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Young People's Use of Social Networking Sites in Ireland: 'Socially Anti-Social' (2017)

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 methods as the numbers of connections on Snapchat are considerably smaller than Facebook.

With strong emotional ties to all their connections on this platform. 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 (1996) and Bennett's (1999) concept of tribes. These online social networks also 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.