How Safe Do Teenagers Behave on Facebook? An Observational Study

# Details

## Year

2014

## DOI

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0104036

## Issued

2014

## Language

English

## Volume

9

## Issue

8

## Authors

Vanderhoven E.;Schellens T.;Valcke M.;Raes A.

## Type

Journal article

## Journal

PLoS ONE

## Topics

## Sample

An analysis of 1050 Facebook profiles of Flemish teenagers between 13 and 18 years old, reflecting a proportional
participation of gender (49% boys, 51% girls), age levels (30% 13–14, 35% 15–16, and 35% 17–18 years old) and education forms as found in the Flemish secondary school population

## Implications For Educators About

Other

# Abstract

The substantial use of social network sites by teenagers has raised concerns about privacy and security. Previous research about behavior on social network sites was mostly based on surveys and interviews. Observational research overcomes problems inherent to this research method, for example social desirability. However, existing observational research mostly focuses on public profiles of young adults. Therefore, the current observation-study includes 1050 public and non-public Facebook-profiles of teenagers (13–18) to investigate (1) what kind of information teenagers post on their profile, (2) to what extent they protect this information using privacy-settings and (3) how much risky information they have on their profile. It was found that young people mostly post pictures, interests and some basic personal information on their profile. Some of them manage their privacy-settings as such that this information is reserved for friends’ eyes only, but a lot of information is accessible on the friends-of-friends’ pages. Although general risk scores are rather low, more detailed analyses show that teenagers nevertheless post a significant amount of risky information. Moreover, older teenagers and girls post more (risky) information while there are no differences in applying privacy settings. We found no differences in the Facebook behavior of teenagers enrolled in different education forms. Implications of these results are discussed.

# Outcome

"Teenagers post a variety of information types on their SNS-profile ( pictures, interests and basic personal information). Building and revealing one’s identity has always existed, yet SNSs give the personal and social identity construction a new dimension: privacy protection. A significant amount of teenagers change privacy settings to ‘friends-only’, another large amount of teenagers still reveals a lot of information to friends-of\_x0002\_friends. If we take into account the average number of friends (M = 384), friends-of-friends might imply a lot of strangers. On the contrary, teenagers did not post a large amount of contact information on their profile page due to parents restricting their children. However, particular information seems to ‘‘slip’’ teenagers’ attention (town, village, name and surname) which is sufficient to track detailed contact information.
Compared to a previous survey research, higher proportions were found on self-report: (96% showed their name, 98% their surname, 100% posted pictures and 95% had 'I likes' on their SNS's respectively). Previous survey research also stated that boys share more self-promoting and risky pictures and girls post more romantic or cute pictures. In the present study, they found the opposite: girls tend to post more risky pictures. These divergent
findings can possibly be explained by the fact that girls might be more susceptible to social desirability. Also, especially older teenagers post potentially risky information such as items referring to alcohol abuse, partying, or nudity. This suggests that teenagers care about posting information, but forget to erase information." (Vanderhoven et al., 2014, pp. 7-8)