more. Moreover, the fact that children aged 10, 11 and 12 all held the same opinion on personal interactions, provided me with grounds to dismiss the notion that only older teenagers prefer face-to-face communication (Livingstone & Bober, 2003), arguing that age is less of an influencing factor as it used to be a decade ago and that, even in this increasingly digital world, personal interactions are still the more desirable way to keep in touch.

CONCLUSION

The general aim of this qualitative study was to answer the research question, ‘How are questions of social norms and media literacy tied into tweens’ use of social media?’ Seventeen semi-structured interviews with children between the ages of 10 and 12 served as a basis for the emergence of four themes in relation to the propound question.

What came about as findings was children’s general tendency to commence social media usage with Facebook as their first platform and use such sites mainly to communicate with friends. Moreover, it appeared that the degree to which children are aware of the possible dangers online has an influence on their platform exploration, whereby tweens who are closer to adolescence (12-year-olds), are very likely to use a multiplicity of SNSs, whereas their younger schoolmates (10-year-olds) show no interest in such an endeavour, referring often to what their parents have warned them about in regards to online activity. Likewise, it seems that parents do not educate their children on the actual practice of using social media, yet they imprint a number of negative stereotypes, in regards to ‘overdoing’ such usage, onto tweens from an early age, which restrain them from exploring new SNSs. This phenomenon could be explained through the notion of a digital divide between adults and children, as suggested by Livingstone (2003), and further supported by participants’ tendency to investigate online platform functionalities on their own. Consequently, tweens appear to possess rather shallow social media literacy, limited to a basic know-how on online content management and shaped by parents’ views. This fact seems to have an impact on tweens’ degree of involvement with social media platforms, whereby the less they know about each platform and the more they are bound by the family context, the less likely they are to explore new platforms.

Similarly, the conducted interviews refuted Turkle’s theory on the use of SNSs for the construction of an improved self (1995), while further illuminating children’s preference for face-to-face communication over online. This inclination appeared to be based on a set of norms, mostly related to the affordances of social platforms, which allow for the easy replication and dissemination of information, as well as on the type of news tweens want to share, whereby participants chose to discuss potentially upsetting or sensitive matters in person rather than online. The collected data additionally exhibited children’s propensity to rely solely on their friends in their choice of platform and to post whatever content they like, which neglected the idea of an existing social need for specific content or the usage of a certain platform in the first place. However, tweens showed a substantial awareness of an ‘invisible audience’ (Marwick, 2013), which appeared to guide their choice for a more private

or public platform to use. Moreover, when frequency of usage was involved, participants displayed a significant desire to dissociate themselves from 'excessive use', yet all of them reported different usage patterns. Therefore, we could imply the existence of some rules guiding one's involvement online which are not fixed and appear to be rather stereotypical, thus supposedly linked to parents' views of social media usage.

Future studies in the same field could benefit from translating the obtained results into a further questionnaire that would involve a larger sample and thus test whether the current findings are representative of the broader population of tweens or not. Research on the unstable nature of the social norms, guiding what one sees as 'too much' and 'too little' social media usage, could prove to be just as useful. An additional employment of participant observations would shed further light onto children's actual frequency of social media use, online content and literacy. Finally, researching the group of tweens' parents could provide a better understand of adults' usage patterns and personal views on social media usage, as well as the ways in which those two factors influence tweens' online behaviour.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction

Hello,

My name is X, I am 24 years old and I am a Master's student in a university in London. I am currently writing a very important paper on children and social media and that is why I have come to meet you today. During this conversation I will be asking you questions in regards to the types of social media you use, the things you post, the reasons you use it and why you like or dislike it. If you have any questions during our conversation, please, don't be afraid to ask. If there is any question that seems confusing to you just let me know and I will rephrase it. If there is any question, which you feel uncomfortable answering, please tell me, and I will move on to the next question. Everything you say will be confidential and anonymous, so no one else will know what you said. This interview is not obligatory so we can quit at any time you find convenient. With this said, I hope you enjoy our talk.

- **What is your name and how old are you?**
- **Can you define what social media is for you?**
- **Can you tell me about how you communicate with your friends online and offline?** (*Where do you meet offline? Do your parents easily let you go out? How often do you talk to them on social media? Would you rather talk to them online or not? Why? Why not? What do you like about talking to your friends online?*)

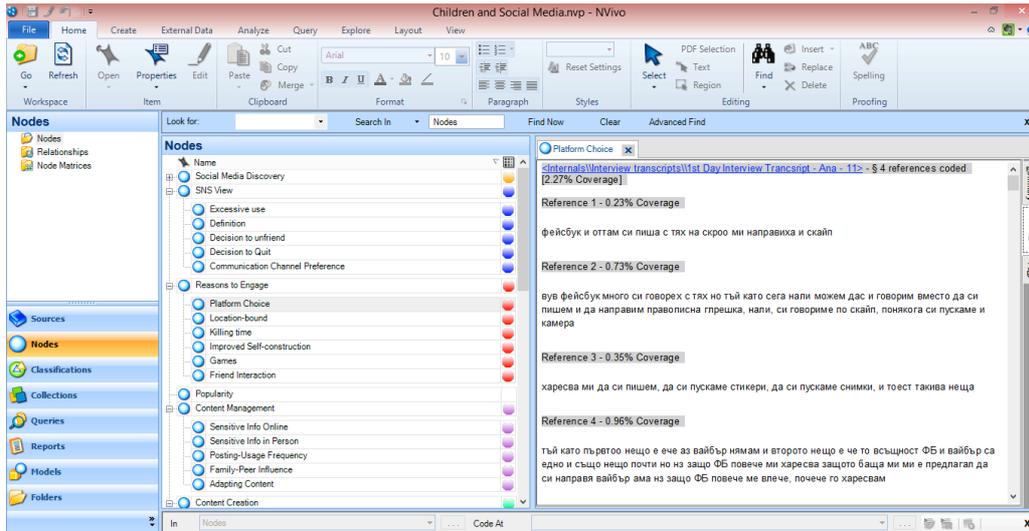
- **Do you find using your social media a natural process or is it not that natural to you?**
- **Could you please put the icons in order, ranging from the one you use the most - on the left to the one you use the least - on the right? Why have you put them in this order?**
- **How often do you post on Facebook?** (*Is that a lot or a little? Why? How does that differ from the amount your friends post? What is your opinion on friends of yours who post more than you?*)
- **What kind of things do you post on Facebook?** (Why this? What about your friends? *Would you post something different than that, say, (if child is a boy) beauty tips or (if child is a girl) results from a recent football game? Why? Why not? How do you know what to post and what not?*)
- **Who do you have on Facebook as friends? Do you keep in mind your online friends when you post something?** (*Why? Why not? How does it matter? Do you have your family online? Does that influence what you post? Would you be friends online with someone that the rest of your friends don't particularly like? What does someone need to post for you to unfriend them?*)
- **What kind of things would you share with your friends online?** (*How would you prefer to share something upsetting or unpleasant to a friend of yours? What about something exciting and pleasant? Why? How does it make a difference if you share it face-to-face or online?*)

- **How does having a Facebook profile make you feel** (*Do you feel as part of a community?*)
- **How would your friends describe you?**
- **What does your profile picture say about you?** (*How do you think your friends perceive it?*)
- **A lot of people tag friends in posts and photos, what about you?** (*Why do you do it? Do you like being tagged yourself? Is it important for you? Why? Why not? Is that how you get popular on Facebook? Why? If not, how? Would you do that thing that makes you popular for the sake of popularity or only if you feel like it? Are there posts or photos you wouldn't like to be tagged in? What kinds and why?*)
- **How do you normally post a photo?** (*Do you use a filter? Does it matter on what social platform you are posting it?*) **What about a written post?** (*How long does it take you to write a post? Do you edit before you post or not?*)
- **Are there any consequences of having a photo with a lot of likes when you are in school? What are these consequences?**
- **Do you have the feeling that you are missing out on something if you don't use social media or not?** (*What is it you feel you would be missing out on? Why is it important to not miss out?*)
- Have you seen the 'Hunger Games'? **Could you write down for me in 1 sentence what you would say to your best friend after seeing the movie?** Could you now write down again in 1 sentence what you would post about the movie on your Facebook profile for everybody to read?

- **What would you think of a friend of yours if they quit using Facebook?** (*Why would you think that? Would you ever stop using Facebook? Why? Why not? How would that influence your relationship with friends?*)
- **Did your parents know when you first made a Facebook profile?** How did they react? Did they impose any restrictions on your use of Facebook?
- **Tell me a bit more about your profile.** (*Is your real information on there? What about your friends?*)
- **Do you know how Facebook functions and what happens to your information?** (*What does Facebook allow you to do? What do you mostly use it for? How would you communicate with your friends if it wasn't for Facebook or Snapchat?*)
- **How did you find out about Facebook in the first place?**
- **How did you learn to use Facebook?** (*Did someone show you or not?*)
- **Is there anything you think I didn't ask about but you would like to tell me about?**
- **Is there anything your teachers should know in regards to your social media usage that I could perhaps tell them on your behalf?**
- **How did you feel during this interview?**
- **What do you think could be improved?**

Appendix B: Coding Sample

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Communication Channel Preference	17	36	7.8.2015 17:54	KA	11.8.2015 18:53	KA
Excessive use	16	69	7.8.2015 17:54	KA	11.8.2015 18:55	KA
Decision to Quit	16	38	7.8.2015 17:55	KA	11.8.2015 18:36	KA
Definition	16	31	7.8.2015 18:18	KA	11.8.2015 18:52	KA
Decision to unfriend	13	30	8.8.2015 13:23	KA	11.8.2015 18:59	KA
Content Creation	0	0	7.8.2015 16:40	KA	7.8.2015 20:05	KA
Post What	17	48	7.8.2015 17:27	KA	11.8.2015 18:57	KA
Post Why	0	0	7.8.2015 17:30	KA	7.8.2015 20:02	KA
Content Management	0	0	7.8.2015 16:41	KA	7.8.2015 16:41	KA
Family-Peer Influence	13	26	7.8.2015 17:45	KA	11.8.2015 16:58	KA
Adapting Content	13	22	7.8.2015 17:45	KA	11.8.2015 17:40	KA
Sensitive Info in Person	13	28	7.8.2015 17:46	KA	14.8.2015 14:45	KA
Sensitive Info Online	10	15	7.8.2015 17:47	KA	11.8.2015 16:37	KA
Posting-Usage Frequency	15	47	7.8.2015 17:48	KA	11.8.2015 18:54	KA
Reasons to Engage	0	0	7.8.2015 16:42	KA	7.8.2015 20:05	KA
Platform Choice	17	76	7.8.2015 17:50	KA	11.8.2015 18:54	KA
Friend Interaction	17	42	7.8.2015 17:50	KA	11.8.2015 18:53	KA
Games	5	10	7.8.2015 17:51	KA	11.8.2015 15:59	KA
Improved Self-construction	16	49	7.8.2015 17:51	KA	11.8.2015 18:56	KA
Location-bound	15	16	7.8.2015 17:51	KA	11.8.2015 18:53	KA
Killing time	5	5	8.8.2015 14:00	KA	11.8.2015 16:43	KA



Appendix C: Coding scheme

SNS View
Definition
Communication Preference
Excessive Use
Decision to Quit
Decision to Unfriend
Content Creation
Post What
Post Why
Content Management
Posting/Usage Frequency
Content Adaptation
Sensitive Information in Person
Sensitive Information Online
Reasons for Engagement
Platform Choice
Friend Interaction
Games
Improved Self
Location-bound
Boredom
SNS Discovery
How
Age of Discovery
Affordances and Privacy
SNS Affordance Knowledge
Personal Information Sharing
Privacy
Difficulty of Use
Popularity
Age

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