Social networking sites and low-income teenagers: between opportunity and inequality

# Details

## Year

2016

## DOI

10.1080/1369118x.2016.1139614

## Issued

2016

## Language

English

## Volume

19

## Issue

5

## Start Page

## End Page

## Authors

Micheli M.

## Type

Journal article

## Journal

Information, Communication Society

## Publisher

Informa UK Limited

## Topics

Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities

## Sample

Large-scale survey (N = 2327) and a set of 56 interviews with Italian teenagers

# Abstract

Recent studies on social networking sites (SNSs) reveal that users’ social background is not a significant predictor of participation in this type of social media. The broad user bases of Facebook and other social media platforms also appear to suggest that social background no longer affects access to SNSs. A small number of studies even claim that in the participatory web environment, social content is more likely to be created by non-elites, such as lower-income people or racial minorities [Blank, G. (2013). Who creates content? Stratification and content creation on the Internet. Information, Communication Society, 16(4), 590–612]. Nevertheless, engagement with SNSs also reproduces inequalities, for example via class- and ethnic-based ‘self-segregation’ [boyd, d. (2012). White flight in networked publics? How race and class shaped American teen engagement with MySpace and Facebook. In L. Nakamura P. A. Chow-White (Eds.), Race after the internet (pp. 203–222). New York, NY: Routledge]. Drawing on a large-scale survey (N = 2327) and a set of 56 interviews with Italian teenagers, the current paper explores the persistent influence of socioeconomic background and cultural capital in adolescents’ use of SNSs. The research findings show that, although structural variables inevitably influence their participation in social media, teenagers from ‘lower-income’ families are more enthusiastic about the communication and relational features of these sites. In contrast, their peers from ‘elite’ families focus on the capital enhancing opportunities offered by SNSs and display a critical stance that leads them to limit their social activities on these platforms. Overall, the results suggest that SNSs are not exempt from digital inequalities, but nonetheless provide novel opportunities to lower-income teenagers.

# Outcome

The research findings show that, although structural variables inevitably influence their participation in social media, teenagers from ‘lower-income’ families are more enthusiastic about the communication and relational features of these sites. In contrast, their peers from ‘elite’ families focus on the capital enhancing opportunities offered by SNSs and display a critical stance that leads them to limit their social activities on these platforms. Overall, the results suggest that SNSs are not exempt from digital inequalities, but nonetheless provide novel opportunities to lower-income teenagers.