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1 **Title:** Are Social Networking Sites information sources? : Informational purposes of  
2 high-school students in using SNS

3

4 **Keywords:** Social media, Social networking sites, Information seeking, Teenagers,  
5 Information literacy, Transliteracy; information grounds

6

7 **Abstract:** *Although social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook or Twitter, are*  
8 *widely used by teenagers, to date, research has focused on the social uses of SNSs.*  
9 *This research sought to investigate the ways in which high school students (15-19*  
10 *years) use SNSs in order to find information. It highlights the importance of*  
11 *considering how young people may use SNSs for everyday life information as well as*  
12 *for academic and school oriented information. Findings from a web-based survey of*  
13 *students from the UK, France, Thailand and Denmark show that SNSs are information*  
14 *sources for most teenagers, especially for information related to social activities.*  
15 *Although academic information seeking were not among the most common reasons*  
16 *for using SNSs, the findings indicate that many students do use SNSs for such*  
17 *purposes, as well as everyday life information seeking.*

18

## 19 **Introduction**

20 SNSs (social networking sites) are defined by boyd and Ellison (2007: ??) as “web-  
21 based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile  
22 within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a  
23 connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by  
24 others within the system”. The expanding growth of SNSs has meant that they have  
25 become a daily activity for millions of people and especially for teenagers (Hampton  
26 et al 2011; CREDOC, 2014; EU kids online, 2014; Lenhart, 2015). While the term ‘social  
27 media’ encompasses a wider range of services, such as blogs, collaborative projects  
28 and collaborative social worlds (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), in everyday discussions  
29 the two terms are often used interchangeably. Although Facebook is still the most  
30 widely used SNS, teenagers now tend to embrace newer social networks such as  
31 Instagram, WhatsApp or Snapchat (Duggan et al, 2015). Many studies describe these  
32 teenagers’ uses of SNS, mainly from social sciences and psychology viewpoints. For  
33 the most part, such studies focus on communication and social uses of SNS, aiming to  
34 describe the nature and processes of a “digital sociability” (Cardon and Delaunay-  
35 Teterel, 2006) and then to warn about the potential dangers and the necessity to  
36 protect privacy and personal data (Livingstone 2008; Ito et al, 2010).

37 Apart from individuals, many brands, companies, organizations, public institutions  
38 (local national as well as international level), and both traditional and citizen-based  
39 media make use of SNSs, having a public Facebook page, a Twitter account, Youtube  
40 channel among others. SNSs thereby provide a huge amount of information, as well as  
41 different types of information compared to those available from many other sources,  
42 and covering a wide range of topics. SNSs can, therefore, be considered as effective  
43 hubs through which information flows, as is demonstrated in the recent agreement,  
44 called « Instant Articles », between Facebook and nine press publishers to submit  
45 articles directly to its members. As information providers, SNS have been shown to  
46 play an important role in participation and political engagement. Recent history has  
47 demonstrated that these communication platforms allow people to challenge the  
48 establishment by publishing and sharing anti-establishment views or opposing  
49 debates, and facilitate people gathering to demonstrate commitment, or even for  
50 strikes or riots (Shirazi, 2013). Furthermore, recent works point out that SNSs could be  
51 used as direct information sources explicitly by students (Kyung-Sun et al, 2011, 2014;  
52 Brandtzæg and Heim 2009; Willemse et al 2014). This is not surprising given the  
53 availability, and increasingly popularity, of user generated content. Moreover, many  
54 young people, and most information searchers in general, rely on sources easily

55 accessible even though the trustworthiness of information is questionable (Flanagin  
56 and Metzger, 2010; Biddix, 2011).

57 In this paper, we consider whether teenagers (15-19) use SNSs to access and/or seek  
58 information. Then we investigate the possible SNS information practices of teenagers  
59 and explore what kind of information they might look for on SNS. Information related  
60 to everyday life as well as academic works or school life are considered.

61 These questions highlight important issues: in the first place, specific uses of the  
62 Internet and Web 2.0 by teenagers questions the evolution of information practices of  
63 future citizens. Furthermore, the capability to search, evaluate and share information  
64 in a collaborative setting, is presented as a crucial skill domain in many Information  
65 Literacy (IL) curricula (e.g. Advisory Committee on Information Literacy, 2011; ACRL,  
66 2015) and, chiefly, in renewed paradigms and frameworks such as Transliteracy  
67 (Thomas et al, 2007) or Metaliteracy (Mackey and Jacobson, 2014). Indeed, while IL  
68 guidelines are usually focused on individual skills and individual assessment, the key  
69 competencies have an increasingly collective dimension: sharing information with  
70 friends and with a large and unknown audience and evaluating information created by  
71 multiple participants for example. As Mackey and Jacobson (2014: ??), authors of the  
72 Metaliteracy framework, point out, the challenge for teachers and trainers is to define  
73 specific competencies for print-based information as well as decentered networks: "*In*  
74 *many ways social media is ideally suited for research if we recognize these*  
75 *collaborative spaces as a means for effectively creating and sharing knowledge in*  
76 *diverse modes, and not just informal social interactions*". However the situation at  
77 school is that, broadly speaking, media, and especially web-based media and social  
78 networks, are perceived as threats for children and teenagers rather than as resources  
79 to support teaching or learning. In an approach that is arguably inconsistent with the  
80 reality of teenagers' digital habits, SNSs are often prohibited by school policies and  
81 dismissed as games or 'kids' stuff' at best, clearly differentiated from serious work  
82 that is done at school. This can contribute to the "participation gap" mentioned by  
83 Jenkins and colleagues (2009). And, if SNS may be meaningful information sources for  
84 young people, researchers and educators need to better understand these SNS-based  
85 information processes in order to design appropriate evaluation guidelines. This  
86 research is intended as a first, explorative step that should be extended in order to  
87 continue to test and specify the ideas and findings presented here.

88

## 89 **SNSs and information seeking**

90 As indicated in introduction, general research about teenagers' information practices  
91 seldom includes SNSs as information sources. However, research about the needs that  
92 SNSs satisfy for people does include information seeking (Whiting and Williams 2013).  
93 Indeed, from a research point of view the different reasons to refer to a SNS need to  
94 be better understood because, to date, the social motivations have chiefly been  
95 emphasized. Some researchers have investigated SNSs specifically as information  
96 sources. In Norway, Petter Bae Brandtzæg and Jan Heim (2009) carried a qualitative  
97 survey (1200 responses) in 2007 on social networking site users (aged from 16 to 29).  
98 The authors demonstrated that information needs were listed by participants (10%,  
99 n=220): « *Users reporting access to information, including about fashion, music,  
100 literature, cultural events, current happenings in their neighborhood and access to  
101 new and shared knowledge regarding people's opinions related to everything from  
102 politics and to more tedious matters. Information updates are related to: a) Friends;  
103 b)Neighborhood; c) City events; d) Fashion; e) Music; f) Happenings; g) Help with  
104 homework at school f) interests/hobbies; g) other and more customized forms of  
105 information than on TV and radio*” (Brandtzæg and Heim, 2009:148). They suggested  
106 that the category named “debating” (6.5%, n=143) can be integrate the information  
107 category, “*because debating often takes place in order to gain access to new  
108 information through a collaborative discussion process*” (Brandtzæg and Heim 2009,  
109 p.148). Although this survey did not focus especially on teenagers, participants cited  
110 academic homework as a motivation to seek information on SNSs.

111 Other researchers who are also primarily concerned with identifying the main  
112 motivations that lead people to use SNSs include Grant (2005) who isolated key  
113 motivations that lead teenagers (13-17) in particular to use SNS including information  
114 seeking “*(...) to enhance their mood, learn by experience, as a form of passive  
115 escapism, as social interaction, and to find or give information and advice*” (cited by  
116 Jansen et al, 2011:??).

117

118 Some of the most significant studies that demonstrate the use of SNS as direct  
119 information source concern undergraduate students such as the several studies  
120 conducted by research team led by Kyung-Sun Kim. Kim and colleagues (2011) carried  
121 out a first online questionnaire that aimed to investigate what kinds of SNSs are used  
122 as information sources and why they are used by undergraduate students from a  
123 public university (446 participants). This study also examined what kinds of actions  
124 users take in order to evaluate the trustworthiness of information provided by social  
125 sources. The study found that Wikipedia was the most widely used source (98%) while

126 SNSs such as Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn were also used as information sources  
127 (97%), followed by online user reviews (72%), YouTube (53%) and Q&A sites (e.g.  
128 Yahoo! Answers) (53%), blogs (32%) and microblogs such as Twitter (24%). The  
129 authors concluded that a range of SNSs and social media are used for everyday life  
130 information seeking while some are used for both everyday life information and  
131 academic purposes (Wikipedia, YouTube, Q&A sites). Furthermore, this study shows  
132 that different sites are used for different purposes: Wikipedia was used mainly for  
133 getting background/introductory information and a quick overview, while sites like  
134 Facebook were used mainly for keeping in touch with others, getting updates/news  
135 and for getting others' opinions. User review sites were used for getting others'  
136 opinions/comments on products and help with purchase decisions. YouTube was used  
137 for recreational information and for finding solutions to a problem or how-to  
138 instructions, while for problem-solving, QandA sites were also used often (Kim et al,  
139 2011:.2).

140 Kyung-Sun Kim and other colleagues conducted additional studies (Kim et al, 2013; Kim et al, 2014; Kim  
141 and Sin, 2014). The 2013 study involved 1286 students from a public university filling out a web based  
142 survey. Findings showed that sources used by students for information seeking related to  
143 academic purposes were, firstly, wikis, followed by blogs, social Q&A, media-sharing  
144 sites, and forums. In 2014, two further surveys were launched to collect data *via* a web-  
145 based survey with 809 undergraduate students (Kim et al, 2014) and web-based survey plus focus groups  
146 from 1355 students in US and 194 in Singapore (Kim and Sin, 2014). Findings of the first study showed  
147 that most of the SNSs and social media platforms are used as information sources, and  
148 wikis, user reviews, and media-sharing sites emerged as the top platforms. Results  
149 also revealed differences in the frequency of information seeking and in the purpose  
150 of use depending on gender, class level, academic discipline and Big Five personality  
151 traits (McCrae and Costa, 1987). In the second study, little difference was found  
152 between the two countries, while different platforms seemed to be used depending on  
153 different contexts. Q&A sites and forums tended to be used in the academic context.  
154 SNSs, user reviews, and microblogs were used in the everyday life situations, while  
155 wikis and media-sharing services were most often used in both contexts. Recently, the  
156 JAMES (Jeunes Activités Médias) study shed light on teenagers' information seeking on SNSs (Willemse et  
157 al, 2014). Since 2010, this representative study has examined the use of media by young people in  
158 Switzerland every two years. In 2014, 1086 young people (age from 12 to 19) were interviewed. This study  
159 showed that SNS are an important information channel for them: SNSs were in third position, after videos  
160 sharing websites and search engines, with 78% (n = 854) consulting them every day or several times a week.  
161 Indeed, for the 2014 session, video sharing websites such as Youtube have been included in the survey as an

162 information channel. The participants declared that this kind of sites is not useful for leisure exclusively but  
163 for information seeking as well. This study also demonstrated a greater tendency for girls to seek  
164 information through SNSs.

165

166 These findings are disputed slightly by other results however. For instance, Williamson  
167 and colleagues (2012) interviewed 34 Australian students (age 18 to 25) about their  
168 topics and sources when seeking information in everyday life information seeking  
169 situations. This study did not focus especially on SNSs. These results suggest that  
170 print media such as books and newspapers still played an important role for young  
171 people while SNSs were perceived as important for interaction with friends rather than  
172 for news gathering. Although Facebook, could be used to get some types of news e.g.  
173 about friends or sport, it was still mostly used for communication. To explain this  
174 reluctance to use SNS as an information source, participants described their skeptical  
175 feelings about privacy issues and quality of information provided on line and  
176 especially *via* SNSs. Nevertheless, this study emphasized the wide range of media  
177 that young people use to meet their information needs.

178 and

## 179 **Research questions**

180 As this literature review demonstrates, relatively few studies exist on our topic:  
181 teenagers' information seeking on SNS. Furthermore, all the cited studies point to a  
182 lack of research on this theme and at the same time emphasize the issues that this  
183 raises. a. As Kim and Sin (2014: ??) argue: "*An empirical study is urgently needed to  
184 better understand how users evaluate and use the information from these social  
185 media, and to provide help for the effective use of such sources*". Based on the  
186 insights gained from the above discussion of the literature, the following research  
187 questions will be investigated in this paper:

188 In the context of "Web 2.0", what does the information landscape of teenagers now look like? More  
189 specifically, do they use SNSs as information sources? What are their motivations for using SNSs  
190 specifically as information sources? Do they use SNSs as information sources for everyday life topics alone,  
191 or do they use SNSs as information sources for academic purposes as well?

192

## 193 **Theoretical background**

### 194 • **Everyday life information seeking**

195 The uses of SNSs by teenagers are directly concerned with the sphere of everyday life. As we have  
196 emphasized in the introduction, these uses are little studied by the research into formal settings such as the

197 school and workplace, but as incursions, disturbances, untimely emergence of intimacy. This subdivision  
198 between “formal” settings of information seeking (work and school) and “informal” settings of information  
199 seeking (everyday life and leisure) reinforces the traditional partition of the information seeking research  
200 into two spheres of life experience: work or job (or study) related on one hand; non-work or everyday life on  
201 the other. This distinction was evident in both theoretical and methodological claims against the lack of  
202 scientific studies about everyday life information seeking compared to studies about information seeking for  
203 work purposes in the 1980s. This led several authors to propose models of ELIS (everyday life information  
204 seeking). The model proposed by Reijo Savolainen (1995) from the Finnish university of Tampere is perhaps  
205 the best known. This founding publication revealed the place of information in daily life and the diversity of  
206 relations people have with the media, which is an appropriate basis for a study focused on SNSs.

207 Savolainen (1995: 266) stressed that the concept of ELIS is "*residual by nature*", meaning that it is difficult  
208 to separate completely the two contexts (professional on one side, and daily life on the other), and that the  
209 different contexts in which an individual life takes place are not fully separated from the individual's point  
210 of view. Moreover, in the 20 years since its publication, features enabled by connected devices, such as  
211 mobile phones, have substantially evolved. It could therefore seem useful to reread the concept of ELIS in  
212 light of recent research, on mobility. Indeed, Stefana Broadbent (2015) showed how much information and  
213 communication technology transforms public and institutional spaces as a consequence of the extension of  
214 the personal and intimate sphere outside of private spaces. What were clearly distinct contexts at earlier  
215 points in history are today geographically and temporally mixed.

216 Savolainen (1995) highlights the potential passive nature of the informational practice. This finding echoes  
217 the practice of social networks based on a connection and constant attention to the notification system and  
218 continuous scrolling of updates. Moreover, Savolainen's model, as well as the other ELIS models, identify  
219 people (personal networks, family and friends) as the most easily accessible sources of information, even for  
220 information acquired by chance (Williamson, 1998; McKenzie, 2003), and mass media and institutional  
221 sources as less accessible sources of information. In line with the ELIS perspective, Agosto and Hughes-  
222 Hassell (2006) carried out a qualitative survey in order to determine the sources or channels US urban  
223 teenagers consult when engaging in everyday life information seeking and their most frequent everyday life  
224 information needs. As a result of this survey, authors found that the participants indicated a preference for  
225 friends and family as information sources for their everyday life information seeking *and*). This is an  
226 appropriate basis for research on SNSs as information sources for teenagers because SNSs are typically  
227 human sources as they are maintained by individuals.

## 228

- 229 • **Information grounds**

230 The concept of « information grounds » developed by Karen Fisher (formerly Pettigrew) is relevant to  
231 understand the information environment of people. She conceived the notion as “an environment  
232 temporarily created by the behavior of people who have come together to perform a given task, but from



233 which emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information”  
234 (Pettigrew: 1999: 801). We choose to refer to this concept as it highlights the crucial role of human  
235 relationship and social interactions in the informational process (Fisher, Durrance and Hinton, 2004).  
236 Information grounds theory focuses on informal social settings “*ranging from book clubs, gyms, folk*  
237 *festivals and bus stops to hair salons and supermarket queues*” (Counts and Fisher, 2010: ??). But  
238 information grounds research points out that the main information grounds that people have are the  
239 workplace, the activity groups (linked to leisure or sport, playgrounds, clubs etc.) and places of worship. It is  
240 noteworthy that for these authors, the information needs are determined by tasks directly deducted from the  
241 professional roles. This raises questions about the role of academic setting and associated tasks in the  
242 information processes of teenagers. While the concept of information grounds does not initially include the  
243 formal context of school, it seems relevant to think that this context plays a significant role in the  
244 information sharing processes.

245

#### 246 • **Transliteracy**

247 Nowadays people have to deal with a wide range of existing information sources (websites, blogs, human  
248 sources, books and magazines, booklets, media, TV, radio etc.). The concept of information literacy itself is  
249 being redefined in the light of the developing “mediascape” (Appadurai 1990) as well as its uses. A strong  
250 theoretical and methodological paradigm is hence emerging that features a “meta skill” relevant to the  
251 presented study: “Transliteracy”. A definition of this concept is given by Sue Thomas and colleagues  
252 (2007:??): “*Transliteracy is the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and*  
253 *media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks*”.  
254 Transliteracy emphasizes the need to work at a global level of expertise that takes into account the various  
255 media and all kind of literacies (Ipri 2010) rather than limiting activities to specific literacies, especially  
256 digital ones. In addition, the concept and research programme of Transliteracy oblige us to encompass  
257 multiple kind of motivations to use SNSs rather than the only one: the socialization aspect. As a part of the  
258 current information landscape, SNSs should be taken into account when information culture is being defined.  
259 Furthermore, as is the case with SNSs, the concept of Transliteracy attaches great importance to the human  
260 interaction within information seeking and sharing processes.

261

#### 262 **Methodology**

263 In order to collect data on users’ characteristics and their possible use of SNS as  
264 information sources, a study was conducted using a short online questionnaire (10  
265 questions) developed using Google Forms. This was developed in French and  
266 translated into English and Danish. The initial questions aimed to gather basic  
267 demographic information (age, gender, course studied). Participants were then asked  
268 about their general use of SNS (number of accounts, type of SNS) and their information

269 uses of SNS (type of SNS used to seek information, frequency, topics sought, content  
270 shared or published on SNS). Regarding the topics sought, we predefined 13  
271 categories from the literature review and from two pretest interviews of the  
272 questionnaire.

273 Data were collected between December 2014 and April 2015. A link to the survey was  
274 sent to librarians and teachers via email lists (e.g. CDI-DOC mailing list, School-  
275 Library-Research and LIS-Info-Skills JISCMail lists); professional associations (e.g. the  
276 UK School Library Association (SLA)); and personal contacts of the authors). Those  
277 interested in participating were asked to send the survey link to any students they  
278 taught aged between 15 and 19. The data were downloaded from Google Forms as an  
279 Excel spreadsheet, and then imported into SPSS where the responses were analyzed.  
280 Descriptive statistics were generated for all the questions and chi-squared analysis  
281 conducted for investigated differences between gender categories of respondents.

282 In total, 473 responses were received: 64.5% were from female students and 35.5%  
283 from male students. The majority of students (94.3%) were aged between 15 and 18.  
284 65.8% of responses were from students in the UK, 22.0% from France; 5.7% from  
285 Thailand; and 5.1% from Denmark. There were also a non-significant number of  
286 responses from students in other non-European countries (Namibia, Netherlands,  
287 Philippines, Qatar, Singapore and Russia).

288 A companion survey was also conducted in Chile for which results will be published  
289 separately (forthcoming).

290

## 291 **Findings**

### 292 **Setting the scene: respondents' general uses of SNSs**

#### 293 *Social networks high-school students have accounts for*

294 As Table 1 shows, the most common SNSs students had accounts for were Facebook (92.9% had an  
295 account), YouTube (76.0%) and Snapchat (75.1%). Students were least likely to have accounts for Flickr  
296 (2.3%), Ask.fm (15.4%) and Vine (17.7%).

297

SNS	Number	%
Facebook	441	93.2
YouTube	358	75.7
Snapchat	351	74.2
Instagram	255	53.9
Twitter	249	52.6
Google+	250	52.9
WhatsApp	164	34.7
Tumblr	149	31.5
Vine	85	18.0
Ask.fm	71	15.0
Flickr	12	2.5

Table 1: Which SNSs do you have an account for? (n=473)

Other sites mentioned by small numbers of students include Pinterest, WeChat, DeviantArt, BuzzFeed, Reddit, StumbleUpon, Instapray, Meow Chat, Viber, Twitch, 9GAG and Skype.

There were some differences between SNSs male and female students had accounts for. There was strong evidence that female students surveyed were more likely to have an account for Instagram (F=63.3%; M=36.9%;  $p<0.01$ ), WhatsApp (F=39.7%; M=25.6%;  $p<0.05$ ) and Tumblr (F=38.7%; M=18.5%;  $p<0.01$ ) and there was also some evidence that they were more likely to have an account for Snapchat (F=78.0%; M=67.3%;  $p<0.05$ ). However, there was greater use of Google+ (F=47.2%; M=63.1%;  $p<0.01$ ) and YouTube (F=71.5%; M=83.3%;  $p<0.01$ ) amongst male students.

### ***Social networking sites students use most regularly in general***

Facebook was, overwhelmingly, the most commonly used SNS (77.4% said they used it regularly), as shown in Table 2. Snapchat (33.2%) and Instagram (29.2%) were next, followed by YouTube (27.3%) and Twitter (22.6%). The proportion of account holders who considered themselves regular users ranged between 83.0% for Facebook to 2.4% for Google+. However, only 1.9% of students surveyed did not use any SNSs regularly.

SNS	Number	%
Facebook	366	77.4%
Snapchat	157	33.2%
Instagram	138	29.2%
YouTube	129	27.3%
Twitter	107	22.6%
Tumblr	71	15.0%
What's App	36	7.6%
Google+	6	1.3%
None	9	1.9%

317

318

**Table 2: What social networking sites do you use most regularly in general? (n=473)**

319

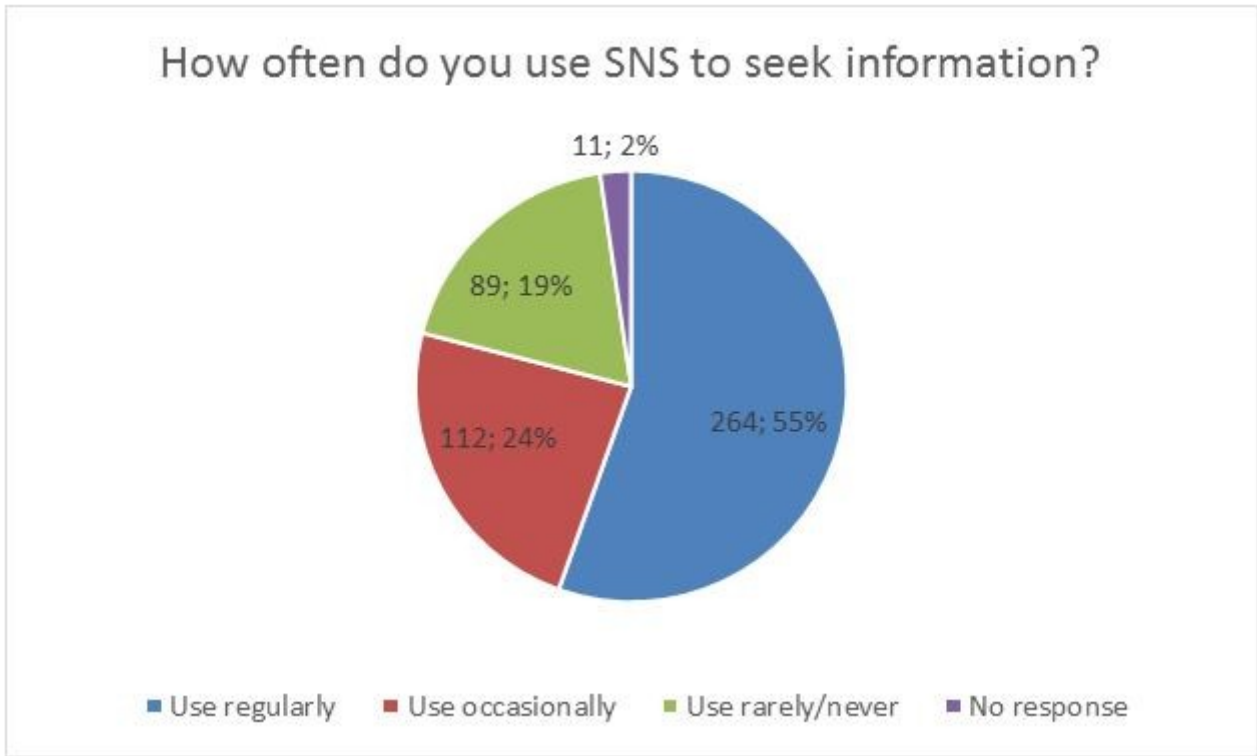
320 Other SNSs mentioned by less than five students included Skype, Reddit, Pinterest, Vine and Soundcloud.

321

322 **Do the participants use SNSs as information sources?**

323 *How often students use social networking sites are used to seek information*

324



**Figure 1: How often do you use these social networking sites to seek information? (n=473)**

More than half the students (55.8%) used SNS to seek information regularly and almost a further quarter (23.7%) did so occasionally. Just less than a fifth (18.8 %) rarely or never used SNS to seek information (see Figure 1). A few indicated in their responses that they felt the idea of doing so was ridiculous.

***Social networking sites students use most regularly to search for information***

When students were asked about SNSs used to search for information, again, Facebook was the site used most regularly (39.1%), as shown in Table 3. YouTube was used regularly to search for information by 30.2% of students and Twitter by 20.0%. All other SNSs were used regularly to search for information by less than 10% of students. The popular general sites, Instagram and Snapchat were used by just 3.8% and 0.8% respectively for information purposes.

<b>SNS</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Facebook</b>	185	39.1%
<b>YouTube</b>	143	30.2%
<b>Twitter</b>	95	20.0%
<b>Google+</b>	44	9.3%
<b>Tumblr</b>	31	6.6%
<b>Instagram</b>	18	3.8%
<b>WhatsApp</b>	7	1.5%
<b>Reddit</b>	7	1.5%
<b>Pinterest</b>	5	1.1%
<b>Snapchat</b>	4	0.8%
<b>None</b>	103	21.8%

339

340 **Table 3: What social networking sites do you use most regularly to search for information? (n=473)**

341

342 The number of students regularly using specific SNSs to search for information was less than the number  
343 using the same SNSs for general purposes, with the exception of Google+, Reddit and Pinterest which were  
344 mentioned more frequently as sites used regularly for information purposes. A little over half the number of  
345 students who used Facebook regularly in general used it regularly specifically to search for information, but  
346 more than four-fifths of the number using Twitter and YouTube in general used them specifically to search  
347 for information.

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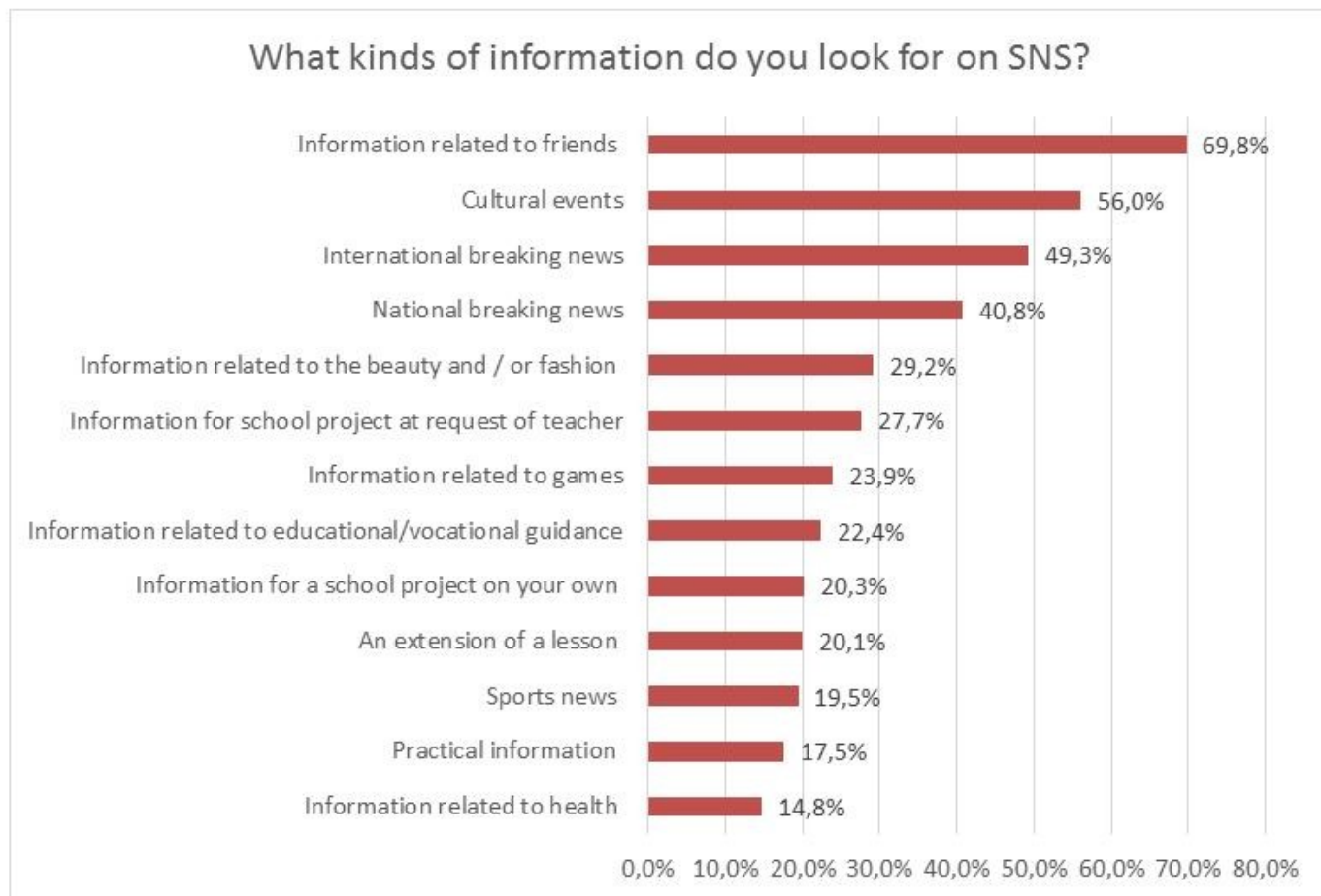
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**What are participants' motivations for using SNSs specifically as information sources?to**  
***Kinds of information students sought on social networking sites***



364  
365

**Figure 2: What kinds of information do you look for on these SNSs? (n=473)**

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373

Information related to friends was the most common type of information students looked for on SNSs (69.8%). This was followed by information about cultural events (56.0%) and international news (49.3%)<sup>1</sup>. Information related to health (14.8%) and practical information (17.5%) were the least commonly sought types of information (see Figure 2). There were some, mostly not unexpected, gender differences in the types of information sought via SNSs. Male students were more likely to look for sports news ( $F=11.8\%$ ;  $M=33.3\%$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and games-related information ( $F=10.8\%$ ;  $M=47.6\%$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), while female students were more likely to use SNSs for information about fashion and beauty ( $F=42.3\%$ ;  $M=5.4\%$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

1 The percentage searching for national news may be slightly lower than expected as international responses to the English version were not anticipated at the survey launch, so mention of the UK in the description of this item may have been misleading for overseas students.

374 Female students were also most likely to use SNSs to find information about friends (F=77.4%; M=56.0%;  
375  $p<0.01$ ) and cultural events (F=60.0%; M=48.8%;  $p<0.05$ ).

376 While tasks directly related to education and school were not amongst the most common reasons for using  
377 SNSs for information purposes, neither were they at the bottom of the list. More than one-quarter of students  
378 (27.7%) said they used SNSs to find information for a task at the direction of a teacher and one-fifth (20.3%)  
379 used SNSs to find information for a school project independently (i.e. not explicitly directed teacher).  
380 Around the same percentage (20.1%) said they had used SNSs to find additional information about topics  
381 taught in class. In addition, just over one-fifth (22.4%) used SNSs to search for information related to  
382 educational and vocational guidance. There were no significant gender differences in the use of SNSs for  
383 obviously school-related tasks.

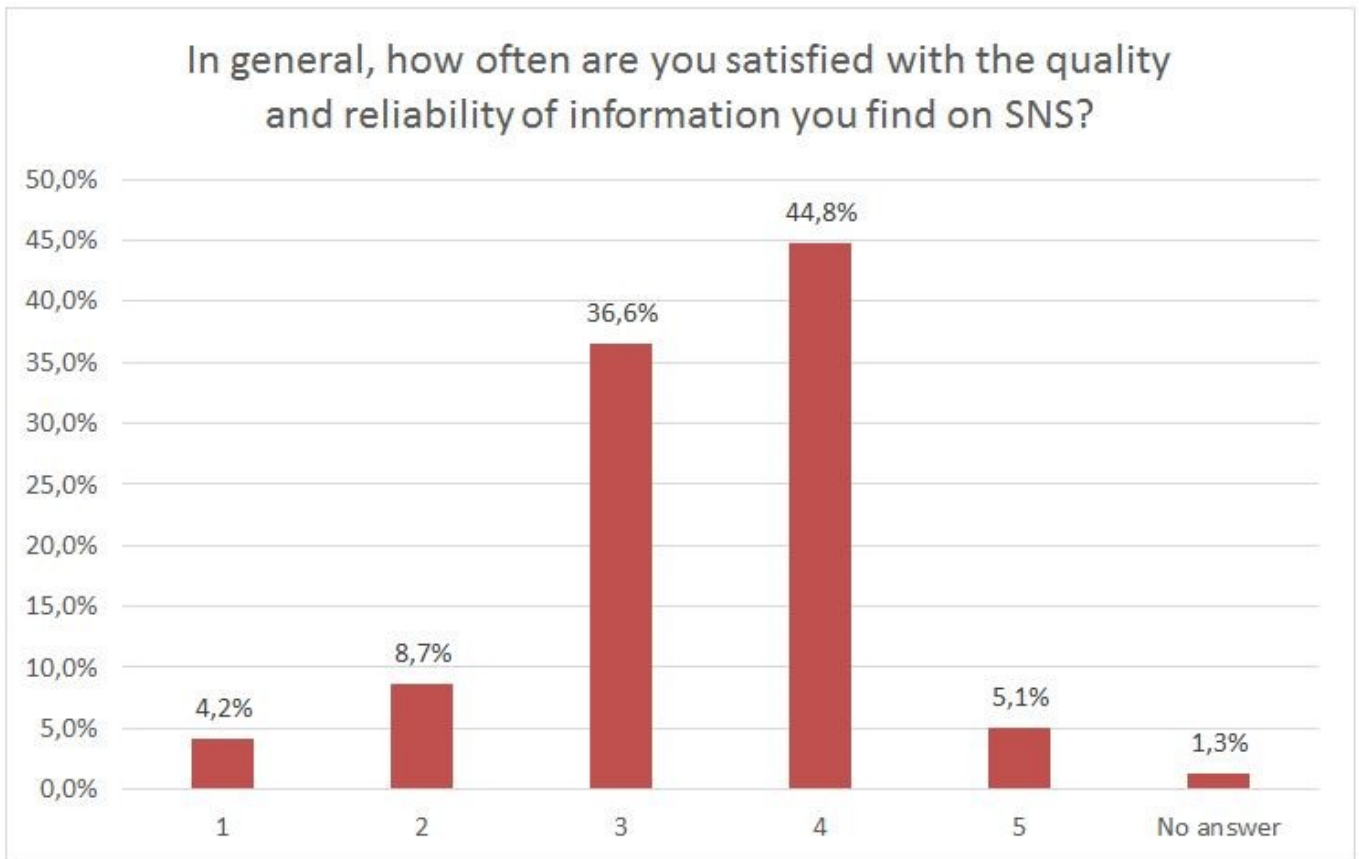
384  
385 Other types of information mentioned by small numbers of students included travel and geography; cookery;  
386 'how to' videos; information about music and films; political and activist information; and information about  
387 hobbies.

### 388 389 ***Satisfaction with the quality and reliability of information found on SNSs***

390 When asked how often they were satisfied with the quality and reliability of information they found on  
391 SNSs, students' responses were skewed towards the positive end of the scale, although just 5.1% said they  
392 were always satisfied (Figure 3). The information on SNS clearly has some value for most students,  
393 although they are conscious it needs to be treated with caution. There was a gender difference between the  
394 levels of satisfaction expressed by male and female students ( $p<0.01$ ), with boys more likely to express more  
395 extreme opinions while girls were more moderate and more likely to select the middle option.

396

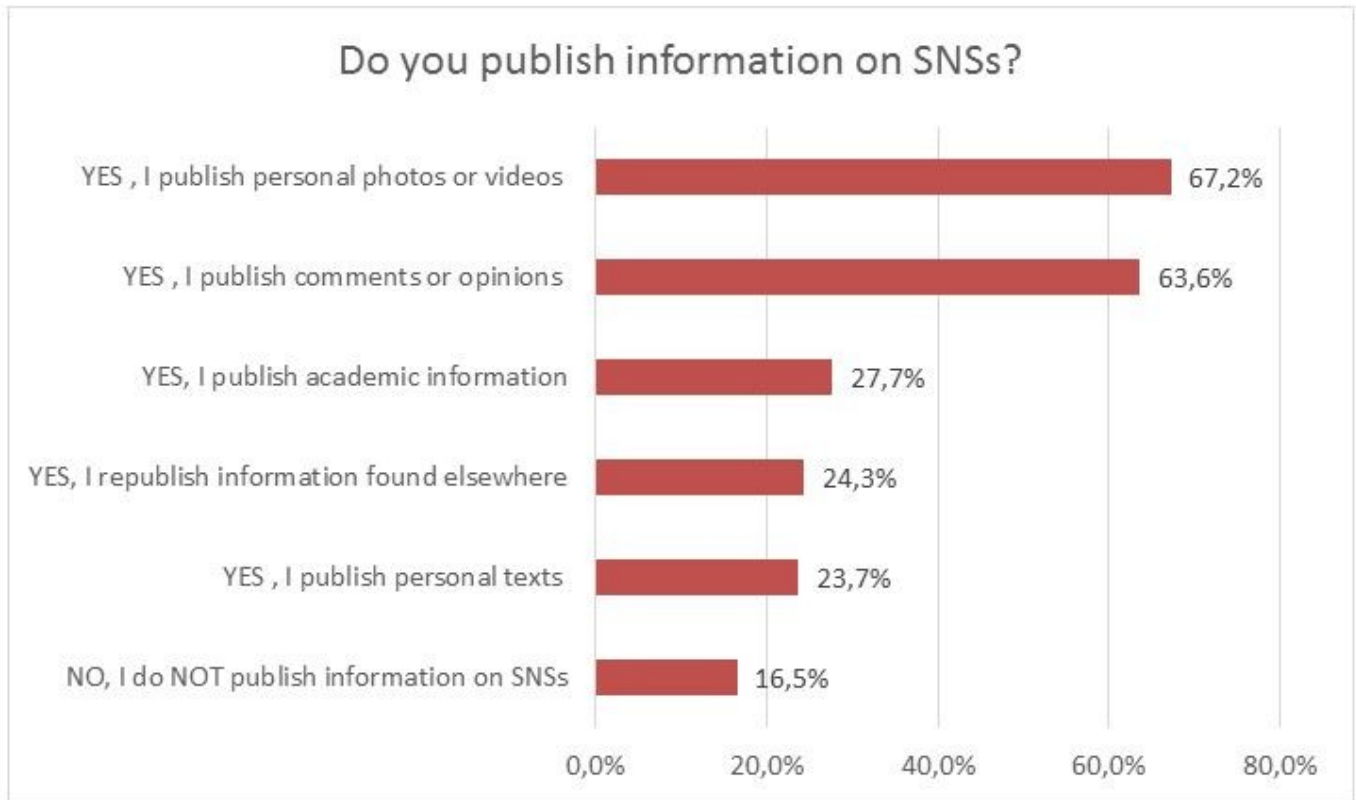




**Figure 3: In general, how often are you satisfied with the quality and reliability of information you find on these SNSs? (n=473)**

***Do you publish information on SNSs?***

Only 16.5% of students said they did not publish any information on SNSs. There was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in response to this question with boys being less likely to publish information on SNSs ( $F=11.1\%$ ;  $M=26.2\%$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Personal photos or videos were the most common form of publishing information on SNS (67.2%), especially amongst female students ( $F=75.7\%$ ;  $M=51.8\%$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). This was followed by publishing comments and opinions (63.6%). Around one-quarter of students said they published academic information such as class Facebook groups (27.7%) and similar proportions republished information found elsewhere (24.3%) and personal texts (23.7%) (see Figure 4).



410  
411 **Figure 4: Do you publish information on SNSs? (n=473)**

412  
413 **Discussion**

414 We will not dwell on the results of our survey concerning general SNSs use because our results are in line  
415 with other quantitative data and show that teenagers are great users of SNSs. The questions regarding the  
416 respondents' general uses of SNS (e.g. « What social networks do you have an account for? », « What social  
417 networking sites do you use most regularly IN GENERAL? »), were there, primarily, in order to define as  
418 clearly as possible the subject of the survey to the respondents, that is specifically social networking sites (as  
419 listed in our survey) and not some other web based tools such as search engines. Some responses to the later  
420 open questions show indeed that the label "Social Networking Sites" is not particularly clear for some  
421 participants. For instance, some answered Google, Yahoo, Bing, Gmail, Mozilla or Hotmail. It is a limitation  
422 of the web-based questionnaire methodology that some respondents could misunderstand the exact subject  
423 of the survey, even though a short and as clearer as possible definition was provided. With hindsight, this is  
424 unsurprisingly: as mentioned in the introduction, SNSs is a term that is often used imprecisely in everyday  
425 situations and teenagers are likely to have approached the survey with their own pre-formed understandings  
426 of the term. A better knowledge of teenagers' understanding of SNSs is necessary and could be achieved  
427 through face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, this would allow teenagers' understanding of the concept of  
428 information itself and information seeking to be addressed. This is thus why we have considered our study to  
429 be explorative. That being said, we want to focus here explicitly on information practices with SNSs.

430 Around 20% of young people said they never used SNSs for information seeking and a number indicated  
431 that they felt that to do so would not be appropriate: "I don't search for information on social networking

432 sites”, “I don’t use these sites to find out information, I use the BBC news app for news and google for other  
433 purposes”, “None, why would I, stupid question”. Here again, it’s quite impossible to say whether the  
434 respondent never uses SNSs to seek information or if he or she thinks what they search for on SNSs is not  
435 really “information”. However our results demonstrate that, as stated by our first research question, SNSs  
436 are, indeed, information sources for most of these teenagers. Approximately four-fifths of the respondents  
437 said they use SNSs to seek information occasionally or regularly. Although some SNSs were primarily used  
438 for general purposes, others such as Google+ were more likely to be used for information seeking.  
439 Even SNSs with a strong social element such as Facebook were regarded as information sources by large  
440 proportions of those surveyed. These results suggest it is important to look deeper into the question of the  
441 multiple motivations for using SNSs. They demonstrate that social motivations, such as maintaining the  
442 links with friends and following conversations, are definitely not the only motivation for teenagers to make  
443 use of social networking sites. These results thus confirm the data presented into the literature review as to  
444 the informational motivation to make use of SNSs, especially among teenagers. Moreover, this research has  
445 provided specific data regarding teenagers at high school level, in contrast to older university students on  
446 whom the majority of research to date has been focused. Our findings suggest that, like their older peers, 15-  
447 19 year olds make use of a wide range of possible information sources, including those sources where social  
448 interaction plays a decisive role

449  
450 With regard to the second research question, our research found that the kinds of information teenagers most  
451 commonly looked for on SNS were related to social activities: information about friends and social events.  
452 This in itself is a quite predictable result. But we also found that information about wider issues was  
453 important too as SNSs were commonly used to find out about national or international news. Our results  
454 here complement those from the JAMES study (Willemse et al, 2014) about the information topics sought  
455 by the teenagers via SNSs. Indeed, as mentioned in our literature review, the JAMES study reports the key  
456 rank occupied by SNSs within digital information practices of young people, but JAMES gives no indication  
457 about the specific areas of life or themes covered by these information seeking uses. Our study and the  
458 categories we have identified bring to light the variety of areas covered by these informational uses of SNS,  
459 from cultural events to health. Here again face-to-face interviews might be helpful to find out more  
460 categories or also to refine those we suggested.

461  
462 At this stage, one of the most interesting results is that although academic purposes  
463 for information seeking were not among the most common reasons for using SNSs for  
464 information purposes, the study indicates that many students do use SNSs for  
465 academic purposes as well as for everyday life information seeking. So, while  
466 respondents say they use SNS in order to find information related to the national and  
467 international news, culture, beauty or fashion, they also report using SNSs to find

468 information linked to the school setting and academic tasks. Searching for information  
469 on SNS following the request of a teacher comes in sixth place (27.7%) of the 13  
470 predefined categories in our questionnaire. It is also worth noting that, unlike  
471 information seeking for some everyday purposes, there were no significant differences  
472 between male and female students in their use of SNS for academic-related  
473 information seeking. Within our questionnaire, two other categories are related to  
474 information seeking based on academic tasks: “information for a school project on  
475 your own” (20.3%), “an extension of a lesson” (20.1%). Another category is closely  
476 linked to academic concerns: “information related to educational/vocational guidance”  
477 (22.4%). The information use of SNS for academic purposes among high school  
478 students is therefore far from insignificant despite the dismissive attitudes often in  
479 evidence, as mentioned in the introduction. In follow up interviews it would be  
480 interesting to explore whether independent use of SNSs for academic tasks is  
481 encouraged (or accepted) only by certain teachers or in particular subjects, or  
482 whether it is something that students engage in across the curriculum. It would also  
483 be valuable to consider exactly how teenagers make use of such resources for  
484 academic purposes, and whether they receive any guidance or training from teachers  
485 or librarians in doing so.

486

### 487 **Implications for theory building**

488 From the perspective of the « information grounds » theory, the results presented  
489 here suggest that SNSs could be considered as online “information grounds”. Based  
490 on the seven propositions that define “information grounds”, Scott Counts and Karen  
491 Fisher already showed in their study of SLAM, a mobile messaging device, that an  
492 online platform can be thought as an information ground (Counts and Fisher 2010).  
493 With SNSs, formal and informal social interaction is usually a primary purpose but  
494 information sharing can also occur. As our respondents were teenagers, the significant  
495 role of academic tasks in these processes should be noted and may be compared with  
496 the role of professional tasks for adult groups. The surveyed teenagers reported that  
497 they use SNSs to satisfy information needs. From the perspective of the ELIS model,  
498 informational uses of SNSs here are clearly associated with everyday life and ordinary  
499 socialization, but they are also related to school tasks including those which are  
500 prescribed or compulsory. These results also let us see different uses of SNSs uses  
501 that may even appear to be seemingly contradictory (friends and socialization on one  
502 hand, educational tasks on the other hand) but which are mixed in the reality of these  
503 teenagers’ practices. This is a specific illustration of the porosity of contexts which the

504 works of Stefana Broadbent (2015) highlighted. These results underpinned the  
505 necessity for the researchers to take into account the reality of everyday life, ordinary  
506 and tiny, information uses but also the theoretical need to re think ELIS models in the  
507 light of this interlacing of contexts.

508

509 Daily information practices are crucial and particularly for young people's personal  
510 development, for example, regarding personality, citizenship and the lifelong learning  
511 skills, and these have been shown to be more heterogeneous than different  
512 (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; Hargittai and Hinnant, 2008; Mercklé and Octobre,  
513 2012; Hatlevik and Christophersen, 2013; boyd 2014). Indeed provision or access are  
514 not sufficient on their own to create use, and practices can be very different, even  
515 discriminating, from an individual to another. As Gil de Zuniga (2009: ??) mentioned  
516 regarding information motivations and political participation: "(...) it is not the media  
517 per se that can affect individuals' social capital and engagement, but the specific  
518 ways individuals use media". Despite many critiques of the concept, the "digital  
519 natives" representation is still often used to describe the digital practices of teenagers  
520 in a global way and on a generational divide basis. But it seems essential to better  
521 understand these practices at a personal level, their evolution through the interaction  
522 with others, the multiplicity of information sources and the relations between different  
523 settings (Octobre, 2008; Zaffran and Pouchadon, 2010). In the same way, this  
524 research could highlight the heterogeneity of young people's uses of SNSs for  
525 information purposes. There is clearly not a single model 'digital native'; teenagers  
526 differ in their attitudes towards SNSs as information sources; the specific SNSs used;  
527 the information purposes for which they used SNSs; and their publishing habits. While  
528 some teenagers make use of a wide range of SNSs for both academic and everyday  
529 purposes, others restrict their information seeking to non-academic purposes, or do  
530 not feel they use SNSs for information seeking at all. A question for further research is  
531 whether some teenagers make limited use of SNSs for information purposes because  
532 they lack the skills needed to do so. Although they may possess the information  
533 literacy skills needed to use more traditional information resources, including online  
534 resources, effectively, they may not have the range of literacies required to seek  
535 information from SNSs. This appears a likely scenario as comments from some  
536 students indicate that they were not even open to the possibility of searching for  
537 information using SNS. Heterogeneity can be perceived also in the declared publishing  
538 uses of SNSs: only 23.7% of the respondents said that they publish personal texts on  
539 SNSs, and 16.5% declared that they never publish content of any kind there. It could  
20

540 be relevant to better understand the motivations of these publishing habits, as well as  
541 the academic uses of SNSs, in the light of work of Lampe et al (2011) who showed  
542 that students may use SNSs such as Facebook to perform academic tasks or  
543 homework assignments and to discuss about school life or teachers' instructions.  
544 The significant position of SNSs in teenagers' information landscapes, demonstrated  
545 through the findings reported above, should encourage educators to consider this  
546 type of sources while designing information literacy training programs and especially  
547 while developing critical thinking strategies and curricula regarding specifically these  
548 social sources. The results of this survey put a different perspective on the training  
549 objectives set by the information literacy standards especially those which promote a  
550 wider approach, not only focused on digital media, such as Transliteracy. Nowadays,  
551 the expert is indeed the one who is able to benefit from different, or even opposing,  
552 information sources or media, and to use them equally. While the results have  
553 demonstrated that SNSs are used in academic tasks, SNSs are still banned from many  
554 schools, associated with teenage life and juvenile socialization, essentially viewed  
555 from the perspective of risk and protection of personal data. These results reaffirm the  
556 necessity to take into account the important role of social interactions in the  
557 information processes that are definitely not merely a simple relationship between an  
558 individual and an information system. In line with the paradigm of Transliteracy, our  
559 results help to point out educational and social issues at stake in the different types of  
560 SNSs uses.

561

## 562 **Conclusion**

563 While this study has some limitations as explained above, it suggests promising  
564 areas for further research and in particular reflections about the relevance of current  
565 IL guidelines and training by highlighting the importance of teenagers' SNS usage.  
566 SNSs, in particular Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, are used by the teenagers who  
567 responded the questionnaire to search for information, . Regarding tasks directly  
568 related to education and school, SNS are used to find information for a task at the  
569 direction of a teacher but also for school projects not explicitly directed by teacher  
570 and about topics not taught in class. In addition, SNSs are used to search for  
571 information related to educational and vocational guidance. The school oriented  
572 searches are, therefore, far from being meaningless in these results and suggest it is  
573 possible to investigate school and academic tasks as possible a information ground  
574 "lever", engaging people in both formal and informal information sharing. By  
575 highlighting the role of SNSs as an information source for teenagers both within school

576 and beyond, this research has stressed the porosity that exists between the two  
577 “opposing” settings: everyday life and school. While SNSs are frequently described as  
578 typical tools in teenagers’ social lives, we should keep in mind that the same SNSs  
579 could equally be used for academic purposes. Although information grounds theory  
580 has not traditionally included school contexts, we would argue that this approach  
581 offers a potentially fruitful framework within which to explore the ways in which  
582 teenagers use SNSs, not only as communication tools, but as information sources.  
583 This research draws attention to the importance of Transliteracy, or more specifically,  
584 taking SNSs into account alongside a wide range of information sources, from word of  
585 mouth to books, when designing IL guidelines and media awareness programmes.  
586 Research considering SNSs as information sources has the potential to enhance the  
587 knowledge about human relationships as an information source, which has been  
588 shown to be an important means for information seeking and sharing. It could also  
589 contribute to better understanding the information seeking activity in a Web 2.0  
590 context, still for the most part overlooked (Hyldegård, 2009; Boubée and Tricot, 2010).

591

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595

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