Strangers are friends I haven't met yet: a positive approach to young people's use of social media

# Details

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Internet usage, practices and engagement

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543 young people aged 11 to 16 years

# Abstract

This article reports on a recent research project undertaken in the
UK that investigated young people’s use of a range of prominent
social media tools for socialising and relationship building. The
research was conducted by a way of online survey. The findings
suggest that this sample of British young people’s socialising and
relationship-building practices via the range of prominent social
media tools reflect similar behavioural categories used offline. The
use of these social media tools provides young people with an
opportunity to manage, simultaneously, different categories of
relationships in a multiplicity of ‘spaces’ created by these tools.
The findings challenge the widely held belief that young people
expose themselves to risk on social media as they indiscriminately
befriend strangers. There is an absence of evidence of ‘unjustified’
intent to harm others. Indeed the findings indicate a strong
desire to primarily support and protect those with whom
relationships have been carefully established. The research
suggests in fact that online engagement through social media can
be positive and constructive for young people. It appears to
provide them with a challenging ‘space’ to practice identity and
relationship management strategies.

# Outcome

"we have found that our participants’ relationship-building strategies
on the range of social media tools reflect similar behavioural categories used offline.
We suggest that the use of social media tools provides young people with an opportunity to
manage simultaneously different categories of relationship with a multiplicity of tools. More
importantly, drawing on theories of modernity, we argue that any attempt at managing such
a highly complex relationship system must be encouraged and protected in order to provide young people with a challenging ground to practice relationship management. Based on
our findings, we challenge the widely held belief that young people expose themselves
to risks on social media tools because they indiscriminately befriend strangers. Our data
show no evidence of ‘unjustified’ intent to harm others. Rather intent is to primarily
support or protect those with whom relationships have been carefully established." (Wang and
Edwards, 2016: 1216-17).