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## 7 Perceptions of Students and Teachers in England about How Social Media Are Used (and How They Could Be Used) in Schools and Elsewhere

*Ian Davies and Edda Sant*

This chapter draws upon the work undertaken in Australia by Suzanne Mellor and Terri Seddon, and discussed in the previous chapter, by examining the findings that emerged from a small-scale research project conducted in England during the autumn and winter of 2012–13. In particular we seek to address four key research questions:

- 1 In what ways do school pupils use social media technologies in their social/informal community-based networks?
- 2 What are the similarities and significant differences in young people's use of social media in their schooling and personal settings?
- 3 How do young people perceive their personal use of social media supporting enhanced citizenship participation and engagement?
- 4 In what ways are social media effectively used in school-based citizenship education programmes to support active citizenship?

On the basis of questionnaire and interview data gathered from pupils and teachers in three schools, we suggest that pupils frequently use social media for personal and social reasons and that some of them consider that this technology may also be of some help educationally. More precisely, pupils and teachers feel that social media can enhance citizenship engagement, knowledge and participation insofar as people can be informed and updated; everybody has the right to give their opinion and to be listened to on an equal basis; opinions posted on websites can be discussed; people may organise and inform others about their actions; and people can engage in global citizenship by getting to know people from other cultures.

But many pupils have reservations. They feel that the content of information presented through social media cannot be easily verified; these forms of technology may be harmfully addictive; any benefits of social media can be achieved in face-to-face situations; it may merely help those who are already engaged; and there would be specific gaps in young people's knowledge if there were to be significant reliance on social media.

We found that teachers used social media less frequently than pupils, although teachers acknowledge its general educational potential and suggest possible connections that may be established with citizenship education. While teachers suggest that social media will be used extensively in educational contexts in the future, current low usage may be explained by the need to preserve professional independence; to maintain barriers between teachers' private and professional lives; and is connected with uncertainty about their expertise with technology.

On the basis of an analysis of data from all respondents, we suggest that social media may enhance citizenship education in relation to identity (generating a sense of belonging, global citizenship and forming new groups); promoting knowledge about citizenship (searching sources, commenting, discussing); and facilitating participation (informing people, organising social movements, being democratic as opinions are developed). However, although there seems to be a general consensus in the academic community about the potential of social media platforms in citizenship education, our general argument is that there is—in light of our respondents' reservations about the nature and extent of social media and citizenship education—an urgent need for more research about the development of high-quality educational programmes using the social web.

In this chapter we attempt to do several things: we outline some of the developments about social media and citizenship education, drawing attention to the context in England where our research was undertaken; we describe and discuss our methods; we present findings; and we develop the argument referred to above.

## Background

There is little doubt that social media and citizenship education are seen as matters of great significance.

Broadly it may be suggested that

Civic engagement is involvement in the public sphere, incorporating participation in constitutional politics as well as less formally constituted activity. Social media are relatively new forms of technology (principally, but not exclusively, social networking sites) that allow users to interact.

(Davies *et al.*, 2012: 294)

There is an almost overwhelming amount of material that refers to the seismic shifts that are occurring or will occur in society as a result of social media and associated educational potential. However, it is important in such contexts to approach such claims constructively and critically. Elsewhere (Davies *et al.*, 2012) we have asked questions that would help us to develop such an approach to this field, discussing whether or

not there is sufficient access to—and relevant usage of ? social media; whether civic engagement is congruent with social media (or, to put it crudely, if there is at least as much potential for social media to be used by dictators as by democrats—Morozov, 2011); and what sort of educational processes could be experienced and what would need to be done by teachers and others in order to develop that work.

All research takes place in a context and we need to sketch the situation in England that pertained at the time of our project. That picture is generally unclear. Ofsted (2004), the UK government inspection agency, has long declared that ‘new’ technologies have the potential to raise educational achievement. And yet the most recent (2010) general election in the UK saw the influence of traditional media (in the form of TV debates) and very little evidence of the impact of social media. There are concerns about differential take-up of civic engagement opportunities which may or may not be ameliorated by the use of new technologies. On the one hand, it is argued that young people of lower socio-economic status are more likely to be both distrustful of government and disadvantaged in terms of access to and skills for technology and civic learning efficacy (Merien *et al.*, 2010); but there are others who suggest that ‘There are hints that forms of civic engagement anchored in blogs and social networking sites could alter long-standing patterns that are based on socio-economic status’ (see <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1328/onlinepolitical-civic-engagement-activity>).

More specifically, in relation to education, Kerr *et al.* (2007) have reported low usage of new technologies in schools. In the National Curriculum’s current citizenship programme of study in England there is only one relevant statement to technology use (number nine in a list of ten ‘curriculum opportunities’). In the version of the National Curriculum for citizenship that will be in place for school year 2014–15 there is no reference to new technologies. It is possible that new technology, if used at all, might ‘merely’ enhance presentation skills in the teacher’s recitation script, and little else (Smith *et al.*, 2006: 455). Livingstone, Bober and Helsper (2005) suggest that young people lack key skills in evaluating online content and perhaps little is being done to address that need. But Selwyn and Gorard argue that ‘the evidence does not suggest the “new learning technologies” imply or precipitate “new forms of learning”’ (2003: 178). However, these reservations about digital learning are not in themselves an argument for failing to explore the potential to generate new forms of learning in relation to civic engagement. Beldarain (2006) notes the potential transition from teacher as deliverer of knowledge to facilitator of online interaction, reflecting the two tenets of constructivism: learning as an active process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it; and instruction as a process that involves supporting that construction rather than a process of communicating knowledge. Some (e.g. Merien *et al.*, 2010: 187) have suggested that

radical change is occurring in civic engagement and that educators have a responsibility to push forward with these opportunities.

We need to know more about the extent and nature of the usage of technology generally and of social media in particular if we are to be able to make judgements about the development of civic engagement through education that uses social media. And at this point the methods of our project should be described and discussed.

## Methods

This research was conducted using mixed methods through numeric and narrative approaches allowing for the exploration of those areas which are contested (Johnson et al 2007; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Miles & Huberman 1994; Bergman, 2008). Within this general approach our principal emphasis was qualitative. Our aim was to understand and interpret the perceptions that pupils and teachers have about social media and citizenship education.

The original intention was to sample from only those schools which are already well known for their expertise in the educational use of social media. Advice was gathered from experts in the field as to which schools could be approached. However, it was not entirely straightforward to gain recommendations about schools with that expertise, and, of those that were recommended and invited, only one agreed to join the project. We feel that it would be unreasonable to draw any conclusions from these difficulties, as schools are under such a range of pressures, but we did not form the impression that schools were eager to display their expertise in this field. The two schools that agreed to join the project but that had not been recommended by experts in the field of social media and citizenship education nevertheless had notable regional expertise in citizenship education as well as interests in the possibility of developing further work generally in that area, and wished to explore specifically the potential of social media. The demographics of the schools varied greatly in terms of several factors, including religious affiliation, funding (independent and state) and size of town. As such, the sample provides a snapshot of a variety of practice from different starting points and is not intended to be representative.

The main characteristics of each of the teachers and the schools they work in are summarised in Table 7.1. The sample of pupils who completed the survey was selected in agreement with the teachers and with the permission of the pupils themselves.

In School 1, all Year 9 pupils (aged 13–14) who agreed participated in the questionnaire. In School 2, all the girls from Year 9 and Year 10 (aged 14–15) answered the questionnaire. In School 3, three of the seven Year 9 tutor groups were surveyed in accordance with practical circumstances and a desire not to disrupt the smooth running of the school. A total of

Table 7.1

Gender	Teacher		Location in England	School	
	Subjects Taught	Principal Curricular Responsibility		Type of School	
Female	PSHE* and religion	PSHE	North	State school	Co-educational school
Female	PSHE and arts	PSHE	North	Independent school	Female school
Female	Citizenship and history	PSHE and citizenship	South	State school	Co-educational school

Note: \*Personal, social, health and economic education.

247 pupils comprised the sample (Table 7.2). The main characteristics of these pupils are described below.

Sixteen of the 247 pupils surveyed volunteered to join the focus group sample. Four focus group interviews were carried out (two in School 1; one in School 2; and one in School 3). Teachers selected those pupils who had some experience of voluntary activities (and so would, perhaps, be better able than others to comment on citizenship) and a range of academic ability and, in two of the schools, sought to provide a balance of male and female pupils.

The questionnaire included both open and closed questions and was divided into three sections: perceptions about citizenship; pupils' current use of social media in personal and educational contexts and in relation to identity; and perceptions about the connection between social media engagement and knowledge. The four focus group interviews of pupils were conducted in the three project schools in order to identify, in greater depth than had been provided by questionnaire data, pupils' practices and perceptions and their preferences in terms of the possible enhancement of social media use in citizenship education. Semi-structured interviews were used in order to investigate teachers' perceptions about the nature of and the extent to which social media are already in use specifically in citizenship education, and teachers' preferences for the future in terms of the possibility of enhancing social media use in citizenship education.

Mixed methods analysis was conducted by exploring qualitative meaning, in part through reflections made in relation to quantitative indicators (Biesta, 2012). Exploratory qualitative analyses of the whole data set (from the surveys, focus groups and interviews) were undertaken using the online software [www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net) (which counts the number of words used). Subsequently, deeper qualitative analyses (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994) were completed using the online software [www.dedoose.org](http://www.dedoose.org).

Table 7.2

		<i>Gender</i>		<i>Age</i>					<i>Year</i>	
		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>Year 9</i>	<i>Year 10</i>
		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
School	1	61	71	1	98	31	0	0	133	0
	2	0	54	0	17	23	13	1	23	31
	3	35	25	0	47	13	0	0	60	0
Global	Frequency	96	150	1	162	67	13	1	216	31
	Valid per cent	39.0	61.0	0.4	66.4	27.5	5.3	0.4	87.4	12.6

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The main steps followed in the process of data analysis are as follows:

- 1 creation and organisation of data documents (Creswell, 1998)
- 2 reading and first impressions about data; first codes created by means of www.wordle.net (Creswell, 1998)
- 3 direct interpretation, category summaries and development of first classification criteria following the steps described by Miles and Huberman (1994):
  - a data codification
  - b code scheme creation
  - c memorandum development to describe the codes
  - d data recodification according to the new codes
  - e creation of matrix nets and schemes to achieve the first interpretations.

Finally, the data from the surveys were analysed using the codes previously created in the qualitative analyses and shown in the tables below. Data were quantified using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) using SPSS.

## Findings

We show below our four research questions and the responses to them.

- 1 *In what ways do school pupils use social media in their social/informal community-based networks?*

In summary, we found heavy usage, principally for the purposes of maintaining contact with friends, but very few considered that social media would help them achieve educational goals. Pupils do, however, feel that social media helps them to have a sense of belonging to groups and this, perhaps, has some civic potential.

Pupils use social media (principally Facebook, Twitter and Skype) at home and elsewhere, checking at least once each day in order to keep in contact with their friends, talk with them, arrange meetings, find people with similar interests, create new groups and develop confidence. They principally use Facebook (89.6%), Twitter (56.1%) and Skype (50.2%). Some of them also use Tumblr (14.9%), Instagram (10.9%) or other sites (33.9%) (Figure 7.1).

There is a sense of incredulity on the part of pupils if they are asked if anyone does not have access to these technologies.

*Interviewer:* Have you got some pupils here who don't have social media?

*School 3 Teacher:* Who don't have?

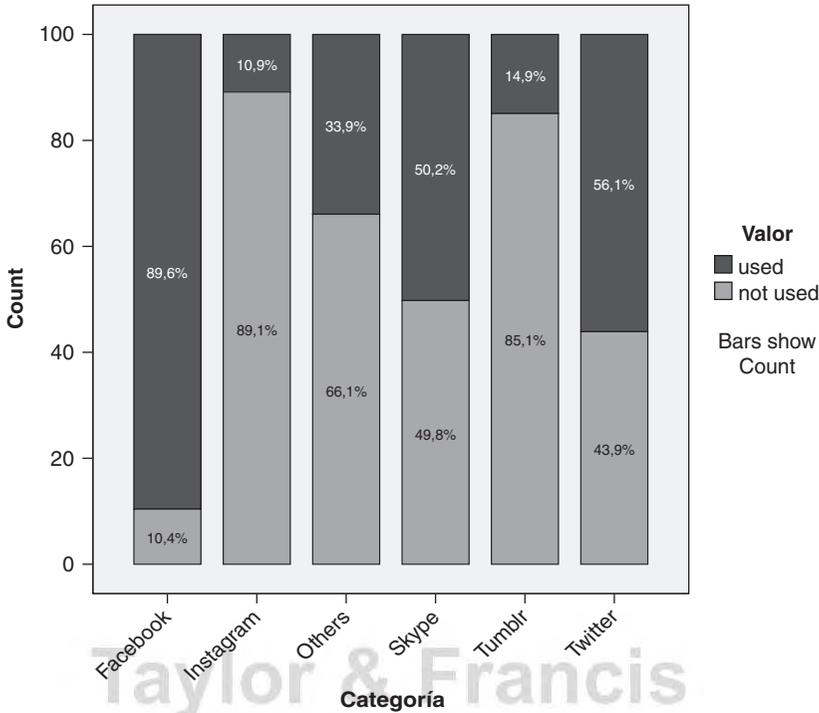


Figure 7.1 Valid percentage of pupils who use each technology

*Interviewer:* Who don't!

*School 3 Teacher:* I'd think there is a few but not very many . . . I'd think . . . The vast majority have access by mobile phones and . . .

Most of the pupils who said that they were using social media 'all the day' explained this by referring to their use of a smartphone. It was common for pupils to reply: 'All the time. On phone walking home from school' (ID41) or 'Whenever I have it on my phone so notifications come through' (ID93). Some (4.7%) claimed that they use social media at least once per hour: 'Quite often, every 1/2 hour just to check' (ID41) (Figures 7.2, 7.3).

More than half of the pupils use social media mainly to talk (59.1%), and also to be updated on the latest news from their friends (32.7%). Some of the pupils also said that they used it to keep in contact (27.4%), to share photos (5.8%), to give their opinions (4.8%), to arrange meetings (4.8%) and to play games (4.8%). Six pupils said that they used it to spend time when they were bored, and only eight pupils (3.8%) reported that they use it in order to achieve school-related aims.

*Interviewer:* Yeah . . . Why do you think young people use social networks?

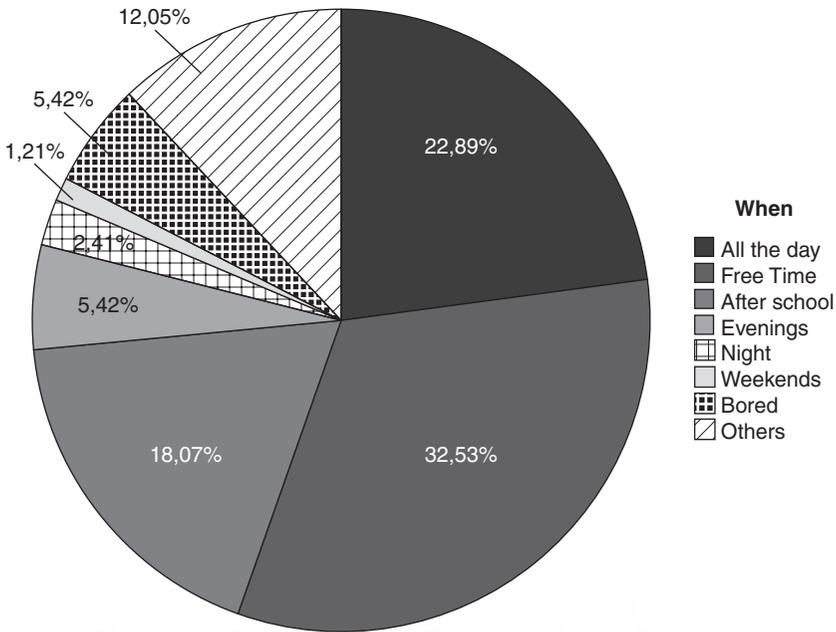


Figure 7.2 When do they use these technologies?

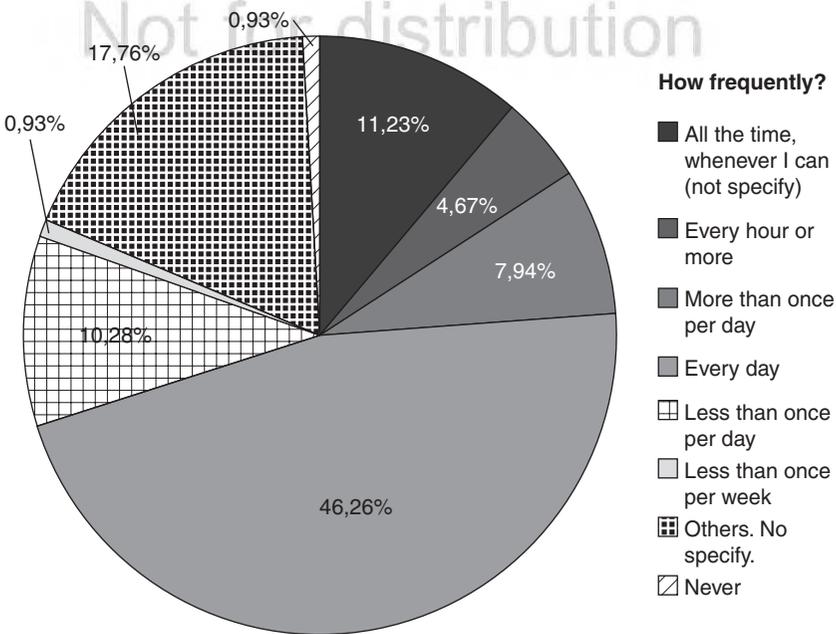


Figure 7.3 Graph related to the question 'How frequently do they use them?'

*School 3 Girl 2:* Usually . . . It's just to . . . like . . . I don't know . . . Contact friends . . . And just you know talk to friends . . . But usually . . . It's like . . . Social networking are used for that . . . Just friends . . .

*Interviewer:* To communicate with your friends, do you mean?

*School 3 Girl 2:* Yeah . . .

*Interviewer:* Do you think it can be used for any other goal?

*School 3 Boy 1:* Mm . . . I suppose you can make friends . . . Probably it's not advised to . . . If you aren't in touch with them . . . Yeah . . . I think that yeah . . . it's mostly like talking to friends and . . .

However, it is possible that this personal usage also allows for the development of civic potential. A majority (71.5%) of the pupils consider that social media contributes to their sense of belonging to a group(s) of people, and Figure 7.4 shows that they feel these technologies allow them to know more about the other group members (29.4%), prepare future meetings (25%), feel connected (19.1%) and talk to them (8.8%).

A considerable number suggested that these technologies allow them to interact with new people (finding people with similar interests, 20.6%; and meeting them, 19.1%). For example, one girl explained in the focus groups that she could meet people through Tumblr (a blog site) who have the same problems as she and who would help her.

*School 2 Girl 1:* Yeah! I mean . . . I've got Facebook and Twitter . . . But the one I use the most is Tumblr, which is a blog in kind of . . . and yeah I use that all the time . . . I think . . . Mainly . . . Because it's really enjoyable for me and it's nice to . . . so if . . . You can like . . . talk to people who have similar interests than you . . . And then . . . It's just . . . That I really . . . really like it . . . It's nice . . . And you can feel connected . . . I think because not that many people have Tumblr I saw . . . It feels like it's just a small sort of thing . . . And I like that . . . And it's nice to feel connected to . . . with people . . .

(. . .)

*School 2 Girl 1:* I think it can help some people . . . Especially things like Tumblr . . . I mean people can like . . . post problems on that and then you can find people who are in like . . . the similar situation and so you don't feel so as alone . . . Like . . . And I think that condition really . . . really helps me to know this people, right across the world maybe . . . That I've never met before that kind of . . . do you feel them . . . and do you care about problems . . . And I think it's a big thing . . .

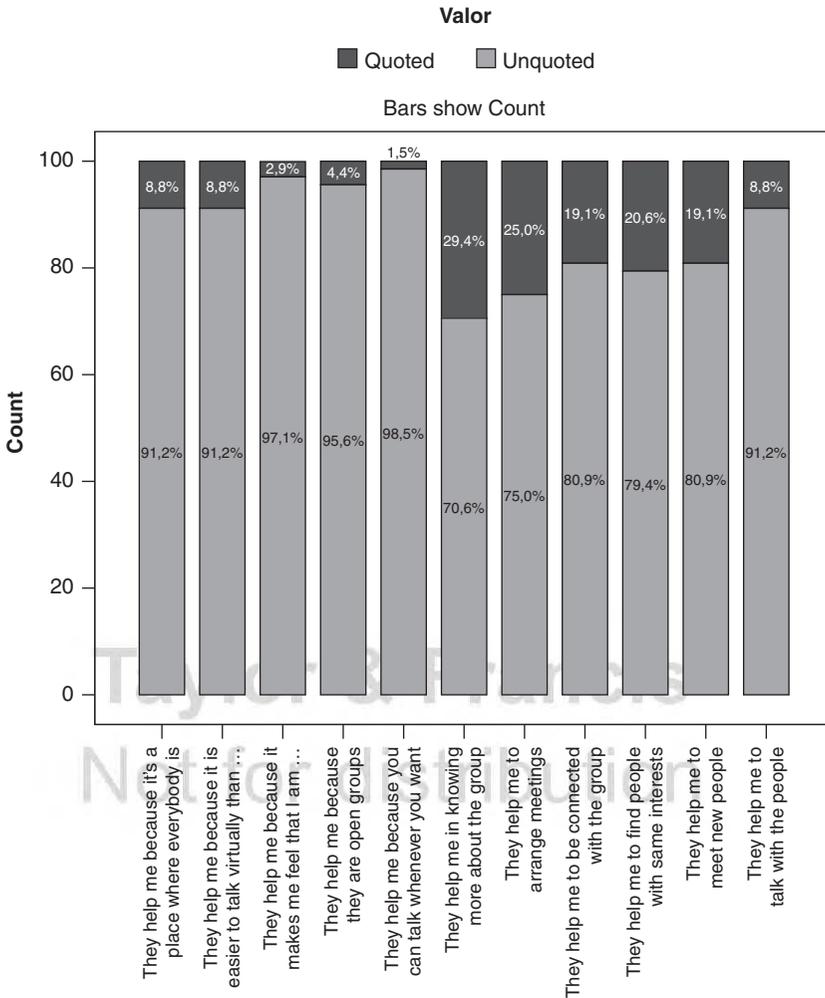


Figure 7.4 Valid per cent of pupils who said each reason that explains why these technologies help them in be part of a group(s)

The ease of use and the possibility of instilling confidence through social media meant that there is the possibility of bringing people together:

*School 3 Boy 1:* (. . .) A lot of groups become closer over social networking sites . . . Cause you also you can be with someone like 24/7 and you have like . . . Facebook or something you've access to people . . . to being able to match with people like . . . the most of the time . . . And so that . . . it keeps . . . it keeps people so close together . . . So people is not just a part . . .

However, the pupils were aware of negative aspects of this communication. Some pupils blame social media for causing a decrease in their confidence, or perhaps what can be interpreted as problems that arise as a result of an excess of confidence:

*School 1 Focus group 2 Boy 1:* But I think it could be some benefits if we never did have social networks sites . . .

*School 1 Focus group 2 Boy 2:* I think we would be more confident!

*School 1 Focus group 2 Boy 1:* Yeah! I think there is a lot of falling-outs happen through social networking sites . . .

*School 1 Focus group 2 Girl 2:* Then everyone calls them a coward because they're not saying it to their face. Then it gets worst . . .

*School 1 Focus group 2 Boy 1:* Sometimes like . . . comments that shouldn't been made, they are made on Facebook . . .

*School 1 Focus group 2 Girl 2:* Like you wouldn't dare say it to someone's face, but you can say it to their computer screen . . .

*School 1 Focus group 2 Boy 1:* There is something you wouldn't say to their face and it gets out hand . . . But for the majority of the time, the Facebook and things like that they do help you a lot . . .

*School 1 Focus group 2 Boy 2:* But I think people would be nice to each other like face-to-face, because it's like they wouldn't have Facebook, they wouldn't like say . . . things like horrible to each other, because they wouldn't say it to each other like to their face . . . They wouldn't do it . . . So, in this times, they do on real life . . . Cause they can do it in the computer first, and so I think we never go to that stage without Facebook and stuff . . .

In short, we suggest that there is frequent use of social media and that, in its connection with identity formation and facilitation of communication, it may have some civic potential. However, there is little evidence available in the data referred to above to support the idea that young people are using social media explicitly for civic purposes or to help them realise educational goals.

## **2 *What are the similarities and differences in young people's use of social networking technologies in school and personal contexts?***

In summary, there is a rather sceptical approach to the educational value of social media. Approximately half of the pupils feel positive to some extent about social media at school, and in particular about the help that may be generated in relation to homework. But throughout the data there

is a clear sense that our pupil respondents quite simply do not connect social media is with school. Teachers are aware of these pupil perceptions.

Those pupils who considered that social media networks were not helpful in terms of the aims of schooling argued that they waste pupils' time (42.3%), that education is not the purpose of social networking sites (30.8%) and that the content of websites is not verified and so is inappropriate for learning (23.1%). There are elements of a more positive stance. Of the pupils surveyed, 7.7 % reported that social media is not helpful simply because it is not used in schools (thus implying that use could occur). Those pupils who considered that social media is educationally helpful explained that it can be used in order to do homework (73.3%), assist with the learning of new knowledge (16%), improve communication skills (8%), improve their computer skills (5.3%), develop confidence (2.7%) and allow for the use of videos as educational tools (1.3%).

When interviewed, pupils were asked about the use of social media in regard to schooling goals. Most of them mentioned that social media can be helpful in order to do homework:

*School 1 Focus group 1 Girl 1:* Yeah! My sister is at university, and I struggle with homework on English or something like that, so I may use Skype or something like that . . . She is not . . . It's not easy to see her, even in the same thing is not easy to see her explaining things and she (even just post sort of her) 6:51 it's like you do this and this so . . . I've done some times, but I wouldn't necessary do it with my friends and probably not likely to do it . . . With family . . .

*School 1 Focus group 1 Boy 1:* Also like . . . If you forget your homework then most people just go on Facebook, and it's just like ask someone in the class . . .

*School 2 Girl 1:* Yeah . . . I mean . . . On Facebook sometimes if I am not sure what to do on homework, then I can just say to people what do you do for question three . . . And then . . . I get people who reply to that . . . And that's really . . . really helpful . . .

*School 2 Girl 2:* We have . . . Just for our year, we have sort of a group . . .

Pupils also reported that they can work in groups through social networking sites and that this was at times regarded more positively than working through conventional means such as through telephone calls.

But most opinions were quite sceptical. A typical response is the following:

*School 3 Boy 1:* Mm . . . I suppose you can pick up a few bits of the . . . Meet you people, like . . . asking people for question on work or something . . . Yeah, I suppose . . . Sometimes you can but . . .

Furthermore, pupils considered that most of the school activities that can be done using social media can also be done using conventional methods:

*School 2 Girl 2:* Yeah . . . I don't think . . . But again . . . I don't think it's the only thing you can use . . . I don't think you are limited to just using social networks. I think they are one of many tools . . .

Teachers are aware that pupils use social media, but lack detailed knowledge about what pupils do and whether or not those activities have educational potential:

*School 2 Teacher:* I think they do, how much they use it, I don't know . . . I wouldn't like to even guess . . . But where they do use it, the levels they may use . . . I don't know . . . It's hard to say . . . I think it would be worth . . . (. . .)

As a result of analysing data in questions 1 and 2 there is an overwhelming sense that pupils regard social media primarily in terms of its social functions and most are negative or sceptical about its educational potential. Given the rather heightened rhetoric about social media and education, this reaction should be of interest to policy makers, academics and practitioners. We need now to explore whether young people regard social media to have potential in relation to civic engagement.

### 3 *How do young people perceive their personal use of social media in relation to enhanced citizenship participation and engagement?*

There does seem to be civic potential in relation to social media. Although there are some differences of outlook and a range of understanding about what social media can be used for, most pupils (79.3%) (Figure 7.5) consider that social media makes a difference to engagement.

For those pupils (who were in the minority) who were reluctant to see the civic worth of social media there were a variety of reasons given. Some felt that social media was for personal and not civic matters. Approximately 20% of pupils said that they did not agree with developing knowledge that would facilitate engagement in society. Of those surveyed, 62.5% argued that they could not or did not want to learn citizenship knowledge by means of social media because that was not the reason they used these technologies. For instance, one girl wrote 'No, because I mainly use these sites for communication purposes' (ID10) and one boy mentioned 'No it's not like the news you only learn what your friends are doing' (ID27).

Some argued that these technologies do not help with acquiring knowledge relevant to engagement because people would become addicted to

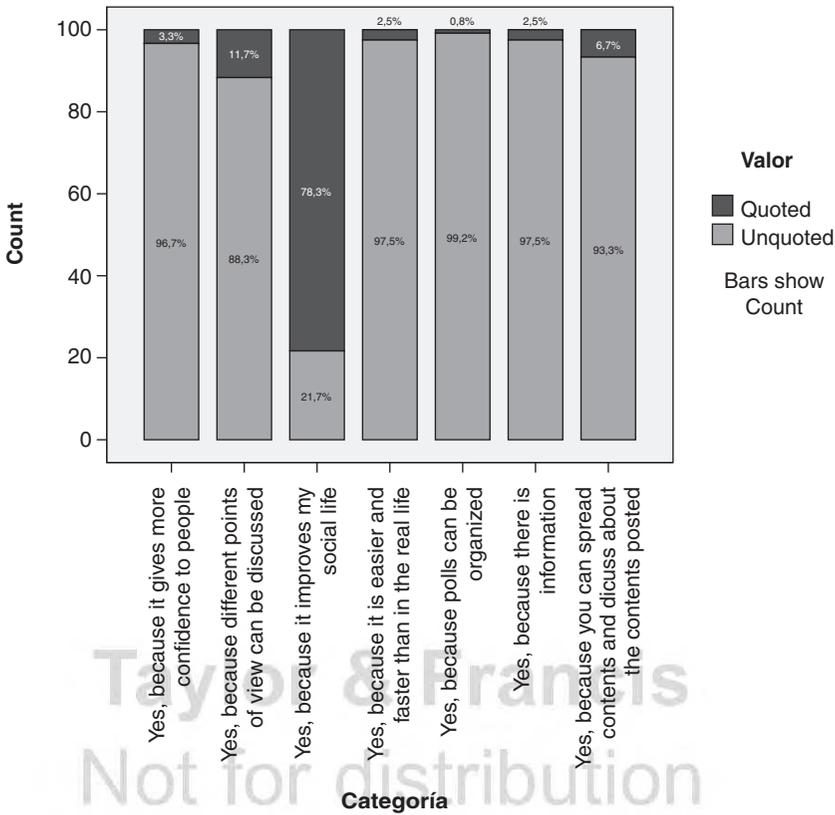


Figure 7.5 Valid per cent of the positive reasons the pupils gave to the question ‘Do you think social networks make a difference to your relationship with others or to your engagement in society?’

networking (e.g. ‘You could get addicted to them so it could affect you badly’, ID115) and some of them argued, again, that everything that could be learned by means of social media could be also learned outside social networks (e.g. ‘I read the newspaper if I want to know about my community or listen to the radio’, ID202).

Some pupils reported that information available in social media was not always credible and so it would not contribute to make them a ‘good citizen’:

*School 1 Focus group 2 Boy 2:* I really would say it make you a citizen . . . Because you can hear stuff, but not necessarily a good citizen . . . Cause some of the stuff that gets posted is just rumours and isn’t true . . . And so if you start talking like that, you can become like a citizen . . .

*School 1 Focus group 2 Girl 2:* People find easier to spread stuff . . . They find easy to say . . . Like . . . Instead of saying it to like someone’s ear

they'd say it to someone's Facebook account. They would say so-and-so did this instead of saying so-and-so did this to their face. Cause then they know, like you can just hide your post and pretend that you never said it, like when you say it in words, you can't take it back if you've said it and like. If someone says you've said this, the person that said it could then just go 'no I didn't' and delete the post.

However, the majority of pupils asserted the positive potential of social media for civic engagement.

There is some suggestion that connections with friends and engagement in society might be closely linked in the minds of young people.

*Interviewer:* OK, last question guys . . . Do you think that social media can help you to participate, to be engaged in your community?

*School 1 Focus group 1 All:* Yeah . . .

*School 1 Focus group 1 Girl 2:* Yeah, definitely . . . Because if you have more chances to communicate, then you have more chances to be a part of it . . . So . . . Like . . . If you use social networking sites you may cross your community . . . So if you have chances to speak out about things, you may have chances to . . .

Pupils were asked if they thought their citizenship knowledge would increase as a result of using social media and most of the pupils (80.1%) agreed with that idea.

There were particular emphases to the sorts of connection that were made between social media and civic engagement. There was acceptance of the suggestion that knowledge of what is happening in society could improve.

Of the pupils surveyed, 63.6% reported that they could participate more in society thanks to social networks because they could be more informed. This emphasis on the role of information was interesting. Some pupils in the surveys (16.8%) and also in the focus group also characterised social media as being a source of information. For instance one girl said in a focus group interview:

*School 3 Girl 2:* Oh yeah . . . Definitely, because if you can, to find out something that is currently happening in a political party, you can search it out on Facebook or something . . . And find pages straight away and information about it . . . Cause without it, I don't think it'd be that easy or that we'd bother to do it . . .

Although just 15% of the pupils reported in their questionnaire responses that social media could help them to learn about other people and cultures, in most of the focus group interviews, pupils reported this to be relevant and possible (Figure 7.6).

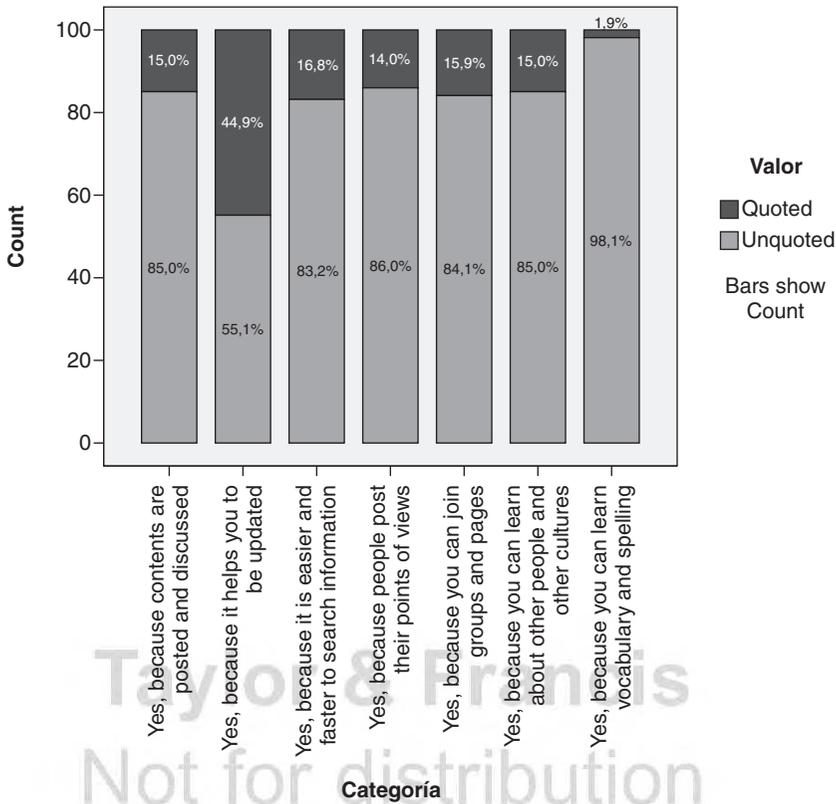


Figure 7.6 Valid per cent of the positive reasons the pupils gave to the question ‘Do you think that social networks can help you in having more knowledge related to your community, your country and the world?’

*School 3 Boy 1:* (. . .) It would just be easy, you can pretty much make a friend in Australia, be aware of what he thinks about the Australian like . . . presidential or something . . . And so . . . I think with time it will grow in and become easier . . . It still is quite easy at the moment to manage but in time especially you can . . . It’s quite of possibilities . . . of quite big . . . for you be able to do . . .

(. . .)

*Interviewer:* And do you think you can learn something about their culture or their country?

*School 3 Boy 1:* Oh, yeah . . . Definitely . . . definitely . . . Cause you are . . . Like I’ve said on Facebook especially . . . You got . . . you got people with walls and stuff who post different things and you may be and you may have a friend who is going out to holiday to a different country . . . Like taking pictures and posting on there . . . And

so that . . . you like I've said . . . You are schooling through without sort of knowing . . . You're learning cause you looking at it, for different people who are posting in it . . . You're looking at pictures and you're learning about that different cultures . . . Like going on holidays to look a different country . . . You, without knowing it, you're learning and picking up things by looking at what people are doing and . . . Also from a person . . . a person from a different culture or a different country posting . . . you feel that you're learning as well . . .

But this emphasis on knowledge was not the only thing highlighted by pupils. Of those surveyed, 74.4% pupils considered that social media could help them participate more in their communities and society and they gave a variety of reasons why they thought this would occur (Figure 7.7).

It seems that school pupils were seeing the spreading of information both as an act of participation and as a creation of a space in which participation could occur. For some focus group participants, social media represent a sort of democratic process where everybody has the same right to participate and the same chances to be listened to.

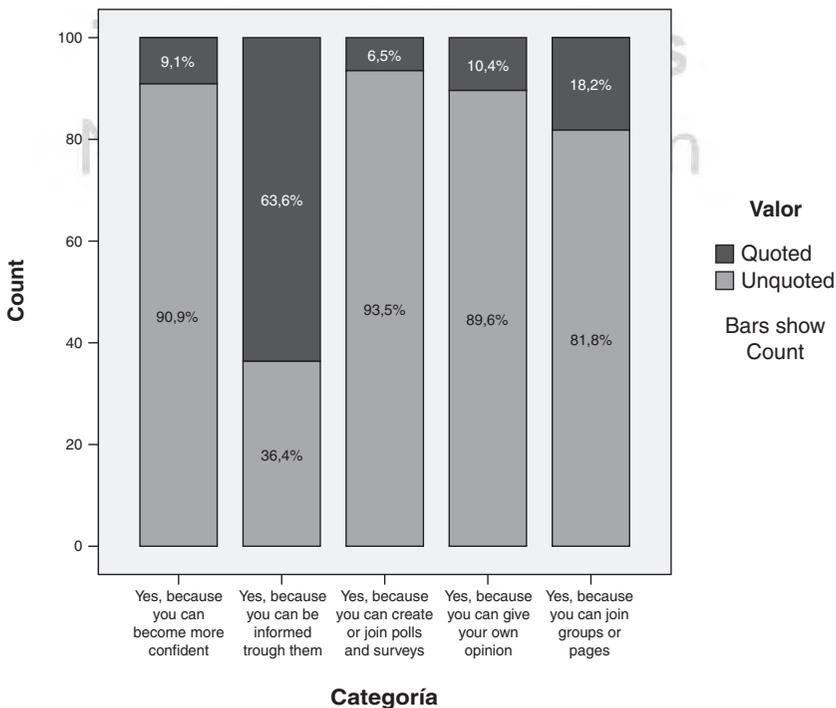


Figure 7.7 Valid per cent of the positive reasons the pupils gave to the question 'Do you think that social networks can help you participate in your community and in society?'

*Interviewer:* (. . .) Do you think that this social media can contribute that you can participate more in your society?

*School 3 Boy 1:* Oh yeah! Definitely . . . cause you think on a . . . On . . . In Facebook, for example, everyone . . . everyone is . . . is . . . virtual profile . . . and so no one it's more important than someone else . . . And so . . . Everyone . . . Everyone gets heard not like basically . . . It's not like no one gets heard or anything . . . Everyone . . . Everyone gets their community across . . . and so everyone is learning from other people . . . And so it's like a big collaboration sort of side web . . . Where people just learn of each other . . .

Thus the data we have gathered in relation to our third research question suggests that pupils perceive the potential to enhance civic engagement by means of social media. However, it is interesting to reflect on the differences between pupils within this generally positive reaction to social media and civic engagement. Although the evidence is not entirely clear it seemed that the biggest users of social media see the greatest civic potential. Those who do not use it as frequently as others are more likely to downplay its potential. A question thus remains as to whether these differences tell us anything about the nature of the effect of using social media in relation to civic engagement or whether those who are already inclined to engage will do so with whatever means are available.

We now need to turn to the issue of how current usage and possible future usage might allow for an educational perspective to be developed through the use of social media.

#### **4 *In what ways are social media effectively used in school-based citizenship education programmes?***

In summary, we suggest that teachers are convinced about the importance of social media, make some limited educational use of it currently and perceive significant barriers that lie in the way of further development. This is not to suggest that teachers do not wish to see increased educational use of social media or feel that it will not happen. It is nevertheless interesting to contrast these findings about limited usage with the rhetoric of those who champion the educational value of social media.

Just one of the three schools that took part in this research used social media explicitly in its school-based citizenship education programmes. The teacher explained how this project was working:

*Interviewer:* Do you use social media in your classes?

*School 3 Teacher:* I do . . . I do yeah! I do in citizenship and the Key Stage 4 classes . . . So Year 10 and 11 they use social media cause we do campaigns so we use it as part of the campaigns and they

would set off Facebook and sites of them, from a view of online petitions . . . to get people be aware of the causes they've chosen . . . Not so much Twitter, to be honest . . . But definitely, Facebook we use it for online petitions . . .

*Interviewer:* And how does it work?

*School 3 Teacher:* So . . . To be honest . . . Because we don't have so much access in the school, most of them we do that at home . . . So they would choose to do that in addition to what we do in school, in lessons . . . So they will do things, for example in the school . . . We'd do, we do Amnesty International causes and the people would write letters and do posters and speeches on the samples and things like that . . . And then on their own, they'd go and set off the Facebook so the people . . . Where they would give information about Amnesty case and then they may advertise that in the school and get people to follow . . . And they sign online petitions, they set up on those as well. So . . . It's about this kind of ( . . . ) And we do use it certainly in citizenship . . .

*Interviewer:* In which is the last goal of these activities? Why did you choose to work with social media instead of doing it in a more conventional way?

*School 3 Teacher:* I guess because of the impact, because the amount of people you can reach is just so much greater, so many greater . . . people you can reach them, than by using conventional, sort of posters they would just put up around the school . . . And . . . But . . . Obviously things like Facebook and Twitter they get much . . . Great coverage . . . And so . . .

( . . . )

In this case the teacher reported using social media with citizenship education aims in one part of the citizenship education course in Years 10 and 11. The activity consists of pupils using Facebook to post online polls related to Amnesty International campaigns they are working with, and it works as an additional activity to that which pupils do at home.

In the independent school, one teacher decided to work with social media in order to make connections between her pupils and those in Russian schools and to encourage discussions about local problems. The pupils were again Year 10, Year 11 and also Year 12. However, in this case the activity was not explicitly related to citizenship aims even though the relationship can be suggested. In that case the school uses IT to communicate with pupils and parents but the communication is one-directional. The same situation is described in School 3, where the school sends tweets but it is not possible for others to comment on these tweets.

*School 3 Teacher:* We use it . . . sort of . . . I think, I've said before, like Twitter feeds we do use it to promote things the school is doing, or give information to parents as well . . . So . . . For example, if we go on a school trip, we may send back photos and information about how trip is going so parents can keep update with . . . How the trip is going . . . And if we've got sort of an inset day it will go out on Twitter as well . . . It's at our school website . . . We use a lots of texts phone as well . . . So . . .

*Interviewer:* And are the pupils able to comment if you . . . for instance . . .

*School 3 Teacher:* I don't think so . . . I think it's locked . . . so . . .

*Interviewer:* One direction!

The three teachers were asked if they used social media in order to facilitate work in the school council, to elect representatives or in other activities related to the decision making process in the school. In all three cases, the teachers responded negatively.

Teachers considered that the lack of availability of technology was a huge hindrance to the use of social media in the schools:

*School 1 Teacher:* It's not really something that we have even thought, because we don't have access to it. So in school, in this building, we don't have wireless internet, we do in that building across there, we don't have the money for laptops, and those kind of things, so at the moment it's not really an issue, the only way I can see it working it would be like a homework task, but again not all our pupils have computers at home. So this few little barriers that we have to be . . . Look to . . . But I do accept . . .

One teacher suggested that social media sites could be used in such matters as homework perhaps by using pupils' smartphones. In spite of this, the schools have different—and not always positive—approaches to the use of smartphones in class.

*School 1 Teacher:* You know a lot of our pupils have got smartphones, a lot of them, you know, could take pictures of their work on their camera phone and email them and print them off . . . or . . . You know, if you need to do some quick research they can use their iPhones . . . You know . . . To a degree, I wouldn't . . . at least sixth formers or seventeen–eighteen years old do that, but the youngest pupils we don't really want them to be on their phones in lessons . . .

According to the teachers' perception, some of their colleagues or themselves are reluctant to use social media in their classes. This concern

is related to several reasons. Teachers reported that some teachers were not confident with social media technologies and that they were concerned that their pupils knew more about them than themselves. Teachers reported that their concerns related to the fact that their work could be constantly observed and assessed. For instance, Teacher 2 explained:

*School 2 Teacher:* (. . .) I think other people do use it . . . I think that there is a sense in teachers that you do have these . . . It's supposed to be fair technology, and fair in their use and way (. . .) . . . Just the other day, for instance, I was doing a photography project, in Arts, and I was getting to use them and SLR digital camera, sorry . . . and SLR manual camera . . . So it was entirely manual, no digital aspects at all . . . And I said they all . . . You know you can use your phones just to record and then I found myself saying that, but . . . Please, make sure that it just ends up on Facebook because it was just . . . Oh! My Goodness! They are all wearing the (name of school) uniform! But some of the ideas we were looking at . . . We were looking at . . . You know . . . Making small things look big, and big things look small . . . And one of the girls, she was lying across the troll train track, tied up . . . Trying to be, rolled by the train . . . And I thought . . . Oh! If that ends up on Facebook, she's got the (name of school) uniform, because of her jacket, you know . . . I could be in serious trouble! And so . . . You know . . . Please make sure that it must in your phone . . . You know . . . This is just to record that . . . I must introduce your friends to record it! So, you have a personal record of your work . . . It must not go on in any other site! And it was . . . Why? And you know . . . And it was . . . You know, they were Year 9 and so they were fourteen and they couldn't understand why, why it wasn't ok for that to be put out there . . . So . . . I think that's our biggest fear . . . That something could be misinterpreted so easily . . . And that makes you think! So perfect example . . . Some ordinary thing . . . And you know . . . You know . . . Used as a tool, but they could absolutely be putting out there on, using Web 2.0 technology . . . And it could be totally misinterpreted and misconstrued and you could . . . You know . . . You could be without a job . . .

Finally, teachers' concerns are related to the boundary between their personal and professional lives.

*School 1 Teacher:* I think that as teachers we are very wary of it, in terms of the boundary between, you know as a teacher using social media with the pupils, the boundary between school and outside of school becomes a little bit blurred and I think that I would never ever be friends with a pupil, you know on Facebook, even you know . . . all our pupils have an email account, and if I have to contact pupils via email I always do, you know in school time, because I think social media can be great in terms of having an instant response . . . as a

teacher, I would be wary of that kind of relation, relationship with pupils, you know . . .

*Interviewer:* The professional role, you mean . . . ?

*School 1 Teacher:* Yeah, the professional role . . .

One teacher did report having a social media profile and suggested that private and professional life can be unlinked by means of using the privacy sections. She also claimed that the use of social media in her school did not cause more problems than those associated with the use of other forms of communication.

*School 3 Teacher:* Yes! Yeah . . . I do, yeah . . . So it's just privacy sections . . . So I make me sure they are all settled at the highest levels and we have very strict rules and guidelines about . . . You know . . . Not being friends with pupils or . . . As I've said, the departments ones . . . who have department Twitter feeds they definitely locked so . . . So . . . People can look at them, and followed them . . . So they can get the access and get and get the benefits of being able to access them . . . But they can't, as I've said, comment and link on those . . .

*Interviewer:* Have you got any kind of troubles using these technologies?

*School 3 Teacher:* Mmmm . . . I mean . . . We haven't had any massive one . . . But I think there've been one or two instances of Facebook being in issues out the school suddenly, and that's build into school life while somebody is using the negative way patterns to bully somebody and then that's obviously continuing in the school . . . I think we have a couple of issues there . . . Which go on obviously in the school . . . But . . . And again in terms of . . . we've got quite clear guidelines, other people should be aware of that . . . And the mobiles . . . Unless you would be nasty use as part of the . . . part of the lesson . . . by the teacher . . . Then the mobiles should be switched off and in their bags and . . . But they are allowed to use them at the two break times that they have . . . So it's something that the school council work with . . . Y.Z. he set off geography, he work with them and bringing the policy together, the mobiles device policy so . . . So it's quite clear guidelines that people have and then teachers obviously know what they are so . . . Follows a usual procedure if they haven't . . . For example, people refuse to find away . . . Then, basically they just refuse to follow the teachers' instructions then they'd get punishment as anything else they did that . . . involved on not following the instructions . . . So . . . It's done . . . In that way really . . . But, nothing specific other than I've said . . . and issues that's not in the school, but that's come back into school really . . .

All three teachers agreed that in the future social media should play a role in citizenship education. However, the ways they suggested to develop that use were quite diverse. The teacher in School 3 considered that the sort of activities she was working with should form part of this citizenship education programme in the future.

*School 3 Teacher:* I think definitely . . . And I am going to use the example again, but it's kind of one we use it in the Amnesty, I think, we make something where they can . . . obviously something that is a global issue, cause it's a case that Amnesty is talking about before . . . Somebody will campaign for cases in Mexico and Gambia and China . . . So across the world really . . . So in that aspect, they're also play a part in a international citizens and global citizens really . . . And they . . . Definitely it also encourage them and we'd look at things like politics and we look at manifestos . . . and various as well . . . All the political parties now have, you know, just feeds and Facebook . . . We do encourage them to look at those and particularly we may look at the same manifestos . . . We look at some of the party websites and definitely Facebook and twitters we encourage them to go and look at those . . . So, I think they can play more of a part and I think that looking at the things like in the future we took a . . . about styles of voting, so that's an area that they sort of keen to perhaps introduce some social media into things like voting cause they say they would get more involved if it was done by Facebook and twitters . . . and so . . . I think definitely it can play a part in all of that . . .

According to this teacher, social media should be used in order to take advantage of the impact it has. But for this teacher and also for the teacher in School 1, social media should mainly be used in order to bring pupils closer together with people from diverse contexts who live in the same country, and also with those around the world, in order to create a sense of belonging to a common citizenship.

*School 1 Teacher:* I suppose it would be interesting if you are getting people from different schools to communicate, because our pupils don't have a great understanding about cultural diversity, I think . . . diversity or these kind of things, we try to discover them in lessons but you need more participants from other schools maybe to engage with that kind of thing . . . So it would be thinking about, so does actually to be a good citizen and what does it mean to be a British citizen?

What seems striking about the above is the awareness of educational potential, the very limited usage and the fear of creating new learning spaces.

## Discussion

In this small-scale research, our data analyses from three schools suggest that most of the pupils investigated are social media users and most of them consider that it can contribute to enhancing peoples' engagement, citizenship knowledge and participation. However there are also some user pupils who consider that social media platforms are not and should not be used in order to achieve these goals. Indeed, those who are not social media users consider that, rather than providing an improvement, it has some negative effects.

Some teachers seem enthusiastic about the use of social media as an educational tool but others show a considerable amount of concern. Some of this wariness is related to a perception of power loss and some of it is based on the current situation of IT infrastructures at their schools. In spite of this, all of them consider that social media technologies will increase in importance in education in the future.

Data analysis also suggests different applications of these social media with citizenship education aims. First, social media sites have several implications for engagement. Engagement can be related to identity, and some of the 'sense of belonging' qualities that pupils attribute to some school activities (sports, clubs, school council) can be transferred easily to the use of social media as an educational tool: e.g. sharing a purpose, considering everybody's work relevant, taking decisions. Moreover, according to the data analysis, some pupils already describe a feeling of global citizenship that is developing through social media platforms. For these respondents communications technologies allow them to have an explicit 'place in the world'. These 'talking activities' could enhance pupils' identity in relation to their nearer contexts (e.g. schools, towns), but also in relation to farther and wider contexts, such as achieving a global identity. Second, social media also could increase pupils' knowledge about citizenship by means of some of the activities mentioned previously, but also by searching, discussing and commenting on some of the content posted on these sites. Finally, pupils and teachers also reported the links between social media sites and citizenship participation. According to most of them, social media could contribute not only by informing people about events and proposals and being an organisational tool for some movements, but also by providing a democratic way for pupils to give their own opinions and to spread their views.

What needs to be done in the future is to continue to explore the general consensus in the academic community about the potential of social media in citizenship education (e.g. Bennett, 2009; Middaugh, 2012). We are (together with the pupils and teachers who have responded to our questions) extremely positive about the ways in which social media could create new learning spaces for civic engagement. However, we need to know a good deal more about the reality of life in most schools, as opposed to the highly publicised few instances of creativity (and we

need to go beyond our small-scale work). We should not ignore those people (teachers and pupils) who deliberately abstain from using the social web. We need to explore with teachers the nature of power relations in learning and teaching situations (Buckingham & Rodríguez-Hoyos, 2013) and we need to do much more to disentangle the complex picture of cause and effect that may be emerging from our work: principally, does social media attract those who are already engaged and could such participation serve to reflect existing or new forms of citizenship education?

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