

Compact

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# An Investigation into the Use of Social Networking Sites by Young People and the Perceived Benefits



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## **ABSTRACT**

*The use of social networking sites (SNS) has been adopted and integrated into the daily lives of an increasing number of adolescents and young people overall are amongst its most prolific and substantial users. This study discuss a number of issues related to the use of social media and social networking sites such as; why do young people mass to such sites? What do young people express on these SNS? And lastly, how do these sites enhance or fit into the lives of young people? Much has been said regarding the risk management paradigm with regards to social media use by young people therefore this study attempts to readdress this imbalance and focus on the perceived benefits; however it did not ignore the potential contents and contact risk which was also explored. This study found that there are a number of significant benefits associated with the use of SNS including: enhanced learning opportunities; facilitating supportive relationships; identity formation; not to mention its contribution towards the emotional, psychological and social wellbeing of young people.*

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*(NB. A glossary of terms used in this study is presented in Appendix A to assist the reader.)*

In recent years, online social networking Sites (SNS) have become integrated into our everyday lives and young people in particular are amongst it's most prolific and substantial users (Boyd 2010). Recent studies (Madden et al., 2013) have found that 95 % of young people (aged 12 to 17) use the internet and 81 % are users of social network sites. According to The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, (2012) *Facebook* secured 94 % of all social media networking teens, *Twitter* 26% and *Instagram* 11%.

Based on this prevalent use, SNS and in particular *Facebook* ( which by the end of 2013, reported to have 1.23 billion users – Kiss (2014) ) have potentially significant implications on the daily lives of adolescents and raises some very important questions, such as; why do young people mass to such sites? What do young people express on these SNS? And lastly, how do these sites enhance or fit into the lives of young people?

The goal of this study is to address the aforementioned questions and explore some of the implications on the lives of young people. Before an explanation is given on the rationale behind the topic of research, it's important to understand the key features of social networking sites and equally a number of considerations which structure this study.

Firstly, Social networking sites (SNS) as defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007) are "*web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site*" (p210-230).

Social networking sites (SNS) include social media sites such as *Facebook*, *MySpace*, *Twitter* and *Instagram* to name a few. Equally, according to Boyd and Ellison (2008) many other web based sites which were developed for media sharing (i.e. *YouTube*, *Tumblr*, *Pinterest*, *Last FM* etc.) have also incorporated a profile feature and may also come under the umbrella of SNS. For purpose of this study, it must be noted that this paper will focus on the *Facebook* social networking site.